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Menstruation and festivals: A historical retrospective

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Abstract

Introduction: Menstruation is still stigmatized and shamed worldwide, as well as in India also. Many Hindu festivals and mythological concepts commemorate this significant event in a pubescent girl's life and social, behavioural pattern.

Methodology: The discussion is entirely based on secondary data sources from different literature sources available in esteem journals and web pages.

Discussion: Most of these festivals and mythological stories indicate that the young girl had reached marriageable age and the celebrations often promote a hetero-normative, patriarchal view of womanhood. This scenario played an essential role in the behavioural pattern of a girl towards her womanhood.

Conclusion: Menstruation is a natural physical activity that has been veiled in mythology, endowed with both positive and evil symbolisms, and has been the subject of a wide range of taboos and rites in all traditional societies for as long as records go back. Many misconceptions and cultural misunderstandings about Menstruation still exist today. Nevertheless, the menstruation festival has become a part of social and behavioural life that cannot be ignored.

Keywords: menstruation, festival, mythology, puberty, society

Introduction

The first period of a girl's life has a considerable influence. It is regarded as a sign of maturity towards womanhood. Even though Menstruation is still stigmatized and shamed worldwide, many Hindu rituals honour this as a cultural event, as the young girl reached marriageable age. Women's puberty is often celebrated as a sign that they can now marry and bear a man's children, reinforcing a patriarchal, hetero-normative view of womanhood. Several Hindu festivals celebrated menstruation centuries before women found it empowering to talk about menses in front of men, much to the chagrin of their moms and grandmothers, and televised ads provided women with the confidence to normalize the monthly periods. The menstrual festival is a hinge of a girl's life from a period of rapid physical growth, sexual maturation, the activation of new desires and motives, as well as a wide range of social and affective changes and problems. Girls' mental health influences the social, behavioural changes in this phase. More specifically, it is believed that pubertal maturation is linked to the activation of social and motivational tendencies, which regulate behaviour and mood swings. Menstrual blood is described as sacred, a gift from the Gods, or a punishment for sin in these stories, but it is always magical and powerful. Menstruation's stigma harms women's health, sexuality, well-being, and social position and behavioural changes. Self-consciousness and hyper vigilance connected with concerns about revealing one's menstrual status are two of the most common repercussions. Period stigma harms those who experience it, ranging from physical issues such as a shortage of sanitary supplies to verbal shaming of menstruation persons as 'unclean'.

Significance of the study

Festivals have an essential role in fostering social cohesiveness. However, menstruation and its related festivals are surrounded by social taboos and norms. Menstruation ritual and women's psychological changes and behavioural patterns are related deeply. This four-day festival commemorates the earth's fertility regeneration cycle, and this is similar to a girl's or woman's menstruation cycle. This review aims to explain how menstruation was seen in diverse ethnic groups and civilizations in certain parts of India, from ancient mythology to

historical or traditional customs to modern belief systems. The study is primarily designed to present a detailed view of menstrual festivals and their associated rituals in Indian society.

Methodology

The discussion is entirely based on secondary data sources collected from different literature sources available in esteem journals, web pages and e-Books. The search for this topic is done systematically based on keywords (Menstruation; Women; Festival; Mythology; Puberty; Society etc.) using Google Scholar, Pub Med etc. After the accumulation of all the information, it is formatting and presenting in an analytical format.

Menstruation and related Festivals in India

India is a diverse cultural combination, where every Indian celebrates a significant number of festivals all year round. Each festival is unique in its way. Menstruation represents the transition from girlhood to womanhood and is one of the most important aspects of it. This transformation used to be marked by the elders claiming that the girl was now as fertile as nature. On the other hand, Menstruation became taboo over time, and myths arose from half-baked stories, most untrue. There are still a few places in India where Menstruation is celebrated the same way it was in ancient times.

