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# SARASVATĪ-VĀC: THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE RIVER WITH SPEECH<sup>1</sup>

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Sarasvatī has been worshipped in India as goddess of knowledge and eloquence amongst Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists alike. When she was introduced to other parts of Asia, such as China and Japan, she entered as a Buddhist goddess governing memory, understanding, and eloquence. Sarasvatī originated, however, as a great river, described, deified, and invoked in many verses of the *Ṛg Veda* (*RV*). She appears in three *RV* hymns in particular: while 6:61 is entirely dedicated to Sarasvatī, she shares 7:95-96 with her male counterpart Sarasvant, to whom are addressed a few of the stanzas (7:95:3; 7:96:4-6). The *RV* Sarasvatī was a powerful river goddess and a symbol of inexhaustible strength and abundance. In subsequent texts, notably the *Atharva* and *Yajur Vedas* and the *Brāhmaṇas*, she was identified with Vāc, speech. In time she became the goddess of knowledge, for knowledge is communicated through speech, and eventually her sway extended over all fields of knowledge, including music and the fine arts.

Sarasvatī's transformation from river goddess to goddess of knowledge clearly occurred via speech, but why was she, as a river goddess, identified with Vāc? It is this topic which I would like to discuss here, and to show that the origins of this identification are to be found in the *RV*.

The transformation of Sarasvatī into Sarasvatī-Vāc has been the subject of very little discussion. Arthur A. MACDONELL, for instance, suggested Sarasvatī's healing of Indra through speech in the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* (19:12) as the starting point<sup>2</sup>. But why should she have suddenly resorted to speech if she had had no direct connection with Vāc in the *RV*? Hermann OLDENBERG looked further back and perceptively noted Sarasvatī's func-

1 This is an expanded version of a very short article which appeared in December 1998 in *Nihon Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* (*Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*) vol.47, no.1 under the title "The Origin of the Conception of Sarasvatī as Goddess of Knowledge" (pp. 510-507). I would like to thank Prof. Werner KNOBL of Kyoto University for his helpful suggestions and comments on this expanded version.

2 *Vedic Mythology*. (Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde, Band 3, Heft A.) Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1897, p. 87. [Repr. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965.]

tion as inspirer of hymns in the *RV* (6:61:4c)<sup>3</sup>. Others, such as Alfred HILLEBRANDT<sup>4</sup> and Arthur Berriedale KEITH<sup>5</sup>, suggested geography: it was especially here, on the banks of the Sarasvatī, that Vedic culture flourished and sacred hymns were recited.

There is only one study which actually discusses the factors that contributed to the identification of the river goddess with speech: Jan GONDA's *Pūṣan and Sarasvatī* published in 1985<sup>6</sup>, the first five chapters of which deal with the Vedic Sarasvatī. Here, GONDA collects the relevant Vedic passages and concludes that Sarasvatī-Vāc owes her existence to four fundamental factors, to each of which he dedicates roughly one chapter: Sarasvatī's association with the ritual goddesses Idā/Iḷā and Bhārati (chapter 2); Sarasvatī's identification with the cow who was associated with Vāc (chapters 3-4); the relationship of the cow and Sarasvatī with *dhī* [inspired thought] (chapter 4); and the primeval Waters as the source of Vāc (chapter 5)<sup>7</sup>. GONDA's treatment of the subject presents a number of problems<sup>8</sup>. Because he works in a kind of historical vacuum, jumping from one text to the next without consideration of chronological order<sup>9</sup>, his study cannot provide a picture of the gradual conceptual development of the Vedic Sarasvatī. The order in which he discusses the factors which contributed to the identification of Sarasvatī with Vāc, furthermore, is not well thought out.

