

Sarasvati in the Rig-Veda - Part 1

Invocation of Sarasvati, Rig-Veda II.41.16-18.

अम्बितमे नदीतमे देवितमे सरस्वति ।

अप्रशस्ता इव स्मसि प्रशस्तिम् अम्ब नस् कृधि ॥ २-४१-१६

ámbítame nádítame dévítame sárasvati |
aprasástā iva smasi práśastim amba nas kṛdhi |16|

Interpretation:

O best Mother, best River, best Goddess, Sarasvati, as soon as we are without (the power of) expression, O Mother, create for us expression. (16)

With Sanskrit:

O best Mother ([ámbítame](#)), best River ([nádítame](#)), best Goddess ([dévítame](#)), Sarasvati, are we ([smasi](#)) likely ([iva](#)) without (the power of) expression ([aprasástā](#)), O Mother ([amba](#)), create ([kṛdhi](#)) for us ([nas](#)) expression ([práśastim](#)). (16)

त्वे विश्वा सरस्वति श्रितायूंषि देव्याम् ।

शुनहोत्रेषु मत्स्व प्रजां देवि दिदिद्धि नः ॥ २-४१-१७

tuvé vísvā sarasvati śritā āyūm̐ṣi deviyām |
śunáhotreṣu matsuva prajāṁ devi didiḍdhi naḥ |17|

Interpretation:

In you the divine, O Sarasvati, all forms (or, energies) of life are set. Take delight in the Shunahotras (in us, who have joy in the sacrifice); O Goddess bestow progeny (inner offspring) on us. (17)

With Sanskrit:

In you ([tuvé](#)) the divine ([deviyām](#)), O Sarasvati, all ([vísvā](#)) forms (or, energies) of life ([āyūm̐ṣi](#)) are set ([śritā](#)). Take delight ([matsuva](#)) in us, who have joy in the sacrifice ([śunáhotreṣu](#)); O Goddess ([devi](#)) bestow ([didiḍdhi](#)) progeny (inner offspring) ([prajāṁ](#)) on us ([naḥ](#)). (17)

इमा ब्रह्म सरस्वति जुषस्व वाजिनीवति ।

या ते मन्म गृत्समदा ऋतावरि प्रिया देवेषु जुहति ॥ २-४१-१८

imā bráhma sarasvati juṣásva vājinīvati |
yā te mánma gr̥tsamadā ṛtāvari priyā devéṣu júhvati |18|

Interpretation:

O Sarasvati, you, who are full of substantial energy, welcome these words (upwelling) from the soul, which, O Truthful one, we Gritsamadas (who delight in a clear mind) offer as expressive thoughts to you, dear among the Gods. (18)

With Sanskrit:

O Sarasvati, you, who are full of substantial energy (vājinīvati), welcome (juṣásva) these words (upwelling) from the soul (imā bráhma), which (yā), O Truthful one (ṛtāvari), we Gritsamadas (who delight in a clear mind) offer (júhvati) as expressive thoughts (mánma) to you (te), dear among the Gods (priyā devéṣu). (18)

Selection from Sri Aurobindo's detailed introduction to Sarasvati in "The Secret of the Veda".

(On Sarasvati's connection with the two goddesses Bharati and Ila and on the symbolism of the Seven Rivers see the appendix below.)

(The Stream of Inspiration in Greek mythology.)

THE SYMBOLISM of the Veda betrays itself with the greatest clearness in the figure of the goddess Sarasvati ... She is, plainly and clearly, the goddess of the Word, the goddess of a divine Inspiration.

... But Sarasvati is not only the goddess of Inspiration, she is at one and the same time one of the seven rivers of the early Aryan world. The question at once arises, whence came this extraordinary identification? And how does the connection of the two ideas present itself in the Vedic hymns? And there is more; for Sarasvati is important not only in herself but by her connections. Before proceeding farther let us cast a rapid and cursory glance at them to see what they can teach us.

