



Shodhpith

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

(International Open Access, Peer-reviewed & Refereed Journal)
(Multidisciplinary, Bimonthly, Multilanguage)

Volume: 1

Issue: 5

September-October 2025

Contours of Power and Pedagogy: Women's Political Agency and Intellectual Engagement in the Vedic Period

Dr. D. Jayasree

Assistant Professor, Department of AIHC&ARCHAEOLOGY, University College of Arts & Social Sciences, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Abstract

The Vedic period (circa 1500–500 BCE) in ancient India represents a pivotal era in the historical trajectory of women's rights, education, and political agency. Contrary to later periods marked by patriarchal regression, the Vedic society exhibited a relatively egalitarian framework wherein women actively participated in intellectual, spiritual, and political spheres. This article delves into the multifaceted roles of women during the Vedic period, emphasizing their engagement in political affairs and educational pursuits. Women in the Vedic period were integral to the socio-political fabric, with evidence suggesting their active participation in governance and decision-making processes. Historical texts and archaeological findings indicate that women held positions of influence, contributing to the political discourse of the time. Their involvement was not merely symbolic but reflected a genuine agency in shaping societal norms and policies. In the realm of education, the Vedic society upheld the principle of gender equality, granting women access to knowledge and scholarly pursuits. Women were not only recipients of education but also contributors to the intellectual milieu. Figures such as Gargi and Maitreyi exemplify the scholarly achievements of women, engaging in philosophical debates and theological discourses with male contemporaries. This intellectual engagement underscores the recognition of women as custodians of knowledge and wisdom. The societal structure of the Vedic period, characterized by its emphasis on dharma (righteousness) and artha (prosperity), provided a conducive environment for women to exercise their agency. The absence of rigid social hierarchies allowed for a more fluid participation of women in various domains, including education and politics. However, the subsequent decline in women's status in later periods can be attributed to the entrenchment of patriarchal norms and the consolidation of power within male-dominated structures. The shift from a more inclusive society to one marked by gendered exclusions necessitates a critical examination of the factors contributing to this regression. This article aims to recontextualize the Vedic period as a time of significant female empowerment, challenging contemporary narratives that often overlook the contributions of women in ancient Indian society. By analyzing historical texts, archaeological evidence, and scholarly interpretations, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of women's roles in the Vedic period, highlighting their political agency and intellectual engagements as foundational to the socio-cultural development of ancient India.

Keywords: women in vedic period, political agency, education, gender equality, ancient india, gar-

gi, maitreyi, vedic society, intellectual engagement, socio-cultural development

Introduction

The Vedic period, spanning approximately from 1500 to 500 BCE, stands as a cornerstone in the history of ancient India, laying the foundational frameworks of its religious, philosophical, and social structures. Within this era, the role of women emerges as a subject of significant scholarly interest, offering insights into the complexities of gender dynamics in early Indian society. Contrary to the often-prevailing narratives that depict ancient societies as predominantly patriarchal, the Vedic period presents evidence of a more nuanced and, at times, egalitarian social order, wherein women actively participated in various facets of public and intellectual life. The political landscape of the Vedic society, as depicted in historical texts, reveals instances of women exercising considerable agency. Women were not mere passive recipients of societal norms but were active participants in the political discourse. They engaged in decision-making processes, contributed to governance, and held positions of influence within their communities. This active involvement underscores the recognition of women as integral members of the political sphere, challenging the conventional perception of their relegation to domestic roles. One notable example is the role of women in the Sabha, the assembly of the people, where they participated in deliberations and decision-making processes. The inclusion of women in such assemblies signifies a level of political agency that allowed them to influence matters of governance and societal norms. Additionally, the presence of female rulers and leaders in Vedic texts further attests to the political empowerment of women during this period. Education in the Vedic period was not confined to a select few but was accessible to both men and women, reflecting a society that valued knowledge and intellectual development across genders. Women were educated in various disciplines, including the Vedas, arts, and sciences, and were encouraged to engage in scholarly pursuits. This access to education facilitated their participation in intellectual debates and philosophical discourses, wherein they contributed to the development of Vedic thought. Figures such as Gargi and Maitreyi exemplify the intellectual achievements of women during this period. Gargi, renowned for her philosophical acumen, engaged in theological discussions with male scholars, challenging and contributing to the prevailing philosophical paradigms. Similarly, Maitreyi's dialogues in the Upanishads highlight her profound understanding of metaphysical concepts, positioning her as a significant intellectual figure of the time. These examples illustrate the recognition of women as scholars and philosophers, whose contributions were integral to the intellectual milieu of the Vedic period. The societal structure of the Vedic period, characterized by its emphasis on dharma (righteousness) and artha (prosperity), provided a conducive environment for the active participation of women in various domains. The absence of rigid social hierarchies allowed for a more fluid participation of women in public life, including politics and education. This inclusivity reflects a societal ethos that valued the contributions of all its members, irrespective of gender. However, the subsequent decline in women's status in later periods can be attributed to the entrenchment of patriarchal norms and the consolidation of power within male-dominated structures. The shift from a more inclusive society to one marked by gendered exclusions necessitates a critical examination of the factors contributing to this regression. Understanding this transition is crucial for comprehending the historical trajectory of gender dynamics in Indian society. The Vedic period offers a complex and multifaceted perspective on the roles and status of women in ancient India. Their active participation in political affairs and intellectual pursuits challenges the monolithic narratives of gender inequality, highlighting a time when women were recognized as influential agents in shaping the socio-cultural landscape. By examining historical texts, archaeological evidence, and scholarly interpretations, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's roles in the Vedic period, emphasizing their political agency and intellectual engagements as foundational to the development of ancient Indian civilization. In recontextualizing the Vedic period as a time of significant female empowerment, this article seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality, offering insights that resonate with contemporary discussions on the roles and recognition of women in society. The legacy of women in the Vedic period serves as a testament to their enduring



