

= Ahalya =

In Hindu mythology , Ahalya ( Sanskrit : अहल्या , IAST Ahalyā ) , also known as Ahilya , is the wife of the sage Gautama Maharishi . Many Hindu scriptures say that she was seduced by Indra ( the king of gods ) , cursed by her husband for infidelity , and liberated from the curse by Rama ( an avatar of the god Vishnu ) .

Created by the god Brahma as the most beautiful woman , Ahalya was married to the much older Gautama . In the earliest full narrative , when Indra comes disguised as her husband , Ahalya sees through his disguise but nevertheless accepts his advances . Later sources often absolve her of all guilt , describing how she falls prey to Indra 's trickery . In all narratives , Ahalya and Indra are cursed by Gautama . The curse varies from text to text , but almost all versions describe Rama as the eventual agent of her liberation and redemption . Although early texts describe how Ahalya must atone by undergoing severe penance while remaining invisible to the world and how she is purified by offering Rama hospitality , in the popular retelling developed over time , Ahalya is cursed to become a stone and regains her human form after she is brushed by Rama 's foot .

Ahalya 's seduction by Indra and its repercussions form the central narrative of her story in all scriptural sources for her life . Although the Brahmanas ( 9th to 6th centuries BCE ) are the earliest scriptures to hint at her relationship with Indra , the 5th- to 4th @-@ century BCE Hindu epic Ramayana ? whose hero is Rama ? is the first to explicitly mention her extra @-@ marital affair in detail . Medieval story @-@ tellers often focus on Ahalya 's deliverance by Rama , which is seen as proof of the saving grace of God . Her story has been retold numerous times in the scriptures and lives on in modern @-@ age poetry and short stories , as well as in dance and drama . While ancient narratives are Rama @-@ centric , contemporary ones focus on Ahalya , telling the story from her perspective . Other traditions deal with her children .

In traditional Hinduism , Ahalya is extolled as the first of the panchakanya ( " five virgins " ) , archetypes of female chastity whose names are believed to dispel sin when recited . While some praise her loyalty to her husband and her undaunted acceptance of the curse and gender norms , others condemn her adultery .

= = Etymology = =

The word Ahalya can be divided into two parts : a ( a prefix indicating negation ) and halya , which Sanskrit dictionaries define as being related to the plough , ploughing , or deformity . In the Uttar Kanda book of the Ramayana , the god Brahma explains the meaning of the Sanskrit word Ahalya as " one without the reprehension of ugliness " , or " one with an impeccable beauty " while telling Indra how he created Ahalya by taking the special beauty of all creation and expressing it in every part of her body . Because some Sanskrit dictionaries translate Ahalya as " unploughed , " some recent authors view this as an implicit reference to sexual intercourse and argue that the name refers to a virgin or a motherly figure . This fits the context of the character Ahalya , who is viewed as being in one way or another beyond Indra 's reach . However , Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore ( 1861 ? 1941 ) , focusing on the literal meaning of " unploughed , " interpreted Ahalya as a symbol of stone @-@ like , infertile land that was made cultivable by Rama . Delhi University professor Bharati Jhaveri concurs with Tagore , interpreting Ahalya as unploughed land , on the basis of the tribal Bhil Ramayana of Gujarat , an undated oral tradition .

= = Creation and marriage = =

Ahalya is often described as an ayonijasambhava , one not born of a woman . The Bala Kanda of the Ramayana ( 5th to 4th century BCE ) mentions that Brahma moulds her " with great effort out of pure creative energy " . The Brahma Purana ( 401 ? 1300 CE ) and the Vishnudharmottara Purana ( 401 ? 500 CE ) also record her creation by Brahma . According to the Mahari dance tradition , Brahma created Ahalya out of water as the most beautiful woman in order to break the pride of Urvashi , the foremost celestial nymph . The tribal Bhil Ramayana begins with the tale of Ahalya ,

Gautama and Indra . In the tale , Ahalya is created from the ashes of the sacrificial fire by the Saptarishi ( seven seers ) and gifted to Gautama . In contrast , the Bhagavata Purana ( 501 ? 1000 CE ) and the Harivamsa ( 1 ? 300 CE ) regard Ahalya as a princess of the Puru Dynasty , the daughter of King Mudgala and sister of King Divodasa .

