ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor (RJIF): 8.4
IJAR 2025; 11(3): 351-357
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 25-02-2025
Accepted: 28-03-2025

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A study on Indian women and their perspective on menstruation

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DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2025.v11.i3e.12443

Abstract
It is important to understand that menstruation is largely not talked about across many cultures. Countries like England, United States, China, Kenya, France, Nepal, Puerto Rico, Afghanistan, Indonesia and several others have their own struggle with menstrual hygiene and awareness. In majority of articles and news commentaries a common observation which comes into picture is that there is severe lack of menstrual hygiene in India. However, a real time data about the representation and societal interpretation of menstruation in India is lacking. In our study we aim to look at aspect of both, celebration and restriction with respect to menstruation. We have got tremendous response from girl respondents who have highlighted various celebrations in family and community that is being done when menstrual cycle begins. Unfortunately, male members are taught not to utter a word related to menstruation, which makes menstruation an exclusionary phenomenon. This was also done taking into consideration the number of restrictions which females are engulfed with due to a taboo attached to periods. However, this study is a step forward to instill positivity attached with menstruation which might help in providing a new perspective to society. In Indian society menstruation is known by different names. The names carry positive and negative connotations with it which will be studied further in our analysis. Menstruation is also celebrated in several parts of India and is known with different names. We need to understand the similarities and differences in these celebrations. This article talks about several models of different states where menstruation is a blessing for girl, which could further inspire others to think the same way. This study also focused on finding menstruation name and meaning in different parts of India. It will also analyze that how Indian menstruation concept is different from western world.

Keywords: Indian women, western world, perspective on menstruation, menstruation

Introduction
In the present study, we have used primary data collected from information-gathering amongst the various groups in India. Our sources were mostly well-educated females. The method used to collect the data was through questionnaires. Open and close-ended questions were used so to have a better understanding about taboos, problems and celebrations surrounding menstruation in India from diverse states. This work fills that void by defining menstruation from a language and sociocultural viewpoint in India (Bramwell R, 2001) [1]. To prompt the euphemisms, we used the "free-recall-task method," in which female informers were asked to recall as many euphemisms as they could. We also asked for help from the girl volunteers of Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) for the pan India distribution of the questionnaires. Most of the respondents were students as well as from various occupations, including teachers, social workers, service sector and traders.
A word is a blameless collection of sounds until a group attaches hidden meanings and then commands that it can be used only in certain speech circumstances anymore. It is this figurative estimation that a particular society attributes to the phrases and terminologies that produce new taboos (Farb P, 2015, Trudgill 1995 and Wardhaugh 1992) [3-5].

Euphemism
Menstruation cannot be avoided in conversations because it occurs frequently in 50% of the lives of any given group. Therefore, strategies for indicating and talking about it were to be found. Irish, Poland, east European Jewish, German, Italian, French, American populations are already known for the use of euphemisms for menstruation.

Young Girls get to learn these euphemisms at menarche, generally from family or friends whereas, boys typically learn them in their school/college from friends. Women use these terms as a code for menstruation as verbal Taboo Avoidance Technique (TAT), as a straightforward reference about menstruation is considered embarrassing. Among Indian men, these indirect references tend to have derogatory connotations or sexual socialization. Since the past century, due to urbanization and modernization, these euphemisms have altered. Table 1 discusses the semantic and metaphorical relationships between euphemisms and the meanings they convey. There are two fundamental models for euphemisms for menstruation across India's vast and diverse population:

(1) Adverse (the woman's illness and loneliness). According to this approach, menstruation should be avoided because it is rude, repulsive, and polluted and (2) favorable (the girl's transformation into a woman, fertility, divinity, and the appearance of a guardian guest). The concept examines menstruation as a symbol of the adolescent girl's cultural acceptance, divine interpretation, and the beginning of fertility.

