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VEPACHEDU EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

మన సంస్కృతి

Mana Sanskriti (Our Culture)

Chief Editor: Dr. Sreenivasarao Vepachedu, Esq.

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Issue: 226

Dr. Sreenivasarao Vepachedu¹

PERIOD LEAVE POLICY (PLP)

Menstruation is a natural, normal biological process experienced by half of the humanity, yet it is not given its due importance due to unnecessary embarrassment, shame, illiteracy and poverty. About 52% of the world's female population is of reproductive age and most of them are menstruating every month. The majority of them have no access to clean and safe sanitary products, or to a clean and private space in which to change menstrual cloths or pads and to wash².

Across the world, women and girls have been historically undermined, and their dignity, value, rights, and voice have been systematically denied. The lack of rights-based health education and sanitary pads is a direct reflection of this system that refuses to let girls choose and step into their own purpose. This has cascading negative effects for the life of a girl and for her community³.

In many third world countries, the lack of proper toilet facilities and appropriate sanitary products not only pushes menstruating girls out of school but also inflicts indignity and taboos upon women. The female-unfriendly school infrastructure including lack of clean, safe and private facilities for female teachers and girls, and lack of adequate menstrual protection alternatives result in infringement of human rights of female teachers and girls.

A UNESCO report estimates that 10% of girls in Sub-Saharan Africa miss school during their menstrual cycle. By some estimates, this equals as much as twenty percent of a given school year. It is estimated that 11.5 million women in Ghana lack hygiene/sanitation management facilities that adequately separate waste from human contact. According to the latest UNICEF water and sanitation in schools monitoring report, 59 percent of primary schools in Ghana have adequate water and 62 percent have adequate sanitation⁴.

India's 113 million adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable at the onset of menarche, because in 14,724 government schools only 53% had a separate and usable girl's toilet, a recent survey found. At home, the situation also needs to improve as 132 million households do not have a toilet leaving adolescent girls and women to face the indignity of open defecation⁵. Over 77% of menstruating girls and women in India use an old cloth, which is often reused. Further, 88% of women in India sometimes resort to using ashes, newspapers, dried leaves and husk sand to aid absorption. Poor protection and inadequate washing facilities may increase susceptibility to infection, with the odor of menstrual blood putting girls at risk of being stigmatized. The latter may have significant implications on their mental health⁶. Therefore, the government of India introduced a Safe and effective menstrual hygiene management (MHM) for better and stronger development for adolescent girls and women⁷.

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Traditionally, most housewives in the Indian Continent enjoyed a PERIOD LEAVE POLICY (PLP), reprieve from their daily chores, which has become a taboo recently in the so-called modern post-independence India and viewed as the confinement of women to menstrual huts⁸. Nowadays, it has become a fashion for some Indian women to criticize Indian traditions of rest and reprieve from chores and separation for health and hygiene are the backward practices of Hindus and a symbol of discrimination of women as “less capable, weaker, dirty or impure for being a woman⁹.” Some women decided to go commando sans pad/tampon either as a protest art¹⁰ or as an emergency measure¹¹.

However, many developed countries like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea have the PLP¹² to support female employees during the monthly menstrual cycle¹³. Japan introduced the PLP almost seven decades ago in 1947 and became the first country to grant leave to female workers who “suffered heavily” with period pains or performed work deemed “injurious” to their health during menstruation. South Korea introduced the PLP in 2001 allowing women to take one day of menstrual leave per month.

The government of the Indian State of Bihar has been following the PLP in several departments for the past two decades. Last year, the government had not only increased the maternity leave to 180 days but also provided for 730 days leave to tend to the children during their illnesses, examinations or to raise them up, to women government servants for two children during their entire service period¹⁴.

Bristol-based Coexist that employs mostly women was the first company in the UK last year by introducing work flexibly at different times of the month and the PLP in an attempt to synchronize work with women's monthly cycle to create the happier working environment. Menstrual cycle awareness helps both men and women become more understanding and productive at work. The company insists on creating a healthier environment, where women are able to concentrate on their work sans any suffering. According to the Coexist director Bex Baxter, "... women really suffer from their periods . . . doubled over in a lot of pain. There is a misconception that taking time off makes a business unproductive - actually, it is about synchronizing work with the natural cycles of the body. For too long there's been a taboo surrounding periods - I have women staff telling me they're ashamed to admit they're in pain. I want us to break down that shame and replace the negativity with positivity. Both men and women have been open to the ideas - especially from the younger generation¹⁵."

