I. Some preliminary observations on Sarasvatī: Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, is held in high esteem in India. She is known variously as Vāc, Vāgdevī, Vāgiśvarī, Vānī, Sāradā, Bhāratī, Vīnapānī and so on. Her milk-white clay images are worshipped in Bengal with great pomp and grandeur by the seekers of knowledge, music and art on the Śrī-pancami day falling usually in the bright fortnight in the month of Māgh (January-February) every year. In India learning being valued as one of the principal objectives of life, the goddess Sarasvatī, as knowledge incarnate, is widely worshipped from the very ancient time. In the Brahmanical mythology, she is conceived as the wife either of Brahmā or Viṣṇu or Śiva, the members of the Brahmanical triad, while the Buddhists assimilated her into their pantheon as the wife of Mañjuśrī, the Buddhist God of Transcendental Wisdom. Several sadhanas in the Śadhanā-mālā allude to her various aspects and prescribe that she confers learning, intelligence and memory to the worshippers. In Jainism also she is named as Sarasvatī, Śrutadevātā, Vānī, and Sāradā, and is assigned a special honoured place. Thus in the domain of Indian religious and cultural life, irrespective of creeds, she maintains a formidable position throughout the ages.
In her earliest references, as found in the Rigveda, Sarasvatī is the name of a river girdling Brahmavarta the sound land on which the Vedic culture flourished. Gradually, she becomes a river-goddess, identified with Vāc in the post-vedic literature; and finally emerges as the pre-eminent goddess of learning and wisdom. This peculiar development of the conception from a river to a river-goddess and then to an abstract goddess of wisdom is possibly for her association with prayer and the sacrificial performances of vajña on the banks of the Sarasvatī. But her character as a river-goddess is never completely separated from her abstract intellectual nature. Those two characters run side by side and finally replace to the abstract concept of Vāc, the goddess of speech, stimulating the holy thoughts. It is also interesting to note that the epithet ambitame, or the most motherly, applied to Sarasvatī in the Rigveda brings her in close connection with other mother goddesses like Aditi, Prthivi, Purandhi, etc. This, probably due to her capacity of supplying abundant water and thereby ensuring fertility to the lands on her borders for the growth of crops. But throughout, the ages she is never lost in the Hindu mythology and religion of her original identity as the goddess of learning, or wisdom, though she is sometimes assigned a unique position as the embodiment of sakti or energetic principle.

In Hindu iconography Sarasvatī is found to be represented in several forms with wide variety in emblems,
vehicles and attributes. She is two-armed, four-armed or multi-armed, and found both in standing and seated poses. Her snow-white complexion, garments and ornaments emphasise on her purity. The texts, however, are not unanimous as to the attributes in her hands, which include manuscript (pustaka), white lotus (pundarika), rosary (aksamālā), musical instrument (vīṇā), water-vessel (kamandalu), etc. Usually, her vehicle is swan, but images of Sarasvatī sitting on ram, peacock and lion have also been discovered from different places of India.

The Jaina Sarasvatī or Śruta-devatā approximates very closely to the Brahmanical Sarasvatī. She is generally endowed with two or four arms, holding lotus, book, rosary, water vessel and the Varadamudrā. The Śvetāmbaras generally give her swan as the vehicle, while the Digambaras provide her with a peacock, both the birds agreeing with the conception of Sarasvatī as a river-goddess of the Hindus. The Śvetāmbaras hold special festivals in her honour on the Jñānapaṇcami which is the fifth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Karttika and the Digambaras observe the Śrutapaṇcami day falling usually on the fifth day of the bright half of Jyestha.

The Buddhist Sarasvatī shows four different forms viz., Vaijra-sarasvatī, Vairavīṇāsarasvatī, Vairasāradā and Mahāsarasvatī. Like Manjusīrī and Prajñāpāramitā, she is also believed to be bestower of knowledge, wisdom and memory. Besides, there are other forms of the deity which
were popularly worshipped by the Buddhists. The cult of the goddess became so popular amongst the Buddhists during its Tantrayana phase that her worship was not limited to India's geographical borders; rather it spread out into Nepal and Tibet, Japan and Java. In all these countries she is regarded as the goddess of speech and eloquence holding lute (vīnā) in her hands. She is white-complexioned and shown seated or standing, her vehicle being swan or peacock.

