

Understanding the Outlook on Menstruation in India “Let’s talk PERIOD!”

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ABSTRACT

The connotations of impurity that surround menstruation gave rise to the phrase and concept of ‘polluted women’ which is one of the few things that almost all the religions (be it Hinduism, Christianity or Islam) seems to be agreeing upon but in actuality it is a game of interpretation at its core. The word ‘menstruation’ that has now been normalized far enough for it to be considered offensive today, finds its roots in religious fanaticism. The elucidation of religious texts in the majority of the religions was left to men so it is not a breach to say that their understandings and explanations might be biased to further their ‘females are inferior’ agenda and can be easily debunked and stripped of their credibility as baseless myths. But women around the world are still suffering under the yoke of these misconstrued interpretations and have been condemned to an eternity of inhumane treatment during those 5-7 days every month. It doesn’t just affect their physical health but the seclusion and alienation cost them their mental equilibrium too. In a time when comfort and care is needed the most, they are subjected to irrational practices that aggravates their trauma and which is so hard to comprehend that society dismisses it as histrionic behaviour. The demotion of menstruation as a tabooed topic is not just a desirable ideal now, but it has become an imperative necessity so in an attempt to keep up with the changing times there is a wave of change being felt in the environment. It is time that this patriarchal society gets rid of its conservative mindset. Everything boils down to pose this question – in a world where a woman’s ability to bear children is her only strength celebrated by this male-dominated society then why, menstruation, a process which aids that is shunned down as a topic which is not worthy or ‘normal’ enough to be discussed in a civil conversation?

Keywords: Polluted women, Hinduism, Christianity or Islam, menstruation

Periods, crimson waves, “that time of the month”, being down, MC and the list can go on till infinity. A concept that has such an extensive nomenclature, which affects almost half of the population of this planet directly, at some point in her life or the other, and the other half indirectly (if we consider the narrative of PMS- premenstrual syndrome to be existing). Yet, people are being hushed when they want to talk about it in public and just as some people are being treated as “untouchables” for the plain reason of their surname, some of the women experiencing this biological process are also subjected to

similar kind of treatment at different places in the world for the plain reason that there are various irrational notions associated with MENSTRUATION.

Having been lived in a culture where on one hand people worship a goddess, who is assumed to be menstruating, and collects that menstrual blood¹ and on

¹Archana Dalmia, “even goddess in temple bleeds like all women. It’s a blessing, not filth” (*daily O*, 17th December 2015) <www.dailyo.in/lifestyle/sabarimala-menstruation-happytolead-religion-gods-dominance-patriarchy-untouchables-assam-kamakhyas-sanitary-napkins/story/1/7987.html>

the other hand menstruating women are burdened with innumerable rituals, beliefs, and superstitions, it is not absurd on part of anyone to juxtapose this dichotomy in people's perception towards menstruation, search for the reasons for the same and think, that if the concept of birth is considered to be completely normal or a felicitous event then why a concept, which is the most important accessorial process to give birth, is such a big taboo.

Research Objectives

- ❖ To understand the actual menstruation process versus people's understanding of it under different religions owing to various historical reasons.
- ❖ To explore the practices adopted on women due to these superstitious beliefs and implications of the same.
- ❖ To study the new wave of change in this outlook and impact of the same on various fronts.

Research questions

- ❖ Whether the tabooed outlook towards menstruation in India can be traced back to the religious roots?
- ❖ Whether the discomfort associated with menstruation can solely be attributed to the biological process itself or is there something/ someone else to be blamed?
- ❖ Whether the current scenario being faced by Indian society has any juxtaposition to the situation a few years back regarding the attitude of the society towards menstruation?

Research methodology

The Research methodology will be doctrinal and descriptive. The sources will be articles and books by eminent scholars who have worked in this field.

Research scheme

- ❖ Chapter 1- Menstruation Patriarchy is a curse.
- ❖ Chapter 2- Impacts of the curse
- ❖ Chapter 3- The fallen angels

Chapter 1: Patriarchy is the Curse

This chapter juxtaposes the dichotomy in the actual biological process of menstruation and society's perception towards the same. There are various myths associated with menstruation under various religions and the roots of all these myths can be traced back to the history associated with each religion. Three major religions that are discussed in this paper are Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity.

