



Woebegone Marriages In Ahalya's Awakening By Kavita Kane

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Abstract

Ahalya, who is known for faultless beauty is seduced by Lord Indra. Ahalya's husband Gowtham, a Rishi who failed to fulfil her physical and mental needs, cursed her to be a stone and Indra to be a man of a thousand vulva. Ironically, Gowtham spared time to reconsider the curse of Indra since he is the God. But the curse of Ahalya remained the same. After so many years of sacrifice, love and service, Ahalya earned the fame of infidelity. This paper studies how Kane has highlighted the thirst for basic needs of a woman in *Ahalya's Awakening*.

Keywords: infidelity, transgression, longing, marriage, myth.

1. Introduction

Marriages are meant to be a union of two minds. It blends two families and the people around them. A slight misunderstanding or mistrust has the power to break all the harmony not only between the couple but also the people around them. "Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another heart whispers back. Those who wish to sing always find a song. At the touch of a lover, everyone becomes a poet." (Plato) Plato's can be true only if love exists between the couple. Unhappiness is common in any relationship. It applies to marriage also. Since the man and women come from an entirely varied environment, it is quite natural to get into quick quarrels. Their beliefs, aim, desire, expectation and level of commitment could take a very long time to coincide.

Normally, problems occur between the couple because of the absence of love, lack of respect, unclear family values and priorities, verbal and physical abuse, infidelity and most importantly, the lack of communication. Any of these issues have the power to create a conflict in married life. Some can be recovered and others are left to separation forever. Kavita Kane, in her novel *Ahalya's Awakening* dealt with the betrayal of marriages between Ahalya and Rishi Gowtham and Indra and Sachi. Both marriages are made out of love. Ahalya the student of Gowtham falls in love madly and after a trial of a fight, ended in marriage. Sachi, the princess of Asura falls in love with Indra, God of Indralok and Devas and Indra deflowered Sachi before their marriage. Though both marriages are a kind of love bonding, the relationship remains a question till the end of the novel.

Kavita Kane narrated the story through Indra and Gowtham, though Ahalya is the central figure of the story. Ahalya is the perfect and ideal creation of Lord Brahma. She is considered the most beautiful

girl in the world and the only daughter of King Mudgal. Rishi Vashist named her Ahalya, which means “the beautiful one without blemishes” (8) She is not only beautiful but also polite, intelligent, kind and courageous. Her outstanding desire for knowledge made her the favourite person of great Rishi Gowtham. Ahalya was sent to the ashram of Rishi Gowtham by Rishi Vashist. It was clearly instructed to Gowtham that Ahalya was to be taken care till the king and the prince returned from the warfare.

Ahalya observed him well at the first sight as tall, thin, with flashy eyes broad forehead, a narrow and long nose and a thin mouth. She did not know that she would fall in love with the man in the future. She wanted to learn and develop her knowledge under his guidance. But Gowtham’s extraordinary kindness and knowledge attracted her. Gowtham was also amazed by the gentle, patient smile, curiosity, interest and beauty of Ahalya. The departure from the ashram made Ahalya sardonic. When the Swayamvar was announced, Narad appeared and explained the necessity of bringing Ahalya to the ashram, their meeting and departure, were made purposely by Brahma to test his cardinal way of living. Slowly, Gowtham realised or questioned himself “was Ahalya the one for him? Or more importantly, was he the one for her?” (134).

Like all others, Ahalya also started her life with complete love and caressing of Gowtham. They both made few promises to follow in their life. One of the promises is to educate Ahalya to become a Rishika. Ahalya became the mother of all the other children including her own four children. She followed the words of Thiruvalluvar “If love and virtue in the household reign, This is of life the perfect grace and gain.” (Kural 45) and let her suffer from the daily chores of the ashram, teaching, learning her lessons and also mending her children. Day by day the burden of her work increased which made her concentrate less on her studies.

The first disappointment started when there was a lack of attention from Gowtham. Gowtham kept himself busy with the establishment of ashrams in and around the country, then educating the new arrival and his publication of scripts. Among all these works, he found less time or time to look at Ahalya. Whenever she was asked to teach him, he becomes annoyed with a hint of complaint. She too felt anxiety about not spending time studying. When Ahalya asked him to teach, Gowtham said “you require the rest now that there are four children to look after” (245) this kind of answer irritated her “Does this mean you won’t teach me? Again?” (245).

