CHAPTER VI

PLACE OCCUPIED BY SARASVATĪ IN THE PURĀNIC LITERATURE
1. The Purānic accounts for the origin of Sarasvatī:

There are numerous accounts in the different Purāṇas for the origin of Sarasvatī. Some of them tally with others, while some are of distinctive nature from others. The important and striking views, according to some Purāṇas, are as follows:

(i) The Brahmavaivarta-Purāṇa:

This Purāṇa contains different accounts at different places. The Brahma-Khaṇḍa Adhyāya 3 of this Purāṇa maintains a detailed account for the origin of the Purānic triad of goddesses - Sarasvatī, Mahālakṣmi and Durgā. In this context, it holds that Sarasvatī was born from the mouth of Paramātman.\(^1\)

At another place, the same Purāṇa maintains Sarasvatī to have been produced from the mouth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the form of his Sakti.\(^2\)

Still at another place, the Brahmavaivarta-Purāṇa virtually following the Sāṅkhya theory of creation puts forth another account for the origin of Sarasvatī. It maintains that there is Ātman whose energy (sakti) is called 'Mūlaprakṛti'. But how things evolved from this

\(^1\) Cf. BVP., I.3.54-57.

\(^2\) Ibid., II.4.12, "śvīr bhūtā yadā devī vakratah kṛṣṇayosītaḥ".
"Mula-prakṛti; is to be seen. In this Purāṇa, it has been maintained that at the primeval the Ātman remained stationed; but when he had a desire of creation, he took two forms - male and female. This female form is called Prakṛti. This Prakṛti also, according to the wishes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, became of fivefold form under the names of Durgā, Rādhā, Lakṣmi, Sarasvatī and Sāvitrī. In this way, Sarasvatī here has been reckoned as one of the five Prakṛtis that are the ultimate cause of the universe:¹

Here Śrī Kṛṣṇa, though severally taken as independently, has also been identified with Paramātmā or Brahma,² and if it is so, it is as equally proper to hold her the daughter of Śrī Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu as it is to accept her as the daughter of Brahmā.

(ii) The Matsya and Padma Purāṇas:

According to the Matsya-Purāṇa, Sarasvatī has several times been referred to as produced by Brahmā, the great Creator, who is thought to have created all the Vedas and śāstras from his mouth.³ After that, he produced his ten mind-born-sons - Marici, Atri, Anīgras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Pracetās, Vasiṣṭha, Bhṛgu and Nārada.⁴ By this creation of his own, Brahmā was not satisfied; and he began to plan which could carry on the burden of creation. He, therefore, began to envoke Sāvitrī; and after sometime, Sāvitrī was produced from the half portion of his

¹ Ibid., II.1.1 ff.
² Cf. ibid., II.1.20,48; see also Ananda Swarupa Gupta, op.cit., p. 64.
³ MP., III. 2-4.
⁴ Ibid., III. 5-8.
body as a female form. This form is also known under various names as Satarūpā, Sāvitrī, Sarasvatī, Gāyatrī and Brahmā.¹

At another place, Brahmā is again said to have produced a beautiful woman from half of his body as his wife. By virtue of her austerities, she equalled Brahmā and was gifted with the faculty of creation of the world.²

Elsewhere, Sarasvatī along with four other maids - Laksī, Marutvatī, Sādhyā and Vīsvesē is said to have been produced by Brahmā.³ The similar notion occurs in the Padma-Purāṇa also.⁴

(iii) The Vāyu-Purāṇa:

According to this Purāṇa, it is maintained that Brahmā at first created his mind born-sons (mānasa-putras), who equalled themselves to their father Brahmā. They all were possessed of knowledge and hence indifferent to the world: "āgatajānānā vītārgānā vimatsarāh". They could not enjoy any pleasure in the worldly lures. Therefore, Brahmā (hiranyagarbho bhagavān-parames̄thi) began to muse over. During this process of his thinking, perhaps, not finding out his solution, Brahmā became angry. Consequently, from his anger a Puruṣa, having sun-like splendour took his birth. Half of his body was male and half female. Brahmā asked this Puruṣa to separate his male and female parts into twin; and he did accordingly. Brahmā again asked the male form of Puruṣa to divide

¹ Ibid., III. 30-32.
² Ibid., CLXXI. 21-22.
³ Ibid., CLXXI. 32-36.
⁴ PdP., V.37.79-80.
him. He did so while dividing him into eleven Rudras. Unlike the male form, the female form was of peculiar type. Her right part was white and left black. Brahmā again asked this female form to divide her black and white parts, which she did. The white part is taken to be the various manifestations of hers, say Svāhā, Svadhā, Mahāvidyā, Medhā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Gaurī. Thus, being one of these, Sarasvatī represents Gaurī (the white coloured goddess) produced from the white part of the female form.¹

According to another account available in this Purāṇa, Sarasvatī is said to have been produced from Brahmā as Viśvarūpā. This Purāṇa maintains that Brahmā had no offspring. Be, therefore, meditated and in course of his meditation, Sarasvatī was born loudly roaring to Him as Viśvarūpā.²

Here, she is supposed to be the mind-born daughter of Brahmā, and at the same time, is also taken to be Prakṛtī.

(iv) The Brahmūnda-Purāṇa:

According to this Purāṇa, there is a conjugal procreation in male and female forms. The origin of this procreation is Mahālakṣmī. For this purpose, Mahālakṣmī at first produced three eggs. Brahmā was produced from one of them along with Śrī, Sarasvatī from the second along with Śiva and Viṣṇu from the third along with Ambikā.³ In nutshell,

¹ Cf. VP., IX. 71-87.
² Ibid., XXIII., 37-38, "brahmanāḥ putrakāmasya dhyāyataḥ paramesṭhimah prādhṛbhūtā mahānām viśvarūpā sarasvatī" 38 pu.
³ BDP., IV.405 ff.
it seems that, according to this theory, the three eggs originally symbolise the stage of Hiranyagarbha Prajápati. This Hiranyagarbha Prajápati also seems to have been born from the Supreme power, Paramátman, along with the combined notion of the latter's female power called Mahá-lakśmi. This Mahá-lakśmi as the Supreme Goddess stand parallel to Paramátman, the Supreme power as giver of birth to the triad of gods Brahmá, Viṣṇu and Maheśa. Similarly, the triad of the Puránic goddesses Lakśmi, Sarasvatí and Ambiká (Durgá) may be taken to have been born from the Supreme female power called Mahá-lakśmi.

In this regard, a very striking reference is made to the origin of Sarasvatí under various names, all synonyms for her. It is held that there is a Devi, who assumes different forms at the time of creation. The same goddess is said to have divided herself into two parts—male and female—at the command of Mahá-lakśmi. As the male portion bears various names, the female portion is known as Vidyā, Bhäsā, Svara, Akṣara and Kāmadhenu, which are all denotative of Sarasvatí. Similarly, the sattva form produced from the goddess Mahá-lakśmi is also called variously as Mahávidyā, Mahávīnā, Bhāratī, Vāk, Sarasvatī, Āryā, Brahmā, Kāmadhenu, etc. Like the previous ones, these names are also synonyms for the various forms of Sarasvatí.

These are some of the main points regarding the origin of Sarasvatí, which the Brahmavaivarta, Matsya, Padma, Vāyu and Brahmānda Purānas

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offer to us.

2. **The colour of Sarasvatī:**

The colour of Sarasvatī is also a very interesting point, particularly so far as her anthropomorphosis is concerned. In the Vedas, particularly in the Rgveda, she is called 'subhrā', which seems to be a step towards her anthropomorphosis; but in the Purāṇas, she has been fully anthropomorphised. Her vigraha form is not only due to her colour, she has been provided with almost all of her physical aspects also. So far as her colour is concerned, the Purāṇas refer to her as of white, blue and śyāma colours. These are briefly discussed as follows:

1. **White:**

Unlike the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇas, the Purāṇas repeatedly describe Sarasvatī to have a purely white complexion. Such a colour of her complexion is obvious enough from the various epithets used for her, for instance, she is called 'paramā jyotirūpā' (like a heap of bright light), 'jyotisvarūpā', 'himaśaṇḍharo kundendukumudāṃbhahomasānibha' (white in colour like snow, scandal, kunda, indu, kumuda, lotus all having white colours), 'śaklarās' (having white complexion), 'koṭiṣcendraprabhājusṭapustasārīyuktavigraha' (having the body besmeared with the lusture of eroses of moons), and 'śvetābha' (one of white lusture).

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1 Cf. RV., V.42.12; VII.95.6, 96.2; see also supra., pp. 40-41.
2 BrP., II.5.10.
3 Ibid., II.5.34.
4 Ibid., II.1.36, 5.13.
5 Ibid., I.3.64; II.2.54, 4.46.
6 Ibid., II.4.46.
7 AP., I.16.
She possesses the beauty of crores of full moons 'koṭipūrṇendunō-bhāḍhyā'.\(^1\) It is not only her complexion that is white; but at one
and the same time, she is also described to have white eyes like lotuses -
'saratpankejañalocā'.\(^2\) Besides, she is also called 'sudatī'\(^3\) 'having
beautiful or shining white teeth'.

