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Myths and Misconceptions Regarding Menstruation: A Study about the Experiences of Adolescents' Girls

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Abstract

Menstruation is a significant phase of women and girls' life. There are several myths and taboos around menstruation process and these are supported by major religious and cultural traditions. Feeling of shame and stigma around it prohibits girls and women to discuss it publically. Menstruation is a gender issue, stigma around menstruation and menstrual hygiene is a violation of several human rights, most importantly of the right to human dignity, but also the right to non-discrimination, equality, bodily integrity, health, privacy and the right to freedom from inhumane and degrading treatment from abuse and violence. (Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, 2013). The present paper deals with religious and socio-cultural myths regarding menstruation and adolescent girls' experiences related with this process.

Keywords: Menstruation, Myths, Misconception, Adolescent girls

Introduction

Menstruation is a normal physiological process like respiration, circulation, excretion etc. that occurs in a female body. This is a natural and healthy physiological process for girls and women of reproductive age. In spite of being natural, it is surrounded by secrecy, taboos and myths that exclude girls and women from many aspects of socio-cultural life. Such taboos about menstruation affect girls' and women's emotional and mental status, lifestyle and most important their health and hygiene.

Women are expected to bear children, failing which they are shunned and tortured. And irony is that the process which make woman enable to give birth is considered as a taboo even impure. At

the same time, no one wants to acknowledge and address the fact that women menstruate while it is completely healthy and natural.

Cultural norms and religious taboos on menstruation are often compounded by traditional associations with evil spirits, shame and embarrassment. In some cultures, women bury their cloths used during menstruation to prevent them being used by evil spirits. In some parts of India, some strict dietary restrictions are also followed during menstruation such as sour food like curd, tamarind, and pickles are usually avoided by menstruating girls. It is believed that such foods will disturb or stop the menstrual flow. As far as the exercise is concerned, in India many adolescent girls believe that doing exercise/physical activity during menses aggravates the dysmenorrhea while in reality exercise can help relieve the menstruating women with symptoms of premenstrual syndrome and dysmenorrhea and relieve bloating. Such taboos about menstruation present in many societies impact on girls' and women's lifestyle and health. Poor protection and inadequate washing facilities may increase susceptibility to infection, with the odor of menstrual blood putting girls at risk of being stigmatized. The latter may have significant implications for their mental health. The challenge, of addressing the socio-cultural taboos and beliefs in menstruation, is further compounded by the fact the girls' knowledge levels and understandings of puberty, menstruation, and reproductive health are very low. **(Garg and Anand, 2015)**

Taboos and myths supported by major religious-cultural tradition

Menstruation is considered as a taboo in most of the religious and cultural traditions barring few exceptions like Sikhism. But in the present study it was found that the Sikh women, sometimes, follow some of the taboos or Muslim women follow more taboos beyond what is stated in their religious books. It is not hard to understand as cultural exchange of more than hundred years among religious traditions influenced the adoption of such customs. The most descriptive religious and cultural taboos against menstruation are found to be stated in Hinduism and it being a dominant religion and sources of cultural tradition of India, it has impacted other religious, socio-cultural practices around menstruation impacting millions of girls and women.

In the following section of the paper we would review briefly about stigma, myths, taboos and behavior restrictions for menstruating girl and women sanctioned by some of the dominant religions.