Biological Understanding of the Process

Puberty is the stage at which every young woman starts to ovulate and ovulation is the primary reason behind menstruation. The age of puberty can vary from person to person but according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, on average, a woman starts her first menstrual period at the age of 12². Ovulation is the process when the ovaries begin to release an ovum (mature eggs). If the egg is fertilized by a sperm as it travels down the fallopian tube, it leads to pregnancy. The fertilized egg attaches itself to the lining of the uterus (endometrium). But if the egg does not get fertilized then the endometrium, which prepares itself each month to provide nourishment to the fertilized egg, along with blood and mucus shed itself in the form of menstrual blood.³ The average menstrual cycle lasts 28 days. The cycle starts with the first day of one period and ends with the first day of the next period.

This process reveals a fact that it is the endometrium that provides nourishment to a foetus. This endometrium is the same lining that sheds itself in the form of menstrual blood if there is no fertilized egg attached to it. Therefore, a woman can bear a child only because of this lining inside her body. This nourishment is responsible for a foetus to grow into a healthy infant and without the process of formation of the endometrium, a woman can't give birth.

²"the menstrual cycle: an overview", (Stanford children's health, 23rd September 2016), < www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=menstrual-cycle-an-overview-85-P00553>

³Stephanie Watson, "stages of menstrual cycle", (healthline, 17th august 2018), <<https://www.healthline.com/health/womens-health/stages-of-menstrual-cycle>>

Myths Attached to Menstruation Under Different Religions

India, although, is a secular country but still the religious lines demarcating the nation's practices, beliefs, actions etcetera are pristinely visible. Some people manifest the glory of India in this diversity while others blame this diversity to give rise to the disease of communalism. Despite innumerable, varying beliefs of these religions, one front on which all religions have common ground is, degrading the position of women to a polluted creature because of a condition that is responsible for advancing the human race. Although there are different stories associated with the menstrual process being termed as a curse under every religion but there is no disparity in the conclusion reached leading to the women being labelled as polluted.

This chapter first explores the stories attached to menstruation under three religious heads and then analyses the problematic areas of these interpretations.

Hinduism

Although different religions in India have different notions attached to the history of menstruation, the most common story accepted all around the nation is that portrayal of menstruation as a taboo can be traced back to a Hindu mythological text called the Rig Veda.⁴ According to the text, there was a demon by the name of Vritra who withheld water from people and was called the demon of droughts. Lord Indra, the lord of water, killed the demon with a thunderbolt releasing water to the people. But Indra was laden with the guilt of killing the demon as the latter was a learned "*brahman*". So, Indra went to womankind requesting them to take one-third of his guilt in the form of a regular cycle of repentance. Thus, menstruation was an eternal punishment that women were forced to accept to wash away the sin of Indra with their blood flow each month.⁵

⁴Rajvi Desai, "*From Riches to Rags: The Evolution of Menstrual Taboos in India*", (the swaddle, 29th march 2019) <<https://theswaddle.com/from-riches-to-rags-the-evolution-of-menstrual-taboos-in-india/>>

⁵Janet Chawla, "*Mythic Origins of Menstrual Taboo in Rig Veda*", (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 29, No. 43 (Oct. 22, 1994), pp. 2817-2827) 2818.

The interpretation, as mentioned in various Hindu texts, was that since the menstrual flow manifests "*brahmanhatya*", the blood was cursed and the women who were considered to be the source of that blood was believed to be under the effect of the guilt of "*brahmanhatya*" and thereby polluted⁶.

