

Menstruation, Advertising and Problematic Frameworks

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Abstract

It is 2022, and menstruation is still a taboo topic to a large extent. Television commercials for menstrual products play a considerable role in constructing a popular narrative about menstruation and menstruators. This paper seeks to prove that Indian television ads are governed by patriarchal ideas and corporate and media appropriation that distort some realities and silence other salty representations of menstruation, menstruators, and related issues. First, the ads imply that periods must be kept hidden and secret. Next, particular brands come forward to sell women their own free. Many ads contain misinformation. The ads are pretty exclusivist. They generally target only the women present in urban areas who study or work outside their homes. In the ads, men do not appear in any substantial role. Non-binary menstruators are entirely left out. Further, the painful aspects of bleeding, products other than pads, and the unavailability of menstrual products are also absent from the ads. The ads spread stigma and gender inequality.

Keywords: Menstruation, Menstruators, Stigma, Menstrual-Concealment, Choice, Menstrual Justice, Menstrual-Cups, Tampons, Gender, Genderqueer.

Introduction

Menstrual blood is the only one that is not shed by any violence, injury, or illness, and it is common knowledge that about half the world menstruates for about a week every month. Yet, we often fail to understand, experience, and treat menstruation as a normal biological process. Winkler (2020) argues, “Menstruation is so much more for many people...it is fundamental. Menstruation unites the personal and the political, the intimate and the public, and the physiological and the socio-cultural” (p.9). Despite this fundamentality, “menstruation is a source of social stigma for women” (Robledo & Chrisler, 2011, p. 9). It is sad but not surprising that, even in 2020, Chris Bobels, former president of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research, says, “It is transgressive to resist the norm of menstrual...concealment. With notable

exceptions, across cultures and historical eras, we socialise this biological process—including a serious inquiry into its form, function, and meaning—into hiding” (p. 1). She calls this shortsighted and deeply revealing at the same time because it exposes the need for change. She characterises the lack of attention to the fundamental reality of menstruation as a profound knowledge gap and an exhibition of the power of misogyny and stigma in suppressing knowledge production (Bobels, 2020, p. 1). It is undeniable that effective change is contemplable in the scarcity of knowledge.

While discussing the importance of knowledge about menstruation, it is worth noting that how people come to know and learn about menstruation has a profound impact on the broader social justice implications of menstrual health (Fahs & Perianes, 2020, p. 449) and Robledo and Chrisler (2011) in the article “Menstrual Mark: Menstruation as Social Stigma” firmly state, “The word stigma refers to any stain or mark that renders the individual’s body or character defective. This stigma is transmitted through powerful socialisation agents in popular culture such as advertisements” (p. 9). Moreover, compared to men, women have more information about the menstrual cycle, including personal experience; men’s attitudes in this regard are more likely to be directly and heavily influenced by popular culture (Hoerster et al., 2003, p. 79). In this context, it becomes essential and relevant, for Indians especially, to critically examine the Indian television advertisements for menstrual products; television continues to be the screen of choice for Indians (Sunil

Lulla, 2021), and advertisements are cultural artefacts that play an essential role in the social construction of meaning (Merskin, 1999, pp. 942-943).

This paper intends to unravel the patriarchal and regressive ideas that characterise television commercials (TVCs) for menstrual products in India. The paper seeks to prove that the ads propagate stigma, taboo, misconceptions, and gender inequality using critical enquiry into the concept of menstrual concealment, the rhetoric of choice and freedom, and the image of womanhood as presented in the ads as well as in the elements, that are missing from the ads, like product unavailability, painful aspects of menstruation, menstrual products other than pads, and genderqueer menstruators.

Whisper and Stayfree are the two most popularly consumed brands of menstrual pads in India (Research and Markets, 2020, “Competition analysis”), and this research is based on TVCs for both brands. Only those TVCs released in the past three years, i.e., 2019, 2020, and 2021 on the YouTube channels of the respective brands (Whisper India, n.d.; Stayfree India, n.d.) have been taken into consideration to concentrate only on the recent trends. Also, generally, the same ad may be launched in multiple languages; hence, this paper deals only with Hindi ads owing to the ease of availability. There are occasional references to ads for brands other than the two mentioned above and advertisements on platforms like YouTube. The broad range of media surrounding us renders talking exclusively about TVCs redundant and impossible. Cross Red cross-referenced content on other platforms helps

successfully elaborate upon the TV situation.

