

“Taboos and Myth” – Indispensable Part of Menstruation: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

Menstruation is a physiological condition for women in their life span. Menstruation is a common fact as blood from the uterus passes into the vaginal canal. It is a normal phase that begins in girls between the ages of 11 and 14 and is one of the first signs of puberty. It has, however, still been surrounded by taboos and myths that keep women out of certain facets associated with this issue. Many societal taboos regarding menstruation affect women's emotional well-being, mindset, lifestyle, and, most importantly, health. As a result, a strategic approach to combating these issues is very much required. This paper aims to discuss common menstruation myths and taboos in various parts of the world. This issue also creates a significant impact on women's sociocultural lives. Even though it is a disorder that only affects females, it has always been shrouded in mystery and myth. Menstruation taboos keep women out of certain facets of social and cultural life. This restriction spreads potential negativity from the grassroots level.

Keywords: Culture, Menstruation, Myth, Puberty, Taboos, Women
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INTRODUCTION

The word “Menstruation” is developed with gender prejudice where it is considered only a women's issue. Two other main words, that is, taboo and myths are an indispensable part of menstrual fact. It is believed that women are impure, disgusting, or immoral while menstruating. The situation becomes more complicated with some weird rituals. The connection between religion-culture-myth and taboos has a multifaceted phenomenon with its multidimensional character synonymous with different social structures during this time. In this scenario, culture plays a very crucial role. As a result, a strategic approach to combating these issues is insufficient.

CELEBRATION OF THE FIRST PERIOD AND THE WORLDS' VIEW

Every girl is experiencing menarche at different ages. Throughout the nation, a girl's first period or menarche is celebrated in many aspects. Moreover, every culture has its rituals to welcome these biological phenomena.

In South Africa, a party is being organized to celebrate the first period. However, girls do not have permission to go outside and meet people while menstruating.^[1] In Japan, when a girl reaches puberty, it is a tradition for her mother to prepare a dish called “sekihan.” The whole family must eat the food as a symbol of the girl's first period.^[2] A Filipino girl washed her face with the first blood, thinking she would never get pimples.^[3] In Brazil, when a girl is bleeding for the 1st time, an event is arranged by the family. On that occasion, all relatives are invited.^[4] In Italy, a girl must be referred to as “signorina” after her first menstruation. It means “miss” or “young lady” so that family and friends can ensure that the girl encounters menstruation.^[3] In Iceland, the family celebrated this ritual by making red and white cakes, symbolizing the daughter's new life milestone.^[1] In Israel, the girl's ceremony of licking a spoon of honey is trendy on her first menstruation as a symbol of smoother menstruation.^[5] When the girl has her first menstruation in Canada, she cannot eat berries for a year. Therefore, the celebration is ended up with the various dishes of berries. In Macedonia, it is believed

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that the girl would have good luck if she washes her hair with first menstrual blood.^[3] In Fiji, when a girl met her first menstruation, some lines are drawn on the floor of the door with chalk so that the number of menstrual dates can be easily identified. First, menstruations celebrate with red wine in Croatia.^[1] Dagara in West Africa, an annual festival, is arranged to celebrate the menarche of girls in that year. In Malaysia, when a girl encounters menstruation for the 1st time, she has to stay home for a week to rest in her body.^[3] Many Navaho people still practice puberty with a grand celebration of 4 days.^[1] It is a sign of red, as a feeling of shame all their lives. Greece, in the United States and the United Arab Emirates, when a girl experiences her first menstruation, her family organizes a party because she becomes a woman.^[3]

Many challenging thoughts can be observed while the relationship between faith and menstruation is explored. The concept of religion is rather complex. Religious practice is related to the social-cultural structure of designated behavior. It is a standard of morality with worldviews, texts, sanctified locations, prophecies, ethics, or organizations that connect humanity to the divine, transcendental, or spiritual elements during menstruation.^[6] However, any behavior codes about menstruation in western cultures and the eastern world are performed in a

nutshell or personal level. Very few societies and cultures around the world have accepted that menstruation is a natural occurrence. With the progression of the social system, there has been no significant shift in people's attitudes toward menstruation.