Islam

In the Muslim tradition, the curse attached to menstruation can be traced down to the koranic law⁷. Verse 2.222 of Koran (Koran 2.222) reads as:

"They question thee (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say it is an illness so let women alone at such times and go not into them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you."⁸

As per the interpretation given to the verse, there are majorly two specific restrictions placed on women. First, she is being treated as a threat to holiness and therefore a menstruating woman may not visit any shrine or mosque and is forbidden to pray or fast in the month of Ramdan. Second, she is forbidden sexual intercourse for seven days after the flow begins and is considered "unclean" until she completes a ritual washing.⁹

Christianity

The folklore attached to menstruation in Christianity is that when Adam and Eve were sent to earth, they were given just one caveat that was to not eat a specific apple of a specific tree. But Eve compelled Adam to take a bit of that apple which according to the folklore released all the evils and gave them an entry path into the real world. This made God sore, due to which he cursed all the women with this trouble for the rest of their lives.¹⁰

⁶ *ibid*

⁷Elizabeth M. Whelan, "*attitudes towards menstruation*", (Population Council, Studies in Family Planning, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Apr., 1975), pp. 106-108), <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1964817>>

⁸Elizabeth M. Whelan, "*attitudes towards menstruation*", (Population Council, Studies in Family Planning, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Apr., 1975), pp. 106-108), <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1964817>>

⁹ *ibid*.

¹⁰William E. Phipps, "*The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition*", (springer, Journal of Religion and Health, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter, 1980), pp. 298-303), <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505592>>

This was used by Dionysius the great, a third-century bishop of Alexandria, for the first time on record to advocate restrictions on women against menstruation. He indicated that such “impure” persons should not be allowed to be on positions of authority and be kept away communal table. Councils of the church upheld Dionysius’ judgment as authoritative in subsequent centuries¹¹.

Contradictory positions

These interpretations were done by the so-called superior genre of the society comprising of only males who found a great opportunity to put yet another burden of the lives of women till eternity to portray them in an inferior position. For each of these interpretations, there are texts which take contradictory positions.

In Christianity, several exceptions to the cursed expression by males towards menstruants have been put forth. One of them is based upon the fact that Jesus in the gospels was remembered for his criticism of the Levitical purification laws concerning women, leprosy, and foods. Two important churchmen in the early centuries of the church comprehended the importance of Jesus’ acceptance of “unclean” women.¹²

In Islam too, there are considerable disagreements over the rules related to menstruation. According to the authorities cited in the reports of normative practices of the female companions of the prophet Mohammad, it is believed that Koran does not specify the exclusion of females from any ritual devotion. Verse 2.222, which is used to proliferate the menstrual taboo, recognizes the potential of discomfort (Adha) being caused by menstruation (al-mahid). The verse tells the audience to remain aloof from the females undergoing menstruation and not to go near them until they are cleansed. By this, the verse is stressing on securing the well-being of the female rather than degrading her status to untouchable or cursed.¹³

¹¹ *ibid*

¹²William E. Phipps, “The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition”, (Springer, Journal of Religion and Health, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter, 1980), pp. 298-303), <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505592>>

¹³Celene Ayat Lizzio, “Muslima Theology” (published in 2013, Peter Lang), 172-173

In Hinduism, most Vedic experts have aired objection to this “impure” treatment theory. For instance, according to Acharya MR Rajesh, the founder of Kerala based Kashyap Veda research foundation, the Vedas never portrayed a woman who is menstruating to be impure.¹⁴ Similarly, according to historian NN Bhattacharya, there were several notions attached to this process in different parts of India and not any of those considered the process to be impure. Instead, the auspiciousness of menstruation, as it represents potential fertility, was recognized everywhere.¹⁵ This assertion can be established by the fact that still in many parts of South India, a big celebration is thrown for a girl upon her first period to celebrate her fertility while simultaneously stigmatizing everything which is attached to that fertility for the rest of her life.¹⁶

Analysis

All these contradictory narratives are enough to conclude that it was not the mythological curses which attached the status of taboo to the beautiful life-giving phenomenon but what actually can be blamed for attaching a negative social status to menstruation are notions of fascism towards religion, superstitions and primarily, patriarchal interpretation of the texts. It would not be absurd (although maybe rebellious) on anyone’s part to ask, why a woman who was considered strong enough by Lord Indra to bear his guilt till eternity was given the status of being polluted and not a miracle? Why the interpretation of a verse in Koran, which was meant to protect a woman during her discomfort so that she could not be compelled by her husband into forceful sexual intercourse, was done in such a way to seclude woman from the mainstream during her menstruation and put the burden of not involving into sexual intimacy on her polluted body and not on unmanliness of her husband? Why the judgment of a church’s bishop was

