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Rituals of Transition: A Study among Adolescent Girls of Koraput District, Odisha

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Abstract

Introduction: Puberty and menstruation are significant biological and socio-cultural transitions in adolescent girls' lives particularly in tribal communities where customary beliefs shape menstrual practices.
Objective: This study explores the socio-cultural restrictions and ritual experienced by adolescent girls in Koraput Dist., Odisha.
Methodology: A descriptive cross-sectional research design with mix method approach was adopted. A total of 541 tribal adolescent girls aged between 10-19 years participated, comprising 147 early adolescent and 349 late adolescent girls selected through simple random sampling. Data was collected using a structured interview schedule and Focus group discussion (FGD). Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS 20 using frequencies, percentages and chi-square test with $p<0.05$ considered significant.
Results: Significant associations were found between adolescent age group and restrictions on entering the kitchen, going someone else's home, staying away from flowing water, performing household work and touching family members. The qualitative findings documented the *Uthani* ritual, purification ceremonies, consultation with *dishari* animal sacrifice, communal feasting, food restrictions and restriction to entering kitchen, sacred places also interact with male persons.
Discussion: These findings reflect the influence of traditional beliefs and cultural customs on menstrual practices, which may affect girls' mobility, hygiene, dignity and well-being.
Conclusion: Culturally sensitive awareness programmes involving families and communities are needed to promote menstrual health while respecting meaningful tribal traditions.

Keywords: Puberty, Transition, Adolescents, Taboo, Koraput

Introduction

1.1 Background

Menstruation, a natural biological process, is often shrouded in silence and surrounded by a complex form of myths and taboos in whole over the world (kumari and Sabharwal, 2025). The socio-cultural perception of menstruation as impure, dirty or shameful persists across both rural and urban settings (Nigam, S., & Soperna, N., 2017; Verma et al., 2021). These perceptions are not isolated beliefs but are embedded within the religious, patriarchal flow according to which detect the behaviour and mobility of women during their menstrual cycle (Ottsen et al., 2026). Menarche, the onset of menstruation, frequently marks a transition into a phase of life characterized by restrictions and changement of traditional norms (Ganguly and

Midya., 2023). A majority of studies significant of girls receive little information about menstruation before their first period, leading to fear and confusion (Ganguly and Midya., 2023). A "taboo" creates when a girl begins menstruating, some rules govern her daily lives, from her diet pattern to her sleeping rooms also with whom she can interact (K. et al., 2021; Panda et al., 2024). In south India studies, report high rates of distress nearly 70% due to the severity of menstrual exclusions, including temple bans and ritual exclusions. (Elliason et al., 2025). Some cultural beliefs associate menstrual blood with danger or mystical powers, perpetuating myths about its potential to influence others or impose one's will, reflecting deep-seated cultural attitudes towards menstruation (Garg and Anand, 2015).

1.2 Taboos and Restrictions Related to Menstruation:

For an adolescent girl, the onset of menarche, is mostly critical phase because it happens unknowingly. menstruation has long been treated as taboo in Indian culture which describe as unclean or dirty (Sudha Tiwari). Socio-cultural taboos surrounding menstruation can lead to fear and shame in discussions with other families, reducing young girls' knowledge about menstrual hygiene practices (Shah et al., 2013). Cultural beliefs and taboos surrounding menstruation, rooted in ancient Vedic times, persist in Indian society, leading to restrictions on menstruating individuals, such as exclusion from the kitchen, worship rooms, temples, and participation in religious activities (Garg and Anand, 2015; Shridhar et al., 2017; Meshram et al., 2020; Mahapatra et al., 2023). These taboos contribute to the perception of menstruation as dirty, impure, or shameful, impacting the social status and well-being of menstruating women and girls (Garg and Anand, 2015). Dietary restrictions during menstruation, such as avoiding sour foods, are practiced in certain communities due to beliefs that they may disturb menstrual flow (Garg and Anand, 2015). The organization of menarche (the onset of menstruation) ceremonies celebrates for adolescent girls and serves as a cultural acknowledgment of this milestone, reflecting societal norms and expectations surrounding female puberty (Garg and Anand, 2015). Christian girls, by contrast, may continue worship and attend church services during menstruation (Maharaj and Winkler, 2020; Ganguly, 2024). Among the Lohra tribe, mothers have a long-standing custom of not discussing menstruation with their daughters. Kayastha is described as a prominent caste in India and Nepal, traditionally linked to administrative and religious duties and regarded as the direct offspring of a Vedic deity (Kumar and Srivastava, 2011; Ganguly, 2024). Among the Oraon, a belief holds that a mother can ease her daughter's abdominal pain at menarche by tearing a piece of cloth into three equal parts in one breath and giving it to her (Kumari et al., 2021; Ganguly, 2024). Bhargav Brahmin girls may be expected not to touch iron objects such as locks and keys during menstruation (Eram & Tamanna, 2016; Ganguly, 2024).

