

CHAPTER - IV

ART AND ICONOGRAPHY OF SARASVATI IN TAMIL COUNTRY

Section - 1 : Textual prescription of Sarasvati image

(i) Sarasvati in Āgama Sāstra.

Section - 2 : Sarasvati images : A historical background.

(i) Northern India

(ii) Southern India

(iii) Tamilnadu.

(a) Sarasvati in Pallava art.

(b) Sarasvati in Chola art.

(c) Sarasvati in Vijayanagar art.

(d) Sarasvati in Nayak art.

(e) Sarasvati in Modern art

(f) Bronze images of Sarasvati.

CHAPTER - IV

ART AND ICONOGRAPHY OF SARASVATI IN TAMIL COUNTRY

Sarasvati cult and its imprint on society based on literary evidences, temple myths, shrines, customs and traditions were discussed in the previous chapters. It is our endeavour here to show how the theme of Sarasvati has inspired the Tamil artists - the sculptors, metal icon makers and the painters through centuries.

A detailed study of the available sculptural representations of Sarasvati in the temples of Tamilnadu reveals the steady and continuous patronage she has received from the artists of different parts of Tamilnadu. They display interesting variety in styles and iconographic attributes. Some of them are based on the puranic themes, some on the local myths while others are on the sectarian adaptations.

The sculptors of the Pallava period have handled the theme of Sarasvati in various manners as can be seen at Kailasanatha Temple, Kāñchi of Rājasimha period and in Sundaravarada Perumāḷ Temple at Uttiramērur both in Chingleput district.

In Chola period, the sculptures of Sarasvati reached their apex of beauty and modelling. They display impressive composition, powerful modelling and graceful execution. We have a few varieties of bronze Sarasvati of this period. In general when compared to the bronze images of Lakṣmi, Parvati and Durga, Sarasvati image is markedly less. This inadequacy may be explained when we bear in mind that there were hardly any shrines for Sarasvati, whereas other goddesses had separate shrines including processional vigrahā. The meagre representation of Sarasvati comes out sharply in contrast to numerous bronze specimen of Lakṣmi, Bhūdevī, Parvati, Durgā in which Tamilnadu abounds. In our documents bronze Sarasvati is limited and available in them are also of later dated ones, when compared with other bronze goddesses. Perhaps this indicates the unpopularity of utsava idol of Sarasvati. However stone sculptural production from the Pallava times indicates the continuous patronage that Sarasvati received from the rulers of those periods. A certain amount of conventionalism of the image is however noticeable from the later Chola times, but still they continue to hold our attention by their poise and grace.

A century between the end of the Chola period and the beginning of Vijayanagar kingdom was a period of lull in the sculptural activities of Tamilnadu. The appearance of the new kingdom of Vijayanagar in South India by the middle of the 14th century brought a renaissance in the temple art and culture. The art under the Vijayanagar (c.1336-1660 A.D.) which reached its great heights in the 16th century shows both Pandyan and Hoysala features. The florid carvings of the Hoysalas developed with greater exuberance, appeared in the temple complexes of this period in Tamilnadu. These temples became elaborate both in structure and organisation with the addition of more shrines, pillared halls, gōpuras and several other subsidiary structures. The most characteristic of such additions are the kalyānamandapa wherein the icons of gods and goddesses were ceremoniously united on festival days, the thousand pillared mandapa with delicately carved sculptures adorning the pillars and vasantamandapa, built amidst the groves to keep the deities during the summer times. These additions of mandapas gave the artists ample scope to depict the puranic theme as well as several Hindu gods and goddesses. In this assemblage of Hindu

divinities, we find interesting portrayal of Sarasvati with puranic background. Particularly, in places like Kāñchipuram, the sihalapurāna story is often illustrated in the plastic form, introducing some improvisation and adaptation of the myths to the particular temple. Hence we find contextual adaptation of the Sarasvati legend in each of the temples based on sectarian influence. Besides this we also see some new forms of Sarasvati with eight arms, familiarly called Ashtabuja Sarasvati.

The Nayak chieftains of Tamilnadu at Madurai, Thanjavur and Senji continued the ornate style of the Vijayanagar period and were responsible for the construction of many large and impressive prakāras, mandapas and gōpuras. We see the introduction of very large and life-size figures of Hindu gods and goddesses with profuse ornamentation dominating the sculptural theme. Some outstanding specimens of Sarasvati can be seen in places like Madurai, Srivilliputtur and Kumbakonam. In Nayak period, the sculptures of Sarasvati received a new nrittya form (dancing) which caught the exceptional attention of art lovers.

It is interesting to observe in the above context, the growth of Sarasvati theme in art to a perfectly developed form from the Pallava period to this date in Tamilnadu, giving full credit to her conceptualisation. To have a background picture of the development of Sarasvati images in an Indian perspective, some salient features are stated here before we study the sculptural art of Sarasvati with special reference to Tamilnadu.

SECTION - 1

TEXTUAL PRESCRIPTION OF SARASVATI IMAGE :

Sources for depicting Sarasvati icon are spelt out in the āgamas and silpa texts. From all the sources, a general feature of the iconic form of Sarasvati can be outlined. By and large, the artists seem to have followed this prescription in the later periods. But there were also exceptions where the artist introduced bold innovations based on his own creative genius and given us new expressions. Later on, the text seems to have taken cognisance of these new forms and included them in their texts. Generally speaking, we observe certain standardisati

in the later specimens where as we see distinctive originality and natural beauty in the earlier specimens. This may be due to the fact that while the earlier artists were not bound by any rigid prescriptions, the artists of the later days followed^a conformity to the prescribed rules and regulations.

SARASVATI IN ĀGAMA SĀSTRA :

Āgama literature is broadly divided into two categories - Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva. They represent the codified body of guidelines for temple construction, icon making and rituals connected with deity worship and festivals. We have another class of work called the Tantras which deal with the Śakti worship. The age of both the categories of works is generally taken to be between 9th and 12th centuries A.D. Further, the descriptions contain in the āgama literature are only the collections from previous sources and practices and not a original invention. So, the āgamic practice could be older than the texts.

Among the Saivagamas the Kārikāgama is considered as the oldest and according to it the priest enters the sanctum of the main deity of Saiva temple only after offering Dwarapūja to Ganapathi, Lakṣmi and Sarasvati. Perhaps to indicate the same, in many temples we find on the lintel of the sanctum chamber images of Ganapati, Lakṣmi and Sarasvati.

The Vaiṣṇava āgamas belong to two schools - the Pāñcharatra¹ and the Vaikhāṇsa². Both recognise the place of Sarasvati in a Viṣṇu temple. Besides we have a good account of the description of Sarasvati icon in Viṣṇu-dharmōttara³, (7th century A.D.) and southern texts like Amsumabhedāgama⁴, Purvakārna-āgama⁵ and Rūpamandana⁶.