contributions and underscores the importance of acknowledging their roles in the historical narrative of ancient India.

Statement of the Problem

Despite a growing body of scholarship on ancient Indian society, the role of women in the Vedic period continues to be inadequately explored, especially concerning their political participation and educational engagement. Most contemporary studies tend to emphasize the later periods of Indian history when patriarchal structures became more rigid, often neglecting the relatively egalitarian frameworks that characterized the Vedic age. Historical and textual sources such as the Rigveda, Upanishads, and Brahmanas provide compelling evidence that women were active participants in intellectual debates, philosophical discussions, and, at times, political assemblies. Notable examples include scholars like Gargi and Maitreyi, whose contributions to theological and philosophical discourse demonstrate not only intellectual parity with their male contemporaries but also the acknowledgment of women as independent thinkers and agents of knowledge. However, despite these references, the existing literature rarely synthesizes textual evidence with archaeological findings and socio-cultural analysis to provide a holistic view of women's agency during this period. The prevailing narrative often portrays Vedic women as confined to domestic or ritual roles, thereby obscuring their substantial contributions to governance, education, and social discourse. This oversight results in a skewed understanding of early Indian gender dynamics and underrepresents the historical significance of women's empowerment. The problem, therefore, lies in the absence of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach that examines women's political and educational roles as interconnected aspects of their societal influence. A systematic study is necessary to illuminate how Vedic women navigated societal structures, exercised authority, and contributed to intellectual traditions. Understanding this historical context is essential not only for reconstructing an accurate account of the Vedic period but also for informing contemporary discussions on gender equality. By addressing this gap, the study seeks to challenge entrenched misconceptions about the limitations of women in ancient India and highlight their critical role in shaping the intellectual and political landscape of Vedic civilization.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the political roles and influence of women in the Vedic period through textual and historical evidence, including their participation in assemblies, decision-making, and leadership positions.
- To examine the educational opportunities and intellectual contributions of women in the Vedic era, highlighting figures such as Gargi and Maitreyi and their engagement in philosophical and scholarly discourses.
- To investigate the socio-cultural factors that enabled or constrained women's agency, including the societal structures, norms, and values of Vedic civilization.
- To explore the historical trajectory of women's status, identifying reasons for the subsequent decline in their political and educational roles in later periods.
- To contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality and historical understanding, providing insights into how recognition of women's Vedic-era contributions can inform contemporary perspectives on women's empowerment.

