

THE HINDU VIEW ON MENSTRUATION

“A woman is the Creator of the Universe, the Universe is her form.
A woman is the foundation of the world...
There is no prayer equal to a woman,
There is not, nor has been, nor will be any yoga to compare with a woman,
no mystical formula nor asceticism to match a woman”
(Shakti-Sangama Tantra II.52)



There have been so many (sometimes untrue, misleading) interpolations of our Vedic Shastras, especially from the West, and by unqualified commentators about this highly sensitive topic, that we now feel obliged to comment about it and right the wrongs that have truly marred our understanding of this extremely delicate and misunderstood subject. In our shastras there is quite a lot of information on this matter but one should remember that one has to view this information with a modernistic mentality rather than a Neanderthal mentality.

DO NOTE:- In this article we tried to cover as much on Menstruation as possible. This very lengthy article is rather thought-provoking and is not intended to create further questions, but rather to view the topic from different perspectives. This is certainly a hotly debated issue that excited and provoked many arguments concerning the relationship between religion, culture and menstruation. In an effort to assist humanity, Dipika's aim is to share this sacred knowledge regarding this controversial subject. We shall be providing views from a Medical, Scientific, Religious, a “Common Sense” point of view, and finally F.A.Q.'s

CONTENTS IN THIS ARTICLE

Page 1:- Introduction

Page 2:- The Medical point of view on Menstruation, The Scientific point of view on Menstruation

Page 3:- The Religious view on Menstruation, Positive Information on Menstruation. Srila Prabhupada on Menstruation.

Page 4:- The "Coming-of-age" / Kani-Peedi / Ritu Kala Samskara (Rituals). Bhagavad Gita on the Soul's gender. The meaning of TANTRA.

Page 5:- Tantric Literatures on Menstruation. The meaning of YONI.

Pages 6-7:- Draupadi Devi. Kamakhya Temple and The Ambubachi Mela. The Shakti Peethas.

Pages 8-10:- The Shakti Peethas. How to celebrate Ambubachi Mela in one's own home.

Pages 10-12:- Information against Menstruation. Srimad Bhagavatam, Garuda Purana and other scriptures on Menstruation.

Pages 13-14:- Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and other Religions on Menstruation.

Pages 14-15:- Why is Menstrual blood seen as dangerous and degrading towards women?

Pages 15-17:- The “Common-sense” point of view on Menstruation. Are menstrual taboos degrading towards women? The popular feminist Gloria Steinem's views.

Pages 17-20:- Questions and Answers on Menstruation. References and Vote of thanks.

In ancient India, women occupied a very important position - in fact a position superior to men. It was a culture whose word for strength and power is "Shakti", the embodiment of the goddess, meaning "power" and "strength." Today, however, the position of women in India seems to be very different and it appears that women have very little to celebrate. The most spiritual country (i.e. India) in the world has the most blatant disregard for women. This truly disturbs and upsets me, hence the humble offering of this article to bring back the glories of women. For many hundreds of years there has been much deliberation regarding women performing Puja's during her monthly menstrual cycle. Equally, there were many thoughts from various individuals, who felt that the "old way of abstinence" was compulsory, while others expressed that there was nothing incorrect, as it's a part of the "natural process of a woman." In the information given below we shall deliver the "FOR" and "AGAINST" MENSTRUATION giving either side an equal chance of their views.

The first angle that we shall pursue is the **MEDICAL ROUTE.**

A woman's period is a monthly health report card. Menstrual cycles highlights a woman's "best times of the month". Regular cycles help inform women of their health decisions. A females menstrual cycle is essential in helping her learn, plan for, and make choices about her personal well being, mood, exercise — and naturally, her sex life. In addition, her regular menstrual period will let her know that her hormones are in balance. This is so important when one realizes that about 80% of women that one sees in clinics experience symptoms relating to an imbalance of their hormones. If this complication is not looked into, it can lead to worsening premenstrual syndrome symptoms (PMS), feelings of fatigue, and weight gain. It can also lead to an increased risk for other more serious health issues.

Here are some of the most essential health benefits of a female's period:

- You can know when your hormones are in or out of balance.
- You can learn about your bones, thyroid, and metabolic wellness.
- You can identify your best days for sexual arousal and enjoyment.
- You can leverage improved energy for your exercise and fitness routine.
- You can inform your health decisions about your life.
- You can create emotional wellness.

The menstrual period provides a "monthly update" about a females hormonal, reproductive, thyroid, and metabolic functioning. This is because every month her period is the result of a coordinated discussion between her brain and her ovaries. The hypothalamus and pituitary glands are two of the areas that direct this conversation. They are also closely connected to the adrenal glands, the thyroid, and the digestive system along these same pathways. When one system is disrupted, then the other systems may suffer. Changes to one's period, or if one has irregular periods, are usually the first indication of a disrupted signal along the pathway, with implications that can be felt throughout one's entire body. Being attuned to one's menstrual cycle can also benefit one's healthy lifestyle by allowing one to have more energy to exercise on a regular basis. One's hormone levels will impact the type of fuel that is available for working one's muscles.

The second angle that we shall pursue is the **SCIENTIFIC ROUTE.**

At about the age of 10 to 13 years, the ovaries of females are stimulated by the follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) of the pituitary. This is called the onset of puberty and is accompanied by release of hormones oestrogen and progesterone. These hormones control the production of ova or eggs and appearance of secondary sexual characteristics. Unlike males where sperms can be produced through out the life of man, in females the reproductive phase only lasts till the age of 45-50 years. This phase is characterised by the presence of menstrual cycle. Each menstrual cycle typically lasts for 28 days. Thus it occurs every month. Each cycle has the following phases: 1) Menstrual phase 2) Follicular phase 3) Ovulatory phase 4) Luteal phase.

The third angle that we shall pursue is the **RELIGIOUS ROUTE.**

FOR MENSTRUATION:-

Why would Hindu dharma, which seems to place women on such an elevated pedestal (in most cases), have these "rules" which seem to treat women unfairly? The Vedas are the final authority on all topics in Hindu Dharma. The very core of Vedic Dharma lies in the fact that unlike any other scriptures, the Vedas do not dictate and give any code of "Do's" and "Dont's". The Vedas show the right path and leave it to the judgement of humans to use their free will in deciding what to do. Generally, Indian women are the center of a family and the web of an Indian life. She is the wall of protection and strength for her family. Women are always kept in the midst of things auspicious viz. flowers, deities, ornaments etc.

Most Hindus are tolerant and respectable humans. What we are humbly implying is that since there is no such thing as one religious tenet of Hinduism, Hinduism in other forms may allow it. Certain sects in Hinduism allow things which are considered adharma in other sects of Hinduism, e.g. Tantriks are allowed Himsa ("injury" it is part of their rituals to sacrifice animals) while other Hindus follow Ahimsa (non-injury) – so one may inquire which one is correct? This then is a major confusion in Hindu theology. If one path of Hinduism says that you will be punished for performing a certain act, and another says that it is actually part of worship to perform that same act which is a sin in the other part of Hinduism, thus one may wonder which path is correct. Amazingly, both are supported in Vedic/Hindu scriptures. Hinduism has two main branches, which are known as Vama Marga and Dakshina Marga. (Marga means path / a way of accomplishing something such as yoga or sadhana). Vama marga is the left path which the Tantriks pursue and which are rajastic (the Mode of passion) and tamastic (the Mode of ignorance) practices and they practice Himsa the sacrificing of animals and the usage of menstruating blood and so forth, while Dakshina marga is the right path which is sattvic and practice Ahimsa (non-violence).