Thus, she is all and all white. Her white colour is one of the
three colours representing her three 'guṇas' in her capacity of one of
the five Prakṛtis.\(^4\) But so far as her 'sattva-guṇātmikā' form of Prakṛti
is concerned, it does not represent her 'suddhasattvasvarūpā' form only;
but it also stands for a psychological connotation. Since knowledge is
generally understood to evolve from sattvaguna, it is quite reasonable to
hold Sarasvatī as the goddess possessed of white colour. Knowledge is
also thought identical with sattva (sattvān jñānam).

Like Brāhmaṇic Sarasvatī, some goddesses of learning in Buddhism,
e.g., Mahaśarasvatī, Vajrāṇī Sarasvatī and Āryā Sarasvatī are also
white-complexioned.\(^5\) In the Aparajitapucchā, by her other epithets
like 'śvetabhājā', 'śvetāngī' and 'candrasēkharā', Sarasvatī seems to
be out and out of white colour. These epithets seem equally applicable
to the four forms of Sarasvatī—Mahāvidyā, Mahāvīṇī, Bhāratī and Sarasvatī.\(^6\)

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1 BhP., I.3.55.
2 Ibid., I.3.55.
3 Ibid., I.3.56.
4 Ibid., II.1.1 ff.
5 Ibid., II.1.36.
6 Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, The Indian Buddhist Iconography (Calcutta, 1958), pp. 349-351.
7 ApaPrC., CCXXX.15.
The most familiar colour is white. The significance of this colour has already been explained. Keeping her nature in view, her devotee is asked to please her by worshipping her just by giving away, according to his capacity, the white garment (suklavastrāṇi) and by offering to her the white garland (suklamālya) and ointment (anulepa).

(ii) Syāmā:

In addition to her description as having the white colour, Sarasvatī is also called "syāmā". It is necessary, in such a circumstance, to decide what the term "syāmā" implies.

The word "syāmā" appears to have been used for Sarasvatī in two different senses. Generally, everywhere in literature, gods and goddesses have been depicted as ever young; and the old age has totally been discarded. In the case of Sarasvatī, "syāmā" probably denotes her youth. But at the same time, Sarasvatī may also be supposed to be of black (syāmā).

Usually "syāma" stands for black colour and the epithet "syāmā" befits Sarasvatī in the sense of "syāma" (black colour), which is clear from the following. According to the Sāmkhya system, there is 'Prakṛti', which is the fundamental source of the universe. In the Purāṇas, too, at one place or the other, the same philosophy has been ushered in a well-mannered way. For instance, Durgā, Rādhā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Svarūpī

1 Supra., p. 156.
2 MP., LXVI.6.
3 BVP., 1.3.56, "sasmitā sudatī syāmā sundarīnām ca sundarī | sreṣṭhā srutīnām sastrānām viduṣām janani pari ||"  
4 From the verse (BVP., I.3.56), it is beyond doubt true that Sarasvatī is called most beautiful (sundarīnām ca sundarī), which is possible in one's youth. Kālidāsa in his Meghadūta (II,22), also uses 'syāmā' for Yakṣinī to denote her youth: "tanvi syāmā sākhārīdāsanā pakvanīma "dharoṣṭhi"."
are said to be denoted by the single name of 'Prakṛti'. All of them are capable of creation. They are, therefore, called the five forms of 'Prakṛti'.

This 'Prakṛti' as the source of the universe, is said to have been possessed of the three guṇas—sattva, rajas, and tamas. These guṇas are classified categorically according to their nature. Sattva stands for white colour, rajas for red and tamas for black.

When these guṇas are low and high in grades, there is an upheaval and creation starts therefrom; but when they are proportionally equal, it is vice versa. Scientifically, when red, white and black colours are mixed together, the ultimate colour is black. Similarly, the ultimate colour of 'Prakṛti' must be black; for, at the stage of Pralaya all the guṇas are in equilibrium and remain standstill and, therefore, their comixture should give rise to black colour. Being one of the forms of 'Prakṛti' Sarasvatī is judiciously described to be of black colour (syāmā). Syāmā also stands for colour like gold.

In Jainism, there are sixteen forms of Sarasvatī. Mahākāli is one of them, whose colour is black. Being one of the forms of Sarasvatī, Mahākāli aptly accounts for her black (syāmā) colour. This also justifies the description of Sarasvatī as having black colour (syāmā).

(iii) Blue:

This colour has not apparently been mentioned in the Purāṇas. This

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1 BP., II.1.1, 4.4.
2 VP., XXIII.54-57; SK., 1.
3 Sārv., Introduction, p. 25.
occurs in the other literature, particularly in the Tantras. In the Śrīvidyārāṣṭra-Tantra, there is the description of 'Viṣṇusarvasvatī'. It appears that Sarasvatī of Brāhmaṇism is there called 'Viṣṇusarvasvatī', probably because of her new tantric conception, which accepts her colour as blue. According to the above Tantra, which provides her with this colour, the hands of the goddess are beautified with blue lotuses.  

Elsewhere, Sarasvatī has been depicted as partially of blue colour. In Buddhism, Vajrasarvasvatī is said to have a face the right phase of which is blue and the left white: 'uḷasitadaksināvāmanākhyāna'. Like Buddhism, in Jainism, too, one of the Vidyādevīs, Mānavī, according to one of the sects is said to be of blue colour. Her seat is also blue. This goddess seems to have her close association with 'Viṣṇusarvasvatī' of Brāhmaṇism.  

In the Aparājita-praçhā, a quite different colour has been associated with Sarasvatī. According to it, it is her neck alone, which is of blue colour; neither her body nor her face. The Aparājita-praçhā brings to light the four forms of Sarasvatī. They are Mahāvidyā, Mahāvēṇī, Bhāratī and Sarasvatī. In the Devatāmūrtipraçāraṇa of Sūtradhāra Nagdona, there are twelve forms of Sarvasvatī – Mahāvidyā, Mahāvēṇī, Bhāratī, Sarasvatī, Ārūṇī, Brāhmaṇī, Mahābhūnu, Vedagardha, Īsvarī, Mahālaṅkāra,  

1 Srlvid T., 11.1; see also ibid., Part II, p. 273 for "Viṣṇusarvasvatī-vidyābhedavidhīh".  
2 Śāhā Mā., 163.  
3 B.C. Bhattacharya, op.cit., pp. 174-175.  
4 Ana Pro., CCXXI.15.
Mahākāli and Mahāsarasvatī. The four forms of Sarasvatī given in the Aparājitasāgara tally with the first four forms among the twelve given by Sūtrakṛta Manu. In all probability, the epithet '-nilakanṭhī' is equally applicable to Mahāvidyā, Mahāvīrī, Bhāratī and Sarasvatī and consequently, they all may be held to have their neck of blue colour.

3. The vehicle:

Like colour, the vehicle of the goddess is also a very interesting point. In the Purāṇas, the only thing alluded to as her vehicle is the swan.

(i) The swan:

By the study of the Purāṇas, we arrive at conclusion that she has inherited her vehicle from her father or husband Brahmā, who has the swan as his vehicle. The Matsya-Purāṇa, which devotes most of its chapters on iconographical aspects, says that the image of Brahmā should be made as seated on a swan or it should be 'kamalasana'. Similarly, Sarasvatī is also described as riding a swan. The Matsya-Purāṇa, while prescribing the identical formula for the making the images of Brahmā and Sarasvatī, says that the image of Brahmānī should correspond to that of Brahmā. As Brahmā has the swan as his vehicle, the similar must be the case with Sarasvatī, too, e.g., she should be seated on a swan (kamādhīrūdhā).

In Jainism, some of its Vidyādevis, like Vajrasrākhalā, Kāli, Gandhārī, etc., are said to have the swan as their vehicle.
(ii) The Peacock:

Besides the swan, the peacock has also been alluded to as the vehicle of Sarasvati. This vehicle hardly finds mention in the Purūnas; but elsewhere it is associated with Sarasvati.  

The peacock gets the prominent place in Jainism as the vehicle of some of the Vidyādevīs, such as Rohinī, Prajñāpti, Apratićakrā, etc.

The different sects of Jainism (i.e., Svetāmbaras and Digambaras) accept a variety of vehicles for the Vidyādevīs. For instance, the cow is the vehicle of Rohinī (Svetāmbara sect), the elephant of Vajrākṣa (Svetāmbara sect), the Garuda of Apratićakrā, the Cuckoo of Puruśadattā, the deer of Kāli (Digambara sect), the tortoise of Mahākāli (Digambara sect), the man of Mahākāli (Svetāmbara sect), the alligator of Gaurī (Svetāmbara sect), and the like.

