**Original Article** **Open Access**

**DOI : https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17403695**

# UNDERSTANDING MENSTRUAL STIGMAS IN TRIBAL SOCIETY OF ODISHA: The Politics of Purity and Pollution

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## ABSTRACT

Menstruation, an essential natural and physiological process, continues to be downplayed and pushed into the private realm. Throughout history, curiosity concerning menstruation has led to multiple taboos and stigmas, widely considering it to be polluted and evil. The constant expectations from family and society to put the topic under the carpet and normalize hiding issues surrounding menstruation are extremely problematic.

Menstruation being a universal experience for all women, the stigma attached to it depends upon location, culture, religion and family background. Tribal society despite being viewed as a less patriarchal culture, hold serious taboos and stigmas that exclude women from engaging in social, cultural, and religious activities. Even though women are regarded as an asset in tribal societies, that doesn't help them escape the monthly taboos and isolation. The study aims to shed light on the widespread centuries-old stigmas and taboos around menstruation among Odisha's tribal population. The chapter reviewed various literatures on menstrual taboos and stigmas to gain a thorough understanding of the severity of the taboos and stigmas in multiple societies and communities and subsequently enquire into the notions on menstruations in the indigenous culture in Odisha.

**KEY WORDS :** *Menstruation, Tribal women, Taboos, Stigmas*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Menstruation, an essential natural and biological process, has long been downplayed and pushed into the private realm. It is often considered a taboo and not meant to be spoken of in public. Various euphemisms are attached to it such as "aunt flow," "time of the month," and "on the rag", reflecting the stigma and taboo associated with it (Newton, 2016). Menstruation is a universal experience for all women, although the stigma attached to it depends on location, culture, and religion. For instance, in Bangladesh, it is prohibited to consume fruits during menstruation, whereas in Nepal, home tasks and religious rituals are not permitted. The stigma of purity and pollution remains ingrained in Indian society also. The diversity within Indian society such as region, religion, caste, class, tribes and ethnicity etc further complicates beliefs and cultural practices around menstruation. Certain countries forbid menstruating girls

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**DOI:** *https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17403695*

Article No - TVRV00089

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| Received | Reviewed | Accepted | Published |
|---|---|---|---|
| 07-Jan.-2025 | 09-Mar.-2025 | 22-May.-2025 | 01-June-2025 |

| Volume | Issue | June | ISSN |
|---|---|---|---|
| No. 7 | No. 1 | 2025 | 2583-1852(P), 2584-0878(O) |

**How to Cite this Article:** :Mohanty, Rupali Rupajita. UNDERSTANDING MENSTRUAL STIGMAS IN TRIBAL SOCIETY OF ODISHA: The Politics of Purity and Pollution. THE THIRD VOICE: REALITY AND VISION. 2025. Vol No-7. Issue No-1. June. Pp:69-76, DOI : https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17403695

from attending school as they believe a school to be a holy area. Women in Nepal are not allowed to enter or touch their homes during menstruation, thus they live in a separate shelter known as Chhaugoth or Chhaupadi. They are also not permitted to touch male members, newborns, pregnant women, or holy persons, and they are not allowed to engage in sexual intercourse (Mishra, 2023). As noted by (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2020), some people find menstrual blood to be more repulsive or undesirable than other biological fluids like breastmilk and sperm (as cited in Bramwell 2001; Goldenberg and Roberts 2004). As a crucial area of analysis, the notions around menstruation need contextual and critical examination.

In certain cultures women are considered to be unclean during their menstrual cycles and require them to take a ritual wash before engaging in sexual activity (as cited in Cicurel, 2000; Goldenberg and Roberts, 2004). Cultural ideas that the menstrual cycle induces physical or mental disorders can stigmatize women as unwell, disabled unfeminine, or even mad (as cited in Chrisler 2008; Chrisler and Caplan 2002). A pilot study in West Bengal, suggest that in India Menstrual behaviors are determined by two significant factors. The principal obstacles to managing menstruation are societal pressures to keep it private, as well as a lack of accessible facilities for young girls and women. These conventional cultural norms and behaviors encourage negative impressions of the female body, perpetuating patriarchal subjugation of women and girls (Karki and Espinosa, 2018). The existing notions persist because of lack of knowledge and awareness around menstruation.

