



# Women and Knowledge of Brahman

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Prasnothara Vahini –  
Chapter 10

# Session Outline



What are the Requisites for Self Realization?



Women have learnt the method of Self Realization



Do Vedas prohibit women from Brahmacharya and Sanyasa?  
Stories of Gargi, Maitreyi and Sulabha Yogini



Women who learnt Brahmavidya in different stages



Jnana is attained even being a householder – Stories of  
Madalasa and Chudala



Pundits pay homage to Saraswathi and Conclusion

## Swami Says ...

- Sama means equanimity
- Dama means self control
- Women have equal right for self realisation

Requisites for  
self realization  
for all - men  
and women



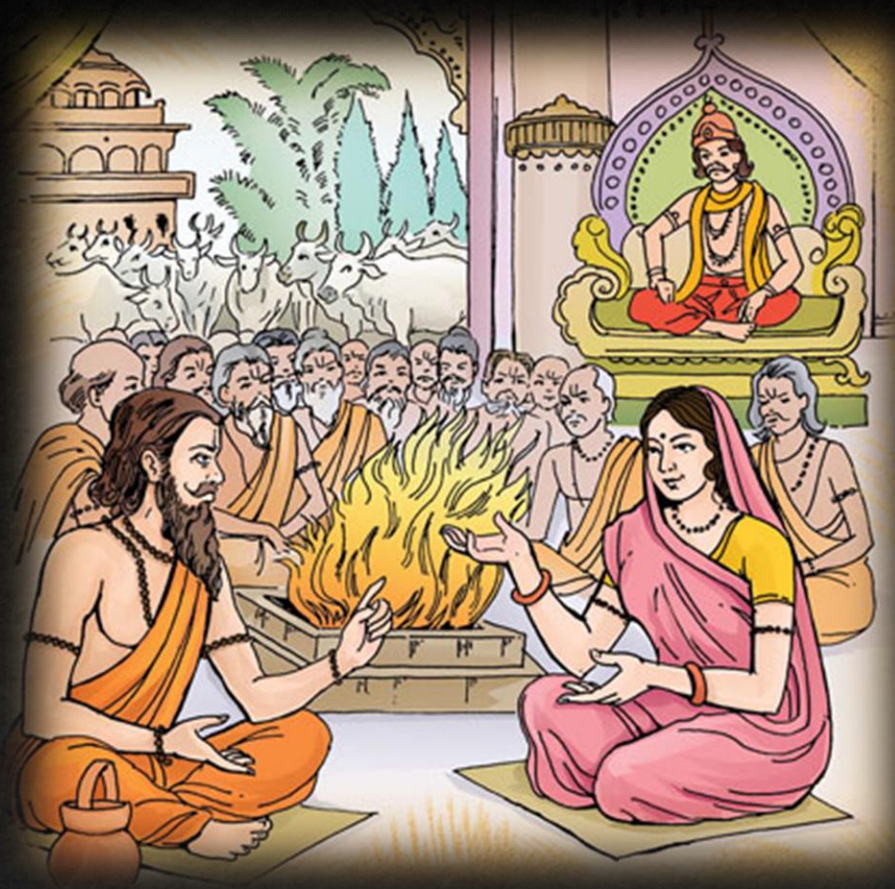
## Women have learnt the method of self realisation

- Lord Vishnu taught His consort, **Bhodevi**, the glory of the *Gita*.
- The Supreme Lord (*Parameswara*) taught **Parvathi** the *Brahman* principle (*Brahma-thathwa*) through the *Guru-gita*. That is what the *Guru-gita* means when it says, “Parvathi spoke.”
- **What do these words mean?**
- Besides, the Lord (*Iswara*) initiated Parvathi into *yogic* and mantra scriptures.
- *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* mentions that Yajnavalkya taught **Maitreyi** this very same knowledge of *Brahman*.

