

## **SOCIAL ATTITUDE: CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN INDIA (THE CASE OF BUYING SANITARY NAPKINS WRAPPED IN NEWSPAPER)**

*Naina Garg*

*HR Intern, Orient Paper Mills Limited, Amlai, Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh*

### **ABSTRACT**

Menstrual hygiene is still one of the most difficult development problems we face today. An investigation on the taboos, myths, and misinformation surrounding menstruation and its effect on public beliefs was conducted to provide light on this problem. The study aims to analyse commonly held notions and practises around menstruation and dispel the idea that it is fundamentally embarrassing, disgusting, and strange. The methodology involved conducting interviews and surveys with individuals from diverse backgrounds to gather insights and experiences regarding menstrual hygiene. The results showed a widespread predominance of deeply ingrained taboos and misconceptions, which contribute to the idea that menstruation is something to be concealed and ashamed of. Participants discussed societal norms that support the stigma associated with menstruation, such as staying home or avoiding the temple. The observation of the modification in sanitary pad and tampon packaging was one startling discovery. They used to be distributed in black polythene, but nowadays they are frequently wrapped in newspaper. This packing decision supports the widespread mind-set of hiding menstruation and heightens feelings of shame and embarrassment. The results of the survey emphasise the need to bust persistent beliefs and taboos about menstruation. By doing this we may develop a culture in which menstrual health and cleanliness are recognised, supported, and respected.

**Keywords:** Menstrual Hygiene, Sanitary pads, Tampons, Myths & Taboos, Periods – Beautiful Gift, Reality, Awareness, Dignity, Stigma, Packaging, Newspaper

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social attitude refers to the social mind setup. It consists of the social beliefs, feelings and actions of an individual and society. It is learned predispositions toward varied aspects of our social environment. Women suffer the brunt of social attitudes throughout their lives in one way or the other. Menstrual cleanliness is still an important but frequently overlooked part of women's health. Despite great progress in many sectors, the stigma and taboos associated with menstruation linger in many countries. The practise of purchasing sanitary napkins wrapped in newspaper is one example of this problem.

Wrapping sanitary napkins in newspaper implies the need for secrecy and discretion, promoting the idea that menstruation is something to be ashamed of. This practise not only marginalises menstrual people, but it also fosters negative attitudes and misconceptions about menstruation.

We may strive towards eradicating the stigma connected with menstruation and encouraging a more open and welcoming society by gaining a better knowledge of the causes for this practise and its ramifications.

### **OBJECTIVES**

1. To spread the awareness that myths and taboos regarding periods are not true.
2. To change the psychology of the society regarding menstruation.
3. To analyse the viewpoints and experiences of both menstruating and non-menstruating people (including boys and men) in respect to sanitary napkin packaging.
4. To investigate the impact of media and advertising on social views on menstruation and packing practices.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for this study involved conducting surveys. Its goal was to elicit information about the participants' experiences and perspectives of buying sanitary napkins wrapped in newspaper. The methods used in this study included a multidimensional approach to thoroughly investigate the practise of purchasing sanitary napkins wrapped in newspaper. In addition to surveys, other approaches were used to gain a more comprehensive grasp of the subject. To synthesise existing research and incorporate past findings into the study, a complete literature review was done. To collect data from a broader and more diverse population, online surveys and social media analysis were used. This study used a variety of approaches to gain a thorough and nuanced understanding of the practise of purchasing sanitary napkins wrapped in a newspaper, taking into consideration numerous viewpoints, situations, and data sources.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Kakoty, J. ( 2021)** Menstruation is the most natural, biological process of a woman's life. In our culture, society continues to categorise it as unholy. It is quite confusing being a girl that at the very first stage it is celebrated but later it became an embarrassing issue occurring every month. The period shame struggle is real; when a shopkeeper was asked why he uses black polythene or newspaper for wrapping sanitary pads he replied the character of a girl should always be covered.

