Pertinence of Literature in Destroying Menstrual Taboos

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Abstract. The impurity of menstrual blood is a universal myth that spans across all societies and cultures. This notion has also established a barrier to gender equality, as females are instructed, throughout cultures, that menstruation is disgraceful. This belief restricts their capacity to conduct regular duties when they are bleeding, hence making them organize their lives around their menstrual period. The need to fill the inadequate understanding of the menstrual cycle in society is a necessity. The third wave of feminism encouraged society to discuss certain challenging topics, which led to considerable breakthroughs in beliefs around menstruation. The day when feminist discussions were limited to people who could pay to express their opinions has long since passed. The concept of feminism in the twenty-first century encompasses a larger spectrum of opinions. Strong arguments on women’s cleanliness and the need for understanding menstruation only serve to emphasize how crucial and significant the issue is. The present paper attempts to explore the myths and taboos, cultural and political perspectives on menstruation, and the role literature is playing in altering society’s attitudes about menstruation. The paper will attempt to comprehend how important literature is in eradicating the stigma associated with menstruation and how it contributes to raising awareness of menstrual hygiene among people.

1 Introduction

Societies generally uphold common moral principles and guidelines for appropriate conduct that its members are expected to follow. By establishing shared norms and expectations, a culture controls its members’ actions and thinking. This set of social rules can be termed as social taboos. In their work “Taboos and Identity: Considering the Unthinkable” (2009) Chaim Fershtman, Uri Gneezy and Moshe Hoffmandescribe how taboos are considered as “…strong social norms” that are “… supported by severe social sanctions’. Moreover, they state that ‘Even thinking about violating a taboo is problematic” [1]. Existing taboos cannot be addressed until there is sufficient knowledge to disprove them.

One prevalent sociocultural taboo is the taboo related to menstruation. Menstrual cycle education is extremely lacking in society, hence existing taboos cannot be challenged until there is enough information to debunk these false beliefs. In her study “A Cross-Cultural Study of Menstruation, Menstrual Taboos, and Related Social Variables” (1974), Rita E. Montgomery explains the “… wide variations in menstrual taboos found cross-culturally” [2]. Furthermore, the study establishes a connection between the development of menstrual taboos and a variable that may be used to correlate this development. Montgomery states how menstrual taboos are imposed on women by society, which imposes certain limitations on women, and several societies also isolate women during the menstrual period. “These taboos are transcultural in nature, represented along a continuum that ranges widely from mild uneasiness and distrust of menstrual fluid and menstruating women, to elaborate complex of restrictions, and ultimately to complete seclusion during the menstrual period” [2].

Despite the fact that menstruation is a natural process, many cultures and communities still hold certain taboos and misconceptions about women during their menstrual period. In her work “Reconsidering the Menstrual Taboo: A Portuguese Case” (1982), Denise L. Lawrencelists various beliefs and taboos followed by various societies and cultures, “Cross-cultural descriptions of menstrual taboo restrictions often include: abstention from sexual intercourse; altered personal hygiene and eating habits; temporary non-participation in normal household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing and child care; avoidance of contact with certain ‘masculine’ items such as tools and weapons, and the community itself to a menstrual hut” [3].

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they touch or prepare it. Similarly, “In nineteenth-century France, …, menstruating women were barred from wine[2].

A woman’s menstrual cycle. In her work “Top Euphemisms for ‘Period’ by Language” (2016), Katrin Freidman has listed several euphemisms like ‘red week’, ‘strawberry week’, ‘these days’, ‘red army,’ and many more, which are used in different countries and languages to talk about menstruation. An international survey in year 2016. The survey discovered that there are “… over 5,000 euphemisms for the word ‘period’. And a ton of interesting stats about education and cultural norms around menstruation” [3].

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2 Empowering Menstrual Discourse through Literature

Literature does more than simply describe reality; it also enriches reality. In the 2014 article “Literature Is Powerful. happens within a society can be written, recorded in, and learned from a piece of literature” [1].

