

CHAPTER - I

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CHAPTER - ISARASVATI CULT - A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN A BROADER
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This chapter outlines the origin and development of Sarasvati cult in the pan-Indian context as perceived in the literary and the archaeological sources. The materials collected have been classified and presented as a background study in the following chapters, with a view to elaborate the history of Sarasvati cult with particular reference to Tamilnadu.

The literary sources are gathered from the Vedas, the Brāhmanas, the Epics, the Purānas and the later classical Sanskrit works mainly from North India. The data on archaeological sources are gathered from epigraphy, numismatics and the extant monumental vestiges. Sarasvati is equally held in high esteem by the followers of Jainism and Buddhism, which are generally considered as non-Vedic religions. The role of Sarasvati in both the faiths is also dealt with in a separate section to show the extent of her impact on them.

The significance of the ancient Indian civilisation is that its traditions have survived with amazing continuity. The survival of the Vedic recitals and rituals can be cited as an example. Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, who occupies an important place in the Hindu pantheon is one of the many Vedic deities, who have come down from hoary antiquity to modern times with an uninterrupted continuity. She retains her universal appeal to all the Hindus, the Jains and the Buddhists under different names.

There are astonishing similarities between the Hindu Sarasvati and the Greek and Roman goddesses of learning. Sarasvati corresponds to the Greek goddess Athena and the Roman goddess Minerva. Minerva was the patron of all arts and trade and the goddess of memory and warfare. Likewise Sarasvati too is the patron of all arts and science though she is not related to trade in Indian mythology. Sarasvati like Minerva can be taken for warfare, for she is called Virapatni in the Vedas signifying her valour and triumph in war. The Greek muse was compared to Sarasvati. Whereas the Greek and the Roman goddesses are no longer worshipped, the Hindu goddess Sarasvati continues to be revered and

honoured as the presiding deity of knowledge even to-day.

SECTION - I

THE EARLIEST CONCEPT OF SARASVATI :

The earliest notion of Sarasvati is in the form of a flowing river. Sarasvati along with the Gaṅgā and the Yamuna formed a triplet of holy rivers having their common source from the Himalayas. It is believed that originally the river Sarasvati was flowing towards west and due to the geological and climatic changes it changed its course and flowed towards east as an̄tharvāhini or invisible river. All the three rivers are supposed to meet in the holy place of Prayag (Allahabad) which is revered by the Hindus as Trivēnī Sangamam. River Sarasvati is supposed to be present in the confluence as the invisible third river. Sarasvati is invoked by the Hindus in their daily prayers as one of the seven holy rivers of India.

The sequence in which they are mentioned follows the order: Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Narmada, Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery.

The idea of Sarasvati as the invisible third river joining at the confluence became widespread all over India. Some of the well-known confluences of this type are Pañcaganga ghāta at Benares, Triveni near Hughli, Tirumukkūdal at Narasippur in Karnataka and Trilinga in Andhra Pradesh. In Tamilnadu also we see the prevalence of this belief. To mention a few examples, at Bhavānikūdal (Kūdal in Tamil means confluence) near Erode, where the rivers Cauvery and Noyyal join, it is believed that the river Sarasvati as Vāni also joins the confluence in the invisible form. The place Bhavāni itself is generally called Vauvāni (in Tamil Vāni vavvukirāi) by the local tribes indicating Vāni i.e. Sarasvati embracing the other two rivers underneath. Incidentally, the presiding deity in this place is called Sangameswarar, the Lord of the confluence. In another place named Tirumukkūdal in Chingleput District where the rivers Cheyyar and Pālar join, it is believed that the Vēgavati i.e. Sarasvati joins the confluence in a latent way. So, the place is called Tirumukkūdal, the sacred confluence of three rivers, though only two are seen.

In these instances we are able to see the widespread influence of the concept of Sarasvati essentially as a river unseen but always contributing to the holiness by her confluence.