**Sharma, k. ( 2020)** Pee Safe's Sister Brand Raho safe, a feminine - Hygiene Company started by a man, is trying to include men in the conversation around menstruation through its latest campaign. The campaign aims to normalise men buying pads just like other things for their women counterparts & breaking the stigma around menstruation.

**Sharma, k. (2021)** Under the same campaign, whisper launched an advertisement urging chemists to not wrap sanitary napkins in a black plastic bag or newspaper.

**Irwin, M. (2020)** We never have the courage to openly take things like sanitary napkins & condoms to our home. Somewhere deep inside we know taking these kinds of things is not acceptable by our society. So whom to blame shopkeeper or society who will blame us for our broad minded mentality. I hope sanitary napkins brands can advertise their brand as well as sanitary napkins to be sold openly.

The review of literature shows that myths & taboos should be eliminated from the roots & sanitary pads should be sold without wrapping in the newspaper & everyone should accept this reality. The present research paper is perfectly consistent with the existing literature, emphasising the deconstruction of all myths and taboos linked with menstruation. It thoroughly dispels myths about menstruation and sanitary pads, emphasising the significance of accepting this natural and beautiful reality. By shedding light on these issues and providing evidence-based information, the research paper contributes to the broader discourse on menstrual hygiene. The present research work aims to empower individuals and communities, promote acceptance, dignity, and improve menstrual health and hygiene for all.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The best news of all time: India is on its way to a brighter future. Women are treated with greater respect in India. The newspaper that was meant to showcase the reality, meant to open the eyes of the things which cannot be seen, meant to create more and more awareness but now we are living in the days where we are hiding the reality.

It reminds one, just how even a drop of blood scares a lot. A woman and a girl who is bleeding throughout the day do all her chores without even letting anyone know about her discomfort and pain. Women are treated as untouchable during this period as they are not allowed to worship, to touch the person who is worshipping. It is not just about the blood and pain and cramps but also about the mental trauma which a woman bears. Many a time it happens that a woman is delivering her speech and she is on the initial days of her periods and at the very same time she is suffering from that pain that she cannot even share. Women do not have the right to express the pain because from the beginning we have been taught that you are a girl you have to bear it, it is a part of your life and you have to live with this. Girls can't even discuss this with their fathers or brothers. Even today in the 21st century, in spite of knowing that, according to the research that the pain during periods is somewhat equivalent to the pain that a person bears during a heart attack, we are doing the same thing. The female menstrual cycle is disparaged, considered impure, and unclean even talking about has been taboo. Several religions mandate that a menstruating woman should follow certain rituals that are often discriminatory. For instance, they can't even touch anyone, use separate utilities, don't touch pickles, or visit temples. Awareness campaigns are run to eradicate misconceptions concerning periods. Periods have claimed to prevail as long as life existed on earth, yet these prejudices remain. Something that helps a girl in the time of need, that protects them from the blood they shared, protects them from the pain they are going through but why? Why hide it? In newspapers that are meant to expose the reality, that is meant to tell us what's happening in the world but hiding what's going inside. The newspaper around pads just depicts prejudices that society carries. From shopkeepers to every bystander doesn't want to look over it, but they do know beneath the black plastic is a so-called girl product. They rush to find a black bag or a paper bag to wrap it in -- as if we have asked for something illegal.

This is the condition in urban areas. Think of what goes on in rural areas, most women are so ashamed that they don't even buy pads from a male pharmacist. Pads hanging in shops and peeping out of a glass window is very much okay. A person has given all his efforts to remove this but still sanitary pads are given in packaging. It is ok to pack it for protection reasons or safety reasons. But what's the point of hiding it with another and packing it with newspaper? Don't you think it is a waste to nature as well? Wasting a paper on a thing that does not even need to be hidden. What actually needs to be hidden is the mentality of the people. And what actually needs to be opened up is the packaging we use to cover as well as the mind-set that we need.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The present research study is based on the survey conducted by designing a questionnaire on the social attitude of girls and boys while buying sanitary pads and the response was the same for both genders. Both male and female faced the same situation, that is, somewhere sanitary pads were wrapped in a newspaper whereas at other places in a black polythene. The results of the survey show that shopkeepers also feel the need to put it into a black polythene. This shows how small minded they are, that they are trying to hide this beautiful gift of nature under a newspaper or black polythene.