- 3 *Die Religion des Veda*. 3. und 4. Auflage (repr. of 2nd ed., 1917). Stuttgart and Berlin: J. G. Gotta'sche, 1923, p. 248 note 1. (1st ed. Berlin, 1894.) Although OLDENBERG does not give a reference for "Förderin der Gebete" (p. 248), 6:61:4c (*dhīnām avitrī avatu* //) is the passage he speaks of.
- 4 *Vedic Mythology*. Vol. 2. Tr. S. Rajeswara Sarma. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981, p. 399, note 114.
- 5 *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925, vol. 1, p. 173. [Repr. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971.]
- 6 *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 127*. Amsterdam, Oxford, and New York: North Holland Pub., 1985.
- 7 *Pūṣan and Sarasvatī*, p. 66.
- 8 As my intention here is not to write a comprehensive review of GONDA's work on the Vedic Sarasvatī, but rather to present the results of my own research, I mention only what I believe to be some of the most significant problems in his study. I intend to discuss further points in my forthcoming dissertation to be presented at the University of Toronto.
- 9 Even the medieval—and thus post-Vedic by far—*Brhaddevatā* is mixed in amidst the Vedic texts.

As the trajectory is from river to speech, GONDA's first chapter is about the river goddess. He relegates a discussion of the Waters, however, to whom she as a river is particularly close, to the final chapter on Sarasvatī. Speech—the end of the trajectory—on the other hand, is taken up in the middle (third) chapter. I also think GONDA overemphasizes certain points, and does not lend enough weight to others. It is odd that he does not include the recitation of hymns on Sarasvatī's banks amidst the leading factors which contributed to the identification of Sarasvatī and Vāc. Furthermore, *dhī* is not even given a chapter to itself, and is instead subsumed under the heading of the cow. As will become obvious in my discussion below, it seems to me that Sarasvatī's connection with *dhī*, related to the recitation of hymns on her banks, was absolutely fundamental in the process of her transformation. The cow imagery, on the other hand, appears to lend secondary support to the Sarasvatī-*dhī*, and also Vāc, connection.

In the *ṚV*, Sarasvatī is invoked as a powerful river surpassing all others in her activity (6:61:13b *apāsām apástamā*). She roars with energy (6:61:8c)<sup>10</sup> like a bull, bellows (7:36:6a *vāvaśānā*) like a cow, and ragingly snorts like a boar (6:61:2ab):

*iyām śuśmebhir bisakhā ivārujat  
sānu girīṇām taviṣēbhir ūrmībhiḥ /*

With enraged snorting, like one who digs up lotus roots<sup>11</sup>, this (Sarasvatī) broke the backs of mountains with her strong waves.

On the banks of this wild river, rituals were performed. Vedic religion centered on the sacred fire into which offerings were placed, as hymns were recited. Her banks, the *ṚV* (3:23:4) clearly states, were amongst the best places on earth to establish one's sacred fire:

*nī tvā dadhe vāra ā prthivyā ilāyās padé sudinātvé áhnām /  
dṛśádvatyām mānuṣa āpayāyām sárasvatyām revád agne didīhi //*

10 Literally, whose impetuosity keeps roaring: *yásyāh...ámas cárati róruvat* (6:61:8ac).

11 The one who digs up lotus roots (*bisakhā*) is the boar. See Karl HOFFMANN, *Aufsätze zur Indoiranistik*, vol. 2 (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1976), p. 387.

I set thee down in the earth's choicest [place], in Iḷā's footstep,  
on the best of days. On the Dṛṣadvatī, amongst Manu's [people]<sup>12</sup>, on the Āpayā, on the Sarasvatī shine richly, O Agni.

In their hymns, Sarasvatī's worshippers called on her, asking for everything from wealth (3:54:13d *rayī*), vitality (10:30:12d *vāyas*), and progeny (2:41:17d *prajā*) to pleasure (1:89:3d *māyas*), fame (2:41:16d *prāsasti*), and victory over enemies (2:30:8b *jeṣi śātrūn*). Of greatest interest to us here, however, are the repeated requests for *dhī*, inspired thought (e.g. 6:49:7b *sārasvatī vīrāpatnī dhīyaṃ dhāt* /).

