

Taboo Associated with Menstruation and the bleeding deity Kamakhya Devi

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Abstract - *The most innate biological activity in a woman's life is undoubtedly her menstruation. In India, there are so many menstrual taboos that girls are unable to discuss serious diseases related to menstruation, which leaves them suffering in silence. However, menstruation is considered important in Tantric tradition. It is considered to be a crucial component of the ritual. Among the 51 Shakti peethas, the Kamakhya temple in Guwahati is considered to be one of the holiest sites. A significant event known as Ambubachi mela occurs during Ahaar month (June–August) in the Assamese calendar, following the first outburst of the monsoon. The door of the Kamakhya temple stays closed because it is believed that mother earth becomes impure for three days. The purpose of this study is to briefly focus on the taboos associated with menstruation in India and the mysterious legend of Kamakhya Devi, the bleeding goddess.*

Key Words: *Menstruation, Menstrual taboo, Taboo, Ambubachi mela and Kamakhya temple*

1. INTRODUCTION

The menstrual cycle is a phenomenon specific to women. But taboos and myths that keep women out of many facets of sociocultural life have always surrounded it. During menstruation, blood naturally leaves the uterus through the vagina. This is a normal aspect of the reproductive cycle. One of the telltale signs of the beginning of puberty in females, it is a normal process that starts when they are 11 or 14 years old. This has always been shrouded in mystery and myths in many countries like India, even though it is a phenomenon exclusive to girls. Women and girls are excluded from many facets of social and cultural life due to taboos around menstruation. While some of these can be beneficial, others might have negative effects. In Indian society, there is several taboo topics related to menstruation. Women who are menstruating are not allowed to touch the idol of God, perform puja, or enter temples. Ironically, however, there is a shrine in India dedicated to the menstruation Goddess Sati. Among the 52 Shaktipeeths in India, Kamakhya is one of the most prominent. It is situated in the Neelachal Hills in the western region of Guwahati.

2. Objective of the study:

In this paper, here try to briefly discuss the taboos surrounding menstruation in India as well as the mysterious legend of the bleeding Goddess of Kamakhya.

3. Methodology:

A secondary source of data was used in the preparation of the current research article. Information has been gathered from a range of publications, including books, essays, journals, newspapers, and websites.

4. Discussion:

Stigma around menstruation is a type of misogyny. Menstrual function is viewed by negative taboos as something to be ashamed of and something to be concealed. Furthermore, we support the notion that something shouldn't be called by not giving it a name. Menstrual taboos that are unfavorable are currently being contested. It's our dread of blood, according to Freud. According to Allan Court, taboo evolved because early humans thought menstruation blood was unclean.

Professor Chris Knight is a social anthropologist at London University. His book "Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture" (1995) is the most significant work on the development of human social organization yet published. Knight addresses various cultural taboos and the underlying material related to menstruation in this book. We lack compelling evidence in contemporary societies to support Knight's theory that early people had to menstruate in time with the moon. Knight clarifies, however, that this does not negate the evolutionary significance of our cycle duration. The menstrual cycle of 29.5 days, which is equal to the length of the lunar cycle, was preferred by the human species during its evolutionary history. The reasons why the human cycle grew to coincide so closely with the lunar cycle and why the original euphemism for cyclical bleeding was associated with the moon in many cultures remain a source of disagreement among scientists. However, Knight contends that we must investigate whether there was an adaptive basis for it—that is, how and why it might have helped females in our evolutionary past—before writing it off as a coincidence.

Knight proposes that the origins of menstrual taboos can be traced back to early human behaviors that were led and influenced by women. Specifically, women had an adequate reason to create their own taboo during menstruation, which prohibited touching their bodies during that time. This taboo only later became something that hindered rather than enhanced female autonomy. In hunter-gatherer societies even now, females used to congregate separately from males for a while during the new moon (darkness). Men might assume that this is the time when women menstruate together. Male participation, food-sharing, and hunt preparation were all rewarded if they brought food back to the pack after the hunt. Men would assume that women are menstruation concurrently at this time. Males would receive rewards for their preparation, participation, and sharing of food if they returned from the hunt with any food. A time period of feasting and sexual activity would commence when the period of sexual seclusion came to an end. During the era of hunting and gathering female have established blood as being powerful, creating a strong cultural symbol. Menstruation was associated with prosperity and power.

