



SHORT STORY

Ahalya's Curse

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Ahalya, of Ramayana, was the wife of Rishi Gautama. This beauty was seduced by Indra, who had to suffer the sage's curse for his adultery. According to the epic, Indra (Lord of the Firmament) sought the help of the moon, who assumed the form of a cock and crowed at midnight. This roused Gautama to his morning devotions. When he went out, Indra went in pretending to be Gautama and made love to Ahalya. The Rishi punished both. He turned his wife into a stone and cursed Indra to have vaginas all over his body. Ahalya was restored to her natural state by Rama, the hero of the epic.

Not knowing one's limitations is a sin... an unpardonable one at that. You married me.

What if Brahma had given me as your bride? You could have easily rejected the offer had you put your common sense to use. Why do you men lose all your senses when it comes to woman?

Sages like you are revered everywhere. People place you on a pedestal in their hearts and worship you. They consider you as an intermediary between god and men. They think you are wise. Yet how shamelessly you fall for women!

Brahma created me. You nourished me. What are you both to me if not fathers? None of you ever seemed to have any respect for the woman in me. To both of you I should have looked like a commodity. A commodity can never have any opinion of its own. And so both of you never bothered about my wishes. And your decisions were final.

Brahma if asked would have given a slippery answer: Where can I find for you a better being than Gautama? You for your turn would have said: You will be safe in my hands.

I became your wife. Rather I was made your wife even before I could ask myself whether I liked it or not. Such a thing happens to ninety per

cent of women in our country. It is destined so perhaps. Or is it a curse on our motherland?

Brahma made you happy by advising you to marry me. You made Brahma happy by obeying him. To you he is the Guru. And Guru's words are law. To him you are the best among sages. He had two birds by flinging a single stone. You had two mangoes in a single shot.

Neither of you seemed to care a hay for me. The butcher made the eater happy. The eater made the butcher happy. But where did the lamb disappear?

The poor lamb has lost its identity. From lovely lamb to meat, from mutton to food, from delectable dish to faeces and from foul-smelling faeces to earth again.

In the case of the helpless lamb, it had the satisfaction of becoming food for someone who appreciated it as it melted on one's tongue. But me? Sage Gautama's wife... That's how the world began to identify me. I was Ahalya, no more. From childhood to girlhood, from girlhood to wifedom, from wifedom to motherhood, from motherhood to ... Oh! The several -hoods of women, they are destined to pass before they become dust with dust.

Before you decide to curse me, let me have your audience. Cursed be me if I fail to convince you. If you feel convinced, then leave me to myself. To live with you or go with Lord Indra is my concern.

O Sage! You brought me up. You sincerely and whole-heartedly fulfilled the wishes of Brahma, who entrusted me with you. I am grateful to you as a daughter would be to her father. You were a mother, too, to me, for I have learnt to distinguish between affection and love. You taught me everything that an impartial guru would do to his illustrious disciple.

You should have stopped there, O Sage! You should have stopped there. It is out of greed that you played the fourth role. It is unexpected of you. All calamities in life are caused by greed. Greed is the offspring of over-confidence. We develop this sort of confidence once we fail to understand our limitations.

Brahma gave a body to my soul. He gave me to you. But you saw only the soul and ignored the body.

I am Brahma's daughter. I am beauty incarnate. I am special to the great creator. He told me once that he made much use of sandal paste to mould my body.

O Sage! Have you ever looked at me at close quarters? Who in all the seven worlds has such a shapely and well-chiselled nose as mine?

It is the nose that speaks for the face. And mine is the most beautiful one. It is unique in its own way.

Have you ever noticed my eyes... my swimming eyes? What beauty in any part of the world has them?

Well? I am a stupid woman talking of beauty to you. All my words will sound nonsensical to you. When you can't even see and admire my face which is an open book, what use can there be if I speak of the hidden treasures that my father took pains to bless me with?

Devas and Asuras would have vied with each other to sing of my frame in glorifying terms. Poetasters, too, would have come out with genuine lines of pure poetry.

A good woman inspires a man; a brilliant one interests him; a beautiful one fascinates him; and a sympathetic one gets him. I know I am all the four rolled into one. Yet I failed to get you.

