
**Gender, Ecology, and Myth: Ecofeminist Perspectives on Kavita Kane's
*Ahalya's Awakening***

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Abstract

This paper examines Ahalya's Awakening by Kavita Kane through the intersecting perspectives of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, focusing on how the novel reconfigures the relationship between nature, gender, and patriarchal authority within myth. Ahalya's transformation into stone, imposed through Gautama's curse, is interpreted as an ecological metaphor for silenced womanhood—rendered motionless, voiceless, and reduced to an object within a male-dominated moral order. Kane's retelling challenges this traditional framing by questioning the patriarchal logic that equates women with nature in order to dominate both. Drawing upon ecofeminist thinkers such as Vandana Shiva and Val Plumwood, alongside ecocritical scholars like Lawrence Buell, and Stacy Alaimo, this study reads Ahalya's petrification and subsequent awakening as symbolic acts that simultaneously reveal structures of control and enable the recovery of ecological and gendered agency. The novel destabilizes conventional binaries such as man/woman, culture/nature, purity/pollution, and silence/voice, thereby opening a space for feminist environmental interpretation. Traditionally remembered as one of the Pancha Kanyas, Ahalya's story has largely been framed in terms of transgression, punishment, and divine redemption. Kane reimagines her not as a passive sinner but as a reflective and resilient subject capable of self-realization and renewal. From this perspective, Ahalya's Awakening demonstrates how mythic retellings can forge meaningful connections between ecological justice and gender justice, positioning Kane's

narrative as a significant intervention within Indian ecofeminist mytho-fiction and the broader field of environmental humanities.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, Mythology, Gender and Ecology.

INTRODUCTION

Nature and culture are inseparable dimensions of the human environment, shaping how individuals perceive, interpret, and inhabit the world. The balance between these two forces influences how societies define their values, traditions, and relationships with the natural world. In literature, this interplay becomes a creative space where writers explore humanity's connection with nature and the moral questions that arise from it. As Lawrence Buell observes, "An environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination, the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it" (Buell, 2), reminding us that literature and creativity are deeply bound to ecological awareness.

Ecocriticism, as a contemporary literary approach, examines how texts express ecological consciousness and the ethical responsibilities of human beings toward their surroundings. As Cheryll Glotfelty explains, "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment... Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty, xviii). Building on this foundation, she further notes that "Ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman."(xviii) These perspectives affirm that literature is not separate from ecology but part of a wider conversation between imagination, ethics, and environment.

Throughout the literary canon, nature has always occupied a central position. From the Anglo-Saxon period to the present, writers have reflected on the natural world as a vital part of human experience. During the Romantic era, poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley celebrated nature as a living force, transforming landscapes into dynamic expressions of emotion and thought. For them, nature was not merely a backdrop for human action but a spiritual and moral presence shaping human consciousness. In the Indian cultural context, the *Ramayana* and the

Mahabharata function as ecological texts that revere the natural world and recognize its sacred dimension. Both epics portray nature not as a passive setting but as a living, divine presence intertwined with human destiny. Every element—earth, water, forest, and sky—embodies symbolic and spiritual meaning. Each major character maintains a strong bond with the environment: Sita, born from the earth, represents fertility and purity; Draupadi, associated with the *Pancha Bhootha* (five elements), symbolizes harmony and resilience; Satyavati, bound to the river, signifies continuity and flow; and Surpanakha's connection to the forest embodies wildness and freedom. The epics often situate their narratives in gardens, mountains, and rivers, revealing how ancient Indian civilization viewed nature as divine. Even in modern television adaptations, these kingdoms appear surrounded by sacred groves and lush gardens, reflecting the enduring harmony between the human and the natural realms.

This recurring alignment between women and the natural world reveals that Indian mythology often feminizes nature, depicting both as life-giving yet vulnerable to domination. The treatment of these women—revered, tested, or silenced—mirrors humanity's shifting relationship with the environment itself. From an ecofeminist perspective, these parallels suggest that the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature arise from the same hierarchical worldview that privileges power over balance. In this light, Kavita Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening* reinterprets the ancient myth through an ecocritical and feminist lens, portraying how both woman and nature are marginalized under patriarchal norms. Ahalya's transformation—from stone to sentient being—symbolically mirrors the silenced condition of women and the exploited state of nature in traditional narratives.

