Chapter - IV

Iconographic information on Sarasvatī

(A) From Texts:

Various texts describe different iconic types of Sarasvatī. They refer to her two-armed and four-armed forms with wide variety in emblems and vehicles. She is either sitting or standing as an independent goddess or is associated with Brahmā both as his daughter and as his wife, and at other times with Viṣṇu as Puṣṭi, one of his consorts. However, all texts are normally unanimous in representing her as a white-coloured deity, clearly indicating her purity.

(1) The Purāṇas:

The Purāṇas contain the most important source materials relating to the iconographic features of Sarasvatī. She is referred to in as many as ten Purāṇas, but her iconographic features are noted only in the following texts:

(a) Markandeya Purāṇa: In the Devī māhātva of the Markandeya Purāṇa it is mentioned that the Sarasvatī holds an aṅkuśa (elephant-goad) in one of her hands. These objects and attributes indicate her close association with Śiva.

(b) Matsya Purāṇa: In the Matsya Purāṇa Sarasvatī or Gayatrī is a deity holding in her four hands a lyre (vīṇā) a rosary (ākṣamālā), a water vessel (kamandalu) and a manuscript (pustaka). It is enjoined that she would be worshipped with white flowers and garlands (śuklamālāvānulepanai) as well as white clothes (śukla-vastrani).

1. Matsya Purāṇa, Ch.LXVI, verse 10.
(c) Bhāgavata Purāṇa : The Bhāgavata Purāṇa describes Sarasvatī as a consort of Viśnu. She sits on the back of a lion. She possesses four arms, red eyes, exposed hair, and developed and pointed breasts. She wears no garment and her appearance is fierce.

(d) Liṅga Purāṇa : According to the Liṅga Purāṇa, Gāyatrī the daughter of Brahmā, holds garlands and clothes in her two hands. She has white head-dress and is of white appearance.

(e) Padma Purāṇa : In the Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa of the Padma- Purāṇa, Gāyatrī, the mother of the Vedas is described as a white-complexioned deity with a beautiful moon like face. Her hands, soft and large hold the horns of a deer and a white lotus. She wears a white lower garment, a red-coloured upper garment and ornaments of different varieties. She sits on a white lotus.

(f) Agni Purāṇa : The Agni Purāṇa gives rosary (aṅkasmālā), book (puṣṭaka), and lyre (vīnā) in the hands of Sarasvatī. It is noteworthy that in her usual representation, prevalent particularly in Eastern India, Sarasvatī holds a vina with her two front hands and tunes the cords of the instruments, while rosary and book in her back hands.

(g) Skanda Purāṇa : In the Nagarkhaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa, it is stated that king Baladeva made an earthen idol

1. Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Ch.III, verse 16.
2. Liṅga Purāṇa, Ch.XXIII, verse 31.
3. Padma Purāṇa : Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa, Ch.XVI, verses 306-309.
4. Agni Purāṇa, Ch. XX, verse 16.
5. Skanda Purāṇa, Nagarkhaṇḍa, Ch. XLVI, verses 10-20.
of Sarasvatī and worshipped her with garlands and perfumes. She possesses four hands having lotus and aksamālā in the two right hands, while kamandalu and pustaka in the left hands. She sits on a holy stone. It is also stated in the said Purāṇa that Sarasvatī possesses Jataukutā with crescent moon over the head. Her neck is of blue colour and she has three eyes.

(h) Brhat-dharma-Purāṇa: In the Brhat-dharma-Purāṇa, which is a Una-purāṇa, Sarasvatī is described as a goddess richly adorned with various kinds of ornaments. She holds in her four hands nectōr (āudhābhanda), book (vidyā) posture (mudrā) and rosary (āksamālā). She is three-eyed (trīnetrā). Her complexion is white.

From the above descriptions of Sarasvatī collected from the various sections of the Purāṇas, it is clear that there was no unanimity as regards number of hands Sarasvatī is supposed to have. In the Līlā and the Padma Purāṇa she is described as with two hands, whereas in Mataya, Bhagavata, Agni, Skanda and Brhat-dharma-Purāṇa, she is portrayed as having four hands. Most of the texts refer to the four-armed Sarasvatī with book (pustaka) and rosary (āksamālā) in her two hands, but they differ with regard to the objects in her remaining two hands. The usual objects are, however, lyre (vīnā), white lotus (pundarika) and water-vessel (kamandalu), though born of a deer is also mentioned.

2. The horn of a deer (enāsruga) being an attribute in the hand of Sarasvatī is found only once in the Puranic texts (Padma Purāṇa), Sṛṣṭikhandā, v.507), but there is
(2) The Tantras:

The Tantrasara prescribes six dhyanas of Sarasvatī, an analysis of which will help in determining the iconographic characteristics of the deity. She is white-complexioned (śvetavarnā), smeared with white sandal paste (śvetascandana-carocita) and decked with garlands and clothes (subhram svacchāv-lepamālya-vasanam sitāngu khandojivalam). She stands on a white lotus (śveta kamalāsinā) or on a swan (hamsaraudā). She wears a head-dress containing a young moon (tarunenduvaddha-mukuta) and is slightly drooping forward for the weight of her developed breasts (kuca-vāra-klāntā). In one of the dhyanas she holds a pen and a book (nīja-kara-kamaldeya lekhanī pustakaśri), while in other cases she holds a lotus (padma), rosary (aksamala), water vessel (kamandalu) and book (pustaka) in her four hands. Again, in two dhyanas she is described as having three eyes (trinavanam) and as bestower of fortune, wealth and knowledge.

