

MAITREY'S WISDOM: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATION OF THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

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Abstract

During the Vedic era, Maitreyi was a well-known female philosopher in India. Maitreyi was well-versed in Vedic scriptures and regarded as a "Brahmavadinin," which means someone who was well-versed in Mantras and who had the vision of Vedic truth. Maitreyi-brahmana, one of the most famous parts of Brhadaryaka-Upanishad, in the Brahma-sutras. Maitreyi's contribution to the Brhadaryaka-Upanishad is significant and profound. In the dialogue between Maitreyi and Sage Yajnavalkya, she plays a crucial role in questioning the pursuit of immortality through wealth. Her inquiry leads Yajnavalkya to impart the knowledge of Advaita Brahman to her, emphasizing the importance of self-realization and the nature of the Absolute Self. Her engagement with Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad exemplifies a pursuit of knowledge that transcends material wealth and delves into the essence of existence and immortality.

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. The Maitreyi section of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad serves as a profound philosophical discourse that not only explores metaphysical truths but also emphasizes ethical values, spiritual equality, and the eternal quest for self-realization. It stands as a testament to the timeless wisdom contained within the Upanishadic texts, offering seekers a path toward understanding the essence of existence and the true nature of the Self.

Key Words: - Brhadaryaka-Upanishad, metaphysical truths, self, self-realization etc.

INTRODUCTION

Maitreyi was a well-known Indian philosopher who lived during the Vedic period around the 8th century BCC. She is listed as one of the two wives of the sage Yajnavalkya. Maitreyi had a good knowledge of the Vedicscriptures and was known as "Brahmavadin", that is to say, women seers who have visions of Mantras and Vedic truth. She is credited with about ten of the thousand hymns in the Rig Veda.

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. The Maitreyi section of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad serves as a profound philosophical discourse that not only explores metaphysical truths but also emphasizes ethical values, spiritual equality, and the eternal quest for self-realization. It stands as a testament to the timeless wisdom contained within the Upanishadic texts, offering seekers a path toward understanding the essence of existence and the true nature of the Self. One of the key conversations between Maitreyi and Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad centers around the nature of the self and the true source of happiness. Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi dialogue make one point very clear: If we want to understand the Truth of the truth, we must be detached from the world of truth.

Maitreyi also emphasized the idea of balance and harmony in all aspects of life. She believed that living in accordance with cosmic law and practicing self-discipline leads to inner peace and a balanced life.

In terms of spiritual practice, Maitreyi valued meditation, self-reflection, and self-awareness as the means to attain spiritual knowledge and understanding. She encouraged individuals to look within themselves and cultivate a deep understanding of their own minds and inner workings.

This article shows the philosophical depth and significance of Maitreyi's dialogue within the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. It also highlights a philosophical explanation of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad which includes the following points –

- Place of *Maitreyi-Brahmana* in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.
- *Maitreyi's* wisdom in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.
- The dialectic approach in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.
- *Maitreyi's* Wisdom for the realization of true happiness.

MAITREYI-BRAHMANA IN BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

Early *Vedantic* interpretations of the *Maitreyi Brahmana*, a renowned part of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. The philosophical depth and meaning of *Maitreyi's* dialogues in the *Upanishad* are revealed through those interpretations.

The word '*Brihadaranyaka*' means 'great forest' and refers to the forest where ancient sages discussed the philosophical concepts written in this text. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* is also known as the *Brihadaranyaka Brahmana Upanishad*, as it contains both philosophical and ritualistic passages.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* is one of the oldest *Upanishads* and is considered to be one of the most important texts in the *Vedic* tradition. It is a part of the *Shatapatha Brahmana* of the *Yajurveda* and consists of six chapters.

The first and second chapters of the *Upanishad* are *Madhu kānd*. The third and fourth chapter of the *Upanishad* are *Yajnavalkya kānda*. The fifth and sixth chapter of the *Upanishad* are *Khila kānda*. The *Madhu kānda* explains rituals while the *Khila kānda* explains philosophy.