From the above texts it is gathered that ordinarily Sarasvati is presented in sitting on a lotus or pīṭam with one leg pendant, a posture called sukhāsana or lalitāsana or both legs folded in a pose called padmāsana. Her complexion is stated to be white and dressed in white garment representing purity with various ornaments. She has the vīṇa, manuscript (pustaka), rosary (akṣamāla), water jug (kamandalu), lotus (padma). She wears the crown (kṛita) sacred thread (yajñopavita).

Her vehicle (vāhana) usually is a swan or peacock or at times a ram or even a lion. The manuscript and the Vīna indicate her close association with learning and fine arts. The akṣamāla, kaṇḍalu and the swan symbolise her association with Brahma. The peacock relates her association with the river on the banks of which the bird is known to have roosted in abundance in ancient times.⁷ At times, we see Sarasvati with 10 arms too, blue neck, three eyes, having lion as her vehicle, perhaps depicting in her association with Sakti or tantric form.

SECTION - 2

SARASVATI IMAGES : A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND :

The details of the sculptural evidence of Sarasvati found in various parts of India are briefly outlined here as they have some relevance for the specimens outlined in Tamilnadu. Some striking similarity in depiction is seen and for this, a comparative study with the specimens of other regions is relevant.

We will briefly review some early specimens found in India in a chronological setting, so that we can appreciate her iconographic development.

NORTHERN INDIA :

The earliest Sarasvati image of the second century B.C. is found on the railing pillar of Bharhut. The carvings on the rails and gateways of the great Buddhist site at Bhārhut is considered to be the most important sculptural remains of the post-Mauryan period. Sarasvati here is standing in a graceful frontal pose on a large full blown lotus, playing on a seven stringed Vīna, with youthful appearance and wearing ornaments of usual Bharhut type. J.N.Banerjea⁸ regards this as an early proto-type of the goddess Sarasvati and Barua finds⁹ it an early iconic form of the deity. The Vīna which was introduced in the Sunga period is shown as a stringed instrument like that of Greek harp or lyre. The Greek influence seen in the harp may be due to the Greek contacts with India during the Mauryan and Sunga rulers.

Gāndhara and Mathura art flourished under the Kushans, during which time Sarasvati was recognised as a goddess connected with knowledge or Jñāna. Evidence of the earliest image of Sarasvati unearthed in a temple at Kankalitila near Mathura is known for Kushana workmanship. It is also identified with the Śvetāmbara sect of Jainism. The goddess is shown squatting on a plain pedestal, holding a manuscript in her hand. The upper portion of the image is lost together with the right hand. The figure draped in cloth has two attendants. The inscription (in Brahmi script of Kushana) found in the pedestal of the image states that this image was a gift of pious Jaina devotees installed under the advice of the preacher Ārya dēva in the year 54 i.e. A.D.132 or 122.

There is the representation of Sarasvati and Lakṣmi in the coin of the Gupta period along with the figure of the monarch also. Perhaps this symbolises the wealth and learning possessed by the ruler.

The sculptural representation of the personified streams of three rivers i.e. Gaṅga who stands in the centre with Yamuna and Sarasvati flanking on either

side in the Kailasanatha temple at Ellora, is a unique example of the river concept. Here Sarasvati is portrayed on her vehicle, the swan.

In the Pāla school of art, Sarasvati appears as one of the consorts of Viṣṇu. It portrays Viṣṇu carrying both his consorts Sri and Sarasvati in his arms. Here Sarasvati is seen holding an early type of harp shaped like the lute, suggesting the early date of the image. It is noteworthy to mention here that a similar harp shaped vīna is seen in the metal images of Vāgdevi from Nalanda.

An image of Sarasvati of the 10th century A.D. discovered from Malwa is now preserved in the National Museum. The image is presented in a seated posture of lalitāsana, holding a rosary in one arm and another in varadamudra. The two left arms and the left corner of the pedestal are damaged. The flying Gandharvas - couples holding long lotus stalks are shown on the upper portion indicating the fertility aspect.

The Paramara sculptures resemble very much the contemporary Rajput style. The family of the Paramaras (948-1088 A.D.) ruled over Malwa from Dhara. Bhoja, the Paramara ruler attained fame for his vast erudition and patronage of poets, besides other achievements as ruler. His ardent worship at the altar of learning is revealed in the establishment of the temple for Sarasvati in the University campus in Dhara. He also paid his homage to Sarasvati in his work Sarasvati Kanthābharana.

The temple at Chandrehi belonging to the period of the Chedis (9th to 11th century A.D.) has beautiful carvings of Sarasvati, Lakṣmi and Ganesha on the lintel of the temple door which appears to be in consonance with the known āgama sastra as pointed out earlier.

SOUTHERN INDIA :

In South Indian context we see some early specimens of Sarasvati in Chalukyan art. The following examples are noteworthy. The temple of Sarasvati at Gadag of 6th century A.D. has an exquisite sculpture of Sarasvati.

Sarasvati image at Bagali of Chālukyan specimen is seated on padmasana and has four arms holding at right upper book and lower a rosary and on the left arms, a noose in the upper and a book in lower left. She is fully ornamented with crown, kuṇḍalas, two necklaces, the flower garland, armlets etc.

The Western Chālukyan style of the tenth century A.D., depicts Sarasvati with six hands, dancing in the bhujangatrāsita mode i.e. left foot reaching the right thigh.

Ghantasāla in Andhra Pradesh is a well known Buddhist site and the image of Sarasvati found from this place according to Yasodadevi is the earliest representation of the goddess in the South India. In the context she observes :

"This Sarasvati is standing in Samabhanga posture, wears a karaṇḍamakuta, has four hands upper right holding a lotus bud, lower placed on the head of a swan, upper left with manuscript and the lower of the same side is hanging softly. A beautiful swan is depicted behind the goddess and faces right. To almost the same age belongs

the representation of Sarasvati on a Bharhut railing pillar in a standing posture playing on harp".¹⁰

Besides the Ghantasāla specimen, there is a beautiful image of Sarasvati of Bhimāvaram in the Chālukya Bhimēśvara temple. She is portrayed with four arms with akṣamāla, and abhaya pose on right side and with yīna and book on the left arms, decorated with kirītamakuta, makarakundalas, harās and yajñōpavita.

TAMILNADU :

The above brief review will clearly indicate her iconographic conceptualisation through the ages and also the variety of forms found expressed not only in Hindu pantheon but also in Buddhists and Jains. Her icon became a common heritage of the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religious ethos. The development of her sculpture from the Pallava period in Tamilnadu follows broadly the same traditions in other parts of the country but certain forms became more acceptable and hence standardised. Similarly certain traditions like Sarasvati included as a consort of Viṣṇu, were not popular.

Now we will turn our attention to Tamilnadu and present the data available to us in historical and aesthetic frame works. This study is based on extensive field work and documentation done by the author. The data is presented in a classified chronological order.

