# *THE MYTH/MYTHICAL WOMAN. MAITREYI*

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***Abstract:*** *Mircea Eliade's literature opens a new direction in the Romanian prose, leading to the synchronizing of the Romanian literature with the western genre. The article entitled "The myth/mythical woman. Maitreyi" throws light upon an unusual hypothesis of the feminine character, which was created after the model, as it is well known, of a young Indian woman who is, in reality, a true character. Something which must be mentioned, though, is the fact that the novel manages to include, in an authentic and sincere manner, a love story which can be compared, as the author himself admits, to that between Dante and Beatrice. The change of the character into a myth is based on Eliade's hero and heroine, Allan and Maitreyi, who, by use of love, succeed in reaching the sacred world, leaving behind the cultural differences and the visual aspects that concern life, the feeling of love becoming the most profound, capable of breaking the traditional borders. What really reflects the myth woman is the way in which the heroine of the novel remains into the affective memory of the western young man who manages to change his thinking regarding the culture and the western feminity. Moreover, the sequel of events, the feelings of the two characters,undoubtedly lead them to the acceptance of an end that both of them are aware of, unacceptable to the others, but this end transcends to sacred, as the social and historical spaces become insignificant.*

**Keywords**: *Maitreyi, eros, soteriology*

The first edition in volume of the novel "Maitrey" appeared at the National Culture Publishing House, Bucharest, 1933. The novel was written between December 26th and February 15th and has generates from a real episode from Mircea Eliade's biography ("Memories", chapter X). As the author mentions, the book is written for the "Techirghiol Prize - Eforia": "In the winter of 1933, when, in my attic in Melodia Street, I was writing the novel I wanted to present for the Techirghiol-Eforia Award, I reread, for the first and last time << The Journal >> of those months. I even used some pages, integrating them directly into the novel. With all the pathos of the narrative, I tried to keep myself as close as possible to reality. But, of course, this "reality" had become mythological right from the moment I had lived it. I had once again lived a long, beatific and terrifying dream of a summer night. But this time I did not live it alone." (Eliade, 1991, 202)

The novel receives this prize under the patronage of the National Culture Publishing House, thus, from fifty manuscripts competing under the pseudonym, the jury made up of G. Călinescu, Perpessicius, Cezar Petrescu, Mihai Ralea and Șerban Cioculescu chooses for the prizes on March, 14th 1933, the novel "Maitreyi". Al. Rosetti, the publishing director, then published three thousand copies, the book having a great success for the readers, followed quickly with the second and third editions in 1933 and 1934. The novel became Mircea Eliade's most famous and most translated book in various languages, which

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was the subject of a screenwright in France with a prestigious international distribution in 1988: Hugh Grant (Allan), Supriya Pathack (Maitreyi), Shabana Azmi (Mrs. Sen), etc. (Pop Ion - coord., 2007, 545)

According to the critic Ion Pop, "Maitreyi" is also an almost unique case in the world literary history, because, as Mircea Handoca adds, a small number of works of the universal literature deal with the same events filtered by the vision of two writers who were simultaneously their protagonists.

More than four decades after the release of the Maitrey novel, true Maitreyi Devi, the daughter of the Indian philosopher Surendranath Dasgupta and model of Mircea Eliade's work, launches her own Romanian version of the works of Bengali - "Na hanya te", New Delhi, Sahitya Academi , 1974 -, English - "It does not die", Calcutta, 1976 -, German and Romanian - "Love does not die" Romanian version by Ştefan Dimitriu and Theodor Handoca, 2nd edition, Bucharest and Amaltea Publishing House, 1999.