Goffman identified three types of stigma: abomination of the body, blemish, and social sign (Goffman, 1963; Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2020). Abomination of the body refers to bodily defects such as bleeding; blemish refers to "blemishes on one's character," and social markings refer to (discriminated) group identification. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2020) utilize Goffman's stigma categories to define menstrual stigma as a negative impression of menstruation and persons who menstruate. They consider it a concealed stigma because revealing it could result in shame.

The constant requirement of women to keep their menstrual experiences concealed from society at large is rooted in cultural standards that see it as shameful or dirty. This phenomenon is what Houppert refers to as the "culture of concealment". The culture of concealment creates a "menstrual mandate" when menstruation is expected to remain secret and invisible. The mandate guides behaviour. The regulation calls for meticulous menstrual stain control and inventive product concealment before, during, and after usage. It also restricts mention of specific times, except in certain companies and under specified situations (Bobel, 2019). The notion goes to an extent that it remains a "girl thing" that needs to be hidden from generic conversation.

## 1. Historical Overview

Traditional customs of restricting everyday activities during menstruation, influenced by society, religion, and culture, might impact women's health and well-being positively, neutrally, or negatively (Garg, et al, 2021). Newton offers a historical framing of menstruation in which the concern towards women's health frequently corresponds with concepts such as inadequacy and weakness, sustaining the culture of patriarchy. Ancient medical thinkers considered menstruation's potential significance in reproduction. The Hippocratic School considered menstruation to be crucial for the process of reproduction, and any irregularity was supposed to cause numerous health issues in women.

Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle, claim that menstruation blood lacks the vitality of male sperm owing to women's weaker souls. Menstruation, he believed, was both an essential aspect as well as a sign of the inferiority of women. These early works of literature defined 'women' from a male standpoint and characterized women as 'what man is not'. In Pliny's work menstrual blood is presented a hazard to both men and their inventions, leading to crop failure and loss of shine in man-made materials. Thus, women have a natural ability to cause damage using their biology, and if left to their own devices, they represented a threat. In contrast, if women were regulated, their strength might be used to heal ailments and be productive in agriculture. The Romans derived a similar notion to that of pliny, connecting menstruation with agricultural productivity. Although menstruation was still regarded as an essential aspect of women's health in the early modern period, medical theories diverged, one viewpoint looking at menstruation as a means of purifying the women's body and the other as the elimination of excessive blood produced by the women's body. These explanations reflected the beliefs of the Hippocratic School of thinking; however they were rapidly challenged owing to medical discoveries made possible by William Harvey, Marcello Malpighi, Regnier de Graaf, Johann Ham, and others. But these developments happened alongside with the stigmas.

Throughout the 19th century, it was still widely held that menstruation was essential for women's health and that if it didn't happen, the retained blood might cause health issues. It was commonly believed that bathing, hair washing, and paddling should be avoided during

menstruation. In the late nineteenth century, medical attitudes concerning menstruation grew more politicized. Menstruation became a topic in the battle for women's independence, and research gained political significance. For instance, in 1883, Henry Maudsley said that young women were unsuitable for higher study due to their menstrual cycles. However, with the outbreak of World War I, women began to perform previously male-dominated tasks, demonstrating their abilities. In the 20th century, anthropologists started examining menstruation and its accompanying cultural rites and taboos. It was at this time that Frazer, Mary Douglas, Marilyn Strathern and Delaney, and Shuttle critically engaged with the theme of menstruation. Hence, this period witnessed resistance to the prior patriarchal interpretation of menstruation, which was often employed to silence women.

Apart from the Western approach to menstruation, which was mainly driven by patriarchal thoughts, non-western approaches diverged in their attitudes toward menstruation; for instance, Samoan girls viewed menstruation positively due to their cultural attitude and family dynamics. The Airo-Pai of Amazonian Peru practice menstruation seclusion, which interrupts routine and alters gender roles within the group. During menstruation, women must remain in a corner of their home, surrounded by banana leaves, while their husband undertakes chores at home. Menstruation is not associated with shame, and the health of menstrual women is a public priority. Other ladies and children approach her to ensure she doesn't feel left out. Men are believed to experience headaches and be unwell if they come into touch with a menstruating woman. The Beng people of Ivory Coast observe various monthly taboos to safeguard women from the pollution (e.g., staying away from corpses), rather than framing them as pollutant. Food produced by menstruating women is honored.

Johnston goes on to say that menstruation has always piqued people's interest since it was thought to be mystical and poisonous. Buckley and Gottlieb (1988) believe that this view emerges from an absence of understanding of the phenomenon. Men may have been terrified of menstrual blood due to their lack of familiarity with it. They may have been concerned about potential bodily harm or contamination from the female body. Thus, menstruation may have appeared dangerous (as cited in Buckley and Gottlieb, 1988).

