The information collected from the sources like the Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas, the Mahābhārata, and the myths and legends of the Purāṇas and the Upaniṣads, throws interesting light on the transformation of the Vedic river Sarasvatī into a goddess of learning, speech and music. The metamorphosis of Sarasvatī from a river to a female deity took place through a process which is far from straight. It has started from the time when the banks of Sarasvatī had been esteemed as the most sacred spot for sacrifice and all considerable sages had their hermitages on them. As a result, the river Sarasvatī became sanctified and the religious rites like the śrādhas were performed on her banks which were regarded as the most auspicious for sacrificial purposes. It is on her shores that Agni-Vaiṣvānara issued forth from the month of Videgha Mādhava and travelled to the east carrying the Aryan religion of sacrifice to that region. It is she who conserved the Vedas by feeding the sage Sārasvat on her fishes when during the twelve years' drought other Brāhmaṇas had left the region. This Vedic tradition of Sarasvatī being the wife of Sārasvat was added to the feminine ending of nadi. An earlier identification with Vāc (speech) helped the process still further. In the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇas, Sarasvatī is also identified with speech of the middle region and also with the second form of the thunderbolt. In fact,
it is she who created the thunderbolt for Indra out of her own foam in which a generous measure of melted butter formed an ingredient. In later lexicons all synonyms of Sarasvatī came to be equated with divine wisdom and the revealer of Vedic lores. Thus in the Vedas and the Mirukta it was securely established that Sarasvatī gave copious waters and imparted wisdom.

In the Rgvedic tradition Sarasvatī is found to be represented both as a river and a goddess. An intermediate identification with the learned female seer Vāc appears to have expedited the process of transformation from river to a deity. Thus the river Sarasvatī so frequently mentioned in the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇas recedes into the background and the aspect of the deity comes to the front. Vāc-Sarasvatī and Sarasvatī-Vāc are the forms sometimes met with, and Sarasvatī is repeatedly credited parallelly with Vāc as having used her speech to help the gods in their attack upon the demons and to cure them when ill or exhausted. Once the relation between Sarasvatī and Vāc became firmly established the status of the former as a symbol of learning was definitely secured and she became the mother of the Vedas and the dispenser of all wisdom and clarity of speech. She then took an anthropomorphic shape to be adorated as a deity. Thence she is noted to be proclaimed as the foremost of all mothers, the best of the rivers and the greatest of the goddesses.

In the Vedic tradition Sarasvatī is primarily regarded as the sakti of Brahmā, the revealer of the Vedas and
the presiding deity of wisdom and learning. She still retains the swan and the lotus as her seats and carries the rosary and the books representing the Vedas in her hands. She is intimately connected with Brahmā in her depiction in literature, inscriptions and religious practices. She is very often described as having a short and strong temper and is devoid of the qualities of an ideal wife. When Brahmā married the youthful Gāyatrī, she cursed him to the effect that Brahmā would be worshipped only one day in the year. This myth seems to have reconciled the reality of the gradual extinction of Brahmā's temples and worship. It possibly also explains why Sarasvatī assumed an independent status. Her devotees preferred to disassociate her from a Vedic god waning in prestige, because they knew that in a country of culture like India Sarasvatī as a symbol of learning would always be popular. But once being divested of matrimonial encumbrances with Brahmā, the Purānic mind began to search for a new partner for her.

When Visnu rose to eminence a connection of Sarasvatī with him was established. In Prāpancaśāra Tantra Vāc and Sarasvatī became the Vaisnava saktis of consonants and vowels, respectively. A close relationship with Lakṣmī, the goddess of prosperity and the wife of Visnu, from very early times helped the Vaisnavite transformation of her. Not only Sarasvatī became endowed with prosperity, but she was very often invoked together with Lakṣmī. She is one of the deities who despoiled Śrī of her riches, and also became the co-wives of Visnu along with ḍāmā Lakṣmī. The natural antagonism of co-wives, found in them, possibly establishes a hate and love
relationship between prosperity and learning all over the world.

To what length the strained relationship between the two co-wives of Visnu might go is described with great details in the Brahma-vaiivarta Purana where an amusing story of domestic unquietness is told. Visnu had always been partial towards Laksmi and this was too much for the other two wives, Sarasvati and Ganga. As soon as Visnu was out one day, a quarrel broke out and by mutual curses all the three were converted into streams like Sarasvati, Ganga and Padma. Here we have the counter process of the Vedic belief, for in the Vedas we find a river transformed into a goddess, while in a late Puranic tradition the goddess is transformed into a river. The same reversal in concept may also be observed in the long legend of the Padma Purana (Srastikhandam) wherein it is stated that Sarasvati, the daughter of Brahma was approached by Visnu to carry fire (anala) from Puskara and to drop it into the sea (lavanasagara).

Both Laksmi and Sarasvati are symbolically worshipped on corn and books, respectively. In some parts of Bengal their images are not usually immersed lest prosperity or learning, as the case may be, should depart. The four arms with which Sarasvati is sometimes invested, the lotus and discus that sometimes appear in her hands, her worship on the Sri-pancami day which is equally sacred to Laksmi, in her descriptions as the sakti of the Saikarsana Vyaha of Narayana—all ally her with Visnu. In order to explain why she was at
all related to Brahma, the Brahma-vaiyarta Purāṇa mentions the quarrel of the co-wives of Visnu who finally sent Sarasvatī away to Brahma and Gaṅgā to Śiva, bestowing on the former the uncomplimentary epithets Vānduṣṭa and Kalabapiyā and calling Laksāmi susilā. This story of the Brahma-vaiyarta Purāṇa, narrating the feud among Laksāmi, Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā, apparently indicative of a late date, when an attempt was made under the influence of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult to transform Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā into their original river form.