The Government of India has been mulling over the PLP for a while, worried about sexual harassment by men¹⁶. In 2013, Mikhail Degtyaryov, a member of the nationalist LDPR party, proposed a menstrual leave law, saying, “During menstruation ... strong pain induces heightened fatigue, reduces memory and work-competence” but the bill died¹⁷, while China’s Anhui province announced paid menstrual leave, and Asian countries have been offering females paid menstrual leave for almost 70 years¹⁸.

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Not so surprisingly, half of the American population has to cope with menstruation, despite America being the super power of the world and most technologically advanced country. Feminine products are a \$2 billion industry in the United States alone. But for those who live in poverty, lack of access to menstrual health care is more than a punch line¹⁹. Women who are homeless or incarcerated face similar risks when they can't access or afford sanitary products²⁰. Women have even been known to trade food stamps for tampons. About 40 states that currently impose a sales tax on menstrual supplies in the US, while our neighbor Canada eliminated the national Goods and Services Tax on tampons, pads, and menstrual cups as of July 1st. America has long lagged behind.

Menstrual hygiene and women's health affect everyone in the society because it happens to every woman and affects every man who is born to a woman. It matters to all of us. According to the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, just like any women anywhere in the world, the average American woman's period lasts from three to five days²¹.

Last year was "the Year of the Period²²" when "the period went public²³" in America. However, America lags behind many third world countries and first world countries in providing support of female workers by providing adequate maternity leave, childcare, and PLP. It is high time that America take the lead by adopting a smarter policy for women in the workplace than the populist rhetoric and disrespect²⁴.

NOTES AND REFERENCES²⁵

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² [Menstrual Hygiene Management](#)

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³ [ZANA Africa](#)

⁴ [Advancing WASH in Schools Monitoring](#)

⁵ [Menstrual Hygiene Management, National Guidelines, 2015](#)

⁶ [Suneela Garg, Menstruation related myths in India: strategies for combating it](#)

⁷ [Menstrual Hygiene Management, National Guidelines, 2015](#)

⁸ [Menstrual Hygiene Management](#)

⁹ [Anisha Bhavnani, My country's problem with menstruation](#)

[Ayesha Mehrotra, Menstruation: A myth that needs to be broken](#)

¹⁰ [Rupi Kaur's photograph exploring the taboo around menstruation](#)

¹¹ [Kiran Gandhi, Why I ran for 26 miles on my period](#)

¹² In Pioneering Period Policy, Valuing natural cycles in the workplace, Alexandra Pope presents a radically new model of the menstrual cycle by pioneering a 'Period Policy' for your organization/work-life as an asset for your entire organization, to maximize the wellbeing of your employees by fostering a positive approach to the menstrual cycle and to create efficiency in the workplace by utilizing natural cycles of men and women, and suggests networking with other individuals, groups and organizations that want to explore and develop these ideas: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/pioneering-period-policy-valuing-natural-cycles-in-the-workplace-tickets-21423634668#>

¹³ [Centre Mulling Period Leave For Women Employees](#)

¹⁴ [Bihar Increases Maternity Leave Period](#)

¹⁵ [UK Company Coexist Is Launching A 'Period Policy' And It's Not Shy About Telling Everyone; Women to get paid 'period leave' EVERY month](#)

¹⁶ [Centre Mulling Period Leave For Women Employees](#)

¹⁷ [Menstruation Leave: Russian Lawmaker Proposes Paid Days Off For Women Employees on Period](#)

¹⁸ [Asian countries have been offering females paid menstrual leave for almost 70 years](#)

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¹⁹ [America's Very Real Menstrual Crisis](#)

²⁰ [Aunt Flo Meets Uncle Sam: Menstruating While Incarcerated](#) Many facilities don't provide feminine hygiene products at all, requiring women to buy pads or tampons from prison commissary.

²¹ [Your First Period \(Especially for Teens\)](#)

²² [Why 2015 Was The Year Of The Period, And We Don't Mean Punctuation](#)

²³ [The 8 Greatest Menstrual Moments of 2015](#)

²⁴ [At Least Donald Trump Started a Conversation About Menstruation](#)

²⁵ In addition to the primary sources cited above, additional references include: New York Times, Washington Post, Mercury News, Bayarea.com, Deccan Chronicle, the Hindu, Hindustan Times, Times of India, AP, Reuters, AFP, The Guardian, Pravda, Spiegel, Connexion, etc.

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"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high, Where knowledge is free, Where the world has not been broken up into fragments, By narrow domestic walls." -- Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Gitanjali, 1912.

One World One Family

AUM! SWASTI!

Om! Asatoma Sadgamaya, Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya, Mrityorma Amritamgamaya, Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih!

(Aum! Lead the world from wrong path to the right path, from ignorance to knowledge, from mortality to immortality, and peace!)

SWASTI! AUM!



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