SECTION - 2

LITERARY SOURCES ON THE SARASVATI CULT :

The vast literature of ancient and medieval India provides ample reference to different facets of Sarasvati. The Vedic literature of the early Indo Aryans is thought to have developed from approximately 1500-500 B.C. and consists of the Samhitās, the four metrical hymns called the Rg Veda (which is the oldest), the Yajur Veda, the Sāma Veda, and the more recent Atharva Veda, the Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas, and the ancillary Gṛhya Sūtras, a body of mystical works describing the rituals in detail, and last of all the Upaniṣads, works which philosophically question the nature of self and the universe.

THE RGVEDA (c.1500-1000 B.C.)

This provides a rich source for Sarasvati worship. In this text, her most important characteristics are those of a mighty river and a goddess. As a river,

she is described as powerful, the best among the rivers (nadītanā). She is stated to be the first born, rich in wealth, mighty in her force. Her waves are said to break down the ridges of the hills and in taste they are full of honey and ghee. They form themselves as a fort of iron (āyasi pūḥ) to protect her worshippers and stand as an impregnable defence for the people. She is a veritable mother (sindumāta), auspicious (bhadrā) and beautiful (śubhrā). She is seen, as a holy stream descended from heaven to bless the earth. She is addressed as one pervading the triple creation of earth, atmosphere, and the celestial regions.

As a goddess, her presence is sought in the sacrifice from the high heaven, for directing the same. She makes her appearance in the sacrifice along with Idā and Bhārati who form a triad of the divinity for the successful completion of the same. She is described as the originator of all pleasant songs and gracious and pious thoughts. We observe in the R̥gveda, the concept of Sarasvati taking its root primarily as a river and then as a goddess with varied potentialities.

It is apparent from the Ṛgveda, that sound particularly verbal mantras (ritual speech) is powerful, creative and a mainstay of cosmic ritual order. This ritual voice is personified as Vāc, the goddess of speech. She is typically characterised by the various attributes and uses of speech. Through her mysterious presence, she enables one to hear, see, grasp and then express in words the true nature of things. She is said to accompany different gods like Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Agni and the Asvins. She is significantly an essential part of the religious and poetic experience of the ṛsis, and of the sacrificial rituals.

Vāc and Sarasvati are treated as a complimentary phenomena in the Ṛgveda. They bring good fortune, plenty and prosperity. According to the Ṛgveda, the vedic recitals and rituals performed on the banks of the river Sarasvati add to her holiness. She is depicted as the daughter of lightning dwelling in the mid-region between heaven and earth. She is propitiated along with other gods for the protection of her worshippers. The celestial origin of Vāc and Sarasvati, is expressed when they are described as the off-springs of thunder and lightning. Though the Ṛgveda makes reference to Vāc

and Sarasvati as two different deities, the attributes of the two render them closer to each other, and finally get identified as a single divinity in the later Vedic literature. This becomes evident owing to their common characteristics and common association with a number of deities.

THE YAJUR VEDA :

It was compiled a century or two later than the R̥gveda and contains sacrificial formulae. References to Sarasvati as a river are only rare in this work. The significant epithets for Sarasvati, mentioned in this Veda are pāvakā (purifying), br̥hātī (great), yaśobhagini (the form of speech or of the goddess of speech or eloquence), haviṣmātī (full of excellent oblations), sudugbhā (fulfilling desires), and jāgr̥yī (one who keeps awake day and night like a physician). Sarasvati is presented as a physician in certain sacrifices in the company of the Asvins (the lords of splendour). In one place in the Yajur Veda, Sarasvati is said to employ speech (Vāc) in curing and invigourating strength and vitality into Indra, the god of clouds or rain. She is mentioned as a milch-cow (dhēnu), on account of her bounteous and affectionate nature as well as her benevolence to her seekers in fulfilling their aspirations.

So in the Yajur veda, the R̥gvedic concept of Sarasvati as a river is rarely mentioned, while the union of Sarasvati with Vāc takes a more prominent place.