It is to be noted in this connection that from the very ancient times, the Indian poets, sages and common people in view of fulfilling the intellectual attainments, composed verses and scriptures on Sarasvati. There is also a common belief that the great poets like Vālmiki and Kālidasa obtained the power of composing verses from her. In subsequent times also the poets normally begin their verses with an invocation to Sarasvati. A Hindu child even to-day worships her on the first day of starting his educational life. The Indians believe that by the grace of Sarasvati, a fool becomes a sage of eminence or a learned man (yat prasādāt munisrestha murkho bhavati mandita).

II. Modern Researches on Sarasvati :

Sarasvati, as one of the most important early Indian deities, had attracted attention of many of the modern scholars who made researches about her antiquity, concept and iconic characteristics. It is rather imperative for us to take into account and discuss the importance of these researches, many of which came to our help in shaping the
present treatise as a comprehensive study on the conceptual and iconic development of the goddess.

Thomas Moore in his memorable work entitled *Hindu Pantheon*, published as early as 1810, made an endeavour to appraise the power and position of a number of Brahmanical gods and goddesses including Sarasvatī on the basis of different Puranic myths and legends connected with their worship. According to him, the goddesses are uniformly represented by the Hindus as the subordinate powers of their respective lords. Sarasvatī as the wife of Brahma enjoys the creative faculty of imagination and invention and is worshipped as the presiding deity of literature, fine arts, music and rhetoric. Her attributes corresponds with those of Minerva Musica in Greece or Italy. Moore's study on Sarasvatī is based on the tenth book of the *Rgveda*, as presented in *Asiatic Researches*, vol.III, and the popular myths connected with the deity. Owing to lack of accurate knowledge in Sanskrit and shortage of archaeological findings, Moore failed to depict the precise position of the deity in all its aspects. But his findings drew the attention of a good number of European scholars who in subsequent times studied on the deity. Vans Kennedy in his *Researches into the Nature and Affinity of Ancient Hindu Mythology*, published in 1831, made some observations on Sarasvatī on the basis of the Matsya, Skanda and Varāha Purāṇas. Kennedy tried to give a comprehensive shape to the self-contradictory Puranic legends relating to Sarasvatī, Sāvitrī and Gāyatrī,
all being the names of the wives of Brahmā and considered them to be synonymous designating a single divinity. But he did not carefully examine all the Puranic myths and legends. As a result, his study became brief and inconclusive. The next significant publication is the translation of the 'Original Sanskrit Text' (vol. I-V) by James Muir in the year 1873. In section XX (vol.V) of the said text Muir presented an elaborate picture of the goddess Sarasvatī on the basis of his study of the Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas and the Mahābhārata. He referred to a good number of Vedic and post-Vedic literature and interpreted them in the lines of Śāyana and Yāska. He is of the opinion that Sarasvatī in the Rāṣṭra is primarily a river-deity and does not appear to be identified with Vāc, the goddess of speech. It is in the Brāhmaṇas and the Mahābhārata that Sarasvatī, the river-goddess, is identified with Vāc, and becomes under different names the wife of Brahmā and the goddess of wisdom and eloquence. Muir further points out that the Aryan, after traversing the country of the five rivers had arrived on the banks of the Sarasvatī, settled there for a long period and considered it to be the holiest of all ancient rivers of India. As the river had completely lost in the desert, it is difficult to identify the courses through which it passed. Muir for the first time presented a systematic study on Sarasvatī both as a river and a deity on the basis of several literary evidences. But the archaeological data did not play any part in his study. Thereafter, C.F. Oldham's article entitled 'The Sarasvatī and the Lost River of
Indian Desert' was published in the *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* in 1893 where it was shown how the Vedic Sarasvatī, a large and rapid river had lost in the sands. Oldham elaborately analysed the literary evidences supplied by James Muir and other scholars and added the archaeological findings based on the remains of the old river-beds and showed how the Sarasvatī had finally disappeared in the sands. His article, as the very name suggests, is related to the river Sarasvatī, that flowed from north to west to reach the sea, and became desicated and lost in the western desert. However, the aspects of Sarasvatī as a deity of learning, eloquence and wisdom did not find a place in it. W.J. Wilkins' significant publication entitled *Hindu Mythology* came out in 1882. His observations on Brahmā and Sarasvatī (Chapter III) are based on the study of Kennedy and Muir, and no additional information was added to it. This was followed by the publication of *Vedic Mythology* by A.A. Macdonell in 1897. On the basis of his study of the Vedic texts, the learned author referred to Sarasvatī as a river and also a deity. Later on Macdonell and A.B. Keith published the *Vedic Index* in 1897 and Hopkins came out with his *Epic Mythology* in 1915. These two memorable works helped the scholars of the subsequent times to analyse the myths and legends connected with the various Brahmanical gods and goddesses. But it should be remembered that their iconographic features did not find any clear recognition in these studies. It was with the discovery of individual iconic image in the beginning
of the twentieth century that the scholars began to analyse individually the peculiarities of the deities belonging to the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina pantheons.