Through this retelling, Kane restores Ahalya's agency and reclaims the ecological and ethical consciousness embedded within myth. Many contemporary novelists reinterpret the Indian epics by focusing on overlooked events and characters. Among them, Kavita Kane stands out as a leading writer of mythological retellings in the present time. She is best known for her best-selling novel *Karna's Wife* and has also written several novels centered on the marginalized women of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In this paper, the analysis focuses on *Ahalya's Awakening*, a novel that gives voice to Ahalya, who is usually portrayed as a fallen woman cursed into silence in the canonical narratives. Kane's reinterpretation uncovers the unrevealed pages of her story, humanizes her experience, and opens new ecological and feminist dimensions.

Most of Kavita Kane's works explore gender, identity, and female agency, but her settings are also deeply connected with the environment—forests, green

landscapes, and palaces surrounded by gardens. Her descriptions reveal that these novels carry strong echoes of ecocriticism. According to Vandana Shiva, women and nature share a deep, life-affirming connection that has been systematically silenced or exploited under patriarchal and capitalist systems. When women are denied agency, it parallels how nature is controlled, extracted, and rendered voiceless. Shiva writes, "All existence arises from this primordial energy which is the substance of everything, pervading everything. The manifestation of this power, this energy, is called nature (Prakriti). Nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos; in conjunction with the masculine principle (Purusha), Prakriti creates the world" (Shiva,37).

In *Ahalya's Awakening*, the environment is not just a backdrop but a symbolic space that reflects Ahalya's emotional and spiritual state. The novel becomes a rich case study of ecological symbolism and feminist resistance, showing how gender, nature, and power are intertwined. This study therefore asks: How does Ahalya's transformation into stone symbolize both the silencing of women and the objectification of nature? In what ways does Kane's retelling reclaim ecological and feminine agency? By exploring these questions, the paper demonstrates how *Ahalya's Awakening* bridges gender justice and ecological justice, contributing to the broader discourse of environmental humanities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rewriting of women characters from Indian epics has become an important area of discussion in recent literary studies. Traditional texts such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have shaped social ideas about womanhood for centuries. These epics often present women through fixed ideals like purity, obedience, sacrifice, and silence. However, contemporary writers and critics increasingly question these representations and attempt to recover the unheard voices of women buried within these grand narratives. In my reading of the texts, modern retellings therefore do more than simply retell old stories; they revise history from the margins and challenge patriarchal authority.

Feminist thinkers have long pointed out that women's identities are shaped more by cultural conditioning than by biological fate. Simone de Beauvoir's well-known statement that "one is not born, but becomes, a woman" remains central to understanding how myth trains women into specific roles. Along similar lines, Judith Butler explains how gender itself is repeatedly performed through social expectations. What stands out to me here is that when these ideas are applied to mythology, it becomes clear that epic women are not just characters in stories but models through

which ideal behaviour is taught, repeated, and controlled. Postcolonial feminist scholars further draw attention to the way dominant narratives silence women. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea of the "subaltern" helps explain how women like Ahalya exist in the epic tradition without a voice of their own. They are often remembered only for a single act—virtue, temptation, punishment, or sacrifice—while their thoughts, emotions, and struggles remain invisible. This selective remembrance turns women into symbols rather than living individuals.

At the same time, literary studies have also moved toward ecological awareness through ecocriticism. Cheryll Glotfelty describes ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, reminding us that stories always emerge from a lived connection with land, water, forests, and climate. Lawrence Buell further argues that environmental problems are linked to failures of imagination, suggesting that literature has the power to reshape how people understand nature. This becomes especially meaningful in the Indian context, where rivers, forests, mountains, and earth are not passive backgrounds but living forces connected to human destiny. When feminism and ecocriticism come together, ecofeminism emerges as a powerful framework. Vandana Shiva argues that women and nature are exploited through the same systems of domination. Val Plumwood similarly explains that patriarchy places both women and nature in inferior positions by constructing them as passive and controllable.

Ecofeminist critics therefore see myth as a space where gender violence and ecological exploitation often mirror each other. But today, writers are no longer satisfied with these fixed images of women. Within this critical background, Kavita Kane has gained wide recognition for retelling Indian myths from the viewpoints of marginalised women. *Ahalya's Awakening* has especially attracted attention for giving voice to a character traditionally reduced to sin, curse, and redemption. Scholars note that Kane does not treat Ahalya as a mere moral example but presents her as a thinking, feeling woman shaped by emotional loneliness, forced choices, and inner conflict. Her silence in the original myth becomes, in Kane's version, a space for reflection, resistance, and self-discovery. These reinterpretations have become especially visible in Indian classrooms and research after 2015, when women-centred myth novels began to be widely discussed.

