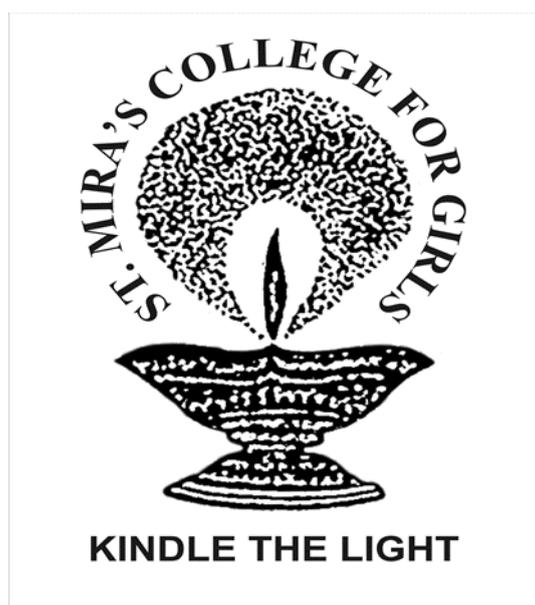


# St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune

Reaccredited "A" Grade by NAAC

First Autonomous Arts/ Commerce College in Maharashtra



## Department of English

A Publication of Papers Presented at the  
State-Level Seminar

## RECONSTRUCTING PERCEPTIONS OF WOMANHOOD: MYTH, BODY AND TABOO

15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

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## **St Mira's College for Girls**

St. Mira's College, established in 1962 was the dream realization of our Revered Founder Sadhu T.L. Vaswani. Sadhu Vaswani—a born teacher, a modern thinker, a builder with a futuristic vision believed deeply in woman-power and the woman-spirit, long before feminism was even thought of.

Today the College provides education right up to the PG level for over 3000 girl students across the Arts, Commerce, Science and Management faculties. Academic excellence with an eye on global perspectives complements aspects such as love for Indian ideals, community outreach, spiritual unfolding and reverence for humanity.

St. Mira's was the first college to voluntarily undergo NAAC accreditation in Pune in 2002 and the first Arts, Commerce College in the entire state of Maharashtra to go in for academic autonomy. It has won the Best College Award in Pune University and has been recognised by the UGC as a College with Potential for Excellence (CPE) twice. In 2012 and 2017 we have been re-accredited with an 'A' Grade by NAAC.

### **The Department of English**

The English Department is a relatively young department as many of the senior stalwart intellectuals have retired, however, they have not left in spirit and the department continues to draw upon their experience to guide the younger energetic teachers.

Much of the Department's identity is fired by our patron saint Mirabai. Not only was the young lady a great poet and musician, she was driven by a passion to surrender to something greater. In our case it is the arts and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. However, with this driving passion comes the recognition that knowledge should be available for all.

How does the department achieve this? First every year it has a series of free open public lectures with academic giants as speakers like Prof Das, a Forster scholar, Prof Jaaware on post-structuralism, Suniti Namjoshi on "Myths Mutate" and many others. We have had many seminars, workshops and competitions but we are most proud of our theatre conferences. The national conference "Theatre: Text and Performance" was a great success. It was inaugurated by none other than Vijay Tendulkar and concluded with a workshop by Satyadev Dubey. "The Theatre of Mahesh Dattani", another national conference, was attended by the playwright himself and concluded with his play "Where did I leave my Purdah?" performed by Lilette Dubey and company. The conference proceedings were published as a book. The international conference "Global Shakespeare" opened with Andrew Dickson, a journalist from the United Kingdom, and had internationally acclaimed academicians like Prof Supriya Chaudhary, theatre professionals like Kunal Kapoor of Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai and ended with a solo performance by Salim Ghose titled "Shakespearewallah". We also had a musical extravaganza which was an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* performed by the students themselves.

All of this is to enhance our autonomous syllabus which is creative and academically demanding at the same time. Our courses vary from music based literature, to epics like the Odyssey to socio-linguistics making it comprehensive and yet fun. However, always the overriding purpose is to produce confident, capable, thinking young women who can take

their place in this world by being self-reliant but with a deep sensitivity and responsibility especially to those less privileged.

### **Reconstructing Perceptions of Womanhood: Myth, Body and Taboo**

In 2019 the department of English, organised a two-day state-level students' seminar on Friday 15th and Saturday 16th February 2019.

The idea behind the students' seminar was to encourage a mentor/mentee relationship for advanced learners and to introduce students to the world of research and paper writing. The students presented their paper based on data they gathered working in the field and it is these papers that have been published as part of the conference proceedings.

The scope of the seminar was to examine past perceptions towards the woman's body particularly with respect to the natural phenomenon of menstruation and how these perceptions have changed due to corporate, social, religious and cultural interventions and thereafter manifested themselves in myth, cinema and advertising.

The key objectives were:

1. To bring about awareness of myths and taboos particularly with respect to menstrual hygiene in the corporate and social spheres
2. Understanding feminist engagement with the woman's body
3. Exposure to work done by the non-profit sector and NGOs in the area of women's health and menstrual hygiene
4. Mapping power structures and cultural influences in the areas of menstrual hygiene, physical disabilities or any other related field
5. Sharing the work done by students of St Mira's as part of a yearlong project on menstrual hygiene and physically challenged women and translating myths associated with it in various social sectors.

The seminar opened with two stunning dance performances. Whether it be the Bharatanatyam dance dedicated to Goddess Durga or the Indianised Burlesque rendition of *Dhan-te-nan* both subverted traditional notions of the woman's body.

Prof Malavika Karlekar (Editor and Archivist) spoke on "Visual Histories", Dr Chandrani Chatterjee (Dept. of Eng., SPPU) on "Gender in Translation: Cultural Texts and the Politics of Alterity", Dr Sneha Gole (Women's Studies Centre, SPPU) on "Bodies in Struggle/ of Struggle: Rethinking Femininity in the Movement", Dr Manisha Bandishti on "Healthy Bodies" and Dr Ujjwal Nene (KEM Hospital) on "Bodily Perceptions Taboos and Myth". Eleven students presented outstanding papers on various topics like body image, mythology, semiotics and religion which have been published in these proceedings.

The aim was to examine whether womanhood has really been reconsidered and in what ways. The following papers attempt to shed some light on the process of reconstructing these various perceptions of womanhood.

# WING IT LIKE THE VICTORIA'S SECRET ANGELS

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## Abstract:

The traditional myth revolves around angels being the archetypal symbols of innocence, beauty, divinity as well as purity. The angels are always venerated. The Victoria's Secret annual fashion show, the most watched show attempts to transform the ordinary models and elevate them into Victoria's Secret Angels and probably into God's celestial beings. This paper attempts to explore whether the signifier 'Angel' given to the Victoria's Secret model resonates to a divine signified thereby elevating the stature of a sparsely clad VS<sup>2</sup> model giving her an aura that elicits worship rather than derision. In particular, this paper re-examines the essays and ideas of Laura Mulvey and Andrea Dworkin in contrast to the idea of empowerment and celebration of women's sexuality.

**Keywords:** angels, divinity, Victoria's Secret, signifier, Angels, signified, aura, Laura Mulvey, Andrea Dworkin, empowerment.

## Wing it Like the Victoria's Secret Angels

The Victoria's Secret annual fashion show won the hearts of millions as well as earned its share of scorn and criticism. The Super Bowl of models, the Super Bowl of lingerie is often believed to be the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. Out of 60 models, only 12 women in the year 2018 were officially privileged and awarded a glittery Angel status, whilst the remaining 48 were not Angels but simple models. What makes the VS Angels truly Angels? Is it their angelic wings? They are simply not just called VS models but are proudly revered as VS 'Angels'. Their outfit resembles a fairy costume. The 'A' also in the VS Angels is always capitalized to constantly elevate and magnify the stature and aura of the VS Angels. The extravagant glamour, éclat ensures the VS Angels in a haloed aura.

Ferdinand de Saussure<sup>3</sup>, defined sign to be a composed of a signifier (significant) - the form which the sign takes and the signified (signifié) - the concept it represents. The signifier can be most commonly interpreted as the material or may be the physical form of the sign which can be touched, smelt. The signified is of a more abstract kind. In relating VS to Saussure's theory, the signifier refers to the VS Angels and the signified then refers to them being heavenly Angels of God. God again in the VS context becomes the signifier representing the Chief Marketing officer- Ed Razek of the VS Company who apparently decides which Angel walks the show and who loses this divine opportunity almost like life and death. The holy Angel is the signified, resonating to God's special celestial beings being the messengers, bearing the blessings of God.

In fine arts, Angels have always been depicted as having the shape of human beings with extraordinary beauty flowing robes of white and are signifying innocence identified with symbols like bird wings. In many religions, Angels are deeply venerated. However, the glamorous signifier represents the VS Angels, but Angels walking in the sexiest revealing lingerie embellished with the heavy blessed wing.

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<sup>1</sup>Daruwalla, Freny. First year MA student, St. Mira's College for Girls. Guided by Dr. Snober Sataravala, Head of Department of St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune, Maharashtra, India

<sup>2</sup>Victoria's Secret.

<sup>3</sup>Saussure, de Ferdinand (1857-1913). Founder of Semiotics, which is a study of signs.

Manushi Chhillar<sup>4</sup>, herself, aspires to walk the runway as an Angel in the future. This paper argues that fulfilling and recreating fantasy all mostly leads to the overtly signified that we are divine “knocking of heaven’s doors”. In 1998, Tyra Banks<sup>5</sup> was one of the very first models to wear angel wings on the runway. Her heavenly ensemble created a tradition and a very fascinating impression. The sexy fashion show featuring all their Angels ornamented with surreal gorgeousness transports the viewers to a dreamy escape. Kim Kardashian<sup>6</sup> also desperately borrowed the VS wings for her Halloween party. All her sisters dressed up as VS Angels and she captioned it, “thank you @VictoriasSecret for sending us actual runway looks and real wings to borrow for the night!!! OMG a dream come true! Got to be a Victoria’s Secret Angel for the night!” Irrespectively whether you the famous Kim Kardashian or upcoming aspiring Models, everyone venerates the Angels and crave desperately to be transformed into celestial Angels. The otherwise simple models are made to look stupendously grander, and the wings do it all.

Despite the glitter, there is no serious doubting that the hallmarks of the show are the celestial over-the-top wings worn by the Angels. Whether they are the literal pure white angel wings (as seen on Heidi Klum<sup>7</sup>), a heavenly bubble bath, butterfly wings fluttering as they walk or even peacock feathers, fireworks or a Christmas tree, the extravagant wings certainly elevate the show. The wings are designed in a peculiar opulent style in order to portray a different theme to match with its respective segment. The wings are extremely heavy, weighing 14 to 250 pounds and the Angels grace the runway with such a tiresome weight effortlessly and with an evergreen smile.

In August 1995, the lingerie company Victoria’s Secret pioneered by Roy Raymond had its first ever fashion show at the Plaza Hotel in New York. The models for the very first time wore delicately slinky slips and shiny bras. These models from the year 1995 to 1998 were looked upon as ‘baby dolls. 1998-the year of redemption, marked the very first appearance of ‘angelic wings’ in addition to the slinky underwear on the runway. The VS models for the very first time graced the catwalk as Divine Angels. In 1999, the wings became the landmark of the show. Viewers gradually ceased to notice the bra and panty. It is these very angelic wings that transform the ‘ordinary models’ into “VICTORIA’S SECRET ANGELS”. From 2005 onwards, the wings became bigger, more elaborate and glamorously larger than life wings.

The show is broadcasted in 192 countries on the ABC channel. In 2018, on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> of November in the New York City, Rita Ora’s<sup>8</sup>, the Chainsmokers’ and Shawn Mendes’ musical performances at the show completely set the stage on fire. Victoria’s Secret has predominantly become the most expensive and well known lingerie brands in America and the lingerie’s popularity all over the world has increased steadily. Winnie Harlow<sup>9</sup> had a chronic skin condition -vitiligo, yet she walked the VS runway confidently for the very first time. VS has taken the first step to empower diversity in the fashion world as it also encourages women to celebrate their womanhood and sexuality as well as enjoy their skin and body. Kendall Jenner<sup>10</sup> also made her extravagant comeback on the show.

Laura Mulvey in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” focuses on the number of pleasures offered by cinema among which one is –‘Scopophilia’. It refers to a concept wherein looking at a woman is a source of pleasure. It refers to the curious male gaze and the pleasure in using a woman as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. She also focuses on the voyeuristic phantasy that is, ‘the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of the light and the shade on the screen”.

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<sup>4</sup>Chillar, Manushi. Miss World 2017.

<sup>5</sup>Banks, Tyra. VS Angel.

<sup>6</sup>Kardashian, Kim. A famous television star and entrepreneur .She appeared in the American reality television show Keeping up with the Kardashians.

<sup>7</sup>Klum, Heidi. VS Angel from 1997 to 2009

<sup>8</sup>Ora, Rita. singer

<sup>9</sup>Harlow, Winnie. VS Angel 2018

<sup>10</sup>Jenner, Kendall. American model and reality star appeared in the reality television show- Keeping up with the Kardashians.

She primarily focuses on the dominant male gaze which entirely projects his fantasy on the female figure at that stage. Women and now in the case of the VS models, in Mulvey's terms perform the traditional exhibitionist role and are looked at and apparently even displayed. In the lavish sets of the show, costing millions of dollars, the lights focus only on the Angels and the stage but the audience is in plenary darkness. These models have been displayed as the "to-be-looked-at-ness". The conventional close up of legs or the face, or even giving a boost to the breasts, has been used as a narrative for a different mode of eroticism. Camera technology has been developed for a very deep focus on the Angels' bouncing breasts, patch of sexy legs, and the panty. The Angels in their sensuous catwalk are made to wear extravagant rhinestone lingerie and are constantly on display, walking the ramp, clicking pictures and all the time being captured minutely even by the paparazzi. The models then actually become an object of constant male gaze and as a result sexualized. However, they are equally the objects of female gaze and fantasy.

Albeit Victoria's Secret being a victim of infinite controversies, complaints, feminists' criticism, yet it is one of the most enjoyable and viewed shows on television. Being a VS Angel is definitely a potentially great boost to the esteem and the immense worldwide popularity of the models. VS has played an immensely significant catalyst in completely transforming the life of the models into renowned, Angels, boosting their career. As Sara Sampaio<sup>11</sup> enthusiastically stated about the impact of her being a VS model -"people know who you are and will associate your name with your face which gives a chance to have a voice". The models earn their wings and their angel status, embellished with a prestigious VS contract, as well as a job and financial security with the Victoria's Secret brand. The themes of the costumes cater to various fantasies from high end sportswear and nightwear to fairyland nymphs. "It is a brand that empowers women and there are women all around the world" as stated by Angel Jasmine Tookes<sup>12</sup> She believes walking the ramp is a complete surreal experience for her and she enjoys wearing the wings. VS Angel Romee Strijid<sup>13</sup> was officially chosen to strut 2018 Swarovski Look during the Celestial Angel part of the show. The celestial angel look is collectively adorned with over 1, 25,000 Swarovski crystals and the look itself weighed 250 pounds. Strijid excitedly responded, "When I wear the Swarovski look I feel like a superhero. Ha! All the sparkle and shine makes me feel so glamorous." Elsa Hosk wore the coveted Fantasy Bra , a Swarovski piece comprising of Swarovski Created Diamonds.

Karlie Kloss<sup>14</sup> told The Telegraph: "There's something really powerful about a woman who owns her sexuality and is in charge. A show like this [Victoria's Secret] celebrates that and allows all of us to be the best versions of ourselves. Whether it's wearing heels, make-up, or a beautiful piece of lingerie — if you are in control and empowered by yourself, it's sexy."

However, controversy is nothing new at all for the event. The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) commissioner Micheal Copps was asked to investigate for the 2018 VS Fashion show. He promptly told reporters that his 27-year-old daughter rigidly believed that it would be extremely inappropriate for her own children to watch the show. The FCC poses as a fashion model police guarding the line between decency and indecency, moral and loose, viewer friendly or not. The VS fashion show was criticized by an initial webcast user as he felt like he was "watching a striptease through a keyhole". In 2002, The National Organization for Women protested against the show and labelled it 'soft-core porn infomercial.' There were even severe protests by the Parents Television Council and several watchdog organizations. . In 2002, the VS show took place at New York's Lexington Avenue Armory, wherein angel Gisele Bundchen was openly surrounded and harassed on stage by four members of PETA<sup>15</sup>, as the Angel was wearing animal fur. They publicly brandished placards saying "GISELE: FUR SCUM"<sup>16</sup>. They protested against her panty which was made of fur. However the protesters were instantly dragged off the stage. Dawn Carr, a Peta

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<sup>11</sup> Sampaio Sara, a Portuguese model, walked the VS runway for the first time in 2013 after facing rejections in 2011 and 2012.

<sup>12</sup>Tookes Jasmine, VS Angel

<sup>13</sup>Strijid Romee, VS angel. <sup>14</sup>

Kloss, Karlie. VS Angel

<sup>15</sup> People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

<sup>16</sup> Fur shame

spokesman, said: "By getting into bed with the fur-pushers Gisele has become Peta enemy number one. Every time that Gisele or anyone else wears furs they are sentencing countless animals to a violent and cruel death."

VS features exclusively slim models and the line-up remains homogeneous in terms of body shape, with the company never taking into consideration to cast a plus-size woman to walk its famous runway. Robyn Lawley<sup>17</sup> started an online petition calling for Victoria's Secret to be more inclusive with regard to age, shape, size, ethnicities of women. She even outrageously argued on Instagram that the lingerie brand has "dominated the space for almost 20 years by telling women there is only one kind of body beautiful. Until Victoria's Secret commits to representing ALL women on stage, I am calling for a complete boycott of this year's Victoria's Secret Fashion Show."

#ImNoAngel, a campaign which is Devilishly Sexy was started by Lane Bryant in 2015, which starred curve models like Ashley Graham and was launched as a "tongue-in-cheek" jab at the lack of size and body diversity in the VS advertisements. Ashley Graham<sup>18</sup>, Danielle Brooks<sup>19</sup>, Candice Huffine<sup>20</sup>, and Denice Bidot<sup>21</sup> proudly and fearlessly declared that they are 'no Angels'. They performed the #ImNoAngel commercial in 2017 at the Emmy awards in order to celebrate and encourage more women to be extremely proud of their own body. They believe that women are extremely beautiful be it any shape or colour. "This is who I am. I dare you, I dare you to own it, own it, all of it. Dare to be you're sexy. The truth is I'm no angel, no angel. I am still no angel" was the adamant message and motto of their commercial. Ed Razek openly scoffed at the idea of casting transgender models and even larger, curvier models to walk at the VS fashion show. "No. No, I don't think we should. Well, why not? Because the show is a fantasy. It's a 42-minute entertainment special. That's what it is. It is the only one of its kind in the world." He was lashed mercilessly for it.

In order to explore human responses towards the VS fashion show and the Angels at the level of the Indian middle class, a survey was conducted using the Snowball or the Random Sampling technique.

After having conducted a research regarding the popularity of Victoria's Secret and the way each and every individual observes the Angel, a few interesting facts have come to the fore. Amongst all the people interviewed, 94.3% have heard about Victoria's Secret, out of which only 51.4% have actually at least once watched the show. As Micheal Copps daughter argues that it would be inappropriate for her children to watch the show, 62.9% of the people interviewed are extremely comfortable watching the show with either their parents or children. Interestingly, only 37.1% of the people are attracted towards the angelic wings, whilst the rest 37.1% are attracted towards the bra. 22.9% are predominantly attracted towards the glitz, glamour of the show and in total contrast; only 5.7% treat the show as baseless, waste of money and a total torture to the models. 37.1% of the people knew it as the Angels enjoying their bodies and their curves. On being asked regarding the authenticity of the title "Angels" for the VS models, 31% felt the title was inappropriate and remarked that the Angels are sexualized, hyped up and it is a titillating garment and nothing else. Further the women are dressed /undressed to supply the appétit for the desiring male gaze. It also promotes a projection of an ideal body shape concept which is undesirable. However, on the other hand, 68.9% of the people enunciated that the Angels deserve the title as they have earned it. They proclaim that by referring to them as Angels they are directly associated with VS and it gives them more power than any simple model.