Otto BÖHTLINGK and Rudolf ROTH<sup>13</sup> list a series of explanations for *dhī*, beginning with thought and ending with the personification of intelligence. Karl Friedrich GELDNER<sup>14</sup> translates it as thought ("Gedanke") in 1:3:12 and as wisdom ("Weisheit") in 1:3:10. In 6:61:4c, Louis RENOU renders it as "vision[s] poétique[s]," in 9:100:3a as "pensée-poétique," and in 1:139:2f as "intuition."<sup>15</sup> He explains that *dhī* indicates a kind of intuition linked in particular with *mānas*, and frequently appearing in combination with *mānas* as in *mānasā dhī*, "voir par la pensée."<sup>16</sup> For Jan GONDA it is vision or inspiration, "the exceptional and supranormal faculty, proper to "seers," of "seeing" in the mind."<sup>17</sup> Although *dhī* generally refers to the inspired thought in its unverbilized state, there are instances where it can be

12 In the RV, six out of nine times the locative *mānuṣe* is connected with *jāne* (1:48:11b; 5:14:2c; 5:21:2a; 6:16:1c; 8:64:10a; 10:118:9c), once with *vṛjāne* (1:128:7a).

13 *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*. 7 vols. St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1855-75. [Repr. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990.] See *dhī* in vol. 3, pp. 964-65.

14 *Der Rigveda aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche übersetzt*, vol.1. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951, p. 4

15 *Études védiques et pāṇinéennes*. 17 vols. (Publications de l'Institut de Civilisation Indienne, Fasc. 1, 2, 4, 6, 9-10, 12, 14, 16-18, 20, 22-23, 26-27, 30.) Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1955-1969. (Henceforth abbreviated to EVP.) 6:61:4c is translated in vol.15, p.131; 9:100:3a in vol. 9, p. 53; and 1:139:2f in vol. 5, p. 8.

16 EVP vol.1, p. 3.

E.g. 1:163:12b *devadrīcā mānasā dīdhyānaḥ* /

"...perceiving with the mind turned towards the gods."

9:100:3ab *tvāṃ dhīyaṃ manoyūjam sṛjā vṛṣṭīm ná tanyatúḥ* /

"You, pour forth inspired thought yoked with the mind, as thunder (discharges) rain."  
[to Pavamāna Soma]

17 *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*. (In *Disputationes Rheno-Trajectinae*, vol. 8.) The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1963, p. 68.

rendered as “poem, hymn, recitation”<sup>18</sup> (e.g. 5:52:14d *stutā dhībhiḥ*...) in that the thought is translated into words. In a circular kind of process, the devotee invokes the god, asking for *dhī*, and upon receiving it, elaborates the inspired thought into a hymn in praise of the god, wherein he asks again for what he desires<sup>19</sup>. Thus *dhī* functions as a means provided by the gods to reach the gods so as to benefit from them in the widest possible sense, to share in what they have.

Sarasvatī is requested to grant inspired thought (6:49:7c *sārasvatī vīrāpatnī dhīyaṃ dhāt*), for she rules over all *dhī* (1:3:12c *dhīyo víśvā ví rājati* //). Accompanied by inspired thoughts (7:35:11b; 10:65:13d *sārasvatī sahā dhībhiḥ*), she is their promoter (6:61:4c *dhīnām avitrī*...). She completes the seers’ *dhī*, making it successful (2:3:8a *sārasvatī sādhyantī dhīyaṃ naḥ*), and should give the singer of the hymn unchallengeable protection (6:49:7d *durādhārṣaṃ grṇatē śārma yaṃsat* //). Thus the singer implores (7:35:11b): “Auspicious [for us] be Sarasvatī with inspired thoughts” (*śāṃ sārasvatī sahā dhībhir astu* /).

In a hymn (1:3) to the Aśvins (vv.1-3), Indra (vv.4-6), the Viśve Devāḥ (vv.7-9), and Sarasvatī (vv.10-12), the poet invokes the goddess as follows:

*pāvakā naḥ sārasvatī  
vājebhir vājīnīvatī /  
yajñām vaṣṭu dhiyāvasuḥ //*

*codayitrī sūnṛtānām  
cétantī sumatīnām /  
yajñām dadhe sārasvatī //*

*mahó árṇaḥ sārasvatī  
prá cetayati ketúnā /  
dhīyo víśvā ví rājati //*

Pure Sarasvatī, rich in rewards, who [finds] goods through inspired thought<sup>20</sup>, shall long for our sacrifice.

18 GONDA, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, p. 133; EVP vol. 1, p. 3.

19 GONDA, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, p. 66.

20 Cf. 1:46:2c *dhiyā devā vasuvidā* // “the two gods who through inspired thought are finders of goods.”



Incitress of energy, expert in good thoughts, Sarasvatī has received the sacrifice.