Menstrual stigmas can negatively impact women's health, sexuality, well-being, and social position (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2020). Self-consciousness and hyper vigilance are among the most often reported findings in the literature. Women are typically anxious about disclosing their menstruation status and exhibit self-policing habits such as wearing baggy clothes and preferring tampons over pads. They avoided swimming and sexual activities while menstruating. Secondly, the persistent internalization of a critical "male gaze" is societal that exacerbates menstrual shame and can cause both physical and psychological distress. Thirdly, menstrual stigma might lead to abstaining from intimate sexual connections during menstruation (Garg and Anand, 2015; Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2020).

Girls transitioning into womanhood often experience embarrassment, shame, and low self-esteem, which can impact their school attendance, academic performance, and social interactions. Additionally, they may be confined to segregated spaces during menstruation (Karki and Espinosa, 2018). Women are expected to keep their menstrual cycles private. They have to follow the norms, such as avoiding discussing menstruation with anybody except their mother, doctor, and few close girl friends. They may discuss their periods with a long-term male partner, depending on his feelings about it (Young, 2005). Sometimes, stigmas surrounding menstruation even make it challenging for women to express their concerns with healthcare practitioners (Miller, et.al, 2023). The isolation of women as a result such stigma exacerbate their physical and mental health. Furthermore, women and girls often see and internalize that the menstrual discomfort is a normal part of the process and avoid discussing or meditating on it (Menstrual Hygiene Management - A Pilot study, West Bengal, India, 2008).

Menstrual stains should not be visible on the floor, towels, bedding, or chairs. And this need for concealment can cause stress and challenges for women, making the monthly experience a source of frustration (Young, 2005). The societal standard demands menstruating women to align with the normality, reinforcing the notion that a normal body is one that does not bleed. And this sense of normalcy forces the women into what Young refers to as a "menstrual closet," in which their acceptance is conditional on having the ability to completely cover up the signs of their menstruation (Ibid.).

The study of 1100 adolescent females in Delhi found that nearly two out of every three participants followed social and work-related constraints while on menstruation. The participants' most prevalent constraints were connected to practices of religion, domestic chores, and personal hygiene. And 60% of them admitted to not attending class when menstruating (Garg, et al).

## 2.1 Menstrual Taboos and Stigmas in Indian Scenario-

Most of the girls when they first get menstruation they are passed on with the 'message of impurity'. She is indoctrinated to consider herself unclean during menstruation. The girl's movement and engagement with boys are restricted; she is forbidden from playing with boys her age group and is instructed not to run, leap, or move freely. She is not permitted to go anywhere alone. During this time, girls are instructed to prioritize 'family honour' and avoid contact with males, including family members (Menstrual Hygiene Management - A Pilot study, West Bengal, India, 2008). With such stereotypes and stigma women are restricted to the realm of home which affects their liberty in aspects of life. Indian society, at large, is not exception to harboring stigma around menstruation. Irrespective of caste, class, tribe, region or religion, there are various notions attached to menstruation. A critical examination of such identities and their social conducts vis-à-vis menstruation would be helpful to enlighten.

Menstruating women are not allowed to prepare food, handle pickle, curd, or spice containers, use cooking equipment, or enter the kitchen or puja room (a holy space for idol worship). In agricultural employment, she is instructed not to touch crops since they would perish (Sukumar, 2020). Participation in religious events includes marriages, rice eating ceremonies (annaprasan), thread ceremonies, women's rites during marriage ceremonies (stree achaar), and funerals and death ceremonies. Domestic prohibitions applies on touching cooking utensils, drinking water pitchers, consuming sour food and entering cow stalls (Menstrual Hygiene Management - A Pilot study, West Bengal, India, 2008). Menstruation can be particularly painful for women working in agricultural fields with fixed hours, as well as those performing household tasks that require hard labour and long walks, such as water collection and open defecation (Ibid, 2008).