- Vedas- two sections-Karma kanda and Jnana Kanda. Karma kanda is for beginners, meant for those who are worldly. Jnana kanda is more advanced; is about Atma
- In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad there is a mention of two females (**Gargi** and **Maitreyi**) who had spiritual studentship ie; Brahmacharya and renunciation ie; Sanyasa
- In Mahabharata there was a woman by name **Sulabha Yogini** who was an intellectual renunciant

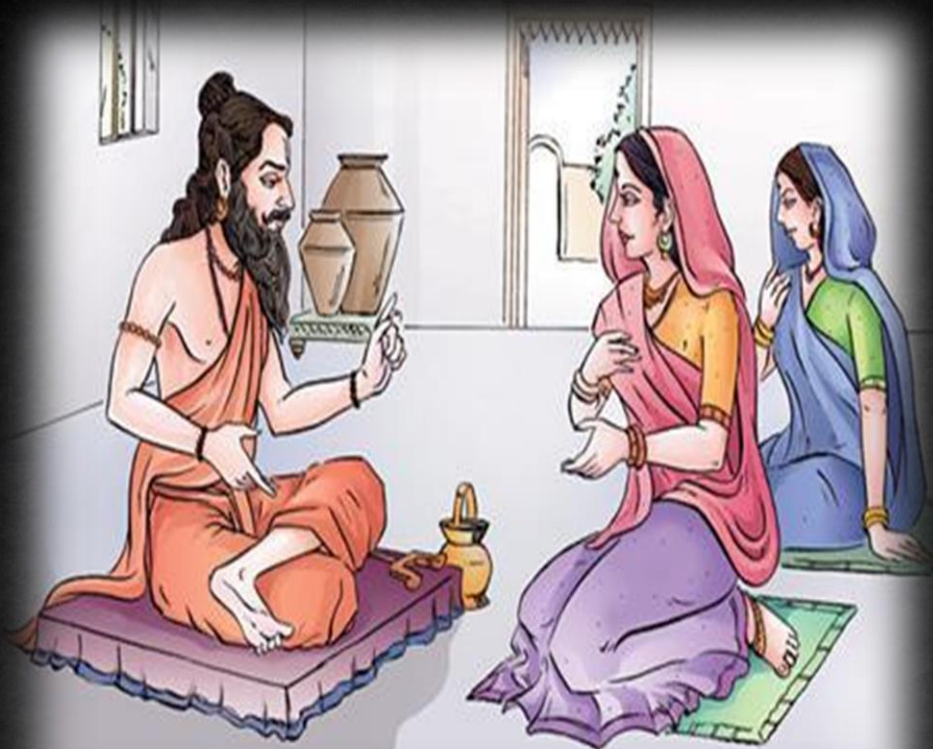
Do vedas prohibit women from Brahmacharya and Sanyasa?

# Gargi – Brahmavadini/ Philosopher



- Gargi Vachaknavi (born around 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was named after her father sage Vachaknu and was a renowned philosopher.
- She was granted the title of Brahmavadini (knowledge of Brahma Vidya)
- She was as knowledgeable in Vedas and Upanishads as men of the Vedic times
- She could very well contest the male-philosophers in debates
- Her name is prominent in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad as she participates in the **Brahmayajna**, a philosophic debate organized by King Janaka and she challenges the sage Yajnavalkya with dumbfound questions on the issue of atman (soul)
- **Short Narration - Brahmayajna**
- Gargi was honoured as one of the Navratnas in the court of King Janaka
- Her philosophical views are mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishads
- She has made significant contributions to the construction of the Rig Veda
- Yoga Yajnavalkya, a classical text on Yoga is a dialogue between Gargi and sage Yagnavalkya

## Maitreyi - Philosopher/ Brahmovadini



- Maitreyi 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.
- However, in the Hindu epic Mahabharata and the Gr̥hyasūtras, Maitreyi is described as an Advaita philosopher who never married.
- In ancient Sanskrit literature, she is known as a Brahmovadini
- Maitreyi appears in ancient Indian texts, such as in a dialogue where she explores the 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.

# Rishika Sulabha Yogini



- The account of **Sulabha**, appears in the Shanti Parva of Mahabharata.
- She was a learned scholar, Rishika, single woman and a renunciate.
- Mahabharata describes her as a woman belonging to the mendicant order, who practiced the duties of Yoga and wandered over the whole Earth.
- The Saulabha Shakha of Rigveda Samhita is attributed to her.
- She is also listed in the Kaushtiki Brahmana among the list of teachers, to whom salutations must be offered.