Hinduism

Vasistha Dharmasutras is a famous dharma sutra written by Rishi Vasistha. It is one of the few surviving ancient Sanskrit Dharmasutras of Hinduism and treatise on Dharma that discusses duties, responsibilities and ethics to oneself, to family and as a member of society. This text (5.5) explicitly states, “A woman in her courses is impure during three (days and) night”. Further text 5.6 describes what should woman not do during menses as “ (During that period) she shall not apply kohl to her eyes, nor anoint (her body), nor bathe in water; she shall sleep on the ground; she shall not sleep in the day-time, nor touch the fire, nor make a rope, nor clean her teeth, nor eat meat, nor look at the planets, nor smile, nor busy herself with (house-hold affairs), nor run; she shall drink out of a large vessel, or out of her joined hands, or out of a copper vessel”. Text 5.7 dealt how woman did become menstruating “When Indra had slain (Vṛtra) the three-headed son of Tvaṣṭṛ, he was seized by Sin, and he considered himself to be tainted with exceedingly great guilt. All beings cried out against him (saying to him), 'O thou slayer of a learned Brāhmaṇa! O thou slayer of a learned Brāhmaṇa!' He ran to the women for protection (and said to them), 'Take upon yourselves the third part of this my guilt (caused by) the murder of a learned Brāhmaṇa.' They answered, "What shall we have (for doing thy wish)?' He replied, 'Choose a boon.' They said, 'Let us obtain offspring (if our husbands approach us) during the proper season, at pleasure let us dwell (with our husbands until (our children) are born.' He answered, 'So be it.' (Then) they took upon themselves (the third part of his guilt). That guilt of Brāhmaṇa-murder appears every month as the menstrual flow.(**Dharmasutras, translated by Patrick Olivelle, 1999**)

In Hindu culture, women aren't allowed to visit temples while menstruating. The boards outside the temples read: 'Ladies in monthly period are not allowed.' In Sabrimala temple, Kerala(India), women from the age-bracket of 10-50 years are not allowed to enter the temple. They conduct a ritual called, 'Ashtamangala Devaprashnam' (ascertaining the lord's will), to establish the truth

whether a female had defied the temple by gaining entry into the sanctum sanctorum. If the results of the ritual are not accepted by chief priest it means someone has defied the rule. Hence we see that women are considered ritually unclean 'while menstruating and aren't allowed to visit temples or pray to deities. Like Shabarimala many more temples in India do not permit women in temple like Lord Kartikeya Temple Pushkar, Patbausi Satra Assam, Jain Temples Guna Madhya Pradesh, Bhavani Deeksha Mandapam Vijayawada, Kamakhya Devi temple Assam.

Islam

In the Quran, 2:222 reads, "*they ask you about menstruation. Say, it is an impurity, so keep away from women during it and do not approach them until they are cleansed; when they are cleansed you may approach them as God has ordained....*".(The Quran, translated by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, 2009). This clearly shows that Quran also supported impurity of women during menstruation. In Islam menstruating women and girls aren't supposed to touch the Quran, enter the mosque and offer the ritual prayer. There are some religious site in India which prohibits menstruating women's entry like, Haji Ali Dargah Shrine Mumbai, Jama Masjid Delhi, Nizamuddin Dargah, New Delhi.

Sikhism

Menstruation does not lead to women being considered impure in Sikhism, and women's behavior is not restricted during the time when she is menstruating. In The Feminine Principle, the Sikh vision of the transcendent, Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh (1993) writes:

'The denigration of the female body "expressed in many cultural and religious taboos surrounding menstruation and Child-Birth" is absent in the Sikh worldview. Guru Nanak openly chides those who attribute pollution to women because of menstruation'

Christianity

Most Christian denominations do not follow any specific rituals or rules related to menstruation. Other denominations, such as those of Oriental Orthodox Christianity, follow the rules similar to those laid out in the Bible Gateway Leviticus 15:19-30 that a menstruating female is considered ritually unclean- "anyone who touches her will be unclean until evening" Touching a

menstruating female touching an object she had sat on or lain on or having intercourse with her also makes a person ritually unclean. **(Bible Gateway, New international version, 1978)**

It explicitly stated that women are ritually unclean and impure and men should not have intercourse with her during her menses.