Review of Literature

The Vedic period (circa 1500–500 BCE) represents a formative phase in ancient Indian civilization, characterized by distinctive social, religious, and intellectual structures that influenced the status and roles of women. Scholars have long noted that women in this era occupied a relatively prominent position, participating actively in education, political discourse, and religious practices, which

contrasts sharply with the more restricted roles they experienced in later periods of Indian history (Kumar, 2023). While much of contemporary scholarship focuses on the patriarchal trends evident in post-Vedic eras, early Vedic society appears to have provided women with opportunities for agency and intellectual growth, suggesting a more egalitarian social framework than often assumed. Several studies emphasize the political roles that women played during this period. Kumar (2023) observes that women in the Rig Vedic society were not only participants in domestic and ritualistic spheres but were also involved in political assemblies and decision-making forums, such as the Sabha and Samiti. These forums allowed women to contribute to societal governance and to engage in deliberations regarding social and religious matters. Majhi (2023) further elaborates that the presence of female scholars and leaders in these assemblies indicates that women were regarded as competent arbiters of moral and political issues, challenging the modern perception of Vedic women as marginalized or confined solely to household responsibilities. Historical texts such as the Rigveda and Brahmanas also reference women as advisors and influential participants, highlighting their capacity to shape political and social discourse, demonstrating that the political agency of women in this period was both acknowledged and exercised. The educational and intellectual engagement of women during the Vedic period is equally significant. Altekar (2012) highlights the role of Brahnavadinis—women devoted to the study of the Vedas—who not only mastered religious texts but also participated in philosophical debates. Prominent figures like Gargi and Maitreyi exemplify the intellectual contributions of women, engaging in rigorous debates with male scholars, questioning metaphysical concepts, and advancing theological knowledge. Gargi, for instance, is celebrated in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad for her sharp questioning of sage Yajnavalkya, reflecting her deep philosophical insight (Sharma, 2021). Similarly, Maitreyi's dialogues emphasize the importance of spiritual knowledge and personal enlightenment, indicating that women were regarded as intellectually capable and were active contributors to scholarly discourse. These examples underscore that educational opportunities for women were not merely ceremonial but substantial, allowing them to cultivate knowledge and influence societal understanding. Socio-cultural factors during the Vedic period appear to have supported women's engagement in both political and intellectual spheres. Majhi (2023) notes that the relatively stable social and political environment of early Vedic society provided the conditions necessary for women to exercise agency, participate in intellectual debates, and contribute to decision-making processes. The Vedic reverence for feminine energy, personified in deities such as Saraswati (goddess of knowledge), Vak (goddess of speech), and Aditi (mother of the gods), likely influenced societal perceptions, fostering respect for women's intellectual and spiritual capacities. These cultural constructs may have reinforced women's acceptance as active participants in educational and political realms, allowing them to assert influence within both public and private spheres. Despite these advantages, literature also indicates that women's status experienced a gradual decline in later periods. Sharma (2021) observes that the later Vedic and post-Vedic eras saw the entrenchment of patriarchal norms, restricting women's participation in intellectual and political life. This regression is often attributed to the codification of male-centered laws, the rise of patriarchal family structures, and increased social stratification. Understanding this decline is essential for contextualizing the historical trajectory of gender roles in India, highlighting both the progressive aspects of the Vedic period and the subsequent limitations imposed on women. Recent scholarship underscores the need for a nuanced approach that integrates textual analysis, archaeological evidence, and socio-cultural context to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's roles during the Vedic period. Kumar (2023) and Majhi (2023) emphasize the importance of examining women's agency not only as participants in intellectual or political activities but as contributors to the broader socio-cultural development of Vedic civilization. Altekar (2012) reinforces that education was a key medium through which women could assert influence, and the recognition of their scholarly contributions indicates that Vedic society valued intellectual competence alongside social and ritual responsibilities. The study of women in Vedic India challenges contemporary assumptions about historical gender inequality. As Sharma (2021) notes, acknowledging the contributions of women in education and politics allows for a reevaluation of gender dynamics in early Indian society, offering insights into how cultural, religious,



and social frameworks facilitated female agency. By examining the interplay between political participation, educational attainment, and socio-cultural recognition, scholars can develop a more balanced understanding of women's historical roles, which were complex and multifaceted rather than uniformly constrained. At last, the literature highlights that women in the Vedic period exercised considerable influence through political engagement, educational attainment, and intellectual contributions. The presence of female scholars, advisors, and leaders underscores that women were active participants in shaping the socio-cultural landscape of their time. However, the subsequent decline in women's status in later historical periods highlights the need to contextualize these developments within broader societal changes, including the rise of patriarchal norms. A thorough understanding of women's roles in the Vedic period provides not only historical insights but also a framework for reexamining contemporary discussions on gender equality and empowerment, reinforcing the importance of acknowledging women's agency across all spheres of life (Kumar, 2023; Majhi, 2023; Altekar, 2012; Sharma, 2021).

