"O Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Sutlej, Ravi, follow my praise. O Chenab, Jhelum, with Haro and Sohan, listen"

The above verse written over 5000 years ago comes from the Nadistuti Sukta portion of the Rigveda. In chronological order the Rigveda names the rivers which once formed the geography of the ancient Vedic civilisation. The British explorers however, when visiting the region between the Yamuna and the Sutlej, found only seasonal streams such as the Ghaggar and the Sarsuti. Although all the other rivers were exactly as described in the Rigveda, the mighty Sarasvati was absent.
More than any other river, the Sarasvati is the embodiment of the ancient Vedic civilisation. She is known as Ambitame, the best of all mothers, Nadhitame, the best of all rivers and Devitame, the best of all Gods. She appears in the Ramayana as the sacred Ikshumati, the daughter of Brahma and flows through the plains of Kuruksetra, where Krsna spoke the Gita. On her banks Vyasadeva divided the one Veda into four, Parashuram bathed in her waters after ridding the world of tyranny and Kartikeya was anointed commander of the Devas. She is the only river the Rigveda dedicates whole verses to, she is responsible for the most scientific of languages and gave birth to the greatest civilisation this world has ever known. The question remained, however, where was she?
In 1844, Major F Mackeson was searching for a route through Delhi and what is today, Pakistans southern province of Sind. He found that the country bore traces of having once been well populated. At one time the waters of the Ghaggar-Hakra river reached as far as Sooratgarh, and throughout this route, old wells were numerous. He noted that “One remarkable feature is the traces which exist of the course of some former river, and it is to the forsaken bed of this river we are indebted for the opening of this road through the desert”. He was thankful because only along this deserted channel was there a continuous line of villages, and the wells which were dug in it were found to have sweet water, while the wells at a distance, on both sides were found to be brackish. Mackesons report continued. “The width to which the bed of the Ghaggar-Hakra attains in this part of the course, is such to favour the idea it was once a much larger river than the Sutlej. Ages have elapsed since this river ceased to flow, and I shall leave to those who care to determine the permanancy or otherwise of its character.” For Mackeson, this route was not only clear, it was serviceable. If need be camels could march fifty abreast on either side of a column of troops. And although ages have passed since this river flowed, there was no worry about water. The numerous wells were enough for a caravan of three hundred camels.

Previously, in 1833, Major Colvin, superintendent of canals, submitted a report to the Government, “What the country about and west of Rania has been may be inferred from the numerous sites of towns and villages scattered over a tract of land, where, now, inhabitants are hardly to be seen. I allude to the Ghaggar-Hakra which I am personally aquainted.” “When the depopulation took place I am not prepared to say. It must have been long, since as none of the sites present one brick standing upon the other above the ground, yet when digging beneath many specimens of an old brick are found, about 16 x 10 x 3 inches, of most excellent quality. Buildings erected of such materials could have not passed away in such a short period of time. The evident cause of this depopulation is the absolute absence of water.”

In 1893, C.F. Oldham, an English engineer, rode his horse along the dry bed of the Ghaggar-Hakra. Oldham wondered why Ghaggar, despite being a small river, had its bed up to 3km wide in places. He proposed that the Ghaggar must be occupying the course of a much larger river. “Although the river below the confluence is marked on our maps as Ghaggar, it was formally the Sarasvati, that name is still known amongst its people.” Mr Oldham went on to say “The course of the lost river has now been traced from the Himalayas to the Raan of Kach. We have also seen that the Vedic description of the waters of the Sarasvati flowing onwards to the ocean, and the one given in the Mahabharata of the sacred river losing itself in the sands, were probably correct at the periods to which they referred.”

In support of these conclusions, Herbert Wilhelmy, a distinguished geographer wrote, “There should no longer be any doubt that Sutlej water once flowed into the Ghaggar-Hakra at three different places in an earlier period. In the very distant past, the Yamuna was certainly one of the suppliers of the lost river. The water flowed through an old 1.5 km wide bed of the Chautung. This dry bed is indeed the holy river Sarasvati. Once upon a time, this was a genuine solitary river which reached the ocean without any tributaries on its long way across the Rajastani desert.”
“Not often has it been given to archeologists... to light upon the remains of a long forgotten civilisation. It looks, however, as if we are on the threshold of such a discovery on the plains of the Indus.” Archeologist John Marshall.