SARASVATI IN PALLAVA ART :

We are able to identify only five figures of Sarasvati in the Pallava context of which 4 are in the Kailasanatha Temple, Kānchi and one in Sundaravarada Perumāi Temple, Uttiramerur - all of them attributable to the 8th century A.D. The Kailasanatha Temple, Kānchipuram is a landmark of Pallava art. Here for the first time we get the vast assemblage of gods and goddesses, major and minor in an integrated manner within a temple complex belonging to one period. According to some scholars it is one of the earliest attempts to give expression to an agamic code while others differ. The main features of the Pallava style are assembled together in this temple in a fascinating way. The walls of the vimāna and the attached shrines are a veritable treasure house of iconographic forms which echo the religious practices of the Pallava times.

We observe the symbolic representations of Sarasvati in various concepts in this temple. In Fig.1 Sarasvati is seen in the company of her consort Brahma, playing on vīna with her two hands, has kritamakuta.¹² Devis are portrayed with two hands when shown in the company of their consort.¹³

In fig-2, we see the reclining form of Viṣṇu, upon the serpent bed, known as Seshasāyī. Here, Sarasvati playing on vīna is found at the feet of Viṣṇu along with Bhūdevī. Inclusion of Sarasvati in this is an unique one, for the well known similar sculpture of Seshasāyī at Mamallapuram of the same period does not include the same. The depiction of Sarasvati in this panel would be because Brahma her consort is shown emanating from Viṣṇu's navel.

The third specimen of Sarasvati that we notice in this temple is in a niche on the southern wall of the mahamandapa, facing south as shown in figure-3. There are four Devis in the niches. Images of Devis seen in this temple of 8th century work, depict the integration of Sakti concept. According to R.Nagaswamy

the sakti concept prevalent in the Tēvāram days is echoed in the sculptural representation of Durgā, ¹⁴ Laṅṅmi, Sarasvati and Jyeshta. The individuality gained by Sarasvati in the Sakta cult is revealed in this temple. Sarasvati sculpture here is the large specimen exclusively devoted to her. She is presented here sitting on a piṭa with left leg lying down and the right in folded form. Besides she has four arms right upper with akṣamāla lower holding palm leaf manuscript in vertical form, her left arm carries the kundika and the lower arm of the same side in dyānamudra. Note-worthy peculiarity of this sculpture is wearing of ¹⁵ kuchabanda. We also see flowing chauries (fly-whisk) a symbol on either side of divinity.

In the same temple we find a sculpture of Sarasvati on the northern prakāra wall to the west of Viṣṅu shrine facing west.

We have the example of late Pallava art of Sarasvati in Sundaravarada Perumāl Temple, Uttiramerur (Chingleput District) shown in Fig.4. It belongs to the later half of 8th century. According to Ganapati ¹⁶ Sthapati, the pattern of structure and the distribution

of sculptures conform to the Marici-Samhita of the Vaikhanasa āgama text. Here we see Sarasvati as Vakdevi accommodated in the southern side of the main sanctum on the sopānabhitta (parapet of the steps). She is found seated on the lotus pedestal with 4 arms, right arms carry aksamāla and abbaya pose, and the left upper has kamandalu while the lower arm is placed on the thigh. Her sitting posture is similar to one found in Kailasanatha temple, Kānci in fig.3 of early Pallava period. Two devotees are shown adoring here. The devotee in the right holds lotus flowers and the one on the left is in anjali pose, seeking her blessing. It is significant to note in this sculpture, the two elephants, one pouring water over the head of the goddess and the other holding the pot. This type of sculpture resembles the well-known Pallava sculpture of Gajalakshmi as found in Mamallapuram.

We also find Sarasvati as vimāna-dēvata in the same temple in figures 5 and 6. The vimāna of this temple has a galaxy of sculptures where Sarasvati is depicted in sukhāsana with 4 arms, two playing on vīna and other two arms hold kamandalu and pustaka. From the

stylistic feature of this Sarasvati it appears to be a later addition.

SARASVATI IN CHOLA ART :

Art and literature witnessed remarkable progress during the Chola rule c. A.D.900 to 1250. We see the marked increase in the number of sculptural production in keeping with increased number of temples witnessed in Chola times. The representation of Sarasvati in the sculptural art of Chola is found fairly in good numbers. This is also characterised the increasing importance given to her in literary works already discussed in chapter-2. About 24 specimens of Sarasvati sculpture in stone are presented here in their stylistic order, dividing them into three categories of early, middle and late Chola art. Some of them can be called as the masterpieces of Chola art and display the sincere devotion (bhakti) and their rich artistic tradition, we see variety and liveliness in the figures.

1. TIRUKKÖTESVARAR TEMPLE, TIRUKKOTIKAVAL, TANJORE DISTRICT

The earliest representation of Sarasvati found as a loose sculpture is in the corridor of this temple (Fig.7). She is depicted in the padmāsana posture with 4 arms - right upper having akṣamāla lower in abhaya pose, and left upper holds kamandalu and the lower of the same side has pustaka. According to an inscription dated A.D. 982 the temple was caused to/rebuilt in stone by Sembian Mahadevi. This sculpture might belong to that period or even slightly earlier.

2. PUSHPAVANESVARAR TEMPLE, MELTIRUPUNLŪRTTI :

A loose sculpture of Sarasvati is found in the entrance corridor of this temple (Fig.8). Though, in appearance, this looks like the one described above, we find variations in the attributes possessed in the arms. She is seated in padmāsana on a prominent lotus pīta. She has four arms - upper right with akṣamāla lower in abhaya pose, upper left holding the pustaka in a horizontal position and lower hand resting on thigh. She has yaḅnopavita and there are two chauri bearers shown behind. This can be attributed to 9th

century, it resembles in some aspect the sculpture of Uttiramerur already cited.

3. VEDĀNĀRĀYANASWAMI TEMPLE, VEDĀRANYAM :

The specimen of Sarasvati found in this temple can be attributed to later half of 10th century (Fig.9) Locally, she is called Yogasarasvati. She has some peculiar attributes. She is found seated on the padmāsana having jatāmakuta. She has two lotuses on two upper hands, her right lower in vyakyāna-mudra and left lower having manuscript. Though her hand is in vyakyāna-mudra which means expounding of knowledge, locally she is known as yogasarasvati.

4. Next figure illustrated here (Fi.10) also belongs to 10th century from Visamangalēśvarar Temple, Tudaiyur (Trichy district). It is placed in a niche in the southern side prākāra of main deity. Here, she is seated in padmāsana on a prominent lotus pedestal and having her right arms with usual abhāya-hasta, aksamāla, left arms have kamandalu and pustaka respectively. A peculiar and an interesting feature is the presence of umbrella over her head indicating her authority in the spiritual knowledge.

5. Sarasvati in the niche of mukamaṇḍapa of Somanathasvami Temple in Pavundarikapuram, is depicted in the same way with umbrella over the head, as in Visamangalesvar Temple mentioned above. The umbrella is shown here much more boldly. Unfortunately, the arms are found broken. The sculpture is datable to early Chola period.

In our study we are able to identify some outstanding sculptures of Sarasvati belonging to middle phase c.1000 to 1150. They are found in the Great Temple at Tanjore, Gangaikondacholapuram, the Tanjore Art Gallery and Mantrapurīśvarar Temple, Kovilur (Tanjore District).