(iii) The Implication of the Swan and the Peacock:

The swan (haasi) is taken to be a very superior bird and is said to possess a sense of spirituality and divinity. It is, probably, due to

1 Charles Coleman, op. cit., p. 9.
2 B.C. Bhattacharya, op. cit., 166.
3 Ibid., pp. 98, 167.
4 Ibid., p. 169.
5 Ibid., p. 166.
6 Ibid., p. 168.
7 Ibid., p. 169.
8 Ibid., p. 126.
9 Ibid., p. 170.
10 Ibid., p. 129.
11 Ibid., p. 171.
12 Ibid., p. 172.
its divinity that it is taken to be one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu. Moreover, in the Prapunccaśāra, Patala 4, this whole world is called 'hamsātmaka'. The word 'hamsātmaka' has with it a philosophical purport according to which the whole world is conceived to be 'hamsa'. In this context it is necessary to bring to light the full connotation of the word 'hamsa' so as to understand the philosophical associations with it.

The following observation offers a very fine explanation of the form hamsa:

'I am that'—one who has this feeling of identification and ends the fear of the world, is hamsa. Here, 'aham' stands for Jīvātmā and 'saḥ' for Brahma or Supreme reality. Sarasvatī also in her personal capacity, represents the three worlds, three Vedas, three Agnis, three guṇas, three stages and all the tattvārūpās. She is, thus, the embodiment of all the fundamental atoms capable of creating the universe. It has already been noted in the Purānic accounts of the origin of Sarasvatī that when the mind-born sons of Brahmā took no interest in the activities of the world, he created Sarasvatī to bear the burden of the universe. So in the form of 'sakti' or 'energy of the Supreme Being', Sarasvatī created the whole world, which has its base in her and shows her association

2 Horner Williams, op.cit., p. 1163.
3 Wep., XXXII, 10-12; Skp., VI.46.29-30.
4 Cf. The Modern Cyclopedia, Vol. VII (London), p. 344, "the name of Sarasvatī itself implies the female energy."
with the Supreme Being. The swan (hansa) represents the position when this 'association' turns into 'identification'. This identification between her and the Supreme Being is symbolized by her vehicle, the swan, whose name 'hansa' by itself is remarkably suggestive.

The other implication of the swan may be interpreted differently. As has been said above, 'hamsa' stands for the identification of 'I' and 'He'. This mode of thinking that 'I' and 'He' are one, can sustain all types of knowledge and hence 'hamsa' is aptly taken to be the vehicle of Sarasvatī. Hansa is also the name of a mantra, which is called 'ajāpā mantra', spoken without an effort. Its sound represents the supreme sound of the Supreme reality. It is by this Supreme sound that knowledge is communicated. Hansa related to Sarasvatī may be thought representing all this and it is for this reason that in the popular belief, 'hamsa' is said to be 'jñānavān'. Her travelling by 'hamsa', psychologically implies her moving with knowledge. It may also mean that she is the embodiment of 'jñāna' and wherever she goes by this vehicle, she brings knowledge with her. Hansa also typifies purity - purity of mind which (mind) is cut off from the worldly temptations. The association of 'hamsa' with Sarasvatī, in a way, implies her becoming pure; for, she is the embodiment of knowledge or is possessed of knowledge, and it is knowledge through which purity is gained.

Now the implication of the peacock remains to be seen. For the peacock, there is a Sanskrit word 'śīkha'. This word denotes the sense of a peacock as well as of Agni. Agni has been identified with Sarasvatī.

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1 John Garret, Classical Dictionary of India (Madras, 1871), p.666.
2 Monier Williams, op.cit., p.1005.
3 Varāha, XXXII.10; RV., II.1.11; also cf. 'pāvakā' in ibid., 1.3.10.
and Sarasvatī (speech) with sacrifice. In the same continuation, it may be held that the three flames of Agni represent the three forms of Sarasvatī (speech). It is, perhaps, to symbolise her psychological and philosophical relation with Agni that she holds the peacock, the symbol of Agni, as her vehicle.

4. The image of Sarasvatī:

(1) The prescription for the image of Sarasvatī:

A landmark in development has been paved towards the iconographical character of the goddess in her entering the Purānic era. It is the Purāṇas, which at first have anthropomorphised her to the fullest extent and offer to us several iconographical references to her. Among the Purāṇas, it is the Agni, the Matsya and Viṣṇudharmottara, which deal with this prominently. The Agni-Purāṇa spares its chapters XLIX to LV on laying down the prescriptions for the images of various gods and goddesses. In its chapter XLIX, on the said subject, while describing the image of Brahmā, it lays down that the images of Sarasvatī and Sāvitrī should be respectively at left and right sides of Brahmā’s image: "ūjayasthāti sarasvatī sāvitrī vāmadaksine".  

Like the Agni-Purāṇa, the Matsya-Purāṇa also maintains the same formula; and for it, it devotes chapters CCLVIII to CCLXIV. Like the Agni-Purāṇa, it prescribes how the image of Sarasvatī and Sāvitrī should

1 SB., III.1.4.9, 14.
"vvāg vai sarasvatī vvāg yajñāḥ".

2 AP., XLIX.15.
be made with Brahmā. It goes on saying that Brahmāṇī (Sarasvatī as either wife or daughter) should be made like Brahmā (brahmāsādṛś) in all respects to his recognition of iconic features. As to the image of Brahmā, it says that it should be made of four heads and there should be a water-vessel (kamandalu) in one of his hands. He should be made riding a swan or seated on a lotus. The image should have a site for oblations of ghee and four Vedas. To its left, there should be the image of Sāvitri and to right that of Sarasvatī.

Like the Agni and Matsya Purāṇas, the Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa spares its third Khanda exclusively for iconic description. In Adhyāya XLIV of this Purāṇa, Brahmā has been pictured as sitting in the lotus-posture (padmāsana) and has Sāvitri placed in his left lap. The striking feature of this description is the absence of Sarasvatī, who has been represented with Sāvitri by the Agni as well as the Matsya Purāṇas. It remains not only as a mere Purānic theory; but it has also taken iconographical form, which is evident from the following evidences:

The dual image of Brahmā and Sarasvatī found in the Mathura Sculpture shows partial acceptance of the formulas laid down by the Purāṇas. Partial because sometimes the Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa has been followed in depicting only Sāvitri with Brahmā. But such distinction does not always

1 MP., CCLXI.24.
2 Ibid., CCLX.40.
3 Ibid., CCLX.44.
5 Cf. Brindavan C.Bhattacharya, opcit., p.19; see also op.cit., p. 43.
prevail. An obvious attempt has been made at wiping out such a distinction and the two goddesses are given their proper places by depicting both of them with Brahmā. This feature is available in some of the famous sculptures like Mirpur Āhas in Sindh¹ and the early Chola and late Hoysala Schools.²

Besides, the Purānas themselves let us believe that in the Purānic age, the theory of image-making had already been put to practice. This is evident from the following instances. Once the King Ambuvīci, after having known the great powers of Sarasvatī, had a great regard in his heart for her and consequently, taking the clay out of the Sarasvatī river, made an earthen image (pratimā) of her.³ Similarly, in the Vāmā-Purāna, Sarasvatī has been said to have been installed in the form of linga at the Sthānu-tīrtha by Siva himself.⁴ These instances will suffice to lead us to assume that in the Purānic age, we find not only allusions to iconic features of various divinities; but we also witness that these were, by and by translated into real iconography.

(iii) Face:

In iconography, face attains very great importance. It is this alone through which the whole image is measured out. According to the Manasārā, the image of Sarasvatī and Savitṛi should be made in accordance

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2 Ibid., p. 518.
3 SkP., VI.46.16-17.
4 VāmP., XL.4.
with the dasātāla system: "sarasatim ca svātirī ca dasatālaṁ kārayeta".1

The dasātāla system is taken to be the supreme one among tālamānas - navatāla, aṣṭatāla, saptatāla, etc., and according to all these measurement systems the whole image (pratimā) should be ten times the face. This dasātāla system is again divided into the three categories according to its height giving the measurement various names such as uttama, madhyama and adhama dasatālaś. As per rule, the largest dasātāla system divides the whole length of the image into 124 proportionally equal parts, the madhyama into 120 and the adhama into 116.2 The method of making the face is detailed in the same Silpāsāstra.3 The three varieties of dasatāla system have fully been defined by Śrī Kumāra in the Silpāratna.4 As regards the measurement of aṅgulas, a detailed description is given in the Silpāsāstra by Prasanna Kumar Acharya.5

1 MāSc., LIV.19.
3 Ibid., p. 64.
4 Sil., V.1-1141/2; VI.1-111/2; VII.1-421/2.
5 Prasanna Kumar Acharya, Silpa-Sāstra. A Summary of the Mānasāra, developed out of a Dissertation accepted for the Ph.D. Degree, p. 35.

"The paramānu or atom is the smallest unit of measurement.

8 paramānus = 1 rathadhūli (lit. car-dust).
8 rathadhūlis = 1 bālāgra (lit. hair’s end).
6 bālāgras = 1 likṣā (lit. a nit).
6 likṣās = 1 yūkā (lit. a louse).
6 yūkās = 1 yava (lit. a barley corn).
8 yavas = 1 aṅgulas (lit. finger’s breadth).