Even within what is thought of as a single religion, there are different perspectives on menstruation. Menstruating women are considered 'low-caste' in Manu Smriti and are identified as someone to avoid (Cohen, 2020). The menstruating women are not allowed to participate in daily activities. She must be "purified" before she can resume her family and daily responsibilities (Garg and Anand, 2015). Brahmin males are not allowed to share a bed or have intercourse, eat or converse with them. And by following these codes would lead to man's wisdom and longevity. The vedic tale reaffirms and reinforces the rigidity of tying the idea of impurity to menstruation.The deity Indra commits Brahmanicide by slaying Vicvarupa, a demon-like Brahmin. In order to cleanse himself of this "sin," Indra asks the land, trees, and women to each bear one-third of his guilt; they all do and receive a boon (reward) in return. When the women take on Indra's shame, "it became (a woman) with stained garments which is why, to converse, sit or eat the food prepared with a menstruating women is considered bad, for she keeps emitting the colour of guilt (Chawla, 1992; Cohen, 2020).

In contrast to the Brahminical justification of menstrual taboos, the non-Brahminical approach, such as the Sangam literature, celebrates it as a divine energy connected to Shakti, and taboos must be followed in order to harness and safeguard this energy. (Cohen, 2020). Tantric rites, originated in tribal and peasant cultures, sometimes included presenting of menstrual blood to the goddess. In Assam, cultural practices involve menstrual goddesses (Kamakhya temple ceremonies), while in Odisha, festivals such as Raja are held, which correlate with beliefs in mother earth's cycle, wherein menstruation signifies rest, fertility, and rejuvenation (Chawla, 1992).

Menstrual experience in India varies depending on social caste, class, and tribe. The social position of the women shapes the taboos that surround them. Despite viewing menstruation as a symbol of pollution, higher caste women celebrate their first period with puberty ceremonies, often referred to as "coming of age" or "becoming a big girl," in order to announce to the society that a girl is available for marriage. On the contrary, Dalit women who are engaged in labour intensive roles are hardly concerned about menstruation taboos (Sukumar, 2020).

Menstrual taboos perpetuate caste and patriarchal structures, favouring males from the touchable castes. Menstrual taboos, which label women as filthy and polluting during their periods, reinforce the perception that women are inferior. This monthly shaming of women's bodies as unclean and inferior issues has enabled males to dominate and control women and their sexuality. Cultural traditions like as menstruation seclusion, ceremonial fasting, and covering one's head and face in the company of males place a heavy duty on women to defend the superiority and purity of the male caste (Sukumar, 2020).

One of the most significant disparities observed among Indian women in rural areas is their lack of knowledge about menstruation and the proper hygienic practices that women should follow each month throughout their periods. No one is prepared to discuss it freely since it is such a taboo subject. This implies that women lack the knowledge necessary to make decisions that will benefit their well-being. The hazards that young girls

and women confront each month are made worse by the culture of shame and silence around this fundamental issue (Goonj, 2019) . (Kumar and Srivastava, 2011) Menstrual behaviours are influenced by various factors like family's religion, education and economic background. Girls from privileged backgrounds acknowledged using sanitary napkins; however those from urban slums do not due to financial constraints. Additionally, they reported having limited access to private restrooms. Girls with higher education levels are more aware of appropriate menstrual hygiene practices. In this regard, parental education, particularly that of women, is extremely important. Hindu females limit their religious behaviours during menstruation, whereas Muslim girls refrain from touching holy literature, reading "Namaz," or visiting shrines. Sarna tribe females do not visit the ''Sarnasthal (Worship site of Sarna people)'' during menstruation (cited from Engineer (1987) and Fischer (1978). However, Christian girls can worship and attend church during menstruation, including touching and reading the holy Bible.

## 2. Menstrual Taboos in Tribal Society of Odisha –

Society is a manifestation of human imagination that ensures the safety, security and sustenance of human beings. The existence of society is complex as it consists of innumerable complex interactions of beliefs traditions and customs that humans make for their convenience and well-being. The age-old tribal or indigenous populations are the ones who have been very specific and religious about their traditions and their uniqueness lies in preserving such traditions for time immemorial.They have their tales and stories about the origin and development of the world in vis-a-vis their community at the center. In the course of its development, society tends to progress in multiple ways and at the same time it tends to adhere to certain behavioral patterns in the form of tradition and culture that are obsolete. The stigma and stereotypes are widespread in every society and permeate to crucial aspects of individual life. Since tribal groupings are mostly concentrated the stereotypes, stigma and taboos are rooted in their communal psyche.

