

Menstrual Taboos of Religion Narratives of Women with Special Reference to Sabarimala Temple Entry 2019

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Abstract:

Within the existing body of literature on Menstrual Taboos of Religion, more pieces of literature indicate the various perceptions of religion about menstrual taboos, how they restrict women from their religious practices, how various religions treat women when they are in their menstrual periods in the historical and theological descriptions. Some studies critically evaluate the ideological differences of different religions on menstruation as a taboo. Addressing the literature gap, this study collects the narratives of three women who have directly participated in the movements of Sabarimala Women Entry 2019 and explores their experiences and perceptions of the menstrual taboos of religion. Working within a narrative methodology, data was gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analyzed the contents manually. In India, the two practices of menstrual taboo and gender-specific access to places of worship come together, as women are prohibited from accessing certain shrines under the menstruating nature of their bodies. This prohibition eventually became a practice and the ritual of the temple. Recently the Supreme Court of India declared the verdict, lifting a legal ban, that prevented women of menstruating age from entering in to a famous Hindu temple in Kerala called Sabarimala Temple located in Pathanamthitta District. The verdict sparked conflict and controversy among people, and some feminist activists claim that the ban is discriminatory against women with active menstrual cycles, the denial of the fundamental right and anti-women in nature. On the other hand, religious and political institutions and the devotees (including a large number of women) argue that the ban is a religious custom, tradition, and the unique aspect of a particular deity for worship. The verdict divided the public opinion and fuelled the protests. The issue demanded to frame the viewpoint of people and many of them have expressed their opinions about the menstrual taboo and the temple entry.

Entry Restrictions of Women in the Sabarimala Temple.

Sabarimala Temple is located in the Periyar Tiger Reserve forest in Pathanamthitta, district of Kerala. In the year 1990 S. Mahendran filed a plea in the Kerala High Court seeking a ban on women's entry to the Sabarimala Temple. On April 5, 1991, the Kerala High Court upheld the age-old restriction on women of a certain age group entering the temple. The Young Lawyer's Association filed a petition in the year 2006 challenging the ban on the entry of women. On November 13, 2007, the LDF (Left Democratic Front) The government filed an affidavit supporting the Public Interest Litigation questioning the ban on women's entry into the temple. On 11th January 2016, the two judges, bench of the Supreme Court questioned the practice of banning the entry of women in the temple. The UDF Government told the Supreme Court that it is duty-bound to protect the right to practice the religion of these devotees. On 7th

November 2016, the LDF government tells the Supreme Court that its Favor's the entry of women of all ages. On October 13, 2017, the case was referred to the constitution bench at the Supreme Court. Since then, the temple authorities have made it compulsory for female devotees to furnish their age proof by showing their identity proof while visiting the temple at the entrance. A number of women from the banned age groups were detained. In July 2017, the Pandalam Royal family challenged the petition seeking entry of women into the temple. They said that it was "mischievous" on grounds of being against practices of the Hindu faith. The reason given for the detainment of the women is that the deity lord Ayyappa is an eternal celibate and therefore women of menstruating ages should not be allowed in the premises. Finally, on September 28, 2018, the Honourable Supreme Court allowed, by a 4:1 majority, women of all age groups to enter the temple. After, the Supreme Court verdict, which lifted the age-old tradition of barring women from entering the temple, it was tried by the protesters to stop two women of 40 years from entering the temple. Unethical ways like pelting stones and hitting with bamboo sticks have been taken up by the protesters to bar the women from entering the temple. The Supreme Court's judgment allowing women to enter the Sabarimala temple has become an ongoing controversy in the last year.

(https://www.academia.edu/38538739/RELIGION_AND_LAW_THE_SABARIMALA_DEBATE)

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this paper, it is mainly studying the key variables of menstruation, taboos, religion, Sabarimala temple entry, gender, power.