Some critics have also pointed out that nature plays an important role in Kane's storytelling. The forest, the ashram, stone, and silence function not just as settings but as emotional and symbolic landscapes that shape Ahalya's transformation. However, while much of the existing scholarship focuses on feminism and narrative

revision in Kane's work, fewer studies closely examine how myth itself becomes a tool for both ecological and identity reconstruction. This gap creates space for the present study, which reads *Ahalya's Awakening* as a narrative where the recovery of a woman's voice is inseparable from the recovery of ecological and spiritual meaning.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is grounded in the principles of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, two intersecting theoretical approaches that provide a strong foundation for interpreting Kavita Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening*. Both fields address the complex relationships between human beings, the natural world, and the structures of power that shape cultural narratives. They help reveal how literary texts reflect ecological concerns, gender politics, and symbolic representations of nature. Ecocriticism, as articulated by Cheryll Glotfelty and other foundational scholars, emphasises that literature is deeply connected to the physical environment in which it is produced and interpreted. Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment... Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (The Ecocriticism Reader, xviii). This definition foregrounds the idea that literature does not exist in isolation; it emerges from human interaction with land, climate, geography, and ecological realities. Ecocriticism therefore seeks to understand how literature represents nature, how it shapes ecological consciousness, and how it encodes attitudes toward the nonhuman world. It encourages readers to look beyond urban-centred or purely human perspectives, turning attention toward forests, rivers, animals, landscapes, and ecological processes as meaningful elements of literary meaning.

Glotfelty's contribution marks the beginning of ecocriticism as an academic movement, but the field has expanded significantly over the decades. Scholars such as Lawrence Buell have added a philosophical dimension to the discipline. Buell argues that ecological crises are fundamentally crises of imagination. He notes, "An environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination, the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it" (The Environmental Imagination, 2). This idea suggests that before societies can address environmental degradation, they must first change the way they imagine their relationship with the natural world. Literature plays a central role here because imagination is shaped through stories, metaphors, and narrative frameworks. The myths, poems, and novels that cultures inherit and produce deeply influence how people think about nature.

Buell's theory is particularly relevant to mythological retellings, where ancient stories are reimagined for modern contexts. Myths contain symbolic representations of nature, gender, morality, and cosmic order. When writers reinterpret these myths, they also reinterpret the ecological ethics embedded within them. Kane's retelling of Ahalya's story is one such imaginative reconstruction that both reflects and critiques ecological and gendered assumptions present in the original narrative. Another crucial theoretical framework for this study is ecofeminism, a movement that explores the intersection between ecological degradation and the oppression of women. Ecofeminism argues that patriarchy—the social system that privileges male authority—creates hierarchical dualisms such as man/woman, culture/nature, reason/emotion, and subject/object. In these dualisms, women and nature are placed in inferior positions, viewed as passive, exploitable, and existing primarily for others' benefit. Scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Val Plumwood have been instrumental in developing ecofeminist theory. Shiva points out that the exploitation of women and nature arises from the same worldview: a patriarchal and capitalist logic that treats both as resources to be controlled. She writes, "Nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos; in conjunction with the masculine principle (Purusha), Prakriti creates the world" (37). Shiva's interpretation highlights that feminine energy, like nature, is life-giving, creative, and interconnected with the cosmos. Patriarchal systems suppress this energy, reducing both women and nature to objects.

Val Plumwood adds another dimension to this idea. She argues that patriarchy constructs women and nature as the "Other," defined as "passive, non-agent, non-subject" (15). This framework helps explain why mythological narratives often portray women as silent, sacrificial, or morally scrutinised. When patriarchal culture turns women into background figures, their agency and individuality are erased—similar to how nature is often reduced to a scenic backdrop rather than a living presence. Kane's rewriting of Ahalya directly challenges this erasure by giving voice to a woman traditionally portrayed as silent or morally ambiguous. Ecofeminism also aligns with postcolonial ecocriticism, which examines how colonial power structures shaped both environmental exploitation and gendered oppression. Postcolonial ecocritics argue that colonialism not only took control of land, forests, rivers, and natural resources but also imposed patriarchal systems and cultural values that devalued native ecological knowledge and women's roles within environmental stewardship. In India, mythology often reflects indigenous ecological wisdom—

knowledge of forests, seasons, animals, and cosmic cycles—but patriarchal interpretation sometimes suppresses the feminine ecological voice. Retellings like *Ahalya's Awakening* therefore become a form of cultural and ecological recovery.