The association of a river with the poetical inspiration occurs also in the Greek mythology; but there the Muses are not conceived of as rivers; they are only connected in a not very intelligible fashion with a particular earthly stream. This stream is the river Hippocrene, the fountain of the Horse, and to account for its name we have a legend that it sprang from the hoof of the divine horse Pegasus; for he smote the rock with his hoof and the waters of inspiration gushed out where the mountain had been thus smitten. Was this legend merely a Greek fairy tale or had it any special meaning? And it is evident that if it had any meaning, it must, since it obviously refers to a psychological phenomenon, the birth of the waters of inspiration, have had a psychological meaning; it must have been an attempt to put into concrete figures certain psychological facts. We may note that the word Pegasus, if we transliterate it into the original Aryan phonetics, becomes Pājasa and is obviously connected with the Sanskrit *pājas*, which meant originally force, movement, or sometimes footing. In Greek itself it is connected with *pēgē*, a stream. There is, therefore, in the terms of this legend a constant association with the image of a forceful movement of inspiration. If we turn to Vedic symbols we see that the Ashwa or Horse is an image of the great dynamic force of Life, of the vital and nervous energy, and is constantly coupled with other images that symbolise the consciousness. *Adri*, the hill or rock, is a symbol of formal existence and especially of the physical nature and it is out of this hill or rock that the herds of the Sun are released and the waters flow. The streams of the *madhu*, the honey, the Soma, are said also to be milked out of this Hill or Rock. The stroke of the Horse's hoof on

the rock releasing the waters of inspiration would thus become a very obvious psychological image. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the old Greeks and Indians were incapable either of such psychological observation or of putting it into the poetical and mystic imagery which was the very body of the ancient Mysteries.

We might indeed go farther and inquire whether there was not some original connection between the hero Bellerophon, slayer of Bellerus, who rides on the divine Horse, and Indra Valahan, the Vedic slayer of Vala, the enemy who keeps for himself the Light. But this would take us beyond the limits of our subject. Nor does this interpretation of the Pegasus legend carry us any farther than to indicate the natural turn of imagination of the Ancients and the way in which they came to figure the stream of inspiration as an actual stream of flowing water. Saraswati means, "she of the stream, the flowing movement", and is therefore a natural name both for a river and for the goddess of inspiration. But by what process of thought or association does the general idea of the river of inspiration come to be associated with a particular earthly stream? And in the Veda it is not a question of one river which by its surroundings, natural and legendary, might seem more fitly associated with the idea of sacred inspiration than any other. For here it is a question not of one, but of seven rivers always associated together in the minds of the Rishis and all of them released together by the stroke of the God Indra when he smote the Python who coiled across their fountains and sealed up their outflow. It seems impossible to suppose that one river only in all this sevenfold out flowing acquired a psychological significance while the rest were associated only with the annual coming of the rains in the Punjab. The psychological significance of Saraswati carries with it a psychological significance for the whole symbol of the Vedic waters. (The rivers have a symbolic sense in later Indian thought; as for instance Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati and their confluence are in the Tantric imagery Yogic symbols, and they are used, though in a different way, in Yogic symbolism generally.)¹

Rig-Veda VII.95, first hymn to Sarasvati by the great seer Vasishtha.

Text in Devanāgarī.

ṛṣiḥ: vasiṣṭho maitrāvaruṇiḥ; devatā: sarasvatī, 3 sarasvān; chandaḥ: triṣṭup.

प्र॒ क्षो॒द॒सा॒ धाय॑सा॒ स॒स्र॒ एषा॑ सर॒स्वती॑ धरु॒णम् आ॑यसी पूः ।
 प्र॒बा॒ध॒ना र॑थ्येव याति विश्वा॑ अपो॒ महि॑ना सिन्धु॒र् अ॒न्याः ॥ ७-९५-१
 ए॒का॒चे॒तत् सर॑स्वती नदीनां शुचि॑र् यती गिरि॒भ्य आ॑ समुद्रात् ।
 रा॒यश् चेत॑न्ती भुवनस्य भूरे॑र् घृत॒म् पयो॑ दुदुहे॒ नाहु॑षाय ॥ ७-९५-२
 स वा॒वृ॒धे न॑र्यो योषणासु वृषा॑ शिशु॒र् वृष॑भो यज्ञियासु ।

¹ Page 91-94 VOLUME 15 THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. © Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust 1998

स वाजिनम् मघवद्भ्यो दधाति वि सातये तन्वम् मामृजीत ॥ ७-९५-३
 उत स्या नः सरस्वती जुषाणोप श्रवत् सुभगा यज्ञे अस्मिन् ।
 मितञ्जुभिर् नमस्यैर् इयाना राया युजा चिद् उत्तरा सखिभ्यः ॥ ७-९५-४
 इमा जुह्वाना युष्मद् आ नमोभिः प्रति स्तोमं सरस्वति जुषस्व ।
 तव शर्मन् प्रियतमे दधाना उप स्थेयाम शरणं न वृक्षम् ॥ ७-९५-५
 अयम् उ ते सरस्वति वसिष्ठो द्वाराव् ऋतस्य सुभगे व्य् आवः ।
 वर्ध शुभ्रे स्तुवते रासि वाजान् यूयम् पात स्वस्तिभिः सदा नः ॥ ७-९५-६

Text in Transliteration.