Srila Prabhupada states: "According to the smarta vidhi, women cannot touch a deity during her menstrual period but the Goswami Viddhi allows. But it's better not to do it. **One thing is that the seva can never be stopped for any reason. This also is for the cooking**". (A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Letter to Amsu. Vrindavan August 13th 1974.)

*** What is most important is not the bodily contamination but contamination of consciousness. Nothing can come in our way of purification of our consciousness. Bhakti is above all. However, for the sake of society we need to follow some rules externally. Physically a mataji (woman) may be contaminated but our mind may be more contaminated than her physical, so-called "contamination". It's possible she is in better consciousness than others who are "physically clean". So dear humans we have to work on our consciousness.

If a menstruating woman is about to expire (die), does this mean she has to stop chanting the Lord's/ Mata's holy names? That just sounds insensitive and is an example of male-based, foolish fanaticism and Neanderthal mentality. In the Caitanya Caritamrita... "Shree Krishna Caitanya Mahaprabhu once went to pass stool, and Gopala-guru who was carrying water happened to pass by. He saw Mahaprabhu holding His tongue very tightly, and Gopal-guru, like an innocent child, asked, "Prabhu, why are you doing like so?" Mahaprabhu told him that His tongue was out of control. "When I am going to pass stool, this chanting of 'Hare Krishna Hare Krishna' will not stop. I want to stop, but it never stops. So I am doing like this." Gopala-guru told Mahaprabhu, "If anyone is going to die, and stool and urine are coming uncontrollably, should he not chant? I think it is better to chant." Mahaprabhu said, "Oh, you are not only Gopala. You are Gopala-guru." He left His tongue and began to chant". Anyone can do this. **Here. The Supreme Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu is saying that there are no rules and regulations.**

It's not that you should only chant in a certain way. It's not that you cannot chant sitting on a bed or walking. You can remember the Lord's Name, you can chant it, you can sing it - in any way you can do it. Mahaprabhu and Srila Prabhupada has explained that the Lord, His name and the service you perform for the Supreme Lord are non-different.

The "Coming-of-age" / Kani-Peedi / Ritu Kala Samskara (Rituals):- When a young female experiences her first menstrual cycle, a prayer (The "Coming-of-age" / Kani-Peedi / Ritu Kala Pujan) is performed to invoke the blessings of Lord Ganesh, and The Supreme Devi Adi-Parashakti (Mother Durga) in her various forms to remove all obstacles and grant success and prosperity in this new stage of the young female's life. It's a cleansing prayer that also celebrates the new stage in life she has just entered - from a child to adolescence. This ritual offers the young female and her family the chance to say good-bye to, and give thanks for, her childhood years, and to welcome her adolescent years. It provides young female teens with an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the changes in their life as they enter a new phase. The prayer service is ideal for females who are approximately in their 13th year or those who are moving from primary school into high school (i.e. the time which she first menstruates). When a female first menstruates, she is said to have 'borne the flower'. The corresponding English word "flower" has the significant literal meaning of 'that which flows'. Hmmm you may ask, "She is in her menstrual cycle, yet still partakes in the various pujas? Exactly my point... many have selective hearing and follow biased, patriarchal traditions from the past it seems.

The rules regarding women and menstruation fall under Smriti, not Shruti – Shruti is considered divine, while Smriti is considered "tradition" or "text" – they are inspired by the times one lives in, and have been passed down. The practice(s) that many perform are therefore, not divine law at all – it's an archaic, oppressive one that has unfortunately remained in existence due to other factors, such as general subjugation of women due to patriarchal structures. Shruti includes the Bhagavad Gita – and in the B.G., people are not referred to as men or women rather they are referred to as souls (because a soul has no gender), so since this is the case then there should not be any restrictions on women being regarded as unclean while menstruating at all. Smriti (tradition), as the unbaised can attest to, regardless of what religion one subscribes to, unfortunately carries with it the stink of male egotistical privilege, and many other neanderthal customs. The Abrahamic religions are especially harsh with this. Hinduism has been unfortunately twisted to incorporate this practice that has no spiritual basis/explanation at all. Fortunately for Hindus, smriti is mutable – or should be regarded as such since it is literally seen and recognised as a product of the times. Hopefully in future years, such practices will be abolished – it's already true that many other laws derived from smriti-texts are not in practice today. I think that is a good thing because anything else alienates an entire gender.

Every great person in this world (i.e. the scientists, engineers, actors, even priests, etc) are created by some woman which is because she menstruated.

Swami Chinmayananda explained this practice in physiological, hormonal and emotional terms. Earlier, the traditional role of a woman in the house involved arduous and physically demanding tasks such as carrying heavy pots of water, grinding of wheat, dals, rice and masalas, farming duties and so on. During periods, women suffer varying degrees of discomfort from cramps to headaches and PMS syndrome which includes depression, anger and mood swings. Thus they were prescribed rest during the three days of menstruation. Swamini Vimalanandaji, a senior and highly respected Swamini of the Chinmaya Mission, emphatically stated there was no need to feel any guilt in performing one's pooja, chanting, and prayers at the altar of one's home. There was absolutely no sin incurred. However, since a large number of people in India are still strict believers, one should, as respect to their beliefs, refrain from entering public places of worship.

The Sanskrit word TANTRA will be mentioned quite frequently below... Tantra in English denotes philosophy, or ritual actions and is first mentioned in the Rigveda (X.71.9). The word Tantra is a very interpolated word, especially by misguided westerners who relate to it as part of their sexual exploits. Also many Indians, when the word Tantra is mentioned, view it as negative or black magic, which is incorrect.

Tantric Literatures on Menstruation:- So the most pertinent question an intelligent person will ask is, "Do Mothers Durga, Lakshmi or Sarasvati menstruate"? Well it's not directly mentioned in our Shastras but Devi Kamakhya is The Supreme Shakti Herself hence this means it refers to all Devi's as they are all expansion of The Supreme Shakti. We glorify Mother Kamakhya Devi, who is none other than Mother Kali, Devi Maha Tripurasundari, and also Mother Chandi (Durga) who are mentioned in much of the Tantric scriptures like (Kalikapurana, Yoginitantra, Kulachudamani Tantra, Kamakhya Tantra, Devi Bhagavata, etc). And Devi menstruates for 3 days every year in Assam, India. So from the valuable information provided, does this mean that one stops performing pujas when Devi Herself menstruates? Again this just sounds awfully wrong.

In India, strict patriarchal structures still prevail with continued intolerance against menstruating women. During menstruation, due to patriarchal structures, women are considered to belong to the lowest caste viz. a Shudra (Shudras are the 4th Varna. The other 3 varnas are Brahmins (priests); Kshtriya (those with governing functions), and Vaishya (agriculturalists, cattle rearers and traders). The Shudras perform functions of serving the other three varna viz menial labour etc), and are thus prohibited from entering and worshipping in Hindu temples, with notices at the entrance of the temple gates reminding menstruating women not to enter.



Hindu religious authorities still continue to debate if women are suitable to chant the Gayatri Mantra. This mantra is one the most powerful mantras in Vedic Shastras, which when chanted accurately and with faith will bestow strength, knowledge, bliss, righteous living, courage, success and glory. Traditionally women are banned from reciting it. Paradoxically/Ironically, Gayatri-Devi is the personification of the mantra as she is considered the Veda Mata, the mother of all Vedas. So the prohibition of women is truly astonishing.