Menstruation has been a source of oppression for women due to the shame attached to it and the challenges they face when discussing it in public. Although it is a natural occurrence, instead of discussing it openly, both men and women face embarrassment. The lack of knowledge about menstruation also hinders open discussions on women’s periods are now emerging in societies with the aim of altering society’s attitudes about menstruation. New
Each literary piece, to a varying extent, incorporates a broad picture of human society, making literature a social awareness of menstrual hygiene among people. Comprehend the importance of eradicating the stigma associated with menstruation and how they contribute to raising books that promotes awareness among parents, educators, and young readers alike. This book is ideal for readers who will eventually receive their periods, those who are already experiencing them, and those who others are suffering and missing school due to unbearable period pain or a lack of access to sanitary products. This book highlights the fact that many girls and women cannot afford these products, while others suffer and miss school due to unbearable period pain or a lack of stigma and bullying that make high school even more challenging for girls. It highlights the fact that many girls and prioritized the football team's uniform and equipment. The novel covers various aspects, including the unjustified centers on a group of friends who embark on a quest to obtain free sanitary products for their school, which has always accessible to sanitary products. It has highlighted the fact that many girls and women cannot afford these products, while others suffer and miss school due to unbearable period pain or a lack of access to sanitary products. 

Lamborn’s research delves deeper into the pervasive cultural misconception of menstrual impurity and its adverse effects on gender equality. The stigma surrounding menstruation creates significant barriers for women, compelling them to conceal their periods and structure their lives around them. This predicament is aggravated by the absence of open dialogues concerning menstruation, which in turn hampers women’s access to education and proper sanitary material that may not be appreciated in many Indian cultural contexts. As noted by Audrey Marie Lamborn in “It’s About ‘That Time’ to Break the Cycle: A Rhetorical Analysis of Challenging Menstrual Taboos” (2017), “Western material that may not be appreciated in many Indian cultural contexts. As noted by Audrey Marie Lamborn in “It’s how it is discussed”]

Menstrupedia Comic: The Friendly Guide to Periods for Girls

Another notable story on menstruation is Salazar’s book, The Moon Within. This book is suited for Indian readers, as it avoids explicit material that may not be appreciated in many Indian cultural contexts. As noted by Audrey Marie Lamborn in “It’s About ‘That Time’ to Break the Cycle: A Rhetorical Analysis of Challenging Menstrual Taboos” (2017), “Western material that may not be appreciated in many Indian cultural contexts. As noted by Audrey Marie Lamborn in “It’s how it is discussed”]

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It is important to note that while literature can be a powerful tool, it should be complemented by comprehensive educational, advocacy, and policy interventions to address menstrual taboos effectively. By combining these efforts, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable world, free from the stigma and discrimination associated with menstruation.

3 Result and Discussion

Menstrual taboos often thrive in silence and secrecy. However, literature is playing a vital role in normalizing menstruation and challenging taboos. The influence of literature on menstruation has instigated observable cultural shifts, permeating various facets of society. Language, once burdened by stigmatizing terminology, has undergone a transformation, with authors incorporating menstruation into their work to challenge derogatory expressions related to menstruation. Additionally, media representations have shifted towards more realistic and inclusive portrayals, moving away from sensationalism or avoidance. The discourse surrounding menstruation in the public sphere has evolved, spurred by literary narratives that challenge societal norms.

The impact of literature on awareness of menstrual hygiene is profound, extending beyond the mere dispelling of myths and taboos. Literature is not only providing information but is also promoting the normalization and acceptance of the significant changes that occur in a person's body during menstruation. The aforementioned writers and their works are persuading individuals to engage in informed discussions about menstrual hygiene. Through the power of storytelling, literature has succeeded in humanizing the menstrual experience, dismantling entrenched taboos, and creating a space for candid conversations around menstruation. Moreover, including these discussions in curricula contributes to a more enlightened and progressive societal outlook.

The influence of literature on menstruation has instigated observable cultural shifts, permeating various facets of society. Language, once burdened by stigmatizing terminology, has undergone a transformation, with authors crafting narratives that challenge menstrual taboos and present alternative perspectives. The inclusion of these literary pieces into school curricula can contribute to raising awareness of menarche and menstruation.

4 Conclusion

Developing a respectful and empathetic perspective towards menstruation is crucial in creating a more inclusive and informed society. Literature serves as a powerful vehicle for this transformation, fostering conversations and actions that lead to tangible change in communities and societies. Literature possesses the power to inspire social change by shaping public opinion and encouraging readers to question and reject outdated beliefs and practices. This, in turn, creates a ripple effect, fostering discussions and actions that lead to tangible change in communities and societies. 

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