

# Traditional and Cultural Myths, Practices as Barriers in Women Health Issues

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## **Abstract:**

Undefined numbers of women worldwide face challenges in managing different health issues especially related to gynecological issues which negatively affects their overall wellbeing. Cultural taboos, myths, norms of the society are considered to be one of the major determinants regarding these challenges. In India Women's health is oppressed by several factors. One of these factors is traditional and cultural believes, myths, and practices. This paper aims to explore different cultural myths and practices which act as barriers in women health in India. This paper is based on different review studies of India and abroad. Here researcher found that there are many traditional myths, and practices related to women's reproductive health, menstrual health etc. Many communities have a myth that women can spread calamity during their menstrual time. They have faced many taboos in daily life like prohibitions on attending religious spaces, handling food, sleeping in home. The study suggests the need for more comprehensive strategies to improve women health issues in India.

**Keywords:** Women health, Menstrual health, Reproductive health, Cultural myths.

## **Introduction:**

Indigenous knowledge indicates various types of skills, philosophies, understandings which are developed or gathered by local people in thousands of years throughout their lives. Indigenous knowledge refers native people's past history, different kind of experiences, interaction within their community in natural surroundings. This knowledge also known as traditional knowledge or local knowledge. Women perform a significant role to transmit this traditional knowledge from generation to generation. Women are more sensitive to retain their community cultural, customs and rituals. But society carried many superstitions in several aspect from many years. Women health issues are one of them. They are suffering from varied health related problems like gynecological problem, reproductive issues, heart related problem, mental health disorder etc.

## **Objectives:**

Researcher framed following objectives for this study-

- To find out the Cultural Myths, and Practices on women health issues in India.
- To find out the Cultural Myths, and Practices on women health issues in Abroad.
- To compare the Cultural Myths, and Practices on women health issues between Indian and Abroad countries.

**Methodology:**

This study is a review paper. Here researcher review several research studies related to women health issues and Cultural Myths, and Practices. Here researcher did not used any primary data, only used secondary data collected from different research paper, article etc. Researcher reviewed various works of literature related to it, out of them there have some Indian studies and Abroad studies also. After that researcher analyzed and interpreted all the collected data.

**Analysis And Interpretation:**

Here researcher analysis the paper in two studies. One is Indian studies and another one is abroad studies. These studies analyzed in two table which are shown below.

**Table:1 According to Indian Studies**

Author & Year	Title	Findings	Noticeable Fact
Garg, S. & Anand, T. (2015)	Menstruation related myths in India: strategies for combating it	<p>Entry in Puja room are strictly prohibited for urban girls and not entering in kitchen are restricted for rural girls in their menstrual time.</p> <p>In menstrual time women body throw out some specific smell or ray which turn to preserved bad food. That's why there is a taboo to touch sour food like pickle.</p> <p>Some community girls are burying their used cloths in menstrual time to restrain the shadow of evil.</p>	From ancient India, some communities still have a myth in menstrual time women are impure and it continued from vedic time.
Madhuri, B. & Gulabrao, S. S. (2023)	Menstruation Myths and Facts - A Review Article	<p>Here researcher found that in India menstruation is still envisage impure and filthy. This practices is started in Vedic time.</p> <p>Girls and women are not to touch holy books</p>	<p>After menstruation women have to clean to back in their regular life.</p> <p>There is a restriction of urban girls not to entering the 'puja room' and rural girls not to</p>

		<p>and they are not to attend prayer when they menstruate.</p> <p>During periods if women cooking any kind of food, then these foods get soiled.</p> <p>Participating women revealed that body eject bad smell or ray when they menstruate which can preserve food harsh. That's why there is a taboo not to touch any sour food like pickle.</p>	<p>entering the kitchen when they menstruate.</p>
<p><b>Choudhry, U. K. (1997)</b></p>	<p>Traditional Practices of Women from India: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Newborn Care</p>	<p>“May you bathe in milk and bloom among sons”. Here milk indicate motherhood and sons indicate symbolizing prosperity is a cultural blessing for the girls of India.</p> <p>In Indian culture motherhood emphasizes a very important role. There has a thought that every girl should marry and give birth to a baby is most important.</p> <p>Ancient Indian scriptures Sushrata Breastfeeding should be started of a baby in fifth day and somewhere it is started in sixth day after celebrating a ritual called ‘<b>Chhatti</b>’.</p>	<p>Family has a fear of harm to new baby from the evil eye called ‘<b>Najar</b>’. For this reason, they placed a black dot of kajal on the newborn baby.</p> <p>Society has a dread to weight their newborn baby.</p> <p>In Indian culture most of the women from low socio-economic background or working class like home delivery by birth attendants or untrained midwives.</p>
<p><b>Naaz, S. &amp; et. al. (2019)</b></p>	<p>Superstition in India “An impediment to</p>	<p>Here researcher found society follow a taboo</p>	<p>There also have a restriction to entering</p>