The Sanskrit word YONI will be mentioned quite frequently below... Yoni in English means "vagina/vulva" or "womb".

There is a vast amount of Tantric literature that are yet to be studied. If these texts are anything like the Yoni Tantra then it is easy to understand why any Hindu male might be shocked. The Yoni Tantra is part of classic Tantric literature and states quite clearly that the way to enlightenment is the worship of a woman's vulva (yoni) and menstrual blood is considered central to Tantric practices: "The yoni which has bled is suitable for worship. Do not worship a yoni which has never bled. If one should worship the yoni, bowing thrice with a flower, all karmas are destroyed and nothing in the three worlds becomes unattainable... One should always smear a line of menstrual blood or sandal paste or semen on the forehead... If one should worship the yoni tattva, making a forehead mark with it, all defects and evils of a hundred births are immediately destroyed".

In Shaktism (Mother worship) the yoni is celebrated and worshipped reverently and according to Tantra, yoni is the origin of life. The yoni is also considered to be an abstract representation of Shakti and Devi, the creative force that moves through the entire universe.. Most Devi devotees worship the Kali Yantra (view below). When one views the Kali yantra one will notice that the yantra has an upside down Meru (triangle or mountain). This inverted triangle represents the Yoni. Without the Yoni there is no Lingam and vice versa.



Yoni Mudra (view below) is a principle in meditation used to reduce distraction during the beginning of yoga practice. Our ancient Indians used the term yoni in agriculture. A 'fertile yoni' meant a good harvest of crops. The yoni is the creative power of nature and represents the Goddess Shakti. The linga stone represents Lord Shiva, and is usually placed in the yoni. The lingam is the transcendental source of all that exists. According to Vedas and Bhagavad Gita, the Yoni is a form of life or a species. There are 8.4 million yonis total with Manushya Yoni (Human form/human species) as one of them. A human (manushya yoni) is obtained on the basis of good karma (deeds) before which a human goes through various forms of yonis (for example, insect, fish, deer, monkey, etc.).



DRAUPADI DEVI:- Draupadi's most exceptional quality was that Lord Krishna considered her His sakhī (friend) and sister. Once Lord Krishna cut His finger while beheading the demon Shishupal, and Draupadi immediately tore off a piece of her sari and bandaged the Lord's cut. Lord Krishna said that with this loving act, she wrapped Him in debt and He would repay each "thread" when the time arrives. Indeed, whenever Draupadi needed Lord Krishna's protection she fervently prayed for His help, He came to her rescue. So when the time arrived Draupadi Devi prayed to her brother Lord Krishna while she was being disrobed by the Kauravas. Her five husbands couldn't help her but when she prayed to The Supreme Lord, The Lord didn't disappoint, the Lord saved Draupadi as promised from total humiliation and supplied her with unlimited cloth. Yet Draupadi Devi was in her menstrual cycle and the Lord saved Draupadi devi without any consideration.

In the Mahabharata, Duhshasana's violent end, and the destruction of his entire clan, was unavoidable because he violated the menses of Draupadi by touching her and attempting to disrobe her (and intending to rape her) during her menstrual period. One equipped with knowledge of Vedic etiquette (Sadachar) will know that Draupadi was in the process of having her menses because she was brought from solitude, and also her hair was undone/not tied up, both indictive and cultural signs associated with menstruation. From the moment of her attempted rape onwards, Draupadi kept her hair untied. She ominously spoke, "When I see your blood, then I will bind my hair again." Perhaps this is alluding to his disruption of her "bleeding." Again, none of these explanations are meant to be offensive, and perhaps none of this can even be offensive as long as one removes, or at least brings awareness to, the conflation between impurity and inauspiciousness within one's mind.

Kamakhya Temple and The Ambubachi Mela

The famous Kamakhya Temple is located in the Kamrup district of Assam (N-E region of India). The temple is dedicated to Kamakhya Devi (a form of Mother Durga who fulfills one's desires). What attracts people to Kamakhya Devi is that this form of the Divine Mother menstruates. The significance of the temple is that it's one of the 51 Shakti Peethas (more on this below). The Kamakhya Temple is amongst one of the holiest Shakti shrines throughout India. This temple commemorates Mother Sati in her aspect of Kamakhya Devi. As per Vedic shastras, after the time of Her self-sacrifice, the genital organ (yoni) of Sati-Devi fell at this spot. Kamakhya Temple has a natural cave with a spring. In order to reach the temple, one has to take a flight of steps that goes down into a dark shrine. In the shrine, Kamakhya Devi, in the form of genital organ (yoni), presides as a big crevice in the bedrock. Devi is covered naturally by a rivulet of water gushing upward from an underground spring. The crevice is usually covered with sari, flowers and vermilion powder (Sindoor). Essentially, 'Kamakhya' Devi is the granter of desires. In Kalika Purana, Kamakhya is referred as the goddess who fulfills all desires, the bride of Lord Shiva and the benefactor of salvation.

The Ambubachi Mela:- The Ambubachi Mela is the most important mela (festival) celebrated in the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, Assam. This yearly mela is celebrated during the monsoon season, around the middle of June, when the Brahmaputra River is in spate. It's the celebration of the yearly menstruation course of Devi Kamakhya. The festival known as Ambuvaci (Ameti), is unique with its own significance. For the duration of this fertility festival, Devi is said to undergo her menstrual cycle period. At this point of time, the temple is closed for three days and before closing, white sheets are draped inside the temple. During these three days some restrictions are observed by the devotees like not cooking, not performing puja or reading holy books, no farming etc. This may sound rather contradicting but they practice this so that Devi can rest. After three days Devi Kamakhya is bathed and other rituals are performed to ensure that the devi retrieves her purity. When the temple is opened after three days, the sheets are found red in color. Then the doors of the temple are reopened and prasad is distributed. On the fourth day the devotees are allowed to enter the temple and worship Devi Kamakhya. On the fourth day, great festivity is observed. Devotees from far and near, come to visit this temple at this juncture of the festival. The red sheets are torn into pieces and distributed amongst the devotees. It's also believed that during the monsoon rains the creative and nurturing power of the 'menses' of Mother Earth becomes accessible to devotees at this site during the mela. The Maha-prasad is distributed in two forms – Angodak and Angabastra. Angodak literally means the fluid part of the body - water from the spring and Angabastra literally means the cloth covering the body - a piece of the cloth used to cover the stone (yoni) during the days of menstruation. There is no Deity of the presiding Goddess but she is worshiped in the form of a yoni-like stone instead over which a natural spring flows.



This mela is also known as Ameti or Tantric fertility festival since it's closely associated with the Tantric Shakti cult prevalent in eastern parts of India. Even some Tantric Babas (ascetics) make their public appearances only during these four days. The rest of the year, they remain in seclusion.

So every year between 22nd- 24th June Devi menstruates in Kamakhya Temple. But for arguments sake, what if hypothetically Devi menstruates once a month and what if one has to perform a puja for Mata like a Devi puja and havan? Does this mean Devi will not attend the puja because she is in her cycle period? Personally I find that rather unfortunate and nonsensical/primitive in mentality.

