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Shakra Indra, The Divine Exploiter: Delineation of His Cunning Subterfuges with Reference To Kavita Kane's *Menaka's Choice* and *Ahalya's Awakening*

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Abstract: Indian epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as met narratives have been the storehouses of myriad mini narratives. The contemporary literary practice, known as revisionist mythmaking, enables the writers to pick out one of the many such mini narratives and to cast upon that a different outlook and perspective through which emerges an entirely new interpretation of that narrative. Indian epics provide that flexibility of narration and pliability of interpretation due to its vast amount of mythological stories. The present study incorporates two novels namely *Menaka's Choice* and *Ahalya's Awakening* authored by Indian myth fiction writer Kavita Kane. In both of these novels Indra appears as a character and his appearance alters the plot structure significantly. Driven by ego, jealousy, and insecurity for his position in heaven as well for his exquisite handsomeness he used and exploited both the protagonists Menaka and Ahalya for his personal gains. This paper aims to exhibit the cunning ways and substandard exploits adopted by Shakra Indra, in the aforementioned novels, to

accomplish his nasty desires which eventually bring him a plethora of ignominy and infamy.

Keywords: Revisionist mythmaking, Indian epics, metanarratives, Kavita Kane.

Introduction:

The vast corpus of Indian ancient literature encompasses four *Vedas* (*Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva*) and each *Vedas* further divided into four parts namely, *Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka, and Upanishad*, six *Vedangas*, various *Dharmasutras*, eighteen *Mahapuranas* along with two Epics, viz. the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. However this list is not exhaustive as there exists abundant texts of various sects and different schools of philosophy. With this many literary texts available, it's not surprising anymore to think about how ancient Indian texts afford to have such numerous stories about myths

RESEARCH ARTICLE

and legends. With the progress of time and society altogether, many of those aforementioned texts have lost their importance and significance and termed as obsolete in the modern worldview. But this is not true in case of the two epics. They continue to exert their influence and maintain their importance in society throughout the ages. These are like any pervading forces and ubiquitously present in every strata of Indian society. Since time immemorial these epics serve as paradigms of moral and ethical advisory and people have been citing and quoting examples and looking forward to these epics for spiritual as well as societal requirements.

Kavita Kane, an Indian journalist turned author has authored books related to Indian mythology and legends. She is a prominent figure in the contemporary Indian neo-mythological writings along with other prolific writers such as Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Devdutt Pattanaik, and Ashwin Sanghi to mention a few. Kavita is famous for her portrayal of female protagonist who are conventionally and systematically overlooked and cornered by male authors and society at large as well. She picked up various lesser known female characters from ancient Indian texts, particularly from epics and through her literary genius and arresting narrative techniques gave them a prominent role. Her works fall in the category of postmodern feminism and “she is considered a

revolutionary force in Indian writing because she has brought in feminism where it is most needed-mythology” (R 259). Her famous lesser known female protagonists include Urmila from *Sita's Sister*, Ahalya from *Ahalya's Awakening*, Menaka from *Menaka's Choice*, Uruvi from *Karna's Wife*, Satyawati from *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, and Surpnakha from *Lanka's Princess*. Through these characters Kane proposes to capsize the conventional trope of “ideal woman” into a “new woman”, who is more fierce and bold toward her desires and requirements. She has been successfully able to give voice to these unheard characters and forced readers to ruminate about these characters in a new light.

Etymology of ‘Shakra Indra’:

This is to clarify and define the name I have used in the title i.e. Shakra Indra. If we consciously analyse and cogitate Indian epics then it can be evidently seen that Indra is not the name of a person who is wielded with immense power and exerts enormous influence upon heavenly affairs and devas, rather it is merely a designation or a post. The post was offered to individuals who are extremely righteous, ethical and diligent in their nature and everyday conducts but the irony is that the designation is not fixed for any particular person and after a period of time the older Indra need to have his seat vacated for a newer one. There have been

RESEARCH ARTICLE

numerous persons to appropriate the designation and each referred to as Indra. Popular myth fiction writer Devdutt Pattanaik puts it: “When we speak of Indra, we must keep in mind that the scriptures refer to six different types of Indra, belonging to different periods of history” (Pattanaik). Readers should engage themselves in an intense rumination as to why a person who has been chosen to the designation of Indra after accumulating enough virtues need to be dethroned for a newer one. The possible reason for this must be power.