6. BRAHADISVARAR TEMPLE, TANJORE :

One found in this temple is indeed a masterpiece in its size flowing grace and grandeur (Fig.12). She is seated in padmāsana under ornate umbrella which is again shown under a tree - a tree of knowledge. We see two little ghandarvas in a mood of astonishment and two graceful girls attending on her with fly-whisks in their hands. She wears a beautiful jatābanda, a paṭṭika

on the forehead, ratnakundala on the ears, hāras of different types, mukha-hāra, ratnahāra, wēkhala but the yajnopavita is conspicuous by its absence. On the other hand, strangely we see a prominent kuchabanda held up by vertical tapes recalling the Pallava sculptural tradition. Another unique feature is that she has two arms of which one is holding the pustaka, and other is broken. This large sculpture shows a fine balance and skilful composition of high order.

7. BRAHADESVARAR TEMPLE, GANGAIKONDACHŪLAPURAM :

This temple was built by Rājendra, son of Rājarāja, who also gave a prominent place to Sarasvati in his magnificent temple. Sarasvati in Fig.13 of this temple is placed in the entrance niche corresponding to Lakṣmi niche on the other side, indicating the high esteem in which she was held by the builder of this temple. It is also rated as one of the best examples of Chola art. However it shows marked difference from the earlier specimen in Tanjore. It has less of ornamentation, no kuchabanda, but the yajnopavita is shown prominently. She has 4 arms - right upper akṣaṃālā,

lower showing sūchi hasta, left upper holding kamandalu and lower having pustaka. We find unusual feature of ornamental prabhāvali behind her. We also find a third eye in her forehead. We can identify this figure as Gñāna-Sarasvati.

This temple shows some influence from the Chalukyas and Kalinga countries perhaps the result of Rājendra's victorial march to Kalinga. In the temple the image of Brahma is placed in his usual place is on the northern niche. But he is portaryed as an old sage with the beard as in the North Indian - Eastern Indian sculptural tradition.

There is also another sculpture of Sarasvati in this temple, going under the name Mehta Sarasvati, supposed to have been brought as a war memento by Rājendra from Chalukya country. It shows clear difference in workmanship and style from the Chola one. She is seated in padmāsana with 4 arms holding pāsa, ankusa, akṣmāla and pustaka which are uncommon in Tamilnadu. Its style also confirms its exotic origin.

The introduction of the Devi shrine in the main temple was another development that probably started from the time of Rājendra I. K.A.N.Sastri observes that the Amman shrine enshrined in this temple was built either along with or very soon after the main temple.¹⁸ The sculpture of Sarasvati in a niche of the same temple at Gangaikondacholapuram found smaller in size than the two discussed earlier. (Fig. 14)

8. TANJORE ART GALLERY :

Sarasvati sculpture (Fig.15) kept here is of medium size with 4 arms with usual attributes. The workmanship of this sculpture is of conventional type and it can be dated to late 12th century.

9. MANTRAPURISVARAR TEMPLE, KOVILŪR :

Sarasvati sculpture found in north prākāra of this temple is fairly large and follows the middle Chola style (Fig.16). The holding of lotus in both upper hands is close to one found in Vedāranyam (Fig.9). The other two arms - the right lower is in vyākyaṇamudra with akṣamala and left lower is with pustaka.

In our study we have five sculptures of Sarasvati in padmāsana attributable to late Chola period. They are detailed hereunder.

NATARAJA TEMPLE, CHIDAMBARAM :

In this temple we see a new development in the representation of Sarasvati on the Gōpura as Gōpura-dēvata. She is found in the niche in the basement of North gōpura (Fig.17). It needs mention here that from later Chole period onwards, there was a marked emphasis on the gōpuras (gateways) which began to dwarf the vimānas on the sanctum. Chidambaram gōpuras are typical of this trend. Noteworthy feature of the Sarasvati sculpture found here is the presence of riṣis at her feet

which we have not seen in earlier sculptures of Sarasvati. Here we are reminded of Dakshinamurti images where also riṣis are depicted as learning under him.

KĀSIVISVANĀTHA TEMPLE, KANCHIPURAM :

The two relief sculptures of Sarasvati found in this temple are more or less of the same period and the size (Fig. 18 and 19). The close examination of

the sculptures show some difference in depiction. She is in anjali pose in one whereas she sports with chind-
mudra and varada-hasta in the other. The former is a
^{pose}
rare/and is associated with her portrayal as the Vegavati
river paying homage to Śiva.

AIRAVATISVARAR TEMPLE, DĀRĀŚURAM (TANJORE DISTRICT)

This was built by Rājarāja Chola II. It is noted for its beautiful maṇḍapa called Rājagambira-maṇḍapa built like a chariot. Here we have a fine sculpture of Sarasvati in a niche (Fig.20). This sculpture, of course is modelled on one found at Gangaikondacholapuram (Fig.13) but clearly of inferior quality.

BRAHMA-SIVAKANDISVAR TEMPLE, KANDIYUR :

This temple is connected with a legend of Brahma, loosing his head at the hand of Śiva, and dedicated to Śiva as queller of Brahma.

Here we find a small image of Sarasvati in a formal form, seated in padmāsana with kuchabanda but no yaṅnopavita and also she is shown in a very stereotyped form (Fig.21).

SARASVATI SCULPTURE IN SUKHASANA :

In the majority of specimens Sarasvati is shown seated in the padmasana. But there are quite a few instances especially when she is shown playing on the Vīna, she is seated in the sukhasana, i.e. left leg folded and the right leg hanging down. We have some interesting parallels in North India in places like Nalanda, Mathura and Bogre.¹⁹

Among the sukhasana posture of Sarasvati in Tamilnadu, an outstanding one is found in Pushpavanesvarar Temple, Pūndi (Fig.22), datable to late 9th century. She is seen in the western prākāra of the temple, depicted in a very natural pose with two hands playing on vīna. Other formal features of Sarasvati are absent here. She has only thick hāra, characteristic of this period and prominent patrakundala. She wears jatābandam. Her eyes are shown half closed perhaps showing her intense concentration on playing vīna.

The second specimen of Sukhāsana Sarasvati comes from Nandikesvarar Temple, Turaiyur (Trichy District) (Fig.23). The sculpture can be dated to 12th

or 13th century. She has two hands holding vīna above the body, and playing on it. She has the jatamakuta with profuse ornamentation in contrast to the earlier specimen.

Next example of the sukhāsana variety of Sarasvatī comes from a Viṣṇu Temple namely Bhaktavatsala Perumāḷ Temple, Tirukkannamangai (Tanjore district). The presence of Sarasvatī in Viṣṇu temple that too placing her in the Devakosta in northern niche which is usually allotted to her consort (Fig.24) is indeed rare. Though in sukhāsana, she does not have vīna in her hands but she appears as a vyakyāna-Sarasvatī here.

