

Dignified Menstruation for Climate Justice: Why? How?

Straight to the point! Hundreds of questions surrounding the topic of menstruation and climate justice have inspired me to write this article. Menstruation is a natural or biological process that has been indispensable to keeping this world moving forward in its history for about three hundred thousand years. Rather than discussing and researching situations related to menstruation, perception, thinking, and practices are formed, sometimes kind of positively but negatively, establishing it as a weird power. When comparing menstruators (born with uteri) and non-menstruators (born without uteri), it is clear that most of the menstruators' strengths have little place in research and discussion. Under this trap, menstruation is not only overshadowed but also misinterpreted. In the whirlwind of silence and ignorance, with this or that excuse, it's been reflected as a 'scary' incident even among science students. Even the ones who study science either do not want to talk about it or cannot not talk about it.

Menstrual discrimination is any kind of taboo, shame, discrimination, restriction, violence, or deprivation of access to means and resources. There are various names, forms, and seriousness of direct or indirect, and less or more discrimination everywhere in the world, though menstrual practices are affected by geographical, economic, political, social, cultural, and technological factors. Researchers have found more than 5,000 names for menstruation worldwide. This is not the question of only 5 days but of the whole life cycle, as menstrual discrimination establishes cyclical socialization by constructing power and patriarchy between 6 and 9 years of age. As this creates socialization by constructing power and patriarchy, there is no moment that doesn't affect menstruators and non-menstruators. Actually, this constructs all kinds of gender norms, like how to walk, who walks, what to wear, what to read, who reads, where to read, and why to read. Now, here, it's too late to understand that gender inequality is constructed because menstruation is exercised as discrimination rather than vice versa. The intention of this article is that, as much as menstruation is natural, gender is not. Or if it were called 'menstruation' in place of 'gender', our inclusivity would have been simple and vigorous. May be we have been facing so many backlashes as we have not been celebrating or keeping behind the natural phenomenon of menstruation but by advocating gender equality. Under whatever pretext we do, according to the UN definition of sexual and gender violence, menstrual discrimination practice is, not only once but dozens of times, sexual and gender violence. If it is interpreted on the basis of the definition of human rights, it is a multiple violation of human rights. The discrimination or violence at menstruation and menopause is a symptomatic effect of menstrual discrimination, whereas the violence or discrimination faced at every step of life and throughout the life cycle by menstruators born with uteri is a structural and systemic effect.

Superficially, menstruation and climate change are natural. Artificially, or in the society we are living in, menstruation is tagged with discrimination, and competitive industrialisation has accelerated climate change. Climate change doubled by day and became four-fold by night (became as intense as day and night) and started to impact the entire world. The chasm between menstruators and non-menstruators is expanding because of menstrual discrimination's trap in the quagmire of silence and ignorance. The gender inequality problem became complicated while trying to address it through other means rather than by addressing the first and foremost

cause, menstrual discrimination. It's not that there are no campaigns, policies, or programs to address, but their impacts are not sustainable and all-encompassing as expected and invested.

Now, let's discuss a byline news story from Surkhet titled '*Mahinawarima Kuwapani Nishedh* (Drinking Water Well is also Prohibited during Menstruation)' by Lalit Bahadur Budha, published in the Appanpurna Post on 1 Chaitra 2080. *The wells in the village started to dry up within the last 6 or 7 years. It was a compulsion to walk for about an hour and a half to fetch water for themselves and their cattle. They say that the well was dried up because they didn't follow menstrual restrictions. There's a lot of bleeding while carrying water from such a distance.* There are many forms of discrimination, even on such issues, which we can and should discuss in various ways. Whichever perspective we use for discussion, the crux of the issue is menstrual practice. The wells might have dried up due to deforestation, climate change, or global warming. Though it seems symptomatic to blame the menstruators for menstruation, this is the systemic repercussion of menstrual discrimination. In such places, menstruation, menstruators, and their activities are taken as impure and dirty. After the well dries up, women are compelled to fetch water by walking a long distance. Such a practice is an act of division of labor imposed upon the women with intention or custom due to the deeply imbedded perception about the same blood, impure and unclean. Menstruators should bathe if there is availability of water, if you have a habit, and if you are comfortable. You need to cleanse during menstruation. But even if you are unable to do so, forcing that you must do so because you are menstruating is because menstrual blood is considered impure and dirty. Or, you can just use materials to manage the blood and sexual organs because the menstrual blood is pure and clean. If you don't have a serious health problem (which is just 5 percent chance), menstruators need not take it as a problem to manage. Suppose, if you fall within 5 percent, non-menstruators can be requested to help to manage. Why isn't that happening? Even if it's happening during menstruation, this is the structural or systemic impact of menstrual discrimination. The thought, perspective, and practice that non-income-generating household work like managing water for cattle is again structural and systemic effect. Not mentioned in the article but prevalent everywhere is the practice of spending the water fetched by the menstruators for non-menstruators' beard shaving or bathing. Such practices are also the effects of structural systems. If menstruators themselves choose to use non-degradable plastic or chemically mixed products (for instance, found in the Nepali market often, which takes 200 to 1000 years to degrade), such products pollute land, jungle, and air and harm human beings, which is a symptomatic effect. Not getting water or getting less water is the systemic effect; if the management of blood cannot be done in the above-mentioned way, mental stress caused by not getting it, undignified and low feelings, or any other health or physical problems develop. It is a health and human rights problem caused by water and climate change.

One aspect of climate justice advocacy is that climate change has increased health problems, increased gender inequality, a lack of or reduced participation of women in decision-making processes, and a nominal budget for gender equality. This writer claims that, in the same vein, it will be yet another blunder to conduct a program under the banner of climate change or justice. Because our advocacy has not even thought to scale the mountain of menstrual discrimination, the root constructor and creator of unequal power and patriarchy. As experienced and thought by most people, sexual and reproductive health, comprehensive sexual education, menstrual health, and management are silent on the multifaceted and complex nature of menstrual discrimination and the role it plays in creating unequal power and reinforcing patriarchy. Therefore, in the

research and advocacy of climate justice in any context, if we can mainstream dignified menstruation (solution) or menstrual discrimination (problem), it is possible to root out the structural discrimination. Otherwise, a parrot can imitate for some days only; after some days, it either flies, forgets, or awaits death. At the current pace, even if the budget is enough to address the increasing health problems due to climate change, many women are appointed, or the role of youth and tribal youths are increased, it will not yield material results because there have not been any initiatives to shake the foundation of unequal power relations and patriarchy, which are the prerequisites for meaningful climate justice. Because even after a 76-year-long *human rights campaign to sustainable development goals*, menstrual discrimination has not been provided proper space. There is not a single place in the world unaffected by climate change, and we cannot even imagine a place without a menstruator; therefore, all who work on climate change don't have any alternatives to working in dignified menstruation.

Thank you!

Radha Poudel, PhD