Shakra’s Insecurity, Jealousy and Menaka:

The city which is the capital of “Heaven, Indralok, Swarg” (Kane, Menaka’s Choice 19) is known as Amravati of which the chieftain is Shakra. He has sovereignty and complete sway over everything that this place has to offer including a bunch of Gandharvas and Apsaras who are there to entertain him. Out of those few chosen beautiful Apsaras who has been placed in the court of Indra, Menaka stands out the most. Her exquisite beauty, elegant grace and well-crafted body make her the centre of attraction in the heaven. Numerous Gandharvas including Vishwvasu and Shakra himself were smitten by her tantalizing and alluring delicacy. But as the rule prescribed in heaven and for Apsaras they are not supposed to fall in love with any

Gandharvas but only to play the game of flesh and to satiate their carnal hunger. Indra himself reflects looking at her beauty and utters: “She was born to distract, destroy and ravish” (14). Things become worse when Vishwvasu and Menaka fell in love contravening the rules of the heaven and their connubial amalgamation results in her pregnancy. Indra becomes infuriated hearing the news and Vishwvasu, once his closest friend now becomes the victim of Indra’s jealous rage. Before that Indra forced the couple to abandon the new born baby since there is no scope of rearing a baby in heaven. In a pre-planned plot woven by Indra and Rambha both smitten by jealousy of the couple throw away Vishwvasu from heaven alleging false accusations on him. These two incidents are enough to give Menaka bouts of mental trauma. She becomes the victim of power politics. Indra, driven by his jealous debarred Menaka from her motherhood and separated her from her husband.

Kaushik, the monarch of Kanyakubja and a fierce Kshatriya warrior after being defeated by Rishi Vasishth swears to be a Brahmarshi. For this he abandoned his great kingdom along with his three queens and children. Driven by his ego he prioritises his personal ambition and escapes from his duties as a king, husband and father. He didn’t care about his whining wife Hemavati who tries everything possible to stop him from abandoning his

RESEARCH ARTICLE

kingdom and her as well. Having grudge against Vasishth, Kaushik started his severe penance which brings him some fruitful result as he receives the Maharishi tag. Up to this juncture Indra has nothing to worry about but the events to be followed after this essentially made him insecure of his position in the heaven.

And as days lapsed into weeks, Indra to his growing horror saw an unbelievable sight. Rishi Kaushik was forming an entire universe, a parallel galaxy with a new set of stars, constellation, solar systems, a generous sprinkling of life to thrive there, and a clone of Indra to rule it! (Kane Menaka's Choice 78)

Kaushik through her ascetic prowess and the boons received by his penance created a "Pratishristi", another universe because Indra didn't allow Trishanku to enter into the heaven citing he's a mortal hence not allowed into heaven. A visibly livid Kaushik accused Indra:

Your Indralok is biased, segregating on the basis of caste, colour and country. My Pratishristi-this new universe-will be just and egalitarian, welcoming all, respecting all, promising salvation to all. Merit not entitlement will be considered (Kane Menaka's Choice 78).

However, due to the intervention of Brahma himself the angry Kaushik comes to peace. Following Brahma's order

Kaushik called off his queer creation for which Brahma gave him a new moniker "Vishwamitra, the friend and philosopher to the universe" (79).