The fourth specimen of the said posture is from Kuchalavapurisvarar Temple, Koyambedu in Chingleput District (Fig.25). It is a fine specimen of later Chola art. It is found in an independent shrine on the western prakāra of the temple. Her depiction is in the usual form with akṣamala, kaṁṁṁṁṁṁ, vyakyāna-mudra and the manuscript

SARASVATI IN A STANDING POSTURE :

The first known Sarasvati image of second century B.C. from Bharhut which is now found in Indian Museum, Calcutta is seen in a standing posture with a vīna.

In Tamilnadu, we meet the first example of standing Sarasvati with vīna at Tillaikalai Temple, Chidambaram (Fig.26). She is found in the niche on the south prakāra of the ardamaṇḍapa. Her figure is tall and impressive one, datable to the middle of 13th century with exquisite ornamentation and pleasing delineation. She is depicted in tribhanga pose with graceful slant of the head, holding the vīna very prominently close to her body and playing on it. The whole figure is beautifully balanced within the orbit of a decorated prabhāvali. There is a prominent paṭṭika on the forehead. She is a Vinadara-Sarasvati.

Next specimen of standing Sarasvati kept in a prominent place, is behind Abirami-amman shrine in Amirthagatisvarar Temple, Tirukkadaiyur (Fig.27). She

is found standing on the padma-pita in samabhanga pose with four arms - right lower vyakyanamudra, left lower pustaka, right upper aksmala and left upper kamandalu. The sculpture is datable to 12th century.

Two loose standing sculptures of Sarasvati kept in the collection of Madras Museum, one said to be from Mallangudi (Fig.28) and another from Bikshandar Koil (Fig.29) have been identified as late Chola sculptures. Both are in samabhanga pose and have bold and some what static features. Considering the large size, they appear to have been installed for worshipping. Both show some unusual features. Left upper arms have lotus instead of kamandalu and lower left is in abhaya mudra. In one of them (Fig.28) we are able to see prominent jaṭāmakuta, besides the usual yaṅnopavita, katibanda and hara. Both of them do not have kuchabanda.

Another sculpture of standing Sarasvati in Tanjore art gallery depicts the late Chola style of 12th or 13th century (Fig.30). Though her attributes are found to be same as the one discussed earlier, she varies in position of her left lower arm.

Thus during the Chola period, a number of beautiful sculptures of Sarasvati in a variety of postures were made and placed in the shrines, niches, vimanas and gōpuras. It was indeed a bright period in the history of religion and art and Sarasvati had her rightful place in the assemblage.

Turning to the Pandyan temples of the Pandyan region, the number of Sarasvati sculpture is indeed very limited. However one specimen found at Radhapuram in Tirunelveli District is illustrated here. It is found placed on the outer enclosure of the Varaguna Pandesvar Temple (Fig.31). The image can be dated to 13th century. The sculpture is some what in static posture and its features are very formal. Here she is portrayed in padmasana with her usual 4 arms - right upper holding akṣamāla, left upper having kamandalu, right lower in vyakhyana mudra with akṣamāla and left lower having pustaka. She is seated in a prominent lotus shaped pīṭa.

SARASVATI IN VIJAYANAGAR ART :

The next important phase of art history of Tamilnadu was the Vijayanagar period. We have identified 8 sculptures ascribable to the style of Vijayanagar period. Of these, three can be identified as Aṣṭabhuja Sarasvati, a unique form seen only during this period. They are seen in the Katchapesvar Temple in Kānchīpuram (in a small shrine in the northern end of west prākāra and the Kāmākshī. amman Temple in a shrine and in the pillars of Vasenta maṇḍapa there. All of them are seated in sukāsana holding vīna close to her body, two of them (Fig.32 and 33) accommodated in prabhavāli and the third one (Fig.34) in relief sculpture. The astabhuja Sarasvati is associated with the tantric tradition which glorifies the Saktis a mighty forces. Here the eight arms with multifarious weapons and objects indicate her various gunas or attributes. It is interesting to note that this kind of multi-armed images are familiar in Vijayanagar period like Astabhuja Vēnugōpala and sixteen armed Sudarsana. In Kumbakonam, Chakrapani Temple, the main deity is with sixteen arms.

STHALAPURĀNA SCENE :

The novelty of Vijayanagar period is the carving of mythological stories on the pillars and walls of the maṅḍapas built during this period. We have a good example of relief sculptures of the period, depicting the temple myths. In the Kalyanamaṅḍapa of Varadarajaswami Temple, Kānchipuram in (Fig.35) we see the depiction of Kānchipuram sthalapurana legend wherein Sarasvati figures prominently. Here Brahma's consort Sarasvati (who was) angry with her husband for not giving due honour to her, induces the river Vegavati to flood the sacrificial altar and destroy it. The flowing river is indicated by the moving fish and tortoise.

In the same way the relief sculpture found on the right side wall to the entrance of Vedanarayanar Temple, Pudupadi (North Arcot district) depicts the same legendary story (Fig.36), in a different way. Here both Sarasvati and Brahma are shown in action, Brahma performing sacrifice in a corner and Sarasvati inducing river to destroy the same from other corner. In between, we find rishis pleading with Sarasvati to

stop the flow of the river. This temple was built during the period of Saluva Narasimharaja of Vijayanagar in 15th century.

Yatotakarishwamy Temple, Kānchīpuram too has a stucco Sarasvati figure, sitting at the feet of the lord who is in a lying posture (Fig.37). This is found at the top of the entrance maṇḍapa of the main deity and is the replica of what is found in the sanction of the main deity. This maṇḍapa originally belonged to Vijayanagar period, later got renovated. As mentioned earlier, this temple is also connected with the legend of Sarasvati of this place.

The tradition of placing Sarasvati as vīmāna-dēvata in the Devi shrine is very well illustrated in figure 38 in Bharadwajar Temple, Pudupadi. She is placed on the northern side, playing on vīṇā. On other two sides there are Lakṣmi and Durga. This temple is datable to 16th century.

The standing sculpture of Sarasvati in the Tanjore Art Gallery dated to 15th century, with profuse

ornamentation is very typical of Vijayanagar period (Fig.39).

SARASVATI IN NAYAK ART :

We have seven specimen of Sarasvati sculptures in the typical Nayak style, which prevailed in some parts of Tamilnadu in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The Nayaks were the Governors under the Vijayanagar empire, and later on they set up independent rule in places like Madurai, Tanjore and Gingee. By and large they continued the architectural and sculptural tradition of Vijayanagar, but elaborated it further with greater embellishment. Particularly during this period we see more than-life size sculptures adorning the pillars of the temples in which, they not only portray the Hindu gods and goddesses but also royal portraits. Outstanding examples of these can be seen in Minakshi Amman Temple at Madurai, Andal Temple at Srivilliputtur, Ranganathar Temple at Srirangam and the Ramaswamy Temple at Kumbakonam. These sculptures are pleasant and impressive, though they carry somewhat exaggerated features and excessive ornamentations.

