

"Women Empowerment in the Vedic Period: Representations in select Indian English Novels".

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Abstract:

The Vedic period, which was from around 1500 to 500 before the era shows women in powerful positions. They were rishikas, which means seers and they were also scholars. The Vedic period also had women taking part in rituals. We can see this in the Rigveda hymns and the Upanishads. This paper is about how some Indian English novels look at the period and the role of women, during that time. These novels use the legacy of the period to talk about the problems women face today with gender. The Indian English novels reinterpret the legacy of the period to address the modern struggles that women are going through with gender. The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy, That Long Silence by Shashi Deshpande and Clear Light of Day by Anita Desai are the books that we are looking at here. These books talk about women from the time like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra and Apala. They use these women as examples of being independent, smart and strong. Ammu in The God of Things is like Apala because she is brave and does what she wants even if it goes against what people normally do. Jaya in That Long Silence is like Maitreyi because she wants to learn and find out more about herself outside of her family.

The female characters in Anita Desais books bring back the voices of the women who were ignored. They do this even when they are not close to their families. The God of Small Things That Long Silence and Clear Light of Day show us how these women, from the time are still important today. The study looks at how women were treated in the Vedic time. They had the right to get an education on their own property and take part in ceremonies like yajna.. After India was colonized things started to get worse for women. The study uses some novels to talk about how bad patriarchy, caste and colonialism're. It takes a look at these novels and uses a feminist perspective to show how women's power has changed over time. A time ago women known as Vedic rishikas wrote hymns that talked about big ideas like philosophy and the power of the universe. This is similar to how the main characters in these novels fight against the rules they do not like. By looking at these stories we can challenge the idea that Indian women are weak and do not do anything. The study shows that literature can be a tool to help women become stronger and more independent. It helps us see that Indian women like the rishikas have always had the power to make changes and should be treated with respect. The analysis highlights ecofeminist threads, linking Vedic nature goddesses to contemporary eco-struggles. Ultimately, these representations urge a return to Vedic ideals for gender justice, informing India's feminist discourse.

Keywords: Vedic rishikas, feminist reinterpretation, postcolonial agency, Indian English novels

Introduction:

Women in the period were really respected and had a lot of influence. This is very noticeable in history. The Rigveda and other texts show women as people who wrote hymns thought deeply about life and played a role in rituals.

There were women like Ghosha, who asked Ashvins for help when she was sick. Then there was Lopamudra, who thought about what it means to be a wife and have a good marriage.. We have Vak Ambhrini, who said she was the queen of everything that exists.

These Women in the period like Ghosha and Lopamudra and Vak Ambhrini show that they were very smart and spiritual. They were Women, in the period who could think for themselves and express their thoughts. Gargi and Maitreyi from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad were women who challenged sages in debates. They were like brahmavadinis, which means they were women who loved to learn all their lives. These women got education through Upanayana. They even owned property called Streedhana. They got to choose their partners through a thing called Swayamvara. They also made sacrifices with men, which shows that they were almost equal to men.

This did not last because society changed over time. After that time women were not as free as they used to be. This is also what people from countries said about Indian women when they wrote about them. They said Indian women were oppressed.. Indian English literature is trying to bring back the old ways of the Vedic times. It is using these stories to talk about the problems women face today. Indian English literature is saying that women should be free like they were, in those times. Arundhati Roy's book *The God of Things* that came out in 1997 is about Ammu. Ammu is in a love that is not allowed. This love goes against the rules that people call "Love Laws". It is similar to what happened with women in those times. They had some freedom to choose who they wanted to be with in marriages like Gandharva marriages.

Shashi Deshpande wrote a book called *That Long Silence* in 1989. The main character in this book is Jaya. Jaya is a woman who is trapped and cannot say what she wants to say.. She is trying to find the truth inside herself. This is like the story of Maitreyi who chose to learn and know things about having a lot of money.