In the Uttara Kanda book of the Ramayana ( regarded by most scholars as a later addition to the epic ) , Brahma crafts Ahalya as the most beautiful woman and places her in the care of Gautama until she reaches puberty . When that time arrives , the sage returns Ahalya to Brahma , who , impressed by Gautama 's sexual restraint and asceticism , bestows her upon him . Indra , who believes that the best women are meant for him , resents Ahalya 's marriage to the forest @-@ dwelling ascetic .

The Brahma Purana gives a similar account of Ahalya 's birth and initial custody , recording that her marriage was determined through an open contest . Brahma declares that the first being to go around the three worlds ( heaven , earth and the underworld ) will win Ahalya . Indra uses his magical powers to complete the challenge , finally reaching Brahma and demanding the hand of Ahalya . However , the divine sage Narada tells Brahma that Gautama went around the three worlds before Indra . Narada explains that Gautama circumambulated the wish @-@ bearing cow Surabhi while she gave birth , as part of his daily puja ( ritual offering ) , making the cow equal to three worlds according to the Vedas . Brahma agrees and Ahalya marries Gautama , leaving Indra envious and infuriated . A similar , but shorter , version of Ahalya 's early life appears in the Padma Purana ( 701 ? 1200 CE ) .

In all versions of the tale , after marrying Gautama , Ahalya settles into his ashram ( hermitage ) , which generally becomes the site of her epic curse . The Ramayana records that Gautama 's ashram is in a forest ( Mithila @-@ upavana ) near Mithila , where the couple practices asceticism together for several years . In other scriptures , the ashram is usually near the river bank . The Brahma Purana says that it is near the river Godavari and the Skanda Purana ( 701 ? 1200 CE ) places it near the river Narmada . The Padma Purana and the Brahma Vaivarta Purana ( 801 ? 1100 CE ) describe the ashram as near the holy city of Pushkar .

= = Hints of a relationship with Indra = =

The Brahmanas ( 9th to 6th centuries BCE ) are the oldest scriptures to mention a relationship between Ahalya and Indra in the " subrahmanya formula " , a chant used by Vedic priests " at the beginning of a sacrifice to invite the main participants : Indra , the gods and the Brahmins " ( priests ) . The Jaiminiya Brahmana and the Sadvimsha Brahmana from the Samaveda tradition , the Shatapatha Brahmana and the Taittiriya Brahmana from the Yajurveda tradition and two Shrautasutras ( Latyayana and Drahyayana ) invoke Indra , the " lover of Ahalya ... O Kaushika [ Brahmin ] , who calls himself Gautama " . The Samaveda tradition identifies her as Maitreyi , who the commentator Sayana ( died 1387 ) explains is " the daughter of [ the god ] Mitra " .

In the subrahmanya formula , Ahalya does not have a husband . The Sadvimsha Brahmana does not explicitly state that Ahalya has a husband , although Kaushika ( interpreted by most scholars as Ahalya 's husband ) is present in the story and his relationship to her can be inferred through Indra 's adoption of the Brahmin 's form to " visit " Ahalya . Renate Söhnen @-@ Thieme , research associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies , feels that the Kaushika of the Sadvismha Brahmana is the same individual described as cursing Indra in the 5th- to 4th @-@ century BCE epic Mahabharata ( discussed below in " Curse and redemption " ) .

The Shatapatha Brahmana 's commentator , Kumarila Bhatta ( c . 700 ) , reasons that the Ahalya ? Indra narrative is an allegory for the Sun or the light ( Indra ) taking away the shade of night ( Ahalya ) . Edward Washburn Hopkins , an American indologist , interpreted the Ahalya of the subrahmanya formula not as a woman , but literally as " yet unploughed land " , which Indra makes fertile .

= = Seduction by Indra = =

The Bala Kanda of the Ramayana is the earliest text to describe Ahalya 's seduction in detail . It

states that Indra becomes enamoured by Ahalya 's beauty , learns of her husband 's absence and comes to the ashram disguised as Gautama to request sexual intercourse with her , praising her as a shapely and slim @-@ waisted woman . She sees through his disguise , but consents owing to her " curiosity " . According to another interpretation , Ahalya 's pride in her beauty compels her . Having satiated his lust , Ahalya requests that Indra , her " lover " and the " best of gods " , flee and protect them from Gautama 's wrath . The Kathasaritsagara ( 11th century CE ) is one of the few texts that mirror the Bala Kanda 's Ahalya , who makes a conscious decision to accept Indra 's advances . However , in this text Indra arrives undisguised .