1.3 Objectives

1. To identify the social restriction during menstruation
2. To identify the socio-cultural practices during menstrual rituals followed by adolescent girls.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design to examine social restrictions during menstruation and socio-cultural practices associated with menstrual rituals among adolescent girls. A mixed-method approach was employed to document the prevalence of menstrual restrictions and to understand the customary practices followed during menarche and related rituals. The quantitative component focused on identifying restrictions experienced by adolescent girls, while the qualitative component explored the sequence of menstrual rituals and the cultural practices associated with them.

2.2 Study Area and Study Population

The study was conducted in Koraput district, Odisha, focusing on tribal adolescent girls. The study population comprised adolescent girls age between 10–19 years. For analytical purposes, the participants were classified into two groups: early adolescents, comprising 147 girls, and late adolescents, comprising 394 girls. The total sample consisted of 541 adolescent girls.

2.3 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A total of 541 adolescent girls participated in the quantitative component of the study. Of these, 147 were classified as early adolescents and 394 as late adolescents. A simple random sampling procedure is followed during the research. The selection criteria included adolescent girls within the specified age range who were eligible to participate and provided consent in accordance with the applicable ethical requirements.

2.4 Data Collection Methods and Tools

Data were collected using a structured interview schedule/questionnaire and focus group discussions (FGDs). The quantitative questionnaire gathered information on social restrictions imposed or followed during menstruation. The qualitative component used focus group discussions with tribal adolescent girls to document socio-cultural practices associated with menarche and menstrual rituals.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS 20 statistical software. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to describe the distribution of social restrictions during menstruation. The findings were compared between early and late adolescent girls. The chi-square test of independence was used to examine associations between adolescent age group and reported social restrictions. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Qualitative data collected through the focus group discussions. The responses were reviewed to identify recurring themes related to the sequence of menstrual rituals, customary beliefs, ritual roles, restrictions, and community participation.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary. Appropriate permissions were obtained from the relevant authorities, and informed consent from their parents. Confidentiality was maintained during data collection, analysis, and reporting. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to decline participation or withdraw in accordance with the study protocol.

3. Result

Social restrictions during menstruation are widely practised across many communities and are often rooted in traditional beliefs concerning purity, pollution, sacredness and the perceived need to protect girls and family members during the menstrual period.

3.1 Social restriction during menstruation:

A bivariate analysis of menstrual profile between the early (n=147) and late (n=394) groups are depicted in table 3.1. The table also includes Pearson chi-square statistics to assess the strength and significance of differences between social restriction during menstruation and age group of post menarcheal adolescent girls. The social restrictions during menstruation comprise eight variables: Entering to kitchen, Temple / sacred places, attending function, going to someone else's home, staying away from flowing water, Household work, sleeping on routine bed, Touching family members. According to the study, the chi-square test showed a statistically significant association between adolescent age group and restriction in "entering kitchen (χ^2=3.99, p = 0.046)", "going to someone's home (χ^2=8.47, p< 0.05)", "staying away from flowing

water (χ^2=19.36, p< 0.05)", "household work (χ^2=4.62, p< 0.05)" and "touching family members (χ^2=6.52, p< 0.05)".

Table 3.1: social restriction during menstruation

Restriction	Early	Late	Total (Count & %)	Chi-Square or FET
Entering kitchen	141 (95.92%)	390 (98.98%)	531 (25.71%)	χ^2=3.99, p = 0.046
Temple / sacred places	144 (97.96%)	390 (98.98%)	534 (25.86%)	χ^2=0.26, p = 0.609
Attending function	45 (30.61%)	95 (24.11%)	140 (6.78%)	χ^2=2.03, p = 0.154
Going to someone else's home	45 (30.61%)	73 (18.53%)	118 (5.71%)	χ^2=8.47, p = 0.004
Stay away from flowing water	15 (10.20%)	6 (1.52%)	21 (1.02%)	χ^2=19.36, p<0.001
Household work	36 (24.49%)	63 (15.99%)	99 (4.79%)	χ^2=4.62, p = 0.032
Sleeping on routine bed	114 (77.55%)	296 (75.13%)	410 (19.85%)	χ^2=0.22, p = 0.636
Touching family members	71 (48.30%)	141 (35.79%)	212 (10.27%)	χ^2=6.52, p = 0.011

