

Recensions of Ahalya's Tale from the *Ramayana* to Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening*

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Abstract: This researcher has analysed the character of Ahalya in Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening* by juxtaposing her against different traditional versions along with her position in some modern retellings. The researcher has extended the study by employing the theory of Sex Positive Feminism— significant aspect of Feminist Literary Criticism. At the same time, this paper also explores the contemporariness of Kane's retelling, Ahalya's Awakening and examines its validity in relation to Indian culture. In the traditional versions such as Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* and Kampan's *Iramavataram*, Ahalya has been perceived as a stone figure who had been cursed by her husband Rishi Gautam for adultery. In comparison to these versions, Kampan's the *Iramavatharam* brings more focus on Ahalya. As she knows that her lover is a pretender but she enjoys his flirtation and seduction. In some retellings of the *Ramayana* like K B Sreedevi's *Silaroopini*, V. R. Devika's *Ahalya: Scarlet Letter*, Sujoy Ghosh's short film titled, *Ahalya*, S. Sivasekaram's Tamil poem *Ahalikai*, Kavita Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening* etc. are written from Ahalya's perspective where Ahalya has been given voice to tell her side of the story. She has been presented as a human being not as an object or a stone figure. She has been portrayed bold, outspoken, and straightforward woman who takes stands for herself.

Key Words: *Ramayana*; *Recension*; *traditional epics*; *Indian culture*; *marginalized*; *gender*; *patriarchy*.

1. Introduction

Kavita Kane's novel, *Ahalya's Awakening* is a recension of the *Ramayana* from the perspective of Ahalya – a marginalized female character from the epic. Kane has revisited Ahalya's episode by using Feminist Revisionist Myth-making technique. This story is about Ahalya's struggles, pains and exploitation in a patriarchal society. It brings to light her journey from a precocious child, to a studious and sheltered princess, desired by God Indra, to the wife of the great *Rishi* Gautam. Generally, Ahalya is known for her infidelity. In the novel, *Ahalya's Awakening*, Ahalya's life journey takes off from her infancy, to the point where she blossoms into her extraordinary beauty and intelligence together, a childhood spent under the wings of the great sages Vasishta and Bharadwaj and her departure to *Rishi* Gautham's hermitage and her subsequent marriage with him. In her interview with Aparana Narrain, Kane points out her reason behind retelling Ahalya's story. She says:

It's such a tiny episode but it somehow has a huge impact. If you see the entire incident, it is a sort of precursor to what happens to Sita years later. Rama, who is supposed to liberate Ahalya, is the same person Sita confronts for her *agnipariksha*. So, in that way, Ahalya is very intriguing. Secondly, in the other tellings of her story, she doesn't talk at all; she is like a mute spectator to her own tragedy. And there are so many versions of this story; it's amazing how her character has morphed from a devoted wife to an adulterous wife. But again, we revere her as one of the *panchakanyas*. That is the paradox (2019).

In the traditional versions of the *Ramayana*, Ahalya's legend has been presented in the way that she is the most beautiful creation of Lord Brahma and an intelligent princess of Panchal. She gets married to *Rishi* Gautam. Lord Indra seduces Ahalya, when he finds a right opportunity. When Ahalya's husband, Gautam *Rishi*, gets to know about this wrong deed done by Indra and his wife's infidelity, he curses Ahalya to turn into a stone and also informs her about her liberation from this curse by Lord Ram. In the novel, *Ahalya's Awakening*, Kavita

Kane has given voice to Ahalya's character who remains passive in the traditional versions of the *Ramayana*. Kane has portrayed Ahalya as an individual and ambitious woman with her set dreams and desires for cognitive upbringing. Kane tries to answer the questions of the reader's mind about the identity of Ahalya as who is she? What does she want? What are her ambitions and desires?