Three kinds of aṅgulas are distinguished by the largest of which is made of 8 yavas, the intermediate of 7 yavas, and the smallest one of 6 yavas."
This is the detailed description of the face, which has an impressive recognition in iconography. But so far as the Purāṇas are concerned, they actually do not go to such a further extent in connection with the face of a deity. While describing the face of the goddess Sarasvatī, they vary to a great extent. Like her father Brahmā, she is often mentioned as having one to four faces; but elsewhere she is also mentioned as having up to five faces. According to the Matsya-Purāṇa, like Brahmā, Brahmāṇḍ should have four faces. Similarly, in the Vaiśṇu-Purāṇa, she (as Prakṛti) is described as having four heads. According to the Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa, Sarasvatī has only one face.

Sri Sūtradhāra Māṇḍana in his Rūpamāṇḍana, has described two forms of Sarasvatī, namely Mahāvidyā and Sarasvatī. There, Mahāvidyā is said to have one face (ekavaktra). Moreover, like Brahmā, Sarasvatī has also been depicted to have five faces. In this form, she has been named 'Sāradā'.

Sarasvatī in Buddhism has some features similar and some dissimilar to those of Brahmanic Sarasvatī. While describing the former's iconic character, it is emphasised that she may have either one or three faces. Like her, Vajrasarasvatī has also three faces 'vajrasarasvatinī trimukhām'.

1 MP., CCLXI.24.
2 VP., XXIII.55.
3 Cf. Dr. Priyabala Shah, op.cit., p. 154.
6 Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p. 349.
7 Sādhu..., 163.
Now the implication of one and four faces is to be seen. It is held that her face represents Śāvitṛī or Gāyatrī.² It has already² been pointed out that Sarasvatī is called `saptasvasā' having the seven metres as her sisters and Gāyatrī is foremost of all. All these metres separately or jointly symbolise not only the metre of the Vedas; but they may be taken as symbolising the Veda as a whole. This sense of one face of Sarasvatī tally with the fact that when Vāk is said to have been issued from Brahmā's mouth.³ This Vāk may be said as symbolising the Veda; and Sarasvatī, who is prominently described in the Purāṇas as Vāk or Vāgdevī or the presiding deity of speech,⁴ may be said as having embodied Veda itself as produced from the mouth of Brahmā.⁵ The four faces of hers may also be taken as symbolising the four Vedas in the same way as the four faces of Brahmā stand for four Vedas.⁶

In the Purāṇas, it is widely held that Brahmā has created the whole universe. For this creation, he had a pre-planning through his mind or intellect. This mind or intellect is nothing, but the Veda, which bears the cosmic feature endowed with fourfold nature.⁷ This sense goes

1 Dr. Priyabala Shah, op. cit., p. 154.
2 supra., pp. 49-51.
4 Cf. BrP., II.4.75, 77, 78, 79, 84-85; DrP., 101.11.
6 Dr. Priyabala Shah, op. cit., p. 140.
7 The four faces of Brahmā represent the four Vedas; the eastern Rgveda, the southern Yajurveda, the western Śāmaveda and the northern Atharvaveda.
8 Vasudeva S. Agrawala, Matsya Purāṇa - A study (Bamnagar, Varanasi, 1963), pp. 15,28.
to the four *Vedas* and mind can be replaced by the fourfold nature or creation. So four faces of Brahmā imply the four *Vedas*. Similarly, four faces of Sarasvatī, undoubtedly, stand for the same fact; for, she also is said as creating the universe.  

So far as the three faces are concerned, they may be taken as implying the three principal *Vedas* - the *Ṛgveda*, the *Yajurveda*, and the *Sāmaveda* excluding the *Atharvaveda*, which is supposed to be a later compendium. That is why she is called 'trayi vidyā' representing those three *Vedas*. She, in fact, represents all the vidyās, namely yajñavidyā, mahā-vidyā, guhyavidyā, ātmavidyā, ānvikṣikī, trayīvārttā and dandaṇī.  

The conception of the five faces of Sarasvatī may be extended to the five *Vedas* in which the *Nātyasūtra* is included according to the new conception of the fifth *Veda*. It is said that Brahmā created this fifth *Veda* in the way, he created the four *Vedas*. May, it is more superior to the other *Vedas*; for it has their essence in it and embraces almost all the arts and sciences. Thus, this *Veda* be identified with the one face of Sarasvatī in the form of the *Veda*; because Sarasvatī herself is said closely related to the various arts and sciences.  

(iii) **The number of hands and the object held by them:**  

The number of Sarasvatī's hands differs from place to place in the  

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1 Cf. *BṛP.*, II.1.1, 4.4. It is said that Durgā, Rādhā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Sāvitri are the five Prakṛtis in creation of the world: "srṣṭīvidhau prakṛtih pañcadhā smṛtāh".  
3 *Nāṭyā.,* I.15-16.  
4 John Dowson, *op.cit.*, p. 284.
Parānas. It is really very interesting to take them all into account. In the Parānas, Sarasvatī is mostly alluded to as having four hands. But by some of her Purānic epithets like 'vīṇāpustakadhārīṇī', she seems to have only two hands having a lute (vīṇā) and book (pustaka). The Matsya-Purāṇa while prescribing certain rules for making the images of various gods and goddesses states that Sarasvatī, like Brahmā, should be made as having four hands. Like the Matsya-Purāṇa, the Agni-Purāṇa also prescribes that the image of goddess Sarasvatī should be made as having a book (pustaka), a rosary (ākṣamālā), a lute (vīṇā) and a lotus (kumbhābja) in her respective hands.

In the Viṣṇudharmottarā—Purāṇa, as in the other Purānas, a number of references put forth her iconic character. At one place, she is described as having four hands. In her two right hands, she holds a book and a rosary while in her two left hands she bears a water-vessel and a lute (vīṇā). Elsewhere also she is pictured as having four hands; but the order of the emblem held in the right and the left hands differs. In the latter case, Sarasvatī is depicted as having a rosary and a trident in her two right hands and a book and a water-vessel in her left hands. Thus, trident has been given the place of lute (vīṇā). At another place, she is mentioned as usual to have a book and a rosary in her right hands and a lute (vaiṇavī) and a water-vessel (kamandalu) in her left hands. 'Vaiṇavī' has

1 BVP., II.1.35, 2.55.
2 MP., CCLXI.24.
3 AP., L.16.
4 Cf. Dr. Prayabala Shah, op.cit., p.225.
5 Ibid., p. 227.
6 Ibid., p. 154.
been explained by Dr. Kramrisch as vaisaavī and by Dr. Priyabala Shah as the staff of vīnā made of bamboo.

In the Brahmanavarta-Purāṇa, Sarasvatī is one of the five 'Prakṛtis'. The Vāyu-Purāṇa, while describing her as the 'Prakṛti Gau', presents her as having four mouths, four horns, four teeth, four eyes and four hands. Since she herself is 'the Prakṛti Gau', all the animals are born under her impression as four-footed and four-breasted.

In the Skanda-Purāṇa, an earthen image (pratimā) is said to have been made by the King Ambuvī. That image is described to have four hands with a lotus, a rosary, a water-vessel and a book in the respective hands. This shows the fulfilment of the rules laid down by the Purāṇas, according to which the image of goddess Sarasvatī should be four-handed.

In Jainism, most of the Vīidyadevis are four-handed; while in Buddhism, the case differs. The Buddhistic Sarasvatī is said to have either two arms or six arms, and in case she is two armed, she has her four forms under different names. She is also said to have eight and even ten arms.

1 Cf. ibid., p. 154, f.n.1.
2 Ibid., p. 154, "The word Vaiśnavī requires some clarification. I have amended the reading Vainavī into Vīnaivā because Sarasvatī is traditionally known to carry Vīnā and not a flute of bamboo which is the usual meaning of the word Vaiśnavī. On further consideration, however, I find that it is not necessary to change the reading into Vīnaivā because the word Vainavī does not mean Vīnā. It indicates the staff of Vīnā which must have been made of bamboo as in the case of the present 'Ekatārā'."
3 BVP., II.1.1.4.4.
4 VP., XXIII. 44-45.
5 Ibid., XXIII.88.
6 SkP., VI.46.16-19.
8 VaiR., 15.
9 H.Krishna Sastrī, op.cit., p. 187; also cf. SārT., VI.37.
(iv) The implication of the objects held in the hands:

The four arms of Sarasvatī, like her four faces, represent the four Vedas, and kamandalu represents the nectar of all sāstras. Since she symbolises the entire knowledge, she symbolises all the sāstras, too. She holds a book in one of her hands and this also conveys the same sense. The Skanda-Purāṇa (VI.46.19), while defining the book (pustaka) in one of the hands of Sarasvatī, says: "pustakaṁ ca tathā vāme sarva-vidyāsamud-bhavam" All other concepts of Sarasvatī have developed from her watery form, e.g., Sarasvatī as a river, and it is also maintained that Sarasvatī has created all the tanmātras, which are but essential for the creation of the universe and of which water is one. As 'Prakrti', she is advocated to have created the universe. The water is fundamentally necessary for this purpose. It is, probably, for this reason that she has water in her water-vessel and, thus, she denotes her earliest association with water. This water may not be thought of an ordinary type. It is divine (divya) and it is only in this capacity that it may be thought to have been kept in the water-vessel of Sarasvatī. 