We will also analyze that how Indian menstruation concept is different from western world. Periods in most parts of hindi speaking belt in India is known as the Maasik dharm, mahavari but it is also known in different languages as Mangba, Muttu, Aarthavam, Thagi khongkap, Ruthuchakra, Sorir kharap, Rutusraba, Tha gi khongkap lakpa, Veetu vilakku, Esha sengdaba, Bada jhia, Kadagi, Aarjavam, tha gi lei lakpa, Ruthumathi, Porathaaval, Purathaayi, hakchang sengdaba, Oxubidha/Nuara, Madha vidai, Tuloni Biya, Mang lakpa, Mangba lakpa, Maathavidaai etc.

The names carry positive and negative connotations with it which will be studied further in our analysis.

Table 1: Some of the languages spoken in India and euphemism related to menstruation in them

Language	Euphemism	Meaning in English
	Down ho jaana	I am down/low
	Shuru ho gaya	'That' has started
	Periods/Mahina/Masik	The cyclic monthly event
	Door rahana hai	Have to stay away
	Haath nahin lagana	Do not get touched
	Aunty aa gai	Aunt is here
	Bimaari	Disease
	Bal dhona hai	Have to wash hair
Tamil	Tūram	Distance
	Thitu	Sharp
maityi	Mangba	Impure
Kannada	Muttu	Pearl
Kannada	Āce kaḍe āgidīni	I am beyond that
Manipuri	Esa sengdaba/hakchang sengdaba	Body has turned impure
Bengali	Sorir kharap	Body has turned bad
	Time ho gaya	It is time (of the month)
Assamese	Chuwa	Impure
Assamese	Asuvidha/Okhubidha	Problem
Assamese	Mahekiya	Flow
Telugu	Pedda manishi	Big Man
Malyalam	māsakkuḷi	Monthly bath
Gujrati	Hātha cōkhkhō nathī	Hands are not clean

Studying this topic in a culturally diverse country like India is a lengthy and complex process. Every language has its own historical journey which increases the need to study the given subject. The correlation among the social stature of women and the development of euphemism in Indian population must be studied in detail.

Menstrual Concept: Indian Overview

However, the culture of hiding and brushing the topic under the carpet is gradually changing and it is being reflected in common advertisements and shows in India (Rostvik, 2018) [15] in article related to narratives surrounding menstruation, water and cleanliness have defined how advertising culture has changed over the time in representing the way menstrual blood is seen. In this study, specific attention is been given to a Bodyform pad company who have led the way in dispelling the taboos related to blood as in traditional cultural depictions, blood and water flow have been seen as impure and unhygienic. The way in which this article has shown the initiative by Bodyform to represent blood in its true sense as real red in advertisements along with images of blood flowing down the thighs clearly. This is a move to see blood beyond the dirtiness and have molded discourse around menstruation beyond the concept of shame and unhygienic practice. Such type of initiatives gives a boost to "Blood Normal" campaign that have been an essential component of the change brought by Bodyform Ads.

Defines different ways in which periods have been portrayed through onscreen episodes and stories. It is mentioned that advertisement on TV about periods and related items like pads and tampons till 1972 was banned. Gradually people started talking about periods which later was depicted onscreen as well. In this article various films and scenes have been discussed taking us from a period of taboo onscreen to depicting periods proudly and boldly. This shift has been an important aspect of modern change being brought by the society over the years.

Her article reiterated the importance of women worship in India during menstruation. Evidence is given from the celebrations and popularity surrounding goddess Kamakhya in Kamakhya temple situated at Guwahati, Assam. In this temple worshippers from all over the country and across globe come to worship the menstruating goddess which is not considered impure and reflects the respect being given to women in form of goddess been considered as a source of divine energy, strength and prosperity. Vagina which in modern advertisement is not even pronounced, devotees worship vagina or yoni part of Maa Kamakhya also known as Sati.