Ahalya's Awakening begins with the prologue, in which Menaka, the ethereal apsara glids into the courtroom to warn the newly appointed Indra, named Nahusha, against his carnal desires for Sachi, the wife of the former Indra, named Shakra. Shakra is compelled to renounce his throne after the curse of *Rishi* Gautam which renders him powerless, his body turns in thousand vulvas and lifelong insecurity. When *Rishi* Brahaspati comes to know that New Indra, Nahusha, covets for Sachi, he says, "She is Indra Shakra's wife... she considers Shakra, her husband. You cannot have her" (*Ahalya's Awakening*, 2019, p.2) but Indra Nahusha gets adamant, "I can and I shall" (2). Menaka warns Nahusha, "Don't". She narrates him the story of Ahalya, the first of the five *Panchkanyas*- archetypes of female chastity in Indian mythology. There is an ancient persuasion in naming five maidens as *pratah-smaraniya*, urging that they be invoked daily at dawn:

Ahalya Draupadi Kunti Tara Mandodari tatha,Panchakanya smaranityam mahapataka nashaka
(Bhattacharya, 2004, p.4).

Translation: Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari: constantly remembering these five virgins destroys great failings. (Bhattacharya, 2004, p.4)

It is the nobility of Ahalya's character, her exceptional beauty, and the importance of her being chronologically the first *kanya* among the five virgin maidens. She remains true to her independent nature and fulfilling her womanhood. Among the *panchakanyas*, Ahalya remains special because of her daring nature and independent personality who takes her own decisions and ready to accept the consequences or the result of that. She decides to make love to Lord Indra and when *Rishi* Gautam curses her to turn into stone, Ahalya accepts the punishment for her infidelity.

Ahalya in traditional versions of the *Ramayana*

In the "*Balakand*" of the traditional versions of the *Ramayana*, when Lord Ram with her younger brother, Lakshmana and *Rishi* Vishvamitra comes to Mithila also known as Janakpuri, there he finds a beautiful Ashram in the outskirts of Mithila city. He goes there and feels surprised that there is no hermit in such a lovely Ashram. So Vishvamitra tells him the story of *Rishi* Gautam and his wife Ahalya and their alienation. He says:

Long ago, with Ahalya he (Gautam) practiced tapas here for countless years. Once, knowing that Gautama was away, Indra (called Thousand Eyes), Sachi's husband, took on the likeness of the sage, and said to Ahalya: 'Men pursuing their desire do not wait for the proper season, O you who have a perfect body.... She knew it was Indra of the Thousand Eyes in the guise of the sage. Yet she, wrongheaded woman, made up her mind, excited, curious about the king of the gods. And then, her inner being satisfied, she said to the god, 'I'm satisfied, king of the gods.... (Ramanujam & Dharwadker, 2004, p.135)

When her husband, *Rishi* Gautam comes back from the river, he catches Ahalya and God Indra in that situation and becomes so furious that he curses God Indra to lose his testicles and Ahalya to turn in to stone. R. K. Ramanujam in his essay, "*Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation*" writes:

The sage, facing Thousand Eyes now dressed as the sage, the one rich in virtue and the other with none, spoke to him in anger: 'You took my form, you fool, and did this that should never be done. Therefore, you will lose your testicles'.... (1991, p.136).

In Valmiki's *Ramayana* it is given that Ahalya gets redeemed from her curse when Lord Rama enters the hermitage. She regains her original form and greets Rama, Lakshman and Guru Vishvamitra. Her husband, Sage Gautama also arrives at this juncture to accept his deputed wife Ahalya. In *Balakanda* of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, it is given:

तथाशप्तवाचवैशक्रम्भार्याम्अपिचशप्तवान्

इहवर्षसहस्राणिबहूनिनिवषिस्यसि

॥

1-48-29

वायुभक्षानिराहारातप्यन्तीभस्मशायिनी ।

अदृश्यासर्वभूतानाम्आश्रमेअस्मिन्वषिस्यसि ॥ 1-48-30

Translation: “On cursing Indra thus, the sage cursed even his wife saying, you shall tarry here for many thousands of years to come without food and consuming air alone, and unseen by all beings you shall live on in this hermitage while contritely recumbent in dust” (Quoted in sanskritdocuments.org).