The Saradātilakatantra, a tantric text, contains a dhyanā of Sarasvatī, and information on her iconic features, the nature and mode of her worship and the conduct of the worshipper. She is Saradā, snow-white, three-eyed and with crescent moon on her forehead. She possesses large and

1. Saradātilakatantra, Ch.VI, verses 4, 34-36 & 113-123.

hardly any sculptural representation of the object in any of the hands of the goddess.
pointed breasts. She carries ānānamudrā, a rosary (aksamālā), a jar full of nectar (sudhābhanda), a book (puṣṭaka) in her four hands. The qualities and attributes noted in the Tantra indicate her close association with Śiva.

(3) The Silpa Texts:

(a) The Brhat-sahihītā represents Sarasvatī as a mighty river flowing along with other mighty streams and disappears in the western country. While describing the Royal Ablution (puṣyā-enānam), the sanctity associated with the river has been alluded to with the following expression.

"May the gods bathe you, and the ancient siddhas, Brāhmaṇa, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Sanchyas, groups of Maruts, the sun, vasus, the great celestial physicians, Aditi, the mother of the gods, Svāhā, Siddhi, Sarasvatī ............ may these bathe you."

(b) The Amśumadbheda-gama and the Pūrvakāraṇagama, the two agama texts have been referred to by T.A. Gopinath Rao as containing description of Sarasvatī. According to the said texts Sarasvatī the goddess of learning is seated upon a white lotus, is of white complexion and is draped in white clothes. She has four hands. In one of the right hands she holds aksamālā and the other right hand is in the pose called vyākhyāna-mudrā, and in the left hands she carries a book and white lotus respectively. She wears a Vajñapavita on her person and has the jatāmukuta on the head. Besides, she

1. Brhat-Saṁhitā Puṣyā-enānam, Ch-XLVII, verse 56.
is decked with other ornaments including pearl necklace, ear-rings, armlets, bangles, bracelets and so on. It is further stated that the kundalas of Sarasvatī should be made of rubies, while the Purvakāramāgama prescribes for her ear-rings of pearl (muktakundala mandita).

(c) The Viṣṇu-dharmottara Purāṇa gives a detailed description of Sarasvatī. She has a face resembling the moon and stands evenly on her feet (saṃapāda pratistha). She has four hands. In her right hands she holds a pustaka and an aksamālā and in her left vaināvī and kamandalu. She is, as usual, richly decorated with ornaments.

In explaining the significance of different iconic traits of the goddess the Viṣṇu-dharmottara states that the four hands represent the four Vedas and the book (pustaka) represents all śāstras. Kamandalu in her hand is supposed to contain the immortal essence of all the śāstras and the rosary symbolizes time (kāla). The vaināvī is achievement (siddhi). Her face represents Savitri and Gāyatrī, while her eyes represent the sun and the moon.

Again, in verse 25 of Ch.73 of the said text, the goddess is further referred to. The only new information found here is that the hand carrying the vaināvī carries a trisūla instead.

(d) The Aparājitapraṇā, stating the nature of the Sarasvatī's advocation, states that the goddess should be

1. Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, Ch.LXVI.
2. Aparājitapraṇā, Ch.230.
worshipped in temples or in a house. The deity, seated in padmāsana, carries aksamālā, vīnā, pustaka and kamandalu in her four arms. She is a snow-white deity in white garments and variously known as Mahāvidyā, Mahāvānī, Bhārati and Sarasvatī.

(e) The Śilpa-ratna, a śilpa text of the 16th century describes a ten-armed Sarasvatī holding lyre (vīnā), disc (chakra), conch shell (sankha), jar (kanāla), noose (pāśa), axe (paraśu), a vessel containing nector (sudā-kumbha), book (veda), rosary (aksamālā), and lotus (padma). The text also gives a description of Vāgīśvarī who is of three eyes. The goddess of moon-like beauty, holds pen and book in her two hands and wears a head dress.

(f) The Rupamaṇḍana also gives a description of Sarasvatī. According to this text, the deity holds aksamālā, pustaka, kamandalu and vīnā in her four hands. She has earrings (kundala) in her ears and head-dress (mukuta) on her head. She sits on a swan.

It, thus, appears that in the Śilpa texts Sarasvatī is usually described as (i) white-coloured, dressed in white garment and decked with ornaments, (ii) two or four-armed, (iii) holding in her hands any of the object from lyre (vīnā), book (pustaka), rosary (aksamālā), water-vessel (kamandalu), pen (lekhani), white lotus (pundarika), etc., and (iv) sitt-

1. Śilparatna, Ch. XXIV, verses 4 & 8.
2. Rupamaṇḍana, Ch.V, verses 61-63.
ing either on a swan, lion or lotus. In one occasion, however, she is mentioned as ten-handed.

(B) From actual images:

In the preceding chapters, the conceptual development of Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, music and fine arts, has been traced on the basis of several literary evidences. It is also shown how the river Sarasvatī, on the banks of which Vedic lore and learning had flourished in ancient times, seems to have played a significant part in the development of the concept of Sarasvatī as a deity. It has further been revealed that Sarasvatī as a deity of learning and wisdom was held in high esteem by the Hindus, the Jains and the Buddhists. In this chapter an attempt will be made to find out the iconographic features of the deity by comparing and contrasting information obtained from canonical texts of the Brahmanical tradition with those of the icons found in different parts of the country. In marking out the iconographic features the images would be arranged according to their vāhanas, āvudhas and āsanas in which the deity is sitting or standing. They will also be treated chronologically so that a clear idea about the peculiar iconic features of the images belonging to different ages can be formed.