Discussing about the importance of women and divinity attached to female in India take reference of temple in Kerala named Chengannur Mahadeva Kshetram (temple) which is in Alappuzha district of Kerala. This temple is being referred to as one of the oldest temples in Kerala build around 300 AD based on believe that human trait is found in the divine Shiva and Parvati. One important point of discussion is celebration of goddess Parvati menstruation phase where blood stain is being considered a cause of prosperity. Once menstruation phase is completed Parvati is reunited with the Shiva leading to celebratory festival named as "Thriputharattu". This gives interested scholars an insight into celebrations surrounding menstruations in Indian temple which has been happening for a very long time.

Writes about the need to uproot practice of dismissing Indian cultural practices with regards to menstruation as superstitious and taboo. She in her article writes about the

reasons behind certain practices which are considered as taboo but the reasons behind are totally different and based on science itself. One such explanation is about the cultural practices being followed in India during menstruation where this period is defined according to Ayurveda as an enhancement of Vata ana Vayu dosh along with downward flow of energy, which if interfered leads to conflict of energies present in environment and within the women body during menstruation. Also, Answers and explanations to question of why a woman is not termed as pure, not allowed to enter the temple or touch food etc. with a scientific logic.

With this part it is very clear that since a long time and even in most developed countries now, the use of pads and tampons or anything else related to periods were used with shame or were considered as something that needs not to be discussed in open which shows that periods have been under the dark side which were not considered as something important to be talked about, leave the imaginations for the awareness related to periods or its related activities in society. We can imagine the plight of girls who could not get an access to several varieties of products which makes life easy during periods. This is the scenario we are talking about during 1960's when most of the countries gave voting right to female but that definitely do not guarantee a natural life to women and their biological rights as females. As seen in the above review of literature several companies have been trying to represent menstruation and advertise their products but still the representation of menstrual blood color on pads during TV advertisement's even today is the same, which shows the prevalence of gaps in the mind of people as well as hesitation to accept a natural phenomenon as menstruation. We as a world which is better interconnected, new technologies are coming up, new innovations and research are being brought up, still are not able to move out of this zone.

Eye opener fact that come to us is a data by New York times which have reported that in US near about 42% women face period shaming and have been looked upon as unnatural by male friends for being on periods. Pads and tampons should largely be talked about for health and hygiene of women everywhere in the world. Statements like tampons are not for virgin's (Hatzipanagos, 2017) [7] is a serious concern which relate women virginity to a tampon. However, by the time perception are changing, females are speaking up for making period blood a normal phenomenon.

In Indian temples we can see, female goddesses are being worshiped for their ability to menstruate and being given extra care during bleeding days so as to give them rest during such days. Indian culture holds special place for Vedas, which do not discriminate women on the basis of natural biological period cycle that woman goes through. Vedas promote the yagna and it is said that every man and woman should perform yagnas daily, wherein we do not find any instance of women being not allowed to do daily rituals and yagnas just because she is on her periods (Rajesh, 2015) [8]. Also, the sacred nature of period blood finds its discussion in tantric tradition of India under the name Yoni Pujan in which female vagina and its blood is worshipped from the entire universe has emerged. In Rig Veda, blood is considered as pure and an important element and essence of Earth's body (Chawla, 1994) [10].

Book Kaulajnaanirnaya of Matsyendrapnath states about the sacred nature of not only female blood but also of semen wherein it is said that in Kaula Agama, "there are five pure and sacred substance such as ash, menstrual blood, semen, wife's nectar and ghee mixed", also with reference to Matrihadrika Tantra, in words of Shankara, it is being said that female menstrual blood Svayambhu blood which makes it possible to get any desire fulfilled. Singhal (2020) have also described about the notion regarding vagina which was openly talked about in old Indian text where Vagina is considered as Mahamaya and penis as Sadashiva, worshiping which gives liberation to all. Such is the broad mindedness of people with regard to vagina and menstrual blood in old Indian cultural practices and books which not only leads the way but set a platform for people of the world to see menstrual blood, female, genital organs as pure, divine and not as something to be feel ashamed about.