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1 Dr. Priyabala Shah, op.cit., p. 164; The Skanda-Purāṇa (VII.33.22) aptly calls her 'srutilakṣaṇa'.
2 Ibid., p. 165.
3 Ibid., p. 166; also cf. S.C. Dimakar, Seon, "Sarasvatī In Jain Iconography" Summaries of Papers. Part.I, AIOC, XXIII Session - Aligarh (1966), p.174. In the Jain Iconography Sarasvatī is shown adorned with four hands having a book, a water-vessel, a rosary and the fourth empty. Here book has been understood for the Sāstra (Right Knowledge), rosary for Right Faith or Devotion, water-vessel for the ideal of sainthood or Right conduct and empty hand indicates the supreme path of nirvikalpa samādhi.
5 Vasudeva S. Agarwala, op.cit., p. 53.
6 BVP., II.1.1, 4.4.
7 SKP., VI.46.19.
Similarly, the lute (विनाः) held by Sarasvatī is also not less important. It is held that the lute represents a kind of achievement or proficiency (siddhi).\(^1\) The close relation of the lute and the book cannot be ignored. Sarasvatī, no doubt, represents the principles of speech and for this very reason that she has been identified with speech (वाग्वाः सरस्वती) in the Brāhmaṇas.\(^2\) Now, this speech can reasonably be divided into sound (dhvani) and word (pada and vākya). The book in the hand of sarasvatī also represents, besides what is said earlier, the second element while the lute in her hand, represents the first element. Only the lute, and no other musical instrument, has been described in the hand of the goddess. The lute is the most ancient musical instrument and finds mention in the Satapatha-Brāhmaṇa (III.2.4.6). Melody helps mental concentration. The lute is the best instrument resorted to for this purpose; because it is highly useful for producing some song.\(^3\) Moreover, the goddess is said to have a rosary (aksiśāla) in one of her hands. This rosary in the hand of the goddess usually represents time.\(^4\)

5. The physical aspect of Sarasvatī (i.e., Sarasvatī as a river):

(i) The origin of Sarasvatī as a river:

The Purāṇas though furnishing a lot of materials to different horizons, concentrate much on the origin (source) of the rivers. All rivers mentioned in the Purāṇas, have their different sources; but

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1 Dr. Priyabala Shah, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
2 *Supra.*, pp. 147-151.
3 Cf. DBhāp., III.30.2.
4 Dr. Priyabala Shah, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
of equal nature; i.e., the mountains. 1

It is in brief the description of the various sources of various rivers. Of the Sarasvatī, it is said that it is originated from the 'Himavatpāda' along with the Ikṣu, Gomati, Niraśrā, Satadru, Īravatī, Candrabhāgū, Bāhudā, Sarayū, Kuhū, Tṛtyā, Yamunā, Kauśikī, Drāsadvatī, Lauhitya, Sindhu, Gaṅgā, Devīkī, Vītastā, Gandakī, Dhūtāpāpā and Vīpasā. 2

Dr. A.B.L. Awasthi, on the basis of the study of the Skanda-Purāṇa, classifies the rivers of Bhāratavarṣa into eleven groups: 3

In such a classification, Sarasvatī is mentioned to belong to
'Sarasvatī-Dṛishadvatī Group'. Here, it is said to be originated from Brahmā and traversing various places and assuming different names, it ultimately found its way to the western ocean. 4 According to this statement,

1 Vasāpāla Tandana, op.cit.., pp. 51-52, cf. the terms used for different rivers. Summarizingly, they are said as: "ṛkṣa-nīḥṛtāh, pūrīyātra-nīḥṛtāh, mālaya-nīḥṛtāh, mahendra-nīḥṛtāh, vindhyapāda-nīḥṛtāh, sūktimata-pāda-nīḥṛtāh, sahyapāda-nīḥṛtāh and himavatpāda-nīḥṛtāh".

2 Ibid., p. 52; see also Vasudeva S. Agrawala, Mārkandeya Purāṇa: Eka Sanskritika Adhvyavaml (Allahabad, 1961), p. 146.

3 Dr. A.B.L. Awasthi, op.cit.., p. 149.

4 Ibid., pp. 153-54, "Sarasvatī, issuing from the water-pot of Brahmā, started on its downward course from Plaksha, on the Himavata, and passing through Kedāra, from where it turned westward (Pascimabhāmukhi), concealed underground. Beyond Pāsabham, she reached at Gandharikeya and thence followed a westward course. Passing through Bhūtīśvar and (contd.)
it is supposed to be produced from Brahmā and, therefore, it may be called 'Brahmaputri' in its capacity of a river. This name of it, according to its origin, has also been recognised by Śrī Hemacandrācārya, who gives two names: (a) 'Brahmaputri', (b) 'Sarasvatī'. She is mentioned several times as the daughter of Brahmā.

A mythological interpretation regarding its coming over to the earth as a river has been given in the Brahmasvaivarta-Purāṇa, where at first she is conceived to be residing in the heaven along with her husband Hari among the company of his co-wives Lakṣmī and Gaṅgā. Once Gaṅgā, in a passionate mood, looked at Hari again and again. Hari knew it easily and responded it by laughing at her. Sarasvatī could not tolerate such an act of Hari. She, overpowered by her furious wrath, told Hari of his profound love for Gaṅgā. When Hari saw Sarasvatī in such a mood, he went out of the assembly hall leaving Sarasvatī, Gaṅgā and Lakṣmī inside. Then Lakṣmī tried her best to appease Sarasvatī with her polite words; but she could not succeed in her endeavour. Sarasvatī levelled her with a curse to become like a tree (vṛakṣārūpā) and a river (saridrūpā). When Gaṅgā came to know of it, she consoled Lakṣmī by saying that Sarasvatī herself should be a river and go to the earth, where sinners reside while committing sins. In return, Sarasvatī again cursed Gaṅgā as she did 'Lakṣmī'.

(Contd. from p.178).

Rudraṇāt, Sarasvatī reached Śrīkaṇṭha Deśa. Flowing, thence, through Kurukṣetra, Viṣṇuṇāgara, Gopālaṇāgiri (near Viṣṇuṇāgara) and Devī-kṣetra, she reached Paśchima Deśa and again passing through Khajurā-vana, under the name of Nanda, as well as Mārkandāśrama, Arbudāranya, Vaṭāvana ... she ultimately joined the Paśchima Sāgara".

1 AE., IV.151.
2 BpP., III.35.44; PdP., V.18.165, 37.79 ff.
3 BṛP., II.6.17-40.
While this was going on, Hari returned in and heard of what had happened. But alas, he could not change the sorrow for pleasure. He, therefore, said Bhāratī! go to Bhāratavarṣa in consequence of your quarrel with Gagā and innocent Laksī. Similarly, Gagā will also go to the abode of Śiva. Since Padmā (Lakṣmī) has remained innocent of all, she should remain here in the heaven with me. Therefore, Sarasvatī came down to the earth. Being on the earth, she is called Bhāratī; being a priyā of Brahmā, Brāhma; being as the presiding deity of speech, vānī; and being stationed covering the world like ever-flowing stream (stotasye 'va) and becoming related to the ponds of Hari, Sarasvatī.  

In the classical period, we find much importance attached to the Gagā. It is held to flow out of the head of Śiva and even greater divinity is assigned to it, when it is held celestial. Since the Gagā river is still in existence on the earth, the above mentioned Purānic notion that first it was in the heaven and later on descended to the earth finding Śiva's head as its abode and, thus, celestial, has been developed and popularity has won in the later classical period. So far as the Sarasvatī is concerned, it was of far-reached fame in Vedic age than the Gagā. But since, it has lost its earthly living, its popularity as a river has considerably suffered. In this way, it is divine and has the same origin as the Gagā in the Purāṇas as well as in the popular belief.

Another story of the similar kind runs in the Skanda-Purāṇa.

1 Ibid., II.6.41-53.
2 Ibid., II.7.1-3.
According to it, Sarasvatī was previously a deity. The ocean lying on the earth was possessed of latent fire (vaḍavāgni). In order to bring it to the bottom of the Pātāla Loka; and to bring good to gods avoiding its injurious effect, God Viṣṇu entreated Sarasvatī to descend on the earth. She being the loyal and obedient daughter of her father Brahmā refused to grant his request until her father ordered her. Viṣṇu, therefore, implored Brahmā, who granting Viṣṇu's request, bade Sarasvatī to descend on the earth. Sarasvatī being turned into a river got down on the Himalayas and passing through Plakṣa, ran to the surface of the earth.