Many indigenous women in Balosore, Odisha, believe that menstruation is a private matter that should not be discussed publicly. Most tribal menstruation girls endure several restrictions on attending or participating in religious ceremonies and activities, which are enforced by their families, notably their mothers. Many indigenous girls in the research regions think that burning used menstruation cloths or pads may cause belly burning in their later years (Mahapatra, 2022). Women, particularly pregnant and menstrual women, are forbidden from participating in a sacrifice event. These prohibitions appear to have a twofold purpose: On the one hand, because the food is hazardous as woman is considered to be a weaker vessel and child bearers and must be safeguarded from it as eating such food may make them unwell. On the other side, the food is sacred and must be kept clean, as women are seen to be more impure than males due to the contamination that comes with menstruation. If unclean people ate ceremonially hunted animals, the community's hunting efforts would fail (Luzzi, 1975).

Every year, the Kui tribe in Kandhamal, celebrates "Raja Praba," a four-day celebration that honours menstruation and women. Girls play on swings suspended from trees as a variety of indoor and outdoor games celebrate the celebrations. When on their period, the Kui tribe follows similar taboos to that of other tribes, such as skipping church and staying out of the kitchen. However, washing garments with wooden ash is a unique taboo followed by the community. Women's financial limitations and feelings of shame and secrecy around menstruation cause them to engage in unsanitary menstrual cloth practices, endangering their reproductive well-being (Goonj, 2019). Due to taboos, shame, and secrecy surrounding the topic of menstruation, tribal girls are prevented from seeking guidance from their parents and school on appropriate MHM (Menstrual Hygiene Management) practices. Tribal females in Odisha do not follow proper menstruation hygiene. Most of them cannot use sanitary napkins because of financial constraints, accessibility issues, and a lack of knowledge. Menstrual problems are another common occurrence for them. As they get from the school, girls use both sanitary napkins and clothing (Jena et al, 2022). There are significant cultural limitations on Ho tribe of Mayurbhanj during menstruation, including bans on certain foods, social events, cooking, and religious activities (Rout and Jena, 2024).

Women have been the subject of sociocultural stigma for quite a long time. (Ramesh, 2020) examined the stigma around menstruation among rural and tribal communities of multiple states such as Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and Orissa.Women on menstruation are forbidden to make contact with food or elders or visit places of worship or kitchens. According to one research, the religious notion that women are dirty or "impure" when they menstruate, is the root cause of these restricted customs. Some of the popular myths on menstruating women area) the female body while on period may generate rays that can infect goods if she comes into contact with them, b) a woman on her period would cause a cow to become infertile if she touches it, c) the pickles will decay sooner if she touches a jar of pickles.

Some of the primary health issues that are prominent among the diverse tribes in India are TB, dysentery, diabetes, jaundice, menstruation disorders, snakebite, skin illness, diarrhea, anemia, discomfort, backache, toothache, body ache, and headache (Singh, et al, 2022). It is needless to say due to lack of proper information and awareness women suffer severely. The menstrual education appears to be essential to deal with such taboo.

### 3.1 Menstrual Taboos and Particular Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

The Particular Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), while being indigenous, are among the most marginalized populations, living in isolated areas of the country (Thamminainaa, et al, 2020). Reaching out to indigenous communities in remote areas is challenging due to their geographical isolation. They still have profound convictions and taboos about menstruation. Understanding menstruation hygiene and health is crucial for indigenous communities. Sanitary menstrual hygiene habits seem exceedingly uncommon among Indian tribal women (Mittal, et al, 2023). The absence of menstrual hygiene amongst rural populations is concerning. Unclean rags and old garments can lead to Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs), such as urinary, vaginal, and perineal infections. Serious infections often go untreated, which can lead to toxic shock syndrome and even death (Health Status of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Odisha, India).

Kharia women are often excluded from religious celebrations and rituals, such as menstrual segregation, due to a tribal belief that menstruation attracts evil spirits, rather than a perceived inferior rank of the women. Gond culture prohibits touching menstruation women since it is believed to ruin the harvest. Women washing their menstrual linen directly in stream water are one of the leading causes of water pollution, resulting in the spread of water-borne illnesses (Study on Traditional Medicinal Healing Practices among Selected Scheduled Tribe Communities in Odisha). According to popular myths in the Kondh culture, there were no restrictions forbidding people from accepting food or tobacco from menstruation women, previously. However, this enraged the Dharani Penu (the community's supreme god), who subsequently communicated to the shaman in a dream that consuming food touched by a menstrual woman is one of the causes of crop failure (Elwin, 1954).