The following is the list of ads included in this study.

Figure 1

Serial Number	Advertisement
1	Whisper Ultra Clean No.1 hygienic protection (WhisperIndia, 2019)
2	Whisper Ultra Soft Air Fresh: Airy freshness for an irritation-free feel (Whisper India, 2020)
3	Whisper Bindazzzz Nights Up to 0% leaks all night long! (Whisper India, 2020)
4	Whisper: <i>Ab din bhar daag ka no darr!</i> (Whisper India, 2020)
5	Whisper: Doctors <i>ka sujhaya</i> No.1 Brand (WhisperIndia, 2021)
6	Whisper Ultra Clean with Herbal Oil Our No.1 Hygienic Protection (WhisperIndia, 2021)
7	Whisper Choice XL+: <i>Ab Baar pad badalne ki no tension</i> (WhisperIndia, 2021)
8	New & Improved Stayfree® Secure – <i>Ab no more Geelapan</i> (Stayfree India, 2019)
9	The Best Ever Stayfree® Secure® Extra Large <i>Don't let wetness get in the way</i> (Stayfree India, 2020)
10	It's time to #ChangeYourPad to the New Stayfree Secure Nights (Stayfree India, 2021)

A Table Containing a List of Ads Included in this Study

Not many academic studies in this area of research have been conducted in India. So, although this research is based on Indian TVCs, many of the scholarly sources used are based on ads and products present outside of India. Nevertheless, instead of becoming a drawback, it only adds to the quality of this research; Whisper and Stayfree are owned by ‘Proctor & Gamble Hygiene and Health Care Limited’ and ‘Johnson & Johnson’ respectively, both of which sell menstrual products in multiple countries and have received the critical attention of many researchers.

It would be imperative to recollect the following lines from an essay by Kissling at the outset.

In conceptualising menstruation as a narrative, we recognise the story as a fundamental element of human culture. Any situation is a story, “a human-constructed set of meanings that make sense out of phenomena” (Gadow 1994, 306) Stories do more than describe the world—stories make the world. They are more than discursive structures; it is only through new narratives that extant culture narratives can be reframed and altered. Activists and advertisers know this (Ganz 2001;

Couto 1993; Kissling 2018); so do politicians and filmmakers (Day 2011). (2020, p. 865)

Menstrual Concealment

A common element found in most ads is menstrual concealment. It is a fundamental norm based on which the ads work. This is problematic because emphasising secrecy renders menstruation literally and metaphorically invisible from everyday life. Bobel (2019, p. 88) says that the mere naming of India's leading brand of sanitary napkins as 'Whisper' is telling. Houppert coined the phrase "the culture of concealment" (1999, p. 13) to explain the impact of taboos and stigma on women's experience of menstruation and the role menstrual products often play in manipulating women into shame and secrecy. TVCs tend to convince and celebrate that a particular brand of sanitary pads is sufficiently reliable in masking marks, order, and the fact that a woman is on her menses. Ads for menstrual products contribute to the communication taboo by emphasising secrecy, avoidance of embarrassment, and freshness (Coutts & Berg, 1993, 179-190; Merskin, 1999, pp. 945-955).

10 out of the 11 ads included in this study involve direct claims of locking menstrual flow and preventing leakage. How this is done requires special attention. Ads play on women's fear of being discovered as menstruating because discovery means stigma (Coutts & Berg, 1993, p. 183). An advertisement for Whisper released in 2021 carries the tagline "*Ab din bar daag ka no darr!*" ("No more