The Shakti Peethas

The Shakti Peethas (seat of Shakti) are places of worship consecrated to the goddess Shakti or Sati, the main deity of the Shakta sect. In the Srimad Bhagavatam (4th canto Chapters 2-7) mentions that Daksha performed a yajna with a desire to take revenge on Lord Shiva. Daksha invited all the Deities to this great Yajna (Havan) except Lord Shiva and Sati (Daksha's daughter). The fact that she was not invited did not deter Sati from attending her father's yajna. She expressed her desire to attend the yajna to Lord Shiva, who tried his best to dissuade her from attending. Lord Shiva eventually relented and Sati attended the yajna. Sati, being an uninvited guest, was not bestowed any respect at the yajna. Furthermore, Daksha insulted Lord Shiva. Sati was unable to bear her father's insults toward her dear husband, so she immolated herself. When Sati Devi immolated herself, Lord Shiva being the all-knowing immediately knew what had transpired and it enraged him to no end. Being inconsolable, Lord Shiva created the great Virabhadra (by throwing on the ground just single strand of his hair) who then then went on a rampage and destroyed Daksha's yajna and also severed Daksha's head, which was later replaced with that of a male goat as Lord Shiva (being so merciful) restored him to life. Still immersed in grief, Lord Shiva picked up the remains of Sati's body, and performed the Tandava (the celestial dance of destruction), across all creation. The other Deities requested Lord Vishnu to intervene to stop the oncoming destructive dance. Lord Vishnu then used His Sudarshana Chakra (The All Auspicious and Powerful Disk), which cut Sati's corpse into 51 parts linking to the 51 alphabets in Sanskrit. The various parts of her body fell at several spots all through the Indian subcontinent and formed sites which are known as Shakti Peethas today. At all the Shakti Peethas, the Goddess Shakti is accompanied by her consort, Lord Bhairava (a manifestation of Lord Shiva).

Some of the great religious texts like the Shiva Purana, the Devi Bhagavatam, the Kalika Purana and the Asta Shakti recognize four major Shakti Peethas (centers). The Body Part or "Ornament" refers to the body part or piece of jewelery that fell to earth, at the location on which the respective temple is built. There are 51 Shakti Peethas in total in and around Bharat Bhumi (India).

List of 4 Main Adi Shakti Pithas

Sr. No.	Place	Body Part or Ornament
1	Puri, Orissa (inside Jagannath Temple complex)	Pada Bimala
2	Berhampur, Orissa	Sthana (Breasts) Tara Tarini
3	Guwahati, Assam	Yoni khanda Kamakshya
4	Kolkata, West Bengal (Kalighat Kali Temple)	Mukha khanda Dakshina Kalika

The yoni is the quintessence of femininity and is a yantra for many Shakta-based Tantric societies in India. Represented as a downward pointing triangle, it stands for the sacred feminine womb, from which all life springs. One worships the Goddess Kamakhya, who, in this form, illustrates her creative power. Devi is venerated as a life giver and Kamakhya temple happens to be one of the very few Hindu shrines where the Goddess is worshipped in Her reproductive aspect as the source of all life on Earth.

During Ambubachi, for three days, Mother Earth Herself menstruates, and all the temples in the region are closed to devotees. Inside the Kamakhya temple, Devi is bathed and then dressed daily. Devi is draped in a red silk cloth in consideration of Her menstrual flow and also is given Naivedhyam (fruits) and is offered worship. Families who reside near the temple also cover their own shrines and offer fruits and simple puja to Devi, preferring Devi to rest in this period. On the 4th day, the temple doors are opened and Devi's devotees wait to receive Her special darshan. Ardent devotees plead to receive a small piece of the "rakta (blood) vastra (cloth)", the red silk "blood cloth" upon which Devi sits during Her menses. As a Tabeez/talisman/amulet, this piece of cloth is said to be very auspicious and powerfully beneficial if tied onto one's body, generally around the wrist or arm.

The Sanskrit word of "Ambuvaachee" from the local Assamese word of "ambubachi or ambubasi" is derived, literally means "the issuing forth of water", referring to the swelling of the Earth's waters from the onset of the monsoon (starting around June/July). Ambubachi is a time of tremendous power and celebration. Mother Earth (a.k.a Dharti/Varahi/Bhoomi) cannot be impure, as she is cleansing the Earth through the monsoons - thus this is the time of potency and reflection. How can she be "unclan" if she is purifying the entire Earth? It's a time to relinquish selfish desires and to focus completely on Devi and celebrate with joy all that She is, to celebrate the gifts that Mother Earth provides to nourish us viz. food, shelter, guidance, protection, etc. This is a time to offer Devi simple worship, serving Her selflessly, without asking for anything in return or for oneself. Recognizing one's own selfish nature without judgement is a powerful part of releasing the ego and striving towards full devotion and love for our awesome Mother.

How to celebrate Ambubachi in one's own home.

During Ambubachi, it's important to allow our dearest Mother to rest. Every day we are asking Ma for this and that, so for these few days we let our most awesome Ma rest rather than asking Her to help in our requests. It's a time we need to be selfless and serve Ma instead - without any expectation of any rewards. In the west this similar concept is celebrated as Mother's day in May every year, when we pamper our Mothers in the same way to acknowledge them for what they have done for us and how much we love them and appreciate them.

In 2014 Ambubachi Mela begins on the 22nd June and ends on the 25th June.

You may observe this important period the way that the families in Kamakhya does. On the first day take a piece of clean cloth (preferably red silk, but you can use what you have access to) and cover the altar/prayer place or the Murti. If you have a temple room in your home then close the door. You can also draw a curtain in front of the altar. This is to allow Devi privacy and rest during this time also to honor and respect Her. She is extremely powerful in this period as She is in the activity of purifying and regenerating the entire Earth, which is Her body itself, and it's best to allow Her a wide berth.

In the Tantric philosophy menstruation is not considered impure, nor can the Mother Herself ever be made impure. So Her worship continues, but no requests are to be made to Ma. Twice a day you may offer Naivedhyam (fruits or sweet rice), warm milk (with Gur/Jaggery/Sugar), and water. The items are to be placed on a tray and left in front of Devi for Devi to consume. After 10 minutes (you must wait for Devi to first finish eating her Naivedhyam), you may offer Devi (on a tray have 3 incense sticks which is in an incense holder, a small lamp which has a piece of camphor on it, and three flowers {red or yellow will be best but optional}). Now light the incense, and camphor while still leaving the items on the tray. With a bell in your left hand now ring the bell as you turn the tray around Devi 3, 5, 7 or 9 times in a clockwise direction. Afterwards, bow down to Ma and ask for nothing - instead giving thanks to Ma for allowing you to serve Her in this important time. When offering the food and aarti you may chant the following mantra dedicated to Ma Kamakhya.

Kaamaakhye varade devee neela-parvata vaasinee
tvam devee jagatam maataa yoni-mudre namo astu te

You may also wish to meditate silently on our most awesome Mother during these three days and focusing on your gratitude to Devi. You may also like to participate in activities that helps to heal Mother Earth like cleaning up your local area of dirt etc, or fertilize your garden.

In the morning of the 4th day viz. 25th June, remove the cloth and open the door to the temple and then clean everything thoroughly. Replace all the clothes, etc, and dress your Deities with new clothes. Offer simple worship as given above but cook tasty, elaborate vegetarian foods for Devi like Pumpkin curry, Drumstick herbs (or any herbs), mixed veg curry, offer Devi her favorite fruits like Anar (Pomegranate), Coconut juice, etc. Offer with your full heart and on this day you may ask Devi for anything you desire, but beware of what you desire. When you ask with a pure heart and with the highest good in mind, this definitely pleases Devi. Devi will give us what we truly need and wants to fulfill our desires. Take the time during this period to purify your heart and recognize your imperfections and humble yourself at Her lotus feet.