Buddhism

The Buddha rejected the idea of ritual purity and impurity and did not endorse any restrictions on menstruating women. His main concern was with what he called the 'inner washing' (M.I, 39), i.e. developing a mind of love, kindness and honesty, and free from greed, hatred and delusion. Some Buddhist cultures have forgotten the Buddha's teaching on inner purity as opposed to ritual purity and continue to adhere to various menstruation superstitions. In some parts of Thailand women in this condition are not allowed to enter temples or circumambulate stupas. In Burma they will not visit temples during this time and they are not allowed to approach certain holy Buddha images or enter simas. **(Dhammika, Undated)**

Need of the study

It is clear that most of the religions have restrictions against menstruating girls/women considering this process impure, therefore, denying several rights to menstruating women. Though all these age old religious strictures are not followed in today, but still one can find its' ruminants in several socio-cultural practices dictating and affecting women's lives negatively. One of the dominant and widely practiced taboos against menstruating woman is that she should not participate in any religious rituals or not come into contact with anything that is sacred. These restrictions exclude women and adolescent girl to participate in their daily life in a dignified manner. From the beginning menstruation is ignored or given low priority by formal agencies of health, water and education sector. Although there are many government schemes (UNESCO, National Health Mission by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare Government of India, UNICEF) and non-government agencies (Sukhibhava, Eco Femme, Mukti Project, Goonj etc.) including social media campaign like Happy to bleed, #Yes I Bleed, focused on increasing awareness in women and girls regarding menstruation. But they are mainly concerned to management aspect of menstruation like; distribution of sanitary napkins in poor areas, teaching girls/women the skills to make cloth pad, organizing awareness camp etc. Menstrupedia, a book

written in comic format to educate young girls about menses (Gupta, 2015) is a commendable effort and helped to fill the void in the realm of educational material on this subject. But Menstrupedia has two limitations; first, it caters only to urban upper middle class girls as it is written in the English and second, in this book main attention is given on management of menstruation and it shies away discussing religious myths against menses. Researchers felt that there is a strong need not only to educate young girls about menstruation but also to work on the deconstruction of socio-religious stigma and myths associated with menstruation.

Hence researchers intend to develop a self-instructional module on menstrual education (SIMME) in Hindi language. The main purposes of this module were; first, to provide knowledge about menses and menstrual management to adolescent girls and second, deconstruction of socio-religious taboos and myths around menstruation among girls. For the development of SIMME researcher needed a thorough understanding of myths and misconception and knowledge level of menstruation among adolescent girls of Varanasi district. This paper is based on the part of research data collected to develop a self-instructional module on menstrual education (SIMME).

Research Questions-

1. What are the knowledge level and experiences of young adolescent girls regarding menstruation?
2. What kind of myths and misconceptions young adolescent girls have regarding menstruation?

Methodology

It is a qualitative study and for that data collection was done through one on one interview of adolescent girls with the help of semi-structured interview schedule.

Sample of the study

For the present study all girls between 11 to 13 years of age studying in upper primary schools of Varanasi district constituted the population. In this study first sampling units were schools of Varanasi district. A representative sample comprising of all caste and social class and religions

were selected through stratified proportionate random sampling method. In the final sample there were 250 girls of Varanasi district participated in the study.