prá kṣódasā dhāyasā sasra eṣā sárasvatī dharúṇam āyasī pūḥ |
 prabābadhānā rathīyeva yāti vísvā apó mahinā síndhur anyāḥ |1|

ékācetat sárasvatī nadīnām súcir yatī girībhya ā samudrāt |
 rāyās cétantī bhúvanasya bhūrer ghṛtām páyo duduhe nāhuṣāya |2|

sá vāvṛdhe náriyo yóṣaṇāsu vṛṣā śísur vṛṣabhó yajñíyāsu |
 sá vājīnam maghāvadbhyo dadhāti ví sātāye tanúvam māmṛjīta |3|

utá syā naḥ sárasvatī juṣāṇā úpa śravat subhágā yajñé asmín |
 mitájñubhir namasíyair iyānā rāyā yujā cid úttarā sákhibhyaḥ |4|

imā júhvānā yuṣmád ā námobhiḥ práti stóman sarasvati juṣasva |
 táva śárman priyátame dádhānā úpa stheyāma śaraṇám ná vṛkṣám |5|

ayám u te sarasvati vásiṣṭho dvārāv ṛtāsya subhage ví āvaḥ |
 vārdha śubhre stuvaté rāsi vājān yūyám pāta suastíbhiḥ sádā naḥ |6|

Text, Translations and Vocabulary.

प्र क्षोदसा धायसा सस्र एषा सरस्वती धरुणम् आयसी पूः ।
 प्रबाबधाना रथ्येव याति विश्वा अपो महिना सिन्धुर् अन्याः ॥ ७-९५-१

prá kṣódasā dhāyasā sasra eṣā sárasvatī dharúṇam āyasī pūḥ |
 prabābadhānā rathīyeva yāti vísvā apó mahinā síndhur anyāḥ |1|

Interpretation:

Forth has she streamed with her sustaining flood, Sarasvati, the divine Stream, the support, (like) a metal city. This oceanic river moves like (on) a chariot-road, pressing (or, propelling) forwards by her greatening might all other waters. (1)

With Sanskrit:

Forth (*prá*) has she (*eṣā*) streamed (*sasra*) with her sustaining (*dhāyasā*) flood (*kṣódasā*), the divine Stream (*sárasvatī*), the support (*dharúṇam*), (like) a metal city (*āyasī pūḥ*). This oceanic river (*síndhur*) moves (*yāti*) like (on) a chariot-road (*rathíyeva*), pressing (or, propelling) forwards (*prabābadhānā*) by her greatening might (*mahinā*) all (*víśvā*) other (*anyāḥ*) waters (*apó*). (1)

Vocabulary:

kṣodas, n. (Naigh. i,12) water in agitation, swell of the sea, rushing or stream of water RV.;
dhāyas, mfn. nourishing, refreshing, strengthening, sustaining, satisfying (cf. *ari-*, *kāra-*, *go-* &c.); n. the act of nourishing RV.;
āyasa, mf(ī)n. (fr. *ayas*), of iron, made of iron or metal, metallic RV. SBr. KatySr. MBh. Yajn. &c.; (ī) f. armour for the body, a breastplate, coat of mail L.; (am) n. iron;
sr, (cf. *sal*) cl. 1. 3. P. *sarati* (ep. also -te and accord. to Pan. 7-3,78 also *dhāvati*), and *sisarti* (the latter base only in Veda); pf. *sasāra*, *sasre* ib. &c.; to run, flow, speed, glide, move, RV. &c.;
prabādh, A. -bādhate (ep. also P. -ti), to press forward, drive, urge, promote RV. Nir.; to repel, drive away, keep off MBh. Kav. &c.;
rathya, mfn. belonging or relating to a carriage or chariot, accustomed to it &c.; (with *āji*, "a chariot-race") RV. SBr.; m. a carriage or chariot-horse RV. Sak.; (ā) f. see below;
rathyā, f. a carriage-road, highway, street Yajn. MBh. Kav. &c.; a number of carriages or chariots, Sis: xviii,3;
sindhu, m. and f. (prob. fr. 1 . *sidh*, to go) a river, stream (esp. the Indus, and in this sense said to be the only river regarded as m. see -*nada*, col. 2) RV. &c.; m. flood, waters (also in the sky) RV. AV. ocean, sea RV. &c.;

Old Translators:

1. THIS stream Sarasvati with fostering current comes forth, our sure defence, our fort of iron. As on a car, the flood flows on, surpassing in majesty and might all other waters.
 1. Mit labender Flut eilte sie voraus; Sarasvati ist ein Bollwerk und eine eiserne Burg. Wie auf einer Fahrstraße zieht der Strom dahin, indem er durch seine Größe alle anderen Gewässer fortreibt.