Although the Bala Kanda mentions that Ahalya consciously commits adultery , the Uttar Kanda of the Ramayana and the Puranas ( compiled between the 4th and 16th centuries CE ) absolve her of all guilt . The Uttar Kanda recasts the tale as Ahalya 's rape by Indra . In one allusion in the Mahabharata , King Nahusha reminds Brihaspati , Indra 's guru , how Indra " violated " the " renowned " rishi @-@ patni ( wife of a sage ) Ahalya . According to Söhnen @-@ Thieme , the usage of the words " violated " and " renowned " indicates that Ahalya is not considered an adulteress .

The Puranas introduce themes that are echoed in later works , including the deception of the unsuspecting Ahalya by Indra 's devious disguise as Gautama in his absence . The Padma Purana states that after Gautama leaves for his ritual bath , Indra masquerades as Gautama and asks Ahalya to satisfy him . Ahalya , engrossed in worship , rejects him , considering it inappropriate to have sex at the cost of neglecting the gods . Indra reminds her that her first duty is to serve him . Finally Ahalya gives in , but Gautama learns of Indra 's deception through his supernatural powers and returns to the ashram . A similar account is found in the Brahma Purana . At times , Indra takes the form of a cock that crows to dispatch Gautama for his morning ablutions , as in the 18th @-@ century Telugu rendition of the tale by the warrior @-@ poet Venkata Krishnappa Nayaka of the Madurai Nayak Dynasty . In other versions , he uses an accomplice , such as the moon @-@ god Chandra , to distract Gautama . In the Brahma Vaivarta Purana , Ahalya comes to bathe in the Svarnadi ( heavenly river ) and Indra becomes infatuated with her when he sees her . Assuming Gautama 's form , Indra has sex with her until they sink to the river bed in exhaustion . However , Gautama catches them in the act . Another version in the same Purana focuses on the question of how the chaste Ahalya was seduced by Indra . In this version , Indra approaches Ahalya on the banks of the Mandakini river in his own form to ask for a sexual favour , which is flatly refused by Ahalya . Indra subsequently poses as Gautama and fulfils his objective .

In some versions , though initially deluded by Indra 's disguise , Ahalya eventually recognises the impersonator . In the Skanda Purana , Ahalya smells Indra 's celestial fragrance and realises 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 . However , Kamban 's 12th @-@ century Tamil adaptation of the Ramayana , the Ramavataram , narrates that Ahalya realises that her lover is an imposter but continues to enjoy the dalliance . Here , Ahalya agrees to have sex with the disguised Indra because she has long been craving affection from her ascetic husband .

In Venkata Krishnappa Nayaka 's Telugu rendition , Ahalya is depicted as a romantic adulteress . When Brahma creates Ahalya as the most beautiful being , she falls in love with Indra and longs for him , but Brahma grants her to Gautama . After Ahalya 's marriage , Indra too craves for her . He frequently visits her and flirts with her in Gautama 's absence . At one point , Ahalya receives a visit from Indra 's female messenger , who proceeds to mock husbands who avoid sex by saying that it is not the right day for pleasure . Ahalya protests , maintaining that she imagines Gautama to be Indra as they have sex and that a woman should be a stone , forgoing all thought of sexual gratification . That night , when Ahalya longs for conjugal bliss , Gautama refuses her , saying that she is not in her fertile period . Agitated , she wishes that Indra was there to satisfy her . Indra perceives her wish and comes in Gautama 's disguise , but is revealed by his seductive speech . Ignoring the deception , Ahalya joyously makes love to him .

= = Curse and redemption = =

While most versions agree that Gautama curses Ahalya after discovering the affair , the curse varies from text to text . However , almost all versions describe Rama as the agent of her liberation and redemption .

