Sarasvati is one of the trinity of the Vedic goddesses—Sarasvati, Ilā (Mahī) and Bharatī. She is the protean goddess of the Vedic pantheon and is the very basis of Hindu thought and culture. In the Vedic pantheon, many deities arose and lateron merged into the personalities of others or they survived in a stereotyped form. But in regard to Sarasvati, the case has been different. With her, there has been a gradual process of change and development. In her earliest stage, in the Rigvedic times, she was merely a terrestrial river. But owing to the excessive affection and reverence shown towards her by seers, she came to be identified as the goddess of speech. The Brahmanas repeatedly speak of her as vāk on the one hand, while the Purāṇas fully anthropomorphise her on the other. In Brahmanical mythology, she is generally regarded as the consort either of Brahmā or Viṣṇu or Śiva, the members of the Brahmanical triad, while in the Tantras, she stands for a specific nerve. Even the Buddhists assimilated her into their pantheon as the wife of Mañjuśrī, the Buddhist God of Transcendental wisdom. In the Gāthānaśāla she appears to be represented as the goddess of learning, intelligence and memory. In Jain pantheon, she is also known as Sarasvati, Śrutadēvī, Viṇā and Sarada, and is assigned an extremely honoured place. In the Classical period, she is unanimously accepted as the goddess
of speech, learning and wisdom. Thus, the phenomena attributed to Sarasvati in the epochs of Sanskrit literature are vastly different from each other. In consequence of this fact Sarasvati had attracted attention of many of the modern scholars who made researches about her antiquity, concepts and iconic characteristics.

Though considerable research work has been done on the personality of Sarasvati, no single volume contains all the necessary information of her in ancient Indian art and iconography. Many foreign scholars like Thomas Moore, Vans Kennedy, James Muir, C.F. Oldham, W.J. Wilkins, A.A. Macdonell, A.B. Keith, Hopkins, Hillebrandt, Louis, Rancou, Charles, Coleman, Hath, Godbole etc. have thrown some light on personality of this Indian goddess of learning. There are, besides, others like T.A. Gopinath Rao, A.C. Vidyabhushan, Haridas Bhattacharya, J.N. Banerjee, K.C. Chattopadhyaya, B.C. Bhattacharya, U.P. Shah, M.I. Khan, K.L. Bhattacharyya etc. have discussed with the help of textual and archaeological evidence the iconographical features of a large number of Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina Sarasvati images. But their attempts have been partial in that as they have dealt with only some one aspects of her personality or confined themselves to a specific periods.
In this book, an attempt has been made to deal brightly with the iconographical features of Sarasvatī. My present work contains five chapters. In the first chapter of this book I have not only given a brief account of her original and evolution in different religious pantheons of ancient India, but also I have examined her history of studies. The introduction also covers the sources for the study of her iconographic features. The chapter II contains a brief account of the iconographical features of Brāhmaṇic Sarasvatī. In the Chapter III, an attempt has been made to deal precisely with the iconic features of Sarasvatī in the Tantric form of religion. Thus, chapter IV includes a critical study of Buddhistic Sarasvatī with regard to some features of iconography. The Chapter V of this book appear to discuss the iconographic features of Sarasvatī in Jaina pantheon.

It seems that my method of study is all through objective and I have treated the subject as an aspect of history and archaeology. However, I would not claim that all my conclusions are final or that I have incorporated all the relevant information. Considering the scope and nature of source materials, I would simply assert that the present dissertation offers for the first time a systematic study on Sarasvatī from historical view point. I may hasten to acknowledge that it has been possible for me to give it such a complete form only being able to utilize properly the results of the previous researches in the field, which is enormous as well as diverse.

Tarapada Mandal. 4.12.85