With the publication of T.A. Gopinath Rao's monumental work, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (vol. I & II), in 1914 and 1916 respectively, the scope of researches on Brahmanical images on the basis of Śilpa texts, inscriptions, coins, seals and actual images became expanded. But the work being a compendium on the developments of Brahmanical iconography, no special attention could be focussed by the learned author on any individual deity, not to speak of a subordinate deity like Sarasvatī. So far the most important contribution in the study of the conceptual and iconographic features of Sarasvatī seems to be the memorable Bengali monograph of A.C. Vidyabhusan, entitled *Sarasvatī*, published in 1933 (1340 B.S.). Vidyabhusan in his work has painstakingly collected information relating to the nature of worship of Sarasvatī prevalent among the Brahmanical Hindus, the Jainas and the Buddhists in ancient and mediaeval ages. He acquaints us with a good number of images of the deity found in and outside India. The notes and commentaries appended to his book were of immense help to us and his method of quoting original verses is no less benefitting. But what is wanting in Vidyabhusan's work is a critical approach to a subject matter which entails so many myths and legends recorded in the Vedic Puranic and epic literature. In the absence of a scientific approach his work appears to be without any method and
direction. As a result, the work becomes rather a catalogue of images without having a proper perspective. In the manner of quoting the verses from the Vedas, Puranas, Sādhana etc., the same lack of historical approach is noticed. Therefore, inspite of its importance as a pioneer work, it is difficult to accept the monograph as a comprehensive and dependable work on the subject.

Haridas Bhattacharjee in the K. K. Pathak Commemoration Volume, published in 1934, wrote an article on "Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning." This article has come to our help in regard to arranging the textual evidences of the Vedas, the Brahmanas and the Purāṇas on Sarasvatī. Subsequently, J. N. Banerjea's monumental work The Development of Hindu Iconography was published in 1941 and 1956 (2nd Edition). It deals mainly with the interpretative aspects of the Hindu divinities as well as the process of evolution of the Brāhmaṇical iconography. This is a comprehensive work on some of the major and minor Hindu deities. While discussing the evolution of the concept of Śrī-Lakṣmī and her worship, he had briefly referred to the nature of worship of Sarasvatī, particularly by the Hindus. Instead of elaborating the topic Banerjea advised his readers to consult the work of N. K. Shattasali who in his book Iconography of the Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum, published in 1929, treated the topic in more details. But it is to be noted that Shattasali's discussion on the special features of the Brahmanical and Buddhist images of Sarasvatī is made mostly on the basis of images found in
East Bengal, now Bangladesh. As Sarasvati is known to be worshipped in different parts of Indian sub-continent in her diverse aspects, it is natural that his study of the goddess could not be comprehensive or conclusive. Since then numerous publications have appeared on the topic, but none of them fulfills the demand of the subject, whether from conceptual or from iconic point of view. For example, O. C. Ganguly's paper, "An image of Sarasvati in the British Museum" was published in Rupam in 1924. In his article Ganguly has discussed the English rendering of the inscription on the pedestal of the image and the iconographic features of the deity in details. References may also be made to the works of Stella Kramrisch, R.D. Banerjea and Bhagawant Sahai, who made elaborately discussion on some of the images of Sarasvati found in different places of India.