Sage Gautama curses his wife Ahalya by saying,

तस्यआतिथ्येनदुर्वृत्तेलोभमोहविवर्जिता

मत्सकाशेमुदायुक्तास्वम्बपुःधारयिष्यसि ॥ 1-48-32.

Translation: “On your welcoming of Rama, oh, ill-behaved woman, you will be divested of your greed and craze in which you lingered so far, and then you will assume your own body (self-appearance) and then you can be in my proximity, rejoicingly” (Quoted in sanskritdocuments.org).

शापस्यअन्तमुपागंयतेषाम्दर्शनम्आगता

॥

राघवौतुततःतस्याःपादौजगृहतुःमुदा । 1-49-17.

Translation: “On reaching the end of curse she came into the view of Raghava-s (Rama and Lakshmana) and they too gladly touched her feet in reverence” (Quoted in sanskritdocuments.org)

In Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas*, it is given:

मुनिश्रापजोदीन्हाअतिभलकीन्हापरमअनुग्रहमैमाना।

देखेउँभरिलोचनहरिभवमोचनइहइलाभसंकरजाना॥

बिनतीप्रभुमोरीमैमतिभोरीनाथनमागउँबरआना।

पदकमलपरागारसअनुरागाममनमधुपकरैपाना॥ (218).

Translation: “That sage cursed me and turned me into a stone, I consider that as my fortune and beneficial for I got to see Hari, the destroyer of the cycle of rebirth, in front of my eyes. Shankar considers this as the advantage of my curse and penance. O Lord! This is my request. I am not very wise, but still, O Lord! I don't want a boon. I just wish that my bumble-bee-like mind, which is desirous of divine affection, suckles the nectar of your lotus-feet” (Tr. by me).

In Kampan’s *Iramavataram*, Ahalya episode is also presented. He describes the scene when Ram and Lakshman came to Mithila, where they saw Ahalya in form of black rock: “There, high on an open field, stood a black rock that was once Ahalya, the great sage's wife who fell because she lost her chastity, the mark of marriage in a house. Rama's eyes fell on the rock, the dust of his feet wafted on it” (Ramanujam, 1991, p.551).

Ramanujan narrates from the Kampan’s *Iramavataram*:

Hurt by love's arrows, hurt by the look in her eyes that pierced him like a spear, Indra writhed and cast about for stratagems.... Sneaking in, he (Indra) joined Ahalya; coupled, they drank deep of the clear new wine of first-

night weddings; and she knew. Yet unable to put aside what was not hers, she dallied in her joy, but the sage did not tarry, he came back, a very Siva with three eyes in his head (1991, p. 553).

In Kampan's *Iramavataram*, Ahalya episode is presented in a different way than what it is in the *Ramayanas* of Valmiki and Tulsidas. In the former, Indra's lust for Ahalya and their mutual gratification is presented. Here Ahalya can be seen as knowledgeably allowing Indra for a sexual alliance with her.

This incident is also presented in Balram Das's *Jagmohan Ramayana* or *Dandi Ramayana*, which is the Odia version of the *Ramayana*. In this version, Ahalya recognizes Indra in disguise of her husband Gautam *Rishi*. Still, she makes love with him:

करिथाअआलिंगनविअगोसुरति। एमोरप्राणरखगोवारेसतो

एतेबोलिकरिजेअहल्याकुधरिविविधछन्देणशृंगाररतिकरि ।

(Tripathi, 1991, p. 870).

Translation: "You embrace me and make love to me. Having said this, he enclasped Ahilya and made love to her in variety of ways" (Tr. by me).

"Another version of this tale appears in the *Kathasaritsagar* where Ahalya knows that Indra has disguised himself as Gautam in order to sleep with her. She goes to him because she is curious about the king of gods. Gautama arrives unexpectedly and Indra quickly transforms himself into cat" (Sattar, 2017).