¹⁴Dipin Damodharan, “Vedas don’t portray menstruating women as impure. Why should we?” (daily O, 19th December 2015)

¹⁵Janet Chawla, “Mythic Origins of Menstrual Taboo in Rig Veda”, (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 29, No. 43 (Oct. 22, 1994), pp. 2817-2827) 2817

¹⁶Rajvi Desai, “From Riches to Rags: The Evolution of Menstrual Taboos in India”, (The Swaddle, 29th March 2019) <<https://theswaddle.com/from-riches-to-rags-the-evolution-of-menstrual-taboos-in-india/>>

taken as an authority for centuries to exclude women to be on any authoritative positions in the church?

These are the questions that are still unanswered or rather suppressed by the linen of masculinity, religion and the inferior status of women in society.

Chapter 2: Impacts of the Curse

Needless to mention that all the religious myths associated with this biological process result in women being subjected to innumerable irrational practices. These practices not only take a toll on their physical health but at the same time negatively impact their mental health. Although there has been extensive research done on the former part, still a lot needs to be done on the latter one. The chapter lays down various practices that are being adopted in different parts of India towards menstruating women and the parallel impacts of these practices on these women.

Physical Health Aspects

In many households, women are not allowed to sleep on their usual sleeping places induced by the fear that she will pollute all the other things with which she will get in contact. In an extreme case scenario, a menstruating woman is secluded from the household and is required to reside in a “chaupadi” which is a house-like structure made of bamboo outside the main house. This practice is highly prevalent in Nepal¹⁷. There have been various cases where a lot of women while residing in seclusion were found dead in the morning due to smoke inhalation in that windowless hut.¹⁸ Another such instance was observed when Tamil Nadu was hit by Gaja cyclone in 2018. A girl of 14 years died after a coconut tree fell over the hut outside her house in which she was made to stay as she was menstruating¹⁹. Here, it was not the cyclone nor the tree nor the menstruation which took her life. Rather, it was the orthodox attitude harboured

by people towards a biological process which made her family seclude her at a time when she needed more comfort, care, and hygiene.

Apart from that, the products used by women for their menstrual flow are still so archaic that they attract many diseases. For instance, many women in the rural setup still use cloth filled with rags or dust as absorbents.²⁰ Although there has been a reversed trend of women using cloth pads keeping in mind their health and also environmental well-being, but the problem associated with these cloth pads is two-fold- firstly, rural women are not aware of the ways of sanitizing these clothes and also because of the taboo attached to menstruation they do not hang these clothes outside in the sun to dry. This results in the cloth remaining damp and hosting millions of bacteria. Furthermore, the sand and rags used inside, as absorbents, are again not the best options because the degree of hygiene cannot be guaranteed in a pile of sand picked from outside.²¹ These archaic modes of dealing with menstrual flow pave way for vaginal infections which in some cases further lead to various reproductive tract infections like carcinoma of the cervix, infertility problems, miscarriage, stillbirths, etc.²² According to the researchers of TATA Memorial Centre and National Institute for Research in Reproductive health, reusable menstrual pads (homemade) harbour human papillomavirus (HPV) which causes cervical cancer²³.

Another problem is that it is considered a shame for a woman to discuss her menstrual cycle with anyone. In a few cases she may talk to her husband but many times even he considers himself to be too masculine to indulge in such talks. As a result of menstruation being treated as a hushed topic a lot of complications, abnormalities

¹⁷Mitoo Das, “Menstruation as Pollution: Taboos in Simlitala, Assam” (Indian Anthropologist, Vol. 38, No. 2 (July-Dec. 2008), pp. 29-42), Indian Anthropologist Association

¹⁸“Exiled for Being ‘Impure’ During Her Period, Nepali Woman Dies in ‘Menstruation Hut’”, *News 18*, 10th January 2019

¹⁹“Teen isolated while menstruating killed in cyclone Gaja”, *Times of India*, 22nd November 2018