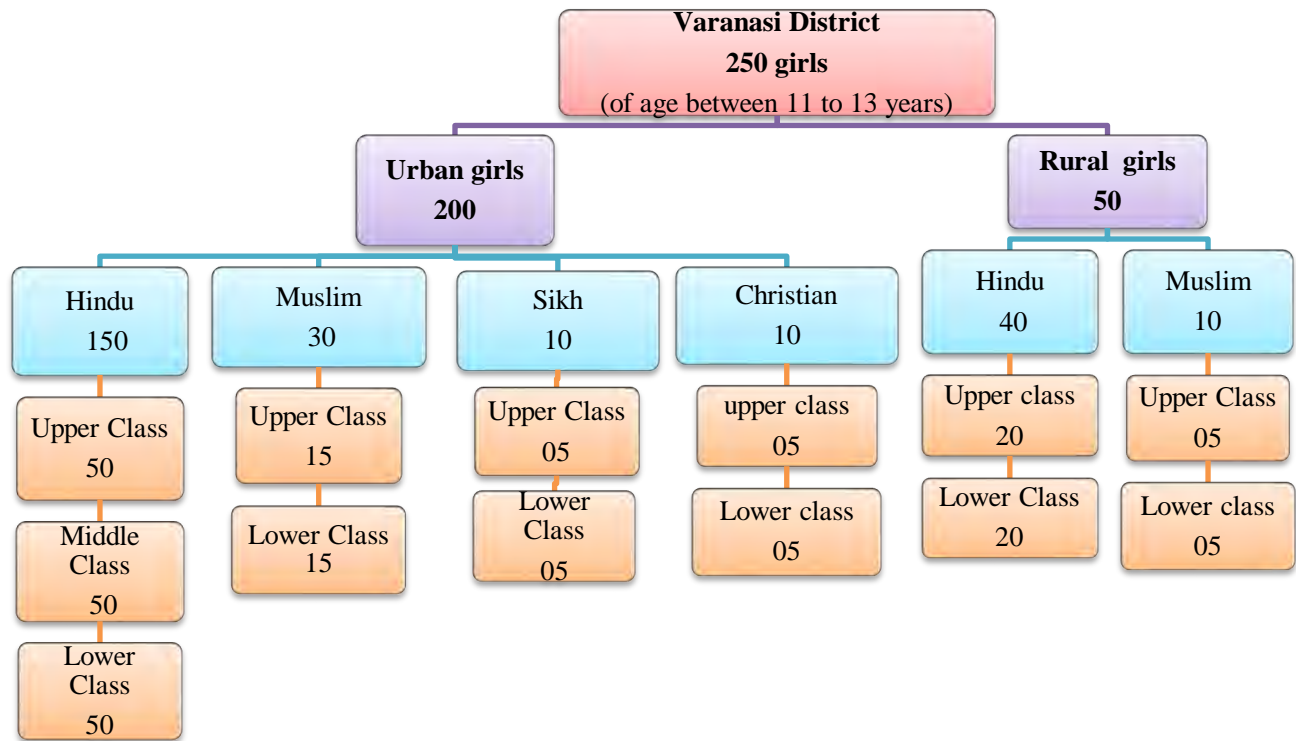


Fig-1 Sample Description

Researcher had chosen 200 girls from urban schools and 50 girls from rural schools. It is evident from the figure-1 that majority of girls belonged to Hindu religion and girls from other religious affiliation were less in number.

Analysis and Interpretation

All the interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and then it was transcribed. Thematic analysis of interview data was done after coding process. Following themes were emerged after the analysis of data.

1-Euphemism for Menstruation

Euphemism is an indirect word or expression that one uses instead of a more direct one when talking about something that seems unpleasant or embarrassing. From the beginning of our culture menstruation is considered as a taboo word which can't be spoken in public and one is

not supposed to discuss about it openly. Due to shame and stigma associated with menses, there are many euphemisms for the menstruation prevalent in our society. In the present study all the participant girls referred the menstruation through euphemism.

One of the rural girls from upper caste, aged 11 studying in class 6 told, *“humen jab bhi periods aata hai, hum ise kapda aa gya bulate hain taki kisi aur ko pata na chale”*(Whenever I have period I used to call it “on the rag” so that nobody could know about it).

And many more names are used by girls like *“aunty aaagyi”*(aunt flows), *“aajmai down hu”* (I am down today), *“masik aaya hai”*, *“mc aayi”*, *“chums”* and most commonly *“periods”* is used.

