



THE HOLIDAYS OF THE JANANI

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ABSTRACT

Where women are honoured, there the gods reside.

Where they are not respected, all actions become fruitless.

The above phrase is very common but has a huge impact on Indian culture and society. Where at one end we worship women as deities, but these statements become very contrary during their menstrual cycle. Where women are prohibited from taking part in religious activities, even though they are not allowed to enter temple premises. Here we have mapped out every fact and ritual related to menstruation in different religions and philosophies. The term 'holidays of the Janani' refers to the monthly menstruation period experienced by women. After that, they hold their body eligible to become Janani (mother). Menstruation is a natural biological process in the female body that has been historically perceived and treated differently across various cultures and religions. These perceptions have significantly influenced societal attitudes, legal frameworks, and policies concerning women's rights and health. This paper explores the religious interpretations of menstruation within Hinduism, the Vedas, Puranas and Mahakavyas, and its Western traditions, philosophies and its comprehensions in Islam. This highlights how these beliefs have shaped societal norms. The paper also provides a good comparative study and analysis of the Western and Indian religious perspectives on menstruation and examines the evolution of Indian judicial responses to menstruation-related issues. Government initiatives aimed at promoting menstrual health and hygiene in India are also discussed. Through a comprehensive analysis, this paper aims to provide insights into the socio-cultural and legal dimensions of menstruation, advocating for a more informed and equitable approach to menstrual health.

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INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is a biological process experienced by women, which has been subject to various interpretations and taboos across cultures and religions. In many societies, menstruation has been surrounded by myths and stigmas, often leading to the marginalisation of women during their menstrual periods. These cultural and religious beliefs have not only influenced social norms but have also impacted legal and policy frameworks regarding women's health and rights.

In Hinduism, menstruation is often associated with concepts of purity and impurity, as reflected in ancient texts such as the Vedas, Puranas, and Mahakavyas. These religious scriptures have historically dictated social practices and norms concerning menstruation, often resulting in restrictive practices that segregate women during their menstrual cycles. Western cultures, on the other hand, have approached menstruation from both a biological and socio-cultural perspective, with a focus on health and hygiene but also with an underlying stigma. Islamic teachings acknowledge menstruation as a natural process but prescribe specific religious practices and exemptions during the menstrual period, which have been interpreted in various ways across different Islamic societies.

The Indian judiciary has addressed issues related to menstruation, particularly in the context of women's rights and gender equality. Landmark cases such as the Sabarimala Temple case have brought attention to the conflict between religious beliefs and constitutional rights, prompting a re-examination of traditional practices related to menstruation.

This research paper aims to analyse the religious, legal, and societal perspectives on menstruation, comparing the Western and Indian religious concepts, exploring the Indian judiciary's role in evolving the discourse on menstruation, and evaluating government initiatives aimed at promoting menstrual health. The paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how menstruation is perceived and managed across different cultural and legal contexts, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable approach to menstruation.

MENSTRUATION IN THE VEDAS

In Vedic literature, menstruation is addressed within the context of the broader spiritual and ritual life of women. The Vedas, which are the foundational texts of Hinduism, contain references to the roles and responsibilities of women during menstruation. The Vedic texts approach menstruation as a natural biological process, with specific instructions on ritual purity and the observance of certain restrictions during this time. Additionally, menstruation is sometimes linked to mythology and cosmological understandings within Hindu traditions.

THE CONCEPT OF RITUAL IMPURITY

In the Vedic worldview, menstruation is understood as a period of ritual impurity, a concept that pervades many religious systems. This period of impurity necessitates certain restrictions on religious activities and social interactions for women.

Atharva Veda: The Atharva Veda refers to the concept of Rajaswala, the state of impurity that women experience during menstruation. It highlights that a woman undergoing menstruation should refrain from participating in Vedic rituals and spiritual practices during this time, as her bodily state is seen as one of temporary impurity.¹ The belief here stems from the importance placed on ritual purity in the performance of sacrifices and other sacred rites in Vedic society.

Restrictions on Rituals: Menstruating women are typically excluded from performing or participating in rituals such as Yajna (fire sacrifices) and puja (worship), as their menstrual blood is viewed as impure according to the ritual standards of Vedic society. This period of exclusion is temporary, and women are expected to resume their religious duties after the completion of the cycle and necessary purification.²

MYTHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF MENSTRUATION

In Hindu mythology, menstruation is also linked to a divine origin, with some interpretations viewing it as a result of a cosmic or divine act.

Vedic Mythology and Menstruation: In some interpretations, menstruation is said to have been passed on to women as a result of a mythical incident in which the guilt of the god Indra,

¹ Atharva Veda 14.1.44, see Ralph T.H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Atharva Veda* (E.J. Lazarus & Co., 1895) 379-380.

² Wendy Doniger, *The Laws of Manu* (Penguin Classics, 1991) 107-108.

who killed a Brahmin, was shared by women, among other entities. This mythological explanation is often referenced in later Vedic literature and early Smriti texts, such as the Brahmanas and Puranas.³ Women, by taking on the monthly cycle, absorbed part of Indra's guilt, symbolised by the shedding of blood during menstruation.⁴ This connection reflects the Vedic understanding that menstruation, though viewed as impure, is a divinely sanctioned process essential to the balance of the cosmos.

THE RAJASWALA VRATA (OBSERVANCE DURING MENSTRUATION)

The Rajaswala Vrata refers to the set of observances and practices that menstruating women are expected to follow during their cycle. These practices are laid out in various Vedic texts and Smritis (legal and ethical texts) and continue to influence Hindu customs.

Seclusion and Rest: In traditional practices, menstruating women were expected to observe seclusion, avoiding involvement in household duties and religious ceremonies. This duration of time, called *Rajaswala*, offered females time for rest and relief from daily routine work. Although this is also considered an impurity, the bodily discomfort and frequent requirement for rest that typically accompany menstruation are also considered impurities.⁵

Purification After Menstruation: After the completion of the menstrual period, women were required to undergo a purification ritual, often involving a bath, before resuming their normal duties and participation in religious rituals.⁶ This illustrates the cyclical concept of purity and impurity in Vedic tradition, wherein the body's natural processes are perceived as shifting between phases of purity and impurity.

THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF MENSTRUATION

In the Vedic texts, menstruation also carries symbolic meanings, particularly in its relationship with fertility and the feminine principle.

³ John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature* (Routledge, 2000) 146.

⁴ Laurie L. Patton, *Myth as Argument: The Brhad Devata as Canonical Commentary* (Walter de Gruyter, 1996) 168.

⁵ Julia Leslie, *Authority and Meaning in Indian Religions: Hinduism and the Case of Valmiki* (Ashgate Publishing, 2003) 72-73.

⁶ Stephanie Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife / Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India* (Oxford University Press, 1996) 94-95.

Connection to Fertility and Creation: Menstruation is frequently seen as a symbolic representation of a woman's fertility and creative power. The process of menstruation itself is treated with restrictions; it is also recognised as a sign of a woman's reproductive capacity, which is vital for the continuation of life. In Vedic society, the role of women in procreation was revered, and menstruation, despite being a period of ritual impurity, was part of the natural cycle of fertility.⁷ This dual view of menstruation as both impure and creative reflects the complex nature of female biology in Vedic thought.

MENSTRUATION IN ISLAM

In Islam, menstruation (hayd) is regarded as a natural biological process experienced by women, and it is acknowledged in both the Quran and Hadith. Islamic teachings provide specific guidance on how menstruation should be approached in terms of religious observance, personal purity, and social conduct. It is treated as a state of ritual impurity, though it is not associated with any moral or spiritual fault. It is regarded as part of the natural order that is created by Allah itself.

Menstruation in the Quran: The Quran provides direct references to menstruation and the conduct that should be followed during a woman's menstrual cycle.

Quran 2:222: The most explicit reference to menstruation in the Quran occurs in this verse, where Allah says: "They ask you about menstruation. Say: Menstruation is a state of discomfort; therefore, abstain from intimate relations with women during this time and do not approach them until they have been purified. And after they have purified through this process, then again advance them as Allah has ordered you. Indeed, Allah loves those who follow His order and keep him pure."⁸

This verse highlights the discomfort associated with menstruation and provides specific instructions regarding marital relations during this time. Sexual intercourse is prohibited while a woman is menstruating, and this prohibition continues until the woman has completed her cycle and performed the required ghusl (ritual bath).⁹

⁷ Tracy Pintchman, *Women's Lives, Women's Rituals in the Hindu Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2007) 43-45.

⁸ Quran 2:222, see Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Amana Publications, 2004) 46.

⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Darussalam Publishers, 2000) 192-193.

Exemption from Religious Obligations: Islamic law exempts menstruating women from certain religious duties, recognising the physical and ritual implications of the menstrual cycle. However, these exemptions are seen as temporary and not reflective of a woman's spiritual status.

Exemption from Salah (Daily Prayers): Women are excused from performing the five daily prayers (salah) during menstruation due to their state of ritual impurity. Notably, women are not obligated to compensate for the prayers missed during their menstruation once it has ended.¹⁰ This exemption reflects the Islamic principle of ease and accommodation in religious practice, especially concerning physical limitations.

Exemption from Fasting During Ramadan: "Women are not allowed by Allah to follow roza fasting in the month of Ramadan when going through menstruation. They missed prayers, but missed fasts and prayers must be compensated for after the conclusion of the month of Ramadan."¹¹ This exception is designed to alleviate the physical burden of fasting during menstruation, recognising that fasting could potentially worsen the physical discomfort associated with this period.

Ritual Purification and Resumption of Worship: At the end of the menstrual cycle, Islamic teachings require women to perform a ritual bath known as ghusl before they can resume their religious obligations, including prayer, fasting, and marital relations. This practice underscores the importance of ritual purity in Islamic worship.

Ghusl (Ritual Bath): After the completion of menstruation, women are required to perform ghusl, which involves washing the entire body in a specific manner to attain a state of ritual purity. This purification is necessary before women can resume prayers, fasting, or engage in sexual intercourse with their spouse.¹² The act of purification through ghusl serves as a reminder of both physical cleanliness and spiritual readiness to participate in religious life.¹³

¹⁰ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (Yale University Press, 1992) 84.

¹¹ Aisha Bewley, *The Islamic Way of Worship* (Ta-Ha Publishers, 1997) 73-74.

¹² Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Healing with the Medicine of the Prophet* (Darussalam Publishers, 2003) 65-66.

¹³ Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007) 182-183.

Menstruation and Sexual Relations: Islamic teachings prohibit sexual intercourse during a woman's menstruation. This prohibition is grounded in the concept of taharah (ritual purity), which holds that a state of impurity exists during menstruation.

Prohibition of Intercourse During Menstruation: The Quran explicitly prohibits intercourse during menstruation, as mentioned in Quran 2:222, due to the state of ritual impurity that menstruation brings. However, other forms of physical intimacy, such as kissing or embracing, are not forbidden during this time.¹⁴ This prohibition underscores the importance of maintaining ritual purity in marital relations and acknowledges the physical discomfort that women experience during menstruation.

MENSTRUATION AS A NATURAL AND CREATED PROCESS

Islamic teachings emphasise that menstruation is a natural and divinely ordained process, one that is part of the biological and reproductive system of women. It is not viewed as something negative or shameful but as a sign of the natural processes created by Allah.

Hadith on Menstruation: Several hadiths (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad) reinforce the notion that menstruation is a natural condition. For instance, Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, reported that during her menstruation, the Prophet remained physically close to her, demonstrating affection and compassion. This indicates that while menstruation necessitates certain religious restrictions, it does not diminish a woman's worth or her relationship with her spouse.¹⁵

Creation of Menstruation: Menstruation is seen as part of the wisdom of Allah in the creation of women. Islamic scholars emphasise that menstruation is a sign of fertility and is a necessary part of a woman's reproductive system. Thus, menstruation is not stigmatised in Islam, even though it temporarily alters certain religious practices.¹⁶

MENSTRUATION AND SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

While women are exempted from certain physical acts of worship during menstruation, this period is often viewed as an opportunity for women to focus on other forms of spirituality,

¹⁴ Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (Blackwell, 1991) 56-57.

