



## **A study of Menstrual taboos in religions and cultures in India**

**Ms Rama**

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology,

Panjab University, sector 14, Chandigarh

Email: rama.ravish19@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

Menstruation is shrouded in cultural and religious taboo in the majority of Southeast Asian nations. Menstruation is a taboo subject even in India, where it is kept a well guarded secret. For young girls, their moms, sisters, and friends are the primary sources of knowledge about menstruation. However, because of the stigma attached to it, this information is often incomplete or wrong. Young Indian women's emotional, physical, and reproductive health are often harmed as a result. Menstrual hygiene facilities and supplies are lacking for millions of women. Breaking the stigma and silence surrounding menstruation is the subject of this study. Women in India's health and hygiene should be the center of attention, according to this report.

**Keywords:** menstruation, hygiene, taboos, gender, patriarchy, health.

### **Introduction**

Every month, women experience menstruation as a natural part of their lives. A terrible, uncomfortable and inconvenient experience awaits you. Women's physical, mental, and social health suffer as a result of the linked societal and cultural taboos. Many facets of its administration should be examined through the perspective of sociology. Studies of menstruation, taboos around menstruation, and commercialization of its care are all common in sociology of health and medicine. In our culture, menstruation is a taboo topic. Traditional notions about the impureness of menstruation women and our reluctance to talk openly about it have contributed to the stigma. What compelled the holy men to label menstruation women as "unclean" we will never know. However, all faiths (save Sikhism) refer to menstruation women as 'ritually unclean'. Menstruation is a taboo subject in society. A lot of young girls are harmed as a result of this. Their knowledge is lacking, and as a result, they have a number of misunderstandings. Menstruation and religious customs are both topics that will be addressed in this presentation. In certain households, the activities described may not be commonplace. Rules and customs are observed to different degrees in different families. To what extent do they cling to ancient ways of life and what extent do they believe in them? As a Hindu living in a mostly Hindu nation, I was able to learn more about Hinduism. That's why my section on



Hinduism is so extensive. I'll be relying on the results of a poll I took part in. Between the 25th of February and the 25th of March 2013, questionnaires were issued to 250 females in the 20-25 age range and 150 of them responded. I collected 150 completed surveys from ladies in Jaipur and Delhi (India), in various locations (such as shopping malls and restaurants). With this in mind, I conducted one-on-one interviews with young women from a variety of religious and geographic backgrounds. Menstruation and its significance in Indian symbolic systems have surely affected Indian women's and men's perceptions of female physiological processes", according to the author. In a nation as varied as India, there are several distinct cultures. Menstruation has a variety of meanings in various cultures. However, menstrual blood's perceived impureness is shared by the majority of individuals. According to research, men and women's opinions of women's bodies have been impacted by these ideas and beliefs. N. N. Bhattacharyya, an Indian historian, claims that various parts of India have had beliefs in goddesses who menstruate. A week of 'sleep' was a belief in Punjab that Mother Earth had each month. In certain regions of the Deccan, temples dedicated to the goddesses were shut down until the full moon day so that she might rest and recharge. During the summer months in the Malabar area, Mother Earth was considered to be dozing off until the first raindrops fell. Monsoon ceremonies for the goddess still take place in temples of Assam and portions of Odisha, even now..

Menstruation was seen as a gift in many civilizations, and the first time a girl menstruated was a cause for celebration. When the menstrual cycle was considered a benefit to reproduction, this concept is flawed. A woman's life's ultimate objective was always perceived as reproduction, even when it was lauded. Sindur, when used in an area of the hair, represents the sanctity of a married woman's reproductive potential (when exercised within the confines of patriarchal marriage). The blood of menstruation is well represented by these old religious notions and symbols. ". Such patriarchal views of women's bodies are rooted in religious teachings, according to this study. During menstruation, the vast majority of women see their bodies as filthy and impure. The entry to these places of worship is strictly forbidden, as is the handling of any sacred texts. Pickles and utensils are off limits to them.