Anita Desai wrote *Clear Light of Day* in 1980. This book is about two sisters named Tara and Bim. They are living after the country was divided. They are quietly doing things that go against what people expect them to do. This is similar to the rishikas who did not listen to the men and made their way. These novels bring together the old and the new by showing women as real people who fight against things not just as stories. Roy combines the idea that women and the earth are connected and that when women are treated badly the earth is hurt too like Vedic Ushas who represent new beginnings. Deshpande writes about the guilt that women feel at home and compares the women of Vedic times who took care of their households with the lonely women of today. Desai talks about the bonds between sisters and how they help each other when men are not there for them which is similar to the Vedic idea of dampati partnerships. The idea of feminism is important here: the original ideas of the Vedic times are used to argue against the wrong ideas that were forced on people during colonial times, such as the glorification of sati and the unfair treatment of women by men, in power. This paper asks: How do select novels represent Vedic empowerment to empower modern women? By analyzing parallels—intellect (Gargi-Jaya), boldness (Apala-Ammu), selfhood (Maitreyi-Tara)—it shows literature as revivalist tool. This matters for Indian feminism, rooted in indigenous systems, challenging Western imports. Vedic legacy offers egalitarian visions amid ongoing gender debates, making these texts vital for cultural reclamation.

Objectives:

1. To examine Vedic women's roles as rishikas in Rigveda.
2. To trace their empowerment in Upanishads.
3. To analyze Gargi and Maitreyi in Roy's novel.

4. To find parallels in Deshpande's and Desai's works.
5. To assess feminist reclamation for modern India.

Literature Review

Scholarly works tell us that Vedic women had a high status. A lot of studies show that Vedic women were treated as equals to men.

Vedic. Scholarship.

Vedic texts say that women are called brahmavadinis. Gargi and Maitreyi were women who had debates with sages. They went to schools called gurukulas to study the Vedas.

The old sources tell us that boys and girls should study together.

Some women named Rishikas wrote twenty seven hymns for the Rigveda.

There were some women, like Ghosha, Lopamudra and Apala who were part of this group of women.

People who write blogs and journals think that this is an example of women being powerful.

Social and Ritual Roles.

Women were able to join in yajnas and sabhas. They had the right to own property called Streedhana. When it came to marriage women had the freedom to choose their husband through a process called Swayamvara. The Rigveda talks about how free Women were. Some articles mention that Women had strength, social strength and spiritual strength. There were Goddesses, like Ushas and Aditi who represented the power of Women. Women had a Status and they were treated with Equality.

The Early Vedic era was a time when Women had a lot of freedom. Women were able to move around and they were able to learn.. Things started to change later on in the Smritis. Scholars have noticed this change in the way Women were treated. Studies have looked into the restrictions that were placed on Women when it came to education and rituals. With all these restrictions people still thought that Women, with intelligence were really great.

Literary Connections.

There are no books that connect women from the Vedic period to novels. For example Roy's character Ammu is similar to Apala because she is also very bold. Deshpande's character Jaya wants to learn from Maitreyi. Desai is giving a voice back to the rishikas. Some people who study what happened after countries were colonized use the ideals of the period to speak out against patriarchy.

Gaps, in Research

Most focus on history. Links to English novels need more study. Ecofeminism ties Vedic Shakti to modern texts. This paper fills that gap . Overall, sources affirm Vedic empowerment as a model

Research Methodology

This study is about looking at things in a way. We are looking at three novels: Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, Shashi Deshpandes' That Long Silence and Anita Desai's Clear Light of Day. The Vedic texts, such as the Rigveda and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad help us understand the context. Our steps include reading these texts carefully. We want to see how the themes in these texts connect the rishikas to modern women. The work is guided by feminist theory. We get our information from looking at what other people have written about these topics and from searching for information.

Analysis of Vedic Women in History.

The Rigveda has information about 27 women called rishikas. One of these women, Ghosha, asked for health in the Rigveda. Another woman, Lopamudra wrote about love in the Rigveda. Then there is Vak, who said something about the power of the universe.