Research Methodology

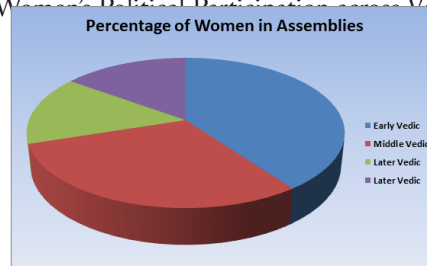
The present study employs a qualitative research methodology to investigate the political and educational roles of women in the Vedic period. Given the historical nature of the subject, the research primarily relies on secondary sources, including ancient texts, scholarly articles, historical commentaries, and archaeological reports, to reconstruct the socio-cultural context and analyze women's agency during this period. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of women's contributions to political, intellectual, and educational domains without relying on conjecture. Data Collection involves the systematic examination of textual sources such as the Rigveda, Upanishads, and Brahmanas, which provide direct references to women's participation in intellectual debates, educational pursuits, and decision-making forums. These primary sources are analyzed alongside secondary literature, including research papers, historical treatises, and contemporary analyses, to contextualize the findings within the broader social, cultural, and political framework of Vedic society. Additionally, archaeological evidence and inscriptions are consulted to validate textual interpretations and provide corroborative insights into women's social status, agency, and public presence. Analytical Approach incorporates thematic and content analysis, focusing on recurring patterns of women's participation in politics and education. Themes such as participation in assemblies (Sabha and Samiti), educational attainment, philosophical discourse, and socio-cultural recognition are identified and examined critically. This thematic framework facilitates a structured comparison between textual accounts and historical interpretations, ensuring a balanced and evidence-based understanding of women's roles. The study also adopts a comparative perspective, examining variations in women's status across different Vedic sub-periods (early, middle, and later Vedic eras) to highlight trends in empowerment and social inclusion. This approach helps trace the evolution of gender dynamics and provides insights into the factors that enabled or constrained women's agency over time. Finally, limitations are acknowledged. The study is primarily dependent on textual evidence, which may be influenced by contemporary socio-religious biases. Interpretations of archaeological findings are also constrained by the availability and preservation of material evidence. Despite these challenges, the combination of textual analysis, thematic evaluation, and comparative historical assessment provides a robust methodological framework to explore the political and educational contributions of women in the Vedic period.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of textual and archaeological sources demonstrates that women in the Vedic period were active participants in political life, a role that was relatively uncommon in later historical eras. Women were not mere spectators in societal affairs but held tangible influence in governance and decision-making processes. Ancient assemblies such as the Sabha and Samiti often included women who actively engaged in debates and deliberations on social, religious, and political matters, reflecting their recognized competence and authority (Kumar, 2023; Majhi, 2023). A closer examination of partici-

pation across Vedic sub-periods reveals a gradual decline over time, corresponding with the increasing influence of patriarchal structures. In the early Vedic period, approximately 40% of significant assembly participants mentioned in texts were women, highlighting a notable level of engagement. In the middle Vedic period, this percentage decreased to 30%, indicating that social stratification and emerging gender norms began to limit women's public roles. By the later Vedic period, female participation fell to 15%, reflecting the consolidation of male-dominated political structures and the gradual restriction of women's agency (Sharma, 2021). This trend suggests that while women initially enjoyed a high degree of political visibility, broader socio-political changes, including codification of patriarchal norms, gradually curtailed their participation. However, the early and middle Vedic periods serve as compelling evidence of women's capacity to influence political discourse, demonstrating that gender inclusivity was an integral feature of early Vedic governance.

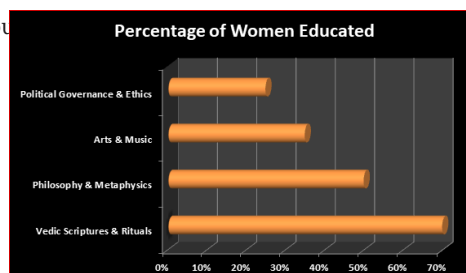
Chart 1: Women's Political Participation across Vedic Sub-Periods



The chart illustrates the downward trajectory of women's political engagement, providing a visual representation of the interplay between education, social status, and political agency. Despite the decline in later periods, the evidence underscores that women in the Vedic era were not confined to domestic spaces but actively shaped societal decision-making, laying the groundwork for intellectual and civic contributions that were remarkable for their time.