In *Skanda Purana* it is mentioned, "Ahalya smells Indra's celestial fragrance and realizes her folly as he embraces and kisses her and "so forth" (probably indicating a sexual act). Threatening Indra with a curse, she compels him to reveal his true form" (Doniger, 1999). The *Kathasaritasagara* (11th century CE) is also one of the few texts that brings to light the *Bala Kanda's* Ahalya and says that Ahalya makes a conscious choice of copulating with Indra (Ramanujan, 1991, pp.28-32).

However, in *Uttar Kanda* of Valmiki's *Ramayana* and the *Puranas* "... absolves her of all guilt and declare her a passive victim who falls prey to Indra's passion and manipulations" (Ray, 2007. p.25). Later retellings however mythicize her and present Ahalya as the symbol of the eternal chastity. In the *Devi-Bhagavata Purana*, Ahalya has been placed in a list of secondary goddesses, who are "auspicious, glorious and much praiseworthy", alongside Tara and Mandodari as well as some of the *pancha-satis* (five *satis* or chaste wives) Arundhati and Damayanti (Vijnanananda, 1921-22).

Ahalya in Some Later Retellings of the *Ramayana*

Sujoy Ghosh retells the story of Ahalya in a short Bengali film titled *Ahalya*. Although the character has been taken from the *Ramayana*, it has been crafted as a modern version with a twist. In this celluloid retelling, the punishment is given to the character of Indra Sen (The police man) while Ahalya is presented as an accomplice in the seduction game. K B Sreedevi, a prominent short story writer and a Malayalam novelist, has written a short story named, *Silaroopini*, later translated as *Woman of Stone* on re-visioning the mythical story of Ahalya. This short story is related to Ahalya's life after the lifting of *Rishi* Gautam's curse. While attending a ritual at Valmiki's *ashram*, she finds Sita (the wife of Lord Ram) who is pregnant but abandoned by her husband. Ahalya says, "I was cursed because I was unfaithful to my husband; what about Sita who was faithful to her husband?" She raises her voice against the false morals and values imposed upon women by the patriarchal society where a woman must prove her purity and chastity to the world.

V. R. Devika, author of *Ahalya: Scarlet Letter*, argues, "So is it right to condemn adultery and physical encounters as modern afflictions are against our [Indian/Hindu] culture? Or do we learn from Ahalya who made a conscious choice to fulfil her need and yet has been extolled?" (2006). Kelkar, the author of *Subordination of Woman: A New Perspective*, feels that Ahalya was made venerable due to her acceptance of gender norms; she ungrudgingly accepted the curse while acknowledging her need for punishment. However, Kelkar adds that another reason for making Ahalya immortal in scripture could be that her punishment acts as a warning and deterrent to women.

“In Hindu Tamil weddings in India and Sri Lanka, Ahalya appears as a symbolic black grinding stone, which the bride touches with her foot while promising not to be like Ahalya. The bride is also shown the star associated with the chaste Arundhati, who is cast as her ideal” (Doniger, 1999). Varadpande in *History of Indian Theatre* states: “The well-known treatise on sexual behaviour, the *Kama Sutra* (301–600), also mentions Ahalya and Indra while discussing how lust destroys men. However, it also urges men to seduce women by telling the romantic tales of Ahalya” (2005). S. Sivasekaram’s Tamil poem *Ahalikai* shows the stone motif in Ahalya’s legend that Ahalya gets marry a person who is no more attracted in her than a stone and she enjoys with Indra to be cursed of becoming a unresponsive stone. “The poet asks if it was better for Ahalya to remain physically a stone and retain her dignity rather than return to a stony marriage” (Richman, 2008).