²⁰Bela Kothari, “Perception about Menstruation: A Study of Rural Jaipur, Rajasthan” (Indian Anthropologist, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan - June 2010), pp. 43-54), Indian Anthropologist Association, 49

²¹Bela Kothari, “Perception about Menstruation: A Study of Rural Jaipur, Rajasthan” (Indian Anthropologist, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan - June 2010), pp. 43-54), Indian Anthropologist Association, 49

²²Baby Niviya Feston and Dr. S. Krishnaraj. “Purpose of Social Practice: Meet the Organizations in Kerala Who Value for Women during their Menstruation” (Journal of Management, Vol. 5 Issue 1 (Jan-Feb 2018) pp. 22–32, 24

²³“Why used sanitary pads are being collected in India”, BBC Tamil Service, 9th September 2017.

and discomforts which a woman faces during her menstruation cycle are not talked about by her to anyone. As a result of this, these ignored complications lead to future issues that give even more traumatizing time to the woman.²⁴ The majority of families do not even advocate the idea of letting that woman visit a doctor, thanks to the taboo attached²⁵.

Mental Health Aspects

Seclusion is the factor that takes the biggest toll on the mental health of women. Women are restricted from entering the kitchen, public gatherings, temples etcetera. In brief, she is ostracized from any societal inclusion for three to four days²⁶. Although many women become used to this as they grow up but for little girls who are new to this practice, this custom proves to be fatal. They become self-conscious of their existence and start feeling anxious each month when their menstrual date starts approaching. Mental health problems are yet to get due recognition in India but a problem not recognized does not mean a problem does not exist.

The next limb refers to the stagnant growth of the minds of the girls. A girl's intellect is hardest hit by menstruation-related oppressive practices as many families stop sending their girl child to schools once they start menstruating or the girls themselves either drop out or bunk the classes during her menstruation cycle²⁷. There are various reasons associated with this too. The foremost reason is, in most of the rural areas, the schools are not menstruation friendly. There is a lack of clean washrooms and clean water²⁸. Also, many people

²⁴Suneela Garg, Nandini Sharma and Ragini Sahay, "Socio-Cultural Aspects of Menstruation in an Urban Slum in Delhi, India" (Reproductive Health Matters, Vol. 9, No. 17, By and for Young Women and Men (May, 2001), pp. 16-25) Taylor & Francis Ltd.

²⁵Bela Kothari, "Perception about Menstruation: A Study of Rural Jaipur, Rajasthan" (Indian Anthropologist, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan - June 2010), pp. 43-54), Indian Anthropologist Association, 48

²⁶Mitoo Das, "Menstruation as Pollution: Taboos in Simlitol, Assam" (Indian Anthropologist, Vol. 38, No. 2 (July-Dec. 2008), pp. 29-42), Indian Anthropologist Association

²⁷Bela Kothari, "Perception about Menstruation: A Study of Rural Jaipur, Rajasthan" (Indian Anthropologist, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan - June 2010), pp. 43-54), Indian Anthropologist Association,

²⁸Bela Kothari, "Perception about Menstruation: A Study of Rural Jaipur, Rajasthan" (Indian Anthropologist, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan - June 2010), pp. 43-54), Indian Anthropologist Association, 49

believe that the body of a menstruating girl is most prone to be possessed by negative energy. Therefore, they prefer the girl/woman to remain inside the house or in a captivated place.

One more narrative which is associated with menstruation is the belief that it is the window for a girl to enter into womanhood. In many Indian regions, especially South India, menarche is celebrated by organizing a grand celebration during which relatives are invited and the girl is offered gifts. The ceremony marks the welcoming of a girl's fertile age²⁹. By elevating the status of a biological process to a validation mark for womanhood, society has put a huge question mark on the identity of those women/girls who are suffering from issues like PCOD, late menarche, early menopause, etc. This attack on one's identity is another major reason for anxiety and depression among women.

Analysis

Being brought up in a society that holds all the myths associated with menstruation in high regard, most women start looking at themselves as cursed and polluted during their menstruating cycle³⁰. This leads them to grab an inferior status unconsciously in every other societal ritual. They accept the ascribed status of "being inferior to men". Another problem ancillary to this acceptance is normalizing all the discomforts felt by them during menstruation.³¹ This happens because of various other allegations of being a "drama queen", "attention seeker", "sensitive" attached to her if she tries to talk about the pain and discomfort related to menstruation to anyone. This again comes from the patriarchal outlook towards menstruation which perceives the phenomenon to be a burden on women which they have to bear throughout their lives without any complaints.