	innovation and growth”	that girls cannot enter the temple during menstruation. The red blood flow indicates impurity and the step of evil.	the kitchen of women when they menstruate. Menstruate girls have some restrictions to their everyday food habits and daily routines.
<b>Delfin, A. T. &amp; et. al. (2017)</b>	Cultural aspects and mythologies surrounding menstruation and abnormal uterine bleeding	Except Shiks most of the other religion indicate menstruation is a sign of impurity, uncleanness and the women can do black magic to in this time. In Hinduism the first day of menstruation of a girl is a sign of positivity. In South India when girls have experienced their first menstrual period for first time are given gratitude and celebrating the day as special occasion.	Islamic culture shows a soft attitude towards menstruant women. They allow the men to sit, eat and live an inartificial life with their wives. Islamic Prophet Muhammad's wife recite “While I was laying [sic] with the Prophet under a single woolen sheet, I got the menses. I slipped away and put on the clothes for menses. He said, ‘Have you got “ <i>nifas</i> ” (menses)?’ I replied, ‘Yes.’ He then called me and made me lie with him under the same sheet.”
<b>Kumar, P. (2021)</b>	Factors associated with gynaecological morbidities and treatment-seeking behaviour among adolescent girls residing in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, India	Here researcher found that 37 percent of adolescence girls were sexually active and 50 percent of adolescence are not used sanitary napkin in their menstruation. Many of them are not get toilet facilities. SC and ST women are faced more	Sexually active adolescence are endured from gynecological calamity and most of them are used sanitary napkin. These symptoms are more seen in working lady rather than who are staying at home.

		gynecological problem than non- SC, ST women.	
<b>Lata, M. &amp; et. al. (2012)</b>	Modernization and superstition among female adolescents – a relational study	This study reveals that when there is increase in modernization there is decrease in superstitious beliefs. The superstitious Practices were found low among the female adolescents of high salaried parents than the female adolescents of low salaried parents.	There are no hard believes to maintain by the women in their menstrual period.
<b>Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at KK Women's and Children's Hospital</b>	Confinement after childbirth: Myths vs facts	New mother thought that if she has a baby, she is going into depression. They did not allow to touch water or take a shower if the wind is entered in her body.	Women should not intimate with their sexual partner for 40 days after delivery.

**Table: 2 According to Abroad Studies**

<b>Author &amp; year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Noticeable Fact</b>
<b>Gainesville, Fl. (N.D.)</b>	Common Myths About Women's Health &Gynaecologists	Gynecological guidance is needed only for those women who need child.  Only adult women are needed to consult with gynecologist.  There is a cultural myth that pap smears screen is used for STDs only. Gynecologist get emphasize only breast and vaginal problem not others issues.	Cancer is not preventable.  Sexual issues have to handle by only women not by men.  Society has a myth that all new mothers are easily adopted to the motherhood.  Women who have no symptoms don't need to worry about STD

		Cranberry juice recovery the urinal infection.	
<b>Aziz, M. A. &amp; et. al. (2018)</b>	Traditional phytomedicines for gynecological problems used by tribal communities of Mohmand Agency near the Pak-Afghan border area	<p>Medicinal plants are used to medicate the women health issues like menstruation, gonorrhoea, menopause, abortion, <a href="#">leucorrhoea</a>, delivery complaints and infertility.</p> <p>Total 52 medicinal plant are recorded from this area and 21 plants are used for menses-related problems, followed by sexual problems (ten plants), <a href="#">leucorrhea</a> (nine plants), gastric problems (seven plants) and <a href="#">amenorrhea</a> (seven plants).</p> <p>Pakistani rural women are repeatedly facing gynecological problems for their poor living standards, extensive physical work even in pregnancy and famine.</p> <p>Lack of modern health facilities women have a tend to contact with midwives and the traditional healers.</p> <p>Poor economic condition, lack of modern health facility, low literacy rate are the main reason to emphasis the local</p>	<p>Local health practitioner called ‘<b>Daya</b>’ used various herbs making from different plants.</p> <p>Local traditional healers are known as ‘<b>Hakim</b>’ have higher secondary and university level of schooling.</p> <p>Muslim worship is divided into three parts – Heart, toung and body.</p> <p>Women’s menstrual time they should focus on the worship of the heart and tongue and restrain from the physical acts of worship.</p> <p>First day of period Muslim women have given <b>Hijab</b> and they think that periods are the form of prayer.</p>