Indra henceforth starts to fear Vishwamitra as he thinks the sage, after becoming a Brahmarshi would again set his eye on his throne so he started devising plans to stop the Rishi from attaining that highest feat. He didn't have the guts to go in person and disrupt Vishwamitra's severe austerity because he fears the wrath of such a great sage. After much evil contemplation finally his crooked brain stops at a point where he decided to ask help from his favourite Apsara Menaka, who kept distance from Indra after the banishment of her husband Vishwavas. Indra had done it before quite a few times so he knew exactly what he is going to do. Whenever Indra felt such insecurity hovering around his throne from anyone doing severe penance he immediately sent one of her many Apsaras to lure the person and distract him from his task. This is exactly what he is going to repeat once more. It sounds almost ridiculous that a person who has enough power to vanquish anyone in the three worlds and someone has been wielded with almost every sacred weapon including the furious "Vajra . . . Indra's divine thunderbolt" (Kane Menaka's Choice 67) is fearing sages. This is not only in case of sages but also demons. Due to the attractiveness and alluring resplendence of

RESEARCH ARTICLE

the Indralok and Amravati, it's capital, it has always been in the target of demons. In the Indian mythology there have been mentions of numerous instances when demons attack Indralok and in each and every occasion Indra being unable to fight with the demon platoons flee for safety and seeking help from either of the Tridevas. Was he so helpless? Or was it any of his compulsion? The question remains.

Indra's fear towards Vishwamitra can be seen in his voice when he has left with no choice but to distract him from doing what he is doing these days. An exasperated Indra utters: "I have to stop him or he'll ruin my Indralok! He had the temerity..." (Kane Menaka's Choice 90). Indra simply couldn't digest the slightest of imagination of his position being threatened by a sage, a mortal. Indra is ready yet again with another of his cunning subterfuges to use Menaka's beauty to lure Vishwamitra which "can consign his tapas to oblivion" (90). Indra knew this move could be fatal for Menaka yet he has decided to use her to exploit the sage and in the process she too is being exploited by Indra's crude selfishness. He confesses his plan and pleads Menaka to help him disrupt the ascetic pursuit of the revered sage: "It's time for him to break! I need you, Menaka," he appealed. 'I need you to go down to Earth, seduce him, sap him entirely of all his powers and find a way to trap him into

domestic bliss on more permanent terms" (91).

Analysing it from the perspective of Menaka and knowing why she has readily acquiesced to the plan of Indra even when she was livid with him for his injustice inflicted upon her familial bonding sheds another light on the characteristic of Indralok and Indra himself. Menaka was fed-up with the routined, spiritless, and unenthusiastic life in Indralok after she was separated from her husband by Indra's trickery. So she took this as an opportunity to go and explore the world outside the gloomy life of Indralok. Menaka desperately wanted to escape this totalitarian and dystopian (at least for her) world of Indra which can be compared with the infamous "OneState" of Russian writer Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, where each and everything goes by the crude rules and regulations set by the state upon it's denizens. Indra on the other hand resembles the ill-famed and notorious "Big Brother" of George Orwell's dystopian fiction 1984. Like the Big Brother, Indra had vivid watchful eyes which almost left nothing out of his gaze. Though the Gandharvas and Apsaras feel discontented at times due to the decisions taken by Indra, they didn't have the right to dissent rather than submitting to the authtarian power. Summing up, all these reasons provides an apparent reason for Menaka to readily agree

RESEARCH ARTICLE

with the proposal of Indra to go the earth and disrupt and unsettle Vishwamitra.

Menaka descended to the earth and started doing exactly what she has instructed to do by Indra. She remains successful in seducing and attracting Vishwamitra towards her captivating and enchanting beauty. Vishwamitra on the other hand continues to lose hold on his ascetic power, his meditations and above all on his ambition to become a Brahmarshi. Menaka's charismatic and enticing beauty was so heavily pounded upon Vishwamitra that he forgets everything, his principles, his ethics, his morality only continuing his amorous play of flesh with her. Menaka, too found a new harbour in the ashram of the sage and altogether a new pattern of lovemaking which was in many ways different from the Indralok. Soon their flighty and childish lovemaking developed into a mutual relationship that finds its culmination with their marriage. Menaka decided resolutely not to leave her Kaushik at any cost because she fears heartbreak but the fear of Indra hovers round her head. She knew it very clearly that once she finishes the assigned task she would be called up by Indra to the heaven. Soon they had a baby girl and named her Shakuntala. Till this time Vishwamitra has entirely detached himself from his glorious path by spending his times in the absurd and unmeaning household chores. He has lost much of his powers that he had accumulated by doing

penance. Menaka could see that and avows to send Vishwamitra again to the path of glory to become a Brahmarshi. She continues to force him to restart his pursuits, reminds him of his past glory but to no avail. He was so besotted with her and their child that he started devaluing his former ambition.