As regards the conceptual and iconographic features of Sarasvati in Buddhist Pantheon, we should especially mention the names of Alice Getty and Benoytosh Bhattacharyya for their works Gods of Northern Buddhism and Indian Buddhist Iconography, respectively. The Tantravāna Art, edited by S.K. Sarasvati and published by the Asiatic Society in 1977 is a recent addition to the subject, which came to our great help. Nevertheless, these works, primarily dealing with the special features of several Buddhist deities, and sometimes of Sarasvati of a particular region, does not claim to be a critical study of the evolution and development of the latter in and outside India.
U. P. Shah may be regarded a pioneer in the study of Sarasvatī from the Jaina point of view. His article "Iconography of the Jaina Goddess Sarasvatī" was published in the Journal of the University of Bombay, in September 1941. In this article Shah has discussed the iconographical features of a large number of Jaina Sarasvatīs, found among the swāi sculptures and paintings of Western India, with the help of textual evidence. He has classified the information collected from a large number of texts in a systematic scheme, and has thereafter studied them in relation to images of the deity discovered from the various parts of the country. In the course of his study Shah has refuted the observations made by B. C. Bhattacharyya in his book 'Jaina Iconography' relating to the sixteen Vidyādevīs of the Jainas and concluded that the Vidyādevīs were in no way connected with Śrutadevatā or Sarasvatī. We should record that in preparing our chapter on the Jaina variants of Sarasvatī, we are heavily indebted to Shah.

It is needless to mention that the above account of the modern research on Sarasvatī is far from exhaustive and it does not cover the names of all the scholars whose works have come to our help in the preparation of our present work. Their names are included in the Bibliography and, whenever felt necessary, also in the notes.
III. Sources for the study on Sarasvatī:

The materials for the study of the conceptual and iconographic features of Sarasvatī are of two distinct kinds—literary and archaeological. In appraising the importance of these sources in general and pointing out difficulties in their study, we propose to take up them under distinct headings.

(a) Literary sources: There is no dearth of references to Sarasvatī in the vast literature of ancient and mediaval India. Starting from the Rāyeda she is found to be represented in her different aspects in the following literature like the Brāhmanas, the Great epics, the Purāṇas, the Āgamas, the Tantras and the Śilpa texts. Besides the Brahmanical tradition, she is also referred to in the Jaina and Buddhist texts. It is natural, therefore, that in different texts, originated from divergent religions and cult backgrounds Sarasvatī appears with different allusions and forms. Such being the circumstances we have taken sufficient care to collect all the relevant materials from these extensive literary sources to correlate them with the best possible critical method for revealing the conceptual pattern of the deity by discarding the superfluous elements in her myths which developed through the centuries. The Vadas and the Brāhmanas are significant for containing information on Sarasvatī in the process of her transformation from a river to a deity. References to Sarasvatī have also been found in the Mahābhārata in various contexts. We have discussed them in details.
under relevant chapters. The **Puranas** and the **Upapurānas**, are of great importance in the study of the conceptual as well as iconic developments of the deity. We have made an exhaustive discussion of all the Puranic myths relating to the position of Sarasvatī and her activities. Some of the **Puranas** like the Mārkandeya, the Matsya, the Skanda, the Padma and Brahma-Vaivarta contain sections dealing with the forms of her images. The information collected from these texts are arranged in separate chapter in order to explain the divergences and distinctive characters of the deity in the changing religious conditions. Casual references noticed in the Āgamas like the Pūrvakāranāgama, the Aṃsumadbhedāgama, etc., in connection with the preparation, consecration and the worship of Sarasvatī have also been taken into account. The Tantras and the Silpa texts deal with the iconographic features and the method of worship. We have especially examined the informations found in the Brhad-Samhitā, the Visnudharmottara, the Aparājitasūrya, the Sīlparatna and the Rupamandana. From our survey of these Sīlpa-texts, it would be apparent that they discuss developments of Sarasvatī covering a period from the 6th century A.D. to the 16th century A.D. References have also been made to the various dhāraya-mantras of Sarasvatī which are incorporated in the works of rituals connected with her method of worship. As the dhāyas of Sarasvatī obtained from the Brahmanical, Jaina and Buddhist texts do not always agree with each other, we have compared and examined the conflicting
types of the deity belonging to different times and regions before arriving at a dependable interpretation.