एकाचेतत् सरस्वती नदीनां शुचिर् यती गिरिभ्य आ समुद्रात् ।
 रायश् चेतन्ती भुवनस्य भूरेर् घृतम् पयो दुदुहे नाहुषाय ॥ ७-१५-२

ékācetat sárasvatī nadīnāṃ śúcir yatī girībhya ā samudrāt |
 rāyás cétantī bhúvanasya bhūrer gḥrám páyo duduhe nāhuṣāya |2|

Interpretation:

Of (all) the rivers Sarasvati alone became conscious, flowing pure from the mountains (of the superconscient higher planes) up to the (lower) ocean (of the inconscient); being conscious of the riches of the manifold world of becoming she has yielded for the human who dwells near her milk and clarified butter. (2)

Comments:

As can be seen in many other hymns milk (literally, that which nourishes) represents the pure white light of knowledge and clarified butter the resultant state of a clear mind or luminous perception, with bliss, symbolized by the honey (or Soma), as the essence of both.

With Sanskrit:

Of (all) the rivers (**nadīnām**) Sarasvati alone became conscious (**ékācetat**), flowing (**yatī**) pure (**śúcir**) from the mountains (of the superconscious higher planes) (**giribhya**) up to the (lower) ocean (of the unconscious) (**ā samudrāt**); being conscious (**cétanti**) of the riches (**rāyás**) of the manifold (**bhūrer**) world of becoming (**bhúvanasya**) she has yielded (**duduhe**) for the human who dwells near her (**nāhuṣāya**) milk (**páyo**) and clarified butter (**ghṛtam**). (2)

Vocabulary:

cit, 4 cl. 1. cetati; cl. 2. (A. Pass. 3. sg. cite); to perceive, fix the mind upon, attend to, be attentive, observe, take notice of (acc. or gen.) RV. SV. AV. Bhatt.; to understand, comprehend, know (perf. often in the sense of pr.) RV. AV. vii,2,1 and 5,5 P. A. to become perceptible, appear, be regarded as, be known RV. VS.; Intens. cekite (fr. 2. ci?, or for -tte RV. to appear, be conspicuous, shine RV.; nāhuṣa, 1 mf(ī)n. (fr. nahuṣa) neighbouring, kindred; m. neighbour, kinsman RV.; nahus, m. neighbour, fellow-creature, man, (comp. -huṣ-ṭara, nearer than a nearer x,49,8); (collect., also pl.) neighbourhood, mankind RV. (cf. Naigh. ii,2);

Old Translators:

2 Pure in her course from mountains to the ocean, alone of streams Sarasvati hath listened. Thinking of wealth and the great world of creatures, she poured for Nahusa her milk and fatness.
2. Einzig unter den Strömen hat sich Sarasvati hervorgetan, von den Bergen zum Meer klar fließend, den Reichtum der vielgestaltigen Welt kennend, spendet sie Schmalz und Milch dem Nahusstamm.

स वावृधे नर्यो योषणासु वृषा शिशुर वृषभो यज्ञियासु ।

स वाजिनम् मघवद्भ्यो दधाति वि सातये तन्वम् मामृजीत ॥ ७-९५-३

sá vāvṛdhe náriyo yóṣaṇāsu vṛṣā śísur vṛṣabhó yajñíyāsu |
sá vājīnam maghávadbhyo dadhāti ví sātāye tanúvam māmṛjīta |3|

Interpretation:

As a power of the soul he (Agni, the Fire) has grown in the women (streams), a fertile child, a sovereign lord in the energies of the sacrifice. For the possessors of fullness he establishes (their) substantial energy and for the conquest he purifies his body. (3)

With Sanskrit:

As a power of the soul (**náriyo**) he (**sá**) (Agni, the Fire) has grown (**vāvṛdhe**) in the women (streams) (**yóṣaṇāsu**), a fertile child (**vṛṣā śísur**), a sovereign lord (**vṛṣabhó**) in the energies of the sacrifice (**yajñíyāsu**). For the possessors of fullness (**maghávadbhyo**) he (**sá**) establishes (**dadhāti**) (their) substantial energy (**vājīnam**) and for the conquest (**sātāye**) he purifies (**ví māmṛjīta**) his body (**tanúvam**). (3)

Vocabulary:

vājin, mfn. *swift, spirited, impetuous, heroic, warlike RV. &c.; strong, manly, procreative, potent RV. TS. Br.; m. a warrior, hero, man RV. (often applied to gods, esp. to Agni, Indra, the Maruts &c.); strong, manly, procreative, potent RV. TS. Br.; the steed of a war-chariot ib.; a horse, stallion Mn. MBh. &c.;*