Menstrual celebrations in India

Due to several changes in the societal makeup regarding the menstruation, modern society can be seen as celebrating films, series that come up on the issues that spread awareness regarding periods. Despite such modern and contemporary details that we are talking about, one aspect in society related to celebration of women on their menstrual cycle is a matter of joy and pride for us as Indians. Ritual of celebrating women as goddess pre and post menstruation is something that needs our consideration. Menstrual taboo is culturally oriented and is interpreted according to the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, norms, and values of a particular culture. However, it is also celebrated in several parts of India and is known with different names. We need to understand the similarities and differences in these celebrations to understand more about the practices and emotions attached to period rituals. Some of the celebrations in India are given in the tabular form in table 2 and figure 2. Surprisingly not much academic work is done on this aspect. Therefore, detailed documentation and research is needed to understand the historical, phycological and sociocultural aspect of these celebrations.

Some of the similarities among these celebrations are as follows

1. They are arranged for the celebration of the first menstruation of the teenage girl, so as to declare and appreciate her puberty.
2. Adolescent girls are treated/ compared/ worshipped as goddess/ mother earth/ bearer of new generation.
3. Girls are showered with gifts and are treated as young female rather than a teenager.
4. Family and friends are invited and thus are informed about the maturity of the said girl.
5. The celebrations are not restricted to female members only.
6. The celebrations are generally a mini version of marriage.

The celebrations are not just restricted to families only. While the world has entered into the age of artificial intelligence and internet of things, we still talk and discuss about the ways to do away with the stigma, taboo and myth surrounding female and menstruation. It is heart wrenching when in 21st century we still see people body shaming females and feel shy about discussing about menstruation in families and society at large. In India several temples have such depiction of female's goddess who are on her period and is considered pure and divine. People not only consider

her blood as pure but also flock from different parts of India and world to seek blessings from Maa Sati, form of Parvati in Kamakhya temple situated at Assam. In Kamakhya temple, maa Sati yoni (Vagina) is worshipped and also a festival celebrating menstruation takes place termed as Ambubachi Mela. Hence to consider female as impure during menstrual cycle is a form of deteriorated understanding over the time due to lack of understanding over the generation. There are several celebrations related to periods in India, which if studied with vigor and opted by people all over the country and remove the barriers to women emancipation and empowerment in true sense. Anything that is celebrated can never be impure as nothing impure is ever celebrated. Then how can in a country which has a long tradition of celebrating females as goddess or mother earth having potential to create universe be termed impure and still be celebrated? No female is though ever impure, awareness can lead to a change in mind set and conception of society in this regard.

This clearly indicates towards openness and extrovert nature of the Indian population. Interestingly, when we look at the map of India in relation to menstrual celebrations, we see a strong presence of menstrual festivals in south and east regions of India. This observation seems to correlate with the historical heavy presence of Islamic and colonial invasions in the states where the celebrations are missing, however this is just a speculation. The topic needs to be studied in detail and it may lead to discovery of an entirely new, fresh and positive perspective on the menstruation in India to the world. Presence of taboos as well as celebrations in the same country makes this topic even more interesting to study

State	Celebration name	Process of Celebration/Significance
Odisha	Raja parba	Raja means rajas that is when women menstruates, she is termed Rajaswala who have now occupied mother earth power of fertility or giving birth to human beings. She is celebrated as a symbol of Bhumi, she wear Saree, Ornamnets and is not allowed to do any physical work as a token of gratitude towards her.
Assam	Tuloni Biya	Small marriage like festivities are organised and people on seventh day are invited in celebration collectively. For first four days consumption of fruits are preffered by menstruating women. Girl is being decorated with flowers, beautiful clothes. Turmeric bath is of utmost importance as Haldi being sacred to Indian culture is being applied on girl who is worshipped on the day of festivity by invited members in Assam, it is a celebration where sexual identity is proudly disclosed, which is far from narrow minded taboos related to menstruation in 21st century.
Tamil Nadu	Samathiya Sadangu, Manjal Neerattu Vizha Ize	Women is considered goddess who is celebrated for her power to reproduce in a similar way human beings are grateful to the earth capacity. women is given turmeric bath and
		Family members sing song related to menstruating women.
Andhra Pradesh	Ritu Kala Sanskar	
Telangana	Pushpavati	
Kerala	Cheriya Kalyanam	
Himachal Pradesh	Ritu Shudhi	
Gujarat	Ritushudhi	