Menstruation is the most natural biological process of a women's life. In India, there are so many menstrual taboos that girls are unable to discuss serious diseases related to menstruation, leaving them to suffer in silence. In India, discrimination against menstruating women is extremely common. The notion that menstruating women are "impure" and "dirty" is the worst aspect. They are frequently kept out of the kitchen, denied entry into shrines and temples, and barred from all social and religious gatherings.

In the context of Indian religious setting, the Tantric tradition is special. The ritualization of women's body is one of the many reasons it stands apart. The annual celebration of Ambubachi mela (menstrual festival) in Kamakhya, it highly justifies the image of ritualization of women in the Tantric tradition. This Hindu religious celebration takes place at Guwahati's Kamakhya temple. It is believed that the Goddess Kamakhya goes through her yearly menstrual cycle during this time. It is an embodiment of yoni worship symbolism. Hindus hold the belief that the earth, sometimes known as Mother Earth, becomes filthy for three days and should be secluded in a similar manner to how some traditionally practicing Hindu women sequester themselves during their own menstrual cycles. For three days, Hindu followers practice various fasts, such as giving up farming, reading sacred texts, and doing acts of worship. After three days, in addition to other rites performed to guarantee that Devi Kamakhya regains her purity, she is bathed by cleaning the statue that depicts her with crimson color streaming from her vaginal canal.

5. Menstruation as a taboo in India:

Menstruation is a monthly process that is specific to women that begins when they reach puberty and ends when they menopause. Menarche typically occurs in girls between

the ages of 10 and 13 while menopause occurs in girls between the ages of 40 and 45. Blood and the inner linings of the uterus flow out of the body every 28 days during menstruation, which is a natural occurrence. Menarche is the term for the beginning of menstruation, which is a sign of puberty in girls. The menstrual cycle is a complex process from a cultural perspective, surrounded by various myths, superstitions, and taboo rituals that are largely shaped by socio-cultural and religious notions of a society. Menstrual taboos are almost universally observed due to the belief that menstrual blood is dirty, polluting, and has magical or medicinal properties. Due of the numerous beliefs and prohibitions around this natural cycle found in religious texts and folklore, a significant portion of India's populace views it as an impurity and a curse from the gods. Menstruation-related taboos included things like not cooking, participating in religious activities, going into sacred spaces, picking fruit and nuts off of plants, touching people, and handling domestic items, among other things. Women are reluctant to discuss the process because it is associated with stigma and humiliation. In India, sanitary napkins are still packaged in newspaper or black polyethylene.

Although the blood that women expel from their bodies during their periods is thought to be unclean or wasteful, it is commonly believed that impurity remains with women during this time. Menstruation is referred to as "a pollutant" because it is thought that if a woman touches anything when she is menstrual, it will become dirty. Women are not allowed to cook or enter the kitchen in the majority of India's rural areas. Married women are prohibited from having sexual relations with their husbands, and the utensils they use to eat are cleaned in the backyard. The patriarchal mindset made women feel inferior and lowly, and women continue to face untouchability and seclusion at times due to tradition and beliefs.

