

In the Vedarthasangraha, Sri Ramanuja explains how Sriyah Pati (Sriman Narayanan) alone is the Supreme Being described in the Vedas and Vedanta. The Vedas declare the nature of the Supreme Truth in many ways. Sometimes they call It Brahman (the great and glorious essence); other times they call It Sat (Being); still other times they call It Purusha, other times Vishnu, Rudra, Atma, Paramaatma, etc. How are we to reconcile all these various names?

Surely they all refer to one Supreme, as the Vedas declare that there is only one Supreme Cause -- ekam eva advitIyam. Fortunately, the Vedas themselves offer a reconciliation of all these names, contained in the various Upanishads and even in the text of the Veda proper.

In the Purusha Sukta, found in all four Vedas, the Supreme Brahman is described as the Being who exists everywhere. At the end of this glorious Sukta, the Purusha is described:

hrISca te lakshmiSca patnyau

He who has Hri (Bhudevi) and Lakshmi as His eternal consorts or attributes.

Similarly, in the Chhandogya Upanishad, we have the description of the Supreme Person as ``tasya yatha kapyaaasam pundarikam eva akshini'' -- His eyes have the beauty of the petals of a lotus, just unfolding under the rays of the sun and crowning a rich stalk. In all religious literature, only Vishnu is addressed as the ``lotus-eyed one''.

There are even more direct Veda vaakyas. For example, in the Rig Veda, we see

tad viSNOh paramam padam, sadaa paSyanti sUrayah

-- the enlightened seers always perceive the supreme abode of Vishnu, a reference to the nitya suris. A similar reference is found in the Katha Upanishad.

The Taittiriya Aranyaka explicitly reconciles all the various names of the Supreme found in the Vedas and encompasses them all under the term ``Narayana'' in the Narayana Sukta. Taking note of the terms Sat, Brahman, Atma, Akshara, all found in the Upanishads, the Sukta goes on to declare

viSvam naaraayaNam devam

All is Narayana.

and

sa brahmA sa SivaH sendraH s0 'ksharaH paramaH svaraaT

Narayana is Brahma, Siva, Indra, the Imperishable,
the Supreme Independent.

These two vaakyas clearly enunciate the principle that
the concept of Narayana encompasses all other deities.

Even otherwise, the etymological meaning of
the word Narayana has perhaps the deepest philosophical
significance of any name of God, over and above even the
terms Vishnu Siva, Brahma, Indra, etc. The latter
terms respectively mean ``pure'', ``great'', and ``king'',
and are applicable to any number of things, including
the individual self. However, Narayana means ``That in
which all creatures rest'', which by implication can only
refer to the Supreme.

It is true that the Vedas themselves often praise other
gods. However, usually these are in the context of
the Vedic sacrifice, which is not the highest essence
of Vedic teaching. When it comes to the purely
philosophical portions, it is quite clear that the
personality to which the vaakyas refer is only
Narayana.

Of course, we should not ignore the Bhagavad Gita,
considered by all Vedic acharyas as the essence of the Vedas.

With this immense Vedic tradition behind them,
it is a wonder that some people call Sri Vaishnavas
closed-minded for choosing to worship only Narayanan!

Mani

P.S.

This is not to say that the other forms of
worship, be it Saivism, worship of Devi, Christianity,
etc., are devoid of significance! Rather, we can
only say that they are not as firmly rooted in Vedic
tradition as is the concept of Narayana. Naturally,
Truth can be found outside the text of the Vedas, lending
authority to the various different creeds that exist.
The only point being made here is that the Vedas and
Divya Prabandham describe the Ultimate Truth as Narayana and
sanction worship of God conceived in those terms.

P.P.S.

As someone else has noted, even Sankaracharya considered
usd the name Narayana when referring to God. Many stotras
are ascribed to him when he may or may not have authored.
However, in his undisputed authentic works, such as his
commentaries on the Upanishads, Gita, and Brahma-sutras,
he invariably refers to Narayana as the Supreme Essence.
His immediate disciples do the same.