Saraswati’s live darshan: Exalted pilgrimage to the invisible river in Haryana

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Much before environmental studies acquired a hallowed academic status, Vedic scriptures had shown both respect and sensitivity to the environment by according to the status of deity to the river, Saraswati. Worship of femininity in Hinduism was symbolically represented in the river Saraswati, revered as a mother and depicted in the Rg Veda as having healing and purifying powers. While Goddess Saraswati is worshipped all over India on auspicious occasions, especially during Vasant Panchami, ‘Saraswati Ghat’ located in Pehowa near Kurukshetra in Haryana is the sacred spot where the invisible river is believed to have manifest by surfacing herself as a river deity originating out of Alaknanda river in Adi Badri region of Himalayas. A Saraswati Development Board created by the government is attempting to connect the missing dots and it has dug out the traces of the vanished river. Saraswati shrouds herself yet again beyond the region, going underground and shows up finally in Saraswati Koop in Allahabad fort (opened for public viewing during Kumbh 2019 at the personal intervention of the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi) before merging into Triveni in Sangam at Prayagraj. The temple dedicated to goddess Saraswati adjoining a pond along with the Ghat in Pehowa is one of the oldest where Hindus offer all the three major religious obligations – Swakarya (Snan and Daan), Pitra Karya (Pind Daan, Shradh, and Tarpan), and Deva Karya (Tapa, Japa, Satsang, Katha, Raas etc) – through the fame of the sacred spot is primarily for Pitra Karya, second only to Gaya.

A close look at the ancient Saraswati Temple and the Ghat surrounded by a linked canal to the adjoining and ancient river source and the dried up land in Haryana bear testimony to the many events mentioned in the Vedas and scriptures including the epic Mahabharat. Etymologically ‘Saraswati’ comes from Sanskrit and literally means ‘she who flows’ or one who provides perennial knowledge with consistent speed. Like the mighty river falling from the enormous mountain ranges of the Himalayas, goddess Saraswati reflects the independent nature of wisdom. During the times when the verses of Rg Veda must have been composed at the vibrating banks of the river, the force of creation must have been visualized through the river as the source of life. The awe and reverence for the river perhaps made Saraswati to be described as the goddess of creation, the energy source of the Hindu trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar. The free-flowing river Saraswati is idolized with the musical instrument veena on her lap and scriptures on her arms. The depiction of femininity mirrors in the deity wrapped in a white saree symbolic of the purity she embodies. Without the gildings of adornments and glamour wrought from ornamentations, Saraswati stands apart as the deity of brightness that seethes through the darkness of the mind. The goddess of heart-wrenching melody and stunning eloquence providing solace to both body and mind just like the river does to humanity around her. Saraswati is thus considered the celestial source of creative energy and worshipped as the goddess of art, speech, music, wisdom, learning and knowledge. Like the river, she can be pursued but never possessed, in your fist.

Saraswati is known as Brahmmani or the consort of Brahma the creator is considered the embodiment of consciousness – pure and simple. The ultimate source of creation is symbolized in the sound OM where the imagination of Brahma and the physical manifestation of life through sound or vibration or even consciousness is represented in Saraswati. The entire universe, both internal and external, is the amalgamation of Brahma or the creator with Saraswati the
consciousness, the vibration, the speech the flow as the final abode of creation. Without Saraswati, the Lord Brahma could not have put words in creation. Vac or speech is the centre of creation and thus Saraswati also gets the name of vacdevi.

For a Sanatan Dharma, the place where the naturally flowing river turns towards the origin rather than her destination makes the place sacred. The sacred river Ganga becomes Uttaryani at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh and at Munger in Bihar. Siddharth turned to his source at Bodh Gaya to become Buddha, thereby rendering the geography as sacred. They all are pilgrim centres. At Pehowa in Haryana similarly, the Saraswati takes a turn to her source direction. This ‘return to the origin’ of the river gets meaning when ancestors are remembered and their origins are honoured through oblations and offerings at the banks of Saraswati. Mike Oldfield’s voice ‘return’ haunts as one climbs back the steps of Saraswati Tirth to make the homeward journey.

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