We have two very delightful examples of Vīnadhara Nritya Sarasvati almost in life-size in Minakshi Temple (Fig.40), and in Andal Temple (Fig.41). Though both represent dancing postures, variations in and depiction of leg position, /head dress certainly speak of the freedom of the sculptors in expressing the same theme. Both show intense flexibility of body. In the Madurai specimen we see a parrot sitting on the shoulder, in She is /tribanga posture with head dress done in the typical damilla fashion characteristic of rural folks of Tamilnadu. Some would identify her as vīṛali. 21

The one in the Āndal Temple shows the difference in hair style. There is a huge prabhavali at her back. She is depicted with cross leg i.e. swastika, showing movement.

Dancing Sarasvati was popular in the Hoysala sculptures and the adoption of the same in the above temples shows the influence of Karnataka art here.

We find another representation of Sarasvati in the wooden door of Mukkurani Vinayagar Gōpuraṁ (Fig.42) She is seated in sukhāsana pose, playing on vīna.

Location and placement in the entrance signify her auspicious quality.

We see yet another representation of Sarasvati in Minakshi Temple, as vimāna devata and gōpura dēvata. The latter one is illustrated here (Fig.43). Here Sarasvati with vīna is found in the third storey of the gōpura in west Ādi Veedhi built in 1570 A.D. This stucco figure however has been recently painted over.

Sarasvati enshrined next to the image of Dasavatar of Viṣṇu in Sundararāja Perumāl Temple, Tādikombu (Madurai District) (Fig.44) has some unusual features. Besides her usual lower arms with vyakhyana mudra and pustaka, the upper two arms have ankusa and pāsa. This is somewhat unusual in Tamilnadu. However, we have some such specimens in Karnataka region. She has karandamakūṭa.

Ramanathaswamy Temple, Rameswaram is a famous pilgrim centre noted for many thirthas (holy tanks) and divinities enshrined here. The presence of Sarasvati-thīrtha here has already been mentioned earlier. There is also a small but beautiful sculpture of Vinadhara

Sarasvati kept in west prakāra of the main deity here.
It is a late 18th century model (Fig.45).

The next figure illustrated is a fine depiction of Sarasvati seated on hansa (swan) playing on makara vīna. She is found as a relief sculpture on a pillar in the mandapa of the (Ādinatha Temple, Valathi, S.A. District), (Fig.46). It is of course somewhat stylistic with some exaggerated traits but a typical 17th century model.

SARASVATI IN MODERN ART :

Apart from the sculptures described above we see the production of Sarasvati sculpture in stone, stucco, paintings even in recent times. By and large, they follow the traditional prescriptions with inevitable modernisation as can be seen with sarees and the modern vīna in her hands.

In the list of modern Sarasvati, the first specimen is from Biksandesvar Temple, Biksandar Koil (Trichy district) (Fig.47) where Sarasvati is installed in a small shrine in the northern prakāra, next to Brahma shrine. She is shown with usual 4 arms, lower

arms in abhaya and varada pose, left upper holding pustaka in a vertical position and right with aksamāla. She has been depicted with jatamakuta, being seated in sukasana posture on a bhadrapita.

The next two specimens in Fig.48 and 49 are shown in saree, with usual attributes and modern vina. One in Tirumulanadar Temple at Tirumeniyur koil (Tanjore district) (Fig.48) has the flowing hair at the back typical of Sarasvati found in Ravivarma's painting. In the other one at Magulisvar Temple, Kodumudi (Coimbatore district), we see the presence of a peacock (Fig.49).

The fourth specimen of modern variety shown in Fig.50 from Parshvanada Temple, Melchittamur (S.A.District) is of Jain association. Besides the vyakyanamudra and pustaka. We find pāsa and ankusa in the 2 upper hands. A small swan is seen at the bottom.

We have a good specimen of Sarasvati in modern painting in the above mentioned temple (Fig.51). The painting is seen on the ceiling of the varanda near Sarasvati shrine there. Here again, Sarasvati is wearing saree and jacket.

A common feature in the house hold of South India is to include a picture of Sarasvati, shown at the back of title page, as conceived by Ravi Varma, a leading painter of 19th century who received the patronage of Travancore Mahārāja. His paintings cover mainly the Hindu mythology, theme from epics and puranās and also the Hindu gods and goddesses. His paintings became popular because of print medium in calenders and others.

It would be interesting to add here the mural paintings in the inner walls of the gōpura of Suchindram Temple. The paintings appear a century ago, probably done in 1888 A.D. when the reconstruction of the gōpura was completed. The walls from the 3rd to 7th storey are mainly devoted to the delineation of the events embodied in the Sucindra sthalapurana. The seventh storey presents the goddesses Lakṣmi on the eastern panel and Sarasvati on the western one. These specimens clearly illustrate how the worship of Sarasvati continues to be a living tradition and how the portrayal undergoes change to incorporate the contemporary dress and costumes.

BRONZE IMAGES OF SARASVATI :

Tamilnadu is noted for its beautiful bronze images which have a long tradition. Some of the productions of bronze images of the Chola period are considered as master pieces of that art. We have 10 specimens of Sarasvati bronzes for our study belonging to the period 10th century to modern times in figures 53 to 62.

The first bronze sculpture in our list in Fig.53 is an exquisite Chola piece belonging to 10th century. It is in the mahamandapa of Brahmapurisvar temple at Siyāttā-mangal in Tanjore district. The figure is in samabhanga pose on a lotus pītam with two hands one holding the lotus and the other with a pustaka. She has karandamakuta, wearing patrakuntala and no yajnopavita and kuchabanda. It has a characteristic of Chola style and particularly the katibanda pattern is typical of the bronze of 10th century A.D.

The next specimen of bronze Sarasvati in figure No.54 comes from Padmanabapuram Palace, Kanyakumari district. This idol is said to have been worshipped by the poet laureate, Kamban of the Chola court. It is

kept in worship even now. Other details regarding, festival associated with this idol have been dealt in chapter-III. It is a tiny idol and is found seated in sukāsana posture on a prominent lotus seat with 4 arms, 3 holding aksamala, kamandala and pustaka and the left lower in vyakyana mudra. There is a fine ornamental prabhāvali at her back. The idol is datable to 12th century A.D.

The third example of bronze image of Sarasvati in Fig.55 is from Tantōnisvar temple, Cholampēttai (Tanjore District). This is datable to 13th century and depicted in the sambhanga posture on a lotus pīṭa. She is well accommodated in a beautiful makaratorana arch.

The fourth and fifth specimens of bronze Sarasvati in figures 56 and 57 which look alike - one from Sarasvati Temple at Kuttanur (Fig.56) and other found in the maṇḍapa of Nagaraḥṛīśwami temple, Nagore (Fig.57). Both are seated in padmāsana on the lotus seat, having 4 arms holding aksamala, kamandalu, vyakyana mudra and pustaka, with jatamakuta hair style. The extra item that we find in the image from Nagaraḥṛīśwami Temple (Fig.57) is the yajnopavita. Both of them are datable to 15th century.

