

Menses and taboos: Are we ever going to come out of this???

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Menses- a normal phenomenon, a female goes through every month...if you accept it to be... a phenomenon. Why I used the term phenomenon- because it is this natural process that blossoms a new life form. Isn't it a miracle and to be part of it a blessing? But if we just see it as a dirty filthy thing...it is always till generations going to be a soiled incident forever. Think over, a girl of teenage as soon as she enters puberty, instead of celebrating she is treated so as if now on she is a culprit and every month she is committing a crime by herself. This is the scenario still seen in majority of Indian house-holds-may it be cities or towns or villages- no place is barred. Yes astounding but true. Though we have developed in many aspects, the discussion on menses remains still under dark and truth be told not many of us would use the term menses directly rather the hush hush words- Date, period, in Gujarati "bahar bethi che" ..sometimes not even a word but just handful gestures. I consider myself blessed because my parents have always discussed openly and never shunned my questions related to menses nothing like the parents of my friends who instead reminded them that menses is not good, should not

be discussed with or in presence of father. I recall certain incidences that my friends experienced in their very household during menses which I would like to share not to criticise but to encourage them to not be like their parents and at least teach their daughters to be proud and not ashamed of having menses.

I still remember my first encounter with term-menstruation. It was when we were 11 years old still children, my friend was acting weird. She was trying to conceal her dress by sweater, covering the seat with bag and asking now and then to check behind her. But I was clueless what was going on? After recess my bench partner gave a smirk and said, "I know she is in "MC" and I suggest you that you should not touch her or go near her or eat with her." I saw her in the face perplexed as now I thought that my friend was suffering from some illness, I did not know what MC was? Because one does such things as to not touch her or so if the person has contagious disease. But she was my friend how could I do this to her? Rest of the day at school was not easy for me as I was worried what was going on with my friend? As soon as I reached home I searched for "MC" in dictionary and read about its definition but I was not able to understand. I asked my mother and she tried to explain what it means and that I would also have menstruation when I am of right age. So I

asked her whether she would also not touch me or eat with me. She smiled and said why would she do that to me and I narrated the whole incident which happened at the school. She said we don't do such things...don't worry and be with your friend as you do normally. Now I think over why my bench partner told me so and she knew about this since she was 6 years old and it lights me now, she had seen her mother go through this ordeal every month in family. The impact of the familial incidences lives with children forever and I am sure she will continue with same rituals as she thinks to be true and worth.

Next instance is again from my school. A girl in other class had menses during routine ongoing lessons. She was shy because she had this for first time. The teacher told her to go and get changed and sit in the Principal's office till her parents come to take her home. The girl said, "Please don't tell my parents I will go on my own." On counselling and enquiring the teacher found that girl knew about menses, her menses had started the last night but she was afraid of the dark. She had seen her elder sister spend days in a dark dingy room during menses. She did not want to spend days and nights in dark so she had not told about her menses to her mother. Now again in some families the girls are separated and made to live in such rooms in the name of ritual that has been followed anciently.

Many more taboos prevail with menses such as if a girl during menses touches pickles or spices it gets spoiled, she should not go in the temple or her shadow should not fall on the temple, she cannot cook or touch gas stove, etc... and many more. And the mediocrity is these same taboos are still followed in the name of ritual and religion even by the educated women. At least we who are educated should try to stop such non sense rituals. Our ancestors did make certain rules in name of rituals viz., staying in room (not dingy dark room), not cook, etc.so that women could rest and would not have to work during menses. Such rules were not made to punish girls.

Lets celebrate being women and teach our children to do so. Lets break this chain of taboos and teach our daughters to live free from shackles of such taboos.

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