Results

It is important to understand that menstruation is largely not talked about across many cultures. Countries like England, United States, China, Kenya, France, Nepal, Puerto Rico, Afghanistan, Indonesia and several others have their own struggle with menstrual hygiene and awareness. In our study 'MY PERIODS' we aim to look at aspect of both, celebration and restriction with respect to periods. We have got tremendous response from girl respondents who have highlighted various celebrations in family and community that is being done when menstrual cycle begins. Unfortunately, male members are taught to not utter a word related to menstruation, which makes menstruation an exclusionary phenomenon. This was also done taking into consideration the number of restrictions which females are engulfed with due to a taboo attached to periods. However, this study is a step forward to instill positivity attached with menstruation which might help in providing a new perspective to society. This article talks about several models of different states where menstruation is a blessing for girl, which could further inspire others to think the same way. Majority of the participants are of 20-30 age group, who make the 60% of the population followed by 12-20 age group (19.1%) and 30-40 age group (14.5%), (Figure 1) spanning to all the states of our country.

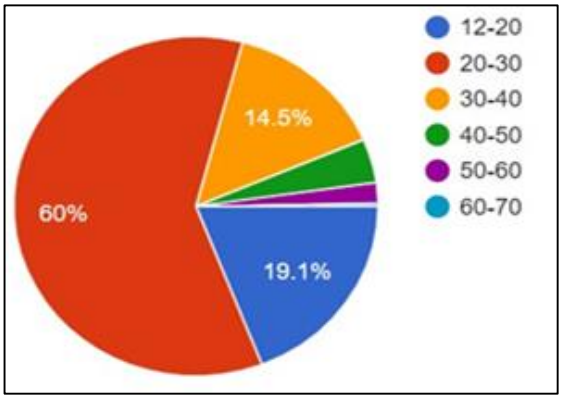

Fig 1: The age groups who participated in the survey.

Menstruation is also celebrated in several parts of India and is known with different names. We need to understand the similarities and differences in these celebrations. We have working to get more responses yet especially the tribal areas but the results collected so far are shown in the Figure 2.

