

Zeitschrift:	Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie
Herausgeber:	Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Band:	54 (2000)
Heft:	1
Artikel:	Sarasvat-Vc : the identification of the river with speech
Autor:	Ludvik, Catherine
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147494

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 01.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

SARASVATI-VĀC: THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE RIVER WITH SPEECH¹

CATHERINE LUDVIK, Toronto

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 *Rg 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 Samhitā* (19:12) as the starting point². 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 Banarsi-dass, 1965.]

tion as inspirer of hymns in the *RV* (6:61:4c)³. Others, such as Alfred HILLEBRANDT⁴ and Arthur Berriedale KEITH⁵, 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 1985⁶, 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/Illā and Bhāratī (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)⁷. GONDA's treatment of the subject presents a number of problems⁸. Because he works in a kind of historical vacuum, jumping from one text to the next without consideration of chronological order⁹, 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 avitri avatu //*) is the passage he speaks of.
- 4 *Vedic Mythology*. Vol. 2. Tr. S. Rajeswara Sarma. Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 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 *RV*, Sarasvatī is invoked as a powerful river surpassing all others in her activity (6:61:13b *apásām apástamā*). She roars with energy (6:61:8c)¹⁰ like a bull, bellows (7:36:6a *vāvaśānā*) like a cow, and ragingly snorts like a boar (6:61:2ab):

*iyám śúśmehir bisakhā ivārujat
śānu girīṇām tavisébhir ūrmibhiḥ /*

With enraged snorting, like one who digs up lotus roots¹¹, 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 *RV* (3:23:4) clearly states, were amongst the best places on earth to establish one's sacred fire:

*ní tvā dadhe vára ā pr̄thivyā ilāyās padé sudinatvē áhnām /
drsádvatyām mānuṣa āpayāyām sárasvatyām revád agne didīhi //*

¹⁰ Literally, whose impetuosity keeps roaring: *yásyāḥ...ámaś cárati róravat* (6:61:8ac).

¹¹ The one who digs up lotus roots (*bisakhāḥ*) 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 Ilā's footstep,
on the best of days. On the Dr̥ṣadvatī, amongst Manu's [peo-
ple]¹², 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 *váyas*), and progeny (2:41:17d *prajā*) to pleasure (1:89:3d *máyas*), fame (2:41:16d *práasti*), and victory over enemies (2:30:8b *jeṣi śátrūn*). Of greatest interest to us here, however, are the repeated requests for *dhi*, inspired thought (e.g. 6:49:7b *sárasvatī vīrápatnī dhíyam dhāt* /).

Otto BÖHTLINGK and Rudolf ROTH¹³ list a series of explanations for *dhi*, beginning with thought and ending with the personification of intelligence. Karl Friedrich GELDNER¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵ He explains that *dhi* indicates a kind of intuition linked in particular with *mánas*, and frequently appearing in combination with *mánas* as in *mánasā dhī*, “voir par la pensée.”¹⁶ For Jan GONDA it is vision or inspiration, “the exceptional and supranormal faculty, proper to “seers,” of “seeing” in the mind.”¹⁷ Although *dhi* generally refers to the inspired thought in its unverbalized state, there are instances where it can be

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

13 *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*. 7 vols. St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1855-75. [Repr. Delhi: Motilal BanarsiDass, 1990.] See *dhi* 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 *devadṛīcā mánasā dīdhyānah* /

“...perceiving with the mind turned towards the gods.”

9:100:3ab *tvám dhíyam manoyújam srjá vrstíṁ ná tanyatúh* /

“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”¹⁸ (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 desires¹⁹. 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 *sárasvatī vīrāpatnī dhīyam dhāt*), for she rules over all *dhī* (1:3:12c *dhīyo viśvā vī rājati //*). Accompanied by inspired thoughts (7:35:11b; 10:65:13d *sárasvatī sahā dhībhiḥ*), she is their promoter (6:61:4c *dhīnām avitri...*). She completes the seers’ *dhī*, making it successful (2:3:8a *sárasvatī sādhāyantī dhīyam nah*), and should give the singer of the hymn unchallengeable protection (6:49:7d *durādhárṣam grṇaté śárma yāmsat //*). Thus the singer implores (7:35:11b): “Auspicious [for us] be Sarasvatī with inspired thoughts” (*sām sárasvatī sahā dhībhír 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 nah sárasvatī
vājebhir vājīnīvatī /
yajñām vaṣṭu dhīyāvasuh //*

*codayitri sūnṛtānām
cétantī sumatīnām /
yajñām dadhe sárasvatī //*

*mahó árnah sárasvatī
prá cetayati ketúnā /
dhīyo viśvā vī rājati //*

Pure Sarasvatī, rich in rewards, who [finds] goods through inspired thought²⁰, 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), Savitṛ (3:62:10c), Uṣas (7:79:5c), and others were all in some way connected with *dhī* 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 *dhī* had a transforming effect on the river goddess. Points of common imagery shared by Sarasvatī, *dhī*, as well as speech also contributed to her identification with Vāc.