The novel is based on a heroine who is, in fact, a real character, but we must not overlook the fictional writing of the novel: "the book manages to burn biographies and convert with the help of authenticity, sincerity, and simplicity the clichés of this genre in as many model sequences which come to conclude a true archetypal and yet highly specific scenario."(Ibidem) But, it is the eros that dominates the novel. This theme of love is fiercely rejected by Eliade, as it has been remembered in his essays, and, paradoxically, it is the theme that governs the whole action of the novel. The narrative is not one of the most complex, but manages to capture the evolution of the heroine related to a Western world with claims to be civilized: being in India, the engineer Allan is invited by his boss, Narendra Sen, in his house, a place where he meets his daughterm Maitrey: "you know, Allan, that I decided to invite you to live with me, 'said the engineer."(Ibidem) Although the Sen family want to adopt him - a fact that young Allan considers a conspiracy with a marital purpose, he ignores the attention paid by the family and falls in love with Maitreyi. Although, initially, he wants to respect the father's desire - the conflict between duty and love - Maitreyi will enter the game of love hidden from the rest of the Sen family.

If we refer to the social aspects of this feeling, love, Julius Evola believes, "can cross the boundaries of the caste and of the tradition, it can perhaps cause conflict among people who belong to the same blood and have the same ideas, it can break children-parents relationships, cancel the bonds created by the most sacred institutions".(Ibidem)

Maitreyi appears to the young engineer Allan in two hypostases. At first, the look of the girl does not specifically get his attention, which he finds very ugly: "I remember very vaguely that, seeing her once in the car, waiting in front of 'Oxford Book Stationary' -while I and her father, the engineer, were choosing books for the Christmas holidays - I had a strange thrill, followed by a very surprising contempt. She seemed ugly to me - her eyes too big and too black, her strong Bengali-like virgin breasts, like a riping fruit. When I was introduced to her and she raised her hands to her forehead to salute, I suddenly saw her whole naked arm and I was hit by the skin color: matte, brown, of a brown I had never seen before, I would say of clay and wax"(Eliade, 1994, 1). It is noteworthy at this first meeting how superficially the Western man looks with vanity on the facial features that will be imprinted in involuntary memory and which will form the basis of the second hypostasis shown to the engineer Allan. One thing worth mentioning is the greeting, which, clumsily



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acted by the guest, will scare the young Bengali woman - the ritual of opening to the myth of Maitreyi.

When he meets Maitreyi for the second time, on visiting Sen, the hero has the intuition of beauty as a mystery and metamorphosis: "Maitreyi seemed to me then, much more beautiful wearing a pale tea-coloured sari, with white slippers sewn in silver, with a shawl like yellow cherries and her too loose curls, her eyes too big, her lips too red which created a less human life in this wrapped and yet transparent body that lived, it would have been said, by miracle, not by biology. I was looking at her with some curiosity, for I could not understand what mystery this creature hides in her soft, silky moves, in the shy, preliminary panicking smile, and especially in her ever changing voice, a voice that seemed to be then discovering certain sounds. She spoke English blandly and correctly, by the book, but whenever she began to speak, both I and Lucien could not stop looking at her: she seemed to have called her words. "(Ibidem)

The initial roles are reversed as they represent the understanding of the dual character of life, and this metamorphosis is triggered by the ambiguous attitude of the heroes, the hesitation between lucidity and romantic passion, between innocence and guilt, between spiritual gifts and carnal gifts. The girl's body gives a scent of a myth through which the sacred rituals apparently transfigure themselves into profane, so "the love for Maitreyi enables Allan to understand the paradoxical way of being in the world of the Indians, grounded on the values of the natural culture, which is the cosmos as a psychophysical unity with people and gods living together. The hero understands that in this cosmological model, the precise boundaries between man and nature disappear, and that his life is part of the vast ritual of cosmic destruction that reveals the illusory character of existence. (Fînaru, 2006, 69)

So, the connection between them is gradually being built. The illusion of the play that Allan proposes to Maitreyi when writing the catalogue of books in the library and learning French translating a text becomes the basis of reality: "I began to explain to her the pronouns and the pronunciation, but Maitreyi interrupted me. - How do you say, "I am a young girl"? I told her how and she kept repeating it happily. - Je suis une jeune fille, je suis une jeune fille! She could pronounce it with amazing accuracy. But my lesson was in vain, because she always interrupted me to translate in French a sum of sentences and words of no use. "You speak something, you translate and I repeat, she found the best method." (Eliade, 1994, 37)