Festival of Ambubachi

Tradition, belief, culture and spirituality these four-terms are linked to a religious festival called "Ambubachi" (Nagarajan, 2007) ^[14]. In Sanskrit, 'Ambuvaci' is known as 'Goddess,' from which the local Assamese word 'Ambubachi' or 'Ambubosi' is derived. It means that water is emitted, which refers to the earth's swelling from the monsoon's onset (Sarma, 2019) ^[19]. This festival is popularized as a celebration of the menstruation time of Goddess 'Kamakhya' in some parts of India. However, it is seen as a menstruation of the entire mother earth. However, the goddess Kamakhya remains the focal point of the festivities. It is referred to as the Yoni or Genital Goddess (one of the leading 'Shakti Pith' where it is assumed that the genital organ of Sati has fallen) (Das, 2018). Usually, Ambubachi said on the 7th day of the month of Ashara, every year. The temple of Kamakhya remained closed for three days during the 'Ambubachi mela'. Mother Earth is considered unclean for three days as traditional women's menstrual seclusion (Hugh, 2019). The popular belief is that the earth's holy mother is a fertile woman and is cultivable for the germination of seeds and the cultivation of crops that made her fertile. That is why the woman's womb is compared to 'Kshetra' for cultivation. Ambubachi symbolizes this phenomenon of the ancient concept of agriculture (Das, 2018). The Bodo community called this festival 'Amthi-sua' (Boro, 2017) ^[2]. The Hindu Lower Assam Community is called 'Amoti' or 'Ameti'. In West Bengal, it is called 'Ambabati' respectively (Sridhar, 2016) ^[22].

Tuloni Biya

Assam also has a unique tradition of public puberty celebrations, known as Tuloni Biya. Tuloni Biya is a ceremonial ritual celebrated seven days after a girl reaches puberty. Various rituals and ceremonies are organized in

different parts of the state. This ritual celebrates a girl's journey to womanhood (Das, 2017) ^[6].

Raja Festival

The word 'Raja' originates from 'Rajaswala' (meaning a menstruating woman). Contextually, this festival became more popular from the middle Ages as the 'Raja Festival' in Orissa (Saharia, 1996) ^[17]. This festival enjoys an agricultural break and worship ceremony for Bhudevi, Lord Jagannath's wife. 'Raja Festival' was held in mid-June. The first day is named 'Pahil Raja.' The second day is known as 'Mithuna Sankranti.' The third day is known as 'Bhu Daaha' or 'Basi Raja', and the fourth last day is celebrated as 'Vasumati Snana' (Mohapatra, 2006) ^[13]. These four days, women take a holiday from their daily schedule and wear new saree, alata and ornaments. This festival is like 'Ambubachi Mela' (Rout, 2015) ^[16]. The villagers organized a joyous celebration for three days to welcome the monsoon. According to common belief, menstruating women is a sign of fertility, and the festival is considered a menstruating span of the planet. Therefore, all agricultural activities remain suspended for these four days (Saharia, 1996) ^[17]. Notably, it is a festival of unmarried girls and potential mothers. There are some restrictions on these three days, especially in bathing, not to walk barefoot, not to scrap on the ground, and not to cook (Rout, 2015) ^[16].

Guru Panchami Brata

'Guru Panchami Brata' is seen on Shukla Paksha Panchami in the lunar month of Bhadrava, i.e. the day after Ganesh Chaturthi. Brata is practised by married women who held upabasha and paid obedience to sapta rishis (seven sages) to eliminate 'rajaswala dosha' as women who consider Menstruation impure immoral their lives (Mohanti, 1935) ^[12].

Ritual Kala Samskaram Festival

Ritu Kala Samskara or Ritushuddhi is a Hindu ceremony conducted in South India when a girl passes through the menarche (first Menstruation). At this stage, a girl's family and friends donate a sari to her as part of the celebration. Nowadays this festival is becoming popular as 'Half-Saree Party' or 'Half-Sari Feature'. When the girl begins to menstruate, a separate room is arranged. Her relatives visit her with presents. On the last day of her menses, her mother and other women in her family perform a 'Bath ceremony'. The girl dresses in new clothes and ornaments, and the 'Griha Pravesh' ceremony is organized (Bajpai, 2011) ^[1].

The festival of Keddasa

The Keddasa or Tulu festival is an ancient festival. This festival is associated with the annual fertility season (agriculture) of mother earth in Kerala and Karnataka. Mother Earth is expected to go through an annual transitional cycle or menstrual period. After that, the world will bear fruit and crops (Tulu festival, 2017) ^[23].