Menaka troubled by her morality and ethics, she couldn't digest the fact that all the events of her life with Kaushik has its base on deceit and duplicity. She agreed that her love towards Kaushik is real but it has deceit in its root. Meanwhile Indra's jealousy started blooming again seeing Menaka's happy life and lovemaking with Vishwamitra so time and again he come to the earth to take back her with him. Menaka got stuck in a quandary and vacillated in-between two thoughts. On one hand she can't see her Kaushik gradually being falling down from his glory and on the other hand she can't even imagine about leaving Kaushik and her daughter once again. But she had to make a choice, she made one, leaving her beloved daughter and Kaushik so that he can again restart his ascetic practices. With a heavy heart, teary eyes and visibly trepidation in face she confesses the deceit to Vishwamitra apprehending a definitive curse. To which Vishwamitra responds coolly: "How could I curse you? . . . You have taken away that power too, for I love you too much..." (Kane Menaka's Choice 164). Menaka and

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vishwamitra continue their ultimate conversation filled with intense emotional and mental agony. Both couldn't comprehend how their life would be after this fateful day. Menaka keeps on saying cruel things intentionally to produce more fury inside Vishwamitra because she wanted him to leave her at any cost for his glorious future. On the part of Menaka it's an act of sacrifice but Vishwamitra thinks he got duped by Menaka's lies and deceits. They have decided to part their ways and never to meet again throughout life but before that they will have to decide the future of their only daughter- Shakuntala.

Indra's plan becomes partially successful and he got defeated by his own envoy, Menaka's revelation of truth. Although the cunning act kept Vishwamitra aloof from his ascetic glory for some time but after the revelation of Menaka about her deceit and plans with Indra, Vishwamitra is again fired up and to start his penance more fiercely this time. This revelation of truth by Menaka can be interpreted as an act revenge for all those oppressions and injustices against her. Just before the couple part their ways Vishwamitra, with immense pride as if he has achieved a royal victory, informs Menaka to "Tell Indra, he lost. I shall win this war too!!" (Kane Menaka's Choice 170). Menaka, badly wants to take her daughter Shakuntala with her to the heaven but mortals are not allowed in heaven as per the established rules. Menaka

could have fought against such rules but another fear gripped her mind as she thinks what would be the future of her daughter in the heaven, what if her daughter would meet a similar fate destined for an Apsara. Clearly, Menaka doesn't want her daughter to be an Apsara in the heaven and become the object of devilish "male gaze" of the lecherous men out there. Vishwamitra too express his reluctance to keep Shakuntala with him because it will create hurdle in his aspiration and ambition and further the child would make him remember every time of Menaka. Vishwamitra puts it, "She is mine, ours, a symbol of our love, our marriage, our loss and our hate. I shall never be able to forget you each time I look at her. She will remind me of you and all what you meant to me, all what you did. I can't have her! Though she is as much a victim as I am" (166). Vishwamitra decides to give the baby girl to his friend Rishi Kanva and retires to his penance. Shakuntala, since then, have had to bear the tag as an "abandoned daughter" (11).

Everyone, starting from Vishwavas, Menaka, and Vishwamitra to the innocent girl child Shakuntala, became the victims of Indra's evil and cunning subterfuges. Indra's jealousy of Vishwavas, trepidation of Vishwamitra and insecurity of his throne made him to devise such intrigues that shattered two beautiful and contented families and both the time Menaka became a scapegoat.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vishwvasu got a curse from Indra which made him a Kabandh, a demon. Indra's irrational jealousy brought such awful state for Vishwvasu. Whenever there is a talk of this episode people are very keen to throw their judgemental eyes upon Menaka as a seductress who seduced Vishwamitra and almost ruined him. But was it her fault? Clearly not. She wouldn't have done such an act had she not pressed and forced by Indra to do so. Shakuntala, the toddler too became the victim of Indra's intrigue. Instead of being celebrated she bore the tag of a result of unholy liaison between a divine and an earthly person. Menaka not only lost Shakuntala but also her previous child, another girl named Pramadvara fathered by Vishwvasu due to the atrocities of Indra. Subsequently, Vishwamitra attained the status of a Brahmarshi through his diligent austerity, Vishwvasu got his original form and freed from curse by Lord Rama but till now the status of Menaka remains the same.