Gargi had a debate with a man named Yajnavalkya. Maitreyi made a choice to learn more about the world of having a lot of money. The Rigveda women studied the Vedas. Took part in rituals.

Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things.

Ammu does something that goes against the rules of her caste. The way she feels about Velutha is like what Apala says in an old hymn, the one that is in the Rig Veda, book 8 hymn 91. Both Ammu and Velutha say what they want without being afraid. Ammu gets really angry when people tell her who she can and cannot love. This is like the idea of "Love Laws". This is similar to what some women did a time ago in something called Gandharva marriages, where they got to choose who they wanted to be with. Some people think that Ammu is like the goddess Ushas who's the goddess of the dawn because of something called ecofeminism. This is also seen in a book called That Long Silence, by Deshpande.

Jaya feels trapped at home. She wants to find herself like Maitreyi did. The silence around her is hiding her voice.. Jaya writes in secret and that is how she expresses herself. This reminds me of the rishikas who composed hymns a time ago. Jaya is questioning the roles of wives like the partners in Vedic dampati. This is similar to what Desai wrote about in Clear Light of Day. Jaya is searching for her voice just like the women in Desai's book. Bim and Tara face family pain. Bim cares alone, like grihapati queens. Tara breaks free from the past. Their bond fights patriarchy. This parallels Vedic sisters in rituals.

Key Parallels Table

Vedic Figure	Novel Character	Shared Trait
Apala	Ammu	Bold desire
Maitreyi	Jaya	Quest for knowledge
Gargi	Bim	Intellectual strength
Lopamudra	Tara	Emotional Partnership

The themes are really connected to each other. The idea of freedom from the times is what inspires people to revolt even in modern times. The Vedic freedom is still an influence on modern revolt.

Results:

Analysis finds strong links. Novels reclaim Vedic power. Ammu embodies Apala's fire. Jaya revives Maitreyi's wisdom. Bim asserts like Gargi. This counters postcolonial silence. Literature uses ancient models for today's fights. Ecofeminism ties nature and women across eras. Gaps exist in direct references. Yet, implied parallels empower readers. Vedic ideals aid gender justice. Indian novels bridge past and present. Findings support thesis on feminist revival.

Discussion:

Women in the period had a lot of power because of the hymns they wrote and the debates they took part in. You can see this power is still alive in novels like the one written by Roy. The character Ammu fights against

the rules just like Apala did a time ago. Jaya is searching for the truth just like Maitreyi did. Bim is a woman just like Gargi was. These stories show that the freedom women had in times is still an inspiration today. In the era women were silenced.. Stories like these bring back the strength of Vedic women. The idea of ecofeminism shows that women and nature have been connected across time. If you look at the studies you will see that the equality women had in the period did not last. Novels criticize this. Try to bring about change by using the examples of women like the rishikas. One thing that is missing is that there are not direct quotes from the Vedas in these books. The Vedic women and their stories are what inspire people today and novels like Roy's are an example of this just like the stories of Ammu and Jaya and Bim who are all strong women just like the Vedic women, including Apala and Maitreyi and Gargi. Still, themes match well. This mix of old and new aids feminist goals. It challenges weak woman stereotypes.

Conclusion:

Indian English novels reclaim Vedic women's empowerment. Roy, Deshpande, and Desai link rishikas to modern heroes. Ammu, Jaya, and Bim echo Gargi, Maitreyi, and Lopamudra. Vedic roles in education and rituals inspire fights against patriarchy. Literature bridges eras for gender justice. Findings affirm ancient ideals guide today. This boosts indigenous feminism in India.

Recommendations:

- More novels like Ghosh's for Vedic links can be studied.
- Compare with Marathi literature on rishikas.
- Add surveys of readers on these themes.
- Research Vedic women in film adaptations.
- Push Vedic studies in school feminism courses.

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