According to Shankaracharya, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* is the greatest not only in extent but also greatest in respect of its substance. It includes the following major discussions -

The *Brahat or Brahman* which is identical with *Atman*-

- The *Upadesa* or revelation of the true nature of the mystic experience of the *Brahman-Atman* identity
- *Upapatti* or logical explanations of the *Brahman-Atman* identity, through the dialectic method of argumentation known as *Jalpa* means arguing constructively as well as destructively for victory and *Vada* means arguing for truth.

MAITREYI - A CENTRAL FIGURE IN THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

Maitreyi is depicted in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as a wise and philosophical woman who talks deeply with her husband about the true nature of herself, the nature of reality, and the ultimate purpose of life. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, *Maitreyi* is portrayed as a wise and philosophical woman who engages in deep discussions with her husband about the true nature of the self, the nature of reality, and the ultimate purpose of life. She's shown to have a keen intellect and a strong desire to understand the fundamental truths of existence and true happiness.

Sannyasa which means the life of one renounce is a stage when one hoards nothing, does not crave for family, wealth, approbation and devotes to the service of entire mankind without holding a position and accepting remuneration. A commonly told story concerns the day that *Yajnavalkya* decided to abandon his worldly life and take the vows of an ascetic or *Sanyasi*. He called his two wives together to give his worldly possessions to them so he would be free to pursue the fourth stage of life, that of the *Sanyasi*.

Maitreyi is the wife of *Yajnavalkya*, a famous yogi and philosopher whose discussions and teachings are recorded in this text as major examples of *Vedic* dialogue and spiritual exploration. She is a well known figure in the *Vedic* texts, particularly in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. It is said that *Maitreyi* contributed to *Yajnavalkya's* knowledge, personality and spiritual evolution.

One of the key aspects of *Maitreyi's* natural philosophy is her emphasis on the interconnectedness of all living beings and the universe as a whole. She believed that everything in the natural world is interconnected and that humans have a responsibility to live in harmony with nature.

DIALECTIC METHOD IN THE BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD

The *Upanishadic* argument's main tool is the dialectic technique or dialogue method. The word 'dialect', here in its root sense, as the method of the dialogue. *Maitreyi* refer to the wife of *Yajnavalkya*, a renowned yogi and

philosopher, and their discussions and teachings are recorded in the text as key examples of *Vedic* dialogue and spiritual inquiry.

As a *Vedic* philosopher, *Maitreyi* is known for her keen intellect, deep wisdom, and profound understanding of the natural world. She is depicted as a devoted student and wife, always eager to learn from her husband and participate in philosophical debates. She is an encouragement to those who seek knowledge and the truth, and those who pursue spirituality still study and understand her talks with *Yajnavalkya*.

Early *Vedantic* interpretations of the *Maitreyi-Brahmana*, a renowned part of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, have been examined. These interpretations shed light on the philosophical depth and significance attributed to *Maitreyi's* dialogues within the *Upanishad*.

Maitreyi challenges *Yajnavalkya's* assertion that wealth and material possessions can bring lasting happiness and instead seeks to understand the nature of true fulfillment and liberation. *Maitreyi* asked *Yajnavalkya* to teach her about the nature of the self and the ultimate reality. *Yajnavalkya*, pleased with her question, proceeded to teach her about Brahman – the ultimate reality that pervades everything. The discussion that follows, also known as the *Maitreyi-Yajnavalkya* dialogue, explores the essence of *Advaita* philosophy, the nature of Atman and Brahman and their unity, and asserts that love is motivated by a person's soul.

Maitreyi said, 'Sir, if indeed this whole earth full of wealth be mine, shall I be immortal through that, or not?' 'No,' replied *Yajnavalkya*, 'your life will be just like that of people who have plenty of things, but there is no hope of immortality through wealth.'

Maitreyi objects to parts of *Yajnavalkya's* explanation and requests clarification. *Maitreyi* is portrayed as theologically minded, as she challenges *Yajnavalkya* in this dialogue and asks the right questions. Then *Maitreyi* said, 'What shall I do with that which will not make me immortal? Tell me, sir, of that alone which you know (to be the only means of immortality).'

