

The Urgency for Dignified Menstruation¹

'Having menstruation itself dignity' was a statement used by an international development fellow from Europe while discussing about an event will be held at Kathmandu in May 2020 on Dignified Menstruation. Of course, she is right for me today but not 40 years ago and not now for millions of girls, women and transgenders across the globe. Menstruation is not form of dignity for many funders, experts, and so many others if not why does menstruation is side-lined and heavily overlooked in a course of development and human right globally. Even after getting space in Human Right Council in 2014, it is confined with hygiene which positively negative notion that reinforce the menstrual blood as dirty. Almost all funders and actors are busy for hygiene or products as if like the menstrual blood is crisis for 21 century though the hygiene/products an important element of dignified menstruation.

Principally, dignified menstruation is a human right concern as aligned with the principles of Human Right Declaration 1948. It is holistic approach to address all kinds of violence, discrimination, abuses associated with menstruation from individual to nation, private to public and all.

As cascading fact, anyone can find the need and urgency of dignified menstruation in Nepal's constitution where right to dignity, health, education, shelter, food, non-discrimination, participation, women etc. are mentioned and directly concerned with girls, women and transgender during menstruation.

Further, if we examine the global definition of gender-based violence or national domestic violence act, menstrual practice is creating various forms of abuses, discrimination, violence or harm or acts related with sexual, physical, political, economic, technological, environmental etc and violated human rights of women. Thus, the dignified menstruation is means to ensure dignity, freedom and justice of a woman no matter whether she is in period or not.

Practically, the dignified menstruation is a matter of daily work of life of an individual, family and government due to intersecting the menstruation with health, education, peace, empowerment, water, sanitation, environment etc. If any of the sector related program missed out the dignity, the outcome failed so far. For instance, why boy didn't die due to snake bite and girl did in project implementation area because missing the link of the dignity during menstruation. Many organizations and scholars suggested to construct new and clean house for the menstrual women in west Nepal which is absolutely wrong idea again. What would be the message to woman herself and the entire community? That house with clean, tidy, decorated, electricity, heater and all will validate that menstrual blood is impure or dirty that make women less value or powerless or insignificant. In September 2019, a girl committed suicide in Kenya because of teasing in school during her first menstruation where the Kenya government has been distributing the menstrual pad free in schools since 2017. It is because of not having dialogue on dignity or not deconstruct the taboo, stigma, rumours, restrictions or assumptions around menstruation. Here in Nepal, recently in few districts, the programs are taking place intensively though the death toll during menstruation is not down yet. In west Nepal, the women are seeking alternative ways for hiding themselves to follow restrictions

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during menstruation. It is happening because the conversation around menstruation is becoming a fashion without touching the dignity during menstruation. The programs run in a way that the brain washed away of menstrual girls, school management and parents. Because the research questions framed and asked where and how did you change your pad? There is huge gap to ask how do you feel when did you know or have menstruation and why?

The entire community from Kathmandu or Solu or Mahottari or Kapilbastu or Doti or Karnali, have deep feeling of fear and ignorance about menstruation which only can tackle through dialogue on dignity during menstruation.

Symbolically, dignified menstruation gives so much essence, energy, values, to live with liberty, freedom as like butterfly or bird to girls/women as a result she built her confidence, determination as considered herself as equal, human being. More importantly, it gives the importance to acknowledge the menstruation and values the existence of this universe as like water or air or entire nature.

It challenges the all personal, cultural, institutional barriers and allow to live with dignity not only for the five days of bleeding or an average seven years of bleeding, or women to death. It is related to each of an individual of this planet today and tomorrow and take care of them all. There must not be an any forms of discrimination because of menstruation. If any woman suffers from severe pain or any symptoms that considered illness and deserved treatment without compromising any dignity due to menstruation.

In order to combat and eliminate all forms of abuses, discrimination, violence against women, the dialogue on dignified menstruation is crucial and very important. Because it examines the power construction between girls and boys since childhood and facilitate to hold the accountability at personal and professional level. It also creates the space to participate in peace and politics by allowing to participate at the primary unit of politics and peace begin from kitchen or dinning table. It takes care of physical and emotional safety and security of girls and women to strengthen an individual and collective agency. More importantly, it challenged to all actors such as engineers, educators, activist, donors and all to redefine their strategies to work issues related with menstruation.

Globally, the dignity during menstruation is missing because it demands passion, knowledge and skills around menstruation, human right and policies. It also challenging bit to the actor whether he or she is practicing dignity or not in her personal and professional life.

It appeals to everyone who speaks about menstruation to focus on dignity. Thus, 'Dignified Menstruation' is a simply 'menstrual talk, dignity first'. All menstruators deserve the dignity during menstruation no matter whether they are in private or public life, in disaster or with disability or any sexual orientation or anywhere of this world.

Dignified menstruation is a tool to fuel the Nepalese's slogan of prosperous country and happy Nepali as well by redefining the quality of life of menstruators. It is the concept of beyond hygiene and infrastructure indeed.