Ahalya in Kane’s Retelling

In Kane version, Ahalya is the daughter of King Mudgal and Queen Nalayani of Panchal. She is a beauty with a brain. She constantly battles the prevailing norms of patriarchy in the society like early marriage of girl child rather than gaining education. According to the patriarchal norms, if a girl is beautiful which means she is a marriage material, no matter how intelligent she is, what she wants. As, Ahalya’s mother, Nalayani, focuses on her physical beauty and wants her to be married to Indra Shakra, but Ahalya does not accepts the norms, she wants to gain education and dreams of becoming a learned *rishika*. The novel begins with the statement by Ahalya’s father, King Mudgal, “Ahalya is the most beautiful girl in the world” (*Ahalya’s Awakening*, 2019, p.6). Since childhood, Ahalya remains brilliant in studies that she can memorizes toughest lessons quickly. Ahalya says on her beauty, “It’s not my talent; it’s a God’s gift” (*Ahalya’s Awakening*, 2019, p.20). She is an intelligent and assertive girl who speaks for her rights for education. Ahalya says, “An ashram is meant for higher learning... I can’t remain in the palace and acquire the knowledge of the world. I don’t want to be some cloistered princess who just looks pretty and does nothing! I want to study. If you think that is a gift, Ma, allow me to use it the way I want” (22).

Lord Indra tries to propose to her for marriage. He says, “You are the most beautiful woman in the world” (*Ahalya’s Awakening*, 2019, p.37). Ahalya asks to Lord Indra, “Does marriage always validate a woman? Or her future?” (38). Ahalya’s feminist stand against patriarchy is revealed here. Ahalya further asserts:

There are devis, there are apsaras, there are dancers, there are musicians, teachers who instruct, cooks who prepare your meals, masseuses who relax you when you are tired. Do you see them as just objects of beauty and desire and not as women as people engaged in specific occupations? Women as individuals learned in their respective fields? (*Ahalya’s Awakening*, 2019, p. 39).

Her dreams of gaining education and becoming a *Rishika* are met by harsh resistance. When their kingdom braces for a war with their neighbours, Ahalya is sent to *Rishi* Gautama’s ashram for protection. There she gets a learning centric environment. She becomes the student of the *Rishi*, where Ahalya begins to like the valuable guidance, love, and caring gestures of *Rishi* Gautam during her short stay in the Ashram. Ahalya falls in love with the *Rishi*, the person with the simplicity, his ideas and intellectual prowess. Ahalya does not want to get back to her palace as the idea of showcasing herself as a trophy to be won by a man in her *swayamwar* crushes her dreams of higher education and of becoming a *rishika*. But Ahalya returns back home and becomes forlorn by the fact that her father and brother are arranging for a *swayamwar* for her. She finally spills her being in love with *Rishi* Gautam, but succumbs to the pressure of the marriage.

In the *swayamwar* of Ahalya, *Rishi* Gautam unknowingly accomplishes the terms of the *swayamwar* and becomes Lord Indra’s arch enemy as he has taken away the woman whom Lord Indra lusted after so long. This makes Lord Indra infuriated. Ahalya looks forward to marry the man (*Rishi* Gautam), whom she loves a lot but he never expresses his feelings till the *swayamwar*.

Lord Indra is driven by his sexual appetite for Ahalya and hurt pride, decides to perform a terrible act which results in destroying the matrimonial relationship of Ahalya and *Rishi* Gautam. He accuses Ahalya of betraying his emotional feelings and love for her. His love and intense passion for having Ahalya turns into hate in no time. Indra goes out of the royal palace of King Mudgal with intense fury, he warns him, “A war is never won until the last battle, Gautam” (*Ahalya’s Awakening*, 2019, p.167).