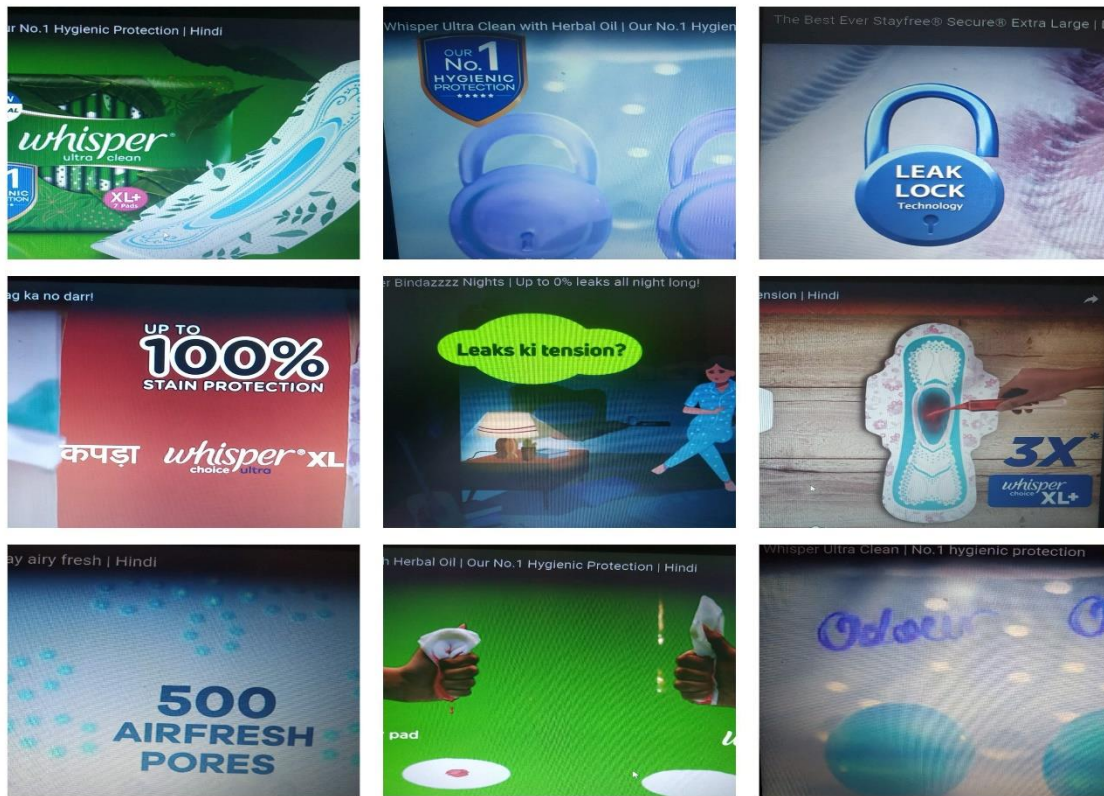
fear of stain for the entire day!). A song that emphasises not turning and repeatedly looking backward plays in the background. The jolly voice and the upbeat music seem to poke fun at rather than express the painful struggle of a college girl who is self-conscious and sceptical lest her period mark should show. In the end, she is advised to give up ordinary clothes in favour of Whisper pads to avoid "*daag ka darr*" ("fear of stain") and not for better comfort, usability for longer durations, skin-friendly texture, anti-bacterial qualities, or safety from other infections. Kissling (as cited in Hasson, 2016/2020, p. 768) asserts that the popular culture depictions that accentuate the requirement of vigilant self-surveillance to hide all signs of bleeding serve to further ideas of menstruation as a source of shame and embarrassment. Such reports also objectify women forcing them to conduct their appearance to satisfy the patriarchal male gaze based on norms of non-menstruating individuals.

The pads' capacity to absorb menstrual flow and prevent 'stains' is often emphasised in several ways, as shown in Figure 2. Comparison of a particular place with another pad or cloth material and jargon like number one, 100% protection, 500 new air pores, leak lock technology, unique design, dual-action gel and even magic gel is present. "The cultural and scientific categories with which we categorise...menstruation is important to how we understand, experience and intervene in it" (Hasson, 2016/2020, 763). One must not take lightly the promises TVCs make, the visuals they show, and the phraseology they choose to use. Advertisers often avoid words like a mark, stain, and

even leakage. Instead, they contrive to insert misleading terms like ‘wetness’ and ‘hygiene’. An attempt to problematise the concepts of wetness and hygiene, as shown

in these ads, lays bare the ambiguous and dubious nature of the narrative being created.