However, in total contrast, after interviewing the lower strata of society by actually showing them a photo of the VS Angels and anticipating their feelings and attractions, Narmada Dende<sup>22</sup>extremely embarrassed remarked, "*kevdhichotichaddhighatli, khup, khupghan. Hyaporinni*

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<sup>17</sup> Lawley, Robyn. The first plus size model to face the cover of Sports Illustrated.

<sup>18</sup> Graham, Ashley. American model. Judge of the America's Next Top Model reality show.

<sup>19</sup> Brooks Danielle, American actress, part of the original Netflix Series Orange is the New Black.

<sup>20</sup> Huffine, Candice, a plus size fashion model. In 2015, she became the 1<sup>st</sup> plus size woman to be featured in the Pirelli Calendar

<sup>21</sup> Bidot, Denise, a plus size American Fashion model. In 2014, she became the 1<sup>st</sup> plus size model to walk the runway during the New York Fashion Week.

<sup>22</sup> Dende, Narmada. 55 years, sweeper, Modi khana.

*ang zhakaylapahije. Angavarchekapdeapli izzat aste. He kashalaghaltat, he pan nakaghalu. Bekkarkapde.*”(She has worn such a revealing panty, it is awfully disgusting. These women must clad themselves appropriately with clothes. Clothes are our identity, our character. If these women even wear so little, they shouldn't wear anything at all?) Rekha Kadam<sup>23</sup> too was so disgusted, when the photo of the Angel was shown to her; she was actually glaring for long and searching for the clothes. She believes rigidly that girls from decent families would never ever wear such rubbish fashion. She even calls them 'nagdi bai' meaning 'naked woman' and said 'che, kitighan, kavdushekapdeghatle'(she has worn crap that covers just only what it is supposed to cover and the rest is all 'ughda' (revealing). Kunda Bansode<sup>24</sup> believes that women in the west can wear it and it is only okay for them to flaunt the lingerie. However, in India, women who wear such clothes excite the men's hot erotic passion which ultimately results in women being raped.

According to Andrea Dworkin<sup>25</sup>, “in the male sexual lexicon, which is the vocabulary of power, erotica is simply high-class pornography: better produced, better conceived. Better executed, better packaged, and designed for a better class of consumer. To call something erotica means simply that a very bright person made or likes whatever it is”. Andrea Dworkin sternly believes that there is no distinction between pornography and erotica. The radical feminists see the photographs of women and identify it as the 'epitome of objectivity, record the drama that men have written and directed'. Male power creates the world and defines their own image of desires. In drawing a parallel, VS models have been accused of posing provocatively and the over sexualised advertisements including VS models only wearing a panty and covering their breasts with their hands or models wearing a skimpy panty and ostensibly spreading her legs or even models attempting to even take off their panties in the dark background. Jessie Sheal, shopper at the VS store refers to the ads on display saying, “It is basically pornography.” Andrea Dworkin firmly states that pornography is a complete celebration of male power over women and a way of giving men the pleasure of dominating a woman. The photograph of these models then becomes the ultimate tribute to the predatory male power. Pornography further validates patriarchal hegemony. A Facebook post revealed that the scantily dressed models target men more than women, “is this even for women?” VS have been accused of falling from grace.

Despite all the above mentioned conflicting views, this paper would like to argue that the Angels are works of art that elevate the woman's body by introducing the divine and erasing the shame. There is a huge difference between a model and an Angel donning exotic back pieces and wings. VS is known as a brand that empowers women, a place where women can confidently flaunt their sexuality. The women in their exposing lingerie disregard all the societal constraints rather than penetrate them. This often is a celebration of womanhood and female empowerment. It gives them confidence to be themselves. They confidently show their bodies and are tremendously proud of themselves. It seems that now it is time to forget the pop stars and the Hollywood actresses, the new, dazzling coveted icons are the VS Angels. They are breath-takingly beautiful, exotic women who grace the pages of showbiz sites, even fashion blogs for their elegance, sexiness on and off the runway. The wings elevate the magnitude of our attraction towards the Angels and the fantasy extends to us. When we wear the lingerie, we grow wings and become divine and are worshipped. VS models reconstruct the traditional myth revolving around Angels and proudly project women as the sexiest Angels in their exposing lingerie.

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<sup>23</sup> Kadam, Rekha. 52 years, nurse, Katraj.

<sup>24</sup>Bansode, Kunda. 49 years, cook, Bhimpura Galli no 13.

<sup>25</sup> Dworkin, Andrea. (1946 -2005)American radical feminist, famous for her essay on Pornography.

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## **A RACE TOWARDS PERFECTION: THE NEED TO FIT IN**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper is an attempt to assess women's perceptions of their own body and why they feel the need to have a stereotypically ‘perfect’ body to fit into society. For the past three decades, women have increasingly been preoccupied with how they look and while as individuals we are growing smarter, our body preferences are becoming rather unrealistic and a perfect body image is considered crucial to personal happiness. The 1997 Psychology Today Body Image Survey showed that most women are more unhappy with the shape of their bodies today than ever before. The study will try to examine the causes that have led to this race towards attainment of a socially acceptable body in light of the writings of certain theorists and will conclude with an attempt to foresee what the future holds for women with respect to their bodies.

**Key words: body image, mental health, body dissatisfaction, BDD, social media**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Today young women are greatly influenced by the image of the ideal body type. Over the years, women have become conditioned to believe in unrealistic standards of beauty set by society. Their self worth is often based on other's perception of them. Women today have started believing that it is important to achieve a perfect figure or the right body shape to fit into society. People often buy into fancy diets and expensive treatments to match up to unrealistic beauty standards.

Body shape or size, complexion, and cellulite-related concerns among others are harsh realities that play havoc with the self-esteem of women and are some of the major reasons why women force themselves to undergo several treatments to achieve the 'perfect body type'. What they fail to understand however, is that the concept of perfection is in itself a flawed concept, or as Emma McClendon<sup>27</sup> states, “*It is not our bodies that are wrong, it is the sizing system that is wrong.*”<sup>28</sup> The ideal feminine body is a patriarchal creation that is designed to suit a particular purpose.

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There are several reasons why the concept of perfection has been introduced among women through acts like body shaming where women are criticised for the way their bodies are and sometimes even personally victimised, and also through constant reinforcement of the ideal body image through visual media.

Newer forms of media constantly offer tips on how to lose weight 'in days', appear slimmer 'instantly', and hide our 'imperfections'. In offering to help us conceal our imperfections, the underlying assumption is that we are imperfect. Witt (2000) reported on several studies from the 1980s and 1990s: "Most females on nighttime television are young, attractive, thin and ornamental."

All forms of media indulge in this covert body-shaming which the modern woman constantly becomes victim to. Body-shaming can lead to a vicious cycle of judgment and criticism. Messages from media and from each other often imply that we 'should' change, that we 'must' care about looking slimmer, fairer, and taller. If we don't, we worry that we are at risk of being the target of someone else's body-shaming comment. No matter how this manifests, it often leads to comparison and eventually shame, in terms of a lack, and perpetuates the idea that women should be judged mainly for their physical features.

Linda Jackson<sup>29</sup> states that "although females are more dissatisfied with almost all aspects of their bodies than are males, most of their dissatisfaction centres on weight issues". In general, women are much more concerned about their appearance than men are. The key reason for this is that their appearance is central to how they feel they are evaluated by others and because of this, women spend a huge amount of time and money on clothes, cosmetics, and other products and services that enhance their physical appearance. As Beauvoir states, "To be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive, and docile. The girl is supposed not only to primp and dress herself up but also to repress her spontaneity and substitute for it the grace and charm she has been taught ..."

## **BODY IMAGE:**

Despite higher global self-esteem, women do not feel good about their appearance. When most people think of body image, they think about aspects of physical appearance. But body image is much more than just that. It's our mental representation of ourselves and our body.

In a research study, Hesse Biber, Clayton Matthews, and Downey have tried to establish how "the psychological construction of body image includes cognitive, attitudinal and affective components as well as kinaesthetic and sensory input"<sup>30</sup>. *Body image* is a perception that a person has of their physical self and the thoughts and feelings that result from that perception. These feelings can be positive, negative or both, and are influenced by an individual or surrounding factors.

Kim Chernin<sup>31</sup> explains how women strive for the 'ideal body' so much that it has a terrible impact on their lives. Body image doesn't only influence feelings, it also actively influences much of our behaviour, self-esteem, and psychopathology. Our body perceptions, feelings, and beliefs rule our life plan, who we meet, whom we spend time with; the nature of our interactions and our day-to-day comfort level. Indeed, our body is what provides others with the first and last impressions. As Plato once insightfully remarked, "We are bound to our bodies like an oyster is to its shell"<sup>32</sup>.

Sadly, negative body image is becoming more prevalent and they often start at a younger age in not just women but also men. A study conducted by the Journal of Women and Aging states that only 12% of all women are satisfied with their body size<sup>33</sup>. However, "negative body image among women is so common that the average young woman can be said to exist in a state of "normative discontent "(Cash and Pruzinsky, 1990; Rodin Silberstein and Streigel Moore, 1985).

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<sup>28</sup> Pound, Cath. "What is the 'ideal' female body shape?" <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20180122-what-is-the-ideal-female-body-shape> Accessed 24 Jan 2019

<sup>29</sup> A businesswoman and the CEO of French carmaker Citroën

<sup>30</sup> Gianine D. Rosenblum and Michael Lewis. "Child Development". Vol. 70, No. 1 (Jan. - Feb., 1999), pp. 50-64. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/1132014?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1132014?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) Accessed 23 Jan 2019

<sup>31</sup> An American fiction and nonfiction writer, feminist and poet

<sup>32</sup> Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. *Wit and Wisdom of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle*.

<sup>33</sup> Walden, Rachel. "What Percentage of Older Women Are Satisfied With Their Body Image? Survey Says..." <https://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/2013/10/what-percentage-of-women-are-satisfied-with-their-body-image-survey-says/> Accessed 25 Jan 2019

Thomas F. Cash<sup>34</sup> introduced the new scientific journal named "Body Image: An International Journal of Research" and wrote "My own professional awakening to this field came 30 years ago in my doctoral dissertation which initiated my decade of research on the "outside view" of human appearance (1990) - how does what we look like "on the outside" affect our lives". Thomas F. Cash also wrote in his paper that "appearance mattered often in complex ways and that any individual's own subjective experiences of their appearance are often even more psychologically powerful than the objective or social 'reality' of his/her appearance".

### **IMPACTS OF A NEGATIVE BODY IMAGE:**

Body dissatisfaction, especially at an early age, can lead to complex issues, especially mental health problems. Body image encompasses many different factors including how you feel when you see or think about your own body, what you might believe about your own appearance, and how you feel in your body. Body image is not only confined to women or a particular culture but in fact a person of any age, gender, and culture may struggle with body image and have a negative perception of their own body and appearance. With the increased use of technology and more involvement and use of social media platforms, negative body image and its effects are becoming increasingly alarming.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is one such mental disorder in which one can't stop thinking about a certain perceived defect or flaw in one's appearance, one that, to others, is either minor or not observable. People with BDD may feel so ashamed and anxious that they may avoid many social situations. It is a condition **where a person spends a lot of time worrying about his/her appearance**. People of any age can have BDD, but it is the most common in teenagers and young adults, in both men and women. Complications that may be caused by or associated with body dysmorphic disorder include, major depression or other mood disorders, suicidal thoughts or behaviour, anxiety disorder, health problems or self harm, eating disorders, substance abuse etc. BDD is also sometimes described as 'imagined ugliness'.

### **EFFECTS OF A NEGATIVE BODY IMAGE ON WOMEN:**

There are many factors that may contribute to a poor body image among women. We live in a world where, though not true, thinness and beauty are highly valued for women and wealth and success are often considered to go hand in hand with a slim figure. Media portraying images of ridiculously thin women are everywhere- television shows, movies, popular magazines. The media often glamorizes a very thin body for women. These are also the pictures that teenagers are constantly exposed to in a time of their lives when they are very impressionable and susceptible to peer pressure. As such, a poor body image can begin to develop at a very young age. Women, however, are not the only ones to suffer from negative body image. Men and boys suffer from a poor body image too, but they are simply less likely to admit to being affected than girls are because it is less socially acceptable for men to admit it. A negative body image can lead to unhappiness and depression both of which are also symptoms of low self-confidence.

### **THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA:**

As social media continues to play a central role in the lives of adolescent girls and young women, its influence on body image and the perception of beauty continues to grow. Social media not only exposes young girls to certain beauty standards and cultural ideals of womanhood, but emerging research shows that it may contribute to several mental health issues as well. When looking at images of women in a magazine, almost all of us know that they are altered electronically to appear perfect. When it comes to social media, most believe that they are looking at raw pictures, or 'real girls.' Whether this is true or not, they are ultimately used as a standard of comparison. Social media has become a way to put these false images of stereotypical beauty right in your field of vision whether you opt

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas. F. Cash (2003). The new scientific journal, Body Image: An International Journal of Research.

for them or not. There are also feminist who have spoken about women's perception of body image and its effects. Dittamar and Howard (2004) had made a statement regarding the prevalence of unrealistic media images: "Ultra-thin models are so prominent that exposure to them becomes unavoidable and 'chronic', constantly reinforcing a discrepancy for most women and girls between their actual size and the ideal body"<sup>35</sup>. Magazines and advertisements are marketed to help women "look better" by providing information and products that are supposed to make them look and feel good. Marketing strategies lure women into purchasing the idea of looking better rendering powerful influence on their sense of self appearance. Tiggerman<sup>36</sup> (2003) found that frequent magazine reading was consistently correlated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction. It is not untrue that women are objectified more than men and that women's bodies are more often looked at, evaluated and sexualised (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). In her masterpiece *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir depicts the atrocities of a typical patriarchal society. The author assumes that every human being should have the opportunity to experience feelings of a conquest and of being conquered to fully appreciate freedom. She makes an attempt to conceptualize the female body from women's point of view: to describe what it's like to live a female body. As Judith Butler states, "It's my view that gender is culturally formed, but it's also a domain of agency or freedom and that it is most important to resist the violence that is imposed by ideal gender norms..."

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## REGENERATING PERSPECTIVES OF THE FEMALE BODY THROUGH A STUDY OF SEX EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** In ancient India, sex was not condemned but was a way for liberation; along with this, women were also revered. Scenarios and perceptions have changed in India: sex is taboo and crime rates against women have increased; sex and the woman's body aren't perceived as before. This contrast is shown in the paper using Bronfenbrenner's theory, which focuses on the importance of the parent's and teacher's influence on behaviour shaping and attitude change; Freud's theory, which highlights the importance of sex which shapes personality; and Maslow's theory, wherein the Tantra's concept of liberation and Maslow's self-actualisation are considered parallel. The paper shows the need for sex education and why it is important in perceiving the female body, because there is a scope for change in the current perception.

**Keywords:** Sex Education, Sigmund Freud, Abraham Maslow, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, Women's body, perceptions

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<sup>37</sup>Khushboo Agarwal is a final-year undergraduate student of Psychology at St. Mira's College for Girls, Pune. She has been guided in the present paper by Ms. Roma Dar, Assistant Professor at the same college.

## INTRODUCTION

Sex is a primary drive: a basic nature of all living creatures that needs to be fulfilled, which is then manifested into behaviours. Though sex is covertly one of the most pervasive topics today, it is not discussed and understood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By discussion, I mean communication of sexual values, beliefs and understanding of a sexual matter. The constant dialogue about sex in ancient India is a contrast from today's absence of dialogue between generations and peers. Moreover, State Governments and a few organisations have protested open discussions in schools on the topic of sex, citing reasons like talking about sex is not Indian culture and that it corrupts young minds. But forbidden topics encourage transgression and chances for an individual's attitude to be negatively impacted is high in adolescence. This explains how individuals who reported using television for companionship were likely to agree that sex is recreational, that men are sexually driven, that women are sexual objects, and that their bodies are disrespected (Ward & Friedman, 2006). Exposure to unrealistic views of sex has a negative impact on sexual development<sup>38</sup>. Significantly, this shows that the right knowledge at right time can lead to a change in attitude towards sex. Those who change their attitude about sex may change their perceptions about women and their bodies.

Since I major in psychology, I will examine the perception of the general population towards sex and the female body and attempt to explain how these behaviours are manifested. I will glance at how sex was perceived in ancient Indian culture in 1600 CE and contrast it with the current scenario on sex education in India, thereby exposing the gap in perception of the female body. This will be done through the application of theories: Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SHAPING OF PERCEPTIONS?

Bronfenbrenner's model is a process-person-context-time model. In order to obtain an accurate understanding of human development, one needs to understand the dynamic relationship between individual and context, the person with their biological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural characteristics, the context or systems and the time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a, 2005b)<sup>39</sup>. This means that human development is conceptualised by complex, correlative interaction of microsystem (family, peers, partner, and biology), mesosystem (interaction between two microsystems), exosystem (School, community, media), macrosystem (gender, culture, religion) and chronosystem (experiences, life events). After the microsystem, the exosystem influences attitudes and shapes behaviour, therefore, the exosystem can also restore attitudes through healthy conversation about the female body as they were in ancient India. When we talk about the macrosystem (culture and religion), another psychological research shows that "sociocultural influences on sexual attitudes and behaviour also exist and may be a source of psychological stress...religious upbringing may also foster a sense of guilt about sex and interest in sex."<sup>40</sup> In my research, I have found that this model, though theoretically sound, is not really followed by the society under my study. It is observed by me that an individual's sexual attitudes are constructed not from *responsible* sources in the microsystem, like the parents, but rather peers. The responsible source in the exosystem is not teachers, but media. In present-day India, young individuals receive the wrong information through the exosystem like advertisements, movies, songs, etc. with incomplete information presented by school systems, the government's initiatives or healthcare and parents. This lapse may happen due to any reason: shyness, inapproachability, miscommunication...Therefore, this model indicates the importance of teachers, parents, government and healthcare to teach sex education to shape behaviours, which leads to a healthy society. Indirectly, there seems to be no outlet to solving

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<sup>38</sup>Jones, Kathryn E, et al. "Sexological Systems Theory: An Ecological Model and Assessment Approach for Sex Therapy." 2011, pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0f90/94a84fdc9141577bf4786e7f80bf7c0759e7.pdf.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid

<sup>40</sup>Page 420S. Ciccarelli and G. Meyer. *Psychology: South Asian Edition*. Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd., licensees of Pearson Education in South Asia, 2008.

doubts that a growing child might have concerning their changing bodies. Therefore, to change the attitude towards women; schools, parents and health care systems should take up the responsibility to provide complete information and solve doubts that growing children have concerning their changing bodies rather than getting misguided from media, peers, etc.

Let us try to understand the result if the responsibility by the various systems isn't practiced. According to the National Crimes Records Bureau, in 2016 the rape of minor girls increased by 82% compared with the previous year. According to Childline-India,

Over 50% of the girls surveyed in rural India and 6.7% of the girls in urban India were unaware of the meaning of menstruation. A very low percentage of girls in both groups were aware of the importance and the reasons behind the menstrual cycle, correct marriage age, safe sex, use of contraceptives, and knowledge about family planning, or health issues, such as anaemia, unsafe abortions, miscarriage, and sexual exploitation...<sup>41</sup>

This is because more than 30% of Indian states have rejected the federal government-supported sex education program. The reason for its recent introduction is “for adolescents for safety measures”<sup>42</sup>. But what is sex education? According to Planned Parenthood,

Sex education is high-quality teaching and learning about a broad variety of topics related to sex and sexuality, exploring values and beliefs about those topics and gaining the skills that are needed to navigate relationships and manage one's own sexual health.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, sex education should impart mutual respect and ways to have the right kind of sex (consent, feelings, understanding, protection). According to the model stated above, it becomes important for micro and exosystems to inculcate knowledge- functioning of another's body as well as theirs. Thus, some branches of the exosystem seem to be absolving themselves of responsibility for shaping perceptions of sex in the microsystem.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

According to the Humanistic perspective, Abraham Maslow proposed

There are several levels of needs that a person must strive to meet before achieving the highest level of personality fulfilment. Self-actualisation is the point that is seldom reached at which people have satisfied the lower needs (hunger, thirst, fatigue, sex) and achieved their full human potential.

This model helps understand the importance of directing the individual's lower needs to grow. If an individual is fully functioning then the microsystem automatically grows, crimes against women's body decreases and awareness towards sexual health increases.