Allan falls in love with Maitreyi, and Maitreyi, in turn, loves Allan. The eros's revelation appears to the hero after entering the girl's sacred space: "Today our friendship starts, doesn't it? Maitreyi asked very sweetly, taking my empty cup. - Why today? We've been friends since we started talking together seriously. She sat down again on the mat and told me that if I were good friends, she would have told me about her sadness." (Ibidem, 46-47)

From this moment on, the feeling of love is consumed in parallel with the feeling of sin, the desire to correct the error by re-entering the order prescribed by the law (dharma) and the presumption of a doomed outcome. Maitreyi is a "brahma," a girl who belongs to a cast for whom marriage to a stranger is unthinkable. (Culianu, 2004, 40)



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What is the meaning of the heroine's name? "The Dictionary of General Mythology," whose author is Victor Kernbach, explains: "Maitreyi: In Vedic mythology, especially in the Upanișad cycle, Maitreyi is the second wife and apprentice of the wise Yājñavalkya (the traditional author of the Yājritnavalkyasmriti legal code) becoming the symbol of the category of wise women and also of the traditional Indian conception of the role of woman in our existence and the effort of knowledge of the universe. Prepared for the brahmanic step of retreat into the forest and having two wives: Katyayani (endowed only with the natural science of women - striprajna) and Maitreyi (capable of discussing the Brahman-Brahmanadini) [...] Maitreyi is primarily a mythosophical allegory, the type of woman thirsty for cosmic knowledge." (Kernbach, 2004, 339) So Maitreyi is the only woman who is not excluded from the Brahman initiation and, implicitly, from philosophical issues.

For an easier understanding, "Brahma IV" from "Upanișade" is relevant: "Maitreyi - Yājñavalkya said - soon I will leave this state. Come to make a division between you and Katyansani! Maitreiy said, "Your sanctity, if my land were full of wealth, could I be immortal through this? >> << - No Yājñavalkya answered - your life would be similar to that of the rich people. But hope of immortality through wealth does not exist. >> Maitreyi said, "What should I do with something that will not make me be immortal? What you know, tell me, too! >> Yājñavalkya replied: "Oh! My dear, I like it when you talk. Come and sit. I'll explain everything to you. But truly mind my explanations!"

He said: "Indeed, you do not love your husband for your husband, but for the self. Indeed, you do not love your wife for your wife, but for the self (ātman). Indeed, you do not love your children for your children, but for the self. Indeed, you do not love wealth for the wealth, but for the self. Indeed, you do not love holiness (brahman) for your holiness, but for the self. Indeed, you do not love the reign for the reign, but for the self. Indeed, you do not love the worlds for the worlds, but for the self. Indeed, you do not love the gods for the gods, but for the self. Indeed, you do not love the beings for the beings, but for the self. Indeed, you do not love Everything for Everything, but for the self. Indeed, the Self must be watched, listened and considered,Maitreyi. Indeed, Everything is known through the sight, obedience, thought, and knowledge of the Self. Holiness has set aside the one who finds holiness outside the self. He reigned out the one who reigned beyond the self. The lights set aside the one who finds the lights outside the self. The gods set aside the one who finds gods outside the self. The beings set aside the one who finds beings outside the self. Everything set aside the one who finds Everything outside the self.

Holiness, reign, worlds, gods, beings and everything - these are the self. Just as no one is able to catch the sounds of a shell in which it blows, but by grabbing the clam or the blower in the shell, the sound is caught. Just as no one is able to catch the sounds of a lute singing, but by catching the lute or the lute singer, the sound is caught. Just as one of a fire in which wet damsels are spreading smoke in all parts, so the breathing of these great beings (bhūta) came out of Rg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda, Atharva-Veda, stories, legends, sciences, Upanishads, verses, aphorisms (sūtra), explanations and comments.