Figure2



Collage Showing Various Ways Menstrual Concealment is Emphasised

The word ‘wetness’ refers to being covered or saturated with a liquid (Oxfords University Press, 2007). Therefore, it is common sense that wetness in ads for sanitary napkins should indicate dampness, a moist and sticky feeling or problems like skin irritation, itching, rashes etc. However, most ads do not seem to follow this simple logic. An advertisement for Stayfree released in 2019 includes the tagline “Ab no more *Geelapan*” (“No more wetness now”) and talks about pads that soak and lock the flow with double speed so that the girl in the ad who was earlier unwilling to go onstage, later goes on to face the audience confidently. This ad may be talking about

wetness. However, things are kept ambiguous, and only specific hints that carry double meaning are provided. On the one hand, the visual illustration of the pad’s absorption capacity involves checking for the presence of liquid on top of the place, unlike the bottom side, which is often the case with ads claiming prevention of leakage. On the other hand, the accompanying audio mentions that the pad soaks and locks the flow as if just soaking and drinking enough. Earlier in the ad, the girl wears blue and black colours with especially dark-coloured lower, but later, she enters the stage wearing a bright white outfit that suggests freedom from the

appearance of menstrual marks. The audio which comes along with this announces, “*Azadi gentleman used*” (“freedom from wetness”). The 2021 ad for Whisper, mentioned earlier, provides even more clarity. It promises 100% protection from ‘stains’ as padlocks wetness. This makes it quite apparent that the advertisers’ term for menstrual discharge is wetness; an ample number of similarities exist. This perpetuates taboo thinking by suggesting the monthly cycle is dirty, socially impolite, something to be concealed and only very loosely referenced in product commercials (Lewis, 2020, p. viii).

Further, hygiene refers to the condition or practices conducive to maintaining health and preventing diseases, primarily through cleanliness (Oxford University Press, 2007). Whisper adds a new angle to hygiene. For years, Whisper has been creating ads that inform the viewers that they get “unlimited hygiene” and “no. 1 hygienic protection” by using its pads which lock ‘wetness’ and odour to give hygienic protection. This is nothing but a random arrangement of catchy words to attract consumers by forcing them into believing that there are numerous reasons to buy these pads. The assertion that the flow to prevent marks, odour or being detected by others can also offer hygiene to the menstruator’s body is incoherent. The ads do not explain precisely how hygiene and good health are being ensured. By masking visual clues to menses externally, nonvirulence of hygiene remains the focal point. This promotes a myopic understanding of menstrual health that limits the importance of hygiene to menstrual containment and concealment,

neglecting the need to address health issues and disorders such as pelvic infections, among others. “The language of appropriation used to sell...pads exemplify one of the hazards of menstrual activism work and serve as a reminder of why menstrual activists must always remain one step ahead of such corporate and media appropriation” (Bobel & Fahs, 2018/2020, p. 1011).

Ad for Stayfree Secure® Nights from 2021 exposes the facade of wetness, cleanliness, and related ideas. The ad shows a girl getting alarmed when told to change the pad she is using by her roommate. The girl begins searching for ‘stains’ in the night. He informs me he has tried everything possible to hide them. It is easily noticeable that the matter of concern is not hygienic protection and leakage prevention; what is hiding ‘stains’, using double bed sheets, dark clothes, and pads. Another ad for Whisper shows a girl sleeping alone and trying about leakage. This is what Wood (2020, p. 326) calls self-objectification, which prevents women from inhabiting their bodies in an emotionally and physically authentic way.

Moreover, in many instances, advertisers are averse of adequately representing the very phenomenon they address, i.e., menstruation which is a material reality. Ironically, they need to distort this reality by using euphemistic and allegorical representation tools like blue liquid. Figurative images, such as blue rather than reddish liquid, have been used euphemistically to promote secrecy (Merskin, 1999, p. 955). “We must pay

attention to our depictions of menstruation...and the knowledge we produce in the pursuit to de-stigmatise menstruation” (Rydström, 2020, p. 945). The situation has improved since 2020. Some TVCs have begun showing reddish liquid to depict menstrual flow. Out of the nine depicture flows, ix6, i.e., more than 60%, show blue liquid. Some of the ads made after the arrival of reddish liquid commercials again show blue liquid. Therefore, it is not yet appropriate to conclude that the trend of blue fluid advertising is nearing its end.