Shakra and Ahalya: Their Liaison and Damnation:

Resting the case for Menaka there, I would now like to delve deep into the other chosen book of Kavita Kane namely *Ahalya's Awakening*. Much like the plot of *Menaka's Choice*, this novel too explicitly elucidates one of the many deceits of Indra. But this time, without using anyone to aid him in his intrigue, he himself decides to continue with his own capacity only to meet

a fate which he had never imagined. This time he becomes the ultimate victim of his own subterfuges but before that he had successfully victimized "Ahalya—the beautiful one without blemishes" (Kane *Ahalya's Awakening* 14). Much like the case of Menaka, Indra, driven by his sexual appetite and hurt pride, perform a terrible act and successfully destroys another matrimonial relationship of Ahalya and Rishi Gautam. However a slight difference can be found between these two books. While in *Menaka's Choice* Indra has been portrayed as a divine person but in *Ahalya's Awakening* his character becomes more anthropomorphic which can be seen evidently as he teams up with Divodas, the brother of Ahalya in his fight with the Dasas. This help gains Indra the invitation to enter into the royal palace of King Mudgal where he meets Ahalya for the first time and desires to have her.

Ahalya remains wary of Indra and his nefarious intentions as she already heard many foul things about him. She chooses to continue her study and wants to become a Rishika, a woman sage like Maitreyi and Gargi (Madaan 10.3), much to the denial of her mother. Her mother, Nalayani acts as a typical Indian mother who wants to wed her child to a man of immense power, fortune and wealth. She secretly plots with Indra and promises to give her daughter's hand to him. Seeing Ahalya's interest in further studies and her aloofness from him, Indra continues to remain desperate to gain

RESEARCH ARTICLE

access over her. It's quite ironic and humorous on the part of Indra, the divine king, who always stays with beautiful Apsaras, pining and yearning for a mortal. However the plot takes a dramatic turn when Ahalya becomes smitten by the guidance, love, and caring gestures of Rishi Gautam during her short in the latter's Ashram. A relationship which started having its root in academic activities only soon finds its culmination in the marriage between Ahalya and Gautam, leaving Indra infuriated. A seemingly livid Indra accuses Ahalya of betraying his feelings and love for her. This event is essentially a turning point in the plot because at this juncture everything for which Indra has been immensely proud of got fractured within no time and his love and intense passion for Ahalya turned into hate instantly. Indra walks out of the royal palace of King Mudgal with intense fury hovering his face with his last sentence being directed at Gautam: "A war is never won until the last battle, Gautam" (Kane *Ahalya's Awakening* 129). It's a warning that Indra gave which will find its culmination much latter in the plot. Henceforth Indra would chase, to get at his hand, this hateful love Ahalya.

Indra's physical burliness and unfathomable power always fetches him female attractions and more frequently he gets entangled in it. His failure to establish a relation with Ahalya forces him to look forward for another way which can

compensate the loss. In this regard Sasi and others evaluated Indra as following: "His view about a woman was that they are born to be first father's daughter and then to get married and known as husband's wife and his description of the woman was 'just lovely creatures', which says it all: a woman is a mere object" (5752). "In anguished frenzy, he had turned to Sachi, rushing into her waiting arms the very same day Ahalya had spurned him publicly in the royal hall. In his intoxicated, depressed state, he had seduced Sachi, a virgin" (Kane *Ahalya's Awakening* 137). He makes love with Sachi but remains visibly annoyed and perplexed and couldn't give satisfactory answers when asked about their marriage. He simply didn't expect Sachi to ask such question because he never had the intention of marrying Sachi, a demon princess, the daughter of the demon king Puloman. For Indra making love with an Asura princess is acceptable but while questioned about marrying her he puts his ego before anything and says, "The king of the Devas going to an Asura king?. . . Never!" (Kane *Ahalya's Awakening* 141). From this Sachi could sense the nefarious intention of Indra and she retaliated saying, "I am a princess, Indra, not one of your aspires that you can have fun with and leave . . .How long did you think you could play around with me?" (140-41).