Ordinarily Sarasvatī is represented sitting on a lotus with one leg pendant, a posture known as lalitāsana. She is white-complexioned, dressed in white garments and decked with various ornaments. She is holding lyre (vīnā),
manuscript (nustaka), rosary (aksamālā), water vessel (kaman- 
dalu), lotus (padma) in her two or four hands, and is provided 
with a swan, a peacock, a ram or even a lion as her vehicle. 
Her white complexion and white garments suggest her purity. 
The manuscript and the musical instrument in her hands are 
indicative of her close connection with learning and fine 
arts. The rosary and the water-vessel in the hands of the 
deity imply the great truth that learning cannot flourish 
without the combination of devotion, meditation and sacrifice. 
Again, rosary, water-vessel (kamandalu) and swan evidently 
point to her relation with Brahmā. The association of the 
goddess with a peacock relates her to the river Sarasvatī 
on the banks of which the bird is known to have roosted in 
abundance in ancient times. The lion as the vehicle of 
Sarasvatī is suggestive of her Śakti aspect and her connec-
tion with Siva. Similarly, ram as her vehicle associates 
her with Agni.

The handsome female figure on the railing pillar of 
Bharhut (Fig.1), carved in the 2nd century B.C., is usually 
regarded as the earliest known representation of the goddess 
of learning. The figure is much mutilated and does not bear 
the descriptive level generally found with the reliefs at 
Bharhut. However, enough remains to enlighten us as to its 
nature. The goddess is standing in a graceful frontal pose 
on a large full-blown lotus. She plays on a seven-stringed 
vīnā or large harp placed in front across her body. She is 
of youthful appearance and wears ornaments of usual Bharhut
type. J.N. Banerjea regards the figure as an early prototype of the goddess Sarasvati, and Barua finds in it an early iconic form of the deity.

The image of Sarasvati from Ghantasāla (Andhra State) (Fig.2), is the earliest known representation of the goddess in south India. The goddess stands in a strict Samapāda posture having four hands: the upper right holds a lotus bud and the lower one is placed over the head of a swan; the upper left holds a noose and the lower is hanging softly. From the strict frontality noticed in this image, it seems to be a contemporary of the above noted Bharhut figure (Fig.1), and thus belongs to the 2nd century B.C. The closed meditative eyes, terraced jatāmukuta and the swan as the vehicle of the goddess, however, indicative of its iconic development of a slightly later date.

One of the earliest figures of Sarasvati with a manuscript as her emblem was discovered from Kaikālitilā, near Mathura (Fig.3). The goddess is shown squatting on a plain rectangular pedestal and holding a manuscript in her left hand. The upper portion of the image is lost together with the right hand which was raised and probably showed Vyākhvānamudrā or a pen. The figure clothed in stiffy executed drapery has two attendants, one standing on each side, with hairs dressed in

---

3. Rea, A.: South Indian Buddhist Antiquities, Pt. XXXI.
rolls. The attendant on the left wears a tunic and holds a jar. Whereas his counterpart on the right shows clasped hands in adoration. The pitcher in the hands of the attendant on the right probably symbolizes the receptacle of knowledge (jñāna-bhānda) of which she is the presiding deity. The figure, found from a Jaina site, bears inscriptive evidence to know it conclusively as a Jaina version of the goddess Sarasvatī. The Brāhmī inscription of the Kuśāna period on the pedestal records the installation of the image by a Jaina devotee, Smith Gova, son of Siha at the instance of the preacher Aryya Deva in the year 54 (or 44 as suggested by Smith) i.e. 132 or 122 A.D. The image probably belonged to the Svetambara sect.

D. B. Digalkar has noticed two other Kuśāna sculptures belonging to the Mathura Museum as the figures of Sarasvatī with a peafowl as her vehicle. Unfortunately, the upper portion of the sculptures are severely mutilated. Thus in our opinion, the presence of peafowl on the pedestal alone is not a sufficient proof for the identification of the figures as Sarasvatī.

Sarasvatī (Fig.4), is also represented on the reverse of the Rājalilā type of coins of Samācāradeva (C.550-575 A.D.), a predecessor of Sañjaka of Gauḍa. Here she stands in tribhūṅga posture on a lotus, her left hand resting on another

lotus with a long stalk towards her face, as if to smell it. There is also a lotus bud under the right hand, and below it a swan is found as trying to snatch a lotus leaf in the front by its beak. The presence of the swan helps us in identifying the goddess as Sarasvatī.

The images of Sarasvatī of earlier age are very rare, and as noted above, far from being complete with her known icononic features. Nevertheless, the above examples show some of the basic elements like lotus, lyre, manuscript and swan associated with the deity, anticipating the crystallisation of the different iconic types in the subsequent period. Among the fully developed form of the deity three distinct types may be noted from the consideration of their poses, viz., seated, standing and dancing. In the following paragraphs we propose to discuss the various images of Sarasvatī found in different times and places in accordance with their said postures.

1. Sitting images:

A two-armed bronze image of Sarasvatī of the Pala period (C. 9th Century A.D.) hails from Nalanda (Fig.5), and is at present preserved at the National museum, New Delhi. The goddess is seated in lalitāsana with her left leg pendent and plays on a boat-shaped vīnā. Two attendants, also seated in lalitāsana, are by her two sides. The goddess wears a semi-diaphanous chowli across her left shoulder and a lower garment. Her ornaments include a crown on her head, pearl necklace, ear-rings and armlets. A damaged figure of a swan,

the vehicle of the goddess, is on the right lower corner of the pedestal.