Shiva, Plumwood, and Buell together provide a powerful framework for reading Ahalya's myth. Shiva explains the spiritual and ecological connection between women and nature; Plumwood reveals how patriarchy constructs both as inferior; Buell highlights the imaginative dimension of ecological crisis. When we apply these frameworks to Ahalya's story, her transformation into stone becomes symbolic of how patriarchal systems freeze women's identities, silence them, and turn them into objects. At the same time, the ecological context of the forest, ashram, river, and hermitage becomes a space for resistance, healing, and renewal. *Ahalya's Awakening* therefore sits at the intersection of these theoretical strands. It uses myth not only to question patriarchal control but also to recover ecological meaning embedded in ancient narratives. Kane's portrayal of Ahalya is both feminist and ecological: it reveals how nature and womanhood share similar patterns of suppression, endurance, and renewal. Through Ahalya's inner reflections, her connection with the forest, and her symbolic return to Shakti, the novel becomes a rich site for ecofeminist interpretation. The theoretical foundation of this study thus lies in understanding how literature reimagines myth, how myth reflects ecological ethics, and how reclaiming the voice of a silenced woman can also become an act of ecological justice.

AHALYA'S MYTH: TRADITIONAL REPRESENTATIONS

In almost all vernacular versions of the *Ramayana*, the story of Ahalya follows a similar pattern—Indra, the king of gods, seduces Ahalya, and both are cursed by Sage Gautam. However, the traditional narratives rarely explain what happened before or after her marriage to Gautam. This narrative gap is what Kavita Kane explores in *Ahalya's Awakening*. Her retelling does not invent a new story but rather reimagines the existing one through a modern perspective. Kane fills the silences left in the ancient texts by giving emotional and psychological depth to Ahalya's experiences. According to the *Valmiki Ramayana*, Ahalya was created by Brahma, the creator god, as the most beautiful woman on earth. Her beauty was so enchanting that kings, sages, and even the celestial gods desired to marry her. To avoid conflict among them, Brahma chose Sage Gautam as her husband, believing his wisdom and virtue would balance Ahalya's divine beauty. Yet, this divine pairing soon turned tragic. Overcome by desire, Indra deceived Ahalya by assuming Gautam's form and seduced her. When Gautam discovered the deceit, he cursed both

Indra and Ahalya—Indra to bear a thousand eyes on his body, and Ahalya to turn into stone and remain invisible to the world until she would be freed by Rama's touch. This is the plain version of the myth known to most people through oral and written traditions. Across various retellings—from Valmiki's Sanskrit epic to regional adaptations such as *Kamban's Ramavataram* in Tamil and *Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas* in Hindi—the central theme remains the same: Ahalya's fall, curse, and redemption. While Valmiki presents her as a sinner who pays for her transgression, later poets like Kamban and Tulsidas portray her more compassionately, emphasizing forgiveness and purity. These interpretations reflect changing cultural and moral attitudes across regions and time periods. Kavita Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening* enters this long lineage of retellings not to deny the original story but to question its silence. She gives voice to Ahalya's inner life—her thoughts, choices, and pain—thereby turning a myth of sin and punishment into one of consciousness and self-realization. Kane's version reveals that Ahalya's story is not merely about moral failure but about reclaiming the dignity and voice denied to women in patriarchal narratives.

ECOLOGICAL SYMBOLISM, FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS, AND RESISTANT MYTHMAKING IN *AHALYA'S AWAKENING*

Ahalya's transformation into stone in *Ahalya's Awakening* emerges as one of the most compelling ecological and feminist symbols in contemporary myth retellings. Kane does not treat the curse merely as a mythical episode or moral punishment; instead, she deepens its symbolic texture by embedding Ahalya's experience within a larger landscape of nature, patriarchy, and spiritual consciousness. To understand the significance of the stone metaphor, Kane first establishes Ahalya's early life within the forested ashram—a world that shapes her identity long before the curse descends. The ashram is not just a physical setting, it becomes the formative ground of Ahalya's intellectual, emotional, and moral evolution. Kane repeatedly shows how the trees, sacred groves, birds, silence, and flowing river form a harmonious environment where Ahalya learns philosophy, compassion, discipline, and introspection. This natural world nourishes her mind and spirit, and she learns to see herself in continuous relation with the rhythms of nature.