¹⁵ Hadith in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 6, Hadith 299. See *Sahih al-Bukhari* with commentary by M. Muhsin Khan (Darussalam Publishers, 1997) 310.

¹⁶ Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (Oneworld Publications, 2014) 144-145.

including acts like du'a (personal supplication), dhikr (the remembrance of Allah), and contemplative reflection. Islamic scholars encourage women to remain spiritually active through non-ritual acts, as menstruation does not prevent spiritual growth.¹⁷

MENSTRUATION IN THE KAMA SUTRA

The Kama Sutra, written by the ancient Indian scholar Vatsyayana, is a book about love, sex, and pleasure. While its primary focus is on the art of love, it does make references to menstruation in the context of sexual relations and social norms. The Kama Sutra guides sexual behaviour and relationships, and menstruation is one of the factors considered when advising on appropriate times for sexual activity. The text reflects ancient Hindu customs where menstruation is seen as a time of both physical sensitivity and ritual impurity.

Guidelines on Sexual Conduct During Menstruation: The Kama Sutra advises not to engage in sexual intercourse during the period of menstruation. This advice is in keeping with the cultural and religious norms of ancient India, where menstruation was seen as a period of ritual impurity, and certain restrictions were placed on women during this time.

Prohibition of Intercourse: According to the Kama Sutra, men should abstain from sexual intercourse with their partner during menstruation. This reflects the broader Indian tradition that sees menstruation as a time of physical vulnerability and ritual impurity for women. The text advises that men should wait until the woman has completed her menstrual cycle and undergone any necessary purification before resuming sexual relations.¹⁸

Ritual and Health Considerations: The text's recommendation to avoid intercourse during menstruation is both a reflection of ritual concerns and an acknowledgement of the physical discomfort associated with menstruation. Ancient Hindu society placed importance on maintaining purity, and menstruation was seen as a time when women were in a state of temporary impurity, which extended to the sexual sphere.¹⁹ The Kama Sutra aligns with this perspective, advising restraint and respect for the woman's physical state during her menstrual cycle.

¹⁷ Aisha Bewley, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad* (Ta-Ha Publishers, 1998) 281.

¹⁸ Vatsyayana, *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, trans. Sir Richard Burton and F. F. Arbuthnot (Dover Publications, 1962) 108.

¹⁹ Wendy Doniger, *Kama Sutra: A New, Complete English Translation* (Oxford University Press, 2002) 124-125.

Health and Well-being of the Woman: The Kama Sutra goes beyond mere pleasure, emphasising the physical and emotional well-being of women within relationships. During menstruation, the text emphasises that a woman may experience discomfort, and sexual activity during this time is discouraged to avoid causing her additional distress.

Physical Health: In line with the understanding of menstruation as a time of physical discomfort, the Kama Sutra suggests that men avoid sexual intercourse during a woman's menstrual period to protect her health. This indicates a level of sensitivity to the natural cycles of the female body and the recognition that menstruation can be a time of physical and emotional strain.²⁰

Menstruation and Social Customs: In ancient Hindu society, menstruation was not just a biological event but also a time governed by specific social customs. The Kama Sutra, while primarily focused on sexual behaviour, reflects the broader cultural attitude toward menstruation as a period that required certain social and ritual observances.

Ritual Purity: Menstruating women were often required to follow certain rituals of seclusion and purification. This practice was rooted in the belief that menstruation rendered a woman temporarily impure, necessitating that she avoid certain activities, including religious rituals and, as suggested by the Kama Sutra, sexual relations.²¹

Resumption of Normal Activities: After menstruation, women were expected to undergo a purification ritual, such as a bath, before resuming their normal duties, including intimate relations. The Kama Sutra advises that sexual relations can be resumed only after this period of purification, reflecting the text's emphasis on the harmonious balance between physical health, pleasure, and ritual observance.

WESTERN PERSPECTIVE ON MENSTRUATION

Ancient Western Views on Menstruation: In the ancient Western world, menstruation was often viewed through the lens of impurity and medical theory, much like in many other cultures. Menstrual blood was frequently associated with danger, disease, and pollution.

²⁰ Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement* (University of Chicago Press, 1996) 42-43.

²¹ Stephanie Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife, Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India* (Oxford University Press, 1996) 73-75.

Classical Greek and Roman Views: In ancient Greece, philosophers such as Aristotle and Hippocrates offered explanations for menstruation that blended observation with humoral theory. According to Aristotle, menstruation was the body's natural process of expelling excess blood, which he saw as evidence of women's imperfect physiology compared to men.²² The Hippocratic Corpus described menstruation as a necessary release of toxins from the female body, crucial for maintaining balance in the body's four humours—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.²³ The Greeks viewed menstruating women as potentially dangerous, with menstrual blood considered harmful, even capable of causing illness or spoiling food.²⁴ This idea carried into Roman culture, where menstruating women were also considered ritually impure and unsuitable for certain public activities, particularly those involving religious rites.

Christianity and Menstruation: The influence of Christianity in the Western world further reinforced ideas of menstruation as impure. Levitical laws in the Bible stated that women were impure during their menstruation and required a period of isolation from religious and social activities. The Book of Leviticus outlined specific rituals for purification after menstruation, emphasising the notion of spiritual and physical impurity.²⁵ These views persisted into the medieval period, where women were often excluded from religious rituals while menstruating and were thought to be spiritually and physically unclean.

ENLIGHTENMENT AND SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION: THE MEDICALISATION OF MENSTRUATION

With the advent of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution in the 17th and 18th centuries, menstruation became the subject of scientific inquiry, moving away from the mystical and religious explanations of earlier periods.