3.2 Socio-cultural ritual during menstruation:

The local language for adolescent girls is *dhangdi*. A girl when attain menarche is called *badpila*, a separate room made by clay and bamboo placed behind the house called as *kudia*. While a girl attains her menarche, her family members note down the exact day and time then went to village traditional male healer (*Dishari*) or traditional female healer (*Gurumai*). *Dishari or Gurumai* according to the religious calendar (*Panji*) told them about the process of ritual. Then he also told them which animal would be sacrificed either hen, fowl, male or female goat, and pigeon. For how many days, the girl stays in indoor is also decided by *Dishari or Gurumai* like 5days or 7days or 9days or 11days or 12 days or 21days. Also, the shadow of a male person is not supposed to see or touch her. On the first day, of menstrual period, that girl eat rice with less amount of sugar (*Jau*). From the second day onwards a normal food taken as usual. In this period, the girl restricted to eat rice, sweet and sour foods as they belief for the heavy bleeding. After the period over, she came to nearby river bank in the early morning before the sunrise wearing a saree with the old lady of her family (*grandma*). They gave her a sour juice before going to river bank. No male is allowed there. That handmade house (*kudia*) threw away beside the road side at the last day of menstrual period. At the river bank, they placed an earthen pot and a bunch of traditional wooden tooth brush (*dantakathi*). The girl kept her saree after cleaning it in that earthen pot, which she was wearing before came to riverbank. She was also chewing that bunch of toothbrushes and put it in that pot. After that they turned down the pot. Then *Dishari* performs ritual in that riverbank & sacrifice that animal and other sacred foods such as puffed rice, egg, coconut etc. After completion of all the ritual, the everyone returned to home and *Dishari* completed the rest of rituals. Then the girl wore a new saree and return to home and again took bath with turmeric water. After bathing she wore new clothes and came to stage. All the family relatives and villagers invited for a feast and came with gifts. In their tradition, they mostly gave pot (*garia*). In evening, there was a cultural programme arranged in the village where the male persons and older women drink traditional alcohol (*mahuli and salap*). During this programme, everyone dances with *Dhemsha* (traditional dance among paroja tribe)

4. Discussion

In many studies girls and women are restricted from cooking or entering the kitchen area (Varghese et al., 2015; K. et al., 2021). Also, they restricted from touching drinking water sources, wells, or dairy products like curd and milk, as these are considered particularly suspect to pollution (Srivastava et al., 2018; Yaliwal et al., 2020; Haseena et al., 2024). Meanwhile the present study found 531 participants are barred from cooking or entering the kitchen and 21 participants restricted to stay away from flowing water.

The prohibition against entering temples or places of worship is nearly universal in the studied contexts. Girls from the Sarna tribe also avoid places of worship (Ganguly et al., 2024). In so many studies, consistently show that 70% to 88% of girls and women are restricted from entering temples or prayer rooms (Sivakami et al., 2018; Elliason et al., 2025). Participating in religious ceremonies is often regarded as "disrespecting God" (Elizabeth et al., 2023). Meanwhile this study also notably found 534 participants restricted to entering temples or sacred places during their menstrual period.

Attaining social gatherings or even going to neighbours' house is often prohibited because in some regions, the presence of a menstruating woman at funerals or in a community gathering is considered as inappropriate or taboo (Haseena et al., 2024; Elizabeth et al., 2023; Panda N. et al., 2017; Ket al 2021; Verma et al., 2021). Meanwhile, in this study, 140 participants also had restricted to attain functions and 118 participants also restricted to going someone else's house during their menstrual period.

Menstruating girls and women barred from touching mirrors, agricultural tools or specific household vessels as well as they also restricted from household work like swiping, washing the utensils, to cleaning the rooms etc. (Srivastava et al., 2018; Dhingra et al., 2009; K. et al., 2021). In some cases, girls are restricted from moving in and out of the house freely or entering specific rooms living room or worship rooms (Nigam et al., 2017; Kushwaha et al., 2022). Meanwhile, in the present study, 99 participants restricted from household works during menstrual period.

In many studies found that a significance numbers of girls 56.6% don't sleep in their usual places during their periods (Varghese et al., 2015). Some of moved to a different room (K. et al., 2021). Also, this study found 410 participants restrict to sleeping in their routine bed.

Restriction to touching family members and avoiding physical contact with male members is often found in many cases. In some border villages of Jammu & Kashmir, girls and women are prohibited from talking to men during their menstrual period (Panda et al., 2024; Haseena et al., 2024). Meanwhile, in this study, 212 participants restricted to touch family members during their menstrual period.

The present study explored menarche as an event associated with a sequence of customary activities involving the household, a traditional religious specialist, a riverbank ceremony and a community gathering. The reported practices demonstrate that the ritual is organized through several distinct stages rather than being limited to single ceremonial event. A similar study found about menarcheal ritual in Balda village of Koraput dist. among paraja and rana community by Swain and Nayak (2018). The menarcheal ritual is known as *uthani* ritual also guided by traditional male healer (*dishari*), involving purification ceremonies animal sacrifice and communal feasting. Menstruating girls face restrictions on religious activities, kitchen entry, food consumption and social interactions. These cultural beliefs also influence menstrual hygiene practices including the use of cloth instead of sanitary napkins (Swain and Nayak, 2018).

5. Conclusion

Menstrual taboos and restrictions in Inia are complex intersection of ancient mythology, religious beliefs

and patriarchal social structure. The classification of menstruation as impure and polluting leads to significant exclusions that restrict to the girl's mobility, social participation and access to education etc. While there is a growing discourse around menstrual justice and rights, the deeply ingrained nature of these beliefs which transformed through generation represented as formidable challenge. The study highlights the menstrual ritual and socio-cultural restrictions among tribal communities in Koraput district completely significant in traditional beliefs, customs and religious practices. Although the puberty rituals such as *Uthani* ritual, an important transition in a girl's life, restrictions in entering kitchen or sacred places, food consumption and social gatherings may affect girls' well-being and menstrual hygiene practices. These practices reflect the cultural identity of the communities.

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