= = = Punishments of Ahalya and Indra = = =

The Bala Kanda mentions that Gautama spots Indra , who is still in disguise , and curses him to lose his testicles . Gautama then curses Ahalya to remain invisible to all beings for thousands of years , fast by subsisting only on air , suffer and sleep in ashes and be tormented by guilt . Nevertheless , he assures her that her sin will be expiated once she extends her hospitality to Rama , who will visit the ashram . Thereafter , Gautama abandons the ashram and goes to the Himalayas to practise asceticism . The Ayodhya prince Rama , his brother Lakshmana and their guru , the sage Vishvamitra pass Gautama 's desolate ashram while travelling to King Janaka 's court in Mithila . As they near the ashram , Vishvamitra recounts the tale of Ahalya 's curse and instructs Rama to save Ahalya . Although Ahalya is cursed , Vishvamitra nevertheless describes her as goddess @-@ like and illustrious , repeatedly calling her mahabhaga , a Sanskrit compound ( maha and bhaga ) translated as " most illustrious and highly distinguished " ; this interpretation contrasts with that of Rambhadracharya , who believes that the word mahabhaga , in the context of Ahalya 's story , means " extremely unfortunate " ( maha and abhaga ) . Following Vishvamitra , the princes enter the ashram to see Ahalya , who , up till then , had been hidden from the universe . Ahalya is described as glowing from the intensity of her ascetic devotion , but hidden from the world like the Sun obscured by dark clouds , the light of a full moon hidden by mist or a blazing flame masked by smoke . Under the direction of his guru , Rama considers Ahalya pure and unblemished and , accompanied by Lakshmana , gives her obeisance by touching her feet , an act that restores her social status . She greets them , recalling Gautama 's words that Rama would be her redeemer . Ahalya extends her warmest reception , making a " welcome offering " of forest fruits and washing their feet , an act of respect according to the rites of that era . The gods and other celestial beings shower Rama and Ahalya with flowers and bow to Ahalya , who has been purified through her penance . Gautama then returns to his ashram and accepts her .

In one instance in the Mahabharata , Indra is said to have been cursed by having his beard turned to gold as he seduces Ahalya , while a curse by Kaushika ( sometimes interpreted as synonymous to Gautama ) is cited as the reason for his castration . In the Uttara Kanda , Indra is cursed to lose his throne and endure captivity and bear half the sin of every rape ever committed , while the innocent Ahalya is cursed to lose her status as the most beautiful woman , as it had prompted Indra 's seduction . Ahalya claims her innocence ( this part is not found in all manuscripts ) , but Gautama agrees to accept her only when she is sanctified by offering Rama hospitality .

Ahalya 's defence plea is also found in some of the Puranas . In the Brahma Purana , Ahalya is cursed to become a dried up stream , but pleads her innocence and produces servants , who were also deceived by Indra 's disguise , as witnesses . Gautama reduces the curse on his " faithful wife " and she is redeemed when she joins the Gautami ( Godavari ) river as a stream . Indra is cursed to carry his shame in the form of a thousand vulvae on his body , but the vulvae turn into eyes as he bathes in the Gautami . The Brahma Purana is a rare exception where Rama is dropped from the narrative . Instead , the greatness of the Gautami river is illustrated . The Padma Purana tells that as Indra attempts to flee in the form of a cat , Gautama curses him to lose his genitals and to bear a thousand vulvae on his body . The beguiled Ahalya declares herself blameless , but Gautama considers her impure and curses her to be reduced to a mere skeleton of skin and bones . He decrees that she will regain her beautiful form when Rama laughs at seeing her so afflicted , dried out ( a reminder of the dried stream motif ) , without a body ( the Ramayana curse ) and lying on the path ( an attribute often used to describe a stone ) . When Rama comes , he proclaims her innocence and Indra 's guilt , whereupon Ahalya returns to her heavenly abode and dwells with Gautama .

= = = Stone motifs = = =

In the popular retelling of the legend in later works , as well as in theatre and electronic media , Ahalya is turned to stone by Gautama 's curse and returns to her human form only after being brushed by Rama 's foot .

According to the Brahma Vaivarta Purana , Gautama curses Indra to bear a thousand vulvae , which will turn to eyes when he worships the sun @-@ god Surya . Ahalya , though innocent , is turned to stone for sixty thousand years and destined to be redeemed only by Rama 's touch . Ahalya accepts the verdict without debate . In another version in the same Purana , Gautama catches Indra fleeing as a cat and curses him with castration . Ahalya 's plea of innocence is acknowledged by Gautama , who declares that her mind is pure and she has kept the " vow of chastity and fidelity " , but another man 's seed has defiled her body . Gautama orders her to go to the forest and become a stone until rescued by the touch of Rama 's feet . In Venkata Krishnappa Nayaka 's Telugu rendition , when Indra reluctantly leaves , Gautama arrives and curses Ahalya to become a stone , to be later purified by Rama 's feet . After she is freed from the curse , Gautama and Ahalya are reconciled and they spend their days in bed , exploring sexual techniques .