		<p>medicinal plant.</p> <p>Women shows more trust and faith to medicinal plant rather than modern medicinal facilities.</p>	
<b>Maharaj, T. &amp; Winkler, I. T. (2020)</b>	Transnational Engagements: Cultural and Religious Practices Related to Menstruation	<p>Here researcher reviewed some participants and found that the traditional rituals are started after married. Husband and wife do not have intimate in menstrual time after seven days when it started.</p> <p>Women envisage as a spiritually pure after the ritual bath called ‘MIKVEH’</p>	
<b>Kheiri, S. A. &amp; et.al. (2017)</b>	Superstitious Food Beliefs and Traditional Customs among Ladies Attending the Antenatal Clinic at Omdurman Maternity Hospital (OMH)	<p>Researcher found that there is a superstitious food belief in more than one third pregnant women. This cultural food beliefs had found in those women who are belonging from rural areas, educationally low, young age and insufficient pre-natal care.</p>	<p>There is a belief that egg, honey, citrus, soda are the avoided food items for pregnant women because it can affect fetus, preeclampsia, miscarriage and prolonged labor.</p>
<b>Oconnell, C. (2017)</b>	Superstition still guides women’s health in China	<p>Eating cold food are restricted to some Chinese women when they menstruate because these foods are prepared in darker environment.</p> <p>Pregnant women have to follow some traditional myth by their mother or mother-in-law that drinking dark liquids like soya sauce, coffee etc.</p>	<p>Chinese have a cultural practice that during menstruation women’s body are contains high yin in energy. Eating cold foods can create uneasiness, crams and other health issues.</p> <p>In China, there are anargumental practice like wearing anti-radiation cloths during</p>

		<p>caused darker skinned color baby which are contrary to highly colorist culture in China.</p> <p>After childbirth rituals strictly follow by the women called ‘Zuoyuezi’ or ‘<b>Sitting through the month</b>’ wearing long sleeves and trousers, keeping the air-conditioning off, sleeping under heavy covers, and so on, even if the beside temperature is high.</p>	<p>pregnancy to protect women and her baby from electromagnetic waves came from mobile, desktop and other electronic device.</p>
<b>Mukherjee, A. &amp; et. al. (2020)</b>	<p>Perception and practices of menstruation restrictions among urban adolescent girls and women in Nepal: a cross-sectional survey</p>	<p>84.5% of urban Nepali women are not praying in menstruation and they are inducing by their mother to maintain the restrictions during period.</p> <p>On the fourth day of period, they have to clean their cloths, bedsheet and other household things.</p> <p>45.4% of women are thought that menstruation is a curse.</p>	<p>One indigenous group called ‘Janajati’ caste are like to enter religious places when they menstruate compared to the Brahmins.</p> <p>Some participant who has Master’s degree are interested to attend prayer than less than a high school education.</p>
<b>Yimaz, F. A. &amp; Uzuncakmak, T. (2023)</b>	<p>Pregnant Women’s Attitudes towards Complementary and Alternative Medicine and the Effect of their Superstitions on their Psychosocial Health Levels</p>	<p>Researcher found that psychosocial health of Turkish pregnant women was good while attitude level towards supplementary and alternative medicine are moderate.</p> <p>Attitude towards various cultural practices is not high.</p>	
<b>University of Utah</b>	<p>The Top 10 Women’s Health Myths</p>	<p>This study reveals that – Women wearing bra caused breast cancer. They think that they have</p>	<p>Some specific food like soya sauce, yam is helpful to get pregnant.</p>

		nothing to do to prevent Cancer. Only old person has faced the heart related problem and men are comparatively face this issue than women.	
<b>Eshak, E. (2020)</b>	Myths about modern and traditional contraceptives held by women in Minia, Upper Egypt	Here researcher found that there was a myth about contraceptives. 88.7 percent of women have a doubt on it. They thought that oral birth control pills caused cancer and IUDs can implant to the uterus.	Different cultural practices and fertility practices by provoking people to use contraceptives has always faced resistance.

**Interpretation:**

**Objectives 1: To find out the Cultural Myths, and Practices on women health issues in India.**

After analyzing table 1 researcher found that there are many cultural myths and practices related to the women health connected with menstruation, reproductive health and others. Women have lot of restrictions during menstruation like they are not entered to the kitchen and religious places. From vedic time there is a thought when women menstruate, they bear impurity and their body emits bad smell. So, they cannot touch preserved food like pickle. Some community girls are burying their used cloths in menstrual time to restrain from evil. Girls and women are not to touch holy books and they are not to attend prayer when they menstruate. After menstruation women have to clean to back in their regular life. In Indian culture most of the women from low socio -economic background or working class like home delivery by birth attendants or untrained midwives. Ancient Indian scriptures Sushruta Breastfeeding should be started of a baby in fifth day and somewhere it is started in sixth day after celebrating a ritual called ‘Chhatti’. The red blood flow indicates impurity and the step of evil. Menstruate girls have some restrictions to their everyday food habits and daily routines. In South India when girls have experienced their first menstrual period for first time are given gratitude and celebrating the day as special occasion. Islamic culture shows a soft attitude towards menstruant women. They allow the men to sit, eat and live an inartificial life with their wives. SC and ST women are faced more gynecological problem than non- SC, ST women.