In fact, the word **menstruation** in itself is a euphemism. In the dictionary menstruation meaning is periods or monthly and *mahvari* in Hindi which simply means that comes or occurs monthly. The purest biological process by which this whole world exists has no any specific name as other physiological processes like respiration for breathing, fertilization, digestion, excretion etc. According to a research conducted by Clue with the international Women’s health Coalition there are over 5000 different slangs terms and euphemisms for the word menstruation or periods. Here are some most frequently euphemism for menses are used- **Aunt flow, Time of month, on the rag, red tide, red sea, red moon, red curse, code red, monthly visitor, mother nature, lady time, lady friend, lady days etc.** Actually euphemisms make females more comfortable while talking about it so that other could not hear it specially a male.

Use of euphemism shows that there is a sense of uneasiness to talk about menstruation among girls. It is a clear indication that our education system has failed girls and didn’t equip them with necessary knowledge about this vital biological process and didn’t instill a sense of dignity among girls and women vis-a vis with this process.

2-Internalized belief of Impurity

In **Hindu religion** Navratri is the time of worship of goddess for protection and prosperity. During Navratri pre-pubertal girls are worshiped as they are supposed to have pure body and worshiping them is considered equivalent to worshiping living goddess. But when she attains the puberty the same girl becomes impure and not to be worshiped or allowed in religious ritual during menstruation. Natural physiological process, monthly blood flow from her vagina made

her impure, unhygienic even untouchable. Menstruating girls or women do not have a right to live like as before menarche. They are prohibited to visit temple and also not allowed to touch any sacred thing and participate any religious rituals.

It is such a dominant myth that most of the girls of sample have internalized this feeling of impurity at the very young age and sometimes even before having their first menses.

All the rural and urban girls in interview accepted that they did not visit temple. One of the urban girls from upper class, aged 13 studying in grade 8th told, "*hume periods me mandir nahin jana chahiye*"(We should not visit to temple during periods).

When researcher asked the reason she said, "*kyonki periods me hum log apavitra hote hai, mandir jane se se hamko paap padega*" (Because we are impure during periods and if we visit temple in periods we would be cursed).

One of the urban Muslim girls from lower class, aged 12 studying in grade 7thtold "*hume periods men namaz nahin padhna chahiye, aur masjid bhi nahin jana chahiye kyonki hum us time gandehotehain*"(We should not offer namaj and also shouldn't visit mosque because we are dirty during period).

Though there are no restrictions mentioned in holy book of Sikhism for menstruating women but in everyday cultural practice it was found that Sikh girls follow some self-imposed restrictions. In the present study sample a Sikh girl, aged 13 studying in class 7thsaid, "*hum periods me guru dware jate hain par vha par kuch chute nahin hain*"(I used to visit Gurudwara during periods but I do not touch anything (sacred) there).

Menstruation is tabooed among catholic Christian while protestant Christian think it is normal as researcher interviewed a protestant Christian girl, aged 11 studying in class 6th told, "*hum vaise hi rahte hain, church bhi jatehain*"(I live as usual and also visit to church during menses).

3-Inadequate Information about Menstruation from the Family

It was found in the study that mother was the primary source of information about menstruation, about 85% girls interviewed got first information from their mothers. Remaining girls reported

other sources, like sister, aunt, grandmother, friend and very few from school or internet (you tube).

Lack of awareness and ignorance are major problem in India's menstrual hygiene scenario. Indian Council for Medical Research's 2011-12 report stated that only 38 per cent menstruating girls in India spoke to their mothers about menstruation (Business Standard, 2018). In the present study sample only 49% girls knew about menses prior to the attainment of menarche but none of them knew its' physiological reasons. Though in the present study majority of girls got first information about menstruation from their mothers or other female family members but the problem is that this information was not adequate or sufficient and girls remained unprepared for this important life event. It may be due to two reasons; either mothers felt awkward to talk about it or they themselves lack the proper knowledge of menstruation process.

During interview, one of the urban girls from upper class, aged 13 studying in class 8th said, ***“mummy ne period ke bare men bataya tha par blood ata hai yah nahin pata tha”***(My mother had told me about periods but I was not told about the bleeding).