SA: the lord of substance, of one who has substance, of plenitude, [of thee] who art stable and strong; steed of the plenitude, the steed of life's plenitude, Horse of power; the abundance of his strength;

vi-mrj, P. A. –mārṣṭi, -mrṣṭe (pf. Pot. –**māmṛjita** RV.), *to rub off or out, purify, cleanse Br. SrS.; to rub dry TS.; to rub on or in, anoint, smear with (instr.) GrSrS.; to wipe off MBh. Mricch. A. (with tanvam), to adorn or arm one's self RV. VII.95.3;*

Old Translators:

3 Friendly to man he grew among the women, a strong young Steer amid the Holy Ladies.

He gives the fleet steed to our wealthy princes, and decks their bodies for success in battle.

3. Er ist als der Männliche unter den jungen Frauen, der männliche junge Bulle unter den opferwürdigen Göttinnen herangewachsen. Er verschafft den Gönnern ein Siegesroß. Er möge seinen Leib reinigen, daß es den Sieg gewinne.

उ॒त॒ स्या॑ नः॒ सर॑स्वती॒ जुषा॑णोप॒ श्रव॑त् सु॒भगा॑ यज्ञे॒ अस्मि॑न् ।

मि॒त॒ज्जु॑भिर् नम॒स्यै॑र् इ॒या॒ना॒ रा॒या॒ यु॒जा॒ चि॒द् उत्तरा॑ सखि॒भ्यः॑ ॥ ७-९५-४

utá syā naḥ sárasvatī juṣāṇā úpa śravat subhágā yajñé asmín |
mitájñubhir namasíyair iyānā rāyā yujā cid úttarā sákhibhyaḥ |4|

Interpretation:

And welcoming us may she, the divine Stream, the goddess of Delight listen closely (to us) in this sacrifice as we approach (her) in obeisance with bended knees; with her luminous wealth and companion-ship she is indeed most high for her comrades. (4)

With Sanskrit:

And (utá) welcoming (juṣāṇā) us (naḥ) may she (syā), the divine Stream (sárasvatī), the goddess of Delight (subhágā) listen closely (úpa śravat) (to us) in this (asmín) sacrifice (yajñé) as we approach (iyānā) (her) in obeisance (namasíyair) with bended knees (mitájñubhir); with her luminous wealth (rāyā) and companion-ship (yujā) she is indeed (cid) most high (úttarā) for her comrades (sákhibhyaḥ). (4)

Vocabulary:

sya, 1 pron. base of 3rd person (= sa; only in nom. m. syas, sya; f. sya; cf. tya, tyad) RV.;

mitájñu, (mita) mfn. *having strong or firm knees RV.;*

SA: bowing the knee 3.59.3;

Old Translators:

4 May this Sarasvati be pleased and listen at this our sacrifice, auspicious Lady,

When we with reverence, on our knees, implore her close-knit to wealth, most kind to those she loveth.

4. Auch diese Sarasvati möge gern bei diesem Opfer zuhören, die Holde, der die Huldiger mit aufgestemmtten Knieen nahen. Im Bunde mit dem Reichtum selbst geht sie über alle Freunde.

इ॒मा जु॒ह्वाना॑ यु॒ष्मद् आ॑ न॒मोभिः॑ प्र॒ति स्तो॑मं सर॒स्वति॑ जुष॒स्व ।
तव॑ श॒र्मन् प्रि॒यत॑मे द॒धाना॑ उप॒ स्थेया॑म शरणं॑ न वृ॒क्षम् ॥ ७-९५-५

imā júhvānā yuṣmád ā námobhiḥ práti stómaṃ sarasvati juṣasva |
táva śárman priyátame dádhānā úpa stheyāma śaraṇaṃ ná vṛkṣám |5|

Interpretation:

From you all are these offerings (made) with obeisance. O Sarasvati, welcome this hymn of (your) affirmation. Placing ourselves in your most dear refuge, may we abide (in you) like under a sheltering tree. (5)

Comments:

The phrase "from you all" relates here probably either to Vasishtha's fellow seekers or to different parts of his own nature.