This study revealed that Indian society have many cultural beliefs and practices regarding health issues of women. Intentionally or unintentionally, they bear this myth in every day’s life. Not only the rural or have less education girls are retain these views but also educated women are bearing this practices intentionally or under the pressure of family. Most of the beliefs are connected to women’s gynecological and reproductive health.

**Objectives 2: To find out the Cultural Myths, and Practices on women health issues in Abroad.**

After analyzing table 2 previous research show that there are several myths and practices related to women health in abroad countries. They thought Only adult women are needed to consult with gynecologist. There is a myth that pap smears screen is used for STDs only. Gynecologist get emphasize

only breast and vaginal problem not others issues. Medicinal plants are used to medicate the women health issues like menstruation, gonorrhoea, menopause, abortion, [leucorrhoea](#), delivery complaints and infertility. Lack of modern health facilities women have a tend to contact with midwives and the traditional healers. Some study found in abroad that cultural rituals are started after married. Husband and wife do not have intimate in menstrual time after seven days when it started. Women envisage as a spiritually pure after the ritual bath called 'MIKVEH'. There is a belief that egg, honey, citrus, soda are the avoided food items for pregnant women because it can affect fetus, preeclampsia, miscarriage and prolonged labor. They think that they not to do anything to prevent Cancer. Only old person has faced the heart related problem and men are comparatively face this issue than women. There also have a myth to used contraceptives.

In abroad countries there also have traditional practices and beliefs on women health issues. These countries have some places where women cannot get modern health facilities. For this reason, they are likely to contact with midwives for delivery cases. 'Mikveh' is the very popular ritual bath in some abroad countries. Local traditional healers are known as 'Hakim' have higher secondary and university level education. Among abroad countries many of them are developed but in spite of them they also have cultural believes which are basically retain and transmit by women.

**Objectives 3: To compare the Cultural Myths, and Practices on women health issues between Indian and Abroad countries.**

Indian and abroad studies both have the cultural beliefs or practices related to the women health. But in India there is a more rigidity to follow these rules or customs. Indian community girls are burying their used cloths in menstrual time to restrain the shadow of evil but in abroad these types of beliefs are not shown. In abroad women have a thought that oral birth control pills caused cancer and IUDs can implant to the uterus but India have not these views. Gynecological Guidance is needed when women pregnant in abroad but in India birth are given by midwives or birth attenders. Some abroad countries have thought cancer is not preventable but India have not this type of myth. Abroad countries beliefs that Only old person has faced the heart related problem and men are comparatively face this issue than women. But India have not such type of believes.

India and abroad both of the countries bare several types of cultural beliefs or practices. Women are specially transmitter of them. They are basically retaining the myths and very rigid to maintain these practices to one woman to another. South Indian people celebrate the day when girls have experienced their first menstrual period.

**Significance of the study:**

The present study is very much helpful to know the traditional cultural beliefs and practices in the world. It specifically focuses on cultural myths in India and abroad countries which are related to women's gynecological and reproductive health issues. After knowing this practices or beliefs society should be conscious about women health. Taking care of women both mentally and physically is much required. Psychologically society specifically women should come out of these superstitions and spread awareness as well as medical guidance to women.

**Conclusion:**

Society has several types of practices on women health problem in worldwide. Different countries, communities have shown various types of cultural superstition. Most of the myth are for the women.

Naturally women health is not escape from them. In India motherhood is the most significant role of a woman. Where most of the countries think that women are impure and they bear bad evil in their menstrual period including India. That's why there have a taboo to enter the kitchen or puja room. Some Chinese women think that they are penetrable during their menstruation. So, they are like to resting more, making themselves comfortable, and avoiding particular foods. Women think that using contraceptives is a sin. Indigenous women are at higher risk of mental health issues, including stress, depression, anxiety etc. Indigenous women use many grandmother cures like to use Neem & Tulsi for the treatment of fevers, coughs and colds. One indigenous group called 'Janajati' caste are like to enter religious places when they menstruate compared to the Brahmins. In other side Islamic tradition in some places of Pakistan shows a soft attitude towards menstruant women. This study suggests the need for more comprehensive strategies to improve women health issues in India like give importance to medical facilities, society consciousness about women health, Free medical service for poor women, widespread of education in women and men also. Women should come out to their modesty and feel no hesitation to share the problem with family members, doctors and others. There are many cases where women do not share or hide their health issues with doctors. That's why disease is not diagnose and they cannot get any treatment. Men should equally show a positive attitude towards women health-related problem and they must treat this matter with sincerely and carefully.

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