THE ATHARVA VEDA :

It is considered a later text and one more representative of the popular religion of the time. This Veda mainly deals with medicines and devices that could cure various ailments. Sarasvati is mentioned only in a few places in the Atharva Veda of which some ideas are similar to those in the R̥gveda. She is mentioned here as one who restores to the fore front the latent power of a man. As a healer, she represents the basic chemical principles which eliminate or destroy the infections, and as the truthful speech, she gives rise to noble thoughts. Sarasvati is depicted here as science and culture to protect human beings against ignorance and barbarism. Her invocation in marriage ceremony portrays her role in the domestic life. She is invoked here for begetting off-springs and good fortune. The trinity concept of the goddesses Sarasvati, Idā and Bhārati mentioned in the R̥gveda recurs here also.

Thus, in the Vedas, Sarasvati first depicted as a river, slowly acquired a divine status, assuming the role of director of ceremonies, and finally merges with Vāc. But towards the end of the Vedic period, the river aspect of Sarasvati gradually diminishes and the divine or the holy aspect comes into prominence.

THE BRĀHMANAS :

The Brāhmanas describe the ceremonial applications of the hymns, collected in the Samhitas. In the Brāhmanas, Sarasvati is consistently identified with the Vedic goddess Vāc (speech). Vāc's character is richly portrayed here. She is associated in a series of myths, connecting her with creation and ritual. In her role as the creator, Vāc is said to originate the three Vedas, equating them with the earth (Rgveda), the air (Yajur Veda) and the sky (Sāma Veda). Therefore, she contains in herself the entire universe. Prajāpati, the central deity in the Brāhmanas as an initiator in the creation, is said to be the co-eternal with Vāc - an idea which led to the Brahma-Sarasvati consortship. Thus, her part in the Brāhmanas is suggestive of the nature of Sakti (the female energy) of the later Hinduism. It is already

stated that the divine aspect of Vāc is often mentioned in the Brāhmaṇas. This brought forth the importance of speech, enlarging her scope as syllable, word, phrase, literature and sound. The combination of Vāc and Sarasvati in the Brāhmaṇas, brought about the identification of the two deities as the one and the same goddess - Sarasvati was Vāc (Vāgvai Sarasvati). According to K.Bhattacharya, "The amalgamation, transformation and identification of these two deities had passed through several stages and ultimately led to the formation of the new concept of Vāgdēvi"².

In the evolution of Sarasvati all through the Vedic literature, it may be seen that the plain river Sarasvati sanctified by the Vedic sacrifices and rituals, performed on her banks, acquired the unique divine status among the deities of the Vedic age. Vāc or speech figuring as another divine character in the R̥gveda becomes synonymous with Sarasvati in the age of Brāhmaṇas. Perhaps Vāc, the sacred speech in Vedic cult, and Sarasvati acquiring divinity through Vedic rituals would have led to the merger of the two. The river concept of Sarasvati pales into insignificant during this period.

THE EPICS :

The epic period which has a terminal date of approximately 400 B.C. documents the beginning of sectarian worship of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇapati and Śākta. In the magnificent volumes of the two epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, prominence of Sarasvati according to the number of passages is very small, but both clearly attest to the significance of Sarasvati cult.

The Mahābhārata honours Sarasvati as a mother of the Vedas,³ the daughter of Brahma⁴ who enriches the thoughts. It also refers to the springing of a voice from Brahma even prior to the creation of the universe which enriched the intellect of the Brāhmaṛsis akin to the Greek oracles and out of which was born the celestial Sarasvati.⁵ Sarasvati is described as appearing before Indra in his court in the form of fluency personified. She is described as the goddess of eloquence and fluency.⁶ In the Bhīṣma-Parva, Kṛṣṇa is said to have created Sarasvati and Vedas from his mind.⁷ The river concept of Sarasvati lingers feebly in this epic.