The next issue was waiting for the company of Gowtham. Gowtham started coming very late to bed. Ahalya’s waiting was prolonged but could stop it. Though her mind knew very clearly that he would arrive late, she waits for the warmth of cuddling. Many days were spent with waiting eyes shut in weary sleep. Once when she initiated by touching his bare shoulders, he instantly said, “I am tired, Ahalya” (268). She felt ashamed of herself. She could not keep the hot blood inside herself. She remained rigid, tranquil with dilated eyes. There begin the arguments and complaints each other. Gowtham enquired about the reason for her unhappiness. Ahalya replied, “I am saying you noticed you have a wife who is morose, moody and miserable – and yet you neglected me!” (269) and finally Gowtham registered that physical sex is not the only way to lead a contented life. She was asked to be prepared to accept the situation and lead her life happier. She realised soon that “he was everyone’s guru but hers...He was her husband, but no longer her guru, no longer her guide, no longer her friend, no longer her lover” (300) After so many nights of treacherous she finally understood that she needs Indra. Ahalya understood that though Gowtham was a kind, good and honest man, he did not belong to Ahalya. He is a Rishi and a common man reachable to everyone who seeks knowledge. This observation made Ahalya completely away from Gowtham and grabbed her towards Indra.

Indra, the God of Indralok is tall, and fair, with grey eyes, a sharp nose and glossy hair. His wife is Sachi, the daughter of Emperor Puloman, the Asura. Sachi married Indra after a long tug of words, though she loved Indra abundantly. Indra, just to forget the thought of Ahalya, sought the company of Sachi. He started visiting Sachi in her private room and spent a week or so. He found that Sachi is the only girl who can make him forget Ahalya. Sachi insisted Indra marry her but he was not accepting the proposal immediately though he was not ready to leave her. He tried convincing “I shall carry your

love as a talisman when I go to war now” (178) but she was not convinced. Sachi married Indra at the cost of the life of her father and brother.

Sachi was in great pain and her departure from her family wounded her a lot. She expected a lot of caressing from Indra to forget her grief. But all her expectations broke into pieces when she heard the name Ahalya during their cuddling. Thereafter Ahalya became the centre of their daily fights. She understood very clearly that Indra loved Ahalya and he had not forgotten her ever after marriage. “Grief overcame her, but she dared not allow a sob to escape.” (202) Sachi doubted the whereabouts of Indra. She started collecting things from his friend Vrishakapi too. She is known for constant fighting in Indralok. Indra tried his level best to make her satisfied.

‘What do you want, Sachi?’ he asked helplessly. ‘I have given you my all!’
 ‘All? She said. I have given my all, Shakra. And I lost my all for you. As your wife, can’t you dignify me with respect I deserve? Even the apsaras pay me no attention!’ (214)

Sachi after seeing Ahalya at her brother’s wedding started melting in the quiet, kind beauty of her. And finally confessed to Indra, “I know it’s funny. I laugh myself sometimes, but now that I am sure, I have lost all fear. I know what I want, what I’m going to have. You and me. Me and you.” (270). Indra convinced Sachi but his heart still had the thirst for touching Ahalya burned heavy in his mind. Indra waited for the right time and chance to seduce Ahalya. He started pretending as if he is repenting for his previous behaviour but again showed his true self towards the end of their conversation. His infidelity or passion to achieve the ultimate goal is fulfilled through his crooked plan of disguise

2. Conclusion

When comparing the marital relationship of Gowtham – Ahalya and Indra – Sachi, both looked similar in one way or the other. The former loved and married against all abuses and the will of her mother. The latter also loved and married against the loss of her father. Marriage happened with some chaos in both cases. Both the couples started their life happily and the indifference started when there is a lack of attention from their husbands. When their promises were broken by the better half, fights and arguments arose. But none of the fights or quarrels disturbed either Gowtham or Indira. The regular activity of seeking the attention of Ahalya continued with the case of Indra. Whereas Gowtham kept himself busy with his ashram, students and books. The most disturbed and affected in this relationship were Ahalya and Sachi. Victor Hugo, in his novel *Les Miserables*, advices women “Ladies, a second piece of advice – do not marry; marriage is a graft; it may take hold or not. Shun the risk” (106) Ahalya became the victim of the curse of Gowtham. Sachi was knowingly cheated by Indra. All women have two choices: either to accept what it is like Sachi or find redemption from the past like Ahalya.

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