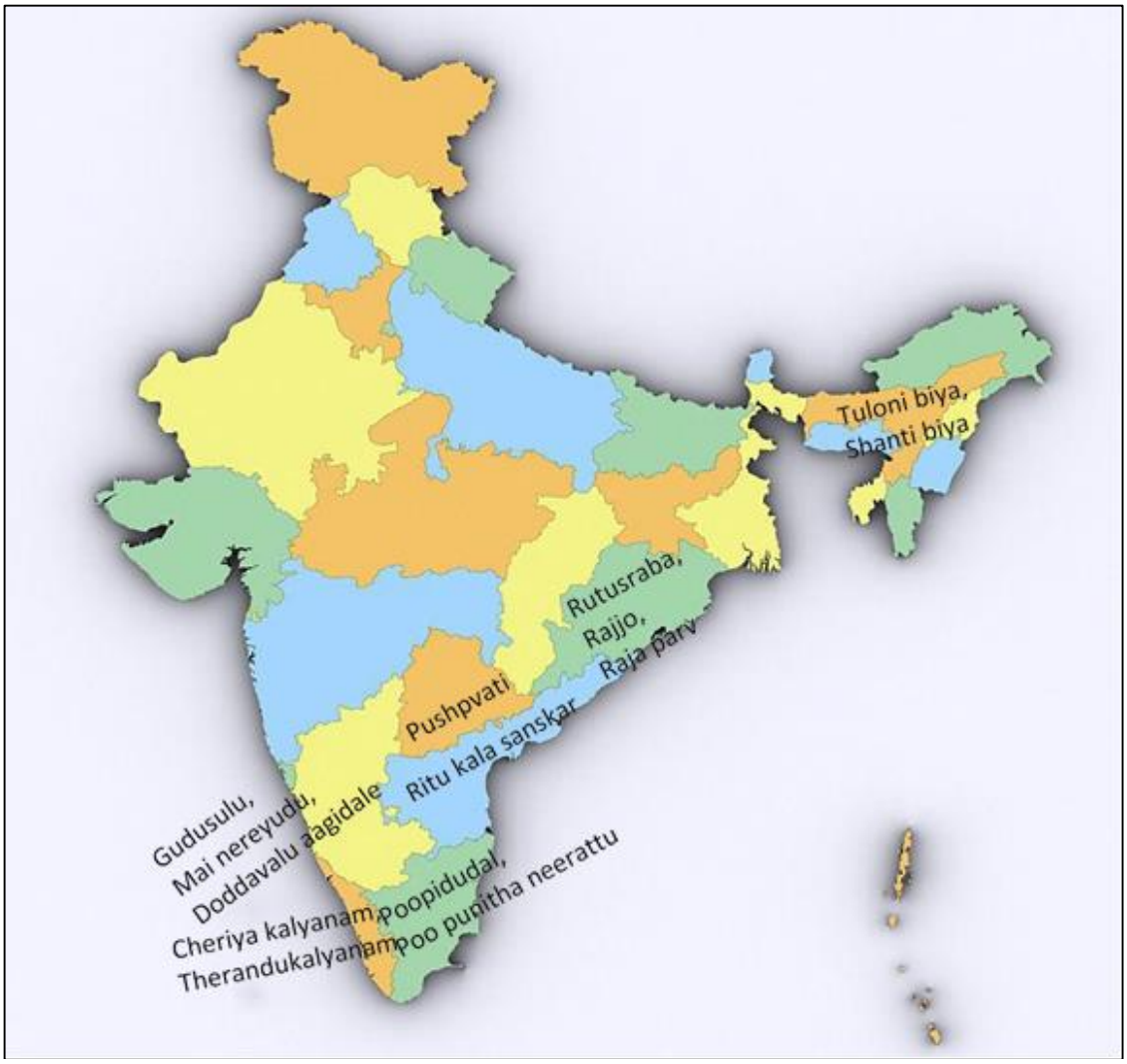

Fig 2: Mapping of Indian states according to the menstrual celebrations collected so far in our survey

One of the interesting results of the survey is the awareness regarding these celebrations. A whopping 45.7 % of the women approved of the information regarding these celebrations as shown in Figure 3. However, majority of respondents (68.7%) are from states where menstrual celebrations are not common (Figure 4).