One of the urban Muslim girls from lower class, aged 13 student of class 7th said, ***“mujhe meri appi ne bataya tha ki mujhe bhi period hoga, par kyu hota hai yah nahi bataya”***(My sister told me about the periods but she didn't tell why it happens).

There wasn't much difference in terms of first experience of having menses between rural and urban girls. Only 50 urban girls from upper class attending private got information about periods through a seminar held in school and one or two girls who had access to internet had prior information about menstruation. Obviously these girls responded differently and said, ***“yah natural hai”*** (it is natural), ***“yah physiology hai”*** (it's just a physiology).

4-Unprepared Girls

Women across the world grow up with the stigma associated with menstruation and remain unaware to the real reasons of menstruation. The taboo surrounding menstruation becomes a part of their growing up and continues with their daughters. Hence, the lack of awareness, shyness and myths are carried forward via generations in India. This is the reason why girls have never a

good and normal experience during menarche. All interviewed girls had a bad, worst, fearful, clumsy, awkward, strange experience during the onset of menstruation.

During the interview of girls, one of the rural girls from upper caste, aged 12th studying in class 6 told "*mujhe jab pahli bar period aaya to laga mera accident ho gaya*". (When I got my first periods, I thought I had an accident).

One of the urban girls from lower class, aged 11 studying in class 6th told "*mai to blood dekh kar bahut dar gayi thi*" (I was scared to see the blood).

One upper class Muslim girl aged 13, studying in class 8th from urban area told "*mujhe jab pahali bar period aaya tab bahut bekar lagat ha*" (I became very upset when I had my first period).

Even those girls who had prior information about menstruation also had bad and scary experience of their first period.

5. Menstruation at School

It is evident that girls are ill informed about menstruation at home but schools also short-changed girls. When it comes to menstruation school are not preparing girls either. There is a culture of silence on menstruation in schools; very few school board textbooks have information about menstruation (Maurya and Kushwaha, 2017), when it is mentioned in the textbooks, most of the teachers tend to skip the chapter, girls are not encouraged to talk about it and boys were not engaged in discussion on menstruation at all. A 2015 survey by the Ministry of Education found that 63% schools in village teachers never discussed menstruation (Business Standard, 2018). Exceptionally some high end private schools in urban areas organized seminar on this topic occasionally but by and large majority of schools particularly in the rural area don't bother about it. It was found in the present study that in rural areas a girl skips school 4-5 days in month on account of menstruation. During interview one rural girl, aged 12 studying in class 6th revealed that, "*hum log periods men school nahi jate*" (we don't go to school during menstruation).

Menstruating girls are forced to remain absent from the school and every month and lose the opportunity of learning as schools, particularly in rural areas didn't have basic infrastructure like toilet, which makes them highly inaccessible for girls during their periods. As the same girl

reported that, ***“ghar par aaram rahta hai school men koi suvidha nahi hai, toilet me pani bhi nahi aata hai”*** (staying at home is convenient as there is no facility in the school, even there is no water in the toilet). She was further probed, what do they do if they start bleeding in school, suddenly? She replied, ***“agar school men period aa jae to tabiyt kharab bolker ghar chale jate hain”***(If suddenly, one has period in the school, then she can go home by reporting to teacher that she is not feeling well).

It is not very surprising that even the teachers also share the same myths, taboos about menstruation and instead of debunking these help to perpetuate them among young girls. As one of the rural girls, aged 12 studying in class 6th responded ***“school me judo ki teacher bhi periods me aane ko mana karti hain, aur ladko se bhi bat karne ko mana karti hain, kuch khelna mana hota hai bolti hain ki ladkiyon ko jyada uchal kud nahin karna chahiye”***(Our judo teacher prohibit us to come to school during periods, she also tells us not to talk with boys, and discouraged us to play during periods as she told us that girls should not play heavily during menses).