Yajnavalkya said, 'You have been my beloved (even before), and you have magnified what is after my heart. If you wish, my dear, I will explain it to you. As I explain it, meditate (upon its meaning).'

Yajnavalkya, explained that the true self, or atman, is immortal and eternal, and that it cannot be found in material possessions. He further clarified that the true self is not separate from Brahman, and by realizing this oneness, one can attain true happiness.

MAITREYI'S WISDOM FOR THE REALIZATION OF TRUE HAPPINESS

Maitreyi listened with great attention and asked further questions to deepen her understanding. *Yajnavalkya* continued to enlighten her, and together they delved deeper into the mysteries of existence. The dialogue between *Yajnavalkya* and *Maitreyi* in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* highlights the importance of seeking knowledge and understanding the true nature of the self. It also emphasizes the role of a supportive and intellectually curious partnership in the pursuit of spiritual truth. Through their discussions, *Maitreyi* ultimately comes to understand the concept of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality and source of all existence.

The *Maitreyi-Yajnavalkya* dialogue includes a discussion of love and the essence of whom one loves, suggesting that love is a connection between the soul and the universal self. She realizes that true happiness and fulfillment can only be found by realizing one's true self as one with *Brahman*. She serves as an inspiration for seekers of truth and knowledge, and her discussions with *Yajnavalkya* continue to be studied and interpreted by spiritual seekers to this day. It is believed that in the end, the individual ego and the universal consciousness are one.

Maitreyi's inquiry leads *Yajnavalkya* to explain profound metaphysical concepts about the Self, consciousness, impermanence, and the epistemic *Maitreyi's* contribution in this sacred dialogue exemplifies her pursuit of knowledge that transcends material wealth and delves into the essence of existence, consciousness, and immortality. Her role as a brahmavadini and seeker of spiritual wisdom adds depth to the philosophical exploration presented in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

Maitreyi's perspective is characterized by her intellectual curiosity and spiritual quest for ultimate truth and self-realization. She is not content with material wealth and seeks immortality through a deeper understanding of existence and the Self. *Yajnavalkya's* teachings on renunciation, non-duality, and the imperishable nature of the Self are influenced by this interaction with *Maitreyi*.

Through their discussions, *Maitreyi* ultimately comes to understand the concept of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality and source of all existence. She realizes that true happiness and fulfillment can only be found by realizing one's true self as one with *Brahman*. By the realization of the Self, through hearing, reflection and meditation all this is known. Only thus is it realized. When these three means are combined, only then is the true realization of the unity of *Brahman* accomplished, not otherwise. The word 'all' emphasizes that the Self alone is dear, and nothing else.

True happiness, according to *Maitreyi's*, is found in the pursuit of spiritual growth, the realization of the interconnectedness between *Atman* and *Brahman*. This wisdom highlights the significance of inner transformation, compassion, and the pursuit of a life guided by spiritual principles as essential elements in the quest for genuine and enduring happiness.

Maitreyi's wisdom for the realization of true happiness includes:

- The significance of spiritual enlightenment and growth.
- Long-lasting happiness cannot be achieved by material possessions or worldly wealth.
- Interconnectedness of *Atman* and *Brahman*.
- Focusing on inner transformation and spiritual principles.
- Everything is interconnected and ultimately part of the same universal reality.

These teachings from *Maitreyi's* wisdom in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* provide a profound insight into the pursuit of true and enduring happiness through spiritual growth, inner transformation and the realization of interconnectedness with the universal reality.

Maitreyi challenges *Yajnavalkya's* assertion that wealth and material possessions can bring lasting happiness and instead seeks to understand the nature of true fulfillment and liberation. Through their discussions, *Maitreyi* ultimately comes to understand the concept of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality and source of all existence. She realizes that true happiness and fulfillment can only be found by realizing one's true self as one with *Brahman*.