An image of Sarasvatī of the 10th Century A.D. has been discovered from Malawa (Fig. 6), which is also preserved in the National Museum. Two left hands of the goddess along with the left corner of the pedestal are damaged. The goddess is shown seated in lalitāsana and holds a rosary (aksamālā) in her upper right hand. The lower right hand is in the varadamudrā. She wears a crown, ear-rings, double necklace, bracelets, armlets and waist-band. Flying gandharvas, a couple on each side, holding long lotus stalks, are seen on the upper portion of the stela. A male figure with turban on head stands in adoration in her right side, while her counterpart on the left is totally broken away.

There is an image of Sarasvatī in the British Museum (Fig. 1). It comes from Mathura and is carved out of red stone. The goddess, treated in a very simple manner, sits in lalitāsana on a plain pedestal, with her vehicle swan presented on the face of it. She plays on a diagonally placed vīnā by her front two hands and carries a rosary (aksamālā) and manuscript (pustaka) in her upper right and upper left hands, respectively. She wears a conical crown, necklace, bracelets and armlets. On stylistic grounds the image may be assigned to the 9th-10th Century A.D.

The Museum of Varendra Research Society, at Rajshahi in Bangladesh, preserves three unique seated images of Sarasvatī.

1. Binyoś, L.: Examples of Indian Sculptures at the British Museum, Pt. IV.
(SBBB). Two of them were discovered from Chatingram (Fig. 8) and Kalanja (Fig. 9) in the district of Bogra and the third one comes from Padumshahr tank, Deopara, Rajshahi (Fig. 10). These images are unique in the sense that the usual practice of providing a swan on the pedestal as the vehicle of the goddess has been substituted by representing a frisky ram. The explanation regarding the presence of ram on the pedestal, as pointed out by Bhattachal, is furnished by the mythological story in the *Satapatha Brähmana* which closely associates ram and ewes with Sarasvati. The image of Chatingram is datable in the 11th Century A.D., while remaining two belong to the 12th Century A.D. The images are made of cericitised slate and black basalt and are beautiful specimens of mediaeval art. In both the images belonging to the Chatingram (Fig. 8) and Kalanja (Fig. 9), the goddess is shown seated on a double petalled lotus in *lalitāsana* having the right leg on a lotus placed on the back of a ram. She plays on a vīnā with her front hands and holds a rosary (*aksamālā*), and a manuscript (*pustaka*) in the upper right and left hands, respectively. She wears a crown on her head, and is decorated with beautiful ear-rings, double necklace, armlets, bracelets, waist-band and anklets. The flying *vidyādharas*, the trefoil arch over the head of the goddess, the female chauribearers on her either side, the figure of the donor with folded hands and a sublime face of the goddess make the sculptures significant. Chating-
ram Sarasvatī should be specially mentioned as one of the finest examples of East Indian Sculpture.

The image of Sarasvatī discovered from Deopara, Rajshahi (Fig.10) is also an equally interesting specimen of the above variety. Here also the goddess sits in lalitāsanā on a double-petalled lotus with her right leg on a lotus placed on the back of a ram. The upper portion of the image together with two of her hands and their attributes is damaged. The goddess is decked with ornaments like double pearl necklace, armlets, bracelets, ear-rings, beautiful waist-band and anklets. A mutilated figure of Chauri-bearers stands on her either side. The pañcarathā pedestal on which the goddess sits, shows rolling vegetable designs usually noted in Pala-Sena sculptures of the late phase, and thus the image may be placed in the 12th century A.D.

In the Museum of the Bangiya Sahitya Parisad, Calcutta, there is a four-handed image of Sarasvatī seated on a mahamāhāpuja pitha, i.e., a large lotus, in Sukhāsanamudrā with the right leg resting on the back of a ram carved on the pedestal. The objects held by the goddess are: the right upper māhārosary (akṣamālā) the left upper, book (pustaka) and the right and left lower hands vīnā with a makara terminal.

There is also a very beautiful image of Sarasvatī in the collection of the Dacca Museum (Fig.11). The four-armed goddess, carved in black stone, sits on a double-petalled lotus in lalitāsanā with her right leg pendent and placed on a lotus.

She plays on a vīnā with her front two hands and holds a rosary (aṃśamālā) and a manuscript (pustaka) in her back right and left hands, respectively. A tiny swan, the usual vehicle of the goddess, is shown in the extreme right proper corner of the pedestal which is decorated with coils usually found in the 12th century Pala-Sena sculptures. The Kirthimukha in the centre of the tapering top of the prabha-vati, the flying vidvādharas, the trefoil arch over the head of the goddess, the female chauri-bearers on her sides, the pañcaratha pedestal, the figure of the donor with folded hands in the extreme right corner—all these features, according to Banerjea, typify the sculpture as one of the fully developed hieratic forms of Sarasvatī. The sculpture was found in the village of Vajrayogini, near Dacca.

In this connection it is curious that the objects held by these images do not correspond exactly to the description of her several dhyānas to be found in the different Tantras; the only description that corresponds to the images found in Bengal is contained in the 1st half of Verse 16, Chapter 50, of the Agninurāṇa. Here she is described as Pustākasa- mālikā-hasta Vīnā-hasta Sarasvatī, i.e., Sarasvatī should have lyre, book and rosary in her hands.

Bhattasali refers to a unique image of Viṣṇu discovered at Laksmankati in the district of Barisal, Bangladesh (Fig.12). The image is at present in the collection of the Dacca Museum.