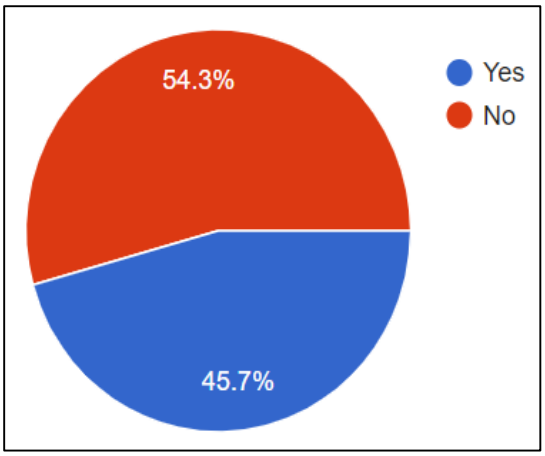

Fig 3: The percentage of women aware of menstrual celebrations in India

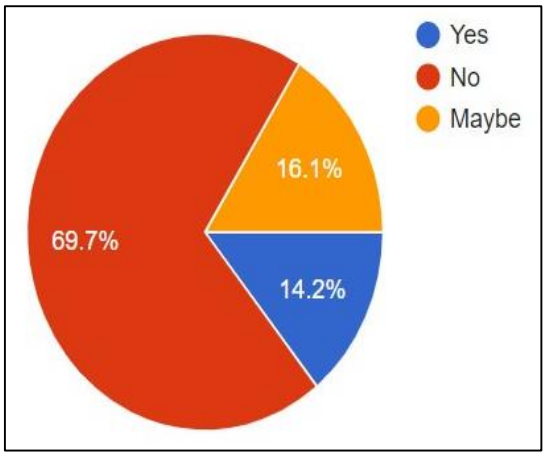

Fig 4: The percentage of women aware of menstrual celebrations in their own respective states.

In majority of articles and news commentaries a common observation which comes into picture is that there is severe lack of menstrual hygiene in India. However, a real time data is lacking in this regard. We did a study on this aspect too by asking the age from which the respondents started to use sanitary pads. Surprisingly, 40% of the respondents did not start to use sanitary pads from first day of their periods. They got sensitized at some stage of their lives. This indicates towards a positive side of sanitary hygiene sensitization in India. The results are shown in Figure 5. The results also reflect that the percentage of women using sanitary pads is increasing in our country

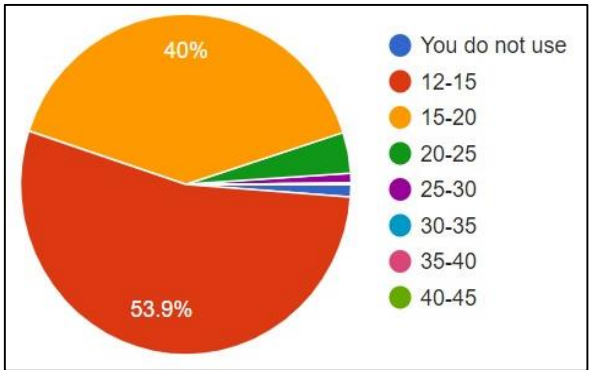

Fig 5: The age group of women when they started to use sanitary pads.

There are several types of restrictions imposed on the Indian women across India. During menstruation some women aren't supposed to enter the kitchen and temples, touch the drinkable water, sleep on bed, bathe, touch plants, wear flowers, have sex, sleep in the day-time, touch other males or females, and touch pickle. Some of them are scientific or have some scientific reason behind them but are distorted and twisted beyond imagination. We need to segregate the scientific and non-scientific parts of these restrictions/ suggestions imposed on women of India.

Discussion

Majority of countries in the world have one or another kind of taboos or euphemism associated with menstruation. However, it is interesting to witness such variety of menstrual celebrations in India. The celebrations are not exactly similar to each other but the whole idea of celebrating the attainment of maturity by girls in the family/ society indicates towards a cultural similarity among the different language speaking population of this huge country. There are several theories regarding the historical facts of the socio-political scenario of India. We need to look at these celebrations and incorporate their importance in understanding the advancement in Indian population.

The taboos associated with menstruation generally have one or another type of scientific backing (however the scientific part is distorted beyond recognition) which ultimately leads to rest and comfort for the menstruating female. Maybe we need to take this into consideration with the treatment provided to our working females. With working hours extending to 5-12 hours shift, her well-being during menstruation must be a concern for us as sensible country. There is The Menstruation Benefits Bill, 2017 which is passed by Lok Sabha in 2017. This bill will give benefits to women. There must be legal policy related to menstruation where women get paid holiday for menstruation days. Many writs are pending in different high courts related to seeking period leave for women Employees.