Ciccarelli writes about Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytical theory, “There is an unconscious (unaware) mind into which we push, or repress, all of our threatening urges and desires. These repressed urges, in trying to surface, created the nervous disorders in the patients.”<sup>44</sup> Freud also focuses on ‘Libido’ “the instinctual energy that may come into conflict with the demands of the society's standard of behaviour.” Therefore, he says “Id makes demands to fulfil basic needs, superego is the moral or

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<sup>41</sup> Mehta, Apoorva. *Need for Sexual and Reproduction Awareness amongst Adolescents*. [www.legalservicesindia.com/article/2592/Need-for-sexual-and-reproduction-awareness-amongst-adolescents.html](http://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/2592/Need-for-sexual-and-reproduction-awareness-amongst-adolescents.html).

<sup>42</sup> Buraah, Maitreyee. “National Education Policy 2016: Schools to Finally Impart Regular Sex Education Classes?” 4 Aug. 2016, [www.oneindia.com/india/national-education-policy-2016-schools-to-finally-impart-sex-education-2172379.html](http://www.oneindia.com/india/national-education-policy-2016-schools-to-finally-impart-sex-education-2172379.html).

<sup>43</sup> *What Is Sex Education?* [www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/for-educators/what-sex-education](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/for-educators/what-sex-education).

<sup>44</sup> S. Ciccarelli and G. Meyer. *Psychology: South Asian Edition*. Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd., licensee of Pearson Education in South Asia, 2008. Page 11

societal restrictions to those demands and Ego comes up with a middle path to satisfy the Superego and quiet the Id.”<sup>45</sup>

## IN THE PAST

Let us equate the Freudian perspective to the Tantras: The Id may be the physiological need to satisfy sexual desire, the Ego the Tantras, and the Superego stands for societal norms. The Tantras bridged the gap between societal norms and physiological needs. Sinha, K.P. in his research “Vedic Origin of the Tantric Practices” mentioned, “In the non-Vedic Tantras<sup>46</sup>the greater concession has been given to the sensual pleasures and feelings of the common human beings. The Karma-Kanda or the path of action is meant for the preservation and smooth running of society (Superego) and Jnana Kanda or the path of knowledge leads men to liberation... The practices prescribed in Tantra embrace both the elements of enjoyment (Ego) and renunciation found in Karma-Kanda and jñāna-kānda, respectively.” The practice in ancient India was to teach responsible sexual practices that balance society's harmony (Superego) as well as one's physiological needs (Ego). Maslow's theory earlier stated that for an individual to function smoothly, his lower needs should be directed first for him to reach self-actualisation, which is known as renunciation in the Jnana Kanda.<sup>47</sup> A healthy microsystem is born when an individual is fully-functioning, i.e. if their Id (sexual urges) is satisfied. Therefore, directing the needs is more important than suppressing it—an act which may cause behavioural disorders.

The Tantric practice (Id) is described by Biernacki Loriliai,

Practice is more about an attitude than a technique—about listening to women, not forcing them to mechanically fulfil his own desires. As we see in teachings of the Kali Practice in the Brhannila Tantra, "women should not ever be coerced (hathad) not even mentally Coercion comes from repression. What the sex rite teaches us here, as we find it particularly in the Brhannila Tantra, is about shifting away from an idea of male mastery over women and over the body through the satisfaction of physiological needs.

This attitude is possible if the exosystem tries to instil it through sex education, bringing in realistic and complete facts about sex<sup>48</sup>.

The Sakta Tantra says, with extreme sensitivity and respect, that women are goddesses irrespective of their caste, creed, status; even widows, lower-caste women, and prostitutes. Sakta Tantra doesn't make any gender evaluation in that they don't consider women subordinate to men. All physical processes such as her breath, her physical acts like postures and gestures, and her biological processes such as menstrual cycle and bodily substances are sacred manifestations of the goddess. Tantra honours both the physical woman of flesh and blood and her energy in the bodily fluids. For example, In Mysore, a stronghold of mother-right, the native customs have influenced even the Brahmans, who celebrate the first menses with great rejoicing. The girl and her friends dance and sing amorous songs. Prayers are offered to her generative organs; her vulva is smeared with honey and called “the second mouth of the Creator.” This indicates women's revered position in ancient culture which has changed drastically in today's scenario 41. There are many cultural pieces of evidence to prove how women were treated previously and how it is today.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid, Page 483

<sup>46</sup>Vedas are the oldest scriptures; a non-Vedic Tantra simply means that it doesn't follow certain principles of the Vedas.

<sup>47</sup>Sinha, K P. “Vedic Origin of the Tantric Practices.” pp. 195–196.

<sup>48</sup>Biernacki, Loriliai. “Sex Talk and Gender Rites: Women and the Tantric Sex Rites.” Vol. 10, ser. 2, Aug. 2006, p. 187. 2.

The paper doesn't propose a complete solution to attitudes towards sex and the female body, though it focuses on the possibility of change and reasons for the current state of affairs as stated earlier. Exceptions may be seen everywhere, and it is difficult to objectively gauge perceptions in ancient Indian society towards sex; but it is assumed the texts represent prevalent thought of the time.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I focus on the importance of sex values. Psychological theories, through parallels drawn to the Tantras, prove the importance of physiological needs, various systems on attitude shaping and how it enhances one's psychological wellbeing. It helps people build a positive outlook towards sex by talking about it, celebrating the female body by creating awareness and knowing its mechanism. The result hoped for is that society does not deviate from societal norms or try to transgress rules due to doubts pertaining to sex. Hopefully sex shouldn't be considered a tabooed topic, many problems such as sex assault towards women hopefully decrease, sexually assaulted women open up, girls will be aware of the dangers pertaining to sexual health and the educated would know how to apply this knowledge in an optimal way where they don't reduce their physiological stressors harmfully. If I've to speak this culturally, even the Tantras talk about 'sex talk' as a crucial benefactor to uplift women or empower women, seeing them in a respectful and dignified position by acceptance of their body as divine.<sup>49</sup>

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## THE BURNING DEBATE: CAN A WOMAN’S MEANS-TO-MOTHERHOOD CHALLENGE THE VOW TO CELIBACY OF LORD AYYAPPA?

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**Abstract:** The paper focuses on the Sabarimala case, where everyone in Kerala is torn between whether to let women into the temple or not. An introduction to the divinity of the temple and the importance of the 41-day cleansing period, and the rituals that people go through before visiting the temple and why women cannot do that because of their periods, has been given. The paper also includes the political views and standpoints regarding the issue and the decision of the Supreme Court. There are also the testimonies of women with varying thoughts about the whole issue and how they justify their decision whether they should be allowed into the temple or not. The paper also questions why periods is considered as impure and why women are refrained from going to this temple just because they are adolescents. Will the divinity of the God be affected by a human’s presence? Human rights and the right to worship extends not only to men, but also to women. In conclusion, women should not be banned from going into Sabarimala under the pretext of them being impure during their periods, and making them see their body, not as an impure vessel but as a natural frame which undergoes menstruation as part of their bodily functions and in a way, re-perceive their ideas about their bodies.

**Keywords:** Sabarimala, menstruation, divinity, myths, re-perception of body

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## THE LORE OF AYYAPPA SWAMI

Sabarimala is a sacred temple situated in the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Pathanamthita district of the southern state of Kerala. The temple attracts approximately 45 to 50 million devotees every year. Sabarimala is the abode to *Swami Ayyappa*, who is a *Naishtika Brahmachari*, or one who is sworn to celibacy till death. The pilgrimage to this sacred temple is a privilege only to male devotees. Women who have not yet hit their puberty, that is, those below the age of 10 years and women above 50 years, who have attained menopause, only are permitted to visit this temple. In short, menstruating women are not allowed into the temple as the age old belief is that it would mar the sanctity of the temple. This paper attempts to explore whether a woman's menstruation challenges the vow to celibacy of the God.

According to Hindu mythology<sup>51</sup>, *Swami Ayyappa* was the son of Lord *Shiva* and *Mohini* (the feminine incarnation of Lord *Vishnu*), born to slay the demoness *Mahishi*. He was adopted by the childless King of *Pandalam*. Though the queen gave birth to a child subsequently, the King was in favour of *Ayyappa* being his heir. The lore has it that as a ploy to remove him from his brother's path to succession, he was sent to the dense, dangerous forest to bring a cure for his foster mother's stomach ailment. It is said that *Ayyappa* fulfilled the purpose of his incarnation by slaying the vicious demoness *Mahishi* in the forest where he was sent. He returned triumphantly riding a tiger followed by a family of tigers bearing the cure. He then gave up his right to the throne and swore to be a celibate for life. His valour was hailed and a temple was built on top of one of the eighteen hills of Sabarimala. Lord *Ayyappa* came to be known as the *Kaliyuga Varada* (The God of the modern times). The temple is considered sacred and pure and so, everyone who wishes to enter the temple and pray to the lord has to undergo a 41-day cleansing period during which the devotee has to live the life of a brahmachari giving up all worldly pleasures. The devotee dresses in black and wears holy beads around the neck. During this period, the devotee is considered to be one with the Lord and is addressed as *Swami*. Women are not allowed to enter the temple as it is commonly believed that they cannot undergo the 41-day cleansing period because of their monthly menstrual cycle.

## THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE SUPREME COURT VERDICT

A section of the Hindu society and some of the thinkers of the state believe that it is discriminatory to not allow women of menstruating age to have equal right to pray to the God. Traditionally, women of menstrual age did not enter the temple, because of the age-old belief that *Ayyappa* is a celibate God. However, there are evidences that show that till 1990, women were allowed entry, and that women participated in the *Chooroonu/Annaprashan* (First rice-feeding) ritual, being held there. In 1986, a Tamil film was shot in front of the *Pathinettam Padi* (the eighteen sacred steps in front of the sanctum sanctorum), featuring young female artists. It is only since the last 55 years that the rules disallowing entry of women of menstruating age have become more stringent. A fire accident<sup>52</sup> in the *sannidhanam* (sanctum sanctorum) in 1950, called for the reconstruction of the temple. The year 1969 witnessed the erection of a *dhwajam* (flag staf)<sup>53</sup>, which marked the ban of entry of women of menstruating age. In 1991 a PIL<sup>54</sup> was filed by S Mahendran which stated that the first rice-feeding (*Chooroonu/Annaprashan*) of the granddaughter of former Devaswom Commissioner Smt. Chandrika was held at the *sannidhanam* in the presence of her 22 year old daughter and that special entry was possible for wives of VIPs. Following this the High Court of Kerala banned the entry of women to legalise the practice of not allowing women to enter the temple premises.

<sup>51</sup> Pathak, Prateek. "Do You Know the Story of Lord Ayyappa?" SPEAKINGTREE.IN, 6 December, 2018, [www.speakingtree.in/allslides/do-you-know-the-story-of-ayyappa](http://www.speakingtree.in/allslides/do-you-know-the-story-of-ayyappa). Accessed 16 January, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Onmanorama Staff. "Mystery Fire in Sabarimala in 1950." Onmanorama, 31 October, 2018, <https://english.manoramaonline.com/news/kerala/2018/10/30/sabarimala-temple-fire-1950.html>. Accessed 16 January, 2019. <sup>53</sup> Cris. "How Long has the ban on women entering Sabarimala existed?" The News Minute, 1 October, 2018, [www.thenewsminute.com/article/how-long-has-ban-women-entering-sabarimala-existed-debate-ensues-89279](http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/how-long-has-ban-women-entering-sabarimala-existed-debate-ensues-89279). Accessed 16 January, 2019.

<sup>54</sup> S Mahendran vs. The Secretary, Travancore ... on 5 April 1991 Indian Kanoon, 5 April, 1991, [indiankanoon.org/doc/1915943/](http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1915943/). Accessed 16 January, 2019.

In August 2006, six women of the Indian Lawyers Association submitted a PIL, which sought to legalise the entry of women between the age of 10 and 50 to Sabarimala temple. The case was presented to a five-judge bench, including Dipak Misra, the chief justice of India. After an eight day hearing which took place in July, they passed their verdict on August 1, 2018, lifting the ban on women entering Sabarimala. The verdict was based on Articles 14 (right to equality), 15 (prohibition of discrimination) and 17 (untouchability). The Supreme Court ruled that the ban on the entry of women of menstruating age cannot be protected by “morality” based on Articles 25 (freedom to practice and propagation of religion) and 26 (Freedom to manage religious affairs)<sup>55</sup>. Despite the Supreme Court ruling, there is widespread unrest amongst the devotees in Kerala and the political parties and no woman devotee has been able to visit the temple till date.

Arguments in favour of and against the ban are raging. Everything boils down to the purity or otherwise of a woman during menstruation. During the menstruating age, will a mortal woman be a challenge to the vow-to-celibacy of God himself? Will her presence mar the sanctity of His abode? Is it important to dwell on age-old practices which lay siege on the path to progress? A detailed look at the arguments and the happenings of the past few months may pave way to the answer to this seemingly impossible conundrum.

The scientific reason for calling a woman impure in the olden days may have been because of the lack of sanitary products and the lack of awareness about the functioning of a woman’s body. Women used to use cloth, leaves, and such other things as sanitary precautions, leading to the spreading of lots of diseases. This may have been the reason as to why a menstruating woman was made to live in a different abode, away from the other family members. Although, now, with the discovery of sanitary napkins, and awareness about menstruation in general, the risks of diseases spreading has come down drastically, and has enabled women to live a hygienic life, even during their menstruation.

Thus, to answer the questions posted above, it is time to let go of the age old practices and re-perceive a woman’s body and her menstruation as any other normal bodily function. Menstruation does not make a woman impure, and it would, in no way, mar the sanctity or celibacy of the Lord. Women should be given the freedom to worship Lord Ayyappa just as freely as men do.

## **THE VIEWS REGARDING THE BAN AS EXPRESSED BY PEOPLE FROM VARIOUS STRATA OF THE SOCIETY**

The August 1 2018 verdict of the Supreme Court saw widespread uprisings across the state of Kerala. Devotees of Lord Ayyappa took to the streets in a novel peaceful protest by chanting prayers to Lord Ayyappa (*Namajapa yatra*)<sup>56</sup>, seeking the reiteration of the ban. Such yatras snowballed across the state and were heavily represented by women. Political parties cashed in on the naivety of the millennials which gave a violent twist to the protests. Women who tried to enter Sabarimala were waylaid by factions of the self-proclaimed devotees and were forced to return without the bliss of a *darshan*. Devotees turned out in huge numbers at Nilakkal, the base camp of Sabarimala. They took it upon themselves to stop every single woman who attempted to climb the hill to reach the temple. The *Namajapa* (chanting of prayers) continued at the base camp. The police were unable to ensure the entry of women to the temple despite massive efforts from their side. Activist Rehana Fathima, a Muslim woman who wanted to break stereotypes, in an attempt to fight the age old regressive practice, tried to enter the temple. "She has hurt the sentiments of lakhs of Hindu devotees", said the Council in a press release<sup>57</sup>. Fathima, is a Muslim, who wanted to question religious orthodox customs and traditions. The bold attempt of a woman of a different religion enraged the Hindu devotees and

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<sup>55</sup> TNM Staff. “Historic judgement: SC allows entry to women of all age groups into Sabarimala” The News Minute, 28 September, 2018, [www.thenewsminute.com/article/historic-judgement-sc-allows-entry-women-all-age-groups-sabarimala-89099](http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/historic-judgement-sc-allows-entry-women-all-age-groups-sabarimala-89099). Accessed 16 January, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> SIFY. “Women’s entry in Sabarimala temple: Devotees organise Ayyappa Nama Japa Yatra against SC verdict” sify news, 9 October, 2018, [www.sify.com/news/women-s-entry-in-sabarimala-temple-devotees-organise-ayyappa-nama-japa-yatra-against-sc-verdict-news-national-skjxkCdbjejb.html](http://www.sify.com/news/women-s-entry-in-sabarimala-temple-devotees-organise-ayyappa-nama-japa-yatra-against-sc-verdict-news-national-skjxkCdbjejb.html). Accessed 16 January, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Kundu, Chayan. “Rehana Fathima, expelled from community for trying to enter Sabarimala, is no stranger to controversies” India Today, 22 October, 2018, [www.indiatoday.in/india/story/rehana-fathima-expelled-from-community-for-trying-to-enter-sabarimala-is-no-stranger-to-controversies-1372469-2018-10-21](http://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/rehana-fathima-expelled-from-community-for-trying-to-enter-sabarimala-is-no-stranger-to-controversies-1372469-2018-10-21). Accessed 16 January, 2019.

they vandalised her house while she was attempting to climb the holy hill to reach the top of the temple. Many other women made failed attempts to reach the shrine.

Eleven women of *Manithi*<sup>58</sup>, a women's rights group from Chennai also faced similar resistance from the devotees although they were more in number. They had to return without fulfilling their wish to visit Lord Ayyappa.

Ultimately, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2019, two women succeeded in entering the temple and praying to Lord Ayyappa<sup>59</sup>. Following this, the temple was shut for purification rituals and reopened only after the rituals were completed. The entry of these women into the temple once again triggered widespread protests across the state.

People who are in support of the ban cite 'impurity' of women during menstruating age as the main reason for disallowing women from entering the temple. Also, it is argued that the celibacy of Lord Ayyappa was at risk if women of menstruating age came in the vicinity of the sanctum sanctorum. It is also said that facilities for bathing etc, were not available in the area due to which women would find it difficult. In earlier times, when the forests were dense, the safety of women was an issue, due to which women were discouraged from making the trek up the hill.

"Issues of deep religious sentiments should not be ordinarily be interfered by the court," *Live Law* quoted Justice Indu Malhotra as saying. Hers was the only dissenting voice among the members of the Supreme Court bench which put forth the verdict on Sabarimala.

Interviewing women of different parts of Kerala, helped in understanding the mindset of these women. "It is a sin to enter the sacred temple. Our Lord is a *Naishtika Brahmachari*. We would never disobey the divine law and defile the temple by entering it. The women who wish to visit the temple can go after menopause," said Lakshmi Devi, an 82 year old lady who is a resident of Valanchery, in the Malappuram District. The shocking part was that even the educated women of Kerala refused to enter the temple in Sabarimala. They consider the involvement of the judicial system as wrong to interfere in the matters of the Lord and the temple affairs. The myths and tales of Sabarimala and Lord Ayyappa is so deeply ingrained in the women of Kerala that they are willing to ignore their education and blindly believe in the divine laws.

The good news is that, there are several other women in Kerala, who believe in the equality of genders and appreciate the Supreme Court judgement of allowing women into Sabarimala temple. "Women should certainly be allowed into the temple. I believe the divinity of god is way above the temporal existence of humans and would never be tainted by the entry of female mortals. Menstruation is what makes us capable of procreation and it is what forwards the mankind. If this fact is taken into consideration, there wouldn't be a physiological process purer than menstruation," says Sreekala Karunakaran, Principal of SBOA Senior Secondary School, Ernakulam.

## THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE SUPREME COURT ORDER

The verdict on Sabarimala was delivered by a five-judge constitution bench comprising Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra and Justices R.F. Nariman, A.M. Khanwilkar, D.Y. Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra.

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<sup>58</sup> M.K., Nidheesh. "Protesters stop eleven women trying to enter Sabarimala shrine" *livemint*, 24 December, 2018, [www.livemint.com/Politics/bbodgnlf7qlfVpoFrEHDJ/Protesters-stop-11-women-trying-to-enter-Sabarimala-shrine.html](http://www.livemint.com/Politics/bbodgnlf7qlfVpoFrEHDJ/Protesters-stop-11-women-trying-to-enter-Sabarimala-shrine.html). Accessed 16 January, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Schultz, Kai and Venkataraman, Ayesha. "2 Indian Women Enter Sabarimala Temple, Setting Off Protests Near Hindu Shrine" *The New York Times*, 2 January, 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/01/02/world/asia/india-women-wall-sabarimala.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/02/world/asia/india-women-wall-sabarimala.html). Accessed 16 January, 2019.

“Rule 3(b) of 1965 Rules is a clear violation of right of Hindu women to practice religion under Article 25,” Misra ruled. “The right guaranteed under Article 25 has nothing to do with gender or physiological factors.”

“The bar on entry of women between age of 10 and 50 years is not an essential part of the religion,” the Chief Justice of India was quoted by *Bar and Bench*.

Justice Nariman read his concurring judgment, saying, “There is no protection under Article 26 for Ayyappa devotees and therefore the rules will not apply insofar as Sabarimala is concerned.”

“Rules disallowing women in Sabarimala are unconstitutional and violative of Article 21,” Justice Nariman said.

In his concurring judgment, Justice Chandrachud held that “Article 25 protects all persons, it means every individual in the society.”