The next four specimens (Figures 58 to 61) are from Jaina temples in South Arcot district where Sarasvati is familiarly known as Jinavāni. Following the Jaina iconographic tradition applied to Tirthankara, the lānchana, is shown at the bottom of the image. Here also swan the vehicle of Sarasvati is shown at the pedestal as in Fig.58. She is mounted on the Hamsa (swan) in figures 60 and 61. These figures are meant for abisheka, worship and procession. Though they are of recent period they are done in the old Jain tradition.

The last specimen of bronze Sarasvati in our list in Fig.62 is from Padmanabapuram Palace. This was made by Maharāja of Travancore between 1800 and 1850 A.D. on the same model of the one said to have been left behind by the poet Kamban in the palace vide Fig.54. But stylistically it carries the Kerala tradition as can be seen in kiritam and the depiction betrays poor metal craftsmanship.

FOOT NOTES

1. Pāncharātra Āgama comprises as many as 108 samhita.
Īśvara Samhita - VII 12-15 of Pāncharātra Āgama states Sarasvati called Vāgdevi is to be installed as a Parivāradēvata in the third prakāra for the shrine of Vīralakṣmi.

Hayasirsa Samhita XXI - 15 and Viśvaksena Samhita XI-213 state that Brahma as parivāradēvata is to be exhibited as having Sarasvati and Sāvītri to his left and right sides respectively in the first courtyard of the Viṣṇu temple.

Hayasirsa Samhita Adi XXII 3b asserts that Lakṣmi and Sarasvati must be represented with lotus and Vīna respectively.

Viśvakṣana Samhita-XI 268-275 describes Sarasvati's representation according to different traditions - the svatantra (independent temple where she is all important) and paratanka (where she is dependent or secondary). If she is all important, she should be shown seated in a white lotus in padmāsana, four armed, clad in white and with pearl ornaments, with two eyes or three eyes, a rosary.

2. Marici Samhita of Vaikhanasāgama mentions the placing of Vākdevi image in the southern side of the main sanctum.

3. Viṣṇu Dharmottara, a silpa text of 7th century lays down that the figurative representation of Sarasvati should be made thus : She should be decked with ornaments of every kind, with 4 hands - two right hands to have book and a rosary and the left hands to have kamandalu and a vaishnavi (the vīna of Sarasvati is a 100 stringed instrument and is known by the special name of kachnapi) The four hands represent 4 vedas, book represented all sastras, kamandalu in her hand supposed to contain the immortal essence of all the sastras and the rosary symbolised time (kāla). The vainavi is the achievements (siddhi). Her face is like a moon, while her eyes represent sun and the moon.

This text also contains a detailed description of Sarasvativrata - the ritual observed in the worship of this goddess.

4. Aṃśumadbhedāgama - describes Sarasvati as a white complexioned lady, seated upon a white lotus, draped in white clothes having four hands - one of the right hands holding rosary and other in the vyakhyāna mudra, two left hands to hold book and kamandalu. She wears jatamakuta on her head, kundalas of rubies, yajnopavita and varied ornaments. She is also shown with three eyes and has to stand surrounded by a number of worshipping sages.
5. Pūrvakāranāgama almost repeats the description of the above text except in that it gives her gem strings and pearl ornament as also a petty stick (sudaṇḍam) in her right hand.
6. Rūpamandana - According to this silpa text the figure of Sarasvati should be located in the south of Ganesa in any temple of Ganesa. She has to be endowed with a single face, surmounted with a crown against the background of a halo with kundalas for ear-rings and with an akṣamala, a lotus, a lyre and a book in the 4 hands. She sits on a swan.

7. K.Bhattacharya, Sarasvati, 1983, Calcutta, p.77.
8. J.N.Banerjea, Development of Hindu Iconography, 1941, Calcutta, p.377.
9. B.M. Barua, Bharhut II, Calcutta, 1937, p.73.
10. Y.Yasoda Devi, Sarasvati through the Age, JIH, part-III, 1963, p.690.
11. R.Nagaswamy, Tantric Cult of South India, 1982, Delhi, p.42. He observes that this temple follows the agamic guidelines.
K.V.Soundarajan in his work "Cult in Pallava Temples", TASSI, differs from this view.
12. Kireeta Makuta, the jewelled ornamented stone-set crowns, which are common head dresses of deities as a whole and more particularly the three divinities - Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva and their devis (cf. T.N. Srinivasan, Hand book of South Indian Temples, 1962, Tirupati, p.33).
13. T.A.Gopinatha Rao, Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol.I, part-II, 1914, Delhi, p.339.

14. R.Nagaswamy, Op.cit., p.42.
15. Kuchabanda is usually seen for Lakṣmi as Sri Dēvi, the consort of Viṣṇu and it is absent for Bhudēvi.
16. Ganapati Sthapathi's paper on Uttiramerur Temple Seminar on inscriptions, Edited by R.Nagaswamy.
17. 37/1930-31.
18. K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, The Cōlas, p.715.
19. Plate Nos.5, 7, 9 in K.Bhattacharya, Sarasvati, 1983, Calcutta.
20. Please see . . . chapter-III.
21. A.V.Jayachandran, The Madurai Temple Complex, 1985, Madurai, p.78.
22. K.K.Pillay, The Sucindram Temple, 1953, Madras, p.431

EPILOGUE

As discussed in the earlier chapters, the evolution and spread of Sarasvati cult to different parts of India is indeed fascinating. Starting as a holy river associated with the Vedic r̥ṣis, she was personified as a river goddess of fertility. In the later and post Vedic times, she was identified with Vāc, the goddess of speech and thus emerged as a pre-eminent goddess of learning and arts. She was also recognised appropriately as the consort of Brahma whose four faces symbolised the four Vedas, the repositories of knowledge. Her association with the river receded into the background and her association with speech, knowledge arts and culture became enlarged. From the epic and puranic times, she was one of the three principle goddesses, corresponding to the Hindu trinity, Lakṣmī, Sarasvati and Parvati, the patron deities of wealth, knowledge and power respectively. Viṣṇu and Śiva rose to pre-eminence as the centres of the two main sectarian streams of Hinduism, but Brahma had no sectarian following and hence he lost his importance. He became a distant figure as the primordial creator (prajāpati), the grand old man (pitāmaha), and did not have independent temples

of his own. Almost all the Puranas centre round only Śīva and Viṣṇu and the role of Brahma is only incidental. His position in the temple is also subsidiary. This had its impact on the position of Sarasvati also visa-vis Lakṣmi and Parvati. Though by belief all the three are of the same status in the concept of Hindu trinity, in practice, Sarasvati did not have a sectarian following as the other two. In all the temples of Śīva or Viṣṇu in Tamilnadu, one would find an independent shrine for Lakṣmi and Parvati, but there is no individual temple either for Brahma or his consort Sarasvati. However, Sarasvati became the non-sectarian symbol of knowledge, art and culture and hence widely accepted by all the sects including the Buddhist and the Jain.