We will see,

- Studentship/Brahmacharya- **Gargi**
- Householder/Grahasta- **Madalasa, Chudaala**
- Vaanaprasta- **Maitreyi**
- Renunciant (Sanyasi)- **Sulabha Yogini**

Women who  
learnt  
Brahmavidya in  
different stages

We will see,

- Queen Madalasa
- Queen Chudaala
- The *Upanishads* declare that Katyayani, Sulabha, Sarangi, Viswavara and others were adepts in *Brahmic* wisdom (*Brahma-jnana*)

Jnana is  
attained even  
being a  
householder

# Story of Madalasa

- The account of Madalasa appears in Markandeya Purana.
- She was a Gandharva queen who was won over by King Ritadwaj after he slayed many Daityas, who were troubling her.
- She was a Brahmavadini, a Jivanmukta, who despite being liberated chose to lead a householder life.
- Her life account depicts the ideal of motherhood and how a mother can be a Guru, guide, and mentor to her children and lead them to the ultimate goal of Moksha.

# Queen Madalasa



- King Ritadwaja
- Four sons:
  1. Vikranth (one who is volure and courage)
  2. Subaahu (one who has beautiful hands and shoulders)
  3. Satrumardanan (one who destroys enemies)
  4. Alarkan (Mad Dog)

## Madalasa's lullaby song to pacify the crying baby

शुद्धोसि बुद्धोसि निरँजनोऽसि  
सँसारमाया परिवर्जितोऽसि  
सँसारस्वप्नँ त्यज मोहनिद्राँ  
मँदालसोल्लपमुवाच पुत्रम्।

Shuddhosi buddhosi niranjanosi

Samsara-maya parivarjitosi

Samsara svapnam tyaja moha nidraam

Madalasollapa-muvacha putram

Madalasa says to her crying son:

"You are pure, Enlightened, and spotless.

Leave the illusion of the world

and wake up from this deep slumber of delusion."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDd3iupKUyl>

# Story of Shikidwaja and Chudala



“I am the ruler of the universe. I am not the finite being. I delight in the Self. Hence I am radiant. This I am, I am not, in truth I am nor am I. I am the all, I am naught. Hence I am radiant. I seek not pleasure nor wealth nor poverty nor any other form of existence. I am happy with whatever is attained without effort. Hence I am radiant. I sport with attenuated states of attraction and repulsion with the insights gained in the scriptures. Hence I am radiant. Whatever I see with these eyes and experience with these senses, whatever I behold through my mind – I see nothing but the one Truth which is seen clearly by me within myself.”

- Queen Chudala to King Shikidwaja on attaining enlightenment, Yoga Vasistha 6.1.79

# Pundits pay homage to Goddess Saraswathi



- Women have all rights to earn knowledge of Brahman.
- They are too weak to maintain certain standards of life and disciplines. They have some natural handicaps; that is the reason for these limitations.
- This does not mean any fundamental inferiority. Why, even pundits and people learned in the scriptures (sastras) acquire their spiritual wisdom (jnana) through the reverential homage they pay to the feminine deity Saraswathi.
- The patron deities of education (vidya), wealth, and spiritual wisdom are all feminine —Saraswathi, Lakshmi, and Parvathi. Even in customary correspondence, when women are addressed, they are referred to as, “To ..., who is equal to Lakshmi”, etc.
- We always speak of mother-father, Gauri-Shankara, Lakshmi-Narayana, Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna, etc. The feminine name comes first, then the masculine. From this itself, we can gather how much reverence is paid to women here.