The Skanda Purana tells that when Gautama arrives , Ahalya explains the whole tale truthfully , but is cursed by Gautama to become a stone , because he believes that she acted as a rolling stone , unable to recognise the difference between Indra 's and Gautama 's gestures and movements . The touch of Rama 's feet is prophesied to be her saviour . The terrified Indra escapes as a cat and is cursed with castration . Ahalya 's truthfulness is also observed in the Kathasaritsagara . When Gautama arrives after the act , Indra tries to flee as a cat but is cursed to bear the marks of a thousand vulvae . When asked by Gautama about her visitor , Ahalya wittily answers that it was a majjara , a word meaning either " cat " or , when split as ma @-@ jara , " my lover " . Gautama laughs and curses her to be turned into stone , but decrees that she will be released by Rama since she at least spoke the truth .

The petrification motif also appears in non @-@ scriptural works . The Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa ( generally dated 4th century CE ) notes that the wife of Gautama ( unnamed here ) momentarily becomes the wife of Indra . Without explicitly mentioning the curse , it relates further that she regains her beautiful form and casts away her stony appearance , owing to the grace provided by the dust of Rama 's feet , which redeems her . Gautam Patel , author of many works about Kalidasa , credits him as the first person to introduce the petrification motif . In the Ramavataram too , Rama does not have to touch Ahalya with his foot ; the dust from his feet is enough to bring her back to life . As in other versions of the tale , the repentant Ahalya is turned to stone , only to be liberated by Rama , and Indra runs away disguised as a cat but is cursed to bear the marks of a thousand vulvae . The Ramavataram is an example of the Bhakti @-@ era poets who exalt Rama as a saviour .

Although opinions differ on whether the Bala Kanda narrative of Ahalya refers to the divinity of Rama , later sources assert Rama 's divine status , portraying Ahalya as a condemned woman rescued by God . The Bhakti @-@ era poets use the episode as an archetypal example to demonstrate God 's saving grace . The main theme of such narratives is her deliverance by Rama , which is seen as proof of his compassion .

Most of the fifth chapter of the Bala Kanda Book of the Adhyatma Ramayana ( embedded in the Brahmanda Purana , c . 14th century ) is dedicated to the Ahalya episode . Like most other versions of the story , Ahalya is turned into stone and advised to engross herself in meditation of Rama , " the Supreme Lord " . When Rama touches the stone with his foot on Vishvamitra 's advice , Ahalya rises as a beautiful maiden and sings a long panegyric dedicated to Rama . She describes his iconographic form and exalts him as an avatar of Vishnu and source of the universe to whom many divinities pay their respects . After worshipping him , she returns to Gautama . At the end of the narrative , Ahalya 's hymn is prescribed as an ideal benediction for a devotee to gain Rama 's favour . The Awadhi Ramacharitamanasa ( 16th century ) drops the narrative of Indra 's visit to Ahalya . In this epic , Vishvamitra tells Rama that the cursed Ahalya has assumed the form of a rock and is patiently awaiting the dust from Rama 's feet . Ahalya tells Rama that Gautama was right to pronounce the curse , and she deems it as the greatest favour , for as a result , she feasted her eyes on Rama , who liberated her from her worldly existence . As in the Adhyatma Ramayana ,

Ahalya lauds Rama as the great Lord served by other divinities , asks for the boon of eternal engrossment in his devotion and afterwards leaves for her husband 's abode . The narrative ends with praise for Rama 's compassion . Tulsidas alludes to this episode numerous times in the Ramacharitamanasa while highlighting the significance of Rama 's benevolence . Commenting on this narrative in the Ramacharitamanasa , Rambhadracharya says that Rama destroyed three things : the sin of Ahalya by his sight , the curse by the dust of his feet and the affliction by the touch of his feet , evidenced by the use of the Tribhangi ( meaning " destroyer of the three " ) metre in the verses which form Ahalya 's panegyric .

= = = Other variants = = =

In some rare exceptions , the curse is dropped . In an instance in the Mahabharata , where details of the seduction are absent , an agitated Gautama orders his son Chirakari to behead his " polluted " mother and leaves the ashram . However , Chirakari is hesitant to follow the order and later concludes that Ahalya is innocent . Gautama returns and repents his hasty decision , realising that Indra is the guilty party . In the Bhil Ramayana , Gautama attacks and imprisons Indra , who is freed when he promises to shower rain on the crops as the rain god . He must also ensure that one quarter of the crops is dedicated to Gautama . Here , Ahalya is interpreted as dry and burnt land , eager for the rains sent by Indra , who is tamed by the wild cyclonic Gautama .

