

INTRODUCTION

TO THE

Nārada Pancha Rātra.

THE *Nārada-pancha-rātra* is one of the oldest, if not the very first, specimen of Vaishṇava literature in Sanscrit. The only work which can contest the palm of seniority with it is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, commonly known by the name of the *S'ri Bhāgavata*. Without stopping to decide this *contest*, we may safely declare that each has in its own way done much to recommend the Vaishṇava doctrine to the Brahmins and give a turn, till then unknown, to the worship of Viṣṇu as the supreme ruler of the universe.

Viṣṇu is a name not unknown to the Vedas. His divinity is recognized in those ancient writings and he is even styled a great god. But he was not considered supreme. The word *parama* stands in some places as his predicate, but, as shown by Professor Max Muller, not in the sense of supreme.

अग्निर्वै देवानामवमो विष्णुः परमस्तदन्तरेण सर्वा अन्या देवताः ।

“Agni is the *first* among the gods, Viṣṇu the *last*, between them stand the other divinities.”

The last, however, became in process of time, *not the least* in the devotional conceptions of the Hindus. Three of the gods had from a remote period been selected as