In the Rāmāyana she is included in the list of eighteen deities to whom daily sacrifices are to be offered. In the Bālakānda (of the Rāmāyana), Sarasvati appears as an oracle and induces Valmiki to commence the narration of the epic, when Valmiki was upset over the lamenting mate of a Kraunchi bird killed by a hunter.

THE PURĀNAS :

Purāna, literally the ancient lore, is a general name of a long series of texts traditionally eighteen. These texts treat in an encyclopaedic manner the myths and legends as well as genealogies of gods, heroes and saints. The Purānas embody many aspects relating to customs, ceremonies, sacrifices, festivals, caste duties, donations, construction of temples and images, and places of pilgrimage. The eighteen principal surviving purānas are divided into three groups those exalting the god Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva. According to R.C.Majumdar, the bulk of the purānic literature is believed to have been codified around 4th century A.D. and some of them are upto 600 A.D.⁹ The most important purānas are the Viṣṇu, Liṅga, Bhāgavata and Skanda. This purānic literature continues with Upapurānas and Sthalapurānas

i.e. glorifications of temples and sacred places of later times.

We find in the purāṇas not only Sarasvati's Vedic characteristics but also many other developments. For instance, the Vāmana Purāna eulogises her as "the goddess moving at will and producing water in the clouds"¹⁰. In the Skanda Purāna, she is considered as a symbol of fertility and a great mother goddess.¹¹ In the Vāmana Purāna sage Mārkaṇḍeya praises her as the mother of all the worlds and the origin of the Vedas.¹² The Pādma Purāna which also mentions similar idea, further identifies her with the goddess of various sciences (vidyās).¹³ Thus, we find Sarasvati emerging as a great goddess in a decidedly more developed form than the Vedic one.

In the Purāṇas, we find greater influence of the sakti aspect which contributed to a change in the outlook towards Sarasvati. She was regarded as a particular aspect of the great mother. In the Purāṇas, Sarasvati, Sāvītri and Gāyatri become co-wives of Brahma and the Skanda Purāna describes the wrath of Sāvītri which resulted in the curses; because of her curse, Brahma was deprived of his worship in temples, Rudra to

loose manhood and hence we see him in the Linga form in temples, Viṣṇu to endure the agony of wife's separation, Agni to devour all clean and unclean etc. The three consorts of Brahma namely Gāyatri, Sāvitrī and Sarasvatī have been interpreted to represent the three parts of the day of infinite power i.e. Gayatri in the morning, Savitrī in the noon and Sarasvatī in the evening. In the Markandēya Purāṇa she is mentioned in connection with the Goddess Mahālakshmi who is endowed with three gūṇas and assume the forms of Lakshmi, Sarasvatī and Pārvati.¹⁴

As the goddess of learning, Sarasvatī is regarded as a daughter of Brahma emanating from his mind and dwelling in his tongue, besides being described as his consort. Further, Sarasvatī is said to have emerged out of the tongue of Kṛṣṇa as the embodiment of Sakti - the cumulation of the powers of Sarasvatī, Lakshmi and Pārvati.

In the Purāṇas, Sarasvatī is addressed by various names reflecting her many sided, attributes. In the Dēvi Bhāgavata, she is called Bhārati because she went down to Bhārata, Brāhmi as the female counterpart

of Brahma; Vāni since she is the presiding deity of speech and Sarasvati as the one who belongs to god Sarasvān or Hari. In the Bhavisya Purāṇa also similar ideas are echoed.