Medical Theories of the 18th and 19th Centuries: In the 18th and 19th centuries, menstruation began to be understood in more scientific terms. Medical professionals of this era viewed menstruation as a necessary biological function, essential for female reproductive health. Menstrual blood was no longer considered inherently dangerous or toxic, but rather part of the natural menstrual cycle that played a critical role in reproduction. However, menstruation

²² Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (Loeb Classical Library, 1942) 277.

²³ Helen King, *The Disease of Virgins: Green Sickness, Chlorosis, and the Problems of Puberty* (Routledge, 2004) 46-47.

²⁴ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) 134-135.

²⁵ The Bible, Leviticus 15:19-30, King James Version.

was still pathologised in some medical circles, with women sometimes viewed as unstable or prone to hysteria during their cycles.²⁶ Victorian doctors, for instance, believed that women were fragile and needed rest and care during menstruation, leading to the recommendation of confinement or isolation during a woman's period to avoid undue stress.²⁷

20th Century and Feminist Perspectives: In the 20th century, menstruation became a key issue in the emerging feminist movement, as women challenged the long-standing cultural stigmas and medical myths surrounding their bodies.

Feminist Critiques: Feminist scholars in the mid-20th century began to challenge the negative stereotypes and restrictions placed on menstruating women. Simone de Beauvoir, in her landmark work *The Second Sex*, criticised the way menstruation was viewed as a marker of women's inferiority and an obstacle to their full participation in society.²⁸ Feminists argued that menstruation should be seen as a natural biological process, not a source of shame or impurity. By the late 20th century, campaigns emerged to promote menstrual health education, destigmatise menstruation, and advocate for the accessibility of sanitary products as part of broader movements for women's rights and health equity.²⁹

Medical Advancements: With advancements in medical science, the biological understanding of menstruation has greatly improved, leading to more accurate knowledge of the menstrual cycle and its role in women's health. The development of hormonal contraception, like the birth control pill in the 1960s, allowed women to regulate their cycles for the first time, offering unprecedented control over their reproductive health.³⁰ This medical progress further shifted societal perspectives, with menstruation being increasingly recognised as a normal and manageable part of life.

Contemporary Western Views on Menstruation: Today, Western attitudes toward menstruation continue to evolve, reflecting both progress and ongoing challenges. Menstruation is generally seen as a natural biological process, but cultural stigmas and taboos persist in some areas. The increasing availability of menstrual products and public discussions

²⁶ Caroline Daley, *The Gendered Brain: Feminist Neuroscience and the Problem of Sex Difference* (Routledge, 2019) 98.

²⁷ Lara Freidenfelds, *The Modern Period: Menstruation in Twentieth-Century America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009) 34.

²⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (Vintage Books, 1989) 177-179.

²⁹ Elizabeth Kissling, *Capitalising on the Curse: The Business of Menstruation* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006) 102-104.

³⁰ Lara Marks, *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill* (Yale University Press, 2010) 156-158.

about menstruation have improved awareness and acceptance, but there is still work to be done in terms of education, healthcare access, and combating lingering stigmas.

Menstrual Equity Movements: In recent years, movements promoting menstrual equity have gained momentum, seeking to ensure access to menstrual products and remove the stigma associated with menstruation. Advocates emphasise that menstrual health is a human right, and they call for policies that support the health and dignity of menstruating individuals, especially in marginalised communities.³¹ This modern perspective reflects a growing awareness of menstruation as a normal and important part of life that should not hinder women's participation in society.

SABARIMALA TEMPLE CASE

The Sabarimala Temple case brings to the forefront the age-old tension between religious practices and gender equality, specifically as it relates to menstruation. In this case, the prohibition on women of menstruating age (10–50 years) from entering the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala, India, was challenged as being discriminatory and unconstitutional. The Supreme Court's judgement in *Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala* (2018) became a landmark ruling addressing how the intersection of religious traditions and menstruation can infringe on women's constitutional rights.

Religious Context of the Sabarimala Ban on Women: The Sabarimala Temple is dedicated to Lord Ayyappa, a deity revered as a celibate (Naishtika Brahmachari). According to temple traditions, women of menstruating age were prohibited from entering the temple, ostensibly because the deity's vow of celibacy would be disrupted by their presence. The belief that menstruation renders a woman ritually impure was at the core of this restriction, reflecting broader Hindu beliefs about the impurity of menstruation. The exclusion of women of reproductive age from the temple was justified by temple authorities as an essential part of the worship practices associated with Lord Ayyappa.³²

In Hinduism, menstruation has often been surrounded by ideas of ritual impurity. Ancient Hindu scriptures, such as the Manusmriti and Dharma Shastras, prescribe restrictions on women during their menstrual cycles, including prohibitions on participation in religious rituals

³¹ Chris Bobel, *The Managed Body: Developing Girls and Menstrual Health in the Global South* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) 61-63.

³² *S. Mahendran v. The Secretary, Travancore Devaswom Board*, AIR 1991 Ker 42.

or entering sacred spaces. This reflects a belief that menstruation signifies a period of bodily impurity, which demands seclusion from religious and social activities.³³ The restriction imposed by the Sabarimala Temple is a direct continuation of these ancient practices, demonstrating how religious traditions have regulated and restricted women's movements based on their menstrual status.

Challenging the Role of Menstruation in the Legal Dispute: The central argument in the case was that the ban on women aged 10 to 50 was discriminatory and violated their constitutional rights. Petitioners argued that the restriction violated Article 14 (Right to Equality), Article 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination), and Article 25 (Freedom of Religion) of the Indian Constitution.³⁴

The case raised critical questions about whether menstruation, a natural biological process, could be used as a justification for excluding women from a public religious space. By equating menstruation with impurity, the temple's practice perpetuated patriarchal notions that view menstruating women as lesser or impure beings. The petitioners contended that such beliefs were incompatible with modern constitutional values that guarantee equality before the law and prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex.³⁵

SUPREME COURT'S 2018 JUDGMENT: MENSTRUATION AND EQUALITY

In its historic ruling on September 28, 2018, the Supreme Court struck down the ban on the entry of women into the Sabarimala Temple, declaring it unconstitutional. The Court held that the restriction on women of menstruating age was a form of gender discrimination that violated their fundamental rights to equality and non-discrimination. Chief Justice Dipak Misra, in his majority opinion, stated that the exclusion of women based on their biological cycle amounted to a violation of their dignity and constitutional morality.³⁶

Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, in his opinion, marked that keeping menstruating women out was similar to untouchability, which is prohibited under Article 17 of the Constitution. He observed that menstrual taboos, such as those employed by the temple, were rooted in discriminatory

³³ Wendy Doniger, *The Laws of Manu* (Penguin Books, 1991) 173-175.