All this came out of her breath. As the ocean is the intersection of all waters, the skin is the intersection of all the touches, the nostrils are the diffusion of all the odors, the tongue is the intersection of all forms, the tongue is the intersection of all the sounds, the



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thoufgt (manas) is the intersection of all the representations (sankalpa), the hands are the transfiguration of all deeds (karman), the lower part is the crossing of all pleasures, [...] the feet are the crossing of all the ways, and the voice (v) is the interdependence of all Vedas. Just as a salt ball would melt into the water, and no one would have the way to get it out, but whatever it takes, the water is still salty, and this infinite and shapeless being is pure knowledge. Bearing on these elements, they are dying together. After death there is no conscience, so I say. >> Thus Yājñavalkya spoke. Maitreyi said, "You have astonished me, your sanctity, saying that after death there is no conscience." He replied, "I do not say, you see well, nothing amazing. What follows is enough to understand: When there seems to be duality, then one smells the other, one sees the other, one speaks to the other, one thinks of the other, one knows the other. But when everything has become one with Himself, then with what and who to smell, with whom and who to see, with whom and who to hear, with whom and whom to speak to, with whom and to whom to think , with whom and who to know? With what to know the one he knows everything about? How do you know the one who knows? >>"(Bercea, 1992, 51-52) Maitrey's love for Allan cannot be known beyond the Self, which becomes an erotic entity from which the very essence of their world originates.

Another aspect related to the evolution of the characters' love, quoting Eugen Ionescu in his famous double, positive / negative chronicle from "No", Ion Pop remarks that this story is structured on the essential scheme of the tragedy."(Pop Ion - coord., 2007, 545), and the end, when love is discovered in India of the castes it becomes merciless. Allan is banished and denied any contact with Maitreyi, he is struggling to get rid of the heroine's memory by ascetic testing of the Himalayas, either through erotic attempts or by resuming everyday activities. But all these solutions are in vain because the face image follows him acronicly.

The protagonist of the homonymous novel becomes a victim of the prejudices of the Indian society, she is bound to a conventional marriage, but she forsakes everything that life might have given her and tries to become a pariah only to be able to find Allan, which is a hope, otherwise, in vain.

The characters of the novel belong to two different worlds: Allan is the exponent of an Anglo-Indian world, "on the first level, the "civilizing white man"prefigures the synthesis between the colonial dandy and the" hooligan "of the interwar period: frivolous, adventurer and attracted to exoticism, individualistic, cerebral and lucid, he is a Gidian experimenter, embarrassed by innocence, detached and blazed, who, despite his resistance, is ultimately defeated by passion from a living < <unreal> and by participating in it to the grace of the "real" plenary existence saturated with the Being and rich in meaning."(Pop Ion - coord., 2007, 545)

Ion Lotreanu in "Introduction to the work of Mircea Eliade" states that "Allan is a Des Grieux strayed in the Asian landscape, turmoiled by the unpredictable dimensions of human feelings. The novelist's solution is, artistically, extremely ingenious. Love could not have taken place naturally. Given the existence of an opposition of mentality, the partners have lost each other in their own way. But the prejudices bring to light another great truth: love has one and the same essence no matter which meridian is manifest. Eliade's 1933



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novel is a poem of love, where the main heroes function as metaphors" (Lotreanu, 1980, 150)

At the other extreme there is Maitreyi who becomes the universal woman's archetype that gradually becomes apparent to the young man.

The conflict of the novel is anticipated from the beginning. Thus, Allan is received in the engineer's home, the Indian whose life is ruled by totally different rules from those of the European newcomer in India. The only one who will suffer dramatically is Maitreiy: she is the victim of her father, but also of the young European man who judges the girl and her family's friendship evidence as a matrimonial plot.

Through this attitude, the heroine becomes "a legendary, oriental fairy tale", but at the same time, a virgin brahman. It is equally early and extremely complex, refined and "barbarian". (Pop Ion - coord., 2007, 545), cruel and gentle, blending the Oriental myth with the Western novelty. She is innocent, playful and expert, carnal and spiritual, of overwhelming materiality in her transperency, natural and bookish, fearful and fearless, moral and amoral, traditional and modern, becoming the woman and the Indian.