### **THE PULSE OF THE PROGRESSIVE LOT**

“Prohibition of women’s entry is a form of untouchability. The sole basis of restriction is menstruation of women. Menstruating women are seen as polluted,” said Indira Jaising, Senior Advocate, representing Happy To Bleed foundation<sup>60</sup>. Jaising was of the opinion that not allowing women to enter the temple because the deity is celibate is like stereotyping all women as seductresses.

A faction of people believe that God is for everyone and that everyone should have equal right to pray. This means that women should have the same right as men to pray to God irrespective of physiological differences. The rituals are age-old and hence not suited to *Kaliyuga Varadha*, the God of modern times. The question also remains whether Ayyappa being God will be enticed by mortal women, and the fact remains that women who visit the temple are there to pray to the God and not entice him. The 41 days penance is possible for women too as they are as devout and religious as men, notwithstanding the fact that Malikapurathamma, the female deity is already present in the premises. Malikapurathamma was Mahishi, who reconciled and was relieved that she was rid of the curse by the grace of Lord Ayyappa. It is also important to remember that if women did not menstruate the physiological process of childbirth would not be possible, which means that the process of procreation would come to a standstill. God has created women with these processes built in. He would never ban women from visiting Him.

“... she does not believe in a force she has not felt in her body, she does not dare to be enterprising, to revolt, to invent; doomed to docility, to resignation, she can only accept a place that society has already made for her.”

These lines by Simone De Beauvoir, in her essay, *The Second Sex*<sup>61</sup>, puts into perspective every woman’s state of mind. In spite of being educated, the women in Kerala are too scared to revolt against the patriarchal norms and a man’s perception of their body and menstruation.

### **TO CONCLUDE**

The conflicts and unrests are between people who believe in equality and people who believe in age old customs and traditions upholding the divinity of the temple and Lord Ayyappa. . There are women in Kerala who are for the Supreme Court verdict and others who are against it. They think women should not be allowed to enter the sacred precincts of the temple.

The Hindu women of Kerala, who have been brought up with the sacred stories of Lord Ayyappa, find it outrageous to want to enter the temple while their menstrual cycle is still active. They truly believe

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<sup>60</sup> Isaac, Anna. “Should Sabarimala temple open its doors to women? Here are the arguments heard in court” The News Minute, 27 September, 2018, [www.thenewsminute.com/article/should-sabarimala-temple-open-its-doors-women-here-are-arguments-heard-court-89070](http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/should-sabarimala-temple-open-its-doors-women-here-are-arguments-heard-court-89070). Accessed 16 January, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> De Beauvoir, Simone. “The Second Sex”, translated by Alfred A. Knopf, Random House Inc., May, 2011.

in the age old customs and consider it best to obey the laws of the temple and the will of the god and to not go to the temple and make it impure. This raises an age old question. Since when did period blood begin to be considered as impure? Hinduism has always considered menstruating women and menstrual blood as impure. This arises from various myths, one of which is even stated in the Vedas. When Indira had killed a *Brahmin*, he had been accursed. The women offered to take away his guilt of having slain a *Brahmin*. This guilt manifests itself each month in the form of menstruation in women, which is why it is considered impure. Such myths ultimately lead to confinement of women during their periods and them not being allowed even inside their own house, as a house was considered a temple in Hindu culture. But with changing times, it is high time, the myths were challenged and people give scientific and logical explanations to things. Science clearly proves that menstruation is nothing but a woman's means to motherhood, shattering the myth around menstruation. Unfortunately, it will take time for people to change their mind-set to accept it as such.

The most important thing to consider is that periods is a natural phenomenon that women go through, which was given to them by nature. It is the patriarchal society that termed periods as impure to further strengthen their stand that men are the stronger gender of the two.

Kerala is known for its progressive approach as a society. It is a state with high literacy, healthcare and sanitation indices, which leads the other states in its stride. Kerala has overcome regressive customs and beliefs to emerge as a state with forward thinking. The literacy of its people has moulded their minds to become more inclusive and secular in nature. The recent floods also have shown the resilient nature of the people and their feeling that they are one family. As a progressive state, the people of Kerala must create and accept changes that will help maintain equality among themselves and avoid discrimination of all kinds. It is possible to believe that the people of Kerala will not let frivolous, politics-driven campaigns over-power them and divide the state in the name of religion and God. Everyone has equal right to worship and no gender should be banned from worshipping their Lord.

The process of menstruation is as normal as any other physiological process and there is nothing impure about it. Age old customs and the patriarchal view of a woman's body and the "purity" of menstruation should be done away with and it should be treated like any other bodily function, crucial for procreation. Just because a woman is menstruating and is capable of reproduction, does not mean that she is a seductress. The women who wish to visit the temple are devotees of the Lord and wish to get the blessings of Lord Ayyappa just as the men do. It is time to re-perceive a woman's body and allow a woman the right to worship Lord Ayyappa at the Sabarimala temple like everyone else.

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## FEMALES AS REPRODUCERS AND PRODUCERS OF ART

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**Abstract:** The patriarchal society in the world has got women stuck in quicksand; the more they try to get out of it, the quicker they sink in. This paper expands on a notion that was internalised by women—to fit in only a selective range of behaviour and actions approved by society. Their role as a wife and a mother—at an early age—not only limited their chances to explore their interests in the field of art, but also initiated a problem which was almost impossible to decipher. The protest against the 'housewifery' role assigned to women came in through the Miss America Protest - 1968 revealing the unrealistic standards of the feminine body. Using the theories of Betty Friedan, F N Souza, Simone De Beauvoir and Hélène Cixous, this paper explores how women were encumbered into the possibility to only reproduce when it is also possible for them to be inspiring producers of art.

**Key Words:** The Jetsons, Women and art, female creators, patriarchal society, reproduce, producers of art, Miss America Protest.

### Females as Reproducers and Producers of Art

*Going about her daily chores she often listens to music, swirls her laced frock to the beats of her favourite jams; hums to herself while the city is fallen into the hustling-bustling monotony. She is a woman. A woman who is complete in her role but deterred in her spirit. The reason unnamed but known. The solution evident but not taken to. However, she is a woman—before a housewife.*

### The Jetsons

#### *An Internalised Notion*

What is the function of a woman? Is it "Kinder, Küche, Kirche"<sup>63</sup> in the words of Betty Friedan. Or is she to be beautiful, prim and feminine in her ways. The fact that a 'woman is beautiful', *is* beautiful. But the notion that beautiful is perfect—is the product of unrealistic beauty standards. In the late 20th century, when the idea of a perfect female body was different than that of today's, the women were 'supposed' to be absolute looking. They always had a public image to maintain and follow.

For instance, reflecting the reality of the times, aired a cartoon show named *The Jetsons* in 1962. The show portrayed the life of its characters in the year 2062. The 33 year old<sup>64</sup> female lead, Jane Jetson, is shown to have an exaggerated need of being up-to-date with the latest fashion. What is more, she also wished she "...was only 32-22-32 again."<sup>65</sup> If the episode is taken to be a reflection of the times *The Jetsons* comes from, then an intriguing snippet is a reflection and a critic of the notion of 'Ideal-Body-Type' for the female. In other words, how a female should appear in society. In Episode 4, while the Jetsons receive an unexpected video call from Jane's friend Gloria early in the morning<sup>66</sup>; Jane is instantly worried, for her appearance is that of any 'morning-face' a person could

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<sup>63</sup>"...a German phrase echoed in my mind—'Kinder, Küche, Kirche', the slogan by which the Nazis decreed that women must once again be confined to their biological role." Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, The Penguin Group.

<sup>64</sup>Season 1/Episode 1 - *Rosey the Robot*, Jane Jetson says at 2:28 min, "Don't be smart. You know I'm only 33...". <sup>65</sup>Season 1/Episode 1 - *Rosey the Robot*, Jane Jetson says at 2:49 min, "If I was only 16 again. In fact, if I was only 32-22-32 again".

<sup>66</sup>Season 1/Episode 4 - *The Space Car*, Release Country and Date: US, October 14, 1962; Accessed December 29, 2018; 13:12.

possibly have. She (Jane) exclaims, “Gloria, oh dear! I can’t let her see me looking like this. I got to put on my morning mask.”

As soon as she has donned her morning mask, she reaches to the screen to speak to her friend Gloria. Interestingly, Gloria is startled by the perfection that Jane fakes and the former compliments, “Jane, darling! Don’t you look lovely! How do you do it!” While Jane and Gloria have their chat, Gloria suddenly sneezes and her morning mask snaps off and her expression is clearly that of embarrassment. The audience in the background is heard laughing throughout the scene. Looking into this snippet objectively, it is clear that the standards of female beauty have been very rigid; as an outcome of the patriarchal norms that govern the female strata and their roles.

### **The Unrealistic Standards**

The image a female body conjures is that of reproduction. While the ‘Ideal Man’ is supposed to be chivalrous and earn the bread and butter for his family, the ‘Ideal Woman’ is supposed to reproduce and look after the household. “The outside world belonged to men, and women belonged in the home” states Ai Ra Kim.<sup>67</sup> The designated role that defined the operations carried out by the male and the female entities were so inflexible that they proved to be a stumbling block for the development of women.

The roles assigned by the patriarchal society conditioned women to almost forget what their life could actually consist of—other than looking perfect, marrying and bearing children. This was one of the reasons why women in the Miss America Protest were pointing at “Let’s judge ourselves as people”<sup>68</sup>. As Simone De Beauvoir frames the idea in her book *The Second Sex*, “The defiant position that American women occupy proves they are haunted by the feeling of their own femininity.”<sup>69</sup> The statement, however, turns out to be universal. “Feminist economists and sociologists have also shown how women’s role in parenting constrains their ability to pursue careers and compete for demanding jobs.” (Bergmann 1986, Folbre 1994).<sup>70</sup>

The slogans for protest which took to the streets of Atlantic City, were primarily against the maxim of ‘Ideal Beauty’ set by the patriarchal governed society. But it also stood against the fact that women during those times were mostly taught to ensnare the men by their beauty to catch them for marriage.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Problem that Must not be Named - Then**

Talking of the *beauty-to-catch-the-men* syndrome, one cannot forego the talk about the book *The Feminine Mystique*. Women were allowed to attend university only to learn about the subtle art of being feminine, catching men for marriage and handling children. Friedan names it all, listing the roles women should know like, “...how to cope with sibling rivalry and adolescent rebellion...how to dress, look, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting...”<sup>72</sup> The influence of the society, in those times, was so impactful that women started to narrow the path for themselves, looking forward to bearing as many children as they could and forgot that they could have bright careers for themselves.<sup>73</sup> This conditioning led women to forget their full potential as women and they

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<sup>67</sup> AiRaKim. *Women Struggling For a New Life*, State University of New York Press, Albany (1996).<sup>68</sup>

Slogan from the picture sourced from National Public Radio:  
[media.npr.org/programs/morning/features/2008/sep/miss\\_america/protest2\\_540-1e8bb1ff9fa804aece5e05b1d2e8ac42a890183b.jpg](https://media.npr.org/programs/morning/features/2008/sep/miss_america/protest2_540-1e8bb1ff9fa804aece5e05b1d2e8ac42a890183b.jpg). Accessed January 14, 2019; 16:26

<sup>69</sup> Simone De Beauvoir. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Introduction by Natalie Haynes. *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books (New York).

<sup>70</sup> Satz, Debra. "Feminist perspectives on reproduction and the family." (2004).

<sup>71</sup> Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, The Penguin Group.

<sup>72</sup> Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, The Penguin Group (p13).

<sup>73</sup> “Women who had once wanted careers were now making careers out of having babies.” Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, The Penguin Group (p14).

became strangers to their true selves. As Julia Kristeva states in *Strangers to Ourselves*, “Or should one recognize that one becomes a foreigner in another country because one is already a foreigner from within?”<sup>74</sup>

Just when women thought that they were happy in their lives where everything was perfect, they realised that they missed something. One of the women in the book *The Feminine Mystique* noted, “The problem is always being the children’s mommy, or the minister’s wife and never being myself.”<sup>75</sup> The problems encountered, they thought, were trivial and they were convinced that their dissatisfaction was nothing to be serious about. Also, as Friedan puts it, “She was so ashamed to admit her dissatisfaction that she never knew how many other women shared it”.

The most intriguing fact that emerges from Friedan’s book is that when other women tried to be bohemian, the conventional race of women looked down upon them—be it “poets, or physicists or presidents”<sup>76</sup>. The unconventional women were not only oppressed by men but also by fellow women; which ultimately made them the subjects of double-victimisation.

In India, a few forms of art like singing, dancing or acting have negative connotations associated with them. Any female who was found in association with any of the forms of such art was assumed to be base. This notion turns out to be one of the reasons that led to the initial setback for women as creators of art. Women feared indulging in the field of art. Eventually, the fear was internalised. As Simone De Beauvoir notes, “Even when her rights are recognized abstractly, long-standing habit keeps them from being concretely manifested in customs.”<sup>77</sup>

## Art and its Producers - Now

Helene Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa*<sup>78</sup> states “Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard.” Creators of art often have an idea that they wish to put across through their creation. Their art, however simple, gives away a meaning. A famous quote by F N Souza justifies the attitude with which the creators of art play with their art, “I paint what I want, what I like, what I feel.”<sup>79</sup> Change is conspicuous and inevitable in today’s time. Not only has the definition of art changed over time but the negative connotations have also withered away. In the words of Francis Newton Souza art has become, “a theory which the artist practices. But for art man would die of boredom!”<sup>80</sup>

For Helene Cixous, if women cannot summon the courage to write, and build themselves through the process, they would remain helpless. Nonetheless, if she writes in secrecy thinking that writing is “too high, too great” an act for her, so great that it must be reserved for “great men” then it is silly of her to think so.<sup>81</sup> Cixous puts it out there straight and clear that, “By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her.” Just as a phoenix is born from its ashes, the **women of today** have to rise from the ashes of the prevalent notion of herself because the body is *hers* to live—before it is for others to judge.

The current creators have inspired many to go ahead in the field of art. They have set a benchmark for others in their respective field. Be it Kaneez Surka in the field of Improv comedy, taking ahead this unique genre or Megha Rao, in the field of poetry invoking, “despite it all, even if

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<sup>74</sup>Julia Kristeva. *Strangers to Ourselves*, Columbia University Press, (June 10th 1991)

<sup>75</sup>“The third, a minister’s wife, wrote on the 15th reunion questionnaire of her college that she never had any career ambitions, but wishes now she had.” p25. Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, The Penguin Group.

<sup>76</sup>“They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents.” Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, The Penguin Group (p13).

<sup>77</sup>Simone De Beauvoir. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Introduction by Natalie Haynes. *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books (New York).

<sup>78</sup>Hélène Cixous. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, The University of Chicago Press, 1976.

<sup>79</sup> Souza, Francis Newton. *Words & Lines*. Villiers, 1959.

<sup>80</sup> Souza, Francis Newton. *Words & Lines*. Villiers, 1959.

<sup>81</sup>“And why don’t you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven’t written. (And why I didn’t write before the age of twenty-seven.) Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it’s reserved for the great—that is for ‘great men’; and it’s ‘silly’” Hélène Cixous. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, The University of Chicago Press, 1976.

you bury me, my tombstone will read, I refuse to die. In capital letters”<sup>82</sup> and speaking about the various issues that disrupt the development of women empowerment. The social change that is brought about by her mother then and now herself, Harnidh Kaur, also stands up for the women while speaking her mind in her books.

### Conclusion

*The problem acknowledged, the quest for resolution started.*

Concluding the matter would be easy. But to conclude the norms, that shape the women into doing what she is ‘supposed’ to do, would be difficult. There is a wide scope for development yet to happen. The change has evidently started but our society still has a long way to go in terms of female productivity in art. Dorothy Parker in *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* states “I cannot be fair about books that treat women as women. My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, whoever we are, should be considered as human beings.”<sup>83</sup> The patriarchal norms that govern the female body are stagnant, however, the potential for change and progress will be inevitable when we treat one another as equals rather than superiors or inferiors.

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<sup>83</sup>Simone De Beauvoir. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Introduction by Natalie Haynes. *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books (New York).

# PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS MENSTRUATION: FROM THE VEDIC PERIOD TO THE PRESENT

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to examine and compare society's perception towards women and menstruation in the ancient and modern context. The first section looks at various Ayurvedic verses which discuss menstruation in detail, including the cause, treatment for disorders and things to do and not to do- all of them, proven to be beneficial and none restricting in any way. The second section looks at how the knowledge of Ayurveda was lost over time owing to religious invasions causing a decline in the use of Sanskrit language. There were also many restrictions laid upon women during this time which then took the form of strict conventions. The third section analyses how certain rituals, which were perhaps relevant once, are still pointlessly followed due to illiteracy and blind faith. We conclude by saying that in the name of tradition, a lot of women are oppressed and it is a way to maintain male supremacy.

**Keywords:** Menstruation, Ayurveda, Women, Women in Ancient India.

## Perceptions Towards Menstruation: From the Vedic Period to the Present

Menstruation is a topic that has been shied away from for centuries. Menstrual blood is considered disgusting and impure and a menstruating woman- even more so. According to Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex*, while writing about the body and menstruation. states that it is seen as a great burden on the woman's body, shameful and dangerous, the woman does her best to keep it hidden. Her body is considered as a menace, which betrays her and makes her feel endangered. The female body and menstruation is widely seen in such a negative light.

In India, in the name of tradition and culture, a menstruating woman is looked down upon and seen as filthy, as though something is wrong with her. However, talking about tradition, the Ayurveda, which is one of the most sacred and ancient medicinal sciences of our country, says something completely different about menstruation. The Sanskrit term 'Ayurveda' can be literally translated as Knowledge or Science of Life. Ayurveda is thought to have emanated from the Vedas - large body of texts originating in ancient India, over 5000 years ago<sup>85</sup>

Looking at the Ayurveda gives us a wider perspective and a deeper understanding of what our ancestors thought about menstruation and the way they perceived it. Ayurveda addresses the topic of menstruation in detail. It has various shlokas which talk about the cause of menstruation, the various disorders, and extensively detailed treatments for those disorders using scientific logic and reasoning. The knowledge of the Ayurveda acts as a myth-buster for all the illogical mal-practices followed even today in the name of tradition.

Ayurveda uses diet, lifestyle, five sense therapies, and herbs to try to help women with treating various problems. There is a text based on the Ayurveda, called the *Rajaswala Paricharya* which focuses on helping a woman gain better health and add quality to her life by following the various practises mentioned in there. The Ayurveda sees menstruation as a vital, highly beneficial and most natural process. According to the Ayurveda, menstruation is a naturally occurring 'shodhan' (i.e. cleansing) process occurring every month in the life of a fertile woman. This is evident as the do's and don'ts specified for a menstruating woman in the ayurveda are exactly the same as that of those

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<sup>85</sup>Sandhiya Ramaswamy. "Ayurveda – An ancient healing system's gifts to the Modern Woman", March 2010

mentioned in the 'Ashta-MahadoshkarBhav'- a section of the ayurveda which mentions the process that a person, man or woman, may follow to undergo a 'shodhan' or cleansing process. This list of the do's and don'ts a woman must follow is not restrictive for a woman in any way. These are mainly aimed at avoiding the imbalance of the various 'doshas' mentioned in the ayurveda which includes prevention of accumulation of toxins inside the body, restoring the woman's strength and balancing the digestive power during this period. The Rajaswala Paricharya says that a menstruating woman should be taken care of, just as a person who has undergone the 'shodhan' procedure has to be taken care of. Due to the physiological changes taking place in a menstruating woman, she has affinity towards, and is more vulnerable towards various diseases and hence she must rest and be comfortable during this period.

Sinu Joseph when speaking on Menstrual Health in India says, "Menstruation was considered to be a sacred process. Some people even believed that a menstruating woman had some kind of an energy inside her and men are believed to have relied on the wisdom and intuitive messages she shared to help them in their daily chores of hunting and in migrating." Although women having 'a kind of an intuitive energy' is clearly a myth, it was an empowering myth as menstruation was thereby seen as highly positive and sacred.