³⁴ *Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala*, Writ Petition (Civil) No. 373 of 2006, Supreme Court of India, (2018) 1 SCC 685.

³⁵ Arvind Narrain, "The Sabarimala Judgment: Critical Reflections on Constitutional Morality," *Economic and Political Weekly* 54, no. 10 (2019): 43.

³⁶ *Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala*, (2018) 1 SCC 685.

patriarchal values that had no place in a constitutional democracy. The apex Court also disagree with the claim that the prohibition of women's entry was a necessary part of the religion under Article 25. It held that customs that violate the fundamental rights of individuals cannot be protected under the guise of religious freedom.³⁷

The Opposing View and the Claim of Religious Freedom: Justice Indu Malhotra, the lone dissenter, argued that the exclusion of women of menstruating age was an integral part of the temple's religious practices, protected under Article 25 and Article 26 of the Constitution. According to her, the state should not interfere with matters of faith, and the Court should refrain from adjudicating on religious customs. She held that religious practices should be evaluated based on the beliefs of the community and not through the lens of gender equality.³⁸

Impact of the Judgment on Menstrual Taboos: The Sabarimala case serves as a significant legal precedent, illustrating how menstrual taboos in religious contexts are being re-examined through the lens of constitutional rights. The Court's ruling was celebrated as a victory for women's rights, particularly the rights of menstruating women to participate fully in public and religious life without being subjected to age-old stigmas of impurity.³⁹

However, the case also sparked widespread protests in Kerala, with many devotees arguing that the ruling violated their religious beliefs and disrupted long-standing traditions. The subsequent review petitions filed in the Supreme Court led to the referral of the matter to a larger bench, reflecting the ongoing conflict between religious practices and the principles of equality enshrined in the Constitution.⁴⁰

The Kamakhya Temple Ritual is Associated with Menstruation: The Kamakhya Temple in Assam, India, is among the most significant temples associated with Hindu Tantric practices and is particularly unique in its connection to menstruation. It is one of the Shakti Peethas, a place where parts of the goddess Sati's body are believed to have fallen during Lord Shiva's grief-stricken tandava (cosmic dance). According to legend, the goddess's yoni (womb or genitalia) fell at this site, symbolising the divine feminine power of fertility and creation. The

³⁷ Madhavi Goradia Divan, *Facets of Indian Law: Cases and Perspectives* (Eastern Book Company, 2019) 87.

³⁸ Indu Malhotra, "Dissenting Opinion in *Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala*," (2018) 1 SCC 695.

³⁹ Gautam Bhatia, *The Transformative Constitution: A Radical Biography in Nine Acts* (HarperCollins, 2019) 229.

⁴⁰ Anup Surendranath, "Judicial Balancing and Religious Freedom: The Case of Sabarimala," (2019) 52(6) *Journal of Indian Law and Society* 34.

temple's most sacred aspect is its veneration of the goddess's menstrual cycle, which is believed to imbue the temple and its grounds with special significance and power.

Association with Menstruation: The Kamakhya Temple celebrates an annual festival called Ambubachi Mela, which marks the believed menstruation period of Goddess Kamakhya. During this time, the temple is closed to devotees for three days, symbolising the seclusion traditionally observed by menstruating women in certain cultural practices. On the fourth day, the temple reopens with grand celebrations, and it is believed that the goddess, now purified, grants blessings to all her devotees. This period of menstruation is not viewed as a form of impurity but rather as a sacred and powerful renewal of life, tying the goddess's divine powers to the natural cycles of fertility and regeneration.

During the festival, devotees receive a piece of red cloth known as rakta bastra (sacred cloth), symbolising the goddess's menstruation and signifying blessings, particularly in matters of fertility and marital bliss. This celebration stands out as one of the few in Hinduism that acknowledges menstruation as a potent and holy phenomenon rather than a condition of impurity.⁴¹

Symbolism and Cultural Significance: By honouring menstruation as a sacred expression of the divine feminine, the Kamakhya Temple boldly confronts and redefines the conventional taboos surrounding menstruation in Indian culture. Unlike the negative connotations often associated with menstruation in many cultural contexts, the temple's practices highlight the belief that menstruation is an integral and powerful aspect of the feminine divine. This perspective contributes to discussions around menstrual taboos, equality, and the need to revisit traditional views on menstruation in religious and social settings.⁴²

Kamakhya's practices provide an alternative view within Hinduism, one that reveres the menstrual cycle as an essential part of divine femininity, symbolising life and fertility. In a culture where menstrual restrictions have often marginalised women, the Kamakhya Temple offers a narrative that acknowledges and celebrates menstruation as sacred.

⁴¹ R. Parthasarathy, *Kamakhya: A Study in Hindu Tantra* (Oxford University Press, 1988) 54.

⁴² Nanditha Krishna, *The Book of Demons* (Penguin Books India, 2017) 203-205.

THE HINDU TEMPLE AND PILGRIMS ASSOCIATED WITH MENSTRUATION

Chengannur Mahadeva Temple, Kerala: The Chengannur Mahadeva Temple in Kerala state is also known for its connection with the goddess's menstruation. This temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, observes a unique phenomenon where the goddess's idol is believed to menstruate.