The Crimson Wave, a travelling art exhibition by Boondh, was held in Delhi on World Menstruation Day 2019. One of the paintings was *We Do Not Bleed Blue* by Sangeetha Alwar. “It is a GIF targeted at TV advertisements. This was to acknowledge the shame that the media seems to purport against the blood that is natural” (Alwar, 2019). Lyla Freechild, a Jaipur-based artist who was also a part of the same exhibition, is known for collecting her menstrual flow and creating paintings out of it (Chakrapani, 2018). This illustrates that “the very substance of menstruation can be translated into the symbolic language of artistic representation and performance” (Hasson, 2020, p. 670).

These can also be seen as protests against the fact that instead of properly using the fund of genuine experiences and knowledge menstruators already have, popular culture is still governed by regressive patriarchal ideas that seek to render menstruation invisible. ‘India’s Best Sanitary Napkin Ad’ (Being Indian, 2015) is a video directing witty satire at Indian ads for sanitary pads. It begins with a fictitious

company, Spongy Pads planning its upcoming commercial. The patriarch boss does not give value to a woman’s point of view and also scolds a man who begins talking about introducing new concepts. Another man who had been sleeping all this while shares his idea, including the typical elements found in most ads. The descriptions he gives comprise a significant part significance of the video. It mocks the way blue liquid, absorbency, womanhood, and ideas of confidence and empowerment are shown in the ads. Towards the end of the video, the boss appreciates and approves this man’s proposal and exchanges sexist jokes with him, making fun of menstruation. There is no room for any other voice. The woman finally gets up and leaves the meeting.

False Empowerment

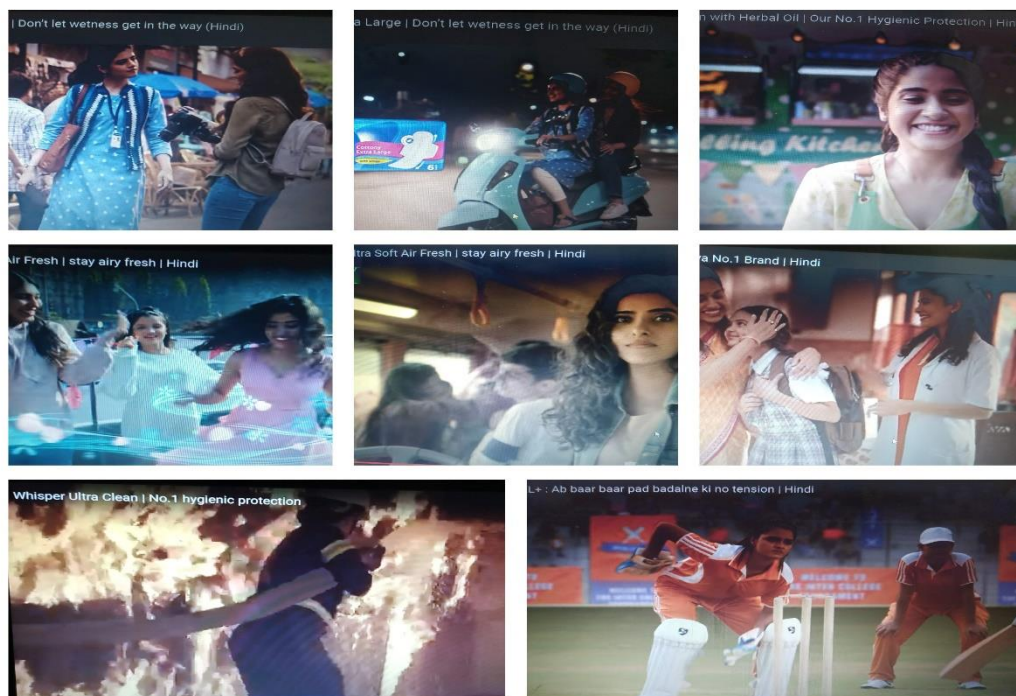
The advertisers seem to have assumed the burden of women’s empowerment on their shoulders. First, they portray menstruation as a hindrance restricting women and then sell women their freedom. Bobel and Fahs argue that corporate and media entities have distorted activists’ efforts to promote women’s empowerment, and particularly menstrual products ads are to be blamed because the “products that purport to empower women often end up merely recreating menstrual shaming and taboo” (Bobel & Fahs, 2018/2020, p. 1011). For example, many of the ads pointed out earlier in this paper for spreading stigma, misconception, and secrecy promise to give women liberty, freshness, and unlimited confidence to do what they “want even during periods” and also to relieve them from the tension of changing pads repeatedly, fear of ‘stain’,