2. Bhattasali, N.X. op.cit., pp.86-87, PLV XXXII.
Here Viṣṇu is shown sitting in lalitāsana on the out-stretched wings of his vehicle Garuḍa, who with folded hands kneels on one leg on a lotus pedestal. The god has the cakra in the normal right hand, which he holds not by a handle as in the images ordinarily met with, but by the rim. In its centre is depicted the miniature figure of cakrauraṇa. The normal left hand of the god holds within its palm the miniature representation of Gaḍādevī with a mace in her right hand. The attributes of the remaining two hands are still more interesting. The right hand holds the stalk of a lotus on which sits the goddess Gaḍa-Lakṣmī anointed by a pair of elephants, and the left hand similarly holds the stalk of another lotus on which sits the goddess Sarasvatī playing on her vīnā. The vīnā in the hands of the goddess accompanying Viṣṇu in the images ordinarily met with is of straight shape, but here it shows an antique shape, i.e. a boat-shaped instrument similar to one held by Samudragupta, as depicted on Lyrist type of his coins.

An image of vīnā-hastā Sarasvatī, as described in the Agni Purāṇa, is found in a niche of a temple in Tezpur, Assam. The goddess seated in ardha-parvanka with her left leg tucked up and the right one hanging down is shown playing on a vīnā.

A beautiful image of Sarasvatī from the Bṛhadēśvāra temple, Tanjore (Fig.13), represents her in the virūṣana pose on a lotus seat. She is two-armed and holds a manuscript in her left hand, which is placed on the thigh, the right hand

1. ASIAR, 1924-25, p.97.
being broken. She wears a tall crown (mukuta) with canopied projection over which rises a tree. According to J.M. Banerjea, the tree signifies the idea of knowledge (jñāna), as the Bodhi-tree in the vajrāsana Buddha figures usually indicates. The goddess is fully bejewelled having ear-rings, double pearl-necklace, armlets, waist-band, and a breast band (kua-bandha). She is flanked at the top by flying Viśvādāras and by the side by standing chaurī-bearers. The whole composition is endowed with sedate and tranquil calm and the resultant of true knowledge is beautifully expressed. Another beautiful image of Sarasvatī from the Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Tiruchirapalli district (Fig.14), found on the north wing of the main Brhadēśvara temple, also represents the goddess in virāsana pose on a double-petalled lotus seat. She is four-armed with rosary (aksamālā) and water-vessel (kamanḍalu) in the upper right and left hands, respectively; the front right hand is in varadamundra and the front left is placed on the thigh. She wears a tall crown (mukuta), double-necklace, ear-rings, armlets, bracelets, waist-band and a vaṭānapavita, leaving the upper portion of the body fully bare. These two temple images belonging to the reign period of the great Chola rulers Rajaraja and Rajendra Chola, of the early 11th century A.D., may be noted as fine examples of the Chola art.

A damaged figure of Sarasvatī of the 11th Century A.D. from Karnataka is in the possession of the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay (Fig.15). The four-armed goddess sits in virāsana on a pedestal having a manuscript in her front left

hand. The face along with the objects held by her other three hands is damaged. The goddess is adorned with a damaged tall crown, double necklace, armlets, wristlets and waist band. She wears a sacred thread (Yajñapavita) in her body.

In the Kedaresvara temple, Nagalpura, Tamkuv district (Fig. 16), there is a four-handed image of Sarasvati seated in padmāsana on a pedestal. The goddess holds a manuscript in the front left and rosary (akṣamālā) in the front right hands. She also bears an elephant-goad (āṅkuśa) and a noose (nāga) in the upper right and left hands, respectively. Her ornaments include crown, ear-rings, pearl-necklace, wristlets and armlets. From the stylistic viewpoint the image may be assigned to the 11th-12th Century A.D.

An image of Sarasvati of the 12th Century A.D., belonging to the Mallikarjuna temple, Basarolu, Mandya district, Mysore (Fig. 17), carries a rosary (akṣamālā) and manuscript in the front right and left hands, respectively. The upper right holds a vīnā and the upper left, a nāga. She is seated in padmāsana and is bejewelled with crown, ear-rings (kundalas) double pearl-necklace, wristlets and anklets. Another Sarasvati (Fig. 18) image of same iconographic traits is also found in the temple, but apparently it is of a later date.

In the Laksmi-Narayana temple, Sindhaghatta, Mandya district (Fig. 19), there is an image of Sarasvati sitting in padmāsana, and holding in her hands attributes like akṣamālā, vīnā, nāga and manuscript in the order of the previously discussed image of the Mallikarjuna temple of Basaralu. Her
iconic peculiarity is the sacred thread that she wears across the left shoulder. The face of the deity is a bit damaged, but she is decked as usual with an elaborately decorated crown, double necklace and bracelets. A swan as the vehicle of the goddess is represented below her in the centre of the lower portion of the pedestal.

Another image of Sarasvati is in the Nagesvara temple, Mosale, Hassan district (Fig.20), belongs to the 12th Century A.D. She holds a rosary, a pāsā, a vīnā in the front right, upper right and upper left hands, respectively, while her left front hand is in the varadānudrā. She wears a karanda-mukuta, ear-rings (karna-kundala), necklace, bracelets, wristlets and anklets. This image is especially significant on the ground that a ram as a vehicle of the goddess sits by the left side of the pedestal, because ram is not usually found in her south Indian representations.

A four-handed image of Sarasvatī, sitting in padmāsana on a pedestal, belongs to the Chennigaraya temple, Nagalpura, Tumkur district (Fig.21). The goddess holds a manuscript and a rosary in the front left and right hands, respectively, while she plays on a vīnā by her upper right hand. The upper left hand, which is totally lost, possibly held the usual pāsā. Elaborately ornate, the image is found to wear a sacred thread.