Taboo:

A taboo is a strong social prohibition or ban relating to any area of human activity or social custom that is sacred and forbidden, based on moral judgment and sometimes even religious beliefs. A menstrual taboo is any social taboo concerned with menstruation. In some societies it involves menstruation being perceived as unclean or embarrassing, inhibiting even the mention of menstruation whether in public (in the media and advertising) or in private (among friends, in the household, or with men)

Menstrual taboos of religion

There are many religions, which hold primitive ideas and beliefs regarding this common phenomenon. Hinduism views the menstruating woman as impure or polluted and is referred to in some places as having a curse. The impurity lasts only during the menses and ends immediately thereafter. Formerly during menstruation, women used to leave the main house and live in a small hut outside the village. They were not allowed to comb their hair or bathe. (Chawla. J, 1992)

In other words, menstruating women did not have access to water when they needed it for personal hygiene, and they were even prohibited from cooking food. Entry to the prayer room within the home and the temple is strictly forbidden. A woman experiencing her period cannot be part of religious ceremonies for the first 4 days of the cycle. In particular, menstruation has to be a private event. There is a strong taboo against menstruation being made known in the public sphere. (Ferro- Luzzi, 1980)

Jewish law prohibits any physical contact between male and female during the days of menstruation and for a week thereafter. In early Western cultures, the menstruating woman was believed to be dangerous, and social restrictions were placed upon her (Keshet-Orr J, 2003).

The history of the menstrual taboo has been a major reason for the decision to keep women away from positions of authority in Christianity. Some Christian denominations including many authorities of the Eastern Orthodox Church, advise women not to receive communion, and perform prayers and fasting during their menstrual period. (Ruether R.R, 1990)

Muslim culture advocates that menstruating women should be avoided by men. There are two main prohibitions placed upon the menstruating woman. First, she may not enter any shrine or mosque. She may not pray or fast during Ramadan while she is menstruating. She may not touch The Quran or even recite its contents. Secondly, she is not allowed to have sexual intercourse for seven days (beginning when the bleeding starts). She is exempted from rituals such as daily prayers and fasting, although she is not given the option of performing these rituals. (Morrow P.A, 2002)

In Buddhism, menstruation is generally viewed as a natural physical excretion that women have to go through every month, nothing more or less. There is also a Buddhist belief that ghosts eat blood and a menstruating woman is thought to attract ghosts and is therefore a threat to everyone around.

In Sikhism, a woman is given equal status to a man and is regarded as pure as a man. The difference between the major religions lies in the level of severity of the menstrual taboos. Buddhism and Christianity offer a lenient view of the menstruating woman, while Judaism has the strictest view and Sikhism is the most liberal. (Stephens W.N, 1961)

LITERATURE GAP

From the literature reviews, the studies are conducted with more focus on theological feminism. The various perceptions of religion about menstrual taboos, how it restricts women from their religious practices, also how various religions treat women when they are in their menstrual periods in the historical and theological descriptions. Also, some studies critically evaluate the ideological differences of religions on menstruation as a taboo.

However this study focuses and collecting the narratives of women who directly participated in the movements of Sabarimala Women Entry 2019 and narratives of their experiences and perceptions of the menstrual taboos. Also collecting the socio-political ideologies that are manifested in those events from their own experiences.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In India, the two practices of menstrual taboo and gender-specific access to places of worship come together, as women are prohibited from accessing certain shrines by the menstruating nature of their bodies. Recently the Supreme Court of India declared the verdict, lifting a legal ban, that prevented women of menstruating age from entering into a famous Hindu temple in Kerala called Sabarimala Temple located in Pathanamthitta District. This verdict divided the public opinion and fuelled the protests. Many people, including women, came out in favor of and against the verdict. The people who are supporting the verdict claim that the ban is discriminatory against women and anti-women in nature. And the people who oppose the verdict, argue that the ban is from religious custom and tradition.

The study focuses on the various narratives of women about the menstrual taboos of religion with special reference to Sabarimala Temple Entry 2018. This qualitative study will explore the experiences of women who directly or indirectly participated in these events and the facts that are manifested in these events.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

During and after the Temple Entry Movements, most of the articles, news reports, and journals interpreted the scene only from a common patriarchal perspective and excluded the women's perspective on these issues. So, the study is mainly focused on the narratives of women who directly participated in the movements and their experiences. Through this study, collecting and interpreting the women's narratives

on menstrual taboos of religion and identifying the things that are manifested in the Sabarimala Temple controversy about menstruation as a taboo.