In this way you can observe Ambubachi and the most powerful time of the year of our most awesome divine Mother Earth in all Her many forms.

AGAINST MENSTRUATION

Lord Vishnu in the Garuda Purana instructs that when a baby is born only the mother cannot perform any puja. But remember, excluding the mother, the father and the family still continue with the daily prayers. This is proof from the Garuda Purana, Preta Kanda Ch 29 verses 9, 11 & 12 Lord Vishnu says "In impurity accruing from birth, the rules are less strict. The mother is purified after 10 days and the father just after taking a bath. In birth the relatives incur no impurity. Impurity attaches to parents alone. Primarily, it is the mother who becomes impure. The father is purified by the touch of water alone. In birth or death O Garuda, impurity lasts only for 10 days."

We can view this in many ways but Lord Vishnu does not elaborate further on this topic. However, I can humbly speculate the reason for this rule is that (well I'm a male hence won't have experienced child birth) when giving birth to a child a woman generally goes through immense pain and stress that only a woman can go through. Hence, after the child birth - to recuperate from that painful and stressful ordeal, Lord Vishnu recommends the mother to rest for at least 10 days and do nothing much but rest and spend time with her child. In this period the mother and baby bathes with leaves boiled in water (leaves like Nochi, Mango, Lemon, Syringaberry, Neem, Gumtree, Guava, Bay, etc) especially for the mothers recuperation, so that her body is healed very quickly.

It's been said that our ancient saints and sages made a rule as to allow females to rest during the days of her monthly menstrual period – i.e. from cooking and many other domestic duties. This can be viewed or speculated upon two angles:- 1) They were very benevolent allowing females these 3+ days to rest as much as possible as the process of bleeding from menstruation is highly complex, energy sapping, draining and mostly painful for many females. 2) Or as people who follow the biased traditions of people who are against menstrual cycles during prayers, will say this is to prove patriarchal dominance over women due to the male dominated societies.

Without being medically technical and from a biological standpoint, the menstrual period is a way the body rids itself of dead tissues, resulting in approximately once a month periodical recurring cycle of physiological changes in females after puberty. During this period of a woman's menses cycle, her body dispels and discharges the dead and decayed "seed of life" or Agni-kusum. It's the only biological mechanism that cleanses a woman during her reproduction years. It's nature's way of ensuring that the cycle of life continues. It is God's Divine creation that during such intervals of a woman's life, her body will eliminate "dead seeds that were once capable of producing life." Hence, from this standpoint, while she is discharging dead materials that were once responsible of giving life, she is regarded as being in a "period of uncleanliness." Therefore, although this phase in a woman's life is biological, it's a period when she is considered "unclean."

In Sanskrit, the term "Aayus" means, "the continuity of consciousness". The word "Artavya", which refers to "menstrual period" in English, means "belonging or conforming to the seasons or periods of time" or "combination of several seasons". This word has acquired the meaning and interpretation of the menstrual cycle. Additionally, the word "Kusum", which means a blossom or flower, has connotation to the Fire-Deity Agni-deva; hence, it can be interpreted as: "a form of fire." From this standpoint, it is construed as the "life-source" that discharges from a woman at the time of her menses. From this concept, it's also referred to as: "Jeeva-raktha – the blood of life." "Rajas" is another word that interprets the flow of menstrual blood.

How does our Scriptures comment about this? One can quote several chapters and verses in our Scriptures that can be construed or interpreted in a manner to endorse a woman's abstinence from puja during her menstrual cycle. However, Householder (Married) Priests, according to mandates and restrictions of Shrautaa Sutra and Kalpa Sutra, among other texts, are restricted from any contact with their spouse on certain days such as Purnima Vrat, Pradosh Vrat, certain Amavasya Vrat's, Somvaar Vrat, etc. Does this mean that God is available on one day and not on the other? No! It simply means that everything is governed by a period of "time".

There are restrictions in every civilization; and Hinduism is no exception. Every individual was born with certain duties: Women conceive and then deliver babies – does it mean that men should be upset because they cannot? Is God unfair?

So the bottom line is women are restricted from performing any puja during their menstrual course or period, because this is a period that her body expels dead tissues. Since she is (by all practicality) expelling dead tissue matter from her body, she cannot perform any puja. Lets elaborate on this concept further. We cleanse our minds of evil thoughts; we cleanse our body by abstinence of certain foods and drinks, sexual and other acts before we sit for a puja. Similarly, a woman must purge herself from these dead tissue materials before she can perform a puja. This very concept was endorsed by Maitrayani Devi, the wife of Rishi Yajnavalkya, who was so revered that a recension of the Yajur Veda was named after her.

Maitrayani Devi expounded on the values of a woman and laid out measures of the "do's" and "dont's" that mandate certain restrictions and allowances as a guideline for a woman. Additionally, men should be co-operative and helpful in the home during his wife's menses. But one should be reminded that one is free to do as one chooses.

Ignorance about a woman's body led many to compile restrictive laws. Manu-deva, in the “controversial” Manu-Smriti, wrote, “A women who is menstruating should be kept isolated from every one for a week in a room and there shall not be even the idol of a Deity in that room.” Of course when Manu-deva compiled all these laws, it was very primitive and there were no female tampons/pads, etc. to prevent actual dripping of blood on the floor...

Isolation on the grounds of health and welfare is understandable...but mere TABOO is Neanderthal mentality at best. If Manu or any other Law givers have written "all bloods are unholy", then we can understand, but they did not. A male priest can go to church with his finger cut or a male Pujari can enter a temple with his hand cut too and yet no one will say a thing against that!!!

Swami Vishwananda comments “Menstruation is purification and a great service to all humankind. At every spiritual ceremony women, who are in their monthly cycle, are asked, not to touch any temple items, not to offer flower petals and not to offer anything into a yagna fire. Here is a summary of explanations to help everyone to understand why it is like that. A woman is energetically receptive and during the month she collects a lot of negativity from her environment. In doing so she does a great service, as she purifies her environment. This impurities get removed from her during menstruation. Many women in their cycle are not allowed to participate in a hawan sacrifice etc. Many Gurus gave the following explanation: “Menstruation is purification. Women are going through their personal purification. They should not even touch the person which is performing the puja. They should not even touch other people. When you are performing a ritual everything gets energetically intensified. In menstruation there is already a certain negativity inside. So it gets intensified in the ceremony. So women should keep a certain distance. They can participate with the mind. Manas puja (puja in thoughts) is also very important.” Normally the flow of energy in people is upwards, but during the time of menstruation, the flow of energy in the woman is downwards. In a spiritual ceremony the energy is going strongly upwards towards the Divine. That means, that the flow of energy in a woman is going in the opposite direction than the energy of the ceremony. This causes an energetic disturbance which can lead to not being well. So in requesting women to stay at a distance it's also about protecting her from energetic disturbances. All together, it's not about portraying women as somehow impure - rather women are the physical manifestation of the Divine Mother and menstruation is also given by the Divine for the purpose told above”.

The katha (from the Srimad Bhagavatam) is the reasoning as to why menses is considered impure:- Lord Indra is the king of the upper planets where the devas reside. The demonic beings reside in the lower planets. We on earth are in the middle. Lord Indra and the devas are intermittently involved in wars with the demons. Once the demons performed a powerful fire sacrifice and conjured up a gigantic warrior, who, because of taking birth from the sacred fire was also a Brahmana. After a gruesome battle Lord Indra killed the Brahmana warrior with his lightning weapon but because the warrior was a brahmana Lord Indra received a sinful reaction for the killing of a brahmana. Because the Devas have control over material nature Lord Indra spread his sin all over the universe: The earth took some of the sin and thus some part of the earth became deserts, water took some of the sin and manifests that sin as bubbles and froth, trees took some of the reactions which are visible in the flowing of sap from trees, the entire womanhood took some sin and manifested that sin as the signs of menstruation every month. Before this woman did not have to go through menses.