Manjal Neerattu Vizha's Festival

'Manjal Neerattu Vizha' is a three-day menstrual festival in Tamil Nadu. At this festival, the girl undergoes ritual seclusion, ritual bathing, and many other local rituals. A turmeric bath ceremony is organized when they first received Menstruation. Friends and family are invited to enjoy these occasions, and for the first time, they have

offered the girl to present a saree as a mini-version of marriage (Guerin, 2019) ^[8].

The Tradition of the Tantric Culture

The Temple of Devipur in Andhra Pradesh is an important centre of Devi Srivida in the Tantric tradition. Devipuram Guruji is synonymous with menstrual rites and restrictions. It is also essential that menstruating women are not allowed into the temple because it is believed that menstruating women will generate an imbalance in the temple's energy (Shanmathi, 2016) ^[20].

Festival of Thriputharattu

Kerala is a region where the idea of Menstruation is being celebrated. Every month, the Murti (idol) of the goddess Parvati (Bhagavati) is believed to be menstruating. Therefore, her Murti has been transferred to a hidden room for three days. After the menstruation cycle is over, a female elephant is brought to the Pamba River for a ceremonial bath. The festival is known as the Thriputharattu Festival (When the goddess bleeds, 2015) ^[26].

Festival of Peddamanishi Pandaga

'Peddamanishi Pandaga' is celebrated in parts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The first and last days of a woman's life are celebrated luxuriously. On the first day, the girls have 'Mangal shan' with five women in their family or relatives, except their mother. The girl is staying in a separate room. When menstruation is over, her family members have arranged a huge celebration known as the 'Peddamanishi Pandaga Festival' (Shraddha, 2019) ^[21].

Baul custom

The Bauls are the religious community, blending elements of Hinduism and Islam, consisting of people who renounce the practices of Bengali society to survive by collecting money from singing in public places (Sarkar 1990) ^[18]. The Bauls practised a peculiar ritual to celebrate Menstruation. In baul culture, having a friendship with a menstruating woman is a way to attain divine happiness and spiritual emancipation (Lister, 2018) ^[10].

Worship of River and Menstruation

The rivers of India are considered holy places and as 'mother'. Since that, most of India's streams are considered impure for two months per year, and then this is implied as the menstrual cycle is going on. However, due to the purity of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers, there is no restriction on using their water (Menstrual cycle, 2010) ^[11] is also seen.

Indian Mythology and Menstruation

All most all the part of India, Menstruation is considered dirty and impure. The origin of this associated myth dates back to the Vedic times. In the "Rig Veda," Lord Indra, the King of Heaven, killed Vritra with a thunderbolt but felt much guilt after the murder of Vritra because he was the son of a God. Lord Indra then rushed to the nearby woman to protect her. The woman said she would be guilty on Indra's behalf if Lord Indra promised to bless her healthy offspring, and this guilt emerged as Menstruation (Chawla, 1994). Women, unlike men, do not become impure when they come into contact with filthy objects or persons, according to the Skanda Purana, since their impurities are wiped away

during Menstruation (Tagare, 1950) ^[24]. The 'Devi Bhagavata Purana' claims that a woman is forgiven of adultery when she goes through Menstruation, whereas the 'Manusmriti' claims the same for mental adultery. Having sex with a lady during her menses is thought to result in the birth of evil-minded nasty offspring, as Narakasura, who, despite being the son of Bhudevi and Varaha avatar of Lord Vishnu, had a predisposition to Asuric tendencies because he was conceived while Bhudevi was undergoing Menstruation, according to the 'Kalika Purana' (Vijnanananda, 1921) ^[25].