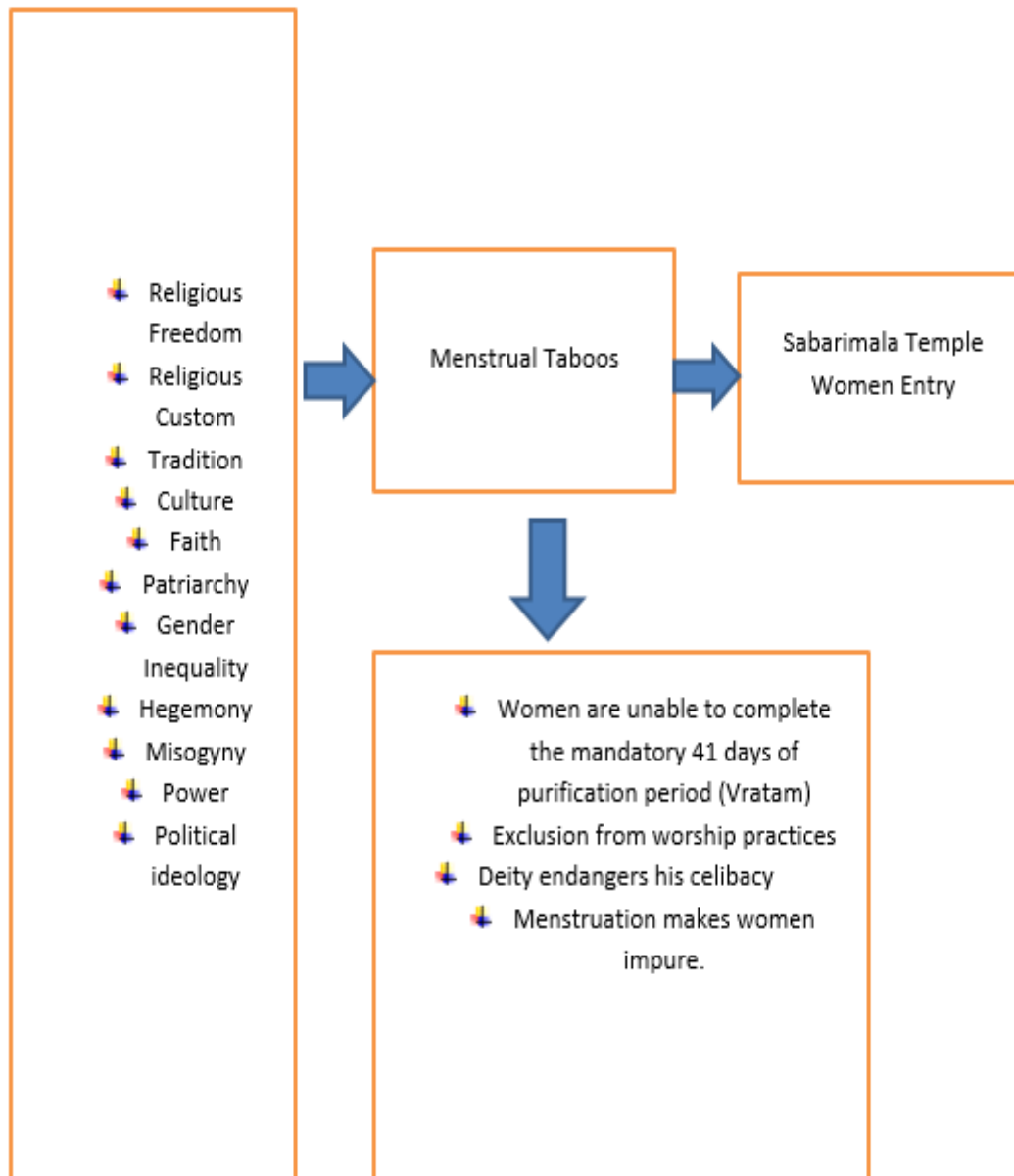
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- **Radical feminist Theory, 1969**

Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts.

In this study, portrayed the impact of all kinds of followed supremacies and the other dominating factors that contributed to the Sabarimala Temple Entry. Studied it by collecting the viewpoints of Women who directly participated in the movements and their part of the description on how they expected changes on society by the influence of these movements. Also, how it calls for a radical reordering in all spheres of societal social contexts.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



THEORETICAL DEFINITION

Menstruation:

Menstruation is the regular discharge of blood and mucosal tissue from the inner lining of the uterus through the vagina.

- WHO-

Taboos:

A taboo is a strong social prohibition or ban relating to any area of human activity or social custom that is sacred and forbidden, based on moral judgment and sometimes even religious beliefs

- Jared Dimond-

Religion:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things apart and forbidden.

-Durkheim-

Menstrual Taboos:

A menstrual taboo is any social taboo concerned with menstruation. In some societies it involves menstruation being perceived as unclean or embarrassing, inhibiting even the mention of menstruation whether in public (in the media and advertising) or in private (among friends, in the household, or with men).