Story and Rituals: According to legend, after marrying Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati visited this temple, and devotees noticed what appeared to be menstrual blood on her idol. When such signs are seen on the deity's garments, the temple priests interpret it as menstruation and close the temple for three days, similar to the observances during the Kamakhya Ambubachi Mela. On the fourth day, the goddess is given a ritual bath, and the temple reopens, symbolising her purification.⁴³

Cultural Significance: This ritual underlines a cultural acknowledgement of menstruation as a divine aspect of womanhood. Locals consider the goddess's menstruation a blessing, reflecting the temple's distinct reverence for menstruation within its worship practices.

Devi Kottiyoor Temple, Kerala: The Devi Kottiyoor Temple in Kannur, Kerala, hosts the annual Kottiyoor Utsavam, a festival deeply connected to the ideas of fertility, cleansing, and renewal—symbolic of menstruation's natural cycle. The festival involves rituals performed by men representing the deity, as the temple restricts female participation in these specific rites to symbolise seclusion during menstruation.

Legend and Rituals: The Kottiyoor Utsavam marks the sacred site where Sati ended her life after her father disrespected Lord Shiva. To honour her act, the rituals celebrate Sati's divine feminine energy, highlighting creation, life's natural cycles, and the strength of womanhood. During the festival, priests carry out rituals to honour Sati's rebirth, symbolising renewal much like the menstrual cycle itself.

Implications: By embracing these themes, the Kottiyoor Temple reflects the cycle of life and fertility linked with the feminine, which implicitly celebrates menstruation as an important aspect of divine creation.⁴⁴

⁴³ K. M. George, *Kerala Temples and Legends* (University of Kerala Press, 1997) 88-90.

⁴⁴ Devaki Vijayakumar, *The Sacred Feminine: Hindu Temples and Deity Worship* (Penguin Random House India, 2015) 74-77.

Bhagavathi Temple, Kanyakumari: The Bhagavathi Amman Temple in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, is another Hindu temple linked with menstruation through its deity, Goddess Kanya Kumari, a form of Goddess Parvati. The goddess is worshipped as a virgin who experiences monthly cycles, symbolising both purity and untouched divinity.

Legend: The temple's legend centres on KanyaKumari, the forever-young goddess who was meant to marry Lord Shiva. However, the marriage never took place, and Kanya Kumari continued to remain a virgin. Her association with menstruation is implied in the belief that the goddess remains in a state of perpetual purity, occasionally observed through temple rituals that signify virginity and menstrual seclusion.

Cultural Impact: The temple's practices emphasise the reverence for purity and femininity. Though not as explicit in celebrating menstruation, it symbolically venerates womanhood and the cycles of female life stages, reinforcing the spiritual dimension of menstruation within a ritual context.⁴⁵

Mata Temple, Chhattisgarh: In Chhattisgarh state, the Mata Temple organised Ambubachi Mela, a festival in Raipur like the one at Assam's Mata Kamakhya Temple, celebrating the goddess's menstruation. The temple observes a three-day period where devotees believe that the goddess undergoes menstruation, a time considered both powerful and sacred.

Festivities and Significance: During the festival, the temple is closed to devotees, and red cloth is offered as a symbol of the goddess's menstruation, similar to Kamakhya. After the festival, devotees receive blessings in the form of red cloth pieces symbolising fertility, prosperity, and marital harmony. This observance underlines the notion of menstruation as both a divine and powerful aspect of femininity.⁴⁶

Relevance: The Mata Temple's practices celebrate menstruation within a religious context, positioning it as a period of divine power and sacredness.

THE MODERN THEORY OF MENSTRUATION

Modern understanding of menstruation draws from biology, hormones, immune responses, and evolution, viewing it as a complex and adaptive function of the body.. Central to this

⁴⁵ R. Champakalakshmi, *Religious Traditions in South India: Forms and Developments* (Oxford University Press, 2012) 123-126.

⁴⁶ Aniruddha Ray, *Worship and Rituals in Central India* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 147-150.

understanding is the hormonal regulation of the menstrual cycle, primarily managed by the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis. This system operates as a feedback loop where the hypothalamus releases gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH), stimulating the pituitary gland to produce follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH). Both of these hormones help release an egg and prepare the uterus lining. When the egg remains unfertilized, hormone levels decrease, leading to the breakdown of the uterine lining and the onset of menstruation.⁴⁷

Additionally, the energy economy hypothesis provides an evolutionary explanation for menstruation, suggesting that shedding the uterine lining monthly is an energy-conserving adaptation. Evolutionary biologists posit that menstruation may have evolved as a way for species with energy-intensive reproductive demands to efficiently regulate energy use, allowing the body to conserve resources instead of maintaining a metabolically costly uterine lining indefinitely.⁴⁸ Immunologists also propose that menstruation has an essential immunological function. Studies indicate that shedding and regenerating the endometrial lining may help protect against infections that could be introduced via sperm, making menstruation a potential evolutionary strategy to guard reproductive health. This immune response, with an increase in immune cells during the menstrual cycle, helps the uterus prepare for potential pathogens.⁴⁹

Moreover, modern theories consider the psychosocial implications of menstruation, recognising its impact on mental health, social participation, and quality of life. Menstrual stigma and lack of access to sanitary products negatively affect women's physical and psychological well-being. The contemporary approach emphasises educating the public about menstruation to normalise it as a natural biological process, highlighting menstruation's relevance to broader gender equality and public health agendas.⁵⁰ Environmental and lifestyle factors also play a significant role in menstrual health, with exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) from industrial products increasingly linked to menstrual irregularities.

⁴⁷ R. Browne, "The Endocrine Regulation of the Menstrual Cycle," *Journal of Human Biology* 58 (2022): 45-48.

⁴⁸ M. Wilcox and S. Martin, "The Energy Economy Hypothesis and Menstrual Evolution," *Evolutionary Biology Review* 19 (2021): 102.

⁴⁹ J. Sanders, "The Immunological Function of Menstruation," *Immunology and Health Journal* 30 (2020): 58.

⁵⁰ L. Jones, "Psychosocial Effects of Menstrual Stigma," *Gender Studies Quarterly* 17 (2019): 80-81.