Through love, Maitreyi tells Allan that she is more than a reclused brahman. She becomes at the same time a virgin and a lover as Magna Mater. The heroine offers different simultaneous hypostases: a fiancé and a wife, daughter and mother, and her game reveals the game between appearance and reality.

India spreads to the young European, a giant country out of time through the moods and behavior of Maitrey, which represents the overwhelming and sensual incarnation of Bengal, the land of great goddesses. "The black and contradictory beauty of the Kali goddess, descended from the universe of forms of Ajanta and Ellorei, a mistress with divine apses, but she is no longer a Indian virgin, but an original soul with a strange will, like Mona Lisa a rest of eternal mystery.(Ibidem)

Maitreyi becomes the feminine character of a novel of knowledge, of the revelation of the sacred, because "through the total experience of love, the heroine reveals to Allan that this universe of fusion between man and cosmos, spirit and matter, myth and reality presupposes accepting illusion as the basis of existence in continuous regeneration. From the complete love, the hero learns that "nothing lasts in the soul, that the most verified trust can be canceled by one gesture, that the most sincere passions never prove anything, that sincerity can also be repeated with another, with others, that, at last, everything is forgotten or can be forgotten >>." (Fînaru, 2006, 71)

One of the springs of the central conflict of the novel is the misunderstanding. The misunderstanding becomes, in fact, the axis on which the characters are built. Because Maitreyi is linked to the Indian world, she becomes a true "axis mundi" of the two worlds, so Allan does not understand the heroine because of the differences between their worlds. The European man has only an ethnographic, abstract and superficial knowledge of India, and this fact determines the lack of depth in understanding the Oriental female enigma. The fact that he looks and listens almost mechanically to Chabu's love for the tree (the element he marks in his thoughts as a subject of study) or the lack of understanding of love for Tagore's guru demonstrates the futile approach of some sarcastically charged acts of sacredness. It is not by chance that the one who dominates this world is the poet Thakkur, whose name refers to the supreme solar god of the munda population in Bengal.



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Another event, which the two heroes live, meant to reveal to Allan the specific view of the world, is the episode of touching both feet and the kiss: "I find it hard to describe the emotion. A calm and at the same time violent happiness, in front of which the soul did not resist, a beatitude of senses that surpassed sensuality, as if it had participated in a heavenly happiness, a state of grace.. "(Eliade, 1994, 68)

The theme of suprasexuality that characterizes Indian love is the one that the Romanian writer insists, the myth of human creation is based on the Upanishads: "At first, it was only the ātman, with the appearance of Man (Pursa). Studying around, he saw nothing but the Self. "It is me" he said at first. That's what I called << I >>. That is why, in our time, the called one says at first: "I am", then the other name he has. [...] He was afraid. That's why the loner is afraid. He wondered, "If there is nothing but me, why am I afraid?" That his fear was scattered. Of whom should he be afraid? Indeed, fear is a second. He did not even enjoy it. That's why the loner does not enjoy. She wanted a second one. He was like a woman and a tightly embraced man. He split himself into two. As the husband and wife came up". (Bercea, 1992, 37) So man has the feeling that he participates in the Great All. In "The Banquet" Platon notices that passion can have negative effects like "willful slavery" or "servitude to which no true slave would agree."

Maitreyi is the one that generates in the novel an eros that behaves as a "daimon, as a primordial, archetypal, supra-national, supracivilizational and supra-native force, uniting the individuals through all the differences (cultural, hermeneutic, social, biopsychological), a true soteriological technique, an initiating solution to the transcendence of the human condition rooted in Time, Space and Limit to a real existence, a synonym for Eliade, to the sacred experience." (Pop Ion - coord., 2007, 546)

Maitreyi finally becomes Allan's seduction by tempting him, and her spell is rooted in the young man's existence, projecting him in an Indian dream. The young Indian girl cannot offer the hero the marriage integration into a historical India, but she gives him unique moments of apogee of one's own being and ultimate sacred sharing of the real wealth of being. (Ibidem) But this absolute is ephemeral because Maitreyi will be crushed by the power of India's eternal customs.