and worry about hygiene. A Whisper ad from 2019 begins with a firefighter girl reporting that she, being a girl, was told by her mother to take up a 9 to 5 job, but she “chose not to limit” herself. “Using neoliberal rhetoric of ‘choice’, the menstrual hygiene industry cleverly posits menstrual concealment as ‘freedom’ and thereby facilitates women’s complicity in their subjugation” (Wood, 2020, p. 320).

Most ads feature either girl students or women from urban areas who work

outside their homes and are often involved in physically demanding jobs, as shown in Figure 3. There is hardly any mention of women from poor and rural backgrounds. Even though less than 20% of menstruating Indian women use sanitary pads and the rest, most of whom are present in rural India, make themselves vulnerable to health issues (Karuna Sharma, 2021, “State of menstrual hygiene in India”), the ads target a selected group of most likely customers.

Figure 3



Collage Showing Women’s Appearance and Works

The women shown are generally well-dressed and presentable, resonating with the idea of rough and tough modern women, as shown in the above figure. This goes in line with the point Grose and Grabe (2014, p. 679) make, namely, that menstruation is antithetical to a sexually desirable, attractive, and ‘feminine’ body, and hence menstruation must be concealed. This objectifies women as monstrous and

menstrual concealment distances them from their bodies. “When framed as an empowering choice, menstrual concealment falsely offers women a sense of control over their out-of-control bodies” (Wood, 2020, p. 327).

In one of the Stayfree ads from 2021, a journalist says, “Periods *ko main sambhal lungi*” (“I will handle periods”), and thus periods become a problem to be

managed. The onus of tackling periods lies with the individual. Being good at it becomes a skill. A powerful message these ads send is that leaks of menstrual blood taint women's femininity because, through the proper choice of products, she should have kept the evidence of her menses out of sight (Raftos et al., 1998, p.179). An example is a repetitive advice, which is less of a friendly suggestion and more of an authoritative command to switch to Stayfree Secure® Nights.

Many ads for Whisper contain, towards the end, the line, "*Meri Life, Mere Rules*" ("My Life My Rules"), implying Whisper lets women live according to their own free will. To draw attention to menstrual taboos, Whisper also runs digital campaigns like 'Touch the Pickel, which "went viral and won the Grand Prix award in Glass Lion category at Cannes in 2015" (Sukumar, 2020, p. 137). However, Sukumar admits it was a carefully curated step that again targeted "urban middle-class women as a marketing strategy". It is not at all true that these digital campaigns are of no use. The objection is against their alienation from TV, which offers wider reach and access to people of different ages and classes. Merely adding a line about living life according to one's own rules to a larger whole which focuses on 'whispering' is tokenistic.

Painful Aspects of Bleeding

Apart from stigma and misconceptions, the TVCs are also filled with characteristic silences. A 2020 TVC for Whisper shows a woman standing inside a crowded bus, struggling with a 'sticky irritation feeling'. The solution suddenly appears— "feel fresh with

