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# Menstruation myths and facts - A Review Article

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## ABSTRACT

Menstruation is a phenomenon that only affects women. It has, however, always been surrounded by myths and taboos that keep women from participating in many facets of sociocultural life. The subject has always been taboo in India. Menstruation-related taboos, which are prevalent in many civilizations, have an impact on girls' and women's emotional well-being, attitude, way of life, and, most significantly, health. The difficulty of confronting the menstrual taboos and cultural stereotypes is made even more difficult by the lack of knowledge and awareness about puberty, menstruation, and reproductive health among females. So, in order to fight these problems, a strategic strategy must be taken. The purpose of the current study is to highlight menstruation-related stereotypes that are widespread in India, how they affect women's lives, and how important it is to address these concerns in primary care.

**Key words:** Menstruation, Ayurveda, Menstruation myths

## INTRODUCTION

India has a long-standing custom of forbidding menstruation women from entering the grounds of temples. Our society is still oblivious of the scientific rationale for some of these customs, such as the way that menstruation, a normal cycle with associated constraints, has taken on more religious overtones. The fact that menstruation is still taboo in India is the only factor keeping the science behind these ancient practices from gaining popularity. This article makes an effort to shed light on the fact that the ancient belief in menstruation has scientific foundations and is not only

a fiction. By explaining numerous facts about menstruation and its causes, the paper also discusses the importance of learning and adhering to religious norms. Furthermore, just by practicing some easy methods of Indian culture, how a woman can avoid various diseases and acquire enormous health benefits have also been included in the paper. The age old traditions of the society were practiced in order to maintain the good health of women both physically as well as mentally. Certain constraints imposed on women back then had various benefits as they are purely based on scientific aspects and not just a myth.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Menstrual cycle explained

A woman's menstrual cycle is a cyclical event that occurs rhythmically during her reproductive years. Puberty starts when a woman is 12 to 15 years old, and her menstrual cycle ends when she is 50 to 55 years old. Menopause is the term used to describe the end of menstruation and menarche, respectively. The menstrual cycle typically lasts 28 days. It could last anywhere from 20 to 40 days under physiological circumstances.

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### The menstrual cycle in Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, several viewpoints on the length, creation, and nature of *Raja* or *Artava* can be found. Usually the term *Raja* is used to denote the menstrual blood whereas *Artava* is used to refer ovum. The life span of woman is divided into three stages according to *Acharya Sushruta* - viz *Balavashta* (young age), *Madhyamaavastha* (middle age) and *Vridhdhavastha* (old age). *Balavashta* - It is the first stage, which lasts up to sixteen years. During this span of time, the *Dhatu*s are immature; body is unable to withstand troubles as *Bala* is not fully developed. *Madhyamaavastha* - This is considered as the adult period of a woman's life. *Vridhdhavastha* - This is span of time in woman's life extends from menopause till death *Rajaswala* includes three phases 1) *Rajasrava Kala* - The period of first 3-5 days of menstruation where there is shedding of endometrium. 2) *Ritu Kala* - The period after menstruation this can be correlated to proliferative phase and ovulation viz., 12-16 days. Establishment of *Navina Raja* can be observed 3) *Rajavyatheetha Kala* - The period after ovulation which can be considered as the secretory phase viz., 9-13 days. Presence of *Purana Raja* can be witnessed.

### Dosha predominancy at different stages of Rajaswala

*Rajasrava Kala* - Vata

*Ritu Kala* - Kapha

*Raja Vyatheetha* - Pitta

**Formation of Raja** - According to some of them, the *Raja* is formed from *Rasa Dhatu*, while others opine that, the *Rakta* accumulates over a period and then is discharged as *Artava*. *Chakrapani* gives a clarification by stating that, *Artava* which is initially formed from *Rasa Dhatu* is *Saumya*, and later at the time of excretion it undergoes specific changes and *Agneya Guna* (hot potency) gets incorporated. Apart from the above information, references about the *Charyas* (regimen) that a woman must follow to avoid diseases and acquire health benefits can also be found in the classics. Mode of living during menstruation according to classics: The regimen that women had to follow for their own good are mentioned in Ayurvedic texts. Right