Sarasvatī reveals [herself as] a mighty flood as [her] ensign. She directs all inspired thoughts.

The bestowal of inspired thought, it should be noted, was not considered a function exclusive to Sarasvatī. Agni (3:11:2c), Indra (1:23:3c), Soma (9:75:2b), Mitra and Varuṇa (7:66:3bc), Savitr (3:62:10c), Uṣas (7:79:5c), and others were all in some way connected with *dhī́* either as granters, stimulators, or lords of it. In Sarasvatī's case, however, other factors came into play, most notably her connection with the recitation of hymns within a ritual context, which together with her related association with *dhī́* had a transforming effect on the river goddess. Points of common imagery shared by Sarasvatī, *dhī́*, as well as speech also contributed to her identification with Vāc.

Cow and water imagery were used for both Sarasvatī and *dhī́*. In several instances (e.g. 2:2:9bc; 4:41:5ab; 10:64:12a-c), *dhī́* is compared to a cow:

2:2:9a-c

*evā no agne amṛteṣu pūrvya  
dhīṣ pīpāya brhāddiveṣu mānuṣā /  
dūhānā dhenúr vrjāneṣu kārāve*

Thus, O Agni, O Primordial One, human inspired thought - the milch cow giving milk to the poet in (sacrificial) enclosures - has swelled (with milk) for us amongst the immortals in the high heaven.

4:41:5ab

*indrā yuvām varuṇā bhūtām asyā  
dhiyāḥ pretārā vṛṣabhéva dhenóḥ /*

O Indra, O Varuṇa, you two be lovers of this inspired thought, as bulls (are) of a milch cow.

10:64:12

*yām me dhīyam māruta indra devā  
 ādadāta varuṇa mitra yūyām /  
 tām pīpayata pāyaseva dhenúm  
 kuvīd gīro ādhi ráthe vāhātha //*

O Maruts, Indra, gods, Varuṇa, Mitra, make the inspired thought which you gave me swell as a cow with milk. Would you carry (my) songs of praise on (your) chariot?

Inspired thoughts (*dhītáyah*) are said to move afar, like cows along pastures, in search of the far-sighted one [i.e. Varuṇa]: *pārā me yanti dhītáyo gāvo ná gavyūtīr ānu / icchāntīr urucákṣasam //* (1:25:16). The cow represents not only milk, food, abundance, and liberality, but also poetic art in the form of inspired thoughts. The “large cow” (*mahī gáuḥ*) in 4:41:5d and 10:101:9d is, as the poet indicates (see 4:41:5b quoted above), inspired thought<sup>21</sup>. RENOU understands this *mahī gáuḥ* and *mahī* in 10:74:4c as poetic art<sup>22</sup>. The divine cow, having descended from (the realms of) the gods, approaches with all inspired thoughts, finds words, and rouses speech (8:101:16a-c): *vacovīdam vācam udīráyantīm vísvābhir dhībhir upatīṣṭa-mānām / devīm devébhyaḥ páry eyúṣīm gām*<sup>23</sup>.

Like *dhī*, Sarasvatī too is associated with the cow. By virtue of being a river, the connection arises in a general context wherein rivers flowing along are compared to cows (e.g. 10:75:4ab):

*abhī tvā sindho śísum in ná mātáro  
 vāśrā arṣanti pāyaseva dhenávaḥ /*

21 4:41:5d = 10:101:9d *sahásradhārā páyasā mahī gauḥ //* (“the thousand-streamed great cow with her milk”).

22 EVP vol.1, p. 10.

23 As far as the sequence of activities is concerned, the word order in 8:101:16ab is clearly reversed in that the earlier is put last: it is certainly not that the cow finds words, rouses speech, and only then approaches with all inspired thoughts. Of what possible use is *dhī* after the words have already been expressed? And of what poetic value are the words if they have not arisen from inspired thoughts?



(Rivers) flow towards you, O Sindhu, like mothers to their children, like bellowing cows with milk<sup>24</sup>.