Sensitization can help women to deal with painful periods with ease, as male members would also realize the complications involved during menstruation. There should be open discussion about periods and a girl from childhood should be taught about periods which can help her to deal with periods and eventually with her health. At government level, respondents have suggested to make sanitary pads accessible and affordable which could reach even the poorest of women keeping in mind the rising cases of cervical cancer which is direct outcome of using dirty clothes and other such equipment during periods. Concerning the climate change and global warming, there should be a promotion for usage of eco-friendly pads which offers female and environment friendly approach which holds a broad scope for changing the present state of environment and female in society. Hence suggestions have given us a wide base to think, plan and execute changes to cherish and celebrate female for their courage, strength and divinity at individual as well as collective level.

During our study, we have been flooded with huge number of suggestions from respondents which acts as a feedback mechanism to the government and policy makers along with the society, as to how they have to foster an environment of inclusion for women during periods which requires awareness program to be conducted by government in order to mitigate the current state of discrimination with female attached with menstruation based on illogical ideas and conceptions of society. Majority of their ideas remain untouched and unknown to the scientific and logical importance of following certain regulatory and precautionary measures in order to maintain a good health condition of female.

One of the interesting observations is in Figure 5, where we saw a steady increase in the number of women using sanitary pads with decreasing age group, this observation indicates towards growing awareness towards women hygiene and health care in India. This is contrary to the popular belief that India is more about taboos rather than healthcare regarding menstruation. Families are taking care of the health needs of the women members leading to growing number of girls in schools/ colleges and as work force. However, as we were more accessible to educated women with the online questionnaire, we are certain about the urban population rather than the rural parts of India.

Future Perspective

We have not been able to reach the less/not educated women of India with our questionnaire, which automatically restricts our viewpoint and knowledge. This will be a major challenge for us as group to work and focus upon, as majority of India still resides in villages and is not exposed to internet as well as English as a language. The celebrations are very diverse and are present in almost all states of India. Proper documentation of these diverse yet similar practices are needed to be done. We will be focusing on this aspect for our future work. There are several eco-friendly methods used by the age-old communities of India for menstruation. These methods are needed to be documented and studied. The menstrual taboos need to be studied with a fresh, unbiased and new perspective for understanding and segregating the scientific and non-scientific parts. Euphemism related to menstruation is an yet another

interesting topic to be studied in detail, as a closer look at the topic makes us understand that it is closely related with the present status of the given community's openness and understanding of the subject. The more is the patriarchal pressure, higher is the shame involved in menstruation for women.

Acknowledgements
Many thanks to the student organization, ABVP (Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi parishad) for their prompt and timely help with the circulation of questionnaire and gathering information via telephonic conversations. Special mention of Ms. Heena Goyal, Ms. Varsha Jandial, Ms. Anamika Patel, Ms. Ksh. Sangeeta devi and Ms. Sunita mondekar is due, as they were pivotal during the discussion sessions of the project. Their cooperation and help all during the research made the work possible.

Conclusion
The study highlights the diverse perspectives on menstruation in India, encompassing both taboos and celebrations. While menstruation is often associated with restrictions and stigmas, it is also revered in certain cultural and religious contexts. Our research, based on primary data from various regions, underscores the linguistic, sociocultural, and psychological dimensions of menstruation, particularly through the use of euphemisms and menstrual rituals.

Despite the persistence of menstrual taboos, there is a noticeable shift in societal attitudes, as seen in increasing awareness, improved menstrual hygiene, and positive representations in media and advertising. Celebrations of menarche in different parts of India provide a contrasting narrative to the prevailing restrictions, indicating a complex but evolving perception of menstruation. By bridging traditional beliefs with modern awareness, we can foster a more inclusive and informed discourse. This study calls for further research to deepen our understanding of menstrual perceptions and to contribute to dismantling stigmas while preserving cultural significance.

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