Whisper ultra-soft air fresh", which gives "airy freshness" and "leakage protection". Her tight outfit gets magically transformed into a loose one. She begins to dance in an open-top vehicle. This exaggerated sense of positivity and excitement completely overlooks the other realities like Pre-Menstrual Syndrome and cramps. Such "ads tend to push able-bodied fitness as well obligatory positivity onto those who menstruate while preceding questions of menstrual product access and the more painful aspects of bleeding" (Przybylo & Fahs, 2020, p. 376). Fine details associated with false representation of menstruation and menstruators are important because Kissling (as cited in Hasson, 2020) asserts that "within the current logic of late capitalism, a woman's relationship to her menstrual cycle is largely defined through consumer products" (p. 669). The advertisers are aware of this. Whisper released an ad in 2021 featuring actor Bhumi Pednekar suggesting food, exercises, hot water bath, etc., which would be beneficial for period days. However, this ad has not made its presence on TV yet. The Stayfree Secure® Nights ad mentioned earlier indirectly references cramps when a hot water bottle is shown near the menstruating girl, but that is all. Getting to know that she can now conceal menstruation in a better and easier way, the girl is too delighted to make any further complaints.

These ads stand in direct contradiction to what some menstrual activists and researchers have suggested. Przybylo and Fahs talk about 'menstrual justice' that "includes thinking about menstruation, menstrual pain, and access to

menstrual products internationally, and in dialogue with one's position about the power structure. Menstrual justice also includes seeing access to menstrual products, including pain control, as a human right" (2020, p. 376). They also advise a 'cranky approach' to menstruation that mainly requires focus on "the uncomfortable and dissident feelings that are part and parcel of the menstrual experience...that is invested in social justice, demands access to menstrual products for all, and that is alerted to the pain and discomfort involved in bleeding" (Przybylo & Fahs, 2020, pp. 386-387). They also hold that a cranky approach would help go beyond products as the end goal and look into why these products sell their empowerment to menstruators using highly problematic frameworks.

A 2020 TVC for Rio pads (The Rio Pads, 2020) takes a relatively revolutionary stance in showing menstrual reality. The point that these pads are handy for heavy flow is made straight away. A critical vital make is that there is no point in hiding or getting disturbed by the mere depiction of blood and menstrual flow.

Absence of Alternative Products other than Pads

Another grave concern is the absence of alternative menstrual products, like menstrual cups and tampons, from the Indian TVCs. Tampons are relatively costlier than sanitary pads, but that is no reason why tampons should not be advertised on TV. Some consider a menstrual cup better since it "can stay within the body for a relatively long period...and does not require as many changes as tampons and pads" (Rydström,

2020, p. 949). Moreover, menstrual cups are reusable and thus more environmentally friendly than single-use products. No ad for menstrual cups appears on TV. A reason often stated is that menstrual cups are mainly sold to mainly-ups who lack enough funds. However, Multi-National Corporations like Tampax, U by Kotex, and O.B. sell tampons in India, but still, their TVCs are not there. Even if the above causes are true, they are not sufficient. The main reason for this absence of TVCs for tampons and menstrual cups is the distaste likely generated among the audience due to prevalent myths regarding virginity.

"Women's status in a particular society and that society's cultural beliefs about women's bodies shape...attitudes towards and experiences with...menstrual cycles" (Hoerster et al., 2003, p. 78). Also, "beliefs and values influence not only what and how information is communicated but whether it is appropriate to communicate any information about certain topics" (Hoerster et al., 2003, p. 78). Tampons and menstrual cups need to be inserted inside the body by the user. These people fear it would lead to losing their virginity (Roy, 2021). This was validated when India's first commercial for tampons by Sofy (Sofy India, 2017) was released on YouTube. It affirms that using tampons does not affect virginity. In the context of menstrual products' advertisements, Przybylo and Fahs (2020, p. 375) describe vaginas are a source of squalor and filth. It is obvious that due to the absence of ads for all available alternatives, consumers are being denied access to the information, which is crucial for making a well-informed choice.

Gender Inequality

Such stigmatised and patriarchal features that characterise ads lead to gender inequality. Menstrual stigma “is a major contributor to the vast gender inequity between men and women” (Lewis, 2020, p. viii). Menstruation has long served as a central aspect of essentialist, biological understandings of sex difference and thus as a marker of biological sex and a site of the production of gender on the body (Hasson, 2016/2020, p. 766). Wood (as cited in Roberts, 2020) considers menstrual concealment as the most important way of performing gender and that “the menstrual hygiene industry steps in to provide the tools necessary for...self-disciplining body project” (p. 177). This needs to be resisted and stopped. “Just because it is not a shared experience doesn’t mean it needs to be a divisive topic that aids gender inequality” (Lewis, 2020, p. viii).