When Indra slayed Vṛtra, he released the rivers, like fenced-in cows (1:61:10c *gā ná vrāṇā avānīr amuñcat*). The rivers bring milk with their waters (1:104:4d *páyo hinvānā udābhir bharante*), and in their relationship to Indra are called the bull's wives (5:42:12b *vṛṣṇaḥ pátnīr nadyó vibhva-taṣṭāḥ* /).

As for Sarasvatī herself, although she is never explicitly called a cow in the *RV*, she would have been perceived as such. *RV* 7:36:6 refers to the rivers of which Sarasvatī is the seventh as *sudúghāḥ*, yielding good milk, as if they were milch cows swelling with their own milk—in this case both the milk of the milch cow and the water of the river:

*ā yát sākāṃ yaśáso vāvaśānāḥ  
sārasvatī saptāthī síndhumātā /  
yāḥ suśváyanta sudúghāḥ sudhārā  
abhí svéna páyasā pípyānāḥ //*

When the glorious and longing (rivers come) to (us) in unison—Sarasvatī, whose mother is the Sindhu, (being) the seventh—(they) who are fertile, well-yielding, rich-streamed are swelling with their own milk towards (us)<sup>25</sup>.

Some of the words in this stanza carry a double meaning, referring on the one hand to the water of the rivers and on the other to the milk of the milch cow. *Vāvaśānāḥ* is a perfect participle either of the root *vāś* “to bellow,” or of the root *vaś* “to wish for, long for.” If the rivers are bellowing, then they are clearly being likened to cows. The noun *páyas* is derived from root

24 For another comparison of rivers with cows, see, for instance, 3:33:1cd, where the Vipās and the Śutudrī are likened to mother cows licking their calves: *gāveva śubhré mātārā rihāṇé vipāṭ chutudrī páyasā javete //*

25 *Suśváyanta* is a “non-formation.” It appears to consist of prefix *su-* (well, etc.), or reduplication, with root *sū* (to bear, bring forth), to which *-aya-* is added. GELDNER, referring to the derivation from *sū*, translates it as “die fruchtbar sind” (*Der Rigveda aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche übersetzt*, vol. 2, p. 218 ) and RENOUE as “qui enfantent” (EVP vol. 5, p. 42).

*pay/pī* (*páyate*) and literally means “swelling.” It denotes any kind of fluid, and thus in the context of this stanza can be both water and milk.

There is also a passage (6:61:14b) where Sarasvatī is asked not to push aside, that is, not to kick the bucket as a cow might during milking:

*sárasvaty abhí no neṣi vásyo*  
*māpa spharīḥ páyasā mā na á dhak /*

O Sarasvatī, lead us towards prosperity. May you not push aside.  
May you not fail us with (your) milk. (6:61:14ab)<sup>26</sup>

Water, the very being of Sarasvatī, is another symbol of inspired thought. The *dhītī* assemble like rushes (of water) into wells (10:25:4ab): *sám u prá yanti dhítayaḥ sárgāso ‘vatām iva /* There is an allusion to the wave which the seer causes to surge from the ocean (10:123:2a *samudrád ūrmim úd iyarti venāḥ*), that is, the heart, as indicated in 4:58:11b, for instance: *antāḥ samudré hr̥dy àntár...* And if the heart is the seat of inspiration, then the wave represents the surge of *dhī*.

There is also the term *dhénā*, etymologically related to *dhenú*<sup>27</sup>, which occurs with *dhī* in various passages (e.g. 10:104:3cd):

*indra dhénābhir ihá mādayasva*  
*dhībhir víśvābhiḥ śácyā gr̥nānāḥ //*

O Indra, revel here in the nourishing streams (of soma or speech), being lauded mightily by all the poetic visions<sup>28</sup>.

In the first volume of EVP (p.11) RENOUE understands *dhénā* as speech in the form of prayer in 4:58:6, and in subsequent volumes considers it to mean a stream of milk<sup>29</sup> or of prayer<sup>30</sup>. According to Hanns-Peter

26 RENOUE (EVP vol. 15, p. 133) explains that *āpa-sphṛ* conveys the image of a cow refusing to give milk.

27 Manfred MAYRHOFER, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindiarischen*, vol.1. Heidelberg: C. Winter Verlag, 1992, p. 797.