In the Kondh tribe of Rayagada, menstruating women are required to stay in an isolated location and refrain from touching or performing domestic tasks. Tribal culture is often less patriarchal than mainstream Hindu culture. However, it is uncertain if these traditions were indigenous Kondh customs or influenced by Hindu culture during the 'mainstreaming' process (MATERNAL HEALTH IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES: A Qualitative Enquiry into Local Practices and Interactions with the Health System in Rayagada District, Odisha, 2015). In Dongria Kondh, adolescent girls adhere tightly to the taboos. Although, the sanitary napkins are becoming more popular among this demographic, some girls still use conventional ways for menstruation, such as using old cloths as absorbents and unsanitary activities. The use of sanitary napkins is not very much prevalent in marginalized group in India. Furthermore, it is an uncommon habit among rural and indigenous women. Unsanitary living conditions at the time might lead to multiple diseases (Das and Gautam, 2022). The Dongria Kondh tribe believes menstruation as dirty and impure. The women conform to all taboos carefully. Some of the taboos include: a) refraining from entering the home during menstruation (Akupeda) and b) sleeping on the rear porch (Akadiki) of the house. c) They were not permitted to visit the front side (Rachapada) of the home and the middle of the hamlet, where the local gods (Kudi) are located. d) After the seven-day impure phase (Dakadigi) of menstruation ends, women must clean their sleeping and sitting areas using cow dung paste (Dapi) and take a bath (Das and Gautam, 2022). (Mudi, et al, 2023) finds the restrictions on menstruation among Juang women. Their study reveals that approximately 85% of women were barred from engaging in activities related to religion. Some women believe that visiting holy locations during menstruation invites a wrath from God due to their perceived impurity. 75% of the participants avoid particular foods, while 94% avoid social gatherings as they perceive attending social events would upset the Gods. 18% of women reported taking a bath just after their menstruation. Furthermore, touching family members and strangers during menstruation is seen as bad, as the woman may spread impurities.

## 3. Conclusion-

Menstruation is a universal experience for all women, although the socio-cultural narratives changes according to the location, culture, and religion. However, there are certain taboos that are found common throughout the country such as prohibition from entering kitchen, places of worship, food and crops, avoiding contact with males and so on. The anxiety around menstruation stems mostly from a firmly held belief in mysticism. Menstruation has long been seen as impure, polluted, and evil and it must be avoided in spaces believed to be pure and sacred, such as religious and holy sites. The traditional cultural lenses that symbolized menstruation as both magical as well as poisonous remain prevalent in today's Indian socio-cultural fabric. Although tribal women are largely equal to the males of their tribe, the

shame and taboo surrounding menstruation puts the women into a stereotypical role. Even while the above literature suggests that some tribal communities in Odisha adhere to taboos and beliefs similar to the mainstream, often blurring the distinctions between taboo practices in mainstream culture and indigenous societies, there are some practices that are typical to the tribal communities such as a) Dongria Kondh refraining from entering the home during menstruation and purifying their sleeping and sitting spaces with cow dung paste following the seven-day impure phase. b) Kui women, washing garments with wooden ash and so on. The above studies shows that the taboo and practices around menstruation are being followed religiously as there is sense of fear and apprehension of bad luck and disaster to the family and community. The blind acceptance of taboos and stigma can cause physical and psychological anguish. Tribal groups, particularly PVTGs, are the most vulnerable and require our immediate attention due to their low literacy levels, pre-agricultural level of technology, economic backwardness, and dwindling or static populations. The PVTGs' geographical isolation further pushes them to the corner. Since they lack literacy, awareness and resources they are more likely to strictly follow societal norms than others.

Stigmas and taboos exist in every community and require serious engagement. The taboos surrounding menstruation severely limit women's individuality and freedom to participate in community life. Since, women account for half of the population and that we have lately concentrated on women's engagement in sociopolitical life, we must critically deal with the stigma and taboos associated with menstruation and actively counter the stigma and demystify the taboos and stereotypes. Women of the tribal community participate and contribute in multifaceted aspects of their community life, and they play a substantial part in passing down indigenous knowledge to coming generations. Hence, it becomes essential to carefully examine the well-being of tribal women in general and menstrual health in particular, because women have to endure nearly seven days of rigorous taboos, which may bring about severe psychological and physiological strain.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests:

The author declare no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

## Funding:

The author received no financial support for this research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

## Acknowledgements

Not applicable

## Availability of data and materials

No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study

## Declarations

## Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

## Consent for publication

Not applicable.

## Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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