Sabarimala Women Entry:

Sabarimala temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to Ayyappan situated in Pathanamthitta district. In the past women devotees of menstruating age were not permitted to worship here, this ban being said to be out of respect to the celibate nature of the deity in this temple.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What are the experiences of women about the menstrual taboos of religion?
- What are the experiences of women about the Sabarimala temple entry?
- What are the perceptions of women about the menstrual taboos of religion?
- How these experiences are influencing their beliefs?
- What changes they are expecting from society to address women issues?

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

- To study the menstrual taboos of religion and the experience of women with special reference to Sabarimala Temple Entry 2018.

Specific Objective:

- To study the experiences of women about the Menstrual Taboos of Religion.
- To Study the experience of women about the Sabarimala temple entry.
- To understand the perceptions of women about the Menstrual Taboos of religion.
- To acquire knowledge about the things that are influencing their belief
- To find out the changes they are expecting from society to address women's issues.

METHOD:

The study is Qualitative in nature, and by using intensity sampling collected the narratives of women who directly participated in the movements of Sabarimala Temple entry 2019. The study is expected to give an

overview of the women's narratives about menstrual taboos of religion by taking Sabarimala Temple entry as a special case.

Scope:

In this study, the researcher tried to study the narratives of women who directly participated in the movements about the menstrual taboos of religion by taking Sabarimala temple entry as a special case. The study will explore the things that are manifested in the events of the Sabarimala controversy.

Universe:

All the women in Kerala, who directly participated in the pro-women movements of Sabarimala Temple entry 2019.

Unit of Study:

Person who directly participated in the pro-women movements of Sabarimala Temple Entry 2019.

Sampling:

The study is conducted in a qualitative method. The type of sampling is intensity sampling and the tool for the data collection is Narratives.

Intensity Sampling can allow the researcher to select a small number of rich cases that provide in-depth information and knowledge of a phenomenon of interest.

RESULTS**Through the words of Respondent A,**

I have continued to argue that the joys, celebrations, opportunities, and circumstances that a human life has to offer are all indirectly related to our social system, which is denied only by being born as a woman. From the onset of my menstrual cycle, the subjections, and limitations that were imposed upon me made me transition into a state of direct reactions. I found the '*Sabarimala yuvathi praveshanam*' such a situation that demanded my conscious reaction. I am a woman who had to face many forms of menstrual taboo in various stages of my menstrual cycle. During menses, I was forced to live in a particular room outside my house. I was not allowed to touch anything in my household and was not allowed inside the kitchen. Let alone food and water, I was not even allowed to go near a well. I was not supposed to take water for myself to drink.

I was driven to a state where I had to depend on someone else when they were convenient enough to get me a glass of water to drink and that was my only option. I was not allowed to go to gatherings, neither was I allowed to speak to people nor was I supposed to tell anyone, my needs. I, along with all the girls of my age and time, was restrained from everything during our period. A life that was cut during menstruation, refrained from contact with the outside world. All of these prohibitions persist in my ancestral home. It is also true that people, including my mother, are following them. All religions have distinct rates of menstrual taboos, and they continue to this day. What I know more is about the practices of Hinduism, a religion that my family members have taught me since my childhood. In it, the rules and regulations that were to be followed during menstruation were very intolerable and cruel. The four-day solitary life during menses inside a particular room was scary. I had to wait for others' convenience to get food, water, and clothes for myself.

I neither had the freedom to enter other rooms in my own home nor was I allowed to pick up my favorite things. I was not allowed to go to the place where men used to sit, not allowed to sit on the threshold, was not even allowed to walk that way, and was restrained from entering the kitchen. I had to sit in solitude without the right to do anything in my own home. I have heard that these norms exist not only in my

religion but in other religions too. I tried to react to all of these rules, but back then, I had no choice but to obey because I was born and brought up in a conventionally religious family that gives way too much importance to these rituals and it continues to this day. Everyone was so careful not to touch anything that was considered sacred within the home.

These were also echoed in the post-marriage situation. From my childhood, I was taught not to lie down beside my husband during menstruation. The statement that the elders provided as a reason was; that lying with your husband during menstruation will shorten the lifespan of your husband. Because of that, neither was I not allowed to lie down beside my husband nor was my husband ready to lie down with me during menstruation. But some people don't believe in this and there are no problems in their lives. These norms continue to be a part of faith in itself. Elders support these norms and instruct them to strictly adhere to them to the younger generation.