An interesting seated image of Sarasvatī in the lalitāsana in the Laksmi-Narasimha temple, Hosaholalu, Mandya district (Fig.22), holds a ankusa and a vīnā in the right hands, and
and a pāśa, a sudhābhānda in the left and upper hands, respectively, the face being damaged. The pedestal on which the seat of the goddess is placed is very beautifully decorated. Her crown, ear-rings double necklace, bracelets and anklets are also like those of other south Indian images of the Hoysala School.

An image of Sarasvatī also belonging to the Hoysala school has been preserved in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay (Fig. 23). The four-armed goddess sits in padmasāna on a double lotus seat holding a rosary, vīnā and pāśa in her three hands, the left lower hand being broken. She wears rich ornaments of different varieties and a sacred thread (vaijñānapāvita) in her body. Two female chauri-bearers, one on each side, stand by her. From the elaborate stela, with undulating rolls connecting the kīrtimukha at its top and two makaras on the sides, and also from its metallic chiselling the image appears to have been carved sometime in the later part of the 12th Century A.D.

An interesting image of Sarasvatī belonging to the 12th Century A.D. has been discovered from Halebid, Mysore (Fig. 24). The goddess sits in lalitāsana on a dragon like peacock which holds by its beak the stalk of a trailing plant. The goddess is three-faced and six-handed. In her left hands she holds a pot (sudhābhānda), a pāśa, and a water-vessel, while in her right hands she holds a rosary (aksamālā) and a lyre (vīnā) and a mace (sūla). She is richly bejewelled with ornaments like decorated crown, ear-rings, double necklace, bracelets and anklets. The figures of the donor and his wife with
folded hands are also there on the decorated pedestal. This Halebid Sarasvati is a unique type, especially from the iconographical viewpoint.

In the Buchesvara temple, Koravangala, Hassan district (Fig. 25), there is an image of Sarasvati belonging to the 13th Century A.D. The goddess sits in padmāsana holding rosary (akṣamālā), lyre (vīṇā), noose (pāsā) and manuscript (pustaka) in her four hands. She is fully bejewelled with an elaborately decorated heavy crown, pearl-necklaces, armlets, bracelets, waist-band and anklets. A four-handed image of Sarasvati from Halebid (Fig. 26), also shows same attributes in her four hands. It is now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The goddess sits in usual padmāsana on a double lotus throne and is decorated with ornaments of different varieties. The kirtimukha on the top of the stela has gained importance in comparison with the above discussed image. This Halebid Sarasvati is extremely conventional in style and therefore appears to be of a very late date, say of the 13th Century A.D.

The image of Sarasvati from Bagali (Fig. 27), representing a very late example of Hoysala style of the 13th Century A.D. is seated in padmāsana pose and shows the usual attributes. It had an elaborate aureole behind, which is now broken, and shows the feeling for minute details of the mediaeval art trend. The right front hand, which holds the rosary, has apparently been raised in abhaya pose. The seated posture as well as the closed eyes with raised eyebrows speak of her meditative concentration.

all of the arms are missing. An image of Sarasvati in Kallesvara temple at Hirahagallii has four arms, but here, too, all of them are missing. It is also of the 13th Century A.D. and its peculiarity is a pretty swan relieved on the face of the central projection of the saptaratha pedestal. On the other faces of the ratha figures of the dancing girls are carved. Another image of Sarasvati in the same temple has four hands, one of the right hands being broken at the elbow. She is seated with piers behind supporting a scroll of canopy. A swan is depicted on the pedestal.

A beautiful image of Sarasvati in the Chalukyan Bhimesvara temple at Bhimararam, seated in the padmasana, on a lotus, has four hands exhibiting abhay pose by the lower right hand, and holding a rosary, a vina and book in the remaining ones. In the temple of the Heroes at Karempudi, on the eastern wall, is an image of Sarasvati in sitting posture. This image of the Haihayas has four arms, three of which are broken and the fourth shows a club. Beneath her, a swan is carved.

In the manuscript of the Devimahatva of Markandeya Purana, preserved in the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, there is a beautiful painting of Sarasvati seated on the back of a peacock in anjalil pose (Fig. 28). The goddess holds the attributes by her four hands in the following manner: lower left - lotus (padma), upper left - lyre (vina), upper right - book (nustaka) and lower right - lotus (padma). She wears ornaments of very simple type, but her long hairs fall up to the knee.

Another four-hundred image of Sarasvatī from Gaya (Fig.29), has been preserved in the Museum of Varendra Research Society, Pajshahī, Bangladesh. The image, though incomplete, exhibits her iconic features. The goddess plays a vina by her two front hands, and holds a manuscript and rosary in her upper left and right hands, respectively.

A six-armed image of Sarasvatī seated on a pedestal, containing the relief of a swan, is found in the Bhramesvara temple at Srisailam. She is holding a pāsa and naraṇa in the upper right hands and an ankusa and an indistinct object in the upper left hands, the lower one being in the varada-mudrā.

(2) Standing Images:

A standing bronze image of two-armed Sarasvatī, discovered from Nalanda and preserved in the Patna Museum (Fig.30), shows in her two hands a vina. From her posture it appears that the cords of the instrument are being tuned. She wears a lower garment up to the ankle and a short chauli across her breasts. Her headdress is of karandamukuta type and she is decorated with various ornaments including double necklace, ear-rings, armlets, anklets, waist-band etc. She stands in slightly bent (abhanga) pose.