The cult of Sarasvati should have come to the south in the wake of the spread of the Brahmanical ideas, institutions and faiths. The Sangam literature, the earliest extant body of Tamil literature attests to the prevalence of vedic-puranic gods, like Viṣṇu, Brahma, Śīva, Indra, Varuna, Lakṣmi, Uma besides the several smaller divinities like Kubera and Kāma. Though there is no direct reference to Sarasvati, there is an implied

mention of her as Vāc or Sol in the Tamil grammar Tolkappiam. The Tamil epic Manimēkalai, a Buddhist work speaks of the temple of Chinta-devi, the Buddhist name for Sarasvati. The Tamil literary sources discussed at length in chapter-II clearly indicate how the Tamil authors have consistently upheld and honoured her in their works. This is further supported by the presence of Sarasvati as Jīna-Vāṇi in the Jain temples of Tamilnadu. From this it seems clear that the spread of Sarasvati worship in the south was not exclusively a Brahmanical legacy but the hetrodox faiths also contributed to its spread to a considerable extent.

We have shown how the two Tamil Bhakti literature strongly espoused the cause of the Brahmanical faiths, glorified Śiva and Viṣṇu in particular as supreme, and all other deities only perform their respective duties at their will. Though the Hindu trinity (Trimurti or ^{he} Mūvar) is often alluded to Brahma (Nānmugam)/was given less importance and almost ignored. Vaiṣṇava saints state that Narayana created Brahma who in turn created Śiva implying thereby that both are subservient to Viṣṇu. There are only few references to Sarasvati in the hymns of Āḷvars and she is said to have obtained

her power of speech from Narayana. More or less similar sentiments are found in the hymns of the Saiva saints who state that both Sarasvati and Lakṣmi derived their power from Parvati. So, the Bhakti movement did not contribute to the development or popularisation of Sarasvati cult.

It is from the post-Bhakti period that we see Sarasvati gaining greater recognition. Many factors contributed to this and one of them was the increasing influence of the tāntric philosophy which glorified the Sakti (the goddess) aspect in general. The later Chola and Vijayanagar periods witnessed the establishment of separate shrines for the goddesses particularly for Lakṣmi and Parvati. A few shrines for Sarasvati also came up with in the Śiva temples as for example at Tiruvanaikka, Vedaranya, Kānchīpuram and others. She also figures prominently as one of the important parivāra-dēvatās in a niche or as a vimāna-dēvata in the leading Chola temples like the Great Temple Thanjavur and the Brihadisvarar Temple at Gangaikondacholapuram. Still later, she is given her rightful place among the other divinities as a gōpura-dēvata as seen in the temples of Cidambaram and

Vridhachalam. They also contain some of the most outstanding sculptural productions of Sarasvati as Jñana Sarasvati, Yōga-Sarasvati, Vinadhara Sarasvati.

The Chola period also coincided with the remarkably bright period in the development of Tamil language and literature. Works of different types, epics, war poems (parani), grammar works, lexicons, commentaries, laudatory poems came up in large numbers. We find a high place given to Sarasvati in these works. Leading Tamil poets like Kamban, Oṭṭakuttan, Kālamegham, Pugalendi expressed their adorations to Sarasvati as a source of inspiration for their literary achievements. Kamban wrote a laudatory poem Sarasvati-andadi and glorified her as the goddess of pure Tamil (Sen Tamil Selvi). Oṭṭakuttan, the court poet of Kulottunga Chola built a temple for Sarasvati at Kūttanur and his descendents patronised it. She became the patron deity for the Tamil poets and several popular stories associating her with their lives appeared in the Tamil literary tradition. They portray Sarasvati as the mother of the poets, ever ready to protect the life and honour of her children. She was extolled as the source of Sanskrit and Tamil languages. Subrahmanya Bharati, the leading poet of Tamil renaissance wrote a

long and beautiful poem on her and described her as the goddess of not only poetry but also science and technology, arts and crafts. For him Sarasvati represents a synthesis of ancient wisdom, poetry, fine arts and the modern expanding frontiers of science and technology.

The influence of Sarasvati is also preserved in the several temple myths (stalapuranas) and traditions of Tamilnadu. Perhaps no where in India can we see this tradition of composing stalapuranas for every temple so well established. They increased in number during the Vijayanagar and Nayak periods (15th to 17th centuries). Sarasvati figures quite prominently in them along with her consort Brahma. Particularly the temples of Kāñchi, both Saiva and Vaiṣṇava, have associated the origin of the temples to the Brahma's sacrifice (yagna) and Sarasvati disturbing it by taking her original form of a river (Vegavati) and flooding it, and Viṣṇu or Śiva controlling her. This story occurs in different versions with appropriate adaptations in almost all the ancient temples of Kāñchi. It also became the theme of some sculptural representations as seen in the Varadarajaswami, Yathokkav and Kamakshi Amman Temples. The recling Viṣṇu at Kāñchi

is supposed to have acted as a dam (Sethu) to contain the River Vegavati and hence called Vekkapai or Vēga-Sēthu. Sarasvati is shown seated humbly at the feet of the reclining Viṣṇu - an iconographic representation not seen anywhere in India.

Sarasvati's association with the river is preserved to this day not only in the daily prayers of the Brahmins but also at the popular level. The traditional belief that the river Sarasvati is present in all the confluences is well preserved in Tamilnadu, in places Tirumukkudal near Kānchi (as Vēgavati), Bhavani near Erode (as Vauvani) and the holy Mahamakam, tank at Kumbakonam.

The sixtythree icons of Sarasvati illustrated in the thesis help us to trace her impact on the art and iconography in the different parts of Tamilnadu right from the Pallava period (7th century A.D.) to the present day. We have shown the subtle variations in the delineation of her icon depending on the aspect illustrated and also the stylistic influences. In the superb specimen of the middle Chola period, she is shown seated in Padmasana under an umbrella or under a tree symbolising

knowledge. In another temple in Gangaikonda Cholapuram she is depicted in a niche with the venerable sages (Riṣis) learning at her feet reminding us of the similar portrayal of Śiva as Dakshinamurthi, the Lord of Vedic wisdom. During the later Chola and Vijayanagar times, we see an increase in her portrayal as the Gāna Sarasvati (with Vīna). The dancing form of Sarasvati (Nritta Sarasvati) which was popular in the Hoysala school at Karnataka, also had its influence here and we see one or two specimens. In the Jain temples she was depicted as Jīnavāni with her vehicle hamṣa. Quite a few bronze images of Sarasvati also indicate that she was taken in procession during the festivals.

Thus Sarasvati has become an integral part of Tamil cultural heritage - religion, literature, myths, music, art and iconography. Though Sarasvati was essential the goddess of the elite, and the deity of the poets and scholars, her popularity percolated to the folk level also through the street dramas (terukūthu) which enacted the Indian epics and puranic stories. Sarasvati-pūja as part of the Navaratri pūja is celebrated by all sections of the society in Tamilnadu. That day is dedicated to her and as a symbol the books and the musical instruments

are placed in pūja for worship. The tradition of starting any educational activity by invoking her blessings is still practised. Despite several changes in customs, habits, and living conditions, among people, veneration to Sarasvati is uneradicably graven in the minds and thoughts of the seekers of intellectual pursuits, particularly and significantly in Tamilnadu (Sarasvati

Kadaksham)

Katalshe