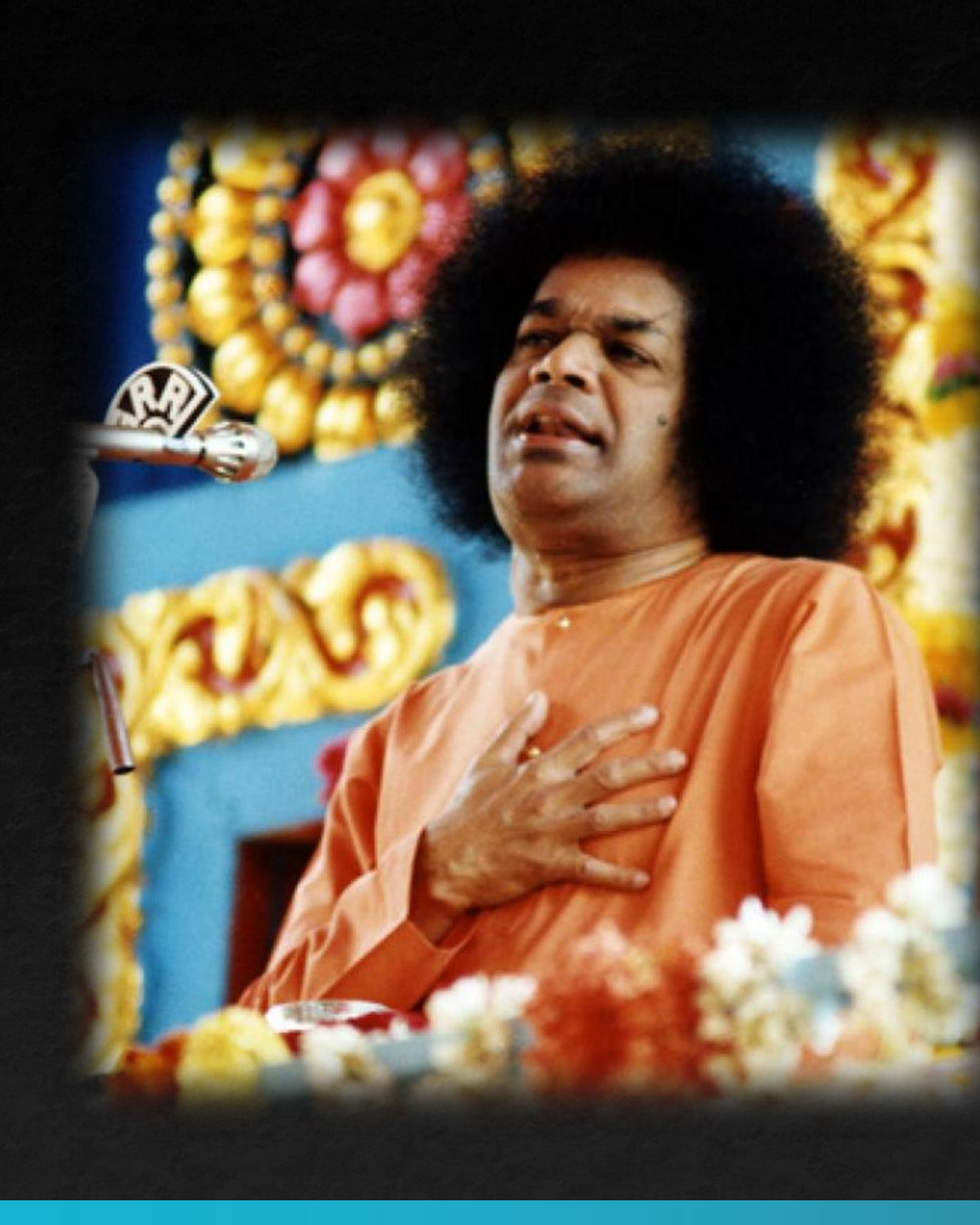


## Atma is eternaly conscious, pure, self-effulgent

The distinction between man and woman —  
condemn it as false knowledge - or value it as Atmic  
knowledge?

- The Atma (the divine Self) has no such  
distinction; it is eternally conscious, pure, self-  
effulgent.
- It is a distinction based on the body mask the  
limitation.
- The Atma is neither masculine, feminine, nor  
neuter; it is the form that limits and deludes and  
wears these names.





## Develop Purity of Heart

Who can realise the principle of the Self?

Only those with purity of heart can realise it.

[https://saispeaks.sathyasai.org/sites/default/files/pages/discourses/audio/1996\\_09\\_02.mp3](https://saispeaks.sathyasai.org/sites/default/files/pages/discourses/audio/1996_09_02.mp3)

One who aspires to realise the principle of the Self and teach the same to others should first of all develop purity of heart. One who lacks purity of heart is not eligible to realise the Self and teach the same to others.

Poisonous snakes and scorpions find their way into a room devoid of light. They do not enter a room that is well lit. Likewise, evil qualities like desire, anger, delusion, greed, pride, and jealousy cannot enter a heart that shines with pure love. They enter only the heart that is devoid of sacred love. It is therefore necessary to develop a pure and sacred heart that is full of love and compassion.

Fill your heart with love for God!!