MENSTRUATION TABOOS-MYTH AND WORLD PERSPECTIVE

For the 1st time every single day, girls around the world were confronted with their menstrual periods. However, with the lack of adequate information, guidance, and support on what is happening to their bodies, many girls see menstrual blood as a severe disease. As a result, menstruation-related taboos and myths have become rituals in many societies around the world. Every ritual has its roots in religion, and the critical passages of life are often traditionally accompanied by religious rituals. Thus, taboos and myths related to menstruation have become a social ceremony. This trait has been going on in society in different parts of the world for generations to come. Women are considered to be left wing during menstruation in the United States and the United Kingdom. It is believed that using "Tampons" would break their hymen and make them impure. They cannot take a bath on those days, and they cannot comb their hair. Menstruating women cannot touch any vegetable before pickling because it is restricted.^[7] In Israel, women do not shower hot water during their period. It is thought that they will have a heavy flow.^[8] In Colombia, they cannot drink cold drinks during menstruation, as they are believed to have cramps. Women do not wash or cut hair during this time, too.^[9] In Poland, it is considered that having sex can kill a partner during menstruation.^[10] In Romania, menstruating women cannot touch flowers because they are suspected of dying quickly.^[11] In Malaysia, women need to wash their pads before throwing them away because they believe ghosts will come and haunt them.^[12] In Mexico, women do not dance to take care of their uterus during menstruation.^[13] In the Dominican Republic, women do not paint their nails, wash their hair or drink lemonade at this time.^[3] In Brazil, women cannot wash their hair and walk barefoot, but they are believed to have cramps.^[9] In Argentina, women cannot make whipped cream during menstruation because they thought that the cream would be curdling. They also thought that if they took a bath, it would stop bleeding and cause lousy health.^[13] In Italy, women believed that everything they cooked during menstruation would be a disaster. Women cannot go to the beach or pool and touch plants.^[11] Women cannot make mayonnaise in France, where they believed that if they touched mayonnaise, it would curdle.^[4] In Japan, women cannot make sushi during menstruation because they believe they have a taste imbalance.^[14] In Taiwan, women blow their hair dry after bathing during menstruation, and it is mandatory. In Venezuela, women avoid shaving their bikini line during menstruation. They believed that this would make their skin darker.^[10] In the Philippines, women need to wash their faces with their first menstrual blood, as this practice is believed to help them clear their skin.^[13] In Afghanistan, women avoid washing their vaginas during menstruation because it leads to infertility.^[15] In Bolivia, women believe that menstrual blood is so dangerous that it can cause cancer mixed with other trash.^[16] In Cree, when a woman transitions from girl to woman, there is a berry ritual to stay separately for 4 days during menstruation and not eat solid food.^[17] In ancient Egypt, menstrual blood is considered a cure for sagging breasts and thighs.^[18] Women cannot do anything during menstruation in Somalia because they are not

considered "Dahir" (clean or pure). Once the time is over, they have to wash their hair and shower. They are not allowed to pray until their hair has been washed.^[19] The Kodi of Sumba (an island in eastern Indonesia) believes that sexually transmitted diseases are contracted by men who have sex with menstrual women.^[20] Menstruating women were isolated from their partners and their families in Bali.^[21] In Portugal, women are never allowed to have sex because they believe that the child would be deformed.^[22] Women are prohibited from entering sacred spaces in Thai culture when menstruating.^[23] In Spain, women's menstruation prepared for mayonnaise is strictly limited because it will become sour.^[3] Menstruating Greece, women are restricted from entering holy places.^[24] Girls are taught that periods make them ugly when openly dispose of menstrual products.^[25] In South Africa, mobility during menstruation is strictly limited.^[26] In Hong Kong, women still believe that women bring bad luck when entering the temple.^[27] In Australia, it is believed that wine will become contaminated and turn into vinegar if a menstruating woman touches it.^[28] Women should not go outside during menstruation in Finland. Women cannot wash their hair in Suriname because it would make them bleed more.^[29] In Belgium, menstruating women should not sit on the ground to avoid cramping.^[3] "Chhaupadi" is a concept or tradition associated with a menstrual taboo in the western part of Nepal, where women live separately during menstruation.^[30]

TRIBAL SOCIETY AND MENSTRUATION

Social and cultural norms related to menstruation also create quite bizarre trends in tribal society. Some cultural beliefs about menstruation are strange, but they can also create bar women from their social lives, and worldwide and tribal women constantly deal with these phenomena.

Yurok, the native tribe on the northwest coast of the United States, women go through a series of rituals during the menstrual cycle because they believe that the period is the most spiritual experience of their lifetime.^[31] According to Rungus women in Borneo, menstruation is just a body fluid that needs to be evacuated. Menstruating women in the Ulithi tribes in South Pacific are separated from their families and live in separate huts.^[32] In the case of the Beng women in the Ivory Coast, it is found that the restrictions imposed on menstruating women by men are extreme.^[1] In Nigeria, Hausa women usually do not go out during their period until it is over.^[32] When the Tlingit girl, the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America, first menstruated, they were immediately isolated in a hut. Her face had been covered with charcoal, and her head had been covered. Girls are not allowed to expose themselves in the daytime and may not chew their food. These practices are going up to menopause.^[28] The mobility of menstruating women of the Eskimos is strictly limited.^[33] In Southwest Alaska, women stay apart during their menstrual period because they can harm the weather.^[34] Among the Canadian tribes, menstruating women are separated from a society based on misfortune. When the Delaware Tribe girl in Indians gets menstruation for the 1st time, they are forced to live in a hut. Women head has been covered with a cloth for 12 days so that she can see no one and they have to maintain all laborious work.^[35] Among the Bribri tribes of Costa Rica, a menstruating woman may not use household utensils. Instead, they can use banana leaves, which are then carefully buried. It is believed that if any cow had eaten such a leaf, it would have died. A menstrual woman lives in a lonely hut, and only her mother or