The transformation of the goddess into the śakti of Śiva, whose spirit of revelation she ultimately became, may be traced in the Śaiva Āgamas. In Kashmir Sarada, who is identical with Sarasvatī, claimed fervent devotion. Durgā as a synonym of Vāc appears in the Brhat Devatā and the only goddess having resemblance with Sarasvatī to be found in the Brhat Samhitā is Brahmāmsā with whom Durgā is identified. In the Sarada-tilakatantra, from which the present mode of worshipping Sarasvatī is derived, the Śaiva associations are obtrusive. She is Sarada, Varadā, Parvata-sikharajāta, snow-white, three-eyed and with the crescent moon on her forehead. Later compositions call her Gouri, Śivakānta, Śahkar-ardhaṅginī, Bhadrakāli, Mahēsvari and Sarvāni. She is seated on a lion, clothed in tiger-skin and decorated with serpents and the trident (trīśula). The blue Sarasvatī is also a Śaiva innovation, based probably on a Brähmana tradition. It was only by helping the gods that Sarasvatī got a blue lotus as a reward. If Brahma's wisdom (jnāna) and Visnu's prosperity
(aisvarya) could be associated with Sarasvatī, it is but natural that Śiva's dispassion (vairāgya) should also be related to her in a land where the ideal of life is a harmonization of these three virtues. In spite of many dark things ascribed to Sarasvatī in the Purānas, she retains all through the whiteness of purity or the blueness of immensity and depth, and represents spiritual qualities of the mind, such as, praṇā, medhā, smṛti, māti, etc.

Sarasvatī, whose first appearance is noted in the Rgveda, has grown in popularity through the ages. No doubt, her association with the presiding deities changed from time to time. In the Vedic tradition she is a consort of the leading Vedic deity Brahmā, and known also to be associated with Indra, Āświns, Mitra, Varuṇa and others in her activities. But as time changed, and the cult of Vishnu emerged powerfully, Sarasvatī came to be associated with him, not withstanding the secured position of Laksāmi as his consort. In still a later period we find her as the consort of Śiva, and worshipped in Sivaite manner. But in spite of such a variegated relationship with the presiding deities of the different phases of her conceptual evolution what seems to be significant is her universal acceptance by the Indians as a goddess of purity, learning and fine arts. There is reason to believe that the followers of different cult divinities, particularly of the Puranic tradition, adopted her in their myths being unable to ignore the popularity Sarasvatī enjoyed. This is because the tradition of Sarasvatī as a goddess of
learning and purity persisted in the mind of the people since the days of the \textit{Ṛgveda}, when she lived the dual-life of a river as also of a female divinity.

From the \textit{Purāṇas}, the \textit{Āgamas}, the \textit{Śilpa} texts and the Tantras, it would be clear that in spite of some variations Sarasvatī retained several easily cognizable attributes and vehicles which help us identifying her without much doubt. She is white complexioned and usually wears white clothes and even among the ornaments her favourites one are made of white pearls. She sits or stands on white lotus and also generally holds the same flower in one of her hands. \textit{Vīnā}, i.e., lyre and \textit{Pustaka}, i.e., manuscript, are however, the most characteristic of her attributes, while rosary, water-vessel, pen etc., are also popularly known in the same category. \textit{Hamsa} or Swan, an association of \textit{Brahmā}, the Vedic god, continues till to date as the usual vehicle of Sarasvatī. Peacock and lion are too variants that may also be met with beneath her in the different traditions.

The place of learning, fine arts and over all purity of mind in the life of the Indian people may be appreciated from the fact that, the concept of a the goddess Sarasvatī made no less impact on the followers of two other major religious systems independent of the Brahmanical Puranic tradition. Though the Jainism and Buddhism originated with a note of protest against the dominations of the Brahmanical vested interest over the religious life of the people in the closing days of the Vedic period, followers of both these religions are found to take up in the course of time many of the
divinities worshipped by the Brahmanical Hindus. It is natural, therefore, that Sarasvatī with her symbolic import in relation to some universal qualities would be inducted in their pantheons. To meet the temperaments and tastes of the followers of Mahāvīra and Tathāgata the form and implication of the deity have been modified in different aspects, but here too, what is significant is her inseparable association with the virtue, or śīla, as it may be called, of knowledge and purity. Besides, in some of the aspects of the Buddhist Sarasvatī it is possible to trace some clear tribal traits associated in particular with the Sabaras. It appears extremely interesting when we note that a tradition of Sarasvatī relating her with snake cult finds a clear cognizance in as late a period as the 12th Century A.D. in the forms of Manasā worshipped in Eastern India. Same can be said also in regard to Jāngulī, the Buddhist divinity, who shows snakes as her associates. Again, all these snake associations seem to have descended from a hoary past when the Atharvaveda, containing a tradition of Sarasvatī as a healer from the dying effect of the snake poison, was composed.

The growth of the Buddhist pantheon took place during the phase of the religion which may be termed as Mahāyāna-Tantrayāna. Development of the Mahāyāna-Tantrayāna cult began sometime about the third-fourth Century A.D., but its final form was given during the period of 8th to 12th Century A.D. in Eastern India, under the supremacy of the Palas in
the region. When the Mahāyāna–Tantrayāna aspect of Buddhism spread out in different Northern and South-eastern countries, we find that the concept of Sarasvatī in her Buddhist version followed the track. Thus, though in a much diluted form, Sarasvatī concept is noted prevalent at least as a passing phenomenon in such distant countries as Nepal and Tibet in one hand and Java on the other. It seems that the reason behind this universal acceptance of the concept of Sarasvatī is nothing but the qualities and virtues, viz., knowledge, purity of mind, learning of fine arts, etc., which she symbolizes in her chaste and exquisite form.