Each week in the menstruation cycle was considered to be distinctly different. The Menstruation Phase was believed to be a period of cleansing and removal of negative thoughts, when most women would feel the need to be silent and contemplative. The Pre-ovulation Phase was when the woman was at her energetic best. It was during this period that she was most creative and innovative. The Ovulation Phase was when women would look and feel more attractive. The last, the Pre-menstrual phase was when the woman would feel a rush of emotions and thoughts which did not occur at any other time. It was a highly intuitive phase and the messages coming to her at this time were taken very seriously. Owing to these four phases of the menstrual cycle, women, they believed, had all the four seasons within her body. The ovum was called *artava*, from the Sanskrit root '*rtu*' meaning season. '*Rtu*' also implies ritual suggesting that the rhythm of life comes from the ritual dance of the seasons<sup>86</sup>.

As we have seen above, Indians had an extensive and detailed knowledge about menstruation since ancient times. Why then, did we start following practices that were in no way beneficial but actually harmful to a menstruating woman? The reason is that we somewhere lost the knowledge of the Ayurveda and people started blindly following customs without knowing the actual reason behind it. In their desperation and determination to follow the 'age-old ancestral practises', they failed to see whether those practises had any relevance in their time and circumstances.

In North India, due to the decline in the number of practitioners of Ayurveda the knowledge of the Ayurveda declined. People with very limited knowledge of the shastras prescribed rituals which, unlike those in the ayurveda or in the Rajaswala Paricharya, had no base in scientific knowledge or logic. This loss of knowledge of the ayurveda was a result of many factors. Foreign invasion and the spread of Christianity and Islam contributed to the decline in the use of Sanskrit language. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, A.D. Persian was set up as the official language in key Sanskrit Scholarly centres. This removed Sanskrit from the Higher Circles of Education. Subsequently, only the Persian language versions were used widely in administrative circles. All fundings to shastra studies were discontinued by the invaders - This had a serious effect in terms of no major development taking place on the scientific front in Sanskrit . During the colonial period, the British discouraged the study of Sanskrit and of various Indian shastras, deeming them backward and undeveloped in order to promote the English language and the western way of learning<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Ayurveda – An ancient healing system's gifts to the Modern Woman Sandhiya Ramaswamy March 2010

<sup>87</sup> Dr. Krishnamurthi CG on Reasons for The Decline of Sanskrit (Quora, Nov. 2016)

“In ancient India, women occupied a very honourable position in society. But a momentous change took place during the medieval period. The outstanding change has been from freedom to bondage and from honour to disgrace.”<sup>88</sup>

“With the Mughal conquests, the position of Indian women suffered a major setback...This period also saw the imposition of numerous restrictions upon women. It was during this period that child marriage became immensely popular, women were discouraged from leaving the house and weren't allowed to roam around freely.”<sup>89</sup> We see instances of such restrictions being rigidly followed in some parts and communities even today where the woman is kept inside the house, especially when on her periods.

Although such practises are mild in some cases, in some others they are so severe that they have even led to the deaths of a lot of women. According to an article in *The Times of India*, Dec 2 2018, the practise of isolating menstruating women in mud huts is still alive in tribal areas of Eastern Maharashtra, and it's claiming lives. According to this practise, every time a woman gets her period, she is forced to leave home and go to a 'period hut' known as 'kurmaghar' or 'gaokar' ('turtle house' literally in the local language). It is located on the outskirts of the village and the ramshackle door provides little protection against wild creatures. This is the place in which a menstruating woman is expected to eat, sleep, bathe and get through her day. There are no toilets provided in these huts and the women tie a sari or make a banana leaf shelter to create a space that they use as a toilet and for bathing. When it rains, the huts are filled with water. These unsanitary conditions combined with unhygienic menstrual practises, often cause infections, illnesses and sometimes even death. At least eight women have died as a result of this practice since 2011 during this enforced seclusion in Gadchiroli alone. Apart from this region, tribes in Gondia, Chandrapur, Chattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Uttarakhand also treat menstruation as a social taboo. The rural women say that they are helpless against age-old beliefs and if they try to resist this practise, they are forced to provide a meal of chicken and liquor to the entire village. Some of the girls also reported that the elders in their family restrict them to move out of the house during this period for the fear of some of some *bhoot-prêt* (ill-omen) following them.

Citing another example, a menstruating girl in some areas of urban Pune, is not allowed to enter her kitchen as the kitchen is believed to be Goddess Laxmi's abode, and a menstruating girl could pollute this holy place. She isn't allowed to even touch the food that other family members are to eat. Food is served to her in a separate utensil, she's supposed to sleep on the floor, not touch the walls, or even sit on the sofa. Anything she touches during her period is said to be dirty or impure.

Using the label of being 'traditional' and following the 'age old ancestral customs', a woman is exploited and oppressed. Forgetting the sound knowledge of ancient Ayurvedic practices that were followed years ago to benefit women, people today are blindly imposing ridiculous restrictions upon women. The practise of isolating women was followed because, according to the ayurveda, a woman should be kept as warm and comfortable as possible during her period and she wasn't supposed to do any of the household chores. Also, a woman slept in a separate room because her husband was forbidden to touch her, look at her, or arouse her in any way during her period. The reason for this was that during menstruation the woman's hormones are undergoing changes any arousal would cause hormonal imbalance, pain, cramps and an irregularity in period. Although this from the point of view of western medicine is debatable, the Ayurveda does believe in it. The reason why a menstruating woman lived in a separate quarter was solely for the woman's comfort and benefit, not because she was considered impure in any way. She wasn't allowed to cook because cooking then was very different from cooking now. Having to prepare food was a tedious process where a woman would have to gather firewood, carry water in heavy buckets, have to blow continuously in the fire to keep it going, grind grains on manual millstones and sometimes even travel long distances to collect groceries. Hence, cooking food involved a lot of physical labour which would subsequently lead to cramps and pain. Ayurveda also clearly stresses on the importance of being clean and maintaining

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<sup>88</sup> K. Singh, "Indian Society and Societal Institution," Lucknow, 2004

<sup>89</sup> Bhartiya Shodh "Position of Women in Medieval India" 2016.

genital hygiene and mentions the diseases and disorders caused due to not washing the genitalia properly during menses.<sup>90</sup>

It is interesting to note how Martin (2001) whose work is of immense value in the world of feminism and anthropology of science asserts that due to the prejudice against women in terms of menstruation, it has come to be viewed as something which is negative and vile. She points out that a bias against menstruation is present in society due to it being characterized by dirt, disease and destruction and hence bad in contrast to the supposed goodness of men.<sup>91</sup> With a proper understanding of what our 'tradition' really is and what it tells us to do, we can appreciate the open-mindedness and optimistic view that our ancestors had towards menstruation, the respect and reverence they had for women and the way women were treated.

As it is said in our puranas, "One daughter is equal to ten sons. Whatever 'phala' (merits, good results) a person attains by siring and upbringing ten sons, the same phala is attained by begetting a single daughter alone."

Or as it mentions in the Manusmriti,

"Where women are honoured, divinity blossoms there, and where women are dishonoured, all action, no matter how noble, remain unfruitful.

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## STUDYING EFFECTS OF EDUCATION OVER PERCEPTIONS OF MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

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**Abstract:** Educational and government systems usually promote using menstrual hygiene products, especially sanitary napkins. While this is necessary and commendable, due to various factors, we generally do not see any need for changing or exploring other options for menstrual use. Privileged women usually tend to accept passively the products advertised to them. Focussing on a select category of women at St. Mira's College for Girls, the differences between using cloth and sanitary napkins are documented. The awareness of menstrual hygiene and alternatives to the napkin amongst those who are a part of the education system, having good access to the right knowledge, is studied. My paper also focuses on the importance of research, inaccurate information, subjugation and control of the female body through control of menstrual health education.

**Keywords:** menstrual hygiene products, menstrual health education, feminism, female body

### INTRODUCTION

Today we generally see menstrual hygiene awareness revolving around lower economic classes or women of rural areas. As stated in the Reproductive Health Matters, The Government of India aims to offer sanitary pads at a subsidised rate to adolescent girls in rural areas (Shobah, 2013). An organisation named Water Aid<sup>93</sup> aims to transform the lives of the poorest and most marginalised people by improving access to WASH<sup>94</sup> services...But it seems that the educated aren't educated enough. Although the goal is far, there are other issues sprouting regarding menstrual hygiene in urban areas.

Menstrual Health Management (MHM) must be taught to everyone regardless of their background. MHM is defined as

Women and adolescent girls using a clean material to absorb or collect menstrual blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the menstruation period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>WaterAid has been working in India since 1986 and has played a significant role in the WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) sector nationally and in the states.

<sup>94</sup>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

<sup>95</sup>According to the International Journal Of Reproduction, Contraception, Obstetrics And Gynecology

Menstrual hygiene is, to some extent, associated with the menstrual product one uses. Campaigns or initiatives on menstrual hygiene till date have generally promoted the use of sanitary pads in India. Arunachalam Muruganantham, Pad Man, initiated the awareness of using sanitary pads in rural areas (Venema, 2014). He came from a village where using sanitary pads was considered taboo. He protested such myths and with immense struggle, started a sanitary pad manufacturing company. This, along with other efforts to educate women about menstrual products, is very commendable.

However, whilst spreading awareness of using menstrual products for menstruation is essential, it is vital to educate youth already using these products on the proper utilisation of the product. Women often ignore the detailed study of such products, and quite a few are unaware of pros and cons. According to Centre for Disease Control MMWR, 55 cases of toxic shock syndrome were reported, out of which 95% of the cases were sanitary napkin related. The CDC study also found that continuous use of tampons and sanitary napkins were associated with a higher risk of TSS. (Reduced Incidence of Menstrual Toxic-Shock Syndrome – United States, 1980–1990, 1990). The website further ideally states the precautions one must take to prevent TSS. According to an article in Times of India, sanitary pad manufacturing companies are not required by law to state ingredients on the packet. This is because they are labelled as ‘medical products’, hence, are exempted from the ingredient listing.<sup>96</sup> Every consumer has the right to know the ingredients. A paper published in 2016 by IIT Hyderabad pointed out:

Dioxins are used to bleach the cotton/material used for making absorbent core, and it is responsible for side effects in the body such as pelvic inflammatory disease, ovarian cancer, immune system damage, impaired fertility and diabetes.

Compare the above statement to my research-which will be discussed later. Some reasons for using sanitary napkins were - convenient, hygienic, easily disposable, and safe. Few of them also said it is because they’ve always used it and were unaware of other options. This contradiction certainly poses a dilemma.

However, 100% usage of sanitary pads is still not achieved. The availability of other products such as cloth pads or menstrual cups is not widely spoken about in schools or colleges. An article by Pragya Sood in Times of India states that only 18% women in India have access to sanitary hygiene and 82% of women are unaware of what a sanitary pad is.<sup>97</sup> Thus, as far as menstrual care is concerned, we have very far to go.

It may take forever to attain 100% usage of sanitary pads or menstrual hygiene all over India. But alternatives could be discussed. ‘Cup and Cloth’ campaign to create awareness on sustainable menstruation is one such campaign by Rekha Balakrishnan that focuses on impressing upon the need for the government to replace disposable sanitary pads with reusable menstrual hygiene products. UNICEF conducted a ‘Developing Washable Sanitary Pads and Raising MHM Awareness Campaign’ by Daniel Gelan. It conducted a research by distributing washable sanitary pads and seeing the results, which were rather positive. Although the study took place abroad, the focus is similar.<sup>98</sup> Eco Femme is UNESCO endorsed city-in-the-making that aspires toward international human unity with a rippling effect to the rest of India and around the world. It promotes awareness of cloth pads. Hamsa Iyer shares her personal experience of using cloth pads in an article written on Menstrupedia Comic. She mentions how our grandmothers actually had it right. The practice of reusing biodegradable material, washing it clean with soap and water, limiting vaginal contact with harmful chemicals, and ultraviolet disinfection

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<sup>96</sup> TNN. “A sanitary pad DOESN'T disclose ingredients: Know what goes inside it!”  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/health-fitness/health-news/a-sanitary-pad-doesnt-disclose-ingredients-know-what-goes-inside-it/articleshow/65354742.cms>

<sup>97</sup> Sood, Pragya. “Only 18% women in India have access to sanitary hygiene in India”. 2018  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/health-fitness/health-news/only-18-women-in-india-have-access-to-sanitary-hygiene-in-india/articleshow/64931350.cms>

<sup>98</sup> Gelan, Daniel. “Developing Washable Sanitary Pads and Raising MHM Awareness”.  
[https://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/Ethiopia\\_MHM\\_Conf.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/Ethiopia_MHM_Conf.pdf)

from the sun was the Holy Grail of feminine hygiene. What was probably needed was some good design to the cloth.<sup>99</sup>

The focus of this paper is on the privileged mass of women who have the accessibility and allowance to have proper education and use menstrual products. I chose to do research in this aspect as I found myself a victim of having scarce awareness of my menstrual hygiene, therefore my study involves girls of St. Mira's College, whom I resonate most to.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Considering that the need for awareness today is at an all-time high, through my paper I will attempt to study the general awareness of menstrual hygiene products among the women of St. Mira's College and to examine the factors that go into this awareness. The focus group involved college students and faculty because they're literate, have access to knowledge and to choose the right product for themselves. Thus, the study was conducted by circulating a Google form link randomly in college groups. The Google form had objective and subjective questions. The results were automatically compiled in percentages through the link. The goal was to attain statistics on preference and opinion.

## **OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS**

60 women responded. The results to the questionnaire— At the time of menarche, 86.7% used sanitary pads, 15% used cloth, and 1.7% used other alternatives. Currently, 100% use sanitary pads.

When asked what is better and more hygienic, 93.3% opted for sanitary pads, 0% for cloth and 11.7% for other. Most stated that cloth is unhygienic, whereas sanitary pads hygienic, convenient and safe to use. A few mentioned cups and tampons as more hygienic. One particular answer to the reason was “cloth is not a good option according to me, because it does not prevent infection and wetness. I would recommend sanitary napkins because I haven't used anything else.” Several responses along similar lines indicated no scientific bases or awareness for choices.

91.7% feel that they're using the best product— the sanitary napkin. Not many questioned their knowledge. One respondent said that she used sanitary napkins because her mother told her to, and another admitted “I guess because we've been taught from the beginning of our periods to use sanitary napkins. It's become a habit.”

In India today, feminists identified the centrality of women's bodies and recognised patriarchy, capitalism and institutions like state, family and marriage as the prime contenders of control. Jane Farrel-Beck and Laura Klosterman Kidd state that from the very beginning medical professionals fostered attitudes that may have predisposed women to accept disposable sanitary products as hygienically superior to reusable menstrual cloth (Kidd, 1996). Additionally, as stated by Carole S Reynold in her study<sup>100</sup> “Medicalisation of menstruation occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Male physicians dominated and took over the definition and treatment of menstruation which had been a primarily a female domain and made it sanitary and hygienic.” As stated in the study by<sup>101</sup>, Bobel and Young, personal power has been given up to the money machines of consumerism. This has taken the power of choice towards our own body. Women are being dominated by the consumer ideas that leads to the silence surrounding menstruation. The above ideas make one realise that the belief system of women is being dominated, due to which they consider themselves to be inferior and give over control of their bodies to society. Awareness is spread by media, television, newspaper, school and college campaigns regarding disadvantages of cloth as unhygienic, and promoting only sanitary pads. This

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<sup>99</sup>HamsaIyer. “Experiment with Cloth Pads- Article for Menstrupedia”.

[https://www.academia.edu/10728133/Experiment\\_with\\_Cloth\\_Pads\\_Article\\_for\\_Menstrupedia?source=swp\\_share](https://www.academia.edu/10728133/Experiment_with_Cloth_Pads_Article_for_Menstrupedia?source=swp_share). 2013.

<sup>100</sup>Reynolds, Carole S. “Breaking Codes: Making Theories on Menstruation Accessible through Third-Wave Feminism.”, Master's Report, Michigan Technological University, 2013.  
www.digitalcommons.mtu.edu/etds/697.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid

lacks complete information. This becomes problematic because it keeps us under illusion of taking care of our body, while in reality we may be complying with the monopoly.

“Woman bodies gets constructed both physically and mentally for procreation or as is widely known, reproduction and for male pleasure.” Stated by Sabala and Meena Gopal, in “Body, Gender, & Sexuality”, “it makes one realise the misconception of woman identity that society manipulates us in believing. Menstruation is a part of the female body which is given no importance. Menstrual blood is considered to be a taboo. From the early times menstruation is seen as a result of a curse, hence menstrual care was not discussed. The feminist movement began the challenge with the notion “biology as destiny”, which aimed for equal rights.”<sup>102</sup> (Gopal, 2010).

Although 63.3% girls believe they know the pros and cons of the product they’re using, 83.3% have faced problems on use. Yet, when asked if they’ve thought of changing their menstrual wear, 71.7% answered negatively, which indicates lack of options. An alternative indicates change, which generally Indians are reluctant to accept. “India has been reluctantly urbanising.”<sup>103</sup> (Tiwari, et al. 2016). It is mainly due to the strong cultural beliefs Indians endure.

63.3 % said they know about cloth pads, while 36.7% were unaware. Given an option, 65% girls will not opt for cloth pads and 35% will try an alternative. Most of the reasons being that current methods are very comfortable and convenient. However, they probably would not realise the impact of opting for plastic pads instead of cloth. “Approximately 125 kg of sanitary waste is generated per person during their menstruating years and these sanitary napkins can take 500-800 years to break down! #ThePadEffect is a campaign to advocate for sustainable menstruation and prevent thousands of tons of sanitary waste” says Tulika Bathija.<sup>104</sup> The effect of using sanitary pads on the environment is massive. Since we’ve not seen the consequences, most of us have eliminated thinking for the environment. One often opts for ‘convenience’ over ‘sustainability’. Majority of respondents stated convenience and ease of use as primary reasons for using the sanitary napkin.

Girls change their sanitary pads between 5- 12 hours and dispose them in a newspaper. The reports of TSS earlier stated are shocking. The effects of prolonged exposure are still being documented. Despite it being clearly being stated on the wrapper that sanitary napkins should not be worn for more than 4 hours at a time, most women in my survey stated they wear them for a minimum of 6 hours or longer, which is dangerous.

Thus, the study clearly elucidates a lacuna in our menstrual education. There are challenges to address. Dialogue on clearing misconceptions and myths that still largely prevail all round India is urgent. The basic way to attain proper menstrual hygiene amongst all is to give the right education. It is a positive belief of mine that once told about the properties of using sanitary napkins, students of my college would take better precautions with them and open themselves up to sustainable, healthier alternatives like cloth pads, cotton pads, and to some extent, the cup.

## CONCLUSION

Although Indian feminists believe that women in the east have different concerns from western women, the paper cites western sources and theorists which apply universally. Living in this post truth world we hardly know what to believe anymore. Immense research across the world is sometimes contradictory. Correlating this concept, there are a number of speculations on which menstrual product to be used and how. I don’t wish to dismiss those who have done so much for the emancipation and menstrual awareness of women by encouraging the use of sanitary napkins. I only wish to enlighten educated young women on their agency to choose what they feel is good for their body by inculcating the

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<sup>102</sup>Sabala & Gopal, Meena. “Body, Gender and Sexuality: Politics of Being and Belonging.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 45, no. 17, 2010, pp. 43–51. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/25664384](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25664384).

<sup>103</sup>Tiwari, P., et al. “*India’s Reluctant Urbanisation: Thinking Beyond*.” Springer, 2016.

<sup>104</sup>Tulika Bathija is a whole school ESL specialist, Language & Literature and Theory of Knowledge teacher at École Mondiale World School in Mumbai.

practice of scientific thought *a la* Mary Wollstonecraft. Thinking and taking back control over one's body is vital. There is a need to reinforce to women that they can take back the power they have over their own bodies, irrespective of the external forces of society. That "Health is Wealth".

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## MYTHS REGARDING PREGNANCY AND DISABILITIES

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### **Abstract:**

This paper talks about how a woman's acts during pregnancy lead to the fate of her born child. People have been following certain beliefs since ages which have now been proven wrong by science. Those beliefs have now become myths which still persist in the society in the form of social evils harming the generation of children who are the future of the country. Not only this, women too are harmed in several ways by these myths which people follow blindly. Moreover, disabilities in children are also considered a result of the woman's doings and hence her actions are strictly guided by these myths which in real sense are false. Most of these myths have been passed on orally from the older generations to the younger ones. This paper represents a collection of myths obtained by interacting with several old people and what the young generation thinks of them.

**Keywords:** myths, pregnancy, disabilities, differently abled.

### **Myths regarding pregnancy and disabilities**

What the ancient Greek's, at least in the early phase of their civilization, called *muthos* was quite different from what we refer to as “myth”. For them *muthos* was a true story, a story that unveils the true origin of the world and human beings. Ironically, today, in popular imagination, the perception of the woman’s body is still entrenched in a mythical and superstitious path rather than that of *muthos*.