According to the Matsya-Purāṇa, the original source of the Sarasvatī is the lake of snakes (sarpānām t atlasah) on the Hemakūṭa. This lake gave birth to the Sarasvatī and the Jyotismatī. Both of these rivers being originated from this lake, ran to fall into the eastern and western seas.

About the Gāṅgā, the popular belief tells us that when the 60,000 sons of Sagarā were reduced to ashes, King Bhagīratha practised severe penances to bring the Gāṅgā on the earth for their salvation. Similarly, Sarasvatī is said to have been brought by Pitāmaha to Puṣkara and by the Sage Markandeya to Kurukṣetra.

This is, in nutshell, the physical description of the origin of Sarasvatī as a river. Other Purānic accounts for her origin as a divine

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1 SkP., VII.33.13-15.
2 Ibid., VII.33.40-41.
3 MP., CXXI. 64-65.
4 Vāmp., XXXVII. 16-23.
being, have already been taken into account. All the rivers originate from the mountains. This is equally true of Sarasvatī also. Much is said about its origin from the mountain as well as about its whereabouts in the beginning. The new fact given about it is that it, in the ancient times, undoubtedly excelled the Gāṅgā and, thus, may be supposed to claim the same popular belief as we have today about the Gāṅgā.

(ii) The sacred aspect of the Sarasvatī:

Since earliest times, Aryans assigned the Sarasvatī a very superb position in their traditional rites and customary religious systems. It is obvious enough from the following Purānic accounts:

The Brahmāṇḍa-Purāṇa says that there were sixteen rivers, the Kāverī, the Krṣṇa-veni, the Narmadā, the Yamunā, the Godāvari, the Candrabhāgū, the Irāvatī, the Vipāśa, the Kauśikī, the Satadru, the Sarayū, the Śītā, the Sarasvatī, the Brādīnī and the Pāvanī, which were all married to Agni. Agni, as we know, is a symbol of light and sacredness. The association (identification) of Agni with Sarasvatī speaks of the attachment of the former’s qualities to the latter. The implication of this statement of the Brahmāṇḍa-Purāṇa with regard to the marriage of the said rivers with Agni, seems that early Aryans at first resided by and around these rivers taking them pious and also kindled the sacrificial fires in their honour. Later on, some of them proceeded southwards.

2 Vide supra., pp. 1-34.
3 Bṛp., II.12.13-16.
4 RV., II.1.11.
leaving them behind. It is, perhaps, for this reason that the north Indian rivers are given more superior place, where more religious minded Aryans lived. Thus, it appears that these rivers had acquired a very pious position by their connection with the sacrificial fires lit on their banks by Aryans. Similarly, a list of pious rivers has been presented by the Agni-Purāṇa. ¹

The Matsya-Purāṇa, while describing the sacred aspect of some of rivers, says that the Gaṅgā is sacred at Kanakhala, the Sarasvatī at Kurukṣetra; but Narmadā is sacred everywhere. The same Purāṇa, while speaking of the purity of water of the Sarasvatī, Yamunā, Gaṅgā and Narmadā, says that water of the Sarasvatī purify one within three days, of the Yamunā in seven days, of the Gaṅgā instantaneously and of the Narmadā just by the mere sight.²

The Sarasvatī river annihilates all the sins with its sacredness and, therefore, is called the killer of all the sins.³ Not only is it or its waters sacred, its bank equally deserves this sacredness and hence is called auspicious one (subhātāta).⁴ It is only due to the auspiciousness of the bank that various tīrthas are situated thereon. It (Sarasvatī) is full of pious waters and, therefore, is called ‘pūrayatoyā’,⁵ ‘pūrayajalā’,⁶ etc. Because of these qualities, it is held to be all pure and

¹ AP., CCXIX. 69-72.
² NP., CLXXXVI. 10-11.
³ Vāmp., XXXII. 3; SkP., VII. 34.31.
⁴ NP., VII. 3.
⁵ Vāmp., XXXIII. 2; XXXVII. 29, 38.
⁶ Pdp., V. 27.119.
This is evident by such attributes as 'subhā', 1 'punyā', 2 'atipunyā', 3 etc.

Rṣis who practise penance, prefer to live in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. Such atmosphere facilitates them to attain the tranquility of mind. The banks of the Sarasvatī had such an atmosphere. It is why they were densely inhabited by such holy sages. 4 By the dwellings of the banks of the Sarasvatī, performed their daily religious rites by its banks and drank its holy waters. One of such sages was the worshipful Kardama, who lived along with the bank of the Sarasvatī and practised hard austerities for ten thousand years. 5 Lord Kṛṣṇa also sitting under an asvattha tree, practised his self denial 6 on the bank of the Sarasvatī.

Earlier 7 we have seen that the Sarasvatī as a river is called 'brahmaputri', the daughter of Brahmā. Brahmā seems to have great affection towards it. It is evident from the fact that Brahmā once along with Marīci and other sages visited the hermitage of Kardama, which was encirced by it. 8 Many other similar references to the holy places and tīrthas by the bank of the Sarasvatī are scattered at numerous places in the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa. They all prove the sanctity of the Sarasvatī river. It is said

1 Vāmp., XXXII.2; Mārp., XXIII.30.
2 Vāmp., XXXII.24; XXXIV.6; Bṛd., III.14-83.
3 Vāmp., XLII.9.
4 Bhāp., III. 22.27.
5 Ibid., III.21.6.
6 Ibid., III.4.3-8.
7 Supra., p. 176.
8 Bhāp., III.24.9.
that a heavy battle took place between Devas and Asuras, when Lord Viṣṇu
destroyed the progeny of Diti. So Diti went to Syamantapaṇcaka, a holy
place situated on its bank and practised hard penance for a long time
worshipping her husband. In the chapter XXII of the Matsya-Purāṇa,
there is an enumeration of the sacred tīrthas for Śrāddhas, in which
the Pitṛtīrtha, Nilakunda, Rudrasarovara, Nānasarovara, Mandākini, Acchāda,
Vipāśā, Sarasavatī, all are taken to be the sacred tīrthas. The Sarasvatī
is also taken to be sacred to Devamātā on its bank at Pārvāra. It is
also said that the sacred rivers, the Gaṅgā, the Sindhu, the Sātadru, the
Candrabhāgā, the Īrāvati, the Vitastā, the Vipāśā, the Yamunā, the Gaṇḍakī,
the Sarasvatī, the Devikā and the Saryū all were utilised as bamboos in
the chariot of Tripūrāri.

The Sarasvatī has, thus, been a very sacred river in many respects;
for instance, as having pure waters of spiritual sanctity, sacred banks
and sacred tīrthas.

(iii) Some epithets of the Sarasvatī:

In the Purāṇas, numerous adjectives are used for rivers in general.
Among them, some are really remarkable and striking; such as śiva, pūpyā
and śivajalā. Usually such epithets imply the munificence and benevolent
nature of rivers. They flow for others and water the earth for others;

1 MP., VII. 2-3.
2 Ibid., XXII. 22-23.
3 Ibid., XIII. 44.
5 Dr. Rēmasākara Bhaṭṭācārya, Itiḥāsa-Purāṇa kā Amsāllana (Vāṛāṇsaī, 1963), p. 219.
and amid such a process of their actions, they bring many beneficial boons to human happiness and feed the world like their own children. It is, perhaps, due to this fact that they are affectionately called mothers of the world (visvasya mātaraḥ). It applies to the rivers in general; we have the following with regard to the Sarasvātī in particular.

The Purāṇas speak of two types of rivers, those which flow only in the rainy season and the others, which are always in flux. The Sarasvātī is reckoned to be of the latter type. The Vāmana-Purāṇa says that it is the Sarasvātī alone, which, irrespective of seasons, never ceases to flow (varsākālavaḥ sarvā varjayitvā sarasvātī). It is probably to denote this very character of the Sarasvātī that the various Purānic epithets such as pravāhasaṁyuktā, vegayuktā, srotasye 'va, etc., have been used for it.

By naditāmā, we know how mighty it was in the Rgvedic times. The Purāṇas do not undermine its such previous superior position. They hail the Sarasvātī as a great river and let it to retain its former status; they only replace 'nagitāmā' with 'mahānādi' (a great river). Great rivers have several characteristics of their own as distinguished from those of smaller ones. One of such characteristic features is as follows:

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1 Ibid., p.219.
2 Ibid., p.223.
3 Vām., XXXIV.8.
4 Ibid., XXXIII.1.
5 Ibid., XXXVII.22.
6 BhP., II.7.3.
7 RV., II.41.16.
8 Vām., XXXVII.31, XL.8; BhāP., V.19.18.
It is generally observed that small rivers originate either from the mountains or from big rivers. If they originate from big rivers, they flow as their tributaries. Similarly, if they originate from the mountains, they run down and join big rivers. In both the circumstances, they have but a little life. But such an opinion cannot be advanced against big rivers. They originate from the mountains and find their ultimate way to the oceans. It is why a big river is called 'samudragā' flowing up to the ocean. This is equally true of the Sarasvatī and it is for this reason that it is called 'sāgaragāmini (flowing to the ocean).