On the other hand, Ahalya's conjugal life which was blissful in the initial years, soon begins to change colors. The initial days of their marital bliss turn bitter by and by as Ahalya gets pregnant and gives birth to one child after another, looks after them and runs *Rishi* Gautam's ashram. Her responsibilities and the burden of managing everything keep increasing, in this way, her learning comes to a grinding halt. Marriage, household and duties soon conflict with her passion for learning. *Rishi* Gautam's ideas of women's sexual desires looks quite progressive in his imparting of regular lessons. But when it comes to practicing these in real life, he fails terribly. *Rishi* Gautam distances himself from his household and conjugal life, as he is aspiring to be a *Maharishi*, travelling across the country to build ashrams and working on the creation of *Dharmasutras*. After the birth of his fourth child, he does not even bother about his responsibilities to provide his wife (Ahalya) emotional, physical and mental support. Gradually he starts to ignore and stop teaching her. Ahalya suppressed all her dreams and emotions within her. However, being a human being, she has some bodily desires too. *Rishi* Gautam easily suppresses his sexual instincts as he is a *Rishi* with spiritual powers. Ahalya cannot do anything except staring blankly around the empty spaces around her. Ahalya gets into tears and addresses her worries and asks him, "We haven't made love since Anjani was born. And she is six years old now, Gautam . . . That's what I meant—do we go on like this? For how long?" (*Ahalya's Awakening*, 2019, p.270). *Rishi* Gautam tries to abstain from physical pleasure. Ahalya says, "But don't you have a duty towards your wife? Tending to her needs?" (271). She further adds, "I am no Lopamudra, who composed a hymn for *Rishi* Agastya to remind him of his obligations to his wife! I am not learned, am I?... Nor am I *Rishi* Veda's wife, who sought her sexual gratification through the students in her husband's ashram" (271).

Looking from the perspective of feminism, Kane, and some other contemporary retellings (as mentioned above) of Ahalya's tale, seems to support her infidelity on the pretext that in addition to being a wife, she is also a human being (a woman) with natural sexual instincts.

"Sex Positive Feminism" a branch of the European feminist movement gained momentum in the year (1980s) - is related with the impression that freedom of sexuality is an important part of freedom of women against patriarchal control of sexuality.

The idea that nobody should be judged for their sexual desires lies at the heart of so-called "sex-positive feminism," the credo that stripping away the stigma historically surrounding female sexuality will liberate women to enjoy themselves without guilt or shame and help to eliminate the slut-shaming and victim-blaming that often stops violence against women being taken seriously (Hinsliff, 2022).

That is visible in *Ahalya's Awakening* where Ahalya takes decision for her sexuality. She remembers Lord Indra, who has been in a hot pursuit of her since he met her. Lord Indra's comments like, "You are beautiful, oh-so beautiful!" (*Ahalya's Awakening*, 2019, p. 311), makes her realize her individuality as a woman. Ahalya gets faltered and her humiliation replaces rage as she is alone, neither her husband nor her children are with her. *Rishi* Gautam's ignorance puts Ahalya in the state that forces her for erotic pleasures. In the novel, *Ahalya's Awakening*, Kavita Kane brings to light Ahalya's anguish, sexual frustration and the thoughts which are clashed by marital vows. Ahalya finds Lord Indra in disguised of *Rishi* Gautam. During their sexual coition, Ahalya whispers, "Don't be Indra, be Gautam" (p. 311). "She touched his throat with her lips, her skin so warm. She breathed deeply his smell, so familiar to her now but so very forbidden until this moment, when she did not deny herself, drinking it in, committing it to memory for life... she whispers, "Love me, love me more" (312).

When *Rishi* Gautam returns from his prayer and sees everything, He becomes so furious that he accuses Lord Indra: "I knew you were a coward, but you are worse than the worst. . . Seducing her in my guise... You could not have lowered yourself more, your dastard" (*Ahalya's Awakening*, 2019, p.314). Driven by extreme rage and jealousy of getting Indra with his wife, Ahalya, *Rishi* Gautam curses Lord Indra:

You are proud of your looks, using them to charm women and seduce them [. . .] this very body, the beauty and strength of which is the reason for your pride and transgressions, be covered with what you seek—a thousand vulvas... (*Ahalya's Awakening*, 2019, p. 315).

Rishi Gautam knows this quite well that Ahalya has enough powers to identify that the man who seduced her is Lord Indra and she could stop him but she did not do so. Ahalya has the moral courage to accept her infidelity.