In collecting information about Sarasvati from the various branches of literature, we have faced some difficulties. First, for the defective reading of some texts we had to make collated studies on them to obtain a dependable reading. Secondly, discrepancies in the recording of the myths of the deity in different Puranic texts are noted, and in such cases we have tried our best to offer the basic story by eliminating their superfluous aspects. Thirdly, there are conflicting stories regarding the status of the deity in some texts, and to reconcile them we have made critical approach from an historical understanding.

(b) Archaeological sources: The iconographical study of Sarasvati is chiefly based on archaeological finds of northern and southern India which include stone sculptures, bronze statuettes, seals, paintings and epigraphical and numismatic evidences. The vast span of time stretching from 2nd century B.C. to the 16th century A.D. have yielded numerous images of the goddess to provide a material background to the information gathered from various literary sources. Some of the images show clear iconographic features, while others are damaged by the vandalism of the iconoclasts. References have also been made to some new types of images which throw interesting light on the iconic features of the deity. But there are the problems of correlation between the textual prescriptions and the forms of the extent images. There are indeed many early and late mediavel
Sarasvatī images whose iconographic features completely tally with the textual descriptions. But there are numerous other images too whose features can only be partially explained by the texts. Occasionally we meet with the images of the deity which are found to be difficult to account for with the help of known iconographic literature. The problems relating to such apparent discrepancies between the images and the texts could not always be satisfactorily solved. But images of Sarasvatī collected from Ghantasala, Bharhut and Mathura belonging to the early Christian era may amply prove that the salient iconographic features of the deity took a cognizable shape as early as the Sunga and the Kusāna periods. Sarasvatī was in all likelihood primarily a Brahmanical goddess, conceptually evolved out of the Vedic myths, and thus her affiliation to Jainism and Buddhism possibly developed as a common heritage. But inspite of apparent conceptual transformations, some of her distinct iconographic features were all through maintained. As time passed, her iconographical characteristics went through modification and ramification, obviously to meet the requisites of the creed to which she belonged and also to satisfy the regional predilections. In the mediaeval temples of Orissa, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujrat, Karnataka, Tamilnadu etc., we thus find exquisite images of Sarasvatī showing iconic types in distinctive regional styles.
We have also collected information regarding the representation of the deity on the coins of Samacāradeva (c. 550-575 A.D.), a predecessor of Śaśānka of Gaṇḍa. Several paintings exhibiting the goddess in sitting or standing postures have also been discovered from different places of Indian sub-continent. We have taken into consideration all these usual materials before suggesting correlations between the textual descriptions and the various kinds of representations.

In a work like this it is legitimate to expect that we should deal with terms commonly used to denote different attributes of hands and poses exhibited by the goddess. But we have not treated the topic under separate heading for the reason that they have already been discussed in greater details by T. A. Gopinath Rao and J. N. Banerjee, in their monumental works on Hindu Iconography. However, we have given in a tabular form the salient iconographic features and special characteristics of the images of Sarasvatī appearing from different places of India and outside. It had always been our endeavour to collect all possible photographic reproduction of the deity as represented in stone, metal or colour. In fact, we have relied more on such archaeological evidences than on the information collected from literature and as such they provide the material background of our dissertation.