= = Modern renditions = =

Ahalya has been examined in a new light by several modern writers , most commonly through short stories or through poetry in various Indian languages . Although Ahalya is a minor character in all ancient sources , " stigmatised and despised by those around her " for violating gender norms , modern Indian writers have elevated her to the status of an epic heroine , rather than an insignificant figure in the saga of Rama . However , in modern devotional Ramayana adaptations where Rama is the hero , the redemption of Ahalya continues to be a supernatural incident in his life .

Ahalya 's tale lives on in modern @-@ day poetry , including works by Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali and English ; P. T. Narasimhachar 's 1940 Kannada poetic drama , Ahalya , which weighs kama against dharma ( pleasure against duty ) ; and the works of the Sanskrit scholar and poet Chandra Rajan . It is retold numerous times in stage enactments as well as in film and television productions . Ahalya is a popular motif in the Mahari temple @-@ dancer tradition of Odisha . Other works and genres of performance art that have been used to tell her story include the mohiniyattam dance of Kerala ; Ahalyamoksham , a play by Kunchan Nambiar staged in the ottamthullal tradition ; and Sati Ahalya , a padya @-@ natakam drama from Andhra Pradesh .

Early in the 20th century , the old norms were reasserted . Pa . Subramania Mudaliar in his Tamil poem ( 1938 ) describes Ahalya lecturing Indra on chastity , but Indra 's lust compels him to rape her . Gautama turns Ahalya to stone to free her from the trauma . The Tamil writer Yogyiar portrays an innocent Ahalya , who sleeps with the disguised Indra , overcome with guilt and asking for punishment . Sripada Krishnamurthy Sastry 's Telugu version of Ramayana ( 1947 ) , one of the most censored versions of the tale , reduces Ahalya 's contact with Indra to a handshake .

Other authors reinterpreted the Ahalya legend from a very different perspective , often depicting Ahalya as a rebel and telling the story from her angle . R. K. Narayan ( 1906 ? 2001 ) focuses on the psychological details of the story , reusing the old tale of Indra 's disguise as Gautama , his flight as a cat and Ahalya 's petrification . The theme of adulterous love is explored in Vishram Bedekar 's musical Marathi play Brahma Kumari ( 1933 ) and the Malayalam works of P. V. Ramavarier ( 1941 ) and M. Parvati Amma ( 1948 ) . The Ahalya of the Tamil short story writer Ku Pa Rajagopalan ( 1902 ? 44 ) also secretly longs for Indra and enjoys dalliance with him . Pratibha Ray 's Odia novel Mahamoha ( 1997 , " Great Lust " ) portrays an independent and nonconformist Ahalya as a tragic heroine , who offers herself to Indra so that he can fulfil his lust and she her womanhood . When Gautama persuades her to lie to society by claiming to have been raped , she debates chastity and freedom of mind with him .

Some writers try to imagine Ahalya 's life after the curse and redemption , a denouement which remains undisclosed in the ancient scriptures . Pudhumaipithan 's Tamil story Sapavimocanam ( 1943 , " Deliverance from the Curse " ) and K. B. Sreedevi 's Malayalam language work ( 1990 ) translated as " Woman of Stone " focus on Rama 's " double standard " from a feminist perspective . They ask why Rama frees Ahalya from being cursed for adultery , but punishes his wife Sita over false accusations of adultery with her kidnapper , Ravana . In Pudhumaipithan 's tale , Ahalya turns back into stone after hearing that Sita had to undergo a trial by fire to prove her chastity . Sreedevi portrays her turning into stone upon learning that Sita was banished from the kingdom on charges of adultery even after proving her chastity through the trial . Pudhumaipithan also narrates how , after the redemption , Ahalya suffers from " post @-@ trauma repetition syndrome " , repeatedly re @-@ experiencing Indra 's seduction and Gautama 's fury , as well as suffering the ire of a conservative society that rejects her . Gautama also suffers from self @-@ recrimination at his hasty decision to curse Ahalya . In another story , Ahalya by Pudhumaipithan , Gautama forgives both Ahalya and Indra .

S. Sivasekaram 's 1980 Tamil poem Ahalikai examines the stone motif in Ahalya 's tale : she marries a husband who is no more interested in her than a stone and briefly encounters joy with Indra , only to end up cursed to become a lifeless 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 . Uyir Maga ( " Life @-@ woman " ) by the Tamil poet Na . Pichamurthy ( 1900 ? 76 ) presents Ahalya as an allegorical representation of life , with Gautama as the mind and Indra pleasure . The Marxist critic Kovai Gnani , in his poem Kallihai , represents Ahalya as the oppressed class and Rama as an ideal future without exploitation . Gautama and Indra represent feudalism and capitalism . The character of Ahalya played by Kamala Kotnis in the 1949 movie Sati Ahalya ( " chaste Ahalya " ) was described as still relevant by contemporary film critics due to its portrayal of the predicament of a stained woman .