Currently, myths have dropped in stature and for many they are trivialized and debunked. Myths are popular widespread beliefs that are in fact false. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, one of the earliest inventors of myths is Plato. However, the myths Plato invents, as well as the traditional myths he uses are narratives that are non-falsifiable, since they depict particular beings, deeds, places or events that are beyond our experience like the gods, the daemons, the heroes, the life of soul after death, the distant past etc.

Most<sup>106</sup>believe that there are eight main features of the Platonic myth: (a)myths are monologues, which those listening to do not interrupt; (b)they are told by an elder speaking to young

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<sup>105</sup>St Mira’s College for Girls, FYBA, guided by Dr. Snober Sataravala.

listeners; (c)they can be traced back to older explicitly indicated or implied, real or fictional oral sources(d) they cannot be verified on the basis of facts or evidence; (e)their authority derive from tradition and for this reason they are not subject to rational examination by the audience; (f)they have a psychological effect: pleasure, or a motivating impulse to perform an action capable of surpassing any form of rational persuasion; (g)they are descriptive or narrative; (h)they precede or follow a dialectical exposition.

For Plato we should live according to what meaning and reason we can derive from what we regard as reliable evidence. This is what real philosophers like Socrates, do. But the non-philosophers are reluctant to ground their lives on logic and argument. They have to be persuaded. One means of persuasion is myth. Myth inculcates beliefs. It is efficient in making the less philosophically inclined and children believe in noble things.

According to Alan W Watts<sup>107</sup>, “Myth is a complex of stories—some no doubt fact and some fantasy—which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life.” Myth cannot be separated completely from archetypes and archetypal patterns and hence it is important that we understand the relationship between the two. Every group has its own distinctive mythology that may be reflected in legend, folklore and ideology. In other words myths take form from the cultural environments in which they grow. “Furthermore<sup>108</sup>, similar themes may be found among many different mythologies and certain images that recur in the myths of people widely separated in time and place tend to elicit comparable psychological responses and to serve similar cultural functions. Such motifs and images are called archetypes”. Archetypes are universal symbols. In literary criticism, the term archetype denotes reoccurring narratives, designs, patterns of action, character types, themes and images which are found in a wide variety of works of literature, myths, dreams and even social rituals.

In order to further explore the influence of myth on perceptions of the woman’s body, several personal interviews were conducted in the city of Ahmednagar. The women were all mature falling into the age bracket of 45-60 years. The age was chosen as the duration of their life is large and hence more exposed to different possibilities. All were educated, married with children and belonged to middle class families.

Across India, we can find many myths regarding pregnancy, abortion and disabilities. Snakes are considered to be a symbol of evil, corruption and destruction. Based on this symbolism, there are several myths. It is believed that if a pregnant woman looks at a snake, her child is born with a bad habit of continuously taking out his tongue/licking his lips. Another belief is that if a pregnant lady looks at a snake and that same snake is killed by her family members, the child is born with a snake like scar somewhere on the body. Also, if the shadow of a pregnant woman falls on a snake, it becomes blind and curses her child with some disability. The novel *Inheritance of Loss* captures the fear of snakes in a tragic-comic manner. Kiran Desai narrates an incident where an old cook defecates behind his house near the hole where two snakes lives. Later, his body swells up mysteriously and he believes that his action has angered the snakes and hence he is being punished. To ask their forgiveness, he makes a clay snakes and does *puja*. After the *puja*, his swelling goes down.

Indian culture considers praying to God regularly very important. However, pregnant women are advised not to pray to gods or goddesses, especially during *Navratri*. A myth says that if done so, there is a high chance that the woman will undergo a miscarriage or abortion. Praying to lord Shiva is avoided even more commonly. He is considered to be the god of death and destruction and so if he is

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<sup>106</sup>Partenie, Catalin. “Plato’s Myths”. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-myths/> Accessed on 1.1.19

<sup>107</sup>Page no 160. Definitions and Misconceptions. Mythological and Archetypal Approaches. A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature.

<sup>108</sup>Page no 160. Some examples of archetypes. Mythological and Archetypal Approaches. A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature.

worshipped, there is a possibility that the child in the womb may get destroyed meaning the mother may have a miscarriage.

Another myth which is followed very widely is that lord Ganesh's idol is not to be immersed into water if any woman in the house is pregnant. The reason being that the instillation of the idol symbolizes a new life and the immersion in water signifies the end of that life. When a woman is pregnant, she carries a new life within her and in order to not destroy that life, the idol must remain in the house.

There is a tradition in India where a woman gives another woman *oti* which consists of food grains, coconut, money and other things which signify a fulfilled and prosperous life. The word *oti* also means a full stomach. According to a myth, if a pregnant woman gives *oti* it is believed that she is giving away something that has filled her stomach meaning that she is giving away her unborn child. So, a pregnant woman should never do this. Many people strictly follow the next myth. It says that a man's wife and his sister, if pregnant at the same time, they must not come in front of each other or else one of them has a miscarriage.

Women who have a habit of cracking their knuckles regularly give birth to children who have six fingers or two fingers fused together is another myth. An eclipse is a beautiful phenomenon around which too people have constructed many myths. There is a whole list of things pregnant women should not do during an eclipse, be it solar or lunar. If pregnant women see an eclipse their children may be born blind. Also, if they cut or stitch anything, there is a chance that there is some deformity in the lips of the baby. The baby is believed to be born half dark and half fair or with either collared spots all over the body if the mother scrubs a pan during an eclipse. Some people also follow a tradition where they donate something after every eclipse. But they avoid doing this if any woman in the family is pregnant because they believe that if they do so, a bag will form around the baby in the womb creating a huge problem for the well being of the child. These are only a few examples.

In India, the male child is given a lot of importance and people go to any lengths for this. There are myths about this too. It is said that if a pregnant lady gives another lady a coconut, she has a baby boy. Coconut or *sreefal* is considered holy and a symbol of goddess Lakshmi. By giving this holy object, people believe that women are blessed with a male child. It is also suggested that a pregnant woman should not see a dead body for the well being of her child.

In today's context these myths are significant for two primary reasons. The first is that they are still prevalent and influence the behaviour, rituals and fate of many women. However, lurking behind the narrative of the myth is a deadlier one. These myths focus on not the woman's body or health but the unborn child. Society's concern has never been for the child bearer. She is a mere receptacle, a container, a carrier.

On interviewing a senior medical researcher, she tells us that she has been associated with the KEM hospital research centre, an NGO working with social and clinical research for the past 30 years. They have a number of nationally and internationally funded research projects and at one point of time they have about 40 to 50 projects running in the hospital and in rural and tribal areas. She is also a consultant at an NGO called Helplife working for the empowerment of differently abled adolescent girls. She also heads the CSR division of a multinational food company. She is an MD in preventive and social medicine from the Armed Forces Medical College and has more than 20 years of experience in socio behavioural research. She has worked in maternal and child health, adolescent health, sex and sexuality, HIV/AIDS, reproductive tract infections and tribal development, skill building and training. There are many myths regarding pregnancy and related issues more so in rural areas. She has listed a few from her experiences. If the woman has sex on a particular day of the month she will bear a boy child. A woman has to get pregnant within 6 months of marriage or she is considered infertile. If the woman takes iron tablets during pregnancy the baby's head will become

enlarged and she will have a difficult labour. If the woman comes in contact or eats food made by an infertile or widowed woman during pregnancy she would either get a girl child or have very difficult labour. Swelling of feet is normal in pregnancy. If the first delivery is not at the woman's mother's place, she will give birth to a girl child. Venturing out on an eclipse or no moon day by a pregnant woman will result in disability. Closing the mother's ears and head after delivery stops air from going in which comes out in the milk and baby vomits. Giving colostrum to the baby is bad.

Being a medical practitioner, she does not think that the myths are relevant but believes that as they have come down through generations, people take them very seriously. She often finds it very difficult to convince women that these are incorrect.

An above mentioned myth states that having sex on a particular day results in a boy child. She has tried explaining to her patients how this is incorrect by telling them exactly how the sex of the child is determined and that sex on a particular day has nothing to do with it.

She has seen various cases where the health of the child has been affected due to the mother following certain myths. Once a baby with a low birth weight was born because even though the mother was anaemic refused to take iron tablets because she believed the myth which says that iron causes the head of the baby to become enlarged resulting in problems.

Another time a baby was born with some disability. The family claims that she went out during a no moon night. They ignored the fact that it was a first cousin marriage and hence the chances of the disability were more than 90%. A woman had swollen feet and giddiness but did not go for treatment and resulted in a pre term baby with delayed development.

According to the doctor, mostly uneducated and about 30% educated people still are forced to follow myths. However, more and more girls/women are standing up and fighting myths and taking decisions for themselves and their babies. Thus, there is a definite reconstruction of perception of womanhood. In the past ten years the educated younger generation has had an open mind but the older generation still tends to hold on to customs but they are gradually opening up today. She also believes that the perception of a woman's body with regards to pregnancy has definitely changed. Women are not stressed out during pregnancy, they are choosing the number of pregnancies they want, they are deciding about the time between two pregnancies and are working during the pregnancy term. The overall attitude is very positive and this is observed in rural areas also to some extent.

Today also, there are many people in our country who do believe and follow myths, uneducated or educated, doesn't matter. In some households where old people still have authority, they make the young educated generation follow these myths regardless of their choice. Also, nowadays, couples tend to have only one or two children. Due to this, even though they know that these myths are not that relevant, they have an attitude where they do not want to risk their children's lives by not following the tradition. They feel that there is no harm in following these myths for the sake of their children and do it happily.

In the uneducated population, it is seen that women who do a lot of physical hard work to earn a living, do not have time to think of all this and do all the things they would have done otherwise and still have very healthy children. However, young girls today are very aware and strongly oppose these myths. They try hard to make their families understand the futility of these myths in this day and age and are sure to not follow any themselves.

The concern is have we in any way reconceived or reperceived the woman's body as we surge into the 21<sup>st</sup> century or are we still entrenched in the myths and taboos of the past. The paper argues that the shadows of the past still loom over the woman's body of the present and yet there is hope as reconstructions are underway.

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## RECONSIDERING MYTHS ABOUT SIN AND VIRTUE: PERIOD

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### Abstract:

Women all around the world have gone through various myths related to their periods for several centuries. Although it is a very natural and biological phenomenon that a female body has to go through women cease to perform many rituals and daily activities during their periods. The myths that women have to go through on their periods in India and around the globe is discussed. Although not all the myths have a strong base to stand on but some myths still have medical evidences that support them. Some myths around the world have also been proved true according to the experiences of the people. Interviews with *certain women* is included in the study for both, their experiences with the myths that are not very rational as well as their experiences that proves some of the myths to be true. Furthermore there are medical proclamations that prove some of the myths true. The study concludes with the myths categorized into two parts – 1) that are true and can be followed and 2) the myths that are no longer rational and can be discarded.

**Keywords:** Menstruation, sin, virtue, withering, rotting, chakras, energies, *prana, doshas, vata, pita, kapha*.

### Reconsidering Myths About Sin and Virtue: Period

Women all around the world have gone through various myths related to their periods for several centuries. Most of these myths ignore that period is a natural phenomenon that a female body has to undergo. It is not something to be ashamed of or to be bothered of. In fact it is bothersome if a female body does not undergo menstruation cycle. But even though it is all natural and healthy, women cease to perform many rituals and daily activities while they are on their periods. Regular periods is a sign of good health in women but for some unknown reasons periods is considered impure by the rest of the society.

In Christian Mythology, in the book of Genesis, it is believed that Eve ate a fruit from the forbidden tree inviting Adam to do the same hence they were banished from the garden of paradise and Eve was cursed with menstruation and Adam was left with the fruit stuck in his throat now known as “the Adam’s apple”.

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According to Bible, in the book of Genesis, Leviticus 15:19-30, “When a woman discharge, and the discharge in her body is blood, she shall be in her menstrual impurity for seven days and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. And everything on which she lies during her menstrual impurity shall be unclean. Everything she sits on shall be unclean and whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bath in water and be unclean until evening.” And in the first Latin encyclopaedia (73 AD) “Contact with menstrual blood turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seed in gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees fall off, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, heaps of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs mad and infects their bites with an incurable poison.”

However, In Hindu mythology, menstruation is not a curse, the women rather accepted menstruation to free Indra of his sin. A story in *Shreemad Bhagvatam* describes women accepting the menstrual cycle, as it frees Indra of his sin along with *Prithivi, Jal, and Vruksha (earth, water and trees)*. The story describes Indra killing Vishwaroopa and to get rid of the sin, he distributes the sin of killing a brahmana (Brahma-hatya) in four parts to women, water, trees and earth. In *Shreemad Bhagavatam, Canto 6, Chapter 9, Verse 6*, it is written as:

“*Brahma-hatyamanjalina*

*Jagrahayadapisvarah*

*Samvatsarante tad agham*

*Bhutanamsavisuddhaye*

*Bhumy-ambu-druma-yosidbhyas*

*Caturdhavyabhajaddharih*”

In translation this means, although Indra was so powerful that he could neutralize the sinful reactions of killing a brahmana, he repentantly accepted the burden of these reactions with folded hands. He suffers for one year, and then to purify himself, he distributes the reactions for this sinful killing among the earth, water, trees and women. Further the verses 6.9.7 to 6.9.9 describe the consequences that each has to face for taking Indra’s part sin on oneself. Verse 6.9.7 states that because the land accepted one fourth of the sinful reactions of Indra’s sin, many deserts can be found. Verse 6.9.8 explains the consequence of the sinful reaction on trees as the sap from the trees. Verse 6.9.9 explains the consequence of the sinful reaction on women which says, as a result of those reactions, women manifest the sign of menstruation every month. Menstruation is still associated with sin, however the culpability has been shifted to the God.

According to *The Quran, 2:222-223*, menstruation is harmful; you shall avoid sexual contact with women during menstruation, do not approach them until they are rid of it. Once they are rid of it, you may have intercourse with them in the manner designed by God. God loves those who are clean. Your women are the bearers of your seeds. Thus, you may enjoy this privilege, however you like, as long as you maintain righteousness. You shall observe God, and know that you will meet him. Give good news to the believers. Women are also not allowed to pray during their periods. According to Quran, “family members should keep apart from women during the monthly course and should not approach them until they are clean.” In this case, the idea of sin is linked to impurity.

Women in India were banned from going to the temple while they are on their periods as it is considered to be dirty and impure since the Vedic times. Women are prohibited from participating in daily chores while menstruating. She must be “purified” before returning to their family and daily chores. However, scientifically, a woman’s body prepares for pregnancy. The lining of uterus gets thicker as preparation for nurturing a fertilized egg. An egg is released and is ready to be fertilized and settle in the lining of uterus. If the egg is not fertilized, it no longer needs the thicker lining of the

uterus, so it starts to break down and is eventually expelled along with some blood from the vagina. So there seems no reason to justify this notion that menstruating women are “impure”. It is simply a biological fact.

In some respects, Indians view menstruation, especially the first menstruation as a positive aspect of a girl’s life. In South India and also in the Assamese community, girls who experience their menstrual cycle for the first time are given presents and celebrations to mark this special occasion, though women who are menstruating are not allowed on the household for a period of three nights. It is also believed that a menstruating woman should not enter the kitchen.

There are various myths around the globe related to periods. This paper attempts to understand these myths under various paradigms and binaries.<sup>110</sup>

The first paradigm is purity and impurity. In Nepal it is believed that, a menstruating woman should not interact with or touch men because men will fall sick by touching an unclean woman. In India, it is believed that a menstruating woman should not enter a worship place. One can only enter a place of prayer once they have washed their hair on or after the fourth day. On the contrary, it is also believed that one should wash their hair on the first day of their period to clean oneself completely. In UK and US, it is believed that tampons can break one’s hymen and make one impure.

The second paradigm is rotting and decay of food and flowers. In UK and US, it is believed that if a menstruating woman touches any vegetable before or during the pickling process, it would not pickle and would go bad. In Romania, it is believed that one should not touch any flower during their periods because it will cause the flower to die quicker. In India too, it is believed that one should not enter a kitchen or cook food or touch flowers during their menstruation. In Argentina, it is believed that one should not make whipped cream because it will curdle. In France, it is believed that one should not make mayonnaise or it will curdle. In Japan, it is believed that one should not make Sushi during periods because one has an imbalance in taste. In Italy, it is believed that dough won’t rise while trying to knead in periods and everything one cooks will be a disaster. Also, one should not touch any plant or it will die.

The third paradigm is sexual intercourse and interaction. In Nepal, it is believed that one should not be at home or have contact with anybody during their menstruation. There are special houses or huts for exile during periods. Women should not interact with men or touch them or they will get sick. In Poland, it is believed that having sexual intercourse during periods can kill the partner. In Bolivia, it is believed that a woman should not cradle babies during periods or she will cause them to get sick.

The fourth paradigm is bath and body. In UK and US, it is believed that a girl should not take bath during her periods and should not perm their hair until after the first period. In Columbia, it is believed that one should not wash or cut their hair while on their periods. In Dominican Republic, it is believed that one should not paint their nails or wash their hair during their periods. In Brazil too, it is believed that one should not wash their hair during periods. In Argentina, it is believed that one should not take a bath during her periods. In Italy, it is believed that one should not go to pool or beach during periods. Also waxing during periods can cause the hair to grow faster. In Taiwan, it is believed that a woman should blow dry her hair after a shower. In Venezuela, it is believed that one should avoid shaving her bikini line during periods as the skin will get darker. In Afghanistan, it is believed that one should not wash their hair or shower during their periods.

The fifth paradigm is health, infertility and menstrual flow. In Israel, it is believed that if a girl showers with hot water while on her periods, she will have a heavy flow. In India, it is believed that if one washes their hair during periods, the menstrual flow will reduce and it will affect the

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<sup>110</sup> The myths around the world are taken from research conducted by the Clue group.

fertility later in life. In Mexico, it is believed that one should avoid dancing to very active rhythms in order to take care of one's uterus. In Argentina, it is believed that if one takes bath the bleeding stops and stopping the bleeding is bad for one's health. In Afghanistan, it is believed that if a woman washes or showers during her periods she will 'gazag' (to become infertile). In Brazil, it is believed that one should not work barefoot or they will get cramps. In Columbia and Dominican Republic, it is believed that one should not drink cold beverages during periods because it causes cramps.

The sixth paradigm is mood and ideas of mental health. In UK and US, it is believed that a woman is clumsy and manifests crankiness and irritability. In India too, it is believed that a woman is irritable during her periods.

There are few more beliefs regarding menstruation in various parts of the world that involve certain activities for better health during menstruation. In Israel, it is believed that when a girl gets her first period, she is slapped on her face so that she has beautiful red cheeks all her life. In Malaysia, it is believed that one should wash their pads, before throwing them out otherwise, ghost will haunt them. In some parts of India, it is believed that if a snake smells a used pad, a woman doesn't get pregnant. In Philippines, it is believed that when one gets their first period, one needs to wash their face with the first menstrual blood, to have clear skin. In Bolivia, it is believed that disposal of menstrual pads with other garbage can lead to sickness or cancer.

Beside these myths there are also some medical myths whose origins are not known but are widely famous. Medical myths are even more disturbing as they legitimize the discrimination like an irregular cycle is indicative of infertility. According to doctors, "Many women have irregular menstrual cycle. This only changes the ovulation period, but does not necessarily point to infertility. Various factors such as a change in weight, stopping birth control pills, and stress can influence the menstrual cycle. Whether one's cycle is regular or not, ovulation occurs 14 days before the start of next period."

Another common medical myth is, menstrual cramps are a warning sign of infertility. According to doctors, "'dysmenorrhea', or menstrual pain, affects approximately 50% of women. Menstrual pain is caused by uterine contractions and is usually a problem that is completely normal. The severity of pain varies from one women to another. Although in some cases, dysmenorrhea can be a symptom of another health problem that can cause infertility."

Another myth is Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is all in head. According to gynaecologists, "A large number of women suffer from PMS to various degrees. The symptoms (fatigue, tenderness and bloating of the breasts, bloating of stomach, headaches, irritability, cravings, etc.) usually disappear after a few days. Hormonal changes play a role in PMS. Regular exercise, healthy eating and adequate sleep can help relieve symptoms."