6. The Mystical tale of bleeding of Kamakhya:

Among the fifty-one Saktipeethas, the Kamakhya temple is devoted to Mother Goddess Kamakhya and is considered one of the primary peethas. The Kamakhya temple is located on the Nilachal Hill in the western region of Guwahati, Assam. In this particular place, Mother Goddess Kamakhya is revered in her "Yoni" (genitalia) form. The primary attraction of the temple is the Yonipitha; the goddess is not symbolized by an image in here. The yonipitha is crimson, the size of a squire, and it is constantly wet from water seeping out of a spring underneath. The peetha has twelve fingers and one arm in length. A Siva linga is also fastened to it. According to the mythology surrounding Maa Kamakhya Devi Temple, following Devi Sati's demise, Lord Siva, overcome with grief, carried her corpse on his shoulder and wandered the entire cosmos aimlessly. With the use of his spinning wheel, Lord Vishnu attempted to restore order to the universe. 51 pieces made up of Sati's corpse were

created by Sudarshan Chakra. The locations where Sati's body parts fell were all transformed into sacred sites where people worshipped her. Out of fifty one body parts, one body part—the female genitalia, or yoni—is believed to have fallen atop Kamakhya's Nilachal hill and eventually developed into the Kamakhya temple. The temple is primarily based on yoni-worship, which was a common Tantric practice in Assam.

Maa Kamakhya Devi is also thought to have a menstrual period, much like normal women. It's annual menstruation, though, in her instance. The menstrual festival, known as Ambubachi mela, is observed at Kamakhya every year in June. In Assamese calendar, it is observed during the month of Ahaar. Thousands of Sadhus, Sanyasis, and Tantrics are drawn to it because of its immense significance. In Tantric tradition, menstruation has a significant role.

A significant ceremony is held during Ambubachi (June-August), following the first monsoon burst, since the water turns red from iron oxide, and the ritual drink represents the rajas or Ritu of the Devi, her menstrual blood. The temple is closed for three days, opening on the fourth day following the Devi's bathing and adoration. According to Hindu belief, the Mother Earth, becomes filthy for three days and should be secluded in the same way as some traditionally devout Hindu women sequester themselves during their own menstrual periods. Hindu followers adopt certain fasting practices throughout these three days, such as not engaging in prayer or reading scriptures. Devi Kamakhya is bathed after three days, along with additional rituals that are performed to guarantee that the Devi regains her purity. The statue of Devi is cleaned, depicting her with crimson color streaming from her vaginal canal.

7. Taboo and the worship of bleeding Goddess:

In Tantric tradition, menstruation has a special place. According to tradition, it is a necessary component. In its most basic and original form, the idea did not include the deeply rooted being afraid of impurity and unholy, as well as the terror associated with the taboo of menstruating women. Contrary to Tantric tradition, the Vedic literature saw menstruation as the cause of impurity, taboo, and contamination. A woman on her period was confined to a room by herself. The Vedic poets created a symbolic structure that excluded, confused, and demonized the female bodily fluid of blood while glorifying women in their roles as mothers. This was their patriarchal synthesis. The Ambubachi reflects this conflict between the transgression Tantric inclination and the conventional requirement of purity. According to convention, the temple closes for four days when goddess Kamakhya begins her menstrual cycle. This is because the menstrual cycle is seen as contaminated, and solitude is one of the phases that contribute to this pollution.

Ambubachi reflects the contradiction between the transgression Tantric inclination and the traditional law of purity. According to convention, the temple closes for four days when goddess Kamakhya begins her menstrual cycle. This is because the menstrual cycle is seen as contaminated, and solitude is one of the phases that contribute to this pollution. This act, which isolates the menstrual female, upholds traditional norms of purity. Nonetheless, it is a breach of the orthodox principles of purity to receive menstrual blood (symbolistically) as Prasad during this festival. However, the celebration of menstruation is limited to a theoretical level. But in actuality, menstruation is frowned upon and considered a taboo.

8. Conclusion:

Women are the world's originators and its foundation. Women are seen as nature's primary reproductive force, which is why they have long been revered as goddesses in different faiths. The menstrual cycle is a monthly phenomenon that is specific to women and is associated with their reproductive system. However, menstruation is linked to a number of taboos in our culture, some of which are acceptable and others of which are not. The myths and taboos surrounding menstruation and the Kamakhya temple in Assam. Numerous Neo-Hindu philosophers contend that this myth was deliberately constructed to dispel certain social taboos related to the menstrual cycle and raise public knowledge of it.

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