Love , sex and desire become important elements of the plot in Sant Singh Sekhon 's Punjabi play Kalakar ( 1945 ) , which places the epic drama in the modern age . It depicts Ahalya as a free @-@ spirited woman , who dares to be painted nude by Inder ( Indra ) , a pupil of the art professor , Gautama , and defends her decision against her husband 's criticisms . N. S. Madhavan 's Malayalam story ( April 2006 ) also retells Ahalya 's tale in a modern setting , wherein Ahalya , accused of adultery , is beaten by her husband , leaving her in a coma from which the neurologist , Rama , revives her . The 2015 film Ahalya gives a feminist twist to the tale where the policeman Indra turns into a stone doll , after visiting Ahalya . The tale was also parodied in the Telugu film Attarintiki Daredi . However , the practice of retelling the classical Ahalya ? Indra tale in a contemporary setting is not new . The Yoga Vasistha ( 1001 ? 1400 ) narrates a tale of two adulterous lovers , Queen Ahalya and the Brahmin Indra . Here , Ahalya and Indra fall in love and continue their affair , despite being punished by Ahalya 's jealous husband . After death , they reunite in their next birth .

= = Children = =

The Ramayana mentions Ahalya 's son , Shatananda ( Satananda ) , the family priest and preceptor of King Janaka of Mithila . In this version , Shatananda asks Vishvamitra anxiously about the well @-@ being of his " renowned " mother . By contrast , the Mahabharata mentions two sons : Sharadvan , born with arrows in his hand , and Chirakari , whose extensive brooding over his actions leads to procrastination . Besides these , an unnamed daughter is also alluded to in the narrative . The Vamana Purana mentions three daughters : Jaya , Jayanti and Aparaji .

Another legend , generally told in Indian folk tales , states that Aruna , the charioteer of the sun @-@ god Surya , once became a woman named Aruni and entered an assembly of celestial nymphs , where no man except Indra was allowed . Indra fell in love with Aruni and fathered a son named Vali . The next day , at Surya 's request , Aruna again assumed female form , and Surya fathered a son , Sugriva . Both children were given to Ahalya for rearing , but Gautama cursed them , causing them to turn into monkeys , as he did not like them . In the Thai version of the Ramayana ,

the Ramakien , Vali and Sugriva are described as Ahalya 's children from her liaisons with Indra and Surya . Although Ahalya initially passes them off as sons of Gautama , her daughter by Gautama ? Anjani ? reveals her mother 's secret to her father . He consequently drives the brothers away and curses them to become monkeys . Enraged , Ahalya curses Anjani to give birth to a monkey too . Anjani bears Hanuman , the monkey @-@ god and helper of Rama . Similar tales are also found in the Malay adaptation , Hikayat Seri Rama , and Punjabi and Gujarati folk tales . However , Anjani is cursed by Gautama in these versions , generally for aiding Indra and Ahalya in concealing the secret .

Some Tamil castes trace their ancestry to Ahalya and Indra 's liaison ; the castes are named after Ahalya 's children . Gautama finds the three boys and names them according to their behaviour : Agamudayar ( derived from " brave " ) , who confronts Gautama , Maravar ( derived from " tree " ) , who climbs a tree and Kallar ( derived from " thief " or " rock " ) , who hides like a thief behind a large rock . A fourth child , Vellala , is added in some versions . In another variant , the liaison is replaced by penance and worship offered by Ahalya to Indra , who gifts her the children as a reward .

= = Assessment and remembrance = =

A well @-@ known verse about Ahalya runs :

Orthodox Hindus , especially Hindu wives , remember the panchakanya , the five virgins or maidens , in this daily morning prayer . One view considers them " exemplary chaste women " or mahasatis ( " great chaste women " ) as per the Mahari dance tradition , and worthy as an ideal for " displaying some outstanding quality " . According to this view , Ahalya is the " epitome of the chaste wife , unjustly accused of adultery " , while her " proverbial loyalty to her husband " makes her venerable . Ahalya is often regarded as the leader of the panchkanya due to the " nobility of her character , her extraordinary beauty and the fact of her being chronologically the first kanya " . In the Devi @-@ Bhagavata Purana , Ahalya is included 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 .