other female attendant is allowed to enter the hut.^[36] For the time being, the menstruating women of the Caribbean tribes have confined themselves to a forest hut.^[35] Among the Klamath Tribes in South Oregon and North California of the United States, women during menstruation are considered impure and not allowed to work outside.^[37]

MENSTRUATION TABOOS AND INDIA

Various myths and taboos about menstruation, such as not entering the prayer room, not wearing new clothes, not touching holy books, not touching people, not eating non-vegetarian diets, or looking in the mirror, have been commonly found in a study conducted in Patiala, Punjab, among adolescence girls.^[38] Patil *et al.* found that menstruating girls usually avoid sour food such as curd, tamarind, and pickles.^[39] Another research was carried out in Ranchi by Kumar and Srivastava, where it was found that women's body emits a specific smell or ray during menstruation, making preserved food terrible. They are, therefore, not allowed to touch pickles.^[40] The research was focused on the areas of the Tamil Nadu district of Cuddalore. The results show that women keep them away from religious and ceremonial participation.^[41] The research attempted to study that the menstruation knowledge level of Dehradun in Uttarakhand, where most girls did not attend any religious function, did not allow them to touch stored food, and did not allow them to attend school.^[42] In Pune, a study showed that schools, dance classes, outdoor games, and temples are avoided by menstruating girls.^[43] Another research paper reviled in Chhattisgarh, the social restrictions were strictly imposed on women.^[44] The cross-sectional study was conducted between the 1st and 2nd year undergraduate nursing students of the Nursing School, Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata. It was found that the majority were restricted to intake of sour food items with cold food items, fish, and other foods.^[45]

The bottom line of the above case studies shows that menstruation taboos are not only insane and ridiculous but also are an enormous obstacle to women being held back in many ways.

Moreover, these taboos have significant roots in society, which lead to specific non-hygienic methods practiced during menstruation worldwide.

DISCUSSION

The first period is considered a celebration or fear all over the world. It signifies an essential transition to womanhood for every girl. On average, a woman menstruates for about 10 years during their lifespan.^[46] Many women do not have complete and accurate knowledge of menstruation as it is a normal biological process. Many women have no option or minimal options for affordable proper menstrual materials. Proper access to toilet facilities with water and safer low-cost menstrual materials could reduce genital diseases. However, especially during an emergency, the situation becomes more complicated. Managing periods in a hygienic way are a significant challenge for women. According to some common belief, menstruating women are symbolized as fertile lands. Religion ambiguity and cultural intricacy have rendered menstrual rituals an eternal mystery to society. These consequences define the role of women in terms of purity and sin in society. The Supreme Court of India, in September 2018, overruled a ban on menstruation to prohibit women (aged 10–50) from entering

the “Sabarimala Temple” in Kerala, India. The Board specified that women, historically prohibited from entering the temple from distracting the deity (perceived to be a celibate bachelor), may enter the temple if they are not menstruating.^[47] Controversies have emerged on how the intersection of menstruation and faith classifies impurity and purity problems linked to gender equality, hierarchies, group delineation, and power boundaries. The above topic outlined the possibilities and weaknesses of menstruation and taboos as imagined and studied globally. The claim of menstruation and religion also focuses on ritual impurity and related prescriptive prohibitions. Extended discussion of menstruation and faith tends to mean a religious categorization of menstruation and guidance regarding what menstruation can and should not be.

CONCLUSION

Taboos and myths are circulated among everyone living in every sphere where menstruation is recognized as significant. There must be a world where every girl can read, play, and protect her health without tension, shame, or excessive knowledge barriers during menstruation. Menstrual is an integral part of a woman's life; however, the superstitions and misconceptions practiced by families and those in the culture are dangerously overlooked and not given priority. Cultural traditions and religious taboos on menstruation are also exacerbated by conventional associations with evil spirits, shame, and humiliation around sexual reproduction. If “Hygiene” is a focal point, it should be addressed without taboos or misconception. This debate emerges that misconceptions and taboos are an indispensable part of the menstrual hygiene management. However, disposing of the substance used is not discussed vividly. The government guideline is not bright for the masses and is not more widely involved.

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