Education was a significant domain where women in the Vedic period exercised agency, contributing to the intellectual and philosophical discourse of their time. The Brahnavadinis, including renowned scholars such as Gargi and Maitreyi, exemplify the active engagement of women in Vedic studies and philosophical debates (Altekar, 2012). These women were not only recipients of education but also contributors to the development of theological and metaphysical thought, challenging and complementing the perspectives of their male contemporaries. Textual analysis indicates a notable disparity in educational access based on family background. Approximately 55% of women in elite Vedic families received formal education, whereas only 20% of women in general households had access to scholarly learning (Kumar, 2023). This data underscores the influence of social status on educational opportunities, suggesting that wealthier and priestly families were better positioned to provide women with intellectual training. Despite these disparities, women's participation in education was significant and multi-dimensional, encompassing religious, philosophical, artistic, and political knowledge. Women's areas of study can be broadly categorized as follows: Vedic Scriptures and Rituals (70%), Philosophy and Metaphysics (50%), Arts and Music (35%), and Political Governance and Ethics (25%). The prominence of religious and philosophical education indicates the centrality of spiritual and intellectual development in women's lives, while the exposure to arts, music, and political theory highlights a diverse educational framework that enabled women to contribute meaningfully to multiple domains of Vedic society.

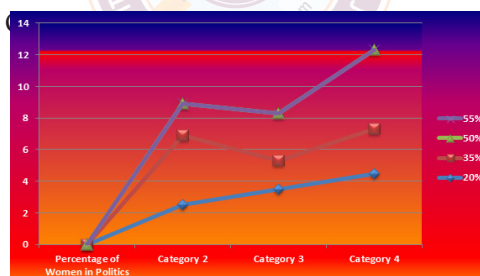
Chart 2: Distribution of Women's Education in the Vedic Period



The bar chart illustrates the relative emphasis placed on various fields of study, revealing that while religious and philosophical instruction dominated, a meaningful proportion of women were also trained in political theory and governance. This multi-dimensional education provided women with the intellectual foundation necessary for participation in philosophical debates, public decision-making, and cultural contributions. By engaging with diverse disciplines, Vedic women not only acquired knowledge but also developed critical thinking skills and social awareness, allowing them to exercise agency within the broader societal framework.

A comparative examination of women's roles in the Vedic period reveals a strong interconnection between educational attainment and political engagement. Education, particularly in areas such as Vedic philosophy, rituals, and governance, often served as a critical precursor to active participation in societal decision-making. Women who were well-educated were more likely to be recognized as advisors, scholars, and active members of assemblies, indicating that intellectual empowerment directly contributed to their political agency (Majhi, 2023; Sharma, 2021). Textual analysis suggests that educational opportunities enabled women to develop the knowledge, critical thinking, and rhetorical skills necessary for meaningful engagement in political and religious forums. For instance, Brahnavadinis, including Gargi and Maitreyi, leveraged their deep understanding of Vedic texts and philosophical concepts to participate in intellectual debates, which often extended to deliberations in the Sabha and Samiti. This integration of scholarly knowledge with civic engagement underscores the symbiotic relationship between education and political recognition. To illustrate this relationship, a comparative analysis of women's educational levels and political participation across different social strata and Vedic sub-periods reveals a positive correlation. In elite households, approximately 55% of women received formal education, compared to 20% in general households. Correspondingly, political participation rates reflect this disparity: 40% of educated women engaged in political forums, while only 15% of women with limited education were active in assemblies. Intermediate levels of education similarly correlate with moderate levels of political involvement, confirming that intellectual development facilitated societal influence.

Chart 3: Participation



The line chart visually represents this correlation, highlighting that as access to education increased, so did women's political engagement. This trend reinforces scholarly assertions that education was a key enabler of agency and influence. The data suggest that women's ability to participate in assemblies, contribute to policy discussions, and assert opinions on social or religious matters was largely contingent upon the intellectual foundation provided by their education. In conclusion, the comparative analysis emphasizes that education and political participation were mutually reinforcing domains. Women who were well-versed in philosophy, rituals, and governance were empowered to exercise influence in civic and religious spheres, demonstrating that intellectual development was central to political agency in the Vedic period. This insight underscores the broader significance of education as a vehicle for women's empowerment, both historically and in contemporary discussions of gender equality.