Various accounts have been given in the purāṇas regarding the origin of Sarasvati. It is indeed very interesting to see her relation with the Trinity Gods, to Brahma as wife and daughter, to Kṛṣṇa (Viṣṇu) as his sakti emerging out of his mouth, and to Śiva, as one born with her from one of the eggs produced by Goddess Mahālakshmi.¹⁵

A study of the purāṇic literature is essential for understanding the emergence of the iconographic forms of many Hindu divinities. We see the abstract ideas taking concrete and iconic forms. The mythological lore provides the themes for later day iconographic forms as seen in the Purāṇas and the Upapurāṇas like the Matsya, Agni, Padma, Vishnudharmōttara. In the Purāṇic era, there was a marked development of the iconographical character of the goddess Sarasvati. The Agnipurāna describes the image of Sarasvati as having the pustaka, akṣamālā and vīṇa in her hands

with swan or lotus as the yāhana. The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna also describes her in the similar way. The Skanda Purāna narrates an instance of the art of making sculptures viz. the King Āmbuci once prompted by the great powers of Sarasvatī made an earthen image of her from the clay collected from the river Sarasvatī.

SARASVATĪ IN THE CLASSICAL SANSKRIT LITERATURE :

The classical Sanskrit literature throws further interesting light on the position of Sarasvatī in the religious and cultural ethos of the Hindu society as has been observed by M.I.Khan.¹⁶ A few salient points are reviewed here.

Patanjali (second century B.C.)¹⁷ invokes Sarasvatī¹⁸ to ward off errors in his work.

Āśvaghōṣa (1st century A.D.) in his Buddhacarita¹⁹ alludes to a story. During severe drought, for over 12 years, the Vedas were ignored and were about to be practically forgotten. The priest ordained Sarasvata, son of Sarasvatī to memorise the same. Again the continuous drought and famine made ṛsis abandon the Vedas in preference to food and shelter. When Sarasvata was also about to leave, he

was ordained by Sarasvati to remain and teach the Vedas²⁰ to ṛsis when they returned.

Kālidāsa, the great Sanskrit poet flourished in the Gupta period (375-455 A.D.)²¹ According to tradition, Kālidāsa who was very dull in his youth, acquired the capacity of poetic competence through the grace of Sarasvati. Indeed, his works have copious reference to Sarasvati in various connotations, mainly as the goddess of learning and speech or vāni. The poet Kālidāsa²² makes her assume the role of the preceptor of music and states that to learn the art from her, one has to worship her. He calls her as Bhārati in his work Kumārasambava. In Vikramōrvasiyan (v.24) he alludes to the rivalry and jealousy of Sarasvati and Lakshmi, conceptually representing the rivalry between knowledge and wealth which usually never go together.

The Kāmasutra of Vātsyāyana also dated to the Gupta period²³ makes mention of a temple for Sarasvati where the wealthy citizens used to flock every fortnight²⁴ to enjoy the dramatic and theatrical performances. Harsha in his work Naisadhīyacarita symbolises Sarasvati for speech and assigns her a prominent role in the major

rituals. In the Grahya-Sūtra she is invoked in the marriage rituals indicating her role in the domestic life too.

The sixth and the seventh centuries can be called the age of prose writing in the literary history of India. The well known prose writers like Daṇḍin, Subandu and Bāna belonged to this period. All of them make frequent reference to Sarasvatī in their works. Daṇḍin describes Vāk as 'the light' called Śabdā (Śabdāhvyam ivōti) and emphasises that unless this light illuminates the three worlds, there would be nothing but darkness. Subandu states that the grace of Sarasvatī is indispensable to the poets.

Bāna was patronised by King Harsha (7th century). In his works the Harṣacarita and the Kādambarī he claims the lineage from Sarasvatī and her continuous favour to his family.

The ingenious poet Māgha who lived in the seventh century A.D. refers to Sarasvatī as presiding over an interior court (Sabhābhyanṭara) and mentions the word Bhārātī to denote the sense of speech.

In the classical age, Sarasvati was considered to represent Vidya consisting of tapas, dāna, sīla, gupa and dharmā. Bhartṛhari (seventh century A.D.) conveys the above idea in his Nītīśataka.

Bhavabhūti's Uttararāma Carita, a drama of the eight century A.D. mentions Sarasvati and Vāk as synonymous.