In "Mystical Erotica in Bengal", Mircea Eliade argues that "India is the country where sacredness and holiness intersect or exclude with more violence than anywhere." (Eliade, 1994, 109) The eros becomes here a way of salvation, a soteriology similar to medieval tantric Buddhism, the only Nirvana's absolute touch. The role of the hero is to unite his own soul with the universal soul, the Romanian writer characterizing this conception as free, courageous and virile. For this reason there is a clear distinction between the composition of the Oriental female character and the feminine characters of the European world.

The final stage of the love of the two is marked by the engagement ritual. This "wedding" culminates with the moment when Maitreyi addresses the elements of nature, in an oriental erotic poem with meanings of cosmic religiosity that transcends the sacred, becoming a hymn of metamorphosis of life through love, placing it in the creativity and fertility of all cosmic levels of Magna Mater: "This solemn beginning irritates me a little. I could not escape lucidity. (And I loved her, God, as much as I loved her!) It seemed to me that it would be a scene from the novels, from the ballads of that Indian Middle Ages, with



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legendary and demented love. I was followed by the fear and superstition of an entire literature, which, if I had not read, I would have seen it, evolving beside me, in adolescence and in the first years of youth. It was my extinction, as any civilized (I, who thought I could dispense with civilization, I could uproot it from me), every solemn gesture, every responsible word, every promise. Maitreyi continues, however, with a simplicity that began to conquer me. She was talking to the water, talking to heaven with stars, the forest, the earth. She pushed her fists well in the grass, with the ring on, and promised: "I swear to you, Earth, that I'm going to be Allan's and nobody else's. I will grow from him like grass in you. And as you wait for the rain, I will wait for him to come, and as your rays are, so will his body be for me. I swear to you that our union will bring forth, as it is my will to love him, and all evil, if it be, shall not fall upon it, but afflict me, for I have chosen it. You hear me, mother earth, you do not lie to me, my mother. If you feel close to me, as I feel now, both with my hand and with the ring, empower me to love him forever, a joy unknown to him to bring, life of fruit and play to give him. Let our life be like the joy of the herbs that grow from you. Let's be our hug as the first day of the monsoon. Rain is our kiss. And as you never tire, my mother, so do not tire my heart in the love for Allan, who God brought him away, and you, my mother, brought him close to me. I was listening to her more and more fascinated until I could not understand her words. She spoke a baby Bengali, simplified, almost digitized. I heard the sounds, I guessed one word at the end, but I missed the meaning of this enchantment. When she was silent, as if I was afraid to touch her, she seemed to me to be charming, inaccessible. She spoke first (I had a hand on my knees and my other hand held down on my knees, as if I had sworn with a gesture of magic). - Now no one separates us, Allan. Now I am yours, completely yours ... "(Eliade, 1994, 98-99)

Referring to the symbol of this engagement, the ring, as Simion Mioc defines it in Anamorphosis and Poetics, symbolizes the eternity: "In << Maitreyi >>, the engagement ring given by the girl is in the form of a lizard, which sends beyond the crowd of temporal significance, to the uroboric archetype, the serpent, which, by biting its own queue, suppresses the finitude and becomes a symbol of eternity. " (Mioc, 1988, 156)

The end of the events captures Maitreyi in the fullness of the sacrifice, and the end of the novel finds the young European man in his attempt to get in touch with the claustrous fiancée, seeking refuge in Himalayas where he meets Lenia Isaac, the symbol of reintegration into the everyday world. The hero understands the character of the young Bengali woman too late: "If I had read the letters of Khokha ... She might have planned something. I am very confused, now, very confused. And I still want to write here everything, everything... And if it was just a trick of my love? Why should I believe? How do I know? I'd like to look at Maitrey's eyes." (Eliade, 2994, 163)

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