Though in government schools in U. P. sanitary pads were distributed to girls by some agencies at free of cost. But girls complained that it was of poor quality and more so not being given regularly. Researcher asked rural girls about pad distribution at school. One of them aged 11, studying in class 6th told, ***“School me bas eak bar hi pad mila tha par ab teacher kahti hain ki khtm ho gya hai”***(I got sanitary napkin in school once but now teachers say that it is not available).

The condition of urban private schools is different in terms of physical facilities and awareness. These schools provide rest room, sanitary napkin and medical facilities. During interview one of the urban girls aged 13 studying in class 8th told, ***“agar school me period aa jae to hmare school me pad mil jata hai , aur rest room me pet dard hone par aaram bhi kar lete hain”*** (If I start menstruating in school, can get sanitary napkin easily in school and in case of pain/ stomachache can rest in restroom).

It seems that it has been normalized that every menstruating girl would skip school for 3-4 days every month. Millions and thousands of girls are missing school due to menstruation and

consequently losing learning hours, it is very disturbing that school authorities, teachers, and educational planner etcetera are not showing much concerns to redress the problem.

6-Learning to be Untouchable during Menstruation

Besides being a biological process menstruation is a socio-cultural process too involving lot of stigma, taboos and negations across cultures. In order to deconstruct the myths about menstruation and educate young girls one might need to know the type and extent of myths and taboos prevalent around menstruation.

During menstruation girls and women are prohibited to enter into the kitchen, cook and touch pickles. The most widespread restrictions are imposed on them regarding religious practices like they are not allowed to pray, visit temple and touch anything which is considered to be sacred like holy Basil, prayer books. They are not allowed to partake in religious rituals and accept holy offerings (*prasad*). Besides, there are several behavioural restrictions and every family has some 'not to do' list for menstruating girls and women and it may vary from family to family. In-depth interview of girls helped the researcher to gain insight regarding many local myths and taboos prevalent among both rural and urban girls in the eastern U.P.

During interview one of the rural Hindu girls aged 13 studying in class 7th told, "*hum log periods me kitchen me nahi jate, Prasad nahi khate, shringar ka koi saman bhi nahi chhute*" (during periods, we do not enter into the kitchen, do not eat Prasad (holy offerings) and also do not touch make up and ornament).

When researcher asked the reason behind following these rules she replied, "*kyonki period me hum log gande hote hain, isiliya kitchen me mana kiya jata hai jane ko, iske alawa prasad bhi khane ko mana karti hain mummy.....mummy bolti hain ki shringar ka saman chhune se vah khraba ho jaega.....yha tak ki mummy ko period hota hai to vo sindoor bhi mujhse ya didi se lagwati hain*" (Because we are impure during menstruation so we do not go to kitchen and even my mother prohibits me to eat Prasad.....mother don't allow us to touch any make up/ornament otherwise it would get spoiledin fact my mother is on her own periods ask me or my sister to apply vermilion on her forehead as she won't touch it).

One of the urban Muslim girls, aged 13 studying in class 8th told, "*Periods me hum log Quran nahi chhute hain aur namaj bhi nahi padhte hain kyonki hum log is time gande hote hai*" (I

don't not touch Quran during menstruation and also don't not offer Namaz because I am impure during this time).

Ramzan the most sacred month in the Islamic faith in which fasting is a central practice, not everyone is required to fast, including children, pregnant or nursing women and also women and girls who are menstruating. Women and girls are not allowed participating in the fasting and prayer rituals while on their periods because they are considered impure while menstruating. Instead they are expected to make up the missed days of fasting as soon as their periods are over and they are ritually cleansed (Selby, 2018)

During interview one urban Muslim girl of class 7th aged 12 said, ***“agar roje me hmaara periods aa jatahai to utane din ka roja bad me rakhkar pura karna hota hai”***(if we have periods during roza, the one month fasting ritual in the holy motnth of Ramzan, then we skip fasting and complete those skipped days of fastafter period is over).