Since I was little, many such experiences in my life raised so many questions regarding the freedom of women often obstructed in the name of religion. These questions started disturbing my mind and that is when the '*Sabarimala yuvathi praveshanam*' verdict was announced and blew up into massive discussions. I kept my decision to visit Sabarimala from being public because I was assured from the public response that I would not receive a that if I announced it to the public then I may not be able to successfully reach my aim. If my family got to know about my decision, they wouldn't let me because I was born and brought up in a conventional religious family. My family would not let me go if I told them that I was joining the women who were constantly struggling for a month or two. I did not tell anyone about it, not my family, colleagues, and not even my friends.

On September 28th the verdict for *Sabarimala Yuvathi Praveshanam* was announced. Several women came forward with struggles and protests. They tried to climb the 'Sabarimala'. But, all of them were driven away by a group of people with brutal and outrageous behavior. The women had to return without fulfillment. When such a situation came up, I felt the urge to give it a try. I also felt the need to demolish the political agendas of the BJP. I introspected, "Will I be able to make a difference?" and with that thought in my mind, I was on my way. Part of it was the embarrassment, humiliation, ridicule, and abuse. I had to go through days of fear and terror. It was with all these sufferings that I was able to visit Sabarimala, attain the '*darshan*' of the deity, and return with fulfillment.

What led me and helped me to climb Sabarimala as a part of '*Sabarimala Yuvathi Praveshanam*' were the experiences that I had come across in different stages of life. It was the determination of my self that motivated me. In a progressive thinking society, there are a lot of people in Kerala who support blind faith, including younger women; I am also from that society. It was this particular thought that gave impetus to my mind to climb Sabarimala when there were women who tried to climb and were forced back and also in a time where who were capable had an opportunity to climb but did not bother to. If another woman climbed the holy hill or if she had not been stopped by the forces of Sangh Parivar, then I wouldn't have climbed Sabarimala. What took place in the surroundings of the holy river Pamba that day was not just blocking women from visiting a temple but it was rather a struggle to prove the superiority of men against women. I was able to understand the political intrigues and power behind it. My struggle was against such anti-women actions.

Change is inevitable everywhere. We need to make changes depending on the age and the circumstances that we live in. But the relevant question today is who needs to make these changes. But, the worst bane of our society is that the people who are in the power and position to bring these changes do not advance

at all. People who are conscious of the inevitability of change, who have acknowledged that there are women's problems, what those problems are, and what they need to do to bring about a change must come forward. This is a situation where the younger generation should come forward and initiate these changes rather than getting afraid of the situations and circumstances. But some angles to these situations brought progress. It is also a fact that many of the menstrual barriers that were practiced in the old households have disappeared in many homes today and the impact of nuclear families in this matter is huge. In such nuclear households, customs began to change when the wife had to be separated during menstruation, leaving her unable to do the household chores, which would have a devastating effect on the family. But there are still issues which are unidentified that need to be changed."

Through the words of Respondent B,

In all religions, menstruation is considered as a taboo. Especially in the Hindu religion. During menstruation, young women are banned from many things. Women cannot go to temples during the time of menstruation. Thus, they are excluded from many rituals related to Hinduism. It is considered as a restriction in a very few countries like India. Revolutionary changes have taken place in many countries. In today's time when the branches of research have grown greatly, there is a growing trend in many countries to collect menstrual blood for medicinal purposes. The claim that menstruation is impure is being repeated in India when such several epic changes and discoveries are taking place around the world. This makes India an insult in front of the world.

A feudal system exists in our society. In that case, women get rest during the time of delivery or menstruation. It was certainly useful in that situation. Because it was accepted by women who were engaged in any kind of labor throughout the day. They may have recognized it as their right. The discrimination of women in certain temples was much discussed later. The rights struggle then begins when the temple entry proclamation is discussed.

The exclusion of women in the special situation of India is a very sad and pathetic situation. The conditions and problems of male supremacy can be seen not only in India but in all other countries. However, the problems of male supremacy from the feudal system in India are creating the conditions for women to fall behind, which creates the causes of women's backwardness.

Because of the existence of male supremacy, women do not recognize their rights and remain in the darkness of ignorance. The history of India's social Environment can be traced back to the fact that it was women who took the initiative to follow customs including 'Sati' and the Upper cloth movement (Channar revolt).

Though *sati* is a cruel custom, thousands of women have come out in support of it. Women were the force in the upper cloth movement. It is only through the use of women that people who are interested in such things come up against women. It was the same way before and it remains the same today. It was those who opposed the struggle for the rights that later enjoyed the benefits from it. Likewise, women cut their development as part of today's social situation. They practice it as part of their faith and their influence on the social system in which the way they live.