Kashmir was a great seat of Sanskrit learning and the Śāradā pīṭam there is said to be the abode of Sarasvati. Bilhana, the author of Vikramāṅkadevacarita who hailed from Kashmir holds the view that the poets are the off-spring of Sarasvati and also mentions her as Śāradā, Bhāratī and Vāgdēvi in different contexts.

Kalhapa, another renowned poet from Kashmir in his work Rājatarāṅgīnī speaks about the Sarasvati pond on the mount of Bhēda in Kashmir. It is believed that Sarasvati resides there still in the form of a swan.

SARASVATI IN BUDDHIST AND JAIN PANTHEON :

Buddhism and Jainism took birth in India almost simultaneously, as a protest movements against the excessive rituals of the Vedic system. They rejected

the sanctity of the Vedic sacrifices and priestly domination and laid emphasis on good conduct, character, compassion and non-violence (ahimsa). But it is interesting and strange too, that many of the older cults and beliefs continued to exist in these new faiths too.

IN BUDDHISM :

According to N.N.Bhattacharya, there is a mention of Sri or Lakshmi in the Pali texts, considering her as the goddess of fortune, wisdom and virtue, a combination of Brahmanical Lakshmi and Sarasvati.

In the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna schools, we see the absorption of many Hindu deities. Though in the initial stage Buddhism was popular, its hold on the people declined in the course of time. To gain popularity in the land of the Hindus, Buddhism borrowed the idea of image worship and absorbed many gods and goddesses from the Brahmanical pantheon. In this process, Sarasvati too found her way into Buddhist pantheon. Here, she was associated with Mañjuśri, the Buddhist God of Transcendal wisdom as his sakti, just as she was considered as the consort of Brahma in the Hindu pantheon.

According to the Buddhist Sādhana-māla, the worship of the goddess Sarasvati confers wisdom and learning. She was also worshipped as a goddess of music and poetry. Gradually Prajñāpāramitā, a Buddhist goddess of wisdom under the Tantric influence was replaced by Sarasvati. In the course of time, Sarasvati became a popular deity associated with learning, intellect and memory in Buddhism.

According to Buddhist textual information, Sarasvati has at least four different forms in Buddhist iconography i.e. Vajrasarasvati, Vajravāna Sarasvati, Vajrasāradā and Mahāsarasvati. Besides these four, there is another form called Ārya Sarasvati. The Sādhana-māla gives clearly the iconographic features of the above mentioned forms.

The earliest findings of the goddess with Buddhist association may be one found at Ghantasāla, a Buddhist site of Andhra Pradesh.

In the wake of the expansion of Indian culture and religion including Buddhism to other parts of Asia like Japan, Tibet, Nepal and Indonesia, the Sarasvatī cult also found prevalence there.²⁹

IN JAINISM :

Unlike Buddhism, Jainism flourished only in India where it had its birth, but has survived to this day with less fundamental changes. The Jaina pantheon too has many common features with that of Hinduism. Sarasvatī appears to have been portrayed more prominently here than in Buddhism. She is named variously as Śrutadēvata, Śāradā, Bhārati, Bhāṣa, Vāk, Vākdevata, Vāgīsvari, Vāg Vadini, Vānī and Brāhma. She presents a diversity of forms and names as the sixteen Vidyādēvis. Śrutadēvi was known to the Jains as the first goddess of learning. She is said to preside over the preaching of the Tirthankaras and Kēvalins.

According to the Jain tenets, the knowledge is five fold and Sarasvatī is the patron-deity of knowledge.

1. Mati-jñāna or ordinary knowledge
2. Srutajñāna or knowledge from scripture
3. Avadhi jñāna or super natural cognition
4. Mahāṃparyāya jñāna or knowledge derived from the perceptions of the thought of others and
5. Kēvala jñāna or omniscience.

The sūtra texts of the Jains make clear the antiquity of her worship which is considered to be very old and widespread.