Earlier, we have noticed that the Sarasvatī took its birth from the Himalayas and first fell into the Rajasthan sea and later on changed its course for the Arabian sea. This change has been shown in the Purāṇas themselves as they furnish two Purānic epithets for the Sarasvatī, namely 'prāci' and 'pascimāmukhi', i.e., when it was easterly, it was called 'prāci', but when it became westerly, it came to be styled 'pascimāmukhi'. In the duration of change, its state was varying. At this time, it was struggling for life in the desert and, therefore, it was sometimes visible and sometimes invisible. In such a state, it is called 'drṣyāḍrṣyagatiḥ' (having visible and invisible course) on account of its flowing through

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1 Cf. Dr. Ramaśākara Bhaṭṭācārya, op.cit., p. 223.
2 Vide SupPā., pp. 20-22.
3 Vide SupPā., pp. 20-22.
4 Pāṇ., V.48.217, 28.123; Bāha., X.78.19.
5 SkP., VII.35.26.
6 Vide SupPā., XXXII.2; also cf. INO, Vol. XVII. No.3, p.216, "Sarasvatī rises in the Sirnar hills of the Siwalik range of the Himalayas and emerges into the plains at Ād-Badrī in the Ambala District, Punjab. It disappears once at Chalaur but reappears at Bhavanipur; then it disappears at Balchappar but again appears at Bara-khera ..."
Kurukṣetra, it is called 'kurukṣetra-prādāyini'. Since the Sarasvatī contains auspicious waters (puñyajalāvahā), various epithets expressive of its sacredness have been used for it, e.g., 'puñyadā', 'puñyajananī, puñyatīrthasvarūpīṇī, puñyavadbhir niṣeyyā, sthitih puñyavatām';

'tapasvinā' taporūpā, tapasyākūrarūpīṇī, jvaladagnisvarūpīṇī';
'tīrtharū-pātipāvanī';
'subhā';
'puṇyā';
'puñyajalā';
'pāpanirmokā';
'sarvatīpapraśāsini';
'atipuṇyā';
'puṇyatoṣyā'; etc.

Both Aryans and non-Aryans have been said residing in the vicinity of the rivers—the Gaṅga, the Sindhu and the Sarasvatī. They were provided with equal opportunity and while living there, they took their waters without any distinction. A collective epithet 'saridvāraḥ' has been used for the Sarasvatī, Devikā and Sarayū. Besides this, a most striking epithet for the Sarasvatī is 'brahmaadī'. It was the brahmaadī Sarasvatī, wherein sage Parasurāma took his 'avabhṛta bath'. The Sarasvatī was, thus, closely associated with Brahmā.

1 VāmP., XXXII.1.
2 Ibid., XXXII. 24.
3 BvP., II. 6.2, 12.
4 Ibid., II.6.2.
5 Ibid., II.6.3.
6 Ibid., II.7.4.
7 VāmP., XXXII.2.
8 Ibid., XXXII.24, XXXIV.6.
9 Pdp., V. 27.119.
10 Ibid., V.27.119.
11 SkP., VII.34.31.
12 VāmP., XLII.9.
13 Ibid., XXXVII. 29, 38.
14 WP., CXIV.20.
15 Ibid., CXXXIII.24.
16 BhāP., IX.16.23.
6. **The Marriage and Spouseship:**

This aspect has been fully developed in the *Purāṇas*. Though its exposition is vague; but it has its own characteristics and has been referred to several times. Sarasvatī has been spoken of as associated particularly with Brahmā, Dharmarāja, Svāyambhuva, Manu, Viṣṇu, Āditya, etc.

(i) **Sarasvatī and Brahmā:**

The marriage between Sarasvatī and Brahmā, though allegorical, has been mentioned several times in some of the *Purāṇas*, and Brahmā is closely related to Sarasvatī. His engagement with the latter is really very remarkable. The *Matsya-Purāṇa* has far more to say on this point than the other *Purāṇas*. According to it, Sarasvatī was born out of the half portion of Brahmā's body as his daughter. But when he looked at her, he was fired by her peerless beauty and praised her for it incessantly 'Oh! what an enchanting form!' 'Oh! what an enchanting form!'. This all, he said in the presence of his mind-born-sons (mānas-putras), which caused shame to his daughter, who with great reverence, began to circumambulate her such bare-faced father. But when, she was circumambulating him, Brahmā took it troublesome to move again and again with her. So he became four-faced to have a full and continuous look at her; and then five-faced, when she proceeded to the heaven. Ultimately, Brahmā entrusted on his sons the work of creation and married her, who was of hundred beauties (satarūpā). Thus, he enjoyed the company of Sarasvatī for hundred years living inside the lotus.  

1 MP., III. 30-43.
From this Purana, it is not clear how Brahma, in spite of the unwillingness of Sarasvatī, won her as his wife; but the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa clarifies this point. It says that Sarasvatī was quite impassionate, when Brahmā fell under the irresistible influence of love. He had to win over the heart of his daughter.¹

When Brahmā married Sarasvatī, he lost his tapasyā and he, therefore, had to practise hard penance. It is due to this tapasyā that he begot his wife from half of his body, who was gifted with the faculty of creation.² This consort of Brahmā was beauty incarnate and stood by her husband as Surābhi. Brahmā enjoyed her company and out of his union with her a smoke-coloured progeny was born.³ Here/is not the clear reference to his wife by name and most probably Sāvitri seems to be referred to which is evident from the following. In the Brahmaśaivarta-Purāṇa, Sāvitri has been mentioned as the wife of Brahmā and when Brahmā enjoyed her company, the Vedaś, Sāstras, year, month, day, night, twilight, dawn, etc., came into existence.⁴ In the Purāṇas, Sarasvatī and Sāvitri have been mentioned in different capacity. As 'Prakṛti', they stand side by side with each other;⁵ while other references present them as essentially one.⁶ Sometimes, they come before us as two different wives of Brahmā.⁷

¹ BhP., III.12.28.
² MP., CLXXI. 20-23.
³ Ibid., CLXXI.34-36.
⁵ Ibid., II.1.1, 4.4;
⁶ MP., III.30-32.
⁷ See supra, pp. 166-167.
(ii) Sarasvatī and Dharmarāja:

The Matsya-Purāṇa says elsewhere that Brahmā created five maids—Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Marutvatī, Śādhyā and Visvesā and all of whom were married to Dharmarāja in due course.

(iii) Manu and Sarasvatī:

When Brahmā enjoyed himself in the company of Śāvitrī (or Sarasvatī) and Manu was born. Thus, Manu was the son of Sarasvatī (also called Śatarūpā) by Brahmā. This Manu is called Svāyambhuva Manu. In some descriptions Śatarūpā has been said to be the wife of Manu, who must be the different person from the above Manu. For the enlargement of the creation, Brahmā divided his body into twain, male and female. These forms were Manu Svāyambhuva that stood in relation of husband and wife.

(iv) Sarasvatī and Viṣṇu:

Sarasvatī has also been mentioned as the wife of Viṣṇu. The Brahmaśaivaśastra-Purāṇa says that Viṣṇu had three wives namely, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Gāṇgā. Śrī Krṣna produced Sarasvatī; but when she showed her affection towards him, he asked her to choose Nārāyaṇa as the object of her love. He told her that he had Rādā as his wife, and, therefore,

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1 MP., CLXXI.32.33; also cf. PD., V.37.79.
2 MP., III.44-45.
3 Cf. BP., II.1; BhāP., III.12.52-53; ByP., II.1.132; MāP., L.13-14; VisP., I.7.17; KṛP., I.8.5-10; also cf. Purnendu Narayan Sinha, A Study of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa or Esoteric Hinduism (Madras, 1950), p. 57.
4 ByP., II.6.17, "lakṣmīḥ sarasvatī gāṇgā tisro bāhīryā harer 'pi
premnā samās tiṣṭhantā satatām harīsannidhau"
there was no room for her to be his wife. Thus, Sarasvatī was given to Nārāyana. According to one view, Sarasvatī was one of the co-wives of Viṣṇu. But when the latter found that one wife was as much as he could manage, he had to offer Sarasvatī to Brahmā and Gaṅgā to Śiva, while he kept Lākṣmī alone with him. Thus, Sarasvatī was at first the wife of Nārāyana and later on of Brahmā.

The relation between Sarasvatī and Sarasvān has already been discussed. Sarasvān was the spouse of Sarasvatī. The similar notion has also been reiterated in the Brahmavaivarta-Purāṇa, where the identification between Sarasvatī and Bhāratī as well as between Brahmā and Hari has been maintained. Hari has been conceived to be Sarasvān, who, in the capacity of the presiding deity of waters, is all-pervading.