28 Translation by Hanns-Peter SCHMIDT in “Is Vedic *dhénā* related to Avestan *daēnā*?” in *Hommages et Opera Minora: Monumentum H. S. Nyberg*, vol. 2 [Acta Iranica, vol. 5]. Téhéran and Liège: Bibliothèque Pahlavi, 1975, p. 173. For another occurrence of *dhénā* with *dhī*, see also 7:94:4, for instance.

29 E.g. vol. 12, p. 49 on RV 3:1:9.

SCHMIDT's study of the term, the primary meaning of *dhénā* is "milk-stream, nourishing stream" and its figurative sense is "nourishing stream of speech." The two senses, however, are never dissociated<sup>31</sup>. *Dhénā* is derived from *dhayī*(~*dhā*) "to suck," in the way a calf sucks its mother's milk, in the way the poet wishes to suck Sarasvatī's breast (1:164:49)<sup>32</sup>. Thus *dhénā* would be that which is sucked. As verbalized inspired thoughts, the flows of speech (*dhénāḥ*) are said to run together like rivers, being purified inside by the heart, the mind (4:58:6ab): *samyák sravanti sarīto ná dhenā antár hrđā mānasā pūyāmānāḥ* //<sup>33</sup>

*Dhī* is obviously connected with *vāc*, speech, for inspired thought not only precedes its utterance, but the utterance itself is nothing but *dhī* in different, i.e. verbalized, form. *Vāc* is thus *dhī*, and yet *dhī* is not *vāc*, for inspired thought undergoes some modification while being transformed into speech. The translation of *dhī* into *vāc* is likened to weaving (2:28:5c):

*mā tāntuś chedi vāyato dhīyaṃ me*

Let the tread (warp) not be cut off while I weave my inspired thought [into a poem].

*RV* 10:71:2ab states that they who are thoughtful (*dhīrāḥ*) have produced speech with their mind<sup>34</sup>, purifying it like (barley) grits with a sieve: *sāktum iva tītaünā punānto yātra dhīrā mānasā vācam ākrata/ Atharva Veda* 7:1:1 describes the different stages in the transformation of inspired thought (*dhīti*) into speech in the form of *brāhman*:

30 E.g. vol. 14, p. 56 on 7:94:4. His comment, however, that *dhénā* is "un aspect poétique de *vāc*" (vol. 14, p. 127) is, as SCHMIDT ("Is Vedic *dhénā* related to Avestan *daēnā* ?", p. 170) remarks, entirely unclear, as it is too vague.

31 "Is Vedic *dhénā* related to Avestan *daēnā* ?", p. 179. SCHMIDT also provides a summary of other interpretations of *dhénā*.

32 *yās te stānaḥ śaśayó yó mayobhūr yēna víśvā pūṣyasi vāryāṇi / yó ratnadhā vasuvíd yāḥ sudātraḥ sárasvati tám ihā dhātave kaḥ* //

"Make [us] suck here that breast of yours which is abundant, which is refreshing, with which you make all choice things thrive, which is providing treasures, finding goods, whose gifts are good, O Sarasvatī."

33 Cf. 9:34:6 *sám enam āhrutā imā gīro arṣanti sasrútaḥ / dhenūr vāsró avīvaśat* //

"Undeviated these songs of praise run together towards him (Soma), flowing in unison. Bellowing, he has made the milch cows bellow."

34 On the other hand, according to 8:100:11a, *vāc* was created by the gods: *devīm vācam ajanayanta devāḥ*.

*dhī́tī vā yé ánayan vācó ágram  
 mánasā vā yé 'vadann ṛtāni /  
 ṛtīyena bráhmaṇā vāvṛdhānās  
 turīyeṇāmanvata nāma dhenóh //*

They who through inspired thought lead to the beginning of speech or they who in their mind spoke truths, having grown through the third formulation, with the fourth [formulation] they understood the name of the milch cow<sup>35</sup>.