The question that arises in our mind, is it an atom bomb? Is it illegal to buy sanitary pads? Aren't periods a normal process? Aren't periods necessary for bearing babies or future offspring? Is it not a biological process? If the answer of all the above mentioned questions is yes then why periods are treated as a crime. If we talk about history, then people were not much aware but now this is not the scene. Everyone is aware of the same, even in advertisements, red liquid is used instead of blue. Then why it is still a taboo, why we females are not allowed to go to the kitchen or market during periods.

## **THE COMPLEXITIES OF MENSTRUATION AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS: CHALLENGING STIGMA**

The difficult issue of seeing women as untouchable while they are menstruating has its roots in cultural and religious customs. There are many instances of women being shunned and excluded from social and religious activities during their periods, despite the fact that there are some instances of women being adored during their periods, such as the adoration of the Kamakhya Devi in Assam. It's like the basic identity of being a woman. We know that menstruation is a biological function which is essential to fertility. Bleeding every month, as any woman would tell you, is uncomfortable, icky and a pain. There are mood swings, bloating, cramps, pain and the inconvenience of having to stuff. A sanitary napkin or a tampon. But we bleed because we have no option. It is what makes us unique, something that we cannot even compare ourselves in this term. They will be smiling even if they are going through periods. If something is helping them we should be proud of that product. I would be giving an award to people, showing it off. I would not be hiding it. Have you seen someone buying a Dettol, shaving razor wrapped in a newspaper? Even the things that are injurious to health like cigarette packets, alcohol. Even drugs are not sold by hiding it. People do sell them freehand. It is not an embarrassment, it is not disgusting, and it is not foul. In actuality, it is a blessing. The waxing and waning of the moon, the ebb and flow of the ocean, are reflected in the menstrual cycle. We are creatures of the earth, and we are gifted with a beautiful reminder of that each time we bleed. This is the truth, the society must accept. India is developing day by day, India is connecting hand with the other developed Nations. In Indian society, across cultures and religions, the female menstrual cycle is still considered as ritually unclean. Most religions have their own menstrual taboos; much of it was based on the lack of understanding of why it occurred. India is changing its lifestyle and trying to cope with the other developed nations. It is also worth noting that menstruation has historically been viewed in different ways in different cultures. In ancient India, for example, menstruation was seen as a gift from the Goddess, and women on their periods were celebrated and given special privileges. While attitudes towards menstruation have changed over time, there is value in understanding the diversity of perspectives that exist on this natural bodily process.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Menstruation has been perceived in a variety of ways throughout history and throughout cultures, including as a gift, a curse, a taboo, and even as a source of power and healing. The necessity for menstrual hygiene items, such as sanitary pads, has emerged as a universal topic despite the considerable variation in views and beliefs around menstruation. Menstrual hygiene management is still a serious concern for girls and women in many regions of the world. Girls may find it difficult to discuss their periods openly due to the stigma and taboo surrounding menstruation, which may also contribute to their lack of information regarding menstrual health and hygiene. Negative health effects, as well as social and economic difficulties, may emerge from this. In rural areas, access to menstrual hygiene products can be particularly challenging. Girls may not have access to the supplies they need, and may lack privacy and adequate sanitation facilities for managing their periods. This can result in missed school days, reduced productivity, and a range of negative health outcomes.