Thus, when Ahalya leaves the ashram after her marriage to Gautam, she feels a deep emotional rupture—a dislocation from the ecological world that had become an extension of herself. Kane uses this moment to foreshadow Ahalya's eventual immobilisation; the subtle disturbance she feels at leaving the forest is the early sign of her alienation from a life anchored in nature. Ahalya does not fall into emotional

turmoil because of marriage alone; rather, her inner discomfort reveals the impact of losing her ecological environment. Her physical movement away from the ashram marks the beginning of her slow emotional confinement within patriarchal systems.

Ahalya's upbringing in the forest is not only spiritual but also intellectual. Gautam sees her potential early and tells her, "People often assume that the most famous figures of ancient times were men, be it rishis or rulers. But there have been several women seers who have excelled equally... learning, my dear, has no gender or caste or class. You worship knowledge and you are blessed with wisdom" (89). This moment is crucial because it affirms that knowledge, like nature, is genderless and freely available to all who seek it. Gautam's words give Ahalya the legitimacy to pursue intellectual growth, placing her in continuity with a forgotten tradition of women sages. Ironically, this same woman—once encouraged to learn—is later immobilised and silenced, showing how patriarchal systems contradict their own ideals. Her transformation into stone thus marks the violent erasure of a woman who embodied wisdom, echoing how nature, too, is stripped of agency despite being the source of life and learning.

This confinement reaches its symbolic peak when she is cursed into stone. Kane's rendering of the stone form makes it clear that Ahalya's transformation is not simply about divine retribution. The stone becomes an ecological metaphor for how patriarchy turns women into silent, immobile matter. Val Plumwood's framework is highly relevant here; her argument that women and nature are repeatedly constructed as "non-agent and non-subject" under patriarchal ideology explains how Ahalya's identity is overwritten by a rigid cultural script. As a stone, she is denied movement, speech, and bodily autonomy—just like nature, which is often perceived as passive, inert, and existing only for human use. The curse strips her of agency in exactly the same way that forests, rivers, and land are stripped of agency through patriarchal and colonial narratives.

Yet, Kane does not allow the stone to remain a symbol of pure silence. Instead, she suggests that Ahalya's stone form contains latent energy—the feminine force that Vandana Shiva describes as Shakti. Even though Ahalya is immobilised, her inner consciousness, her capacity to think, question, and feel, continues beneath the surface. Shiva's interpretation of Prakriti as a creative, animating feminine principle helps illuminate Ahalya's condition: she embodies suppressed vitality, endurance, and resilience. Patriarchy may reduce her to stone, but her essential energy remains alive. This is why Kane's stone metaphor becomes so powerful: it reveals that both woman and nature, even when suppressed, hold an inner life and capacity for renewal.

Priyanka Singh's observation that the Anthropocene originates from mythic constructions of male dominance is particularly relevant when analysing Gautama's curse. His act is not simply the anger of a wronged husband; it is a representation of patriarchal authority deciding the fate of a woman's body, voice, and identity. Ahalya's transformation into stone thus becomes a microcosm of a larger cultural logic—one where men determine the value and purpose of women and nature. Kane uses the curse to expose the beginnings of ecological injustice: the stone symbolises a woman turned into an object of nature, and nature turned into an object controlled by patriarchy. Thus, the stone becomes a shared symbol of silencing—encapsulating both ecological and feminine agency frozen under patriarchal power. Indeed, this shared silencing is what makes Ahalya's awakening so significant; the transformation into stone is not just a narrative pause but an extended metaphor for ecological endurance and the long silence forced upon women. Ahalya's own reflections deepen this symbolism. When she says, "I remain in the forest, away from man's rules and falseness" (Kane, 349), she reveals an acute understanding of the moral and ideological conflict between nature and patriarchal culture. Nature, for her, is honest, accepting, and non-judgmental, whereas human society constructs rigid standards that shift according to convenience. Her words expose the hypocrisy of societal expectations, which she later articulates more sharply through her critique: "born a daughter, to live as a wife and die as a mother" (Kane, 40). This reveals how patriarchy defines women only through relational roles, never as independent subjects.