For the full, unedited, uncut version please refer to Srimad Bhagavatam Canto 6 Chapter 9 verses 4-10. In the Garuda Purana Preta Khanda 32.7-10 states:- “The first four days of menstrual flow of blood shall be avoided when the sin of a Brahmin’s slaughter resides in her. Brahma had removed this sin from Indra and apportioned a fourth in women. A woman becomes pure on the fourth day. After seven days, she becomes pure enough to take part in the worship of the ancestors and deities. If conception takes place within seven days the progeny is impure.”

Other Religions and cultures on Menstruation

Christianity and Judaism:- Bible - Leviticus 15:19-30. "When a woman has a 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 also on which she sits shall be unclean. And whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. And whoever touches anything on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. Whether it is the bed or anything on which she sits, when he touches it he shall be unclean until the evening". In Judaism, menstrual restrictions are stronger than they are in modern day Christianity, and men are not supposed to have sex with their menstruating wives (Leviticus 12). In the Old Testament of the Bible there were Jewish restrictions around menstruating women (in Leviticus 12). Menstruating women were unclean for 7 days and couldn't have sex with their husbands (men who had a seminal discharge were also considered unclean, until nightfall). A woman had to purify herself after she finished menstruating, until then anything that she touched would be unclean (as would anyone who had touched her, or had been touched by a person who had been in contact with her).

The Bible calls menstrual blood the flower (Leviticus), precursor of the fruit of the womb (a child). As any flower mysteriously contained its future fruit, so uterine blood was the moon-flower - which supposedly contained the soul of future generations. The Hebrew word for blood, "dam", means 'mother' or 'woman' in other Indo-European languages (e.g. dam, damsel, madam, la dama, dame) and also "the curse" (damn). Tantric worship of menstrual blood penetrated the Greco-Roman world before the Christian era and was well established in the Gnostic period. This worship provided the agape - "love-feast" or "spiritual marriage" - practiced by Gnostic Christians like the Ophites. Gnostic Christians used to call their religion Synesaktism – another word for Agape – which means "The Way of Shaktism", referring to Tantric Yoni-Worship. Synesaktism was declared a heresy before the 7th century A.D. Subsequently the "love-feast" disappeared, and women were forbidden direct participation in Christian worship, according to St. Paul's rule (1 Timothy 2:11-12). One of the most important rituals was preparing a 'drink of immortality' made from menstrual blood, which is full of healing stem cells, which can actually activate one's cellular capacity to regenerate and transport one to endocrine states of rapture.

During the first 500 years of Christianity menstruation was not considered a curse and there were no restrictions placed on it, however after that some Christian leaders started to view anything to do with sex as improper or sinful, including menstruation and pregnancy. In many churches, menstruating women no longer were permitted to enter the church or to take communion. This menstrual taboo was continued by theologians into the Middle Ages. In modern Christianity there are no restrictions around menstruation except in conservative Orthodox parts of the Catholic church. Menstruating women are still not allowed to take communion in conservative Orthodox Catholic churches (sometimes they are not even allowed enter church). The idea still exists that menstruation makes women 'unclean' and this has been used as a reason why women shouldn't be ordained as priests (they would make the altar 'unclean').

Buddhism:- In Buddhism (Theravada or Hinayana branches/paths) menstruation is viewed as "a natural physical excretion that women have to go through on a monthly basis, nothing more or nothing less". Menstruation is just seen as a natural bodily process. During this time some or many women tend to have weaker emotional balance. Some or many women would need religious support more than any other time. However some Buddhist temples do restrict menstruating women from entering them (probably because of the Neanderthal influence that Hinduism has had on Buddhism).

Islam:- In Islam, menstruating women are not supposed to touch the Quran, enter the Mosque, pray the 'salat' (the ritual prayer), or have sex with their husband. They are allowed to meditate or pray in other ways. They may read the Arabic Quran as long as they don't touch It, or touch and read a translation of the Quran (because the Arabic Quran is the only true Quran). The only specific restriction on menstruating women that is in the Quran Itself is that menstruating women should not have sex with their husbands (all the other restrictions are mentioned in various hadiths, which are tools for understanding the Quran).

Why is Menstrual taboos seen as dangerous and degrading towards women?

Menstrual taboos exist in most cultures who view menstrual blood as potentially dangerous and place restrictions around it. In the past, Western (male) anthropologists held that such taboos existed because menstrual blood was seen as polluted and unclean. More recently, some Western (female) anthropologists have questioned this assumption and they argue that some cultures have menstrual prohibitions not because menstrual blood is seen as dirty but because it's seen as sacred and powerful.

Most words for menstruation also meant such other words as incomprehensible, supernatural, sacred, spirit or deity. For example, the Latin "sacred" and old Arabian words for 'pure' and 'impure' both applied to menstrual blood and to that only.

In Polynesian cultures, for instance, menstrual blood is seen as "taboo" which means that it's seen as sacred, special, powerful and set apart. Things that are "taboo" have special restrictions placed on them because they are seen as powerful and potentially harmful. Regardless of whether a culture considers menstrual blood polluted or powerful/sacred, what's surprising and unfortunate is that menstrual blood is always perceived as dangerous. Polynesian cultures have taboos on what women can do while menstruating – a menstruating woman cannot go to fishing areas (for instance) because then no fish will be caught. She also can't go into the garden because then the vegetables won't grow. If menstrual blood is seen as sacred and powerful, why can't its power be viewed as beneficial to society (rather than as dangerous and primarily harmful to society, like the power of witchcraft)?

Some or many perceive the reason behind this is that a lot of cultures with patriarchal structures fear powerful women and it's said that "a powerful woman cannot be trusted". This fear of powerful women is present in the European society as well: historically, mainly women were accused of witchcraft and murdered, and women who worked medicinally with plants were quickly viewed with suspicion as 'witches'. The idea that women have this dangerous 'witchy' power over men continues up to today. A beautiful woman is called 'glamorous', 'enchanted', 'bewitching' and 'spellbinding' (a 'glamour' was originally a spell cast on a man to make him believe that a woman was more attractive than she really was).

For religious ceremonies, Australian Aborigines painted their sacred stones, Churingas, and themselves with red Ochre, declaring that it was really womens' menstrual blood.

Egyptian pharaohs became divine by ingesting 'the blood of Isis', a Soma-like ambrosia called "Sa". Its hieroglyphic sign was the same as the sign of the vulva, a yonic loop like the one on the ankh or Cross of Life. Painted red, this loop signified the female genital and the Gate of Heaven. Amulets buried with the dead specifically prayed to Isis to defy the deceased with her magic blood. A special amulet called the Tjet represented Isis's vulva and was formed of red substance - jasper, carnelian, red porcelain, red glass, or red wood. This amulet was said to carry the redeeming power of the blood of Isis.

A Celtic name for this fluid was Dergflaith, meaning either "red ale" or "red sovereignty." In Celtic Britain, to be stained with red meant to be chosen by the Goddess as King. Celtic "ruadh" meant both "red" and "royal." The same blood color implied apotheosis after death.