With Sanskrit:

From you all (yuṣmád) are these offerings (imā júhvānā) (made) with obeisance (námobhiḥ). O Sarasvati, welcome (práti juṣasva) this hymn of (your) affirmation (stómaṃ). Placing ourselves (dádhānā) in your (táva) most dear (priyátame) refuge (śárman), may we abide (in you) (úpa stheyāma) like (ná) under a sheltering tree (śaraṇaṃ vṛkṣám). (5)

Vocabulary:

upa-sthā, P. A. -tiṣṭhati, -te, to stand or place one's self near, be present (A. if no object follows Pan. 1-3,26); to stand by the side of, place one's self near, expose one's self to (with loc. or acc.) RV. AV. KatySr. Gobh. MBh. Mn. &c.; to place one's self before (in order to ask), approach, apply to RV. AV. SBr. AsvGr. Ragh. &c.; to stand under (in order to support), approach for assistance, be near at hand or at the disposal of RV. AV. TS. MBh. Sak. &c.;

Old Translators:

5 These offerings have ye made with adoration: say this, Sarasvati, and accept our praises;
And, placing us under thy dear protection, may we approach thee, as a tree, for shelter.
5. Diese Opfergaben mit Verbeugungen vor euch darbringend - nimm, o Sarasvati, das Loblied gern entgegen - in deinen geliebtesten Schutz uns stellend wollen wir wie unter einen schützenden Baum treten.

अ॒यम् उ॑ ते सर॒स्वति॑ वसि॒ष्ठो द्वा॑राव् ऋ॒तस्य॑ सु॒भगे॑ व्यु॒ आवः॑ ।
वर्ध॑ शु॒भ्रे स्तु॒वते॑ रा॒सि वा॑जान् यू॒यम् पा॑त स्व॒स्तिभिः॑ सदा॑ नः ॥ ७-९५-६

ayám u te sarasvati vásiṣṭho dvārāv ṛtasya subhage ví āvaḥ |
vārdha śubhre stuvaté rāsi vājān yūyám pāta suastíbiḥ sádā naḥ |6|

Interpretation:

For you, O divine Stream (of Inspiration), O goddess of Delight, this Vasishtha has opened the doors of the dynamic Truth. Grow (in him), O brightly shining one, and bestow on your affirmer the plenitudes. O Gods guard us ever with perfect states of being. (6)

With Sanskrit:

For you (te), O divine Stream (sarasvati), O goddess of Delight (subhage), this (ayám) most luminous seer (vásiṣṭho) has opened (ví āvaḥ) the doors of the dynamic Truth (dvārāv ṛtásya). Grow (vārdha) (in him), O brightly shining one (śubhre), and bestow (rāsi) on your affirmer (stuvaté) the plenitudes (vājān). O you (yūyám) (Gods) guard (pāta) us (naḥ) ever (sádā) with perfect states of being (suastíbhīḥ). (6)

Vocabulary:

vāja, m. (fr. vaj; cf. ugra, uj, ojas &c.) strength, vigour, energy, spirit, speed (esp. of a horse; also pl.) RV. AV. VS. SankhSr.; (vājebhis, ind. mightily, greatly; cf. sahasā); a contest, race, conflict, battle, war RV. VS. GrSrS.; the prize of a race or of battle, booty, gain, reward, any precious or valuable possession, wealth, treasure RV. VS. AV. PancavBr.;

SA: plenitude, plenty, a substance of plenty, wealth, wealth of mind, the plenitude of the infinite and immortal state, the riches, substance, stable strengths;

Old Translators:

6 For thee, O Blest Sarasvati, Vasistha hath here unbarred the doors of sacred Order.

Wax, Bright One, and give strength to him who lauds thee. Preserve us evermore, ye Gods, with blessings.

6. Dieser Vasistha hat dir, o holde Sarasvati, die Pforte des Gesetzes geöffnet. Mehre, du Schöne, schenke dem Sänger Belohnungen. - Behütet ihr uns immerdar mit eurem Segen!

Appendix from "The Secret of the Veda".

On Sarasvati's connection with the two goddesses Bharati and Ila.

Sarasvati is not only connected with other rivers but with other goddesses who are plainly psychological symbols and especially with Bharati and Ila. In the later Puranic forms of worship Sarasvati is the goddess of speech, of learning and of poetry and Bharati is one of her names, but in the Veda Bharati and Sarasvati are different deities. Bharati is also called Mahi, the Large, Great or Vast. The three, Ila, Mahi or Bharati and Sarasvati are associated together in a constant formula in those hymns of invocation in which the gods are called by Agni to the Sacrifice.

Ilā sarasvatī mahī, tisro devīr mayobhuvah; barhiḥ sīdantvasridhaḥ.

"May Ila, Sarasvati and Mahi, three goddesses who give birth to the bliss, take their place on the sacrificial seat, they who stumble not..."

