



## Key Note Speech

- Namaste, good evening friends
- Its my great pleasure to be with you all.
- Thank you so much for the opportunity.
- I have so many stories to share, let me share a story about why do I dedicate my life to Dignified Menstruation today.

It started 40 years ago. I knew menstrual blood as an impure, dirty, and contaminated fluid from my mother, and not only observed dozens of menstrual restrictions among my three sisters but also noticed that they were treated as powerless beings, inferior, disadvantaged, and weak. I was shocked and deeply traumatized. I did not like to live as a girl child so I attempted suicide. Unfortunately, I failed, and fortunately, I am speaking with you all now. The story continued.

At my menarche, when it was my turn to do as expected, I revolted. I refused to follow any form of menstrual discrimination. My three sisters like every other menstruator had followed our mother in the culture of menstrual discrimination but I questioned my mother just like I would later question her and reject the forced early marriage my sisters would quietly accept just like the menstrual restrictions.

But, we know this is not only my story. It is the story of many of us globally who are born with uterus and ovaries, and bleed. It is happening now. Since I start my keynote speech here today:

- **28 girls got already married. And one in every five girls is married before 18 years.**

Principally, we all agree that marriage before the age of 18 is considered a human rights violation, that this mostly affects people who menstruate, and that it can lead to a lifetime of disadvantage and deprivation. Practically, we have been repeating the same things for decades....with minimum results.....Meaning we are also repeating the same mistakes.

Today, I am claiming that we are also drivers for child marriage...Because, historically, it has already been 93 years since the first policy against child marriage was called the “Shardha Act” of 1928 yet we are not close to eliminating child marriage.

A global network called Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation, where I work as a founder reviewed the policies of Bangladesh, India, and Niger regards to child marriage and menstrual practices. That report identified the drivers for child marriage are; no or low education, poverty, harmful practices, FGM, family honor, trafficking, gendered norms, disasters, wars, and Pandemics. In another word, the ending child marriage campaign focused on improving education, livelihood, laws, and legal mechanism, engaging boys, and religious leaders. Sadly, we still have insignificant results today.

Global South Coalition firmly states that child marriage would reduce if we dismantle menstrual discrimination at home and school. But all research countries and networks are dedicated to ending child marriage such as the South Asia Initiative to End Violence (SAIEVAC), the African Union (AU, 2013, 55 nations), Girls Not Brides (2011,1500 CSO) remain silent on menstrual discrimination.

This is not a blunder of NGOs or networks. It's the misunderstanding, undermining, and negligence of the most vulnerable community's narratives of their authentic experiences and the corresponding grassroots organizations from the Global South. It may sound harsh but this is the reality. Menstruation is an inevitable



biological phenomenon with more than half of the population of this planet who are born with uteruses and ovaries. Irrespective to global north or south, the taboo, stigma, restrictions, abuses, violence, deprivation from resources during menstruation that manifested as different names or forms or magnitude. We, Global South Coalition clubbed it and called Menstrual Discrimination. It is very complex and multifaceted. It is not only a form of GBV but also cause and effect for many forms of GBV all around the globe. For instance, the underlying reason of sex selective abortion in global south and gender pay gap in global north is same where menstruators are considered weak, powerless, inferior, and disadvantaged.

Most importantly, menstrual discrimination plays vital role for construction of power and patriarchy since childhood. Regrettably, Human Right Declaration-1948, CEDAW (Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women)-1979, CRC (Convention of Child Right) 1989, and SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 2015 never ever discuss about the systemic and symptomatic impact of menstrual discrimination throughout the life cycle of menstruators.

As a result of systemic impact, people who menstruate have low social status. Symptomatically, her mind and every-day routine for 5 days in a month or 60 days in a year is interrupted. In Australia, 8 out of 10 girls hide menstruation. Is this because of menstrual cramps or lack of menstrual pad or what ? ....It is because of lack of dignity?

### **Currently, many of us agree that pandemic accelerated child marriage?**

Did we ask whether the menstruation stop due to COVID? who were in isolation, quarantine, ICU, Relief distribution, vaccine booth.... ? were not 70 frontline health workers menstruating people ? Which gender responsive or GESI policy address the menstrual discrimination from UN to local NGOs? Which DRR & SRHR policy address such menstrual discrimination? What was the underlying cause of Shadow Pandemic as Secretary General called in April 2020? Which International Human Right Instruments address Menstrual discrimination and its impacts on human right, politics, climate justice, economic etc. Do the free distribution of pad or pad in relief package address such complexity of menstrual discrimination?

Next week, will celebrate the 16 days activism against VAWG globally, we are here as a lead up event today. According to the UN's definition of SGBV, which menstrual practice is not VAWGs ? Before having menstruation, between the age of 6-9 years, people who menstruate knew about their status through menstrual perceptions and practices from their mother, sister or school/community. She considered herself as inferior, impure, contaminated, and disadvantaged. She also learned and adopted all Dos and Do nots associated with menstruation. Once she menstruate, emotionally she drained like feeling powerlessness, disgusting, crying etc. If she is not allow to participate in religious activities or not allowing to touch any man member? How many types of violence's she experienced already at her home. The girl who cannot say no for menstrual discrimination at home, cannot and will not say no at school for inappropriate sexual advances, or any marriage proposal.

In this connection, this is very high time, to unite, hear, and believe the stories of grass root activist, lobby and advocacy to acknowledge the menstrual discrimination, a multifaceted SGBV and address accordingly. Without having dialogue on dignified menstruation, ending GBV is like living in fantasy. We should learn from our past.

Additionally, the resources should shift towards the grass root activist, organization or networks. I dedicated my life for advocate of dignified menstruation and Global South Coalition for dignified menstruation and have been working in zero funding since beginning.



**Global South Coalition**  
For Dignified Menstruation

Before conclude my speech, ***I appeal to UN secretary general to endorse dignified menstruation as a 14<sup>th</sup> day of 16 days activism for December 8. And urge to everyone, mark the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2022, as 4<sup>th</sup> International Dignified Menstruation Day and celebrate within your organizations. This year, we will be marking over 50 countries all around the globe under the theme of dignified menstruation for ending child marriage.***

At last, if you are looking for gender equality, use the lens of dignified menstruation as vehicle.

I wish for successful conference.

I thank you and good night.

**Radha Paudel**

**Founder**

**GSCDM**



Dignified Menstruation