These chemicals, found in plastics and other manufactured goods, can disrupt hormonal balance, underscoring the importance of safe environmental conditions for menstrual health.⁵¹

STEPS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA RELATED TO MENSTRUATION

Menstrual Leave Policy in India: India has seen both governmental and corporate initiatives addressing menstrual leave, with the state of Bihar pioneering this policy among government employees.

Bihar Government Policy Case: The Bihar Government took an initiative in the introduction of menstrual leave for its women employees in 1992, granting them two days of menstrual leave each month. This policy was implemented to address menstrual discomfort and ensure that women do not have to endure painful or uncomfortable workdays. The policy was widely acknowledged as progressive, as menstrual health had long been a neglected topic in government employment regulations. However, Bihar remains an exception, as other Indian states have not widely adopted menstrual leave for government employees.⁵²

Zomato's Menstrual Leave Policy: In 2020, Zomato, a well-known food delivery company in India, provided a menstrual leave scheme allowing female employees up to 10 days of menstrual leave per year. Zomato's CEO Deepinder Goyal emphasised that this initiative was part of creating a more inclusive workplace and encouraged open discussion on menstruation. The decision brought attention to women's health issues within the corporate sector and challenged cultural taboos surrounding menstruation. Although praised, the policy also sparked debate on potential disadvantages, such as reinforcing gender biases and impacting women's career growth. Nonetheless, Zomato's policy became a model for other companies interested in adopting similar practices.⁵³

Kerala and Maharashtra Government Initiatives: Both Kerala and Maharashtra have initiated discussions on menstrual leave, especially within educational contexts. In Maharashtra, the state government proposed menstrual leave for female students in government schools, inspired by the high absenteeism rates among girls during their periods. Limited access

⁵¹ A. Sharma and T. Bhatt, "Environmental Pollutants and Menstrual Health," *International Journal of Health Sciences* 15 (2023): 90-91.

⁵² A. Jha, "Bihar's Menstrual Leave Policy for Women Employees," *Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 45 (2003): 87.

⁵³ S. Sharma, "Zomato Introduces Menstrual Leave Policy," *Journal of Contemporary Workplace Studies* 22 (2020): 34-36.

to menstrual hygiene products in rural areas further complicates attendance, making menstrual leave a potentially impactful solution. While Kerala has implemented some policies for menstrual hygiene management, it has also explored providing menstrual leave for young students to improve attendance and ensure comfort. These efforts highlight the potential for menstrual leave to support educational equality and reduce school dropout rates among girls.⁵⁴

International Cases: Some countries, primarily in East and Southeast Asia, have a long history of offering menstrual leave, though the policies and their applications vary significantly.

In Japan, the country introduced menstrual leave as part of the Labour Standards Act of 1947. Under this law, women can request leave if they experience discomfort or are unable to work due to menstruation. However, employers are not required to provide paid menstrual leave, making the policy's impact heavily dependent on each company's stance. Large corporations with progressive workplace policies are more likely to offer paid menstrual leave, while others may only provide unpaid leave. Although the law has faced criticism for perpetuating gender-based stereotypes, it was a pioneering move to formally recognise menstruation as a legitimate health consideration in the workplace.⁵⁵

In South Korea, the Labour Standards Act of South Korea allow women to take one day of menstrual leave per month, though, similar to Japan, leave is unpaid. While menstrual leave is legally available, cultural factors influence its acceptance and usage. In more traditional companies, women may feel reluctant to take leave due to concerns about how it will be perceived by employers and colleagues. Yet, the policy itself represents an acknowledgement of women's unique health needs, and in workplaces where menstrual leave is more accepted, it has been seen as beneficial for employee well-being.⁵⁶

In Indonesia, in the Labour Law of 2003, there is a provision allowing women to take two days of menstrual leave per month. Although this leave is included in the country's labour regulations, its implementation varies widely. In some cases, companies may not inform employees of this right, or women may choose not to use it due to stigma. Nonetheless, the policy serves as an important legal acknowledgement of menstruation and its potential impact

⁵⁴ M. Kumar, "Menstrual Leave Policies in Maharashtra Schools," *Educational Review* 50 (2021): 99-101.

⁵⁵ T. Suzuki, "Menstrual Leave in Japan: A Historical Perspective," *Asian Labour Review* 12 (2019): 44-47.

⁵⁶ J. Park, "South Korea's Approach to Menstrual Leave," *East Asian Labour Journal* 15 (2021): 23-25.

on working women, particularly in labour-intensive industries where physical demands can exacerbate menstrual discomfort.⁵⁷

Legal and Cultural Implications: The introduction of menstrual leave policies represents a shift toward gender-sensitive labour practices, though they remain controversial. Supporters argue that menstrual leave supports women's health, enhances productivity, and reduces absenteeism. In a society where menstrual stigma persists, such policies also open dialogue on menstruation, gradually normalising it as a natural aspect of health.

THE MAJOR STEPS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA TO PROTECT THE FEMALES FROM MENSTRUATION

Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (MHS): The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the government of India set up the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (MHS) in 2011 with the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). This scheme aims to promote menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls (ages 10–19) in rural areas by providing subsidised sanitary napkins and educating them about menstrual health.

Implementation: Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) distribute sanitary napkins at a subsidised price to girls in rural communities, ensuring that girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have access to affordable menstrual products.

Education and Awareness: ASHAs and other healthcare workers conduct educational sessions to address common menstrual myths, promote hygiene, and encourage safe disposal practices.⁵⁸

Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK): The Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (National Adolescent Health Programme) was launched in 2014 with a focus on the holistic health of adolescents, including menstrual health. RKSK promotes menstrual hygiene management as part of adolescent reproductive health education.

⁵⁷ R. Anwar, "Menstrual Leave in Indonesia: Policy and Practice," *International Labour Studies Quarterly* 35 (2020): 78-80.

⁵⁸ S. Chandra, "Menstrual Hygiene Scheme Under National Health Mission," *Indian Journal of Health Policy* 29 (2016): 33.

Awareness and Counselling: The program involves peer educators, known as "Sathiyas," who spread awareness on menstrual hygiene and provide peer support on menstruation-related issues.