**DISCUSSION TIME!!!**

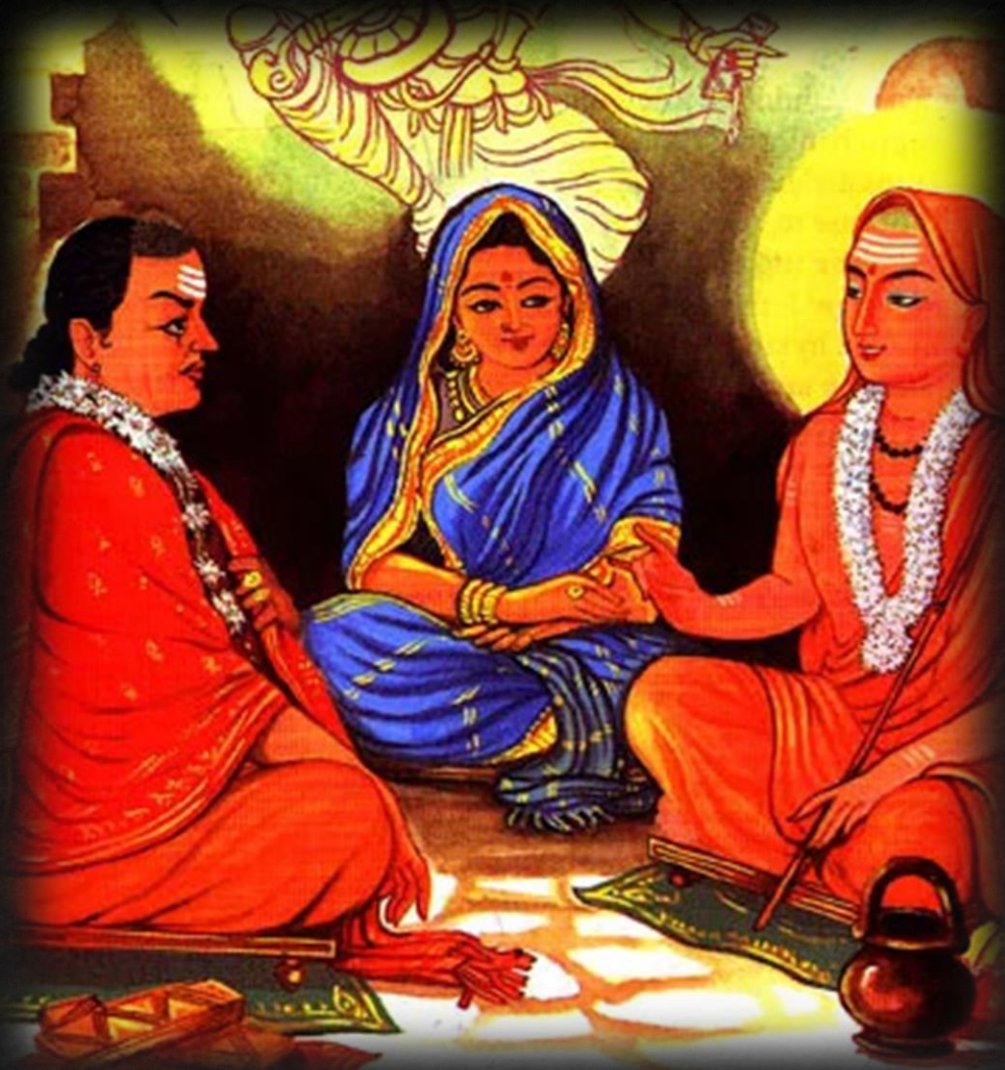


## Bhairavi Brahmani & Shri Sharada Devi

- **Bhairavi Brahmani**, spiritual guide to Sri Ramakrishna. The Brahmani put him through all the exercises mentioned in the sixty-four principal Tantra books.
- **Sri Sarada Devi** wife and spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, a nineteenth-century Hindu mystic and saint.



## Ubhayabharathi – Great Scholar



- Wife of Mandana Misra
- Very popular for her fair judgment in the Debate between Adi Shankara and her husband Mandana Misra



# Ideal Mothers, full of Virtues

- Aryamba (Mother of Adi Shankara)
- Suniti (Mother of Dhruva)
- Sumitra (Mother of Lakshmana)
- Eashwaramma (Mother of Sathya Sai)