### **Implications for Development of Women : Physical and Mental Health Issues**

Look at the implications on girls' physical and emotional well-being of the silence around menstruation. It has been taboo even among planners to talk about menstruation," writes Swapna Mazumdar in The Tribune. It wasn't until 2011 that the Ministry of Health became



aware of it. Due to poverty, ignorance, and shame linked to the menstrual cycle, around 70 percent of Indian women are at danger of developing serious infections, which may lead to death. Girls have suffered much as a result of the stigma and secrecy surrounding the menstrual period. Girls in northern India drop out of school at a rate of 30 percent when they begin menstruation. Women who are unable to maintain proper cleanliness throughout their menstrual cycle are 70 percent more likely to get a reproductive tract infection (RTI). A considerable proportion of girls between the ages of 12 and 18 who continue their education skip five days of school every month during their menstrual cycle because schools do not provide separate facilities for female students. The usage of sanitary napkins should not be compelled. The usage of cloth is acceptable as long as it is done so in a hygienic manner. It is because of the taboos around it that women are unable to dry their fabric properly in the sun, which results in the need to conceal it. As a result, there is a critical shortage of facilities for females to feel at ease when having their periods. The need for schools that are menstruation-friendly is an absolute need. Menstrual taboos affect women in the workplace as well. Though sanitary napkin usage is generally encouraged, there are a number of factors to consider, including difficulties of availability and expense. Another problem with sanitary napkins is that they pose a harm to the environment since they are nonbiodegradable in nature. Non-biodegradable sanitary napkins pose a severe environmental danger, as well." They clog waterways and drainage systems, especially in rural areas of India. WASH United estimates that 432 million non-biodegradable sanitary napkins are used each month in India, and this figure is expected to rise in the future years due to massive advertising and media efforts. To make fun of itself, Kotex released an ad campaign in 2010 that made light of the genre. Menstrual blood used to be shown in ads using a peculiar blue liquid. However, the term "vagina" would not be allowed to be used by any television networks.

### **Review of literature**

(Jalan et al. 2020) studied "A Sociological Study of the Stigma and Silences around Menstruation" discovered this and Menstruation is shrouded in cultural and religious taboo in the majority of Southeast Asian nations. Menstruation is a taboo subject even in India, where it is kept a well guarded secret. For young girls, their moms, sisters, and friends are the primary sources of knowledge about menstruation. However, because of the stigma attached to it, this information is often incomplete or wrong. Young Indian women's emotional, physical, and reproductive health are often harmed as a result. Menstrual hygiene facilities and supplies are



lacking for millions of women. Breaking the stigma and silence surrounding menstruation is the subject of this study. Women in India's health and hygiene should be the center of attention, according to this report.

(Bhartiya 2013) studied “Menstruation, Religion and Society” observed that and all faiths prohibit menstruation women from engaging in certain activities. It doesn't matter whether you follow Judaism, Christianity, Islam or Hinduism. In Sikhism, menstruation women are not restricted in any way by the scriptures, which denounce misogyny. This study examines how menstruation women are seen and handled by various faiths. Further, it discusses how society regards and treats women who are menstrual. Menstruation and its many euphemisms, sources of information for girls, ads, and how open we are about discussing this normal physiological process are all examined in the study.

(Holkar n.d.) studied “exploration of the foundation of menstrual taboos along the lines of culture and religion and its implications on the development of women” discovered this and The menstrual cycle is a natural, bodily function that is closely tied to a woman's reproductive system in today's world. When we're menstruating, most of us still adhere to the same rules as when we're at home with our families or at religious events. The prevalent patriarchal rhetoric continues to limit women's freedom of choice. Menstruation is a natural event in just a few civilizations throughout the globe. People's attitudes regarding menstruation haven't changed all that much during the course of these civilizations' development. So the only issues left are: What exactly is it about menstrual blood that makes people believe it is dirty, and what exactly does a bleeding woman pollute? What are the long-term repercussions of these taboos on the development of females? Menstrual health issues in India may be linked to taboo beliefs about menstruation, a study has shown. Because of this, the article will provide evidence of how these viewpoints alter women's fundamental interactions with their surroundings and bodies, causing them to fall farther behind in society.