J. N. Banerjea studies a sculpture, belonging to the 10th Century A.D., hailing from Khiching (Orissa) (Fig.31), along with the Bharhat relief. It shows the half-length

---

figure of a seven-hooded Nágini playing on a vīnā. She is beautifully decorated with ornaments and wearing a karandamukuta, usually worn by the goddesses. Banerjea has aptly observed that the number of the hoods behind her head and the type of head-dress worn by her distinctly prove that she is not an ordinary snake maiden, but is a goddess with much iconographic affinity with Sarasvatī. It may be suggested here that in the Atharvā-veda a reference to Sarasvatī with snake has been made. In the Buddhist pantheon, too, Jāṅgulī, the goddess of the snakes, is also sometimes equated with Sarasvatī. It may thus be noted that association of the goddess with snake, though not so pronounced had a long antiquity.

An important Brahmanical sculpture of the early mediaeval period preserved in the British Museum is a life-size inscribed image of Vāgdevī, the goddess of speech, carved out of grey sandstone (Fig.32). The image bears an inscription on its pedestal recording its installation in the city of king Bhoja in Sambat 1091, i.e. 1037 A.D. This king Bhoja is evidently the Paramara king of Malawa of that name who reigned from 1018-60 A.D. Manathāla, the name of the sculptor, is also inscribed in the pedestal. The four hands along with the object held by the goddess are broken. In the upper right hand, a part of a broken lyre may be identified. The pearl-garlands, encircling her breasts follow the prescription of the texts (hāra-mukta-bharamphusitam), while the expression of the face recalls the verses describing her serenity. A lion (Sīṁha) being her vehicle (vahana), she may be identified as Vāgdevī.

1. Rupam, 17, 1924.
Two male attendants, one is shown bearded and holding a staff in the left hand, and the other representing a dwarfish figure holding a nectar pot, are on her right side. To her left is a female figure, seated on the lion, and with right hand supplicating to the goddess. This Sarasvati probably symbolizes Pārvatī or the sakti of Siva, and representing a sattvic aspect. The goddess wears rich ornaments like the crown, the necklace, the armlets, the bracelets, the pendant round the loin and anklets. "As an example of Brahmanical Sculpture it is a 'chef d'œuvre' of rare beauty in its exquisite serenity of pose, in its entrancing and balancing rhythm, in the elegance and snavity of its aquiline features, and in the general restraint in the treatment of the anatomy which is almost wholly free from any exaggeration." It is a remarkable piece of West Indian medieaval sculpture.

Sarasvati had been popularly represented as one of the consorts of Viṣṇu - a fact which is amply corroborated by the numerous image of the Pala-Sena period in which she is shown as accompanying Viṣṇu to his left as Pusṭi, while Laksāṇī standing to the right. From the absence or scarcity of independent Sarasvati images in eastern India, it seems that she was usually worshipped during the period as a consort of Viṣṇu. A beautiful bronze image of Viṣṇu from Rongpur, Bangladesh (Fig.33), and now at the Indian Museum, Calcutta, shows Sarasvati as a parśva-devatā. The goddess stands in tribhanga posture holding noose (pāśa) in her left hand, while the right hand being in abhayamudrā. She puts on a diaphanous

1. O.C. Ganguly - 'An Image of Sarasvati in the British Museum', Rupam, 17, 1924.
lower garment and wears crown, necklace, armlets, bracelets, bangles and waist-band as ornaments.

There are also two stone sculptures of Sarasvati in the Indian Museum (Figs. 34, 35), which similarly depict her as a parsve-devata of Viṣṇu. In both the cases the goddess stands on the left side of Viṣṇu on a lotus, and shows a tribhanga pose. She puts on a lower garment with highly conventionalised undulating striations leaving the upper portion of the body fully bare. She is decked with various ornaments and plays on a vina by both the hands. A subordinate figure is found to be standing by her left side in abhayamudrā.

There is a beautiful two-armed stone image of Sarasvati of the Pala-Sena age in the Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta (Fig. 36). The goddess stands gracefully in the tribhanga pose and plays on a vina. She puts on various jewelleries and her coiffure is tastefully decorated. The youthful figure of the deity is full of dynamic quality. Her soft smiling face is fully enliven. Another stone figure of Sarasvati of the Pala age, belonging to the Patna Museum, is equally interesting. The two-armed goddess, standing in tribhanga pose is represented as holding a vina by her left hand, while the right hand is placed on the waist.

In the Bangiya Sahitya Parisad Museum, there are several bejewelled images of Sarasvati standing in abhanga and tribhanga

2. Sinha, B.P, Bhāratīya Kalā ko Bihān ki Denā, p.131, for Fig. 102.
poses holding vina in hand. But in all of them she is represented as a companion of Visnu. The examples of this type of Sarasvati are found in abundance in the different parts of Bengal and Bihar, and they agree with the later Puranic evidence that Sarasvati came to be regarded a consort of Visnu.

Assam also yields a number of Sarasvati images bearing lyre (vina) in her hands. The Sarasvati recovered from Silapasar (Fig.37) stands with a vina held in her two hands across the chest. She wears a ratna-kundala kāra, girdles and anklets. The compositional simplicity of the figure, wearing semi-diaphanous drapery flowing round her body, marks it out as one of the most elegant examples of the early part of Assam. The figure, which may safely be dated in the 10th-11th Century A.D., shows a smiling face and a tri-bent form. In its physiognomical treatment, the regional ethnic impact is clearly noted. A similar but less artistic form of Sarasvati has been recovered 1 from the ruins of the Tamresvari temple at Sadiya by Bloch.

In the Allahabad Museum there are two sculptures from Jamsot (Figs.38,39), representing Sarasvati. Both of them are carved out of buff coloured sandstone. One of the images represents the goddess standing in tribhanga pose (Fig.38). She holds diagonally a comparatively long vina by her two hands, while she carries a lotus by the upper right hand, the lower left being broken. A swan can be seen near her feet. The

other image (Fig. 39) represents the goddess as seated in the ardhanarīya-ka pose. Four out of her eight hands are broken and so also her bead. She carries a vīṇā by her two hands, while by her three left hands she holds severally a manuscript, a bell and a pot. Her mount, the swan, may be seen near her feet. Both the images are datable in the 10th Century A.D.