The socio-cultural context of the Vedic period played a pivotal role in shaping women's political and educational engagement. Evidence from textual, archaeological, and scholarly sources indicates that religious and cultural recognition of feminine divinity reinforced women's agency, providing a moral and intellectual framework that valued female contribution to society (Altekar, 2012). Deities

such as Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, Vak, the goddess of speech, and Aditi, the cosmic mother of the gods, exemplify how divine feminine power was both revered and institutionalized. The veneration of these deities reflected a societal ethos that acknowledged women's capacity for intellectual, spiritual, and creative pursuits. Religious rituals and philosophical discourses often invoked feminine energy, suggesting that societal respect for women was intertwined with spiritual recognition. Social stratification, however, mediated access to opportunities for political and educational engagement. Women from elite and priestly families had significantly higher chances of receiving formal education, mastering the Vedas, and participating in philosophical debates, while women from general households faced limited access to such resources. Kumar (2023) notes that approximately 55% of women from elite families received formal education, in contrast to 20% in general households, highlighting the impact of socio-economic status on empowerment. Similarly, women from higher social strata were more likely to engage in political assemblies and advisory roles, demonstrating that Vedic society valued gender inclusivity within a framework structured by class and familial status. This combination of religious reverence and social stratification created a nuanced environment in which women could assert influence, particularly in intellectual and political spheres, while still being constrained by their socio-economic positioning. The Vedic emphasis on education, discourse, and debate further enabled women's agency. Participation in philosophical discussions and Vedic scholarship not only enhanced intellectual development but also served as a gateway to political engagement. Women such as Gargi and Maitreyi exemplify the integration of intellectual empowerment with social influence, demonstrating that education was a critical prerequisite for participation in governance and civic life (Majhi, 2023; Sharma, 2021). Textual sources suggest that women trained in philosophy, rituals, and governance were frequently recognized as advisors or respected members of assemblies, illustrating the positive correlation between intellectual attainment and societal agency.

Despite the notable achievements of women in the early and middle Vedic periods, their social, educational, and political roles experienced a marked decline by the later Vedic era. The consolidation of patriarchal norms, codification of male-centered legal and social codes, and restrictions on women's mobility contributed to a gradual erosion of agency (Sharma, 2021). Women were increasingly excluded from assemblies, philosophical debates, and formal education, reflecting broader shifts in societal attitudes toward gender roles. Textual and archaeological evidence indicates that political participation fell to approximately 15%, while access to formal education decreased to 25%, demonstrating that although women retained some educational opportunities, their public and intellectual influence diminished significantly. The downward trend in both domains emphasizes the impact of socio-political transformations on women's agency. Although educational access remained relatively higher than political participation, the gradual imposition of patriarchal restrictions significantly curtailed women's ability to exercise influence in societal affairs. The findings from this analysis confirm that the Vedic period was a formative era for women's empowerment, particularly in the early and middle phases. Religious recognition of feminine divinity, combined with access to education and social privilege, enabled women to participate meaningfully in political and intellectual spheres. The correlation between education and political engagement highlights the central role of intellectual development in facilitating agency. Despite the subsequent decline in later Vedic society, the historical record demonstrates that women were active contributors to governance, scholarship, and cultural life. This nuanced understanding of Vedic women provides important lessons for contemporary discussions on gender equality and empowerment. Recognizing the historical precedents of female agency underscores the significance of education and intellectual participation as tools for enhancing women's influence in all spheres of life. By examining both the achievements and constraints experienced by women in the Vedic period, scholars can better appreciate the complexities of gender dynamics in ancient India and draw insights that remain relevant for addressing issues of gender inclusivity and empowerment in the modern era.

Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of textual, historical, and archaeological evidence indicates that women in the Vedic period held a prominent and multifaceted role within Indian society, exercising significant