...The formula is expanded in Hymn 110 of the tenth Mandala:

*ā no yajñam bhāratī tūyam etu, ilā manuṣvad iha cetayantī;
tisro devīr barhir edam syonam, sarasvatī svapasaḥ sadantu.*

"May Bharati come speeding to our sacrifice and Ila hither awakening our consciousness ... in human wise, and Sarasvati, — three goddesses sit on this blissful seat, doing well the Work."

It is clear and will become yet clearer that these three goddesses have closely connected functions akin to the inspirational power of Sarasvati. Sarasvati is the Word, the inspiration, as I suggest, that comes from the Ritam, the Truth-consciousness. Bharati and Ila must also be different forms of the same Word or knowledge. In the eighth hymn of Madhuchchhandas we have a Rik in which Bharati is mentioned under the name of Mahi.

evā hyasya sūnṛtā, virapśī gomatī mahī; pakvā śākhā na dāsūṣe.

“Thus Mahi for Indra full of the rays, overflowing in her abundance, in her nature a happy truth, becomes as if a ripe branch for the giver of the sacrifice.”

The rays in the Veda are the rays of Surya, the Sun. Are we to suppose that the goddess is a deity of the physical Light or are we to translate “go” by cow and suppose that Mahi is full of cows for the sacrificer? The psychological character of Saraswati comes to our rescue against the last absurd supposition, but it negatives equally the naturalistic interpretation. This characterisation of Mahi, Saraswati’s companion in the sacrifice, the sister of the goddess of inspiration, entirely identified with her in the later mythology, is one proof among a hundred others that light in the Veda is a symbol of knowledge, of spiritual illumination. Surya is the Lord of the supreme Sight, the vast Light, *br̥haj jyotiḥ*, or, as it is sometimes called, the true Light, *ṛtam jyotiḥ*. And the connection between the words *ṛtam* and *br̥hat* is constant in the Veda.

It seems to me impossible to see in these expressions anything else than the indication of a state of illumined consciousness the nature of which is that it is wide or large, *br̥hat*, full of the truth of being, *satyam*, and of the truth of knowledge and action, *ṛtam*. The gods have this consciousness. Agni, for instance, is termed *ṛtacit*, he who has the truth-consciousness. Mahi is full of the rays of this Surya; she carries in her this illumination. Moreover she is *sūnṛtā*, she is the word of a blissful Truth, even as it has been said of Saraswati that she is the impeller of happy truths, *codayitrī sūnṛtānām*. Finally, she is *virapśī*, large or breaking out into abundance, a word which recalls to us that the Truth is also a Largeness, *ṛtam br̥hat*. And in another hymn, (I.22.10), she is described as *varūtrī dhiṣaṇā*, a widely covering or embracing Thought-power. Mahi, then, is the luminous vastness of the Truth, she represents the Largeness, *br̥hat*, of the superconscient in us containing in itself the Truth, *ṛtam*. She is, therefore, for the sacrificer like a branch covered with ripe fruit.

Ila is also the word of the truth; her name has become identical in a later confusion with the idea of speech. As Saraswati is an awakener of the consciousness to right thinkings or right states of mind, *cetantī sumatīnām*, so also Ila comes to the sacrifice awakening the consciousness to knowledge, *cetayantī*. She is full of energy, *suvīrā*, and brings knowledge. She also is connected with Surya, the Sun, as when Agni, the Will is invoked (V.4.4) to labour by the rays of the Sun, Lord of the true Light, being of one mind with Ila, *ilayā sajoṣā yatamāno raśmibhiḥ sūryasya*. She is the mother of the Rays, the herds of the Sun. Her name means she who seeks and attains and it contains the same association of ideas as the words Ritam and Rishi. Ila may therefore well be the vision of the seer which attains the truth. As Saraswati represents the truth-audition, *śruti*, which gives the inspired word, so Ila represents *dr̥ṣṭi*, the truth vision. If so, since *dr̥ṣṭi* and *śruti* are the two powers of the Rishi, the Kavi, the Seer of the Truth, we can understand the close connection of Ila and Saraswati. Bharati or Mahi is the largeness of the Truth-consciousness which, dawning on man’s limited mind, brings with it the two sister Puissances. We can also understand how these fine and living distinctions came afterwards to be neglected as the Vedic knowledge declined and Bharati, Saraswati, Ila melted into one.

We may note also that these three goddesses are said to bring to birth for man the Bliss, Mayas. I have already insisted on the constant relation, as conceived by the Vedic seers, between the Truth and the Bliss or Ananda. It is by the dawning of the true or infinite consciousness in man that he arrives out of this evil dream of pain and suffering, this divided creation into the Bliss, the happy state variously described in Veda by the words *bhadram*, *mayas* (love and bliss), *svasti* (the good state of existence, right being) and by others less technically used such as *vāryam*, *rayiḥ*, *rāyaḥ*. For the Vedic Rishi Truth is the

passage and the antechamber, the Bliss of the divine existence is the goal, or else Truth is the foundation, Bliss the supreme result.²

On the symbolism of the Seven Rivers.