(3) Dancing Sarasvatī

Sarasvatī with elaborated features makes her appearance several times on the Hoyasalesvara temple at Halebid, Karnataka, where she is sometimes shown in dancing. The six-armed dancing images of Sarasvatī from Halebid are considered as the Śakti of Śiva, possible for holding rosary, ankusa, and pasa, the āyudhas of Śiva along with her usual attributes like lotus, vīṇā with a bamboo stem and pustaka. She is flanked by two chauri-bearers and near her feet her vehicle, the swan, is shown. She wears a jatā-mukuta and is elaborately decked with various ornaments.

There are several dancing images of Sarasvatī from Halebid having a calm facial expression. A four-handed image with sūla in the upper right, noose in the upper left and a kamandalu in the lower left hand and a crown on head, having chaṭra, prabhamandala and torana, may be referred to. The goddess is fully ornamented. As far posture, her left

foot is placed just below the right knee and her right foot rests on a lotus. On her left is a man beating a drum, while another standing on her right, and almost totally broken, possibly played with cymbal.

A six-handed dancing image of Sarasvati has also been recovered from Halebid. The goddess is richly ornamented, and holds a disc, (nakra), mace (sula) and a vina by her three hands; the attributes in her other three hands are damaged and beyond recognition. It also appears to be a beautiful specimen of Hoysala art.

An eight-handed image of dancing Sarasvati, belonging to the 12th Century A.D., is found in the Laksmi-Narasimha temple, Hosaholalu, Mandya district, Karnataka (Fig. 540). The goddess holds vina, ankusa, sula, pustaka and paga. The objects held by her other two hands are irrecognisable. Her crown is smaller, but there is an elaborately decorated torana over her head. Her left foot is placed just below the right knee and the right foot is on a lotus base on the pedestal. On her left side a man standing on the pedestal, beats a drum while the figure on her right is totally broken. The goddess is richly ornamented with pearl necklace, armlets, bracelets, girdles and anklets, and remarkable for its artistic beauty.

Another four-handed image of dancing Sarasvati, preserved in the Aghoresvara temple, Govindanahalli, Mandya district, Karnataka (Fig. 41), holds a vina by the front hand and a paga by the upper right, while the upper and lower left
hands are broken. A small swan is seen on her left side on the pedestal. She is richly ornamented, but her face is very much eroded. A six-handed image of dancing Sarasvati from the Krishna temple at Somanathapura, Karnataka (Fig. 42) may be especially noted for representing the Hoysala art in its best creative phase. The goddess holds \textit{vina}, \textit{sula}, a lotus stalk, \textit{pustaka} and \textit{pasa}. She is richly bejewelled and wears a decorated \textit{Karandamukuta} on her head. Even in her dance she is found to be absorbed in deep meditation, the closed eyes being its indication.

The image of Sarasvati playing on a \textit{vina} from Madurai is a specimen of Nayaka school which reached its climax under Tirumala Nayaka (1523-1557 A.D.) at Srirangam, Kumbakonam, Madurai. The goddess standing in \textit{tribhanga} pose plays on a \textit{vina} by her two hands.

A study of the Sarasvati images belonging to northern India, makes it quite evident that they are either two-armed or four-armed. When two-armed, she usually holds a \textit{vina} in her hands. Sarasvati with a \textit{vina} appears in Indian art from a very early date. Her earliest possible representation being a proto Sarasvati upon the Bharhut railing of the 2nd Century B.C. In another variety, as noted in the Lucknow Museum example the two-armed Sarasvati is provided with a manuscript in one of her hands. The other hand of the image being bro-

ken, we are not sure about the object held by it, probably the object was a pen as enjoined by the Saradatilakatantra and the Silparatna. In her armed variety, she is represented in the sculptures of early mediaeval school of Bengal and Bihar with a vīnā in her front hands and a rosary and a manuscript in the back hands. It is in accordance with the prescription of the Agni Purāṇa. It seems that the sculptors of Bengal and Bihar carved majority of the images of Sarasvatī following the advice of the Agni Purāṇa. Images of Sarasvatī with four-hands are found to be differently prepared in other parts of the country. Usually the vehicle of the goddess is a swan, the earliest representation of which may be found in an example from Ghantasala (Andhra State) belonging to the 2nd Century B.C. A ram or a lion is also provided to her as a vehicle. The peacock, another vehicle of her, is however scarcely found in the north Indian images. Disalkar has identified a Kusāṇa sculpture having peacock as the vehicle of the goddess, but the sculpture being mutilated and almost beyond recognition, the said identification is not without doubt.

Different types of Sarasvatī images from both north and south India with various iconographic features have been noted above. They show characteristic āyudhās, āsanas and vāhanas associated with her. Basically there is no iconographical difference between the Sarasvatīs of the north and the south. But the north Indian images rarely represent her as the sakti of Śiva, which appears to be a popular aspect of the south Indian variety of Sarasvatī. Sarasvatī with more than
four-arms is not known in the northern part of the country, nor has she been shown with a breast-band (kucaabandha). The swan as the vehicle of the goddess can be found both in northern and southern India. The specimens having ram as the vehicle of the goddess, though not totally unknown is found in southern India rarely. Literary as well as archaeological evidences testify to peacock as the vehicle of the goddess Sarasvati. But in the Brahmanical traditions it is very restrictedly represented, particularly in comparison with swan.