²⁹Aru Bharti, "Menstruation, Religion and Society" International Journal of Social Science and Humanity (Vol. 3, No. 6) November 2013, 525

³⁰Suneela Garg, Nandini Sharma and Ragini Sahay, "Socio-Cultural Aspects of Menstruation in an Urban Slum in Delhi, India" (Reproductive Health Matters, Vol. 9, No. 17, By and for Young Women and Men (May, 2001), pp. 16-25) Taylor & Francis Ltd.

³¹Bela Kothari, "Perception about Menstruation: A Study of Rural Jaipur, Rajasthan" (Indian Anthropologist, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan - June 2010), pp. 43-54), Indian Anthropologist Association, 49

Hence, the implication of the process itself on a woman's body cannot be termed as the main reason behind the discomfort and distress at the time of menstruation. Rather, all these discomforts are aggravated and become more problematic when instead of supporting a woman dealing with the same, society puts hurdles in front of her. Pondering over the instances of trauma faced by women during their menstrual cycle, as mentioned in the chapter, it can be comfortably concluded that none of these experiences were directly related to the process of menstruation itself, rather these were the situations which can be given the name of a social construct. These social constructs are a result of the narrative of women being polluted, cursed and untouchable at the time of their menstruation cycle. These are aimed at reinforcing this narrative forcing the women to be on the receiving end always, not receiving any support but banishment.

Chapter 3: The Fallen Angels

History has always seen the voice of oppressed being suppressed. The situation was no different in the scenario related to women. There was no opinion put forth by the women regarding the cruel practices they were subjected to because of the plain reason that either they had normalized the situation they were in or they behaved like mute pigeons owing to the fear of patriarchy. Contradicting opinions being put forth were only by few academicians, historians and scholars and that too based on some strong backing for their scholarly works so that their works do not get categorized as rebellious.

Social Change

Many volunteer-based organizations, individuals and even government are joining hands to lend voices to the mute masses.

One such incident, which was seen as an active step towards reform by some and as an act of rebel by others, was when Nikita Azad, a Patiala based young woman wrote an open letter to the chief of Sabrimala temple and initiating a campaign called #HappyToBleed on social media³². The campaign not only gathered huge support

³²The Hindu, "Campaign against menstrual taboos goes viral", (6th September 2019), <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/campaign-against-menstrual-taboosgoes-viral/article7930328.ece>>

from other females but at the same time was a great manifestation of gender participation in a female related taboo in which many males also rendered their support to the campaign. This was a major step taken by the male community especially in a society that has always witnessed males being excluded or rather protected from indulging in discussing such a "polluted" topic.

Not only individuals and NGOs, but many global brands have also assumed it to be part of their corporate social responsibility to contribute their share in the forbearing of the initiative. This was manifested in an initiative called "Wind beneath her Wings" by social enterprise Dharma life in collaboration with Spain based enterprise called Believe Athletics.³³ The main objective of this initiative was to educate young rural girls about menstrual hygiene.

Medical Change

Another significant contribution rendered in campaigns against the exploitation of women on the ground of menstruation was by the medical field. One of the main reasons behind the evolution of the school of sociology was the urge of its thinkers to develop a scientific basis to study society and human behaviour. The reason being, science has always enjoyed a prestigious status in the mindset of people. The subject is always seen as the one which is used to provide a rationale behind a notion. That is why the intervention of medical research in the field of menstruation was yet another milestone in rationalizing the demands of these campaigns.

