

= Maitreyi =

Maitreyi ( " friendly one " ) was a Hindu philosopher who lived during the later Vedic period in ancient India . She is mentioned in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad as one of two wives of the Vedic sage Yajnavalkya ; he is estimated to have lived around the 8th century BCE . In the Hindu epic Mahabharata and the G?hyas?tras , however , Maitreyi is described as an Advaita philosopher who never married . In ancient Sanskrit literature , she is known as a brahmavadini ( an expounder of the Veda ) .

Ten hymns in the Rigveda are attributed to Maitreyi , and she explored the Hindu concept of Atman ( soul or self ) in a dialogue with Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad . According to this dialogue , love is driven by a person 's soul , and Maitreyi discusses the nature of Atman and Brahman and their unity , the core of Advaita philosophy . This Maitreyi @-@ Yajnavalkya dialogue is the topic of Sureshvara 's varttika , a commentary .

Maitreyi is cited as an example of the educational opportunities available to women in Vedic India , and their philosophical achievements . She is considered a symbol of Indian intellectual women , and an institution is named in her honour in New Delhi .

= = Early life = =

In the Asvalayana G?hyas?tra , the daughter of the sage Maitri is referred to as Sulabha Maitreyi and is mentioned in the G?hyas?tras with several other women scholars of the Vedic era . Her father , who lived in the Videhan capital of Mithila , was a minister in the court of King Janaka .

Although Maitreyi of ancient India , described as an Advaita philosopher , is said to be a wife of the sage Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad in the time of Janaka , the Hindu epic Mahabharata states Sulabha Maitreyi is a young beauty who never marries . In the latter , Maitreyi explains Advaita philosophy ( monism ) to Janaka and is described as a lifelong ascetic . She is called as a brahmavadini ( a female expounder of the Veda ) in ancient Sanskrit literature . Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya are estimated to have lived around the 8th century BCE .

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad , Maitreyi is described as Yajnavalkya 's scholarly wife ; his other wife , Katyayani , was a housewife . While Yajnavalkya and Katyayani lived in contented domesticity , Maitreyi studied metaphysics and engaged in theological dialogues with her husband in addition to " making self @-@ inquiries of introspection " .

= = Maitreyi @-@ Yajnavalkya dialogue = =

In the Rigveda about ten hymns are attributed to Maitreyi . She explores the Hindu concept of Atman ( soul or self ) in a dialogue contained in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad . The dialogue , also called the Maitreyi @-@ Yajnavalkya dialogue , states that love is driven by a person 's soul , and it discusses the nature of Atman and Brahman and their unity , the core of Advaita philosophy .

This dialogue appears in several Hindu texts ; the earliest is in chapter 2 @.@ 4 ? and modified in chapter 4 @.@ 5 ? of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad , one of the principal and oldest Upanishads , dating from approximately 700 BCE . The Maitreyi @-@ Yajnavalkya dialogue has survived in two manuscript recensions from the Madhyamdina and Kanva Vedic schools ; although they have significant literary differences , they share the same philosophical theme .

After Yajnavalkya achieved success in the first three stages of his life ? brahmacharya ( as a student ) , grihastha ( with his family ) and vanaprastha ( in retirement ) ? he wished to become a sannyasi ( a renunciant ) in his old age . He asked Maitreyi for permission , telling her that he wanted to divide his assets between her and Katyayani . Maitreyi said that she was not interested in wealth , since it would not make her " immortal " , but wanted to learn about immortality :

In the dialogue which follows , Yajnavalkya explains his views on immortality in Atman ( soul ) , Brahman ( ultimate reality ) and their equivalence . Maitreyi objects to parts of Yajnavalkya 's explanation , and requests clarification .

Scholars have differing views on whether this dialogue is evidence that in ancient Vedic tradition

women were accepted as active participants in spiritual discussions and as scholars of Brahman . Wendy Doniger , an American Indologist and a professor of History of Religions , states that in this dialogue Maitreyi is not portrayed as an author , but is part of an Upanishadic story of a Brahmin with two wives who are distinguished by their intellect . Karen Pechelis , another American Indologist and a professor of Comparative Religion , in contrast , states that Maitreyi is portrayed as theologically minded , as she challenges Yajnavalkya in this dialogue and asks the right questions .

First @-@ millennium Indian scholars , such as Sureshvara ( Suresvaracharya , c . 750 CE ) , have viewed this male @-@ female dialogue as profound on both sides ; Maitreyi refuses wealth , wishing to share her husband 's spiritual knowledge , and in the four known versions of the Upanishadic story she challenges Yajnavalkya 's theory of Atman . Yajnavalkya acknowledges her motivations , and that her questions are evidence she is a seeker of ultimate knowledge and a lover of the Atman .

The Maitreyi dialogue in the Upanishad is significant beyond being a gage of gender relations . Adi Shankara , a scholar of the influential Advaita Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy , wrote in his Brihadaranyakopanishad bhashya that the purpose of the Maitreyi @-@ Yajnavalkya dialogue in chapter 2 @.@ 4 of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is to highlight the importance of the knowledge of Atman and Brahman , and to understand their oneness . According to Shankara , the dialogue suggests renunciation is prescribed in the Sruti ( vedic texts of Hinduism ) , as a means to knowledge of the Brahman and Atman . He adds , that the pursuit of self @-@ knowledge is considered important in the Sruti because the Maitreyi dialogue is repeated in chapter 4 @.@ 5 as a " logical finale " to the discussion of Brahman in the Upanishad .

= = = Nature of love = = =

The Maitreyi @-@ Yajnavalkya dialogue includes a discussion of love and the essence of whom one loves , suggesting that love is a connection of the soul and the universal self ( related to an individual ) :

According to theological author and editor Robert Van De Weyer , this asserts that all love is a reflection of one 's own soul : parents ' love of their children , a love of religion or of the entire world . German Indologist and Oxford University professor Max Müller says that the love described in the Maitreyi @-@ Yajnavalkya dialogue of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad extends to all aspects of one 's life and beyond ; in verse 2 @.@ 4 @.@ 5 , " The Devas ( gods ) are not dear to one out of love for gods , but because one may love the Self ( Atman ) that the gods are dear " . In the dialogue " the Brahman @-@ class , the Kshatra @-@ class , these worlds , these gods , these beings , everything that is what this Soul is " , and when " we see , hear , perceive and know the Self , then all is known " .

Concluding his dialogue on the " inner self " , or soul , Yajnavalkya tells Maitreyi :

After Yajnavalkya leaves and becomes a sannyasi , Maitreyi becomes a sannyassini ? she too wanders and leads a renunciate 's life .

= = Legacy = =

Maitreyi , who is also mentioned in a number of Puranas , " is regarded as one of the most learned and virtuous women of ancient India " and symbolizes intellectual women in India . A college in New Delhi is named after her , as is the Matreyi Vedic Village , a retreat location in Tamil Nadu .