Despite these challenges, there are signs of progress towards a more supportive and inclusive culture around menstruation. Increased awareness and advocacy efforts have led to greater visibility for menstrual health issues, and many organizations and individuals are working to increase access to menstrual hygiene products and reduce the stigma surrounding menstruation. It was only a few years ago that we got supermarkets and we could pick up our choice of sanitary napkins from shelves stacked with various options. Extra-large, with wings, dry gel you name it. And we could toss them on shopping trolley in full public view and not feel embarrassed about it. Overall, it is important to recognize the complexities of menstruation and the challenges that girls and women face in accessing menstrual hygiene products. The promotion of greater awareness and understanding of menstrual health issues will surely help to reduce the stigma and taboo surrounding menstruation.

## REFERENCES

1. <https://bmcwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12905-021-01231-6>
2. <https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-020-00935-6>
3. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(18\)30143-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(18)30143-3/fulltext)
4. <https://www.thebetterindia.com/131162/dont-hide-it-sanitary-napkins/>
5. <https://www.businessinsider.in/advertising/brands/article/rahosafe-is-the-first-brand-in-india-to-feature-a-man-participating-in-a-conversation-around-menstruation/articleshow/78369807.cms>
6. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/body/article/45624/1/what-your-menstrual-cycle-says-about-you-according-to-the-moon>
7. <https://everydayfeminism.com/2013/02/menstruation-is-awesome/>
8. <https://m.facebook.com/logical.indian/photos/i-go-to-the-medical-shop-and-ask-for-a-sanitary-napkin-first-i-myself-use-a-euphe/534028476726876/>
9. <https://www.idiva.com/travel-living/womens-journal/can-we-get-the-sanitary-napkin-without-the-newspaper-wrapping-please/15112797>
10. <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/world-menstruation-day-menstruation-cup-sanitary-napkins-menstrual-hygiene-5192494/>
11. <https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/video-why-should-buying-sanitary-napkins-in-india-be-a-shameful-act/>
12. <https://www.quora.com/Why-are-sanitary-pads-wrapped-in-newspapers-while-selling-even-now-in-India>
13. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305493493\\_Scope\\_and\\_Opportunities\\_for\\_Menstrual\\_Health\\_and\\_Hygiene\\_Products\\_in\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305493493_Scope_and_Opportunities_for_Menstrual_Health_and_Hygiene_Products_in_India)
14. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324224308\\_Menstrual\\_Cycle\\_and\\_the\\_Misconceptions\\_Associated\\_with\\_It\\_among\\_Young\\_Women\\_in\\_Delhi-NCR\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324224308_Menstrual_Cycle_and_the_Misconceptions_Associated_with_It_among_Young_Women_in_Delhi-NCR_India)
15. <https://sheroserevolution.com/shanijay/052020-white-moon-and-red-moon-cycles/>
16. <https://www.shethepeople.tv/top-stories/opinion/sanitary-pads-wrapped-in-newspaper/>
17. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/arbitrary-thoughts/breaking-the-menstrual-taboo31440/>
18. <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/U-Report/menstrual-hygiene-polls-pakistan>

## QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **How would you rate your level of comfort when purchasing sanitary pads?**
  - Very comfortable
  - Comfortable
  - Neutral
  - Uncomfortable
  - Very Uncomfortable
2. **Have you ever experienced Judgement or stigma while purchasing sanitary pad?**
  - Yes
  - No
3. **How do societal attitudes towards menstruation affect your experience of buying sanitary pads?**
  - Positively
  - Negatively
  - No impact
4. **How you feel about menstruation and the act of buying sanitary pads?**
  - Comfortable
  - Uncomfortable
  - Neutral
5. **How do you believe boys can contribute to creating a supportive environment for girls when it comes to purchasing sanitary pads?**
  - By being understanding and supportive

- By challenging stigma and judgement
  - By educating themselves and others
  - Others (Please specify)
- 6. Do you believe it is important to have open discussions about menstruation and menstrual hygiene with boys?**
- Yes
  - No
- 7. Are there any cultural or societal norms that influence how girls and boys perceive the act of buying sanitary napkins?**
- Yes
  - No
- 8. Have you ever purchased sanitary pads for someone? (Specifically for boys)**
- Yes
  - No