Research in this field can be best described to be a roller coaster ride. It started with unravelling the ill effects of Indian women using folded cloth filled with rag or dust because of a lack of sanitization of such a method. This research led to increased awareness about the introduction of disposable sanitary napkins³⁴. Although there has always been a cultural lag in Indian society concerning options used by the women during their

³³Press trust of India, "New campaign aims to spread awareness on menstrual health", *Business Standard* (Delhi, 28th January 2019)

³⁴"The Journey of Menstrual Hygiene Management In India", (*Feminist India*, 3rd September 2019), <<https://feminisminindia.com/2017/05/19/journey-menstrual-hygiene-management-india/>>

periods, this cultural lag has not transformed into a technological lag. As time passed, the degrading effects of the disposable sanitary pads came forth, both on the health of the women and on the environment. This new finding created an additional burden on the researchers to find alternatives that gave rise to products like the menstrual cup, biodegradable pads, etcetera.³⁵

Apart from intervention in the arena of products used by women during menstruation the medical field has also started working on the effects of menstruation on women's bodies.

One such intervention that came into news recently was by Professor John Guillebaud of London's University College on dysmenorrhea. He concluded that the pain felt by women during menstrual cramps can be as bad as having a heart attack³⁶. The study gathered huge support from all over a world as it was an answer to all those patriarchal views which termed the pain as exaggeration, drama, and sensitivity of women.

Analysis

Observing these changes, it is not difficult to conclude that whenever a society is in the state of reform regarding any particular issue it affects every limb of the society viz. societal life, intellectual life, government's response etcetera. These campaigners are seen *not begging* for the share of equality, respect, and dignity for menstruating women *but demanding* the same with pride. There is an accepted understanding prevalent in the society which says that there is no need for any kind of strong basis to negate the irrational actions and beliefs of the majority in society towards the menstruating women rather the demand should be based on the basic principles of humanity. All these campaigns act as inspiration creating a ripple effect on many others but as it is always said, "an inspiration before its time appears to be a rebellion."

³⁵"The Journey of Menstrual Hygiene Management in India", (*Feminist India*, 3rd September 2019), <<https://feminisminindia.com/2017/05/19/journey-menstrual-hygiene-management-india/>>

³⁶Trends Desk, "Professor said menstrual pain as bad as heart attacks; women on Internet say 'We told you so!'" *The Indian Express* (New Delhi, 2nd March 2018)

CONCLUSION

After studying in detail about the dichotomy in the actual process of menstruation and society's perception towards the same, it can be concluded safely that the way society responds to menstruation manifests a high level of hypocrisy, especially in Indian society, a society that celebrates nine days worshipping Goddess, a society which worships a menstruating goddess, a society which celebrates the potential fertility of a woman. But blame cannot be entirely put on the heritage passed to us because taking into consideration various contradictory opinions on the interpretations of religious texts, it cannot be said conclusively that religious texts used to advocate an inferior view towards menstruation. Various other factors can be called to have attributed in attaching a social status to a biological process. These factors are the fascism of Indians towards their religion and the tendency of hero-worshipping the people who used to portray themselves to be God's agents having the copyright to translate and interpret each and everything which religious texts potentially mentioned. This fascism and hero-worshipping did not allow anyone in India's history to question the patriarchal interpretation put forth by the "agents".

The customs adopted by people under this influence are still in practice taking a heavy toll on not only the physical but also the mental health of women. Some of the worst effects of these practices are women normalizing the situation they have been subjected to and accepting these as a part of their destiny. An extension of this, some women also find peace with considering themselves to be polluted and curse and thus automatically occupying an inferior position in society on every other front too. The tendency to rebel against the injustice extinguishes as women see no wrong in anything they are subjected to.

Indian society has witnessed some changes in recent years. It has seen some brave individuals, organizations and even government lending voice to mute masses. The change can only be explained by the power of reasoning and questioning. It was only after many people questioned the authority of interpreters, the rationale behind putting patriarchal interpretations of

religious texts over Basic human rights and entry of notion of feminism in India that the wave of reform was felt in the nation. The wave affected not only the basic social life but also the other limbs of society as well. These campaigns pose a fundamental question in front of the majority of society that “menstruation is the basis on which a family’s name is carried forward, so what is more polluting- menstruating or not menstruating? Because if menstruation is polluting then Indian society should never see any woman being thrown out of her marital home due to her incapacity to give birth and if not-menstruating is polluting then the brutal practices to which women are subjected during their menstruating days should evade.

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