Athlete Kiran Gandhi ran her first marathon in London in 2015 while bleeding-free (Jung, 2015). This is a solid counter to all the narratives that spread stigma against menstruation and force concealment upon women in the name of choice and empowerment. Poet Rupri Kaur’s Instagram post (Rupri Kaur, 2015) of herself in blood-marked pyjamas is a similar statement. Menstrual concealment cannot be a choice in the absence of alternatives. For it “to be a viable choice, women must be able to choose to claim their menstrual realities just as freely as they opt to conceal menses” (Wood, 2020, p. 330).

In a short and satirical essay, Steinem states that menstruation is treated the way it is treated because it is associated with women. She wittily attacks medical

schools, religion, intellectuals and even feminists, arguing that logic is in the eyes of the logician and if men could menstruate, it would become an enviable, boast-worthy, masculine event, “TV...would treat the subject openly”, and that “sanitary supplies would be federally funded and free” (Steinem, 1978/2020, p. 353). None of the TVCs shows men in a substantial role, as if they require nothing to know or do about menstruation. This contrasts sharply with how both men and women want to listen in, speak, and make others listen and talk about menstruation. Examples include watching and performing stand-up comedies that satirise ads for sanitary pads (Aditi Mittal, 2019) and describe a lot of effort women have to go to hide menstruation (Abish Mathew, 2018), initiating conversation among men and collecting their views about menstruation (Samdishi Bhatia, 2018), and attempting to de-stigmatize periods through a series of photographs like *Sacred Stains* by Niraj Gera. (“Why India must battle the shame of period stain”, 2020). The TVCs are still busy showing periods as a women’s only affair.

Women are not the only humans who menstruate. The ads take no stock of non-binary or genderqueer people who menstruate. No single ad about trans men or intersex menstruators is to be found. As already established, choosing to remain silent on specific menstruation-related topics indirectly perpetuates menstrual stigma (Robledo & Chrisler, 2011, p. 12). Thus, all these ads can be categorised as exclusivist and transphobic. “Refusing to assume who does and does not menstruate is one way of challenging the rigid gender binary that perpetuates privilege and

oppression (Society for Menstrual Cycle Research, 2011, 1)” (Arakistain, 2020, p. 878). “Understanding trans and genderqueer perspectives on menstruation is essential to contribute to a non-pathologizing discourse about trans and genderqueer bodies and experiences” (Frank & Dellaria, 2020/2020, p. 69). Menstruation which is already a stigmatised event can be all the more so for genderqueer people, reminding them of a body, body part, or function with which they do not identify (Rydström, 2018, p. 57-58). The heteronormative stance of advertisers and product manufacturers often serves as constant reminders of the contested self (Frank & Dellaria, 2020/2020, p. 75). “Some menstruators feel invisible when looking for information about menstrual products, just because...companies target girls and women” (Rydström, 2020, p. 953).

Conclusion

Various problematic elements and frameworks are present in the Indian TVCs for menstrual products. The depictions of menstruation, menstruators and menstrual products that carry a stigma, euphemisms, misconceptions, and gaps contribute immensely to building the popular narrative, which affects all the viewers. Regressive patriarchal ideas and corporate and media appropriations distort and corrupt the realities of menstruation. The situation is such that menstrual flow, which is a very much existent physical matter, needs to be made to matter. People are hungry for an authentic dialogue on menstruation. The very first step in the direction of improvement is to highlight the problem areas and bring this critical and

relevant topic into the arena of critical enquiry and to the forefront of discussion. This is precisely what this paper seeks to do. This research attempts to understand and present the troublesome condition of the popular menstrual discourse. It may serve as instrumental in generating, among the readers, a better informed and media literate awareness and an interest to carry the enquiry forward. This research also constitutes a unit in the more significant movement towards criticism and reformation of the TV ads for menstrual products and the status menstruation occupies in popular culture and people’s attitudes.

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