A different myth says, if a girl does not have her period by the age of 14, it's not normal. According to doctors, "Even though a girl's first period usually occur between the ages of 10 to 14, it may occur earlier or later in some girls. If a girl does not have her period by the age of 16, it is called "primary amenorrhea". It is then important to see a doctor to determine the cause. Most often, primary amenorrhea is due to delayed puberty and is not serious, but several other causes are possible. So it is recommended to see a doctor in such a case."

Other myth says, the use of tampons can often cause toxic shock syndrome (TSS). According to doctors, "TSS is a rare infection which can sometimes be fatal and which is caused by the presence of bacterial toxins in the blood. TSS can affect anyone. Studies have not clearly determined a link between the use of tampons and TSS, but hygiene practices, the duration of time in which a tampon is left in place, and the absorption capacity of tampons could play a role. So to limit the risks related to tampon use one should read and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully."

Further myth says, heavy periods are not normal. This myth according to doctors is part true, and part false. According to studies “A woman loses about four tablespoons of blood during her period on average. The duration and abundance of the menstrual flow varies from one woman to another. And can also vary from one cycle to the next. Oftentimes and without cause if alarm, “menorrhagia” is characterized by a heavier and longer lasting period. It is most often caused by a hormonal change, but can sometimes be a sign of more serious problem.”

Another commonly believed myth is, one shouldn't practice sports while on their periods. Quite to the contrary, doctors say “physical exercise can be beneficial during period. In fact, regular physical activity helps to reduce menstrual pain and alleviate PMS.”<sup>111</sup>

Following some of the above stated myths like not taking a bath during periods can be dangerous to health. However, for many, the myths believed around the world are true. Interviews of some women talking about their experiences during periods prove so. They have ostensibly experienced these to be realities.

Interviews are used as research methodology. Hema Aylani (AIZEN Communications, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2018) says that women are irritable during periods. According to her, this is a truth. Most women go through irritability and mood swings during periods. She adds that pickles do rot if touched during periods, she has experienced it herself. She also says that she has experienced cramps after drinking cold beverages during periods, she also adds that she has experienced that plants and flowers die if touched by menstruating woman. Shreya Agrawal (Student) says, she agrees to being irritable and moody during periods and she has experienced rotting of pickle and curdling of cream during periods as well (her father owns a dairy cum grocery shop and she works there in her free time because of which she experienced this) Surbhi Tiwari (Software Engineer, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2018) says she is also irritable and moody during her periods and has also experienced rotting of pickles. She also stated that it is true that that if you drink cold beverages or lemonade during periods, it adds to cramps, she has experienced it. Savita Upadhyay (Sales Manager, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2018) too agrees to being cranky and irritable during periods. Also, she too has experienced rotting of pickle when touched during periods. She also says that she has experienced severe pain after going to the temple during her periods. She agrees that if a woman takes bath with hot water during periods, it causes heavy flow whereas taking a bath with cold water reduces the flow. She also says that she has experienced cramps after bathing with cold water. Muskan Ambasta (Fashion Designing Student, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2018) agrees to being irritable and experiencing rotting of pickle during periods. She also agrees to the myth that taking a bath with hot water causes heavy flow and washing hair reduces the menstrual flow. Sonal Ram (Interior Designing Student, 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2018) agrees to the same. Doctor Priyambada Tiwari (Gynaecologist, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2018) advises women to drink coffee or other hot beverages and avoid drinking cold beverages to avoid cramps.

After going through the interviews of these women, it is clear that for many women, these myths are not just myths, but are believed to be the truth. But some myths like not taking a bath during periods can be dangerous to health as it can cause infections in the genital area. Being isolated from the house during periods when a woman is already cranky and irritable can be perilous to the mental health of women. Signs and research has no concrete evidences supporting the statements of male members or child getting sick because of being in contact with a menstruating woman.

Looking into ancient Indian science of Ayurveda for explanation of some of the myths, which includes, Ayurveda, Yoga, meditation, mantra, astrology and the science of mudras (a part of yoga), “the ancient Vedic seers recognized a principle of “energy” that gives movement, velocity, direction, animation and motivation. This energy of life is called “*prana*”, meaning life-force. Ayurveda which is almost 7000 years old, is a science of life and natural healing systems, with a deep understanding of

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<sup>111</sup> The medical myths and there debunking is taken from a research conducted by Jean Coutu group.

the human body and its relation to nature. Ayurveda is based on three primary life forces in the body, called the three “*doshas*”. *Doshas* are the bio-energies that make up every individual and help perform different functions in the body. The three types of *doshas* are *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*, which corresponds to the elements of air, fire and water respectively. According to Ayurveda menstruation is closely linked to the functions of *doshas*. Menstruation is regarded in Ayurveda as a special opportunity enjoyed by women for monthly cleansing of excess *doshas*; it is this monthly cleansing that accounts for female longevity. There is a build-up of energy in the days leading to menstruation as the body prepares itself for pregnancy. If pregnancy does not take place and menstruation starts, this built up energy gets dissipated from the body during menstruation. Therefore any activity that interferes with the necessary downward flow of energy during menstruation should be avoided. During menstruation, women are more likely to absorb other energies in their environment. This forms the basis of most of the cultural practices in India.”

According to Ayurveda, not attending religious functions and visiting temples has its own explanation. The energy of a woman during menstruation goes downwards (whereas energy is upward raising at other times) and at puja table, offerings or altar, or in temples the energy is going upwards. This can bring discomfort to body. Mr. Hitesh Mohapatra and his team travelled to Devipuram (Andhra Pradesh) to find answers to this culture. The Guruji, Sri Amritananda Natha Saraswati is the founder of Devipuram, a temple dedicated to Devi. He told the researchers that “In his temple most of the priests are women, who are free to be at the temple during their periods (though it is not forced). There is a *Kamakhya Peetham* at this temple, which is a natural formation in the shape of a *Yoni* (vagina) and worshippers gather here whether or not they have their periods. The Guruji turns the silly assumptions of impurity upside down. He says “what is pure, we don’t touch, we call it a taboo. A menstruating woman is so pure, that she is worshipped as a Goddess. The reason for not having a woman go into a temple is meticulously this. She is a living Goddess at that time. The energy of god or Goddess which is there in the *Murthi* (idol) will move over to her, and then the idol will be lifeless, while the menstruating woman the life. So that is why they were prevented from entering the temple. So, it is exactly the opposite of what we think (women as impure during periods).” For Guruji the menstruating woman is not impure. And it is for her to decide whether or not she wants to follow these practices.”

Avoiding cooking and eating with others during menstruation is explained as: According to a pranik/energy healer, eating was considered as a spiritual activity . “During the process of eating, the lower *chakras*<sup>112</sup> are active. So while eating people release negative energy which may not be felt in the normal course of things. But if a menstruating women who is sensitive to energy and absorbs all types of energy around her eats with a group of people she can get affected by the lower energies”. This is probably the reason that menstruating women were told to eat separately.

Spiritual and Ayurveda teacher Maya Tiwari, in her book “*Women’s Power to Heal: Through Inner Medicine*” explains “asking women to avoid gardening or cooking during menstruation is not due to the irrational thinking that our menstrual blood is unclean, unhygienic or toxic. The cosmic memory of food – that which is derived only from plant life according to the Vedas – is imbued with *prana*, a rising energy flowing up from the earth towards the sun and the sky. Conversely, our menstrual blood is instilled with *apanavayu*, the downward flowing, bodily air pulled down from the body by the magnetic forces of the earth. These two powerful sadhanas do not go hand in hand. Plant-derived food is also *kapha* in nature, full of youth giving energy that nourishes the body; menstrual blood is dominated by *Pitta* and *Vata*, which fosters the cleansing of the spirit. It is most unwise to introduce the rising, energizing nature of our food into our blood, or to mix the downward flowing,

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<sup>112</sup>*Chakras* are energy centres in the spinal column. There are seven *chakras* in human body. The lower *chakras* are involved in bodily functions while the higher *chakras* are connected to the higher centres of the brain.

cleansing energy of blood into our sustenance, either by preparing food during menstruation, or by slaughtering animals and eating them.”

When it comes to avoiding intercourse during menstruation, Ayurveda explains it as “A female’s energy is going downwards during menstruation and during a sexual intercourse, the energy goes upwards. So, having intercourse during periods can disturb one’s energy and can cause one to feel uneasy.”

When it comes to avoiding swimming or washing the hair during the menstrual cycle: Maya Tiwari, offers a Vedic explanation for this practice. She writes “at the psycho-energetic level, we need to safeguard the body against the persuasive rhythm of the water element. Water is one of the five powerful elements used to bless, cure, heal, nourish, nurture, and revive the body, mind and spirit... Unlike the mundane understanding of cleansing we have, the ancients knew that water is sacred and powerful, and like all the elements has its own cosmic energy and memory. Water, guided by its cosmic memory, can influence the flow of the menstrual cycle to its own strong beat – exactly what we do not want happening during menses. Conversely, we want the fire element, which is the dominant memory of the blood, to flow in tempo with its own rhythm and tune.”

The theory of menstruating women losing their energy and absorbing the energies that are around her can be applied to all the menstrual restrictions we know of, whether it is the withering of a *Tulsi* plant (Indian Basil, considered as a holy plant), the spoiling of curd, pickle or other sensitive processes like silk worm rearing. This is believed to affect the menstruating woman as it interferes with her natural process of having to dissipate energy, and it also impacts the person or thing (plant or other biological process) by depleting it of its vital energy. This is also used to explain the reason behind practicing untouchability and menstrual seclusion.

However, not all women believe the myth that menstruating women can affect living processes. The reason is given as, “because not all women have their cycles in sync with nature and therefore, their energies are not as pronounced. So, while some women swear that the *Tulsi* plant or any other plant or flowers they touched withered away, other woman dismisses it by saying it is superstition.” In ancient India it was believed that all women menstruated according to the moon cycle and so there was this generalisation of rules for every menstruating woman. It is yet for a woman to decide according to her personal experiences whether or not she wishes to follow these practices.<sup>113</sup>

In conclusion, where on one hand not all myths are worth following, there are still some myths that are realities for a relatively large part of the modern population. Every woman has her own experiences regarding these myths and it is totally her verdict whether or not she wishes to follow these practices. In exploring these myths, the paper has tried to map at the trajectory of ideas that has either liberated a women or repressed her. The Mythical paradigms were about purity-impurity etc. These dominated popular imagination. However, in contrast, the modern memory has reworked the ancient Ayurvedic myths to trace notions of purity and impurity. However, there is still a subtext of exclusion, justified by a north south or up down polarization. Ultimately, perhaps, women can hope for some equality when they debunk these myths and move beyond justifications to acceptance of the natural without having to neutralize it.

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<sup>113</sup> The debunking of myths by Ayurveda is taken from Hitesh Mohapatra’s research.

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## THE UNDOING OF #METOO: TESTIMONIAL INJUSTICE, AND DISBELIEF AND DISMISSAL

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**ABSTRACT:** The debate about do the women have the right to protest or not is as old as time and it has manifested itself in different ways the most contemporary been the #MeToo movement. This paper focuses on the importance of #MeToo movement and how it will be lost within the sea of protests throughout history by presenting the dismissed cases and the claim that it is a dangerous witch hunt which women use irresponsibly and over report sexual abuse and the immediate unconscious reaction of people by using the testimonial injustice theory. The paper will first be starting with the review of the history of #MeToo movement in the west and then #MeToo movement in India. Continuing with different responses to #MeToo from eminent people, so basically celebrity responses. And finally summing up my argument and conclusion.

**KEYWORDS:** #MeToo, Sexual Harassment, Patriarchy, Identity Power, Gender

### INTRODUCTION:

The central problem underscored by the #MeToo campaign is sexual harassment. Feminist scholars echo that sexual harassment causes considerable harm to women as a social group. Harassment undermines women's workplace authority, reduces them to sexual objects, and reinforces sexist stereotypes about appropriate gender behaviour. <sup>1</sup>

### DEFINITION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT-

Sexual harassment can be defined as unwanted sexual attention directed from a perpetrator to its

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target. Defining and understanding the concept is tricky for it is complex. <sup>115</sup>Sexual harassment can occur in many ways—physical, virtual, direct, indirect, verbal or nonverbal. Verbal harassment takes the form of sexual jokes or comment, while nonverbal harassment can take the form of displaying sexual objects or pictures. Indirect harassment describes the situation where the victim is not directly approached, but still carries a mental burden because of the harassment for example- sexual rumours or private information and pictures displayed on social media. Physical harassment takes place when the victim is brushed against or held in an unwanted sexual way or is coerced into kissing or having private parts touched or even being coerced into sex.

### **REVIEW OF #MeToo MOVEMENT IN THE WEST:**

The hashtag came from singer/actress Alyssa Milano, as a means of addressing, in the public domain, the prevalent sexual assault and harassment in America. The celebrity, on Twitter, asked people who had experienced sexual violence to reply “me too” to her tweet. She explained the idea behind the action in an accompanying screenshot. “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem,” she wrote. The tweet has since garnered more than 61,000 replies and more than 22,000 retweets. The simple phrase – “Me too” – has become a viral hashtag and spread to Facebook and Instagram as well.

While Ms Milano may have kick-started the online campaign, the “#MeToo” movement actually started with an African American activist in Harlem more than 10 years ago.

Community organiser Tarana Burke founded the #MeToo movement in 2006, in order to spread awareness and understanding about sexual assault in underprivileged communities of colour. Her team now provide educators with kits to teach in classrooms in local schools.

But the “#MeToo” hashtag took off in the wake of some troubling news: Renowned producer Harvey Weinstein was publicly accused of sexually harassing multiple women who had worked with him. The news inspired dozens of female celebrities – including Gwyneth Paltrow, Angelina Jolie, Kate Beckinsale to open up about being harassed by Mr Weinstein and other Hollywood bigwigs. Another point worth noting is that a number of male artists and celebrities also spoke up about the need to put a stop in sexual violence in their industry.

### **REVIEW OF #METOO MOVEMENT IN INDIA:**

The #MeToo movement, which began in the United States more than a year ago in response to accusations of sexual harassment and abuse by powerful men in the entertainment industry, gained momentum in India in India after actress Tanushree Dutta accused Nana Patekar of inappropriate behaviour on the set of film they were shooting in 2008. Since then, the hashtag has become a rallying cry against sexual harassment, with multiple women coming out with their #MeToo stories.

Some prominent Indian names who have been accused of sexual harassment are-

M J Akbar, Former Union minister; Rahul Johri, BCCI CEO; Ashish PatilVP - Brand Partnerships and Talent Management & Business and Creative Head - Y-Films, Anirban Blah Talent manager, Bhushan Kumar T-Series chairman, Alok Nath Actor and many more.<sup>116</sup>

### **DISMISSED CASES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT:**

A lot of actors, artists, politicians and executives are facing sexual harassment allegations in the public domain but in actual courts, such cases seldom see fitting resolutions.

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<sup>116</sup><http://m-timesofindia.com>.

Cases which are filed in courts are very often dismissed by the judges. The high dismissal rate of sexual harassment cases is disturbing.

University of Cincinnati professor Sandra Sperino has read roughly 1,000 sexual-harassment work-related cases that were dismissed before they went to trial.

"You'll see case after case where a woman was groped at work and the court will dismiss the case as a matter of law, finding that's not sexual harassment," Sperino says in a 1986 decision, the Supreme Court said the behaviour needs to be "severe or pervasive" in order to qualify as harassment, whether it's on the basis of sex or race. Sperino says judges' interpretations of what qualifies are out of step with common sense and standard office policies.<sup>117118</sup>

According to Laura Beth Nielsen, a research professor at the American Bar Foundation and at Northwestern University,<sup>119</sup> the point just intensified in future supreme court cases. For tracking discrimination cases, there is no central database, but according to Nelson's random sampling of cases revealed that half of the cases settle out of the court and others were settled pre-trial. If the groping didn't result in direct skin contact the judges demoted the offence. These laws became hardened in law because both state and federal judges would dismiss them. Only 2% of plaintiffs win, Nilsen's data shows.

### **SOME INSTANCES OF DISMISSED CASES-**

**Christopher Maurice Brown** is an American singer, songwriter, dancer and actor.

**Chris Brown** has been named in a lawsuit in which a woman Jane Doe<sup>120</sup> and Rihanna allege they endured a horrific night of sexual assault while imprisoned in his house. Attorney Gloria Allred filed the lawsuit on behalf of the woman, labelling it "one of the most horrific sexual assault cases" she had ever seen.<sup>121</sup> "I really hit her" - Chris Brown tells all about infamous assault of Rihanna in new documentary<sup>122</sup> Chris Brown continuously shows that he is a violent misogynist and a danger to women and yet still has a career in entertainment industry. His fans recently rejoiced that the 'Freaky Friday' singer is releasing a new album in 2019.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Sandra Sperino,

Associate Dean of Faculty

University of Cincinnati College of Law: 'Rethinking discrimination law' Date of excess- 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 2019

<sup>118</sup>Yuni Nougchi, Sexual Harassment Cases Often Rejected By Courts: Date accessed 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/28/565743374/sexual-harassment-cases-often-rejected-by-courts>

<sup>119</sup>Consent to Sex: The Liberal Paradigm Reformulated by Laura Beth Nielsen, a research professor at the American Bar Foundation and at Northwestern University. Date accessed 29<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2019

<sup>120</sup>Chris Brown Sued Over Alleged Sexual Assault at His Home, an article by **DANIEL KREPS** published on **MAY 9, 2018 8:54 PM EST**

<sup>121</sup>I was trapped, raped in Chris Brown's home, woman claims in lawsuit: published on 10/05/2018. Date accessed 15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2019.

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.newshub.co.nz/home/entertainment/2018/05/i-was-trapped-raped-in-chris-brown-s-home-woman-claims-in-lawsuit.amp.html>

<sup>122</sup><https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/entertainment/2017/08/i-really-hit-her-chris-brown-tells-all-about-infamous-assault-of-rihanna-in-new-documentary.html>

<sup>123</sup>Chris Brown New Album 2019: Release Date, Songs, Tracklist & Everything You Need To Know: Published on- 3 December 2018, 12:43. Date accessed 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2019

<https://www.capitalxtra.com/artists/chris-brown/news/new-album-indigo-2019-songs-release-date-tracklist/>

### **Bret Kavanaugh**

Bret Kavanaugh is the federal appeals court judge who has been picked by Donald Trump to fill a seat on the Supreme Court, the highest court in the United States. Christine Blasey Ford, a university professor, has accused Mr Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her when the pair were in high school. Another woman, Deborah Ramirez, says Mr Kavanaugh exposed himself to her at a drunken party during their time together at Yale. A third woman, Julie Swetnick, claims she saw him and others trying to get girls drunk at parties so they could be raped. She alleges Mr Kavanaugh was at a party in 1982 where she was raped<sup>124</sup>.

### **Alok Nath**

A veteran writer producer of the 1990's show "Tara" fame, Vintaa Nanda has accused actor 'Alok Nath' - famous for his 'sanskari' image on small screen dramas, of sexually violating her almost two decades ago.

It is the escalating voices against sexual harassment across the world as part of the #MeToo wave that gave Nanda the courage to pen down the experiences which had left her "shattered".

"He was an alcoholic, shameless and obnoxious but he was also the television star of that decade, so not only was he forgiven for all his bad behaviour, many of the guys would also egg him on to be his worst," Nanda wrote, adding that he even harassed the show's lead actress who was not interested in him<sup>125</sup>.

**The case against Alok Nath was lodged on the basis of a "defamatory" and "false" report of complainant Vinta Nanda, and was granted a granting a pre-arrest bail to the Bollywood actor last week<sup>126</sup>**

### **Nana Patekar**

Tanushree Dutta accused actor Nana Patekar for inappropriate sexual behaviour on the film set of Horn Ok Pleasss, 10 years ago.

Ms. Dutta is said to have filed a complaint with the Cine and Television Artistes' Association (CINTAA) shortly after the incident. A statement from Ms. Dutta to The Hindu said, "A man who is claiming to be Nana Patekar's advocate is calling up people close to Tanushree and media houses alike threatening to drag Tanushree to court for speaking up. Even after 10 years, Nana Patekar is still harassing Tanushree Dutta with legal threats and intimidation tactics<sup>127</sup>

Cine And TV Artistes' Association (CINTAA) has cleared the air that they are not going to expel Nana Patekar from the association, "We can't expel Nana Patekar as he is not proven guilty." said Sushant Singh, General Secretary of Cintaa.<sup>128</sup>

Power can operate actively or passively. It has capacity and has persisted through periods even when it's not being realised in action i.e. power always exists. In institutions, people are appropriately conceived as objects and means of power with one party exercising power and other party being influenced. When this influence practiced for long periods it becomes unconscious, it becomes a part of people's attitude and schemas and the fact that they are influenced is forgotten.