Her silence, therefore, is not merely imposed punishment but becomes a period of profound introspection. Kane uses this silence to illustrate how women, when pushed into marginal spaces, often find the clarity to analyse the structures that oppress them. Ahalya's inner monologues during her stone state reveal a growing awareness of how patriarchal society uses morality to control women's behaviour. Her awakening marks the next phase of ecological and feminist transformation. Kane portrays the forest as Ahalya's teacher, companion, and quiet witness. The natural world becomes the space where Ahalya learns to reflect, forgive herself, and understand her own truth. Her confession—"It was in the forest that I found my mistake, my fidelity, my recovery, my rumination" (Kane, 349)—shows that her awakening is not granted by Rama's divine touch alone but is essentially an inner process nurtured by the ecological world. This shifts the focus from divine male intervention to feminine ecological renewal.

Ahalya's awakening is thus shaped by nature. The forest is not a passive setting; it actively participates in her healing. This resonates with ecofeminist thought,

which emphasises the nurturing role of nature and the deep connection between ecological renewal and feminine resurgence. When Ahalya realises that “Women are not told that they also belong to a bigger world—of freedom, of knowledge, of passion, of ambition” (Kane, 340), her awakening becomes both intellectual and emotional. She no longer sees herself within the narrow boundaries society had assigned her. Her identity expands, mirroring the expansive freedom of the forest itself. Her critique of society—“Societal expectations are hypocritical... they enjoy a woman being subjugated” (Kane, 344)—demonstrates how deeply she understands patriarchal systems. This insight reflects the ecofeminist belief that patriarchy constructs women and nature as inferior to maintain power. Ahalya’s awakening parallels ecological regeneration: just as damaged land revives when liberated from oppressive forces, Ahalya’s inner strength returns when she reconnects with the forest. Finally, Kane’s retelling becomes an act of resistance literature. By giving Ahalya interpretive authority over her own suffering, Kane challenges the traditional patriarchal narrative that treated her as a guilty woman awaiting divine redemption. Singh’s observation that modern retellings destabilise “mythic constructions of male centrality” becomes clear in Kane’s portrayal. Ahalya becomes the storyteller, interpreter, thinker, and agent of her own life. Her awakening is not a gift; it is a reclamation.

Rana’s ecofeminist insight that both women and nature are commodified under patriarchal systems resonates throughout the novel. When Ahalya moves from stone to self-awareness, Kane transforms the myth into a critique of patriarchal ecologies. The forest becomes a metaphor for healing and truth, while the stone becomes the symbol of patriarchal immobilisation. This is why Ahalya’s voice, once restored, becomes a powerful instrument of resistance. Kane’s retelling is therefore not merely a modern adaptation but an ideological intervention. By reframing the myth, she challenges patriarchal authority, reclaims female agency, and ties feminine awakening to ecological consciousness. The novel participates in the decolonial feminist turn in contemporary mytho-fiction, offering readers a renewed understanding of Ahalya—not as a sinner, but as a woman whose awakening signals the possibility of ecological and feminist rebirth.

Conclusion

Ahalya’s Awakening reshapes a familiar myth into a narrative of ecological awareness and feminist empowerment. Kane challenges the traditional moral lens through which Ahalya has long been viewed and instead emphasises her inner strength and spiritual clarity. The novel shows how myths can evolve, offering new

meanings that question injustice and illuminate overlooked dimensions of gender and nature. Kane demonstrates that women and the natural world face similar forms of exploitation under patriarchal structures, which often treat both as resources rather than living entities. Ahalya's stone form symbolises this suppression, while her forest-based renewal highlights the possibility of healing and transformation. Her awakening marks the return of agency and Shakti, aligning with ecofeminist insights from Shiva and Plumwood, who argue that patriarchal worldviews undermine feminine and ecological energies in parallel ways. By situating Ahalya's suffering and recovery within the forest, Kane underscores nature's role as witness, teacher, and source of truth. The novel thus contributes to feminist ecological discourse and affirms that retelling myths can restore dignity to silenced figures while re-establishing the connection between gender, ecology, and cultural memory.

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