The Śvetāmbara and the Digambara sects of Jainism have different salutations (dhyāna slokas) for Sarasvati. They describe her in three different forms having two arms, four arms and numerous arms. The chief symbols of identification of the deity remain the same as that in the Hinduism i.e. the book of eternal knowledge and the swan as vehicle which is at times replaced by a peacock.

The earliest known representation of Sarasvati is found from Kankalitila, near Mathura a Jaina site. It bears inscriptional evidence to show it conclusively as a Jaina version of the goddess Sarasvati belonging

to the Kusāna period. Another bronze Jain Sarasvati with art and style of 7th century A.D. has come to notice from the west i.e. Akota and at present preserved at the Baroda Museum. According to K.Bhattacharya, "Sarasvati appears to have entered into the Jain pantheon almost directly from the later vedic tradition and thus she is found to maintain almost all the iconographic features by which she is also known to her Hindu worshippers :

SECTION - 4

TEMPLES DEDICATED TO SARASVATI :

Compared to the temples of other deities, the temples dedicated exclusively for the goddess Sarasvati are indeed as rare as those of her consort Brahma. However, the literary evidence tends to show the existence of some temples in the early period.

About the existence of Sarasvati temple in the early centuries of the Christian era, mention has already been made in the Kāmasūtra referred to earlier. Likewise, the Tamil epic Manimekalai, makes a reference to the existence of a temple for Chintā Dēvi, who has been identified with Sarasvati in the form of transcendent wisdom.

A few more extant temples of Sarasvati may be briefly mentioned here.

A temple for Sarasvati known by the name Saradapitam existed as a seat of learning in Kashmir.

The Chāhamana King, Vighararāja established a Sarasvati temple at his capital at Ajjunyameru (Ajmer) which was converted into a mosque and is now known as Adhai din-ka-Jhompra.³¹

Sarasvati Sādana at Dhar in Malwa established in early eleventh century A.D. by the Paramara King Bhoja reveals the dedication of a temple for learning. This temple was built in a Sanskrit College founded by him. The image of this temple is now preserved in the British Museum, London.

Temples built in honour of Sarasvati have also been found at Bhurda and Sevadi in Rajasthan.

The image of Sarasvati in the temple at Gadag in Karnataka belonged to the Chalukyas (6th-8th centuries A.D.). The deity has four arms with lower of the right in chin-mudra, upper of the same side with pāsam and

the left arms holding pustaka and ankusa, wearing jaṭāmakuta, fully ornamented.

Sārada Temple at Sringeri in Karnataka State, said to have been established by Ādi Sankara (8th or 9th century A.D.) is maintained still in a grandeur way.

At Kuttanūr in Tamilnadu there is a temple of Sarasvati said to have been established by the poet laureate Oṭṭakūttan of the Chola court datable to the twelfth century A.D.

Thus though temples exclusive for Sarasvati were comparatively rare, the availability of hundreds of sculptures of Sarasvati from different parts of India and belonging to different periods clearly attest to the importance given to her in the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain pantheon. This is further supported by the iconographic prescriptions to make the images of Sarasvati found in the Puranas, the Āgamas and the Silpa texts. This aspect is taken up for a more detailed discussion in the last chapter. Suffice it to mention here that we find the representation of Sarasvati in her various aspects from second century B.C. onwards.

FOOT NOTES

1. A.L.Basham, The Wonder that was India, Ed.3, 1967, London, p.232.
2. K.Bhattacharya, Sarasvati, 1983, Calcutta, pp.36-37.
3. Mahābhārata : Śānti-pārvam : verse-12920 - Vedānam mātaram pasya.
4. Ibid., verse - 13234 - ṛta brahmāsutā devi.
5. Ibid., verse-6811.
6. N.N.Bhattacharya, Indian Mother Goddess, Ed.2, 1977, New Delhi, p.103.
7. Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma-parvam : verse-3019.
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