I spent several days, months, and then years in trying to know the root of my failure. Then one day I understood that it was not my failure. It dawned on me that you are not a man.

It was a late realization, of course. You have no feeling for me. Fine! But you have no feeling for any other woman either.

Perhaps you have outgrown all such human feelings, which you would call human weakness. This is one solid case in which body

magnetism failed. One who has conquered all his senses can never be a man.

In all these years of married life, I've been living just like a stone, a dead wood. I doubt if you ever knew what a wretched life I was leading. It was a death-in-life-existence.

I needed a saviour who could look at me with lust-filled eyes. This is what every woman worth her salt ever wants her man to do. It is only lust that leads to love, and never love to lust.

Lust is the essence of life...the only means of satisfying the biological urge. Without it there can be no creation. Brahma would have to sit idle only to be forgotten once and for all.



Indra, the lustful lad of the firmament, is really my prayer answered.

Just try to recollect what happened in the morning, a short while ago. I know you are not in that mood now. So I will do that for you.

The cock crowed. You woke up. You went out to take your morning bath. You never knew that you were tricked by a human voice. People call you sage. But how gullible are you?

I knew it. I knew it was not a rooster's voice. I was also certain that my saviour had come.

A few days ago when I was half-clad and bathing in the river, Indra speeding in his vehicle amidst the clouds, eyed me and slowed down. I

waved my hand smiling at him all the time. He, too, smiled back and disappeared.

The next day when I was bathing, I heard a voice from behind the bushy trees that said, "No tongue can paint your beauty."

I was happy at heart. I jumped for joy. All because someone has seen me and found that I am a beauty beyond words. Neither a lexicographer nor a fertile poet can ever express in words the joy I experienced on that day, at that hour.

I looked around and asked, "Who is it?" Indra showed up as if he were waiting for my words of permission.

I smiled. My long tresses were hiding the front of my body, and I didn't make any attempt to hide it with my hands. Neither did I go down into the water. Instead I stood hip deep.

Indra came closer to me on the bank. His words told me that I am tall and graceful and that my magnificent hair cascades in profusion from my shapely head.

Beneath my arching eyebrows, I learnt only from him that my eyes like twin stars shine forth with a brilliancy only softened by long, black, curving lashes

that veil them.

It is not that I do not know how delicately and finely my features are moulded. But when he continued, I fell in love with myself. He spoke at length of the winning sweetness of my smile and certified that the tender lines of my lovely mouth personify the gentleness of my nature.

He was all praise for my complexion. Deliciously creamy, he said, with a transparent yet perfectly healthy texture that never wearies one's eyes and becomes insipid.

He stopped awhile as I admired him and his words of praise. He stepped into the water and embraced me.

It was really a man's touch, a touch I was craving for all along. He brushed

my long tresses aside, and I didn't object to it. He saw the real me, unadulterated and uncivilized. He closed his eyes for a few seconds or so and heaved a sigh.

I reciprocated his sigh and expressed my longing for man's touch. Why should I die a virgin and allow the flames to turn to ashes my long preserved virginity?

My heart pounded for him. He was the first man to see my beautiful frame with nothing on it. My soul accepted him as my true husband. My body craved to consummate.

But the bank of the river can never be the right place to consummate. And we are not animals in heat. Above all my conscience, the inner voice, warned me that someone might be looking.



So I gave Indra the ruse. I told him to come well before dawn and park his vehicle away from your sight. It was I who told him to imitate a rooster at that odd hour. It was I who advised

him to make the best use of this hour for consummation.

Oh God! Indra is a real man. He showed me the womanpower in me, which you allowed to slumber. But for Indra I would have died an untimely death. Thanks to my Lord.

You can never, O sage, brand me unchaste. I slept with only one man. I will sleep only with him. I would say I am made for him. If Indra happens to die, I would love to jump into his funeral pyre.

Do not brand me faithless. There is no frailty in my act. And I am not perfidious.

So think twice before you curse me. A chaste woman like me can also curse, and her curse is as good or as bad as any Sage's.

Aren't you listening? Oh God! You are already a stone. □

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