(Norris 2017) studied “The Menstrual Taboo and Modern Indian Identity” discovered this and After India gained its independence from Britain in the 1940s, it was declared a secular country and experienced a series of political and cultural upheavals during the rest of the 20th century. However, even in secular India, the menstruation taboo continues to operate, despite the country's efforts to distance itself from it. To what extent are Hindu beliefs and ideals essentially Indian? The abuse of women during menstruation in India has been influenced by Hinduism's practice and history. In India, menstruation women face a number of restrictions,

including exclusion from sacred places. It is the purpose of this research to examine the many interpretations of the menstrual taboo and Hinduism in India, as well as how it operates in the secular world, in order to debate whether or not India is a secular country. It will illustrate that Hindu rituals and beliefs are intrinsically Indian by navigating through the 20th century, independence, secularization, and Hindu nationalism. I'll demonstrate how Hinduism had a direct impact on what it meant to be Indian in the twentieth century by looking at how menstruation was seen as a taboo.

(Selvi and Ramachandran 2012) studied "Socio-cultural Taboos concerning Menstruation" discovered this and Most societies have a set of socio-cultural norms and guidelines that dictate how individuals should act and behave in certain situations. Menstruation (a component of reproductive health) is seen as ritually and spiritually impure in Hinduism. During menstruation, women are expected to adhere to a slew of socially sanctioned taboos. These taboos, in addition to their validity, assist women maintain menstrual cleanliness as a requirement to avoiding reproductive health concerns. It is thus the purpose of this research to investigate the practice of social taboos, as well as what influences it. A systematic sampling strategy was used to choose 600 rural and urban residents for this paper's main data collection. In order to categorize women into low, moderate, and high levels of social taboos practice, the Index was devised. To see whether there's a link between the variables, scientists use statistical tools like the chi-square test. A strong practice mentality among women prevents them from participating in religious and ceremonial activities, according to the findings. Among urban responders, this behavior is rather common. Other than religious and ceremonial taboos, women don't appear to be in favor of engaging in other types of socially unacceptable behavior. Conclusion: At the very least, they perform menstrual hygiene because to their strong conviction that "Menstruation is spiritually filthy and ceremonially unclean."

### **Conclusion**

To summarize, it is apparent that menstruation is no longer seen as taboo and many individuals are eager to breach taboos surrounding this problem. When looking at menstrual taboo's roots, we've looked at how menstruation is seen in many cultures and faiths, including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Judaism. One may argue that religion is so firmly embedded in Indian society that the menstruation taboo has been emphasized and defines what it means to be a woman in India as a particular component of the faith that supports a social shame. To encourage women's rights in India throughout the 20th century, several components of



Hinduism have been stressed. As a human rights problem, not a religious one, men and women have evolved their own public attitudes on the taboo. No one can deny the existence of Hindu traditions and beliefs in secular India, regardless of how or why they managed to survive Muslim and Christian conquests. Menstruation-related religious taboos and social constraints are real. They are part of a larger cultural context. The thesis here is that Hindu values and beliefs have been reinforced to reinforce and perpetuate social and political conceptions about women throughout Indian independence, secularization, and the Hindu nationalist movement. As a consequence, these values and beliefs are no longer merely Hindu but inherently Indian.

**References:**

1. Bhartiya, Aru. 2013. "Menstruation, Religion and Society." *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 3(6):523–27. doi: 10.7763/ijssh.2013.v3.296.
2. Holkar, Kena. n.d. "Exploration of the Foundation of Menstrual Taboos Along the Lines of Culture and Religion and Its Implications on The." 59–66.
3. Jalan, Anurita, Himansha Baweja, Mehar Bhandari, San Kahmei, and Aruna Grover. 2020. "A Sociological Study of the Stigma and Silences around Menstruation." *Vantage: Journal of Thematic Analysis* 1(1):47–65. doi: 10.52253/vjta.2020.v01i01.06.
4. Norris, Jessie. 2017. "The Menstrual Taboo and Modern Indian Identity." *Mahurin Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects*.
5. Selvi, K. Tamil, and S. Ramachandran. 2012. "Socio-Cultural Taboos Concerning Menstruation: A Micro Level Study in the Cuddalore District of Tamil Nadu." *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* 2(8):1–7.