She accuses Gautam *Rishi* as he is also a culprit. She says, “Yes, I do, but have you ever heard me?... then you have no right to punish me... and punish me for what? That I felt desire- a desire you and my husband, could not perceive or satiate?” (323). *Rishi* Gautam also confesses that he didn’t try to solve their difference and problems in their marital life. Ahalya says furiously, “I am not an infallible being, I am not a god, I am a woman” (321). Listening Ahalya’s words, *Rishi* Gautam realizes his failure in becoming a good husband and his responsibilities towards her wife. He has remained unable to gauge Ahalya’s emotions in his self-absorption. This incident is not given in any of the traditional versions of the *Ramayana* where *Rishi*Gautam is also accepting his flaws in their marital life.

However, *Rishi* Gautam curses Ahalya for her infidelity and leaves her forever to find herself so that she may get awoken with a new enlightenment: “May you remain invisible to the human eye but visible in your mind’s eye, surviving on air and lying-in ashes till the time you receive your blessing, your enlightenment, Ahalya in that quest you shall receive your salvation - the deliverance you searched for so long all these years” (*Ahalya’s Awakening*, 2019, p.328).

Meanwhile *Rishi* Gautam comes back to take Ahalya back but she denies to do so, as she thinks that they have changed as people. This is given in Kane’s version of the *Ramayana* that Ahalya rejects Gautam *Rishi*’s proposal to begin a life together. Contrastingly, in the traditional versions of the *Ramayana*, this is presented differently as there Ahalya and Gautam *Rishi* meet again and start living together. In *Ahalya’s Awakening*, after denying *Rishi* Gautam’s proposal to live with him, she meets Sita. At this juncture of time the fate brings the two abandoned wives – Sita and Ahalya – together. Sita is forsaken by her husband-king (Lord Ram) as she is accused of infidelity as Ahalya is infamous for the same sin. They both find comfort in each other and their common sufferings. In the conversation with Sita, Ahalya says, “I searched all these years for myself- and I only found Ahalya, the woman I was supposed to be born as: unblemished, without any faults. I had no hala in me, no sin, no crime, no guilt. What I had done was to respond to the call of life within me...” (*Ahalya’s Awakening*, 2019, p.345).

2. Conclusion

In *Ahalya’s Awakening*, Kane’s Ahalya remains no more a muted figure who has been passivized in the traditional versions of the *Ramayana*. In some traditional versions like Kampan’s *Iramavataram*, Balram Das’s *Jagmohan Ramayana* or Dandi *Ramayana* and others like *Kathasaritsagar*, *Skand Puran*, it is mentioned that Ahalya knowledgeably allows Indra for a sexual alliance with her. While in Valmiki’s *Ramayana* and Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas*, Ahalya has been presented as a victim by Lord Indra. In Kane’s *Ahalya’s Awakening*, Ahalya’s bold decisions for her own individuality, physicality and choices for her sexuality have been mentioned. Her character is relatable to those sections of the Indian society where women’s aspiration for education is curbed. This novel brings to light the objectification of women that can be seen in the present society as well. Taking these aspects into consideration, Kane’s Ahalya, in this paper, has been also analyzed from the perspective of the western concept of Sex Positive Feminism – an off-shoot of the third wave of feminism. Ahalya’s debauchery may gather support from the feminist point of view, but it will be difficult to provide sustenance to her bold stands considering them from the stand point of traditional Indian culture. The Indian culture, whose roots are still strong, has never been seen to support adultery in any form. Even in the classical Indian epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* adultery has been considered as a sin. Speaking from the Indian cultural perspective, even from the contemporary traditional Indian society’s point of view, a deliberate infidelity on the part of a married man or a woman is immoral. So, from this angle, Ahalya’s infidelity cannot be accepted. Therefore, Kane’s defense of Ahalya’s adultery and freedom for her sexuality may be valid from the view of the Western concept of Sex-Positive Feminism, but cannot be supported from the constructs of the Indian cultural tradition.

3. References

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