Discussion

Procreation celebrations are not limited to such old Hindu rites. Historian Jawhar Sircar believed that the cycle of creativity among human females and nature are linked somehow. According to the Egyptians thought, Menstruation was the real strength behind the Pharaohs, making them immortal (Chakraborty, 2020) ^[4]. From the primitive era, Menstruation- festival and socio-cultural behavioural pattern of adolescence are interdependent. Socio-cognitive functional changes with psychical development characterize adolescence, and culture plays a catalyst in this whole scenario (Blakemore, 2008) ^[3]. The researchers believe that the surge in reproductive hormones during puberty triggers motivational tendencies, such as appetitive motives in the arena of social objectives and rewards, which aid in social reorientation which reflects on the worship of the Mother Goddess through the menstrual festival (Nelson, Leibenluft, McClure, & Pine, 2005) ^[15]. The activation of these rituals has a favourable impact on the behavioural pattern in the curtail point of puberty. The experiences of pubertal development, both in terms of hormonal changes and contemporaneous social events, impacts teenage development and, presumably, later conduct, which is celebrated through festivals and rituals. Given the compelling discoveries to date on the contributions of biological factors to teenage social behaviour, future research extending this line of inquiry to individual differences in the relationship between puberty and social behaviour will be exciting. It is vital to investigate the range of pathways through this developmental age, just as it is essential to explain standard, mean-level developmental patterns of adolescent behaviour. As reflected via the festival, periods as a symbol of creativity and women have always been an essential component of society's culture. On the other hand, Menstruation has been stigmatized for a long time, whereas in some places, it is honoured as menstruating earth. In truth, while the event is credited with honouring menstruation women and the soil, it also reinforced and glorified the societal norm of not letting menstrual women and girls participate in household work. Festivals commemorate the birth of Gods and Goddesses, as well as their victories over evil forces. Festivals are reflections of people's faith, social, and cultural lives. Hindu festivals, in particular, are intertwined with peoples' religious lives. The appreciation of nature's contribution to human life and humans' responsibility for maintaining nature's good health is another significant aspect of these festivals. This situation emphasizes that society's festivals have a greater functional and philosophical dimension, which is often needed for a sustainable universe and an equitable society for all. The celebrations often promote a hetero-normative, patriarchal

view of womanhood. A Festival is a symbolic representation of rituals performing as a nutshell of sexual desire and mentally preparing a girl for her marital life. As a symbol of productivity, periods are reflected through festivals, which have always been an essential aspect of Indian culture. Moreover, what perplexed stated that, even though it was a celebration of menstruating earth, it was not acceptable to treat women and girls as usual when they had their periods. After all, it was simply a physical function. Therefore, it was never discussed publicly. On the contrary, such traditions are represented to empower women and promote menstruation health and happiness. Based on mythological context, women's blood is considered sacred in some cultures, and it is believed that it should be ritually separated. According to this logic, sacred blood only becomes ritually hazardous or 'unclean' when it comes into contact with nasty things, but it is always magical and powerful. With its robust, deeply ingrained patriarchal foundations, society has been preoccupied with girls' virginity. The specific type of behaviour and collective ritual action could simultaneously establish totemism, law, exogamy, and kinship, as well as uniquely human language and thought. Period poverty creates significant impacts on menstruating women around the world. Shyness, fear and anxiety not to get menstrual desire products during Menstruation create a negative psychological impact. Anyone who can use menstrual products needs the freedom to regulate their periods without shame, stigma or fear. This is not only a health danger; it can also damage a girl's education, well-being, and, in some cases, her entire life.

Conclusion

To celebrate menarche is a part of the festival in a different part of the country. However, it is also essential to remember that social isolation in teenage girls who have recently reached puberty is also associated with mental pressure. Restricting women during their Menstruation only reinforces the sexism and patriarchy on which these practices are established. Festivals like those described above confuse and scare young girls if they are not aware beforehand, particularly in cultures where topics like Menstruation are rarely discussed. Festivals are happy occasions. On the other hand, the celebrations have a dark side: they are typically sexist against women. Furthermore, Menstruation is viewed by most global religions as a big problem, a sign of impurity and dirtiness, and as such, menstrual women are secluded, barred from polluting holy sites ostracised. Many of these beliefs and cultural misunderstandings still exist today, manifesting in a broad spectrum of unfavourable attitudes regarding Menstruation, which can have substantial and direct consequences for reproductive health. Given the increasingly worldwide character of modern clinical practice, health care clinicians must be conversant with existing cultural and social beliefs and attitudes concerning menstrual function.

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