The cow, as we have seen, represents inspired thought: she rouses speech, for she is the finder of words (*vacovíd*)<sup>36</sup>. Appropriately, she is asked to invigorate the praiser: “The cow should strengthen him [the poet] with [her] nourishment, with [her] milk” (7:68:9c *iṣā táṃ vardhad aghnyā páyobhiḥ [kārúṃ]* ). Speech is also called a milch cow (8:100:11d *dhenúr vāk*). It might be added that *dhénā* is both a stream of milk from the udder and the flow of speech from the mouth<sup>37</sup>.

Similar to *dhī́ra* is *vípra*, an ecstatic seer<sup>38</sup>. *Vípra* comes from the root *vip* “to tremble, shake, quiver.” Born with the faculty of *dhī́* (8:6:28c *dhīyā vípro ajāyata //*)<sup>39</sup>, the *vípra* is closely connected with *vāc* (3:8:5d): *devayā vípra úd iyarti vācam //* The *vípra* as speaker, therefore, conveys *dhī́* into *vāc* in the form of vibrating metrical words<sup>40</sup>.

Since *dhī́* and *vāc* walk hand in hand so to speak, Sarasvatī, who is repeatedly associated with *dhī́* in the *ṚV*, is, in turn, by way of *dhī́*, implicitly connected with *vāc*. As she grants inspired thought, she makes its manifestation in the form of recited poetry or prayer possible. *Dhī́*, therefore, over which she rules (1:3:12c), is fundamental to the gradual rapprochement and eventual identification of Sarasvatī with speech. In fact, in the *ṚV* itself, the river goddess and speech share common imagery and metaphori-

35 AV 7:1:1 is discussed by Paul THIEME in “Bráhmaṇ,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 102 (NF 27), p. 106 [repr. *Kleine Schriften*. Vol. 1. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1971, p. 115]. The name of the milch cow, as he explains, is a mystic expression for the poetic formulation of a secret truth (“dichterische Formulierung einer geheimen Wahrheit”).

36 8:101:16a. See pp. 125-126 above.

37 See pp. 127-128 above.

38 A *ṛṣi* can indeed be a *vípra*, as indicated in 4:26:1b *ahám kakṣívāṃ ṛṣir asmi víprah/*

39 In 8:6:28c the *vípra* is Indra or Soma. See GELDNER's note in *Der Rigveda aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche übersetzt*, vol. 2, p. 297.

40 See GONDA, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, p. 39.

cal language, which thus also bring them together. Their association, never expressed in the *RV*, was nevertheless present at the level of ritual performed on the banks of the Sarasvatī, for the recitation of inspired hymns accompanied offerings into the sacred fire. The connection of the river goddess with the recitation and hence also the composition of hymns would inevitably have contributed to her connection with inspired thought, and in the long run with speech.

Another point of connection between Sarasvatī and *vāc* is sound, common to both the river flow and speech. *Vāc*, furthermore, can be translated as voice<sup>41</sup>. The sound of Sarasvatī's waters, as we have seen, is powerfully described: they bellow (7:36:6a) like a cow, roar (6:61:8c) like a bull, and snort ragingly like a boar (6:61:2ab). With the river's raging as the background to the rhythmic recitation of inspired hymns on Sarasvatī's banks, the connection with speech on the one hand and music on the other can hardly be overlooked.

Despite the connecting links between *vāc* and Sarasvatī, the goddess *Vāc* clearly extends far above and beyond Sarasvatī in the *RV*. There is a beautiful hymn (10:125) in which *Vāc* reveals herself as an unseen, all-pervading power, producing, sustaining, and extending beyond creation. Sarasvatī, on the other hand, is very much within creation, flowing through it rather than transcending it.

*Vāc*, furthermore, is not merely speech or voice, but that which is communicated through speech: knowledge. Thus Sarasvatī, identified with *vāc* in the *Atharva* (5:7:5ab) and *Yajur* (*Vājasaneyi Samhitā* 10:30) *Vedas* and repeatedly in the *Brāhmaṇas* (e.g. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 5:5:4:16), is identified with speech, the mother of the *Vedas* (*Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 2:8:8:5), through whom all that is to be known is known (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4:1:2). Sarasvatī thereby becomes goddess of knowledge.

41 See, for instance, *RV* 3:8:5d quoted above in connection with the *vīpra*. *Iyarti vācam* can be translated either as "starts speech" or "raises his voice."