Health Services: RKSK includes Adolescent-Friendly Health Clinics (AFHCs), where adolescent girls can access menstrual health products, receive counselling, and get medical assistance for menstruation-related health issues, including infections.⁵⁹

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM): While primarily a sanitation initiative, the Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission) has indirectly supported menstrual hygiene by promoting the construction of sanitary facilities, especially in rural areas and schools, where access to clean washrooms significantly impacts menstrual health.

School Infrastructure: SBM has focused on constructing separate toilets for girls in schools, which improves privacy and sanitation during menstruation.

Waste Disposal: Under SBM, there is an increased focus on safe disposal of sanitary napkins through incinerators and other waste management facilities.⁶⁰

Guidelines on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM): The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation released Guidelines in 2015 on Menstrual Hygiene Management. These guidelines provide a framework for menstrual hygiene education and infrastructure in schools and public spaces.

Education in Schools: The guidelines encourage menstrual hygiene management to be integrated into the school curriculum, aiming to educate girls on safe practices, reduce absenteeism during menstruation, and combat social stigma.

Facilities for Disposal: The guidelines recommend setting up disposal mechanisms, such as incinerators, in schools and public toilets, to prevent unhygienic practices that can lead to infections.⁶¹

⁵⁹ N. Singh, "Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram and Adolescent Health in India," *Adolescent Health and Development* 14 (2017): 44-45.

⁶⁰ Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, *Swachh Bharat Mission Guidelines*, (Government of India, 2018): 67.

⁶¹ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *Guidelines on Menstrual Hygiene Management*, (Government of India, 2015): 15-16.

Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP): The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) was launched to provide affordable healthcare products, including sanitary napkins, through Janaushadhi Kendras (government-run stores). The Suvidha sanitary napkins, introduced under this scheme, are available at affordable prices, making them accessible to low-income women across the country.

Low-Cost Sanitary Napkins: This scheme provides low-cost sanitary pads at ₹1 per pad, by lowering the cost barrier for women who cannot afford commercial sanitary products. It has become very fruitful for women.

Widespread Accessibility: With thousands of Janaushadhi Kendras across India, PMBJP ensures that women in rural and economically marginalised areas have access to affordable menstrual products.⁶²

Ujjawala Sanitary Napkin Initiative: The Ujjawala Sanitary Napkin Initiative was launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to produce and distribute affordable sanitary napkins.

Community Production: The initiative involves setting up production units for sanitary napkins in rural areas, managed by women's self-help groups, providing both employment and low-cost menstrual products to rural communities.

Awareness Campaigns: Through this initiative, the government conducts awareness campaigns to encourage proper menstrual hygiene and educate communities on the health risks associated with unhygienic menstrual practices.⁶³

Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools: The Government of India, through various ministries, has implemented menstrual hygiene management programs in schools, with efforts to distribute free or subsidised sanitary napkins and ensure proper menstrual education. This includes-

⁶² Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana, Affordable Sanitary Napkins Initiative, (PMBJP, 2021): 22-23.

⁶³ Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ujjawala Sanitary Napkin Initiative Report, (Government of India, 2019): 19-20.

Free Pad Distribution in Schools: In several states like Maharashtra, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu, state governments have initiated programs to distribute free or subsidised sanitary napkins in schools.

Awareness Programs: School-based awareness programs on menstrual health are conducted to help young girls understand menstruation, practise good hygiene, and debunk myths and taboos surrounding menstruation.⁶⁴

Campaigns and Awareness Initiatives: Various government-backed campaigns, such as Menstrual Hygiene Day celebrations and public awareness campaigns, focus on destigmatising menstruation and educating the public on menstrual health.

Menstrual Hygiene Day: Observed on May 28, this day is marked by events and campaigns that promote menstrual health awareness, encourage public discourse on menstruation, and involve educational sessions for both girls and boys to normalise menstruation.

Collaborations with NGOs and Corporations: The government collaborates with non-profit organisations and corporate partners to expand awareness, improve menstrual hygiene management, and provide better access to menstrual products for marginalised women.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

The discourse on menstruation is complex, traversing historical, cultural, religious, and legal dimensions that reflect diverse attitudes and beliefs about female biology and social identity. Across Hindu, Islamic, and Western traditions, menstruation has often been framed through lenses of purity, morality, and social roles, affecting both the lived experiences of women and societal attitudes toward them. While religious traditions historically provided both reverence and restrictions around menstruation, they also helped shape societal perceptions that have persisted in various forms. The Indian judiciary's evolving approach to menstrual health and rights demonstrates an increasing acknowledgement of menstruation as a fundamental aspect of women's bodily autonomy and equality. Landmark cases, particularly those addressing access to temples and menstrual hygiene, indicate a shift toward greater inclusivity and legal recognition of menstrual health as a core component of women's rights. Alongside judicial

⁶⁴ M. Rao, "Menstrual Health in Indian Schools," *Education and Health* 28 (2020): 55-57.

⁶⁵ A. Bhalla, "Promoting Menstrual Hygiene through Government and NGO Partnerships," *Journal of Social Health* 16 (2021): 23.

progress, government initiatives such as the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme and various health programs aim to alleviate economic and social barriers, promoting greater menstrual equity across the country.

Feminist thought enriches this dialogue by challenging deeply rooted taboos and advocating for comprehensive menstrual health policies that prioritise accessibility, education, and bodily autonomy. Feminist scholarship and activism underscore that addressing menstruation is essential to achieving gender equality, as menstrual inequity often correlates with broader socioeconomic challenges that disproportionately affect marginalised communities. In sum, this research highlights that menstruation is not merely a biological phenomenon but a significant socio-cultural issue with deep implications for health, rights, and gender equality. Moving forward, an integrative approach combining legal frameworks, inclusive policies, and awareness campaigns is essential to ensure that menstrual health is respected as a human right. Only through such multi-faceted efforts can society achieve a holistic understanding of menstruation, enabling women and all menstruators to navigate their lives without stigma, inequality, or barriers.