Indra however married her (out of fear that if he doesn't do so he would

RESEARCH ARTICLE

eventually lose Sachi too) killing her father to uphold his pride as the divine king. Without being judgmental, he acts as a hypocrite when he takes Sachi, a mortal with him to Indralok. He himself set the rule that no mortal can come and stay in Indralok as it is reserved only for divine beings. He contradicts himself and defied the law of cosmos in the process of his immature yet intense love for Sachi. This remains as a testament that he can go to any length if it suits his agenda and convenience. His marriage was too a matter of convenience as he never felt real love for Sachi and it is also a way to escape the inner turmoil he was experiencing being separated from Ahalya forever. It's only because he wasn't able to get Ahalya's hand, he chooses to marry Sachi out of his needs. This becomes evident subsequently when Indra along with all his celestial devotees didn't treat her as their queen and she had to plead Indra for her role and designation in Indralok: "Each one at Indralok has a purpose and designation. What is mine, Shakra, besides being your wife?" (Kane *Ahalya's Awakening* 162). Indra forces her to identify herself as "The wife of Indra. You are Indrani" (162). Even if after their marriage Indra couldn't forget Ahalya. His deep longing for her creates turmoil and completely shattered Sachi's life. Even if Indra is married to her he continues his closeness with other Apsaras of heaven which eventually makes Sachi jealous. So she becomes a victim of Indra's

whimsical and fanciful marriage devoid of any real feelings and his irresponsible treatment.

Sachi's woes are much similar to that of Ahalya's. Both of them feel alienated from their husbands after their marriage. Indra keeps himself busy in revelry while Rishi Gautam remain besotted with his unfinished task of drafting various laws. Ahalya strived very hard to reconcile the seemingly invisible barrier between her and Gautam but to no avail. Gradually she feels betrayed as Gautam started to ignore and stop teaching her. Despite her love for Gautam, if there was any reason behind her marriage with him, probably that was her intense yearning for higher learning as she wanted to become a Rishika. She suppressed all these emotions within her but how could she suppress her carnal desire! It can be easy for a Rishi to suppress all his desires of carnality but what about Ahalya! Clearly in this regard her husband completely failed her. Gautam left her in a state which forces her pining and demanding for erotic pleasures: "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?" (Kane *Ahalya's Awakening* 202). Much like Sachi, Ahalya become a victim of her husband's irrational and alienated behaviour.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Throughout all these years Indra continues to keep his lascivious and salacious gaze upon Ahalya. He could clearly read the uneasiness and resentments in the eyes and face of Ahalya. Sensing and suspecting something is troubling her in her matrimonial relationship, he plots another subterfuge to go near her pretending to ask for her forgiveness for his rash behaviour during her Swayamvar. He continues his look upon her naked body while she takes her bathe for several days and stalks her by making various natural disturbances to make her aware that someone is behind her, following and keeping track of her. He just wanted a chance to go near her and her loneliness provides him enough boost to do this. He finally makes his appearance before Ahalya and with an extremely polite voice says his reason for coming to her:

I confess, I come here for a personal reason. I came to apologise. [. . .] For my behaviour at your brother's wedding . . . And, of course, at yours as well. I should have apologised when I met you in the palace, but again, we started on a wrong note (Kane *Ahalya's Awakening* 214).

