

THE SPIRITUAL SCIENTIST

An Ezine for Those Who Think

Published by VOICE, ISKCON, Pune

Is God Male or Female?

God is neither - and is both. Lets see how.

Before we can understand whether God is male or female, we need to clearly understand that we ourselves are neither male nor female. We are at core spiritual beings, souls, whereas our gender refers only to our shell, our physical bodies. Our spiritual identity is eternal, our gender is transient. According to the law of last thought described in the Bhagavad-gita (8.5), we attain in our next life a body as per the thought that predominates our consciousness at the last moment of this life. So a male in this life may become a female in the next life, if the person dearest to him happens to be a female and vice versa. Hence both male chauvinism and feminism are two sides of the counterfeit coin of physical misidentification. Only when we distance ourselves from our temporary physical gender will be freed from the ideological preconceptions that are inevitably dragged into discussion on the gender of God. So in the conventional sense of the words 'male' and 'female' where these refer to bodily gender, God is neither.

Yet God is both too - as seen in the worship of Divine Couples in the Vedic tradition. The highly inclusivistic Vedic definition of God as the source of everything, the cause of all causes, leads naturally to an egalitarian understanding of God - as both male and female. Lets consider the divine couple Radha- Krishna. Here Radha personifies the primordial cosmological feminine principle and Krishna the primordial cosmological masculine principle. Sometimes personification is mistaken to be a mere literary device, but this misconception overlooks the omni-dimensional all-encompassing nature of divinity. So Radha and Krishna are not symbols denoting metaphysical principles. As divine embodiments, they are fully concrete, particular individuals, yet they are, so to say, universal individuals, being wholly identical with the ontological principles they personify.

Krishna is compared to the sun and Radha to the sunshine. Though the sunshine comes from the sun, to say that the sun is superior to or exists prior to the sunshine is incorrect- as soon as there is a sun, there is sunshine. More important, the sun has no meaning without sunshine, without heat and light. And heat and light would not exist without the sun. So the sun and the sunshine co-exist, each equally important for the existence of the other. It may be said that they are simultaneously inconceivably one and different (achintyabhedabheda tattva). Likewise, the singular Absolute Truth manifests as the plural Radha-Krishna for the sake of loving reciprocation. One person, two personalities;

inconceivable identity in diversity. Hence the saint Bhaktivinoda Thakura sings, "Just as there is no sun without sunshine, I do not accept Krishna without Radha."

The Gita explains that God is the source, the essence and the best of everything. So, of worshipers of God, God alone is the best. Therefore, as Radha, God is the supreme worshiper, and as Krishna, God is the supreme worshiped. both par excellence.

In terms of tattva (philosophical truth), Krishna excels as the supreme controller and so the traditional reference to God as masculine. But in terms of lila (divine loving exchanges), Radha excels by controlling Krishna with her selfless spiritual love. Krishna is celebrated as Madan-Mohan, the mesmerizer of Cupid, who mesmerizes everyone, but Radha is glorified as Madan-Mohan-Mohini, the mesmerizer of the mesmerizer of Cupid. Moreover for spiritual aspirants, Radha acts as the divine mediatrix, without whom access to Krishna is not possible. So devotees always chant her name before Krishna's, as is also seen with Sita-Rama and Lakshmi-Narayana.

Like the Biblical Bride-of-Christ concept and the Kabbalistic Jewish conception of the Feminine Divine, the truth behind Radha-Krishna is theologically profound and constitutes the zenith of spiritual awareness. This enlightened God consciousness resolves all confusion, contradiction and conflict caused by myopic conceptions of sexuality and spirituality.