Taoist China considered red a sacred color associated with women, blood, sexual potency, and creative power. White was the color of men, semen, negative influences, passivity, and death. This was the basic Tantric idea of male and female essences: the male principal is seen as “passive” and “quiescent”; the female principal as “active” and “creative”, the reverse of later patriarchal views – Hmm I rest my case...

Female blood color alone was often considered a potent magic charm. The Maori rendered anything sacred by coloring it red, and calling the red color menstrual blood. Andaman Islanders thought blood-red paint a powerful medicine, and painted sick people red all over in an effort to cure them. The Hottentots people are based in S-W Africa and they addressed their Mother Goddess as one "who has painted thy body red"; she was divine because she never dropped or wasted menstrual blood.

Easter eggs, classic womb-symbols of the Goddess Eostre, were traditionally colored red and laid on graves to strengthen the dead. This habit, common in Greece and southern Russia, might be traced all the way back to Paleolithic graves and funeral furnishing reddened with Ochre, for a closer resemblance to the Earth Mother's womb from which the dead could be "born again."

Sadly many of today's women are giving their power away to patriarchal ideologies, taking drugs to stop their menstrual cycle, using cancer-causing chemical bleached tampons to stem the flow, seeing their menses as an inconvenient ‘curse’ they are ashamed of. Women need to reclaim their feminine power and thus honor the sacred regenerative properties of the ‘flowering’ of their wombs.

In Western society, menstruation was never viewed as powerful (only as polluted), however had it been considered powerful then some people in our society today would have feared it and labeled it as dangerous just like most other cultures around the world.

It seems that almost all cultures view menstruation as dangerous in some way (even in the cultures that also view menstrual blood as sacred/special). I personally would love to hear of a culture that told women “come to our fishing areas when you are menstruating, to bring us good luck!”

Today many menstrual restrictions exist because of the idea that the powerful force of menstrual blood clashes badly with other sorts of powerful forces... but what seems to many as a conundrum is why the power of menstrual blood cannot be seen as primarily neutral or beneficial to societies around the world, rather than as primarily destructive.

The fourth angle that we shall pursue is the **"COMMON SENSE" ROUTE.**

Are religious menstrual taboos degrading to women?

Most men, with their patriarchal position in society, feel that they need to control women who possess the natural power and declare them unclean during the menstruation period. Many find the menstrual taboos and restrictions of some religions really strange, and rather offensive. Many feel they should not be considered unclean for a sixth of every month simply because “I’m a woman”. Many women view menstruation as a natural bodily process and nothing more or nothing less. Most women don't view menstrual blood as something negative/impure that could cause ‘harm’ to sacred objects or places and they feel menstruation should not separate them from the God who made them. Many women feel there is no difference between religious people who place restrictions on all women, and those who place restrictions only on menstruating (‘unclean’) women. They think that both views portray women quite negatively: women are seen as more separated from God and the spiritual world than men are. Women are viewed as less perfect/holy than men because they are more strongly tied to their bodies (menstruation, sexual impurity/sex, pregnancy, childbirth, being a mother). Because women are seen as so strongly tied to their bodies (and therefore to the physical earth), most religions have tended to see this as a barrier that prevents women from fully entering the spiritual and holy realm. Some women see God as genderless (equally male and female) because He created both women and men in ‘His’ image. Why would God make a woman in His image, make her menstruate for a sixth of every month, and then reject her in any way during that time because she was suddenly ‘religiously unclean’?

The controversial American feminist Gloria Steinem said “so what would happen if suddenly, magically, men could menstruate and women could not? Clearly, menstruation would become an enviable, worthy, masculine event: Men would brag about how long and how much. Young boys would talk about it as the envied beginning of manhood. Gifts, religious ceremonies, family dinners, and stag parties would mark the day. To prevent monthly work loss among the powerful, Congress would fund a National Institute of Dysmenorrhea. Doctors would research little about heart attacks, from which men would be hormonally protected, but everything about cramps. Sanitary supplies would be federally funded and free. Generals, right-wing politicians, and religious fundamentalists would cite menstruation (“*men*-struation”) as proof that only men could serve God and country in combat (“You have to give blood to take blood”), occupy high political offices, be priests, ministers. Street guys would invent slang (“He’s a three-pad man”) and “give fives” on the corner with some exchange like, “Man you lookin’ good!” “Yeah, man, I’m on the rag!” TV shows would treat the subject openly. Men would convince women that sex was more pleasurable at “that time of the month.” Medical schools would limit woman’s entry (“they might faint at the sight of blood”). In philosophy and religion, how could women compensate for being disconnected from the rhythm of the universe? Menopause would be celebrated as a positive event, the symbol that men had accumulated enough years of cyclical wisdom to need no more”. “And how would women be trained to react? One can imagine right-wing women agreeing to all these arguments with a staunch and smiling masochism”. In short, we would discover, as we should already, that logic is in the eye of the logician. I leave further improvisation up to you. The truth is that, if men could menstruate, the justification of their “power” would go on and on and would no longer be considered something ‘unclean’ that kept certain people at a greater distance from God..”

Man/Men in words relating to Women... MAN comes from the word MANU-deva (Srimad Bhavagatam). Manu deva is the first created man and the son the Suryadeva (The Sun Deity), and his wife Satarupa. To show how much patriarchal terminologies that devalued women that had emerged during history we shall name but a few... MANKind, MANhours, MENstruation, MENses, HuMAN, HuMANity, WoMAN/MEN, MANageress, MANDatory, MANnerism, MANifestoe, MANipulator, MANhandling, MANifesting, MANoeuvre, MANicure, MANaging, MANpower, MANmade, MANual, MANiac, MANtle (I’m pretty sure there are much more words than these...). Isn’t it ironic that so many words has the letters MAN/MEN, hence my gripe is that for thousands of years patriarchal dictatorship has been practiced.

On the other hand women are fortunate, in this regard, that they have at least twelve times in a year in which repressed emotions come to the surface for them to release. It’s sad that most women do not take this time to be aware of, or present with, and consciously feel these emotions as they are released. Women meet the anxiety, anger, or depression that might surface during or before menstruation with comments like, “Ugh, I wish I was a man.” Most women wish not to be bothered with their “scary, strange, and irrational emotions”, even if it’s just generally for a few days per month. But by regarding this release of emotions also as a part of their natural detoxification process, and allowing these emotions to resurface and be felt (without acting on them or hurting others, of course), they are actually engaging in a potent form of psychological healing. Yes, it may seem rather difficult for some women to digest what’s being said.

When women have their menstrual cycle, there are many restrictions that are implemented. This is not to alienate a woman; rather it is from a health and cleanliness point of view. Restrictions like not performing deity worship and not going to one’s prayer place are observed, because at this time whatever she comes into contact with, becomes contaminated. In some really orthodox societies women are confined to a certain room where little contact is made. This is the proper procedure that makes sense but due to time, place and circumstances, this is rarely practice now...

... An example to be given here is if you pass stool until you bath whatever you touch becomes unclean (I'm sure you would not go to your prayer place) so in the same way when you are in your monthly cycle, until your 3rd or 4th day you remain "unclean" and until you have cleansed yourself with a turmeric (Hurdi/Nelengu) bath you shall remain so. After the bath try to do a cleanup of your house by sprinkling Turmeric water or Ganga water all around your house. During this period women should try and rest as much as possible. Women are advised not go out late at nights, near trees, rivers, the ocean, etc. In these places subtle bodies frequent. During the menses period women emit a certain odor, which is very pleasing to these subtle bodies, and thus women attract them unknowingly. During this period women should make sure that they are adequately protected by having a knife on oneself at all times and chanting protective mantras. I'm not saying these things to scare a person - rather young adults often disregard these things as nonsense and superstition. This is rather foolish.