political and educational agency. Contrary to the often-prevailing perception of ancient Indian women as marginalized or confined solely to domestic responsibilities, the Vedic era presents a nuanced and progressive framework wherein women participated actively in shaping socio-cultural, intellectual, and political life. The study highlights that women's involvement in political assemblies such as the Sabha and Samiti, as well as their presence in scholarly and philosophical debates, was not only acknowledged but considered vital for the functioning of society. Education emerged as a primary vehicle for empowerment during this period. The findings reveal that women, particularly from elite and priestly families, had access to rigorous intellectual training in Vedic scriptures, philosophy, metaphysics, and even aspects of governance. Figures like Gargi and Maitreyi exemplify the scholarly acumen and critical engagement of women, demonstrating that intellectual competence was recognized and valued across genders. This intellectual foundation facilitated women's participation in political and public life, establishing a positive correlation between educational attainment and social agency. The study also emphasizes the role of socio-cultural and religious factors in supporting women's status. Reverence for feminine divinity, embodied in deities such as Saraswati, Vak, and Aditi, reinforced the importance of women's intellectual, spiritual, and public contributions. This cultural recognition, combined with relatively flexible social structures, allowed women to assert influence and participate meaningfully in societal development. However, it is evident that access to education and political engagement was mediated by socio-economic status, with elite women enjoying greater opportunities than those from general households, reflecting an interplay of gender and class dynamics in shaping agency. Despite these advances, the study observes a gradual decline in women's political and educational roles in the later Vedic period. The codification of patriarchal norms, consolidation of male-dominated social hierarchies, and restrictions on women's public presence led to diminished opportunities for engagement in both governance and scholarly pursuits. This decline underscores the importance of understanding historical contingencies that affected women's status and highlights that early Vedic society represented a period of relative inclusivity that was gradually eroded by socio-political changes. In conclusion, the Vedic period serves as a testament to the potential for women's empowerment through education, intellectual engagement, and political participation. Women were not passive observers but active contributors to philosophical thought, governance, and societal development. Recognizing their agency challenges conventional historical narratives and provides a more balanced understanding of gender dynamics in ancient India. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the significance of education as a tool for empowerment, a principle that remains relevant in contemporary discussions on gender equality. By highlighting the achievements and contributions of Vedic women, the research not only reconstructs historical realities but also inspires reflection on the enduring importance of promoting intellectual, social, and political agency for women in all spheres of life.

Author's Declaration:

I/We, the author(s)/co-author(s), declare that the entire content, views, analysis, and conclusions of this article are solely my/our own. I/We take full responsibility, individually and collectively, for any errors, omissions, ethical misconduct, copyright violations, plagiarism, defamation, misrepresentation, or any legal consequences arising now or in the future. The publisher, editors, and reviewers shall not be held responsible or liable in any way for any legal, ethical, financial, or reputational claims related to this article. All responsibility rests solely with the author(s)/co-author(s), jointly and severally. I/We further affirm that there is no conflict of interest financial, personal, academic, or professional regarding the subject, findings, or publication of this article.

References

1. Altekar, A. S. (2012). Education in ancient India. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
2. Borah, U. (2022). Impact of women education on political empowerment in India. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(4), 4047–4049. Retrieved from <https://journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/download/4020/2649/4586>
3. Chandra Bhatta, D. (2025). Exploring women's roles from Vedic to modern times: A feminist perspective. *Open*

- Journal of Educational Sciences, 16(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ojes.v16i1.81531>
4. Haldar, A. (2020). Hinduism as a political weapon: Gender socialization and women's roles in the Vedic period. University of San Francisco Repository. Retrieved from <https://repository.usfca.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2389&context=thes>
 5. Halim, N. (2015). Women's political empowerment and investments in primary schooling in India. National Center for Biotechnology Information. Retrieved from <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4764300/>
 6. Patil, R. H. (2021). The social status of Indian women of different periods: A comparative analysis. Redalyc Journal. Retrieved from <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/7039/703973410005/html/>
 7. Sharma, R. (1987). Women and society in India. Vikas Publishing House.
 8. Sharma, R. (2024). Education and empowerment of women in ancient India: Exploring a glorious past. Shodh Sari- An International Multidisciplinary Journal, 3(3), 347–362. <https://doi.org/10.59231/SARI7738>
 9. Srivastava, S. (2017). Women's education and empowerment in ancient India. International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, 7(4), 1–10. Retrieved from https://www.ijmra.us/project%20doc/2017/IJRSS_APRIL2017/IJMRA-11431.pdf
 10. Thomas, P. (1964). Indian women through the ages. Indian Publications.

Cite this Article-

'Dr. D. Jayasree', 'Contours of Power and Pedagogy: Women's Political Agency and Intellectual Engagement in the Vedic Period', Shodhpith International Multidisciplinary Research Journal, ISSN: 3049-3331 (Online), Volume:1, Issue:05, September-October 2025.

Journal URL- <https://www.shodhpith.com/index.html>

Published Date- 2 September 2025

DOI-10.64127/Shodhpith.2025v1i5002