“Several hundred sites have been identified, the great majority of which are on the plains of the Indus or its tributaries, or on the now dry course of the ancient river Sarasvati, which flowed south of the Sutlej and then southward to the Indian ocean, east of the main course of the Indus itself.”

Raymond Allchin, Archeologist and cultural historian.

“Indians have always been justly proud of their age old civilisation, believing it as ancient as any in Asia. They have long been hoping that archeology would discover definite monumental evidence to justify their belief. This hope has now been fulfilled.” Archeologist John Marshall.

All along the ancient river bed of the Sarasvati, thousands of archeological sites have been discovered. Indeed the last count totalled over 3000 sites, and the findings such as fire alters, Siva lingas, meditating yogis, four headed Brahmas, swashtikas and co-ordinates used in town planning are basically 101 Hinduism. Archeologist Jane Mcintosh writes, “This work revealed an incredibly dense concentration of sites, all along the course of a river which could be identified as the Sarasvati. Suddenly it became apparent that the Indus civilisation was a misnomer. Although the Indus river played a major role in the rise and development of this civilisation, the “lost Sarasvati” judging by the density of settlements along its banks, has contributed to an equal or greater part of its prosperity.”

She goes on to say, “The desertion of the Dhristadvati and the Sutlej is typical of the instability of the river courses in the Hindu plains. But in the case of Sarasvati, the effect was not localised but devastating on a major scale. Cities, towns and villages were abandoned, their inhabitants drifting to other regions of the Indus and eastwards towards the Ganges, pushing back the centuries old boundaries of Indus culture and venturing into unchartered territory.”

Similar sentiments are expressed by archeologist Johnathan.M. Kenoyer, “Another ancient river, the Sarasvati, had taken its course along the eastern edge of the plain. Numerous surveys in the deserts of Cholistan and Rajasthan made it clear that large numbers of settlements, dating from 4000 to 1000 BC were situated along the banks of this major river system. Now that we know of the presence of the ancient Sarasvati, some scholars refer to this culture as the Indus - Sarasvati civilisation.” And finally archeologist Mr V.N. Misra concludes “The description of the location, size and dessication of the Sarasvati river in the Vedic epic and classical literature perfectly matches the features and history of the Ghaggar - Hakra, which is nothing more than a remnant of the Rigveda Sarasvati, which was once the lifeline of the Indus civilisation.”
As well as being a holy river, Sarasvati is a tirtha, a bridge, a crossing to a higher realm. Once millions of people would line this river, either upon its banks or deeper into the forests. In the Vedas we read of Duvarsi muni and his 10,000 disciples. Hermitages would house great sages such as Vasistha and Vyasadeva and ashramas leading all the way up the Himalayas would be full of thousands of students. Grihasthas retiring from family life, upon entering the forest, would find accommodation, food and instruction on how to prepare for life's ultimate journey. The flow of the sacred river provided the perfect environment for meditation and contemplation upon the absolute.

Its existence is in defiance to a gross mentality which claimed she did not exist, a mythological river belonging to a mythological history. The Rigveda places the Sarasvati between the Yamuna and the Sutlej, exactly where she has been found and the Mahabharata correctly describes her as disappearing into the Rajasthani desert. In their attempts to destroy this ancient culture they tried to date the Rigveda as less than 2000 years old. European scholars, such as Max Muller, sold their souls to please their paymasters and perpetrate such falsities. The obvious question is, however, if you have a scripture which is central to and describes a civilisation which existed alongside a river, which flowed some 5 - 7000 years ago, how old does that make the scripture? 5 - 7000 years perhaps? The very age which was given by the tradition itself.

"Often enough it seemed as though, like the Sarasvati, the river of Indian thought had disappeared beneath the surface, or became lost in shallow marshes and morasses, but sooner or later we see the stream reappear and then the old ideas resume their way." H.H. Gowen.

If you enjoyed this article or would like to make a comment, please scroll down to the bottom of the page and click "submit comment" Hare Krsna.