According to the literal meaning, Viṣṇu (Hari) is the one who is all-pervading. The sense is explicit from the root viṣ, to enter, or to pervade. The personality of Brahmā also implies this for he represents the whole universe as well as the soul (ātman) or Supreme Being, beyond space and time. It is probably for this reason that Brahmā has also been identified with Nārāyana: "brahmā nārāyaṇātmakaḥ".

1 Ibid., II.4.12-19.
2 Ibid., II.2.59.
5 BVP., II.7.1-3; also cf. Amanda Swarupa Gupta, op.cit., p. 63.
6 Monier Williams, op.cit., p. 946.
7 Ibid., p. 689.
Besides, Sarasvati has also been mentioned at different places as the wife of Aditya,\(^1\) Ganapati,\(^2\) etc.

As to the relation of Aditya with Sarasvati, we should first see the meaning of Aditya. The word has many meanings, for instance, the son of Aditi, one of the seven rṣis, Sūrya, Višṇu, etc.\(^3\) Sūrya, sometimes, represents Indra. It is why Indra has been reckoned as one of the twelve Adityas and is also subordinated to Brahmā, Višṇu and Śiva.\(^4\) Probably, the acceptance of Sarasvati as the wife of Aditya is just to show her most ancient affinity to Indra. Sarasvati in ancient times, was supposed to be the goddess of the Bharatas tribe, who held their descending from her.\(^5\) In the post-Vedic period, the place of Indra is highly under-rated and his Vedic superiority seems to have been encroached upon by Brahmā, Višṇu and Śiva. If it be true, one may reasonably except Sarasvati to come to be accepted as the wife of Brahmā and Višṇu. So far as the marriage between Brahmā and Sarasvati is concerned, it is out and out allegorical. It is said that the primal creation is the result of the divine knowledge. Brahmā is understood to be the Creator of the Vedas and Gāyatrī (Sarasvati) the presiding deity over them. Thus, their corporal and incorporeal relation is simply shown by this mythological way of interpretation.\(^6\)

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1 MP., CLXXI.57, "ādityasya sarasvatyām jajñāte dvau sutau varau".
2 V.V.Dixit, "Brahmam and Sarasvatī" FO, Vol.VIII, No.1 & 2 (Poona, 1943), p.67. "In course of time a fresh deity arose who usurped the function of Prajāpati and Brahman. That deity is Gaṇapati. He is the lord of all knowledge, like them ... Gaṇapati also has two wives Sāradā and Sarasvatī. Sāradā represents profane learning and Sarasvatī represents sacred learning. The earlier idea that the daughters became wives of the father was dropped as it was unesthetic to the refined taste".
3 Monier Williams, op.cit., p. 119.
4 Ibid., p.140.
5 Donald A. Mackenzie, op.cit., p.XL.
7. The offsprings of Sarasvatī:

Among the offsprings of Sarasvatī, we are told of Sārasvata, Svāyambhuva Manu and some cosmic elements. Their brief description is as under:

(i) Sārasvata:

Sārasvata has been referred to at several places in different contexts in the Purāṇas. For instance, it stands for the son of Sarasvatī and Dādhīca,¹ the twelfth kalp,² the son of Jaigīśavya,³ a Vedavyāsa of the ninth dvāpāra,⁴ etc.

In the Purāṇas, we also find that women had the same name as rivers. The Sāravastī was an ancient one; but in the later period, persons were given this name.⁵ Similarly, the name Sārasvata, too, happened to be much popular.

In the Mahābhārata, also Sārasvata has been taken to be the son of Sarasvatī. There, at one place, Sārasvata is held to be a rśi and the Sarasvatī a personified river. It has been said that there occurred a severe drought lasting for a period of twelve years and resulting in a famine. On account of this, people lost all the sources to live upon. Brahmānas could not devote themselves to the Vedic studies for want of food. Consequently, the entire Vedic knowledge was lost. Only Sārasvata

¹ VP., LXV.91; BD., III.1.94, "sārasvataḥ sarasvatyāṁ dadhīcāc co papadyate".
² MP., CCXC.5.
³ VP., XXIII.138, "jaigīśavye 'tī vikhyātāḥ sarvēśāṁ yogināṁ varah".
⁴ ViśP., III.3.13, "sārasvatyas ca navame".
could retain it; for his mother saved his life feeding him upon fish. When the drought was over, it was he, who taught the Vedas to the Brähmanas.¹

Still at another place,² Sārasvatī has been told to have been born to Sarasvatī by God, who asked him to study Vedas and impart the Vedic knowledge to others. This Sārasvata is the same as Vyāsa and Apāntaratamas.

The Purāṇas tell us that there lived an ancient sect of Hindus called Sārasvatas. They were in the western country by the side of the Sarasvatī river. The people of the sect are supposed to be the Brähmanas. The area they lived in, was also called Sārasvata nation after their name.³

They were called Sārasvatas apparently because of their continuous inhabitance along the Sarasvatī river. On account of benefits they got from the river and their reverence for it, they regarded it as their own mother. The sanctity and divinity attached to the river influenced their lives and many of them rose as seers (ṛṣis).

It is not impossible that these Sārasvatas were the descendants of Sārasvata of the drought-episode alluded to above. Their number would have risen up to 60,000 and it was, probably, to them that Sārasvata imparted the Vedic knowledge after the drought. The episode appears to point to a climatic change and to the extinction of waters of the Sarasvatī river, too. The Sārasvatas would have, even during the period of famine, persisted to live by the side of the river and when the drought

¹ SālvP., LI.2-51.
² SāntīP., CCCLIX.38 ff.
was over, they would have been imparted the extinguished Vedic knowledge by Sārasvata. Prof. Wilson terms it revivalism and thinks it introduction of Hindu rituals. 1

(ii) Svāyambhuva Manu:

When Brahmā was enamoured of the beauty of his daughter Sarasvatī or Satarūpā, he married her and enjoyed her company for hundred years in the lotus-temple. On account of their union, Svāyambhuva Manu was born. 2 Besides him, there are fourteen other Manus, all of whom are his descendants. 3

At another place, the Matsya-Purāṇa states that when Brahmā got married to Satarūpā, he lost the very virtue of his tapasyā. He, therefore, again practised tapas and created his wife of equal qualities and capable of creation out of half of his body and then he recited the Gayatri and created some Prajāpatīs like Visvēśa, also named Dharma, Dakṣa, Marīci, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Vasistha, Gautama, Bṛhgu, Aṅgiras and Manu. 4

There are two types of creation, Manasī and Maithunī. The former creation (sṛṣṭi) symbolises his Idea and the latter the very conversion of the Idea into form. The latter creation of his includes his physical sons, Dakṣa, Dharma, Kāma, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada, Pramoda, Mṛtyu and Bharatā. 5

2 MP., III.43-44.
3 Ibid., III.45-47.
5 Cf. Vasudeva S. Agrawala, op.cit., p. 35.
Manu as the son of Sarasvatī or Gāyatrī or Satarūpā or Brahmanī also implies the principle of manas or buddhi including five tanmātrās, which are essential for the creation of the universe. Manas, buddhi and five tanmātrās are, sometimes, taken as seven sons of Sarasvatī, but these may also be supposed to be her energy in the form of śraddhā, rddhi, kalā, medhā, tuṣṭī, puṣṭī, prabhā, mati, omkāra, etc. It is why puṣṭī, dhṛti, kirtti, siddhi, kānti, kṣamā, svadhā, svāhā and vāṇī are sometimes identified with Sarasvatī.

These śraddhā, rddhi, kalā, medhā, etc., are mental qualities of Sarasvatī and symbolise her mind itself. In the case of Brahmā, too, Svāyambhuva Manu, the offspring of Brahmā, represents Mind or Intellect of Brahmā and his progeny is the place for the very manifestation of that principle of intellect. The Purāṇas often tell us that all the Vedas were produced from Brahmā and Sarasvatī. The Vedas are the store of knowledge and knowledge is the very product of mind. And if Svāyambhuva Manu is the Mind of Brahmā, he is Veda. Similar view may also be held with Sarasvatī. In a broader sense, Svāyambhuva Manu may be said to have representing the Vedas proper.

(iii) Others:

Satarūpā has been said in the Padma-Purāṇa to have produced Rṣis, Prajāpatis, Manus and others. The Matsya-Purāṇa speaks of

1 Ibid., p. 53.
2 GarP., I.7.9.
3 VemP., XL.15,16.
4 Cf. Vasudeva S. Agrawala, op.cit., p. 15.
5 PdP., V.16,10-12.
twelve Ādityas, Indra, Viṣṇu, Bhaga, Tvasţr, Varuṇa, Aryaman, Ravi, Pūṣan, Mitra, Dhanada, Dhātṛ and Parjanya. Āditya has also been
taken to be the husband of Sarasvatī. Danu and Diti were produced
from this very couple. ¹ Besides, the whole universe and the Vedas
are also said to have evolved from Sarasvatī. ²

¹ MP., CLXXI. 56-58.
² VēmP., XXXII. 6.