from the first day of menstruation, primarily one should maintain chastity. The contra-indications include *Divaswapana* (sleeping during day time), *Rodana* (crying), *Pralapa* (prolong speech), *Anjana* (apply collyrium), *Abhyanga* (massage), *Vyayama* (exercise) etc. *Acharya Sushruta*, mentions that apart from maintaining abstinence, one should sleep on the bed made of *Truna Panchamula*, eat *havishya* (a meal containing ghee, milk, rice) in an earthen pot (due to its cooling effect). *Nasya* (nasal drops), *Swedana* (sudation), *Vamana* (vomiting procedure) procedures are also not indicated during this period. It is also advised that a menstruating woman should not consume *Katu* (spicy), *Amla* (sour) and *Lavana* (salty) food as it can aggravate *Pitta Dosha*.

Some of the practices that were followed in ancient times Avoiding household chores like cooking, cleaning and other physical exertions. Maintaining celibacy. Being confined to one place to maintain distance from people, plants, animals etc. Not entering the temples or any place of religious activities etc. According to our *Acharyas*, some of the contra-indicated acts during menstruation are - *Divaswapna*, *Anjana*, *Nasya*, *Rodana*, *Snana*, *Pradhavana*, *Nakhaapakarsha*, *Bhramacharya* etc.

### Myths related to Menstruation in India

In India even mere mention of the topic has been a taboo in the past and even to this date the cultural and social influences appear to be a hurdle for advancement of knowledge on the subject.<sup>[1]</sup> Culturally in many parts of India, menstruation is still considered to be dirty and impure. The origin of this myth dates back to the Vedic times and is often been linked to Indra's slaying of *Vritras*. For, it has been declared in the *Veda* that guilt, of killing a *Brahmana*-murder, appears every month as menstrual flow as women had taken upon themselves a part of Indra's guilt.<sup>[2]</sup> Further, in the Hindu faith, women are prohibited from participating in normal life while menstruating. She must be "purified" before she is allowed to return to her family and day to day chores of her life. However, scientifically it is known that the actual cause of menstruation is ovulation followed by missed chance

of pregnancy that results in bleeding from the endometrial vessels and is followed by preparation of the next cycle. Therefore, there seems no reason for this notion to persist that menstruating women are “impure.”

Many girls and women are subject to restrictions in their daily lives simply because they are menstruating. Not entering the “Puja” room is the major restriction among urban girls whereas, not entering the kitchen is the main restriction among the rural girls during menstruation.<sup>[3]</sup> Menstruating girls and women are also restricted from offering prayers and touching holy books.<sup>[4]</sup> The underlying basis for this myth is also the cultural beliefs of impurity associated with menstruation. It is further believed that menstruating women are unhygienic and unclean and hence the food they prepare or handle can get contaminated. According to study by Kumar and Srivastava<sup>[5]</sup> in 2011, participating women also reported that during menstruation the body emits some specific smell or ray, which turns preserved food bad. And, therefore, they are not allowed to touch sour foods like pickles. However, as long as general hygiene measures are taken into account, no scientific test has shown menstruation as the reason for spoilage of any food in making.

## DISCUSSION

Traditional practices during menstruation: According to the history of Indian culture, menstruating women were supposed to follow a set of rules and regulations. As mentioned before, the ancestral beliefs regarding certain traditions had a major motive behind them. The customs that the women were compelled to follow were never aimed at suppressing them. On the contrary, it was framed and practiced so that a woman could maintain good menstrual as well as reproductive health. Though, most of rituals that a woman followed at the time of menstruation, were common in many parts of the country, some of them were specific to either a community or a region. For example, the

practice of women not being allowed to enter the temple was followed everywhere, whereas menstruating women spending time in seclusion huts were specific to some of the region

## CONCLUSION

Considering the social changes which have taken place over a period of time, especially with technological advancements inter alia, it is practically not possible to follow all the traditional practices. It can be concluded that, if menstruation is considered as an essential topic for public discussion, then the scientific reasons can be understood by the mass, which helps in betterment of women in terms of health.

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