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<sup>124</sup>McGuinness. A. Why the Brett Kavanaugh case matters. Date accessed 20<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2019. <https://news.sky.com/story/why-the-brett-kavanaugh-case-matters-11510835>

<sup>125</sup><https://m.khaleejtimes.com/citytimes/MeToo-India-12-Indian-celebs-journalists-accused-of-sexual-harassment-1->

<sup>126</sup><https://www.news18.com/news/movies/rape-case-against-alok-nath-lodged-on-basis-of-complainants-false-report-court-2-1996771.html>

<sup>127</sup><https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/nana-patekar-responds-to-charges-with-legal-notice/article25074654.ece>

<sup>128</sup><https://www.m.dailyhunt.in/news/bangladesh/english/lifeberrys%2benglish-epaper-lifebeen/metoo%2bcintaa%2bwon%2bt%2bfire%2bnana%2bpatekar%2buntil%2bproven%2bgUILTY%2bin%2btanushree%2bdutta%2bcase-newsid-99507705/amp>

Practising power is not necessarily bad, but when it's in action one should be ready to understand who is controlling whom and why?<sup>129</sup>

“Whenever there is an operation of power that depends on some significant degree upon such shared imaginative conceptions of social identity, then '*identity power*' is at work”

Gender is one arena of identity power which as mentioned above can be practiced actively or passively. Though gender is the main concern under testimonial injustice, testimonial injustice is a blanket which extends to race and all other forms of prejudice. Gender identity power when in action can be said to be activated when a man makes unconscious use of his identity as a man to influence a woman's action and make her submit to his judgement, because of the identity power they inevitably have over women. A deeply rooted patriarchy sees women as lying, hysterical beings whose emotions cloud their judgement. It is because of this hard-set prejudiced view of women and attitudes that operate at a highly unconscious level that movements like #MeToo suffer a backlash. This is main reason sexual harassment cases are thrown out and no matter how incriminating the proof, they remain as allegations which eventually pronounced false and dismissed. Prejudice, social and identity power works on all level and can be seen clearly in public perceptions of the women. Questions such as 'why now?', 'why is she speaking after so long?', 'what is she going to gain?' immediately emerge as indictments against the women. For instance, Ganesh Acharya's response to Tanushree Dutta's #MeToo case, while talking about the #MeToo movement at the launch of his dance academy GADA in Mumbai, was, "Whatever is right is right. I will never support a person who has lied to all of us and support a false allegation"<sup>130</sup>

Note that the operation of identity power does not require that either party consciously accept the stereotype as truthful. If it were to interpret the through awareness of the distorting nature of the stereotype used to silence victims, it would still be no surprise that they should be silenced by it This testimonial injustice can be disastrous for the stereotyped party because of its persistence and frequent repetition.

“Women who live in a society in which the prejudice that devalues his word also blocks his everyday pursuits repeatedly and in every social direction. By contrast, cases of testimonial injustice that are neither persistent nor systematic are on the whole unlikely to be very disadvantageous. Generally speaking, systematic injustice tends towards persistence, because the imaginative conceptions of social identity that feature in the relevant tracker prejudices are likely to be enduring features of the social imagination.”

## CONCLUSION:

Patriarchy does not mean a small group of men are sitting in a room actively making decision to oppress women. Rather it's a system that has historically given men more rights than women these rights can be obvious such as not allowing a woman to own a land etc. or subtle such as presenting women as sex object in media/advertisement etc.

The road to justice for sexual harassment is very slow. What's worse that everyone plays a part in it and are not even conscious about it, right from the moment when it becomes important to know what the victim was wearing to justifying what happened by using phrases like 'men will be men'. In India only one in 4 rape cases end up in conviction<sup>131</sup>, rape cases which were 'reported'. This problem isn't something which can't be solved, but first what needs to change is our perspective, our thoughts and our attitude, we need to start questioning phenomenon around us but starting from our own conscious and unconscious actions, otherwise movements like #MeToo are going to go nowhere. But Conversation is necessary. Sexual assault was disregarded for many years, movements like these makes victims field they are not alone.

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<sup>129</sup>Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press, September 01, 2007. Oxford Scholarship Online. Date Accessed 4 Feb. 2019  
<<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198237907.001.0001/acprof-9780198237907>>.

<sup>130</sup><https://www.news18.com/news/movies/choreographer-ganesh-acharya-on-tanushree-dutta-metoo-case-wont-support-false-allegations-2012153.html>  
<https://m.timesofindia.com/india/over-30000-rape-cases-only-1-in-4-convicted/articleshow/63748925.cms>

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## GLASS CEILING ON WOMEN'S BODY

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**Abstract:** The term “Glass Ceiling” has become a very popular and frequently used metaphor over the last two decades. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines it as an intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper-level positions.<sup>133</sup> Most of us are familiar with the notion of a corporate glass ceiling; today we have religious glass ceilings where women are prevented from ascending the highest echelon in priesthoods, political glass ceilings where women seldom become electoral representatives, science glass ceilings, fitness, and so on. The glass ceiling that concerns almost every woman irrespective of race, age or class is the one on women's body, specifically the limitations and the restrictions imposed on the body.

**Keywords:** Body Shaming, Women, Body, Breaking the ceiling

### Introduction

The power politics of women's bodies determine her sexuality, appearance, and her behaviour. Women have altered themselves to fit beneath the glass ceiling for far too long in order to protect themselves from verbal/physical attacks. Glass ceiling on women's body includes limitations on how much of their body they can reveal, a standard type of body and body shaming on those that deviate from this model of perfect body. According to a website called Proud2bme, “a survey conducted by Yahoo, 94% of teenage girls have experienced body shaming.”<sup>134</sup>

### Causes and Effects of the Glass Ceiling on Women's Body

The perfect body means to have the proper figure of 39-25-36 inches<sup>135</sup>, and those who don't fall into this measurement are criticised as fat, thin or disabled. The perfect body is also supposed to have a fair and bright complexion, and those whose melanin doesn't match the standard are referred to black, brown or yellow. The perfect body is considered one with the perfect height, legs and hands. “Model” women are forced to have cosmetic medical surgeries to star in advertisements and movies as they are expected to meet the standards of beauty. An article written by Barbara-Jean Mellinger highlight show women, especially models, spend most of their time, effort and money in maintaining their shape and looking good, and states, “The modelling industry is showing signs of eschewing the stick-

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<sup>132</sup>Bhakti Oza is a second-year undergraduate student of English at St. Mira's college for girls, Pune. She has been guided in this paper by Mrs. Suhaile Azavedo, who is the English professor at the same.

<sup>133</sup>“Glass Ceiling.” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, 27 Dec. 2018, 8.40, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/glass%20ceiling](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/glass%20ceiling).

<sup>134</sup>“Survey of body shaming of teens.” Proud2bme, Yahoo, 29 Dec. 2018, 22.30, [www.proud2bme.org/content/yahoo-survey-shows-94-teen-girls-have-experienced-body-shame](http://www.proud2bme.org/content/yahoo-survey-shows-94-teen-girls-have-experienced-body-shame)

<sup>135</sup>“Perfect Body.” Elite Readers, 30 Dec. 2018, 0.34 [www.elitereaders.com/perfect-body-according-to-science/](http://www.elitereaders.com/perfect-body-according-to-science/).

thin body type that often leads to dangerous conditions such as anorexia nervosa. However, designers still believe their clothes look best on long, lean frames. While "plus-sized" models also have a place in modelling today, many plus-sized models are sizes 10 and 12, which are sizes that still require attention to diet and exercise."<sup>136</sup> Jean Kilbourne, a writer of Centre of Media Literacy, pointed out how women are portrayed in advertisements and thus expected to look like in real life. She says.

“Conventional beauty is her only attribute. She has no lines or wrinkles (which would indicate she had the bad taste and poor judgment to grow older), no scars or blemishes--indeed, she has no pores. She is thin, generally tall and long-legged, and, above all, she is young. All "beautiful" women in advertisements (including minority women), regardless of product or audience, conform to this norm. Women are constantly exhorted to emulate this ideal, to feel ashamed and guilty if they fail, and to feel that their desirability and lovability are contingent upon physical perfection.”<sup>137</sup>

The article on BoredPanda pointed out Jameel Jamil’s views on Twitter about airbrushing and wrote, “airbrushing and editing apps are legitimizing the patriarchy’s absurd aesthetic standards that women should be attractive to the straight, male gaze at all costs.”<sup>138</sup>

### **Body Shaming: Causes and Effects**

Women are catcalled when they are seen wearing short clothes, women are also body shamed for showing too much skin, too less skin or too dark/pale skin. According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, body shaming is “the practice of making negative comments on a person’s body, shape or size.”<sup>139</sup> Body shaming happens in various ways such as comparison, body “joke” and constant criticism. In an essay written on Testbig, body shaming happens due to “the pressure and comparison of sociocultural on individuals at the very young age is clearly seen to be an inextricable link to body-shaming.”<sup>140</sup> The essay faulted mass media as the cause of body shaming—“mass media is generally agreed to be an influential source of images and messages about the idealized body that women and girls are expected to strive for.”<sup>141</sup> BuzzFeed wrote an article and summarized testimonies of women who have been body shamed, even by their immediate family.<sup>142</sup> The effects of such mind-sets are horrifying as women have started to develop anorexia in order to become thin, or they have started to feed themselves with unnecessary and unhealthy food complements to gain weight, and have gone into depression and self-loathing due to the dependence, the chains of limitations tied to their hands and the constant idea of not being enough. According to a new study, “the painful, psychological effects of body shaming—being stereotyped as lazy, unattractive, incompetent, or to blame for body size—can increase stress and the risk for medical problems such as heart disease and metabolic diseases like diabetes.”<sup>143</sup> In an article written on Kakcho, “The more self-blame and devalued that

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<sup>136</sup>“Disadvantages of modelling.” AZCentral.com, 1 Jan. 2019, 8:00, [www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com/disadvantages-modeling-industry-3885.html](http://www.yourbusiness.azcentral.com/disadvantages-modeling-industry-3885.html).

<sup>137</sup>“Women in advertisements.” Centre of Media Literacy, 1 Jan. 2019, 8:40, [www.medialit.org/reading-room/beautyand-beast-advertising](http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/beautyand-beast-advertising)

<sup>138</sup>“Airbrushing and Photoshopping.” Bored Panda, Jameel Jamil on Twitter, 1 Jan. 2019, 9:00, [www.boredpanda.com/women-men-difference-photoshop-ban-jameela-jamil/?cexp\\_id=14086&cexp\\_var=13&\\_f=featured](http://www.boredpanda.com/women-men-difference-photoshop-ban-jameela-jamil/?cexp_id=14086&cexp_var=13&_f=featured).

<sup>139</sup>“Body Shaming.” Oxfords advanced learner’s dictionary, 1 Jan. 2019, 8.28, [www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/body-shaming](http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/body-shaming).

<sup>140</sup>“Cause for body shaming.” Testbig, 1 Jan. 2019, 8.42, [www.testbig.com,others-essays,body-shaming](http://www.testbig.com,others-essays,body-shaming).

<sup>141</sup>“Social Media.” Testbig, 1 Jan. 2019, 8.42, [www.testbig.com,others-essays,body-shaming](http://www.testbig.com,others-essays,body-shaming).

<sup>142</sup>“Experiences of body shamed.” BuzzFeed, 29 Dec. 2018, 22:47, [www.buzzfeed.com/ryanschocket2/women-are-sharing-their-experiences-being-body-shamed](http://www.buzzfeed.com/ryanschocket2/women-are-sharing-their-experiences-being-body-shamed).

<sup>143</sup>“Effects of body shaming.” HealthCentral, 1 Jan. 2019, 8:21, [www.healthcentral/article/bodyshaming](http://www.healthcentral/article/bodyshaming).

people said they felt when stigmatized as overweight, the more likely they were to have health problems that could lead to heart disease said Rebecca Pearl-Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine in Philadelphia."<sup>144</sup> She went on to say that, in "those with higher levels of devaluation by others and self-blame were 46% more likely to have metabolic syndrome and were 6 times as likely to have elevated triglycerides"<sup>145</sup> In an article the theory of Erving Goffman, called the Stigma Theory, the root, idea and effects on a person who is stigmatized is written in detail. The article on Stigma theory on ThoughtCo. written by Ashley Crossman, three types of Stigma are mentioned, one of which is the Physical Stigma, in which, "Physical stigma refers to physical deformities of the body while stigma of group identity is a stigma that comes from being of a particular race, nation, religion, etc. These stigmas are transmitted through lineages and contaminate all members of a family."<sup>146</sup> She has also stated the effects of these drawn from the Stigma Theory, "Goffman", she says, "discusses a number of responses that stigmatized people can take. For example, they could undergo plastic surgery; however, they still risk being exposed as someone who was formerly stigmatized. They can also make special efforts to compensate for their stigma, such as drawing attention to another area of the body or to an impressive skill. They can also use their stigma as an excuse for their lack of success, they can see it as a learning experience, or they can use it to criticize normals. Hiding, however, can lead to further isolation, depression, and anxiety and when they do go out in public, they can, in turn, feel more self-conscious and afraid to display anger or other negative emotions."<sup>147</sup>

Body shaming also triggers the onset of stress and anxiety, depression and eating disorders. SELF's new body-image survey—on which they've been conducting since 1989—reveals a complicated reality. While today twice as many women report liking the way their bodies look than did in our 1992 survey, the total number is still just a scant 14 percent. And while women are less likely than they were two decades ago to consider themselves overweight (84 percent then to 53 percent now), a whopping 80 percent of them remain unsatisfied with the number on the scale—and 57 percent think about it "constantly." Perhaps worse still, 85 percent of women believe they should feel more body-positive than they do.<sup>148</sup>

### **Limitations on the Differently Abled**

The differently abled women who do not meet the physical standards are told they cannot achieve academic, social and personal success under the stigma of 'disability', public perception, and the social and religious misconceptions. A blog posted by Engender, a Scotland feminist podcast, reveals that "disabled women are still contained from receiving proper education on reproduction. It reveals that they still face huge barriers in the realisation of their rights in Scotland when it comes to sex, reproductive health, and parenting support. A project was run by feminist policy organisation

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<sup>144</sup>"Effects of body shaming." Kakcho, 1 Jan. 2019, 9.04, [www.blog.kakcho.com/effects-of-body-shaming](http://www.blog.kakcho.com/effects-of-body-shaming)

<sup>146</sup>"Stigma Theory." ThoughtCo, 31 Jan. 2019, 8:15, [www.thoughtco.com/sigma-notes-on-the-management-of-spoiled-identity](http://www.thoughtco.com/sigma-notes-on-the-management-of-spoiled-identity).

<sup>147</sup>"Stigma Theory." ThoughtCo, 31 Jan. 2019, 8:15, [www.thoughtco.com/sigma-notes-on-the-management-of-spoiled-identity](http://www.thoughtco.com/sigma-notes-on-the-management-of-spoiled-identity).

<sup>148</sup>"Women on their bodies." SELF, 28 Dec. 2018, 10:15, [www.self.com/story/what-women-really-think-about-their-bodies](http://www.self.com/story/what-women-really-think-about-their-bodies).

Engender, along with disabled people's organisations and academics, and it found out "that disabled women do not receive sufficient education, support or freedom to make informed choices about their reproductive lives."<sup>149</sup> Fiona Robertson, a disabled writer and an activist, wrote a thread on Twitter about disabled women's experiences of abuse and "how it's complicated by issues of autonomy, intimacy, and reliance." She wrote, "So when you are talking about disability to insult people, be aware of the complexities where the two intersect."<sup>150</sup> Although women are now open towards acquiring liberty of themselves, a lot still feel the need to adjust and not wear the clothes they wish to, and in order to protect themselves from body shaming and other harassments, women tend to keep themselves in a protective shell, thus not reaching their full potential in any sphere of life.

### **Breaking the Glass Ceiling Imposed on Women's Body**

For long, women have been following these norms and rules of life, but recently a lot of them have been accepting themselves as they are and embracing different forms of beauty as realization and understanding has started to slide in. Various movements such as feminism have started gaining popularity and appreciation as people relate to the experiences of others, as they see how almost every woman has been body shamed, harassed and criticized at one point in their life. According to Merriam Webster, "feminism means the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes."<sup>151</sup> Emma Watson gave the HeforShe speech at the UN, inviting more people in to this cause of feminism and empowerment, asking men to be a part of this movement while giving them the same emotional and physical support as they give women.<sup>152</sup> Oprah Winfrey gave an astounding speech that further paved the path to feminism. She spoke on the issues black women face as they are mocked on their colour and are even ill-treated due to it.<sup>153</sup> Social media is lending a huge hand in advocating the start of women empowerment and breaking the glass body ceiling by accepting unique beauties and embracing them. The #MeToo campaign gave thousands of women voice and courage to stand up for themselves and to stand up to the bullies, radiating hope, stating we are not alone and women can be strong and in fact are strong.<sup>154</sup> Various actors and models have stepped up and speak about the crazy stuff they do to look so flawless. When Priyanka Chopra's armpits were photo shopped to look fair, she posted another picture of it showing her "real" complexion of her armpits, thus stating that dark is beautiful and doesn't need to be hidden or photo shopped.<sup>155</sup> Women are breaking the glass body ceiling. Social media, celebrities, models and even the youth of today are lending in their piece of mind on accepting and loving their unique selves. To state a few better and clear examples : models are breaking the glass body ceiling as they achieve success being chunky/skinny, black/white; women who choose to wear shorts and short clothes outside, the differently abled women who choose to work and achieve success despite the limitations imposed upon them. Some inspiring examples around us are: Lauren Blackmore: a plus size model; Summer Jacobs: a very thin model; Sudha Chandran: a prosthetic foot dancer; Arunima Sinha: the first women amputee to climb Mt. Everest; Malta: an accountant with the NGO HelpLife, Pune. Now, women see no boundaries to hold them back, they

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<sup>149</sup>"Disabled women's rights ignored." Engender, 30 Dec. 2018, 0.18, [www.engender.org.uk/news/blog/disabled-womens-reproductive-rights-routinely-ignored](http://www.engender.org.uk/news/blog/disabled-womens-reproductive-rights-routinely-ignored).

<sup>150</sup>"Issues of disability." Twitter, Fiona Robertson, 1 Jan. 2019, 9.17, [twitter.com/FionaSnp/status/1059810442858643456](https://twitter.com/FionaSnp/status/1059810442858643456).

<sup>151</sup>"Feminism." Merriam-Webster, 1 Jan. 2019, 9.58, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism).

<sup>152</sup>"HeforShe." UN, 1 Jan. 2019, 10.03, [www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too](http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too)

<sup>153</sup>"Speech on feminism." CNN, Entertainment, 1 Jan. 2019, 10.12, [www.cnn.com/2018/01/08/entertainment/oprah-globes-speech](http://www.cnn.com/2018/01/08/entertainment/oprah-globes-speech)

<sup>154</sup>"MeToo." MeToo, 1 Jan. 2019, 10.17, [www.metoomvmt.org](http://www.metoomvmt.org)

<sup>155</sup>"Priyanka Chopra." Twitter, 1 Jan. 2019, 9.32, [twitter.com/priyankachopra/status/745286470622121984](https://twitter.com/priyankachopra/status/745286470622121984)

see no standard to limit their potential, they see no patriarchy to chain them. Instead, they see other women supporting them, they see their goals, and they now see their life. A happy and true life.

### **Are we there, though?**

Although many women have broken the bodyglass ceiling, there are women who still remain unaware of they are being restricted as they are conditioned to think that this is how women are supposed to live, a lot of women are still suppressed and not allowed to live up to their potential, and many differently abled women aren't yet aware of their abilities because of their 'disability' and negative environment. A world with strong and bold women who strive to reach their potential and contribute well to the world is what we strive for. We look to live in a world where there will be no sexual harassment, or harassments of any kind on women as they achieve greater things in life. By the looks of it, things are definitely changing as women no longer wish to sit at home, all dolled up and wait for their prince on a white horse but rather go out and become better and successful versions of themselves without any chains of patriarchy and limitations holding them back.

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