During his sweet and unusual subservient conversation with her, Indra sensed the truth behind Ahalya's resentments. He becomes completely aware

of the discord that arouse between the couple and used it as his weapon to exploit Ahalya then and there. Putting a sudden kibosh to their conversation, Indra "grabbed her waist" (219) forcefully and loathes her for rejecting his love for her. This completely exposes the morality that Indra has, as the divine king. He didn't feel any remorse or pity while doing such kind of heinous act of misbehaving with someone's wife. He commits the same crime for which he had banished Vishwvasu from the heaven, which clearly exposes Indra's cunning self and his pleasures in exploiting women.

The events make him crazy and insane and he further tries to become more and more close to her. His exploits didn't end there as he weaves another nefarious plot to subjugate Ahalya completely under him. But this well-crafted plot becomes a boomerang for him as he loses his respect and in return gets enough of shame and infamy. It will also give an emotional trauma to the reader as to how a person belonging to such higher echelon of divine order can think of such substandard way to achieve things. It also challenges the age old beliefs of something is eternally good or bad and force the reader to acknowledge the evil residing inside everyone. Indra manipulated the timing of night with the help of much reluctant Chandra Dev, the moon god which makes Gautam leave his Ashram early for morning ablution,

RESEARCH ARTICLE

thinking that it's already dawn. Amidst this Indra through his magic guise himself exactly as Gautam and started exploiting the poor Ahalya. Though Ahalya sensed that the man upon her is not his husband but Indra, still she didn't protest much rather submits herself to him. Therefore Indra's success in this move not only comes from his plans but also from the burning desires for love making of Ahalya. But here the question still arises on the ways adopted by the so-called divine person to achieve his desires. The person who should be the stalwart and flagbearer of everything righteously and morally upright and who should keep himself busy in the divine affairs is busy in plotting intrigues to exploit his praise and ruining them forever.

The act performed by Indra being driven by extreme sensual passion earns him an equal amount of extreme ignominy. Gautam returns from his prayer and reacts to the situation in the same way any husband would do. He burns in extreme rage and accuses Indra vilely saying: "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, you dastard" (Kane *Ahalya's Awakening* 234). Gautam driven by extreme rage and jealousy of seeing Indra with his wife, and to exhibit his power he does the same thing as is expected from a Rishi, curses 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. The female parts you so openly lust for! And may you lose what is needed to unite with it . . . May the world know of your indecent thoughts and actions. Henceforth, carry your shame with you, Indra! (235).

Rishi Gautam shunned everything that Indra has had and his curse made Indra extremely vulnerable to public ridicule and ostracize. Indra lost all his pride of his exquisite handsomeness and immense power remaining hidden from the world. He finally understood his folly which made Ahalya vulnerable to such predatory act by Indra. However it didn't stop him from abandoning her, he went away from her saying: "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" (Kane *Ahalya's Awakening* 244). Not only did he, but all their children abandoned her and till date people have very foul opinion of her. But the most pertinent question- what is the folly of Ahalya here? Why has she been looked down upon by people till this day? Has she committed a mistake in demanding love from her husband? No one can give a satisfactory answer because we all have bias. But we shouldn't ignore the fact that she became yet another victim of Indra,

RESEARCH ARTICLE

much like Menaka. Indra put a sudden kibosh on her marital life like he did with Menaka and Vishwvasu, and Vishwamitra and Menaka. This remains another testimony of the victimization of an innocent woman by two men- Indra, and Gautam. Subsequently coming under pressure from the Gods, Gautam forced to dilute his curse upon Indra but he never thought of giving another chance to Ahalya to repent or to reconcile with him (255).

Conclusion:

Thus we see the many substandard ways adopted by the extremely “righteous” Shakra Indra to fulfil his desires. It was his insecurity towards his throne and jealousy of Vishwvasu which led to the disaster in Menaka’s life while in case of Ahalya it was more about intense love turned hate and jealousy towards Gautam. It’s not the case of these two women only rather there are several others characters including, Vishwamitra, Vishwvasu, Shakuntala, Gautam etc., who become victims of Indra in some of their life. Finally we see how Indra himself gets victimized by his own plot but the common thing among all these is the fact that men gets away very easily from their state of victimhood but women continue to endure it perennially.

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