The conception of Sarasvatī is a very complex problem in the Indian mythology. She is one of rivers or deities of the Rgvedic origin. In the Vedic pantheon, many deities arose and later on merged with others. If any one of them survived, it was mostly in an stereotyped form. But in regard to Sarasvatī, the case has been of a different nature. With her, there has been a gradual process of change and development. In her earliest stage in the Rgvedic times, she was merely a terrestrial river; but owing to the excessive affection and reverence shown towards her by seers, she got identified with speech or the goddess of speech. The Brāhmaṇas repeatedly speak of her as Vāk on the one hand, while the Purāṇas, fully anthropomorphise her on the other. In the Tantras, she stands for a specific nerve, while in the classical period, she is unanimously accepted to be the goddess of speech, learning, eloquence, etc. Thus, for instance, these phenomena to which Sarasvatī has been referred in these epochs of the Sanskrit literature are very much different from each other. This difference in the objects to which Sarasvatī is related naturally provokes one to think and investigate into the problem seriously.

There are many scholars like A.A. Macdonell, A.B. Keith, Hillebrandt, Louis Renou, Charles Coleman, Roth, N.N. Godbole, etc., who have shed a flood of light on her personality. There are, besides, others like K.C. Caittopādhya, Sir Aurel Stein, H.C. Raychoudhuri, Anand Swarup Gupta, Divaprasad Das Gupta, B.R. Sharma, etc., who have written stray articles on her. But their attempt has been partial. Each one of them has either dealt with only some one aspect of her personality or has confined himself to a specific period.

In this work, an humble attempt has been made broadly to deal with her various aspects as: a river (Chapter I); river-goddess,
goddess or goddess of speech (Chapters II - V), and as fully anthropomorphised in the Purānas. The various allusions made to her by some important classical writers have been brought out briefly in Chapter VII. The Appendix includes a study of Sarasvatī with regard to her corresponding deities in the Roman and the Greek mythologies. Thus, I have traced the origin and development of Sarasvatī through the Sanskrit literature in historical sequence from the Vedic down to the classical period. I have put the data collected as far as possible from the whole literature available in an interpretative perspective.

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