"Such, then, is the character of Saraswati as a psychological principle, her peculiar function and her relation to her most immediate connections among the gods. How far do these shed any light on her relations as the Vedic river to her six sister streams? The number seven plays an exceedingly important part in the Vedic system, as in most very ancient schools of thought. We find it recurring constantly, — the seven delights, *sapta ratnāni*; the seven flames, tongues or rays of Agni, *sapta arcīṣaḥ*, *sapta jvālāḥ*; the seven forms of the Thought-principle, *sapta dhīṭayaḥ*; the seven Rays or Cows, forms of the Cow unslayable, Aditi, mother of the gods, *sapta gāvāḥ*; the seven rivers, the seven mothers or fostering cows, *sapta mātaraḥ*, *sapta dhenavaḥ*, a term applied indifferently to the Rays and to the Rivers. All these sets of seven depend, it seems to me, upon the Vedic classification of the fundamental principles, the tattvas, of existence. The enquiry into the number of these tattvas greatly interested the speculative mind of the ancients and in Indian philosophy we find various answers ranging from the One upward and running into the twenties. In Vedic thought the basis chosen was the number of the psychological principles, because all existence was conceived by the Rishis as a movement of conscious being. However merely curious or barren these speculations and classifications may seem to the modern mind, they were no mere dry metaphysical distinctions, but closely connected with a living psychological practice of which they were to a great extent the thought-basis, and in any case we must understand them clearly if we wish to form with any accuracy an idea of this ancient and far-off system.

In the Veda, then, we find the number of the principles variously stated. The One was recognised as the basis and continent; in this One there were the two principles divine and human, mortal and immortal. The dual number is also otherwise applied in the two principles, Heaven and Earth, Mind and Body, Soul and Nature, who are regarded as the father and mother of all beings. It is significant, however, that Heaven and Earth, when they symbolise two forms of natural energy, the mental and the physical consciousness, are no longer the father and mother, but the two mothers. The triple principle was doubly recognised, first in the threefold divine principle answering to the later Sachchidananda, the divine existence, consciousness and bliss, and secondly in the threefold mundane principle, Mind, Life, Body, upon which is built the triple world of the Veda and Puranas. But the full number ordinarily recognised is seven. This figure was arrived at by adding the three divine principles to the three mundane and interpolating a seventh or link-principle which is precisely that of the Truth-consciousness, Ritam Brihat, afterwards known as Vijnana or Mahas. The latter term means the Large and is therefore an equivalent of Brihat. There are other classifications of five, eight, nine and ten and even, as it would seem, twelve; but these do not immediately concern us.

All these principles, be it noted, are supposed to be really inseparable and omnipresent and therefore apply themselves to each separate formation of Nature. The seven Thoughts, for instance, are Mind applying itself to each of the seven planes as we would now call them and formulating Matter-mind, if we may so call it, nervous mind, pure mind, truth-mind and so on to the highest summit, *paramā parāvat*. The seven rays or cows are Aditi the infinite Mother, the Cow unslayable, supreme Nature or infinite Consciousness, pristine source of the later idea of Prakriti or Shakti, — the Purusha is in this early pastoral imagery the Bull, Vrishabha, — the Mother of things taking form on the seven planes of her world-action as energy of conscious being.

² Page 94-97 VOLUME 15 THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. © Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust 1998

So also, the seven rivers are conscious currents corresponding to the sevenfold substance of the ocean of being which appears to us formulated in the seven worlds enumerated by the Puranas. It is their full flow in the human consciousness which constitutes the entire activity of the being, his full treasure of substance, his full play of energy. In the Vedic image, his cows drink of the water of the seven rivers.

Should this imagery be admitted, and it is evident that if once such conceptions are supposed to exist, this would be the natural imagery for a people living the life and placed in the surroundings of the ancient Aryans, — quite as natural for them and inevitable as for us the image of the “planes” with which theosophical thought has familiarised us, — the place of Saraswati as one of the seven rivers becomes clear. She is the current which comes from the Truth-principle, from the Ritam or Mahas, and we actually find this principle spoken of in the Veda, — in the closing passage of our third hymn for instance, — as the Great Water, *maho arṇas*, — an expression which gives us at once the origin of the later term, Mahas, — or sometimes *mahān arṇavaḥ*. We see in the third hymn the close connection between Saraswati and this great water.”³

³ Page 97-99 ibid.