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

2:2:9a-c

*evā no agne amṛteṣu pūrvya
dhīś pīpāya bṛhāddiveṣu māṇusā /
dūhānā dhenūr vṛjāneṣu 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

*īndrā yuvām varuṇā bhūtām asyā
dhīyāḥ pretārā vṛṣabhbhēva dhenōḥ /*

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 īndra dévā
ádadāta varuṇa mitra yūyām /
tām pīpayata páyaseva dhenūm
kuvíd gīro ádhi 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 (*dhītāyah*) are said to move afar, like cows along pastures, in search of the far-sighted one [i.e. Varuṇa]: *pára me yanti dhītāyo gāvo ná gāvyūtīr ánu / icchántīr urucáksasam //* (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” (*mahi gāuh*) in 4:41:5d and 10:101:9d is, as the poet indicates (see 4:41:5b quoted above), inspired thought²¹. RENOU understands this *mahi gāuh* and *mahi* in 10:74:4c as poetic art²². 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): *vacovídām vācam udīrāyantīm vīsvābhir dhībhīr upatīṣṭāmānām / devīm devébhyah páry eyūśīm gām*²³.

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):

*abhi tvā sindho śíśum in ná mātāro
vāśrā arṣanti páyaseva dhenávah /*

21 4:41:5d = 10:101:9d *sahásradhārā páyasā mahī gāuh* // (“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 milk²⁴.

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

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 sākám yaśáso vāvaśānāḥ
sárasvatī saptáthī síndhumātā /
yāḥ suṣváyanta sudúghāḥ sudhārā
abhī 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)²⁵.

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 *vas* “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 Vipāś and the Śutudrī are likened to mother cows licking their calves: *gāveva śubhré mātārā rihānē vīpāt chutudrī páyasā javete //*

25 *Suṣváyanta* 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 RENOU as “qui enfontent” (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 nesi vásyo
mápa spharih páyasā má 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)²⁶

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 dhītāyah sárgāso 'vatām iva* / There is an allusion to the wave which the seer causes to surge from the ocean (10:123:2a *samudrād ūrmim úd iyarti venāh*), that is, the heart, as indicated in 4:58:11b, for instance: *antāh samudré hr̄dy 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 *dhenū*²⁷, which occurs with *dhī* in various passages (e.g. 10:104:3cd):

*índra dhénābhir ihá mādayasva
dhībhir viśvābhih sácyā gr̄nānáh //*

O Indra, revel here in the nourishing streams (of soma or speech), being lauded mightily by all the poetic visions²⁸.

In the first volume of EVP (p.11) RENOU understands *dhénā* as speech in the form of prayer in 4:58:6, and in subsequent volumes considers it to mean a stream of milk²⁹ or of prayer³⁰. According to Hanns-Peter

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

27 Manfred MAYRHOFER, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*, 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 dissociated³¹. *Dhénā* is derived from *dhayi*(~*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)³². 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 sarito ná dhenā antár hṛdā mánasā pūyámānāḥ* //³³

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 tántuś chedi vāyato dhīyan 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 mind³⁴, purifying it like (barley) grits with a sieve: *sáktum iva títaünā punánto yátra dhīrā mánasā vācam ákrata/ Atharva Veda* 7:1:1 describes the different stages in the transformation of inspired thought (*dhītī*) into speech in the form of *bráhman*:

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 *yás te stánah śaśayó yó mayobhūr yéna viśvā pūsyasi vāryāni / yó ratnadhā vasuvíd yáh sudátrah sárasvatí tám ihá dhātave kah* //
"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 áhrutā imā gíro arṣanti sasrútaḥ / dhenūr vāśrō 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*.

*dhīti vā yé ányan vācō ágram
mánasā vā yé 'vadann rtáni /
trtiyena bráhmañā vāvrdhānás
turiyena manvata 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 cow³⁵.

The cow, as we have seen, represents inspired thought: she rouses speech, for she is the finder of words (*vacovid*)³⁶. Appropriately, she is asked to invigorate the praiser: “The cow should strengthen him [the poet] with [her] nourishment, with [her] milk” (7:68:9c *isā tám vardhad aghnyá páyobhiḥ [kārūm]*). 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 mouth³⁷.

Similar to *dhīra* is *vípra*, an ecstatic seer³⁸. *Vípra* comes from the root *vip* “to tremble, shake, quiver.” Born with the faculty of *dhī* (8:6:28c *dhiyá vípro ajāyata //*)³⁹, the *vípra* is closely connected with *vāc* (3:8:5d): *devayá vípra úd iyarti vācam //* The *vípra* as speaker, therefore, conveys *dhī* into *vāc* in the form of vibrating metrical words⁴⁰.

Since *dhī* and *vāc* walk hand in hand so to speak, Sarasvatī, who is repeatedly associated with *dhī* in the *RV*, is, in turn, by way of *dhī*, implicitly connected with *vāc*. As she grants inspired thought, she makes its manifestation in the form of recited poetry or prayer possible. *Dhī*, 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 *RV* itself, the river goddess and speech share common imagery and metaphorical

35 AV 7:1:1 is discussed by Paul THIEME in “Bráhman,” *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 *ṛsi* can indeed be a *vípra*, as indicated in 4:26:1b *ahám kaksívāṁ ṛśir 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 voice⁴¹. 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 (*Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4:1:2). Sarasvatī thereby becomes goddess of knowledge.

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