One urban girl from lower socio-economic class, aged 12studying in class 7thsaid- ***“mujhe achar, tulsi ka paudha aur nail paint chune ko mana kiya jata hai, hum log is time kuch bhi khatta nahi khate hain kyonki khatta khane se periods ruk jata hai, jab teesare din pe bal dhul kar nahate hain tab sab kuch chhu sakte hain”***(I am prohibited to touch pickle, holy Basil plant and nail paint. We don't eat anything sour at this time because eating sour would stop the period. On the third day of the period after having bath from head (washing our hair) we can touch everything).

When researcher asked about the reason of not touching basil plant, pickle and nail paint she replied,***“tulsi ka paudha chune par sadh jata hai, achaar bhi kharab ho jata hai, nail paint sajne ka saman hota hai mummy chune par dantati hain”***(Basil plant would get dry and pickle would be spoiled if a menstruating girl touches it and mother scolds when I touch nail paint as it is related to adornment).

Although most of the myths followed by Hindu girls were found to be common in both rural and urban area but some myths were followed only in rural area as one rural girl of class 8th aged 13 told, ***“agr kahin period ka kapda galti se dikh jae to agli bar ka period ruk jata hai isiliye masik ke kapde ko jala dete hain”***(If one sees the cloth used in the period cloth by mistake, then her next period would stop, that's why we burn the cloth used in periods).

One of the rural girls aged 12 studying in class 6th told, “*agr kisi fal vale paudhe ko ya late vale paudhe ko chuo to ghar men daant padhti hai kahte hain ki vo period me chune se sadh jaega*”(We are scolded at home if we touch any fruit’s or creeper plant while having menses. It is said that it will be rotten if touched during menstruation).

Muslim girls and woman also face restrictions and taboos regarding menstruation. During menses they didn’t bath until it’s over. They didn’t touch Quran and avoid to offer Namaj, daily prayer. During interview one Muslim urban girl aged 11 of class 6th responded, “*jab tak ki periods khtm nahi ho jata humlog nahate nahin hain*”(We don’t take bath until the menstruation is over). When probed she replied, “*is time nahane se bukhar ho jata hai*”(Taking bath during periods causes fever).

Conclusion

It is evident from the present study that different types of restrictions, myths and taboos were practiced by girls of Varanasi district during menstruation. Although awareness regarding menstruation was more in urban girls than rural but both of them have stigma around menstruation and follow taboos. Most of the myths are passed on from mothers to daughters and it is very clear from the study findings that schools are not of much help when it comes to menstruation. As myths, secrecy and taboos associated with menstruation is very much the part of school culture. Schools are not providing knowledge about menstruation and there is no opportunity to discuss menstruation without shame in the school. Thus, study findings reveal that on the one hand knowledge about menses provided by family is inadequate and inaccurate and helps to perpetuate myths against menses and on the other hand schooling does not provide any agency to young girls either to talk discuss about this process in public life. It is not strange that most of the participating girls in the study felt dirty and ashamed of a totally natural bodily function.

Social beliefs and practices against menstruation affect girls’ right to education especially in rural area where girls either miss school during menstruating days due to inability to manage their periods at school or drop out school completely on reaching puberty. In India alone, almost a third of girls are unable to attend school during their period because they lack access to proper facilities and sanitary products (UNICEF). According to the report on sanitation facilities for

women across India (2016) reveals that 63 million adolescent girls live in homes without facilities and 23% of girls drop out of school when they start menstruating. One of the leading factors for leaving school is the lack of toilets in their schools. (Punekarnews, undated)

Since girls have internalized the feeling of shame and stigma regarding menstruation they don't raise voice for the better facilities and treatment at school. And don't question and challenge the myths and taboos related to menses either in school or at home. It is high time to educate our girls about the facts of menstruation, physiological implications, significance of menstruation, proper hygienic practices during menstruation, and most important deconstruction of myths and stigma associated with it.

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