Yes I know this may create a uproar amongst the Hindu community about what I have just said but people need to wake up and evolve as Hinduism is above fanaticism. We are a practical culture and that's why we survived for thousands of years. If one has a problem with this sentiment, then answer the following question. Many weddings and funerals are performed with the female still in her cycle period. Is one going to stop/postpone the wedding or funeral – of course not. Let us rise up from these stubborn beliefs and be practical. What happens if there are no men at all to perform pujas in a particular place, must all pujas then stop because the women are menstruating? Also some women menstruate for over a month.

F.A.Q.'s

So from the information provided above in this article you can decide for yourself the route you shall pursue. As with any article we compile we like to include a F.A.Q's section.

QUESTION:- What happens if I planned for a puja and during the morning of the puja proper my menstrual cycle starts? What do I do?

OR... What happens when a bride is about to get married and her menses starts the night before or the morning of the wedding?

OR... Can the mother (who is menstruating) give her daughter away in the Kanya Daan puja although she is in her menses, even though her daughter is not?

OR... I was just told I couldn't sit for my family prayers because it was that time of the month for me. If women are seen as the Lakshmi of the household, why are we treated as if we are unclean? That's the word many older folks like to use. We are also told we can't perform prayer, why?

ANSWER:-

FOR MENSTRUATION:- "Why should I ingest a tablet that will stop my natural flow of nature and why should I feel embarrassed?" some females may say. I couldn't agree more. The rules regarding women and menstruation fall under Smriti, not Shruti – Shruti is considered divine, while Smriti is considered "tradition" or "text" – they are inspired by the times one lives in, and are passed down. The practice that many perform are therefore, not divine law at all – it is an archaic, oppressive one that has unfortunately remained in existence due to other factors, such as general subjugation of women due to patriarchal structures. If a female commences her graha (planetary) fast and hypothetically on the 8th Saturday her menses starts. Now many will say that the fast has to be broken and started all over again. In all likelihood this may happen again. So shouldn't we think outside the "match-box". This could be a recurring situation over and over again. Hence a simple fast for e.g. 9 Saturdays could go on for years due to ill-timed menstrual cycles – is this practical and fair?

AGAINST MENSTRUATION:- If for some reason one is not aware of their cycle or their cycle "jumped" and it came unexpectedly, then there is two options: One is, go to your doctor and get a prescription pill that would apprehend the cycle immediately (in a day). If this is not available or possible, then postpone the puja to another day. So there is no ambiguity here. One cannot transgress and still hope for the best. Many may feel that God knows their intention is good, but try telling that to Maharaja Parikshit (from the Mahabharata) who lied to save a life - although he was blessed for the good deed, he still had to pay the consequence of the lie. Additionally, women should see this cycle as a blessing, not a curse. Therefore, make adjustments when planning a puja.

QUESTION:- What happens if there isn't nobody but females (who are in their menses) to cook and perform Deity worship?

ANSWER:- Srila Prabhupada states: "According to the smarta vidhi, women cannot touch a deity during her menstrual period but the Goswami Vidhi allows. But it's better not to do it. **One thing is that the seva can never be stopped for any reason. This also for the cooking**." (A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Letter to Amsu. Vrindavan August 13th 1974.) What is most important is not the bodily contamination but contamination of one's consciousness. Nothing should come in the way of purification of our consciousness. Bhakti is above all. However, for the sake of society we need to follow some rules externally. Physically, a woman may be contaminated but her mind may be more contaminated than her physical so called "contamination". It's possible she has a better consciousness than others who are "physically clean". So my dear fellow humans, we have to work on our consciousness first and foremost. Based on the aforementioned information, I would humbly suggest that she can cook and perform deity worship.

QUESTION:- Can I wash my Lakshmi Lamp and anoint my Lamp with Sindhoor when I'm menstruating?

ANSWER:- So, based on the above information, I would suggest YES - she can.

QUESTION:- My lamp is in my daughter's room, and I was advised that she should not sleep in her room when menstruating. Is this correct?

ANSWER:- Reading the replies given above it would suggest NO, she should not sleep in her room or rather move the Lamp to another room for the duration of her cycle. But I would leave this to your discretion as there could be variegated reasons why the lamp is in your daughters room in the first place. But generally speaking prayer places should not be in a bedroom/sleeping room for common sense reasons rather is a room where totally cleanliness is observed. Rather section off a small area in your lounge and make that your prayer place.

QUESTION:- I am a female; can I pray to Shree Hanumanji by my Jhanda/prayer place and chant the Hanuman Chalisa when I have my menstrual cycle???

ANSWER:- Reading the replies given above it would suggest NO. But why not? Shree Hanumanji, being a pure devotee of the Lord, is above identifying with the self. He does not discriminate between male and female. He sees everyone with equal vision. Yes, I am aware when I perform pujas women always ask me why they are always put down when it comes to Shree Hanumanji's puja. I find that rather annoying when men (and in general older folks) behave like this - because who is cooking the food and making the preparations like rhot, etc...? I can almsot guarantee you that if all the women are menstruating before the puja, the men would rather postpone the puja rather than have them preparing all the prashad offerings. I feel that a female has as much right as a male to perform pujas to Shree Hanumanji "clean" or not.

Another issue to mention is that many females feel embarrassed to let anybody know about their so-called “unclean period”. But why should they? It’s a gift from God. It’s a cleansing time. So the question is should a female chant Hanuman Chalisa when she is “unclean”??? Certainly YES, and the answer is in the Hanuman Chalisa itself. “Bhoota pishaacha nikata nahin aavai / mahaaveera jaba naama sunaavai.” what this means is when Hanuman’s (Mahaveer’s) name is chanted all ghosts and the like disperse from that place. Wherever a female in her monthly cycle goes she leaves a trail of odor, that is above the human sense of smell BUT is very very pleasing to these Bhuta’s (ghosts), pisacha (a.k.a Tokoloshe in South Africa). As the female walk they follow her and “smell” and “eat” this odor. Yes they “eat” the odor. Spirits eat by smelling. (That’s why we burn lobhan or incense at night because if there are any negative forces lurking around the smell from the lobhan or agarbatti neutralizes their intentions). That’s why especially during the menstrual cycle the Hanuman Chalisa should be chanted.

Finally do remember I was taught by my Mataji and also by my beloved late Aajee that I should NEVER disrespect women (no matter what) to be a successful individual in this world. I pray that I have not in any way disrespected any female that have read this article. I do know many men will be rather miffed with this article but I am a forward-minded person with an open mindset and not a Neanderthal minded buffoon confined to old, biased patriarchal ways.

“Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah”
Dharma protects those who protect Dharma. (Manu Smrti, Ch8,v15)



We would like to thank and credit our sources viz. Manu Smriti, Shakti-Sangama Tantra, Goswami Viddhi, Bhagavad Gita, Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Srimad Bhagavatam, Kalikapurana, Yoginitantra, Kulachudamani Tantra, Kamakhya Tantra, Devi Bhagavatam, Mahabharata, Shiva Purana, Garuda Purana, Shrautaa Sutra, Kalpa Sutra, Bible, Quran. Srila Prabhupada, Swami Vishwananda, Swami Chinmayananda, Swamini Vimalananda, Gloria Steinem, Pt Roop Sukhram of Florida.

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===== PAGE 20 =====