Another view does not regard the panchakanya as ideal women who should be emulated . Bhattacharya , author of Panch @-@ Kanya : The Five Virgins of Indian Epics contrasts the panchakanya with the five satis enlisted in another traditional prayer : Sati , Sita , Savitri , Damayanti and Arundhati . He rhetorically asks , " Are then Ahalya , Draupadi , Kunti , Tara , and Mandodari not chaste wives because each has ' known ' a man , or more than one , other than her husband ? " Because they exhibited sexual behaviours that were non @-@ ideal and even unethical according to traditional norms , Indian social reformer Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was perplexed by the inclusion of Ahalya and Tara in the panchakanya . Although Ahalya 's transgression blemished her and denied her the high status and reverence accorded to women like Sita and Savitri , this action made her immortal in legend .

The place where Ahalya is held to have practised her penance and was redeemed has been celebrated in scriptures as a sacred place called the Ahalya @-@ tirtha . A tirtha is a sacred place with a body of water , where pilgrims generally bathe to purify themselves . The location of the Ahalya @-@ tirtha is disputed : according to some scriptures , it is on the river Godavari , others place it on the river Narmada . Two sites are widely held to be the Ahalya @-@ tirtha . One is located near Ahalyeshvara Temple in Bhalod , on the banks of the Narmada ; another is located in Darbhanga district , Bihar . The Ahilya Asthan temple in Ahalya @-@ gram ( " Ahalya 's village " ) in the same district is dedicated to Ahalya . For those seeking to attract women and be handsome like the love @-@ god Kamadeva , the Matsya Purana and the Kurma Purana prescribe the worship of Ahalya at the Ahalya @-@ tirtha . This is to be done on the day of Kamadeva , in the Hindu month of Chaitra . According to the texts , he who bathes in the tirtha will enjoy pleasure with the celestial nymphs .

For Bhattacharya , Ahalya is the eternal woman who responds to her inner urges and the advances of the divine ruler , a direct contrast to her ascetic husband , who did not satisfy her carnal desire . The author regards Ahalya as an independent woman who makes her own decisions , takes risks



and is driven by curiosity to experiment with the extraordinary and then accept the curse imposed on her by patriarchal society . It is this undaunted acceptance of the curse that makes the Ramayana praise and venerate her . V. R. Devika , author of *Ahalya : Scarlet Letter* , asks , " So is it right to condemn adultery and physical encounters as modern afflictions and 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 ? "

Like Bhattacharya , Meena Kelkar , 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 . Patriarchal society always condemns Ahalya as a fallen woman . In Bhavabhuti 's 8th @-@ century play *Mahaviracharita* , which alludes to Ahalya 's redemption in a verbal spat with Parashurama , Satananda is mocked as the son of Ahalya , the adulteress . Jaya Srinivasan , in her discourses on tales from the Hindu epics , says that though Ahalya 's action was " unpardonable " , she was redeemed by the divine touch of dust from Rama 's feet . Jaya adds that Ahalya 's actions and the resultant curse are a warning that such immoral behaviour leads to doom , although sincere penitence and complete surrender to God can erase the gravest sins . 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 . 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 .

The right @-@ wing Hindu women 's organisation *Rashtra Sevika Samiti* considers Ahalya the symbol of " Hindu woman 's ( and Hindu society 's ) rape by the outsider " , especially British colonisers and Muslim invaders , but also Hindu men . The feminist writer Tarabai Shinde ( 1850 ? 1910 ) writes that the scriptures , by depicting gods such as Indra who exploit chaste wives such as Ahalya , are responsible for promoting immoral ways ; she asks why so much importance is then given to *pativrata dharma* , the devotion and fidelity to the husband which is said to be the ultimate duty of a wife .

A similar tale of divine seduction appears in Greek mythology , where Zeus , a king @-@ of @-@ the @-@ gods figure akin to Indra , seduces Alcmene by assuming the form of her husband , resulting in the birth of the legendary hero Heracles . Like Ahalya , Alcmene falls victim to Zeus 's trickery in some versions or , recognising his true identity , proceeds with the affair in others . The main difference between the tales is that the *raison @-@ d'être* of Alcmene 's seduction is the justification of Heracles 's divine parentage , so she is never condemned as an adulteress or punished ; in contrast , Ahalya faces the ire of the scriptures as her encounter is regarded as purely erotic ( not resulting in procreation ) .