The people, who oppose these struggles today, will certainly conclude and support them. Because they realize that, these struggles are meant to bring about changes in the social system that is practiced today. Under pressure from some politically motivated people, most of the people turn away from the rights struggle. I believe that time will change it, or it will be an insult to the world.

The first factor that makes the women's entry in Sabarimala a controversial subject is surely the discrimination based on menstruation. There are many things to be evaluated. All over the world, changes

are happening. The *Shani* temple in India has undergone many changes. Even though there are changes in temples where women are not allowed to enter, it is not just about menstruation that women should not enter on Sabarimala. Behind that, the role of people with political interests is huge. People who are politically motivated have used people who claim to be believers. There is a political game where women use themselves against women.

India is a rule-of-law country. Here law and order are supreme. Beliefs, customs, and religion are under the rule of law. The leaders of the political parties have known this. Equality is a constitutional right in such a country. The Supreme Court has ruled that women should enter Sabrimala in connection with gender justice. In such a case, tens thousands of people are saying that we will not abide by it, and is completely a failure of the governing body. The central and state governments are equally responsible for that.

I have been to Sabarimala in connection with gender justice. Therefore, I find all the obstacles to be negligible. At no point, do we turn away from the goal. Many people threatened us, threw stones, and faced psychological problems. However, there I was being brave. All religions discriminate against women because of the menstruating nature of their bodies. Although there are nuns in Christianity, priests are the most involved in the ministry. There was a situation in which nuns could be given the last sacraments. The clergy or the priests prepared a new prayer to stop the nuns and gave the clergy a central place. Women are not allowed to enter the mosque in the Muslim religion. In Hinduism, however, there are only a few places where one can become a priest in the temple. Self-respecting women cannot admit this.

I want this to be a big movement. Most people think of it as an act of in Hindu religion. But I consider it as a problem against women. There must be revolutionary changes happening. A group of people are moving to the streets in the name of 'namajapam' and continuously challenging the constitution. I feel that, the same feeling as any Indian citizen.

Those who make changes in every religion of society do not necessarily have to be people who believe in those religions. The thoughts of minority people who brought about the changes have now become the voices of the minorities.

The majority of the people who favor or oppose verdicts are from any political party. The ideologies of those political parties are influencing their thoughts. The RSS and BJP organizations have welcomed it in the initial stage. Then they changed their stance on maintaining their vote bank. This is similar to all other religions. Therefore, there is no importance of Individual stance. History has shown that this system will change shortly. That is what I believe and hope.

Through the words of Respondent C,

It is customary in all religion to establish that women are below and behind the shadow of men. Men who are ignorant of women's sexuality and fertility get knowledge from religion. Religion gives the knowledge that, women must be slaves and should be under the shadow of men. The persistence of such practices in the 21st century is proof of the lack of scientific knowledge in man. Women were excluded from the rituals of religions during menstruation. Religion only granted the second degree of citizenship to women.

All menstrual taboos are from upper-caste supremacy. There were no menstrual restrictions in lower-caste families. Their living conditions were such. However, in the upper caste families, women were excluded and out of the rituals. As time went on, those upper caste rituals became the customs of a whole people. Religions also took over it. When the government is responsible for overcoming the ignorance of scientific knowledge, and lack of rational acts in the political interests, society is on the verge of collapse again.

I am not a person who was born and raised in a Hindu religion. I was a member of Latin Catholics. Therefore, I did not get an experience of menstrual taboos from my home or the natural surroundings. However, the children of nowadays, shared their experience with me that, during the menstrual period, they will not read a single line of what written in the bible, and will not go to church. All of these are the result of an influence from the community. Many taboos that have never existed in Christianity have been made.

Here I am commenting on the spread of these taboos and rituals after so many changes happened in the educational and science field. I do not have any experience with menstrual taboos, but I have learned directly from the experience of many other people. Christianity trying to imitate other religions in many ways, including rituals, and also trying to bring menstrual impurities with them.

First of all, this is politically motivated, when you look at the circumstances that have led to the Sabarimala issue becoming a controversial issue. We think of it as a *Shudra* Rebellion. There the riot happened when the RSS- NSS group of upper came together.

When the verdict came, many political parties welcomed the verdict and later used it I the name of political interests. There is patriarchy and male dominancy along with political interest and power.

I was ready to go to Sabarimala as a part of my Feminist Politics. Since I made my stand clear on social media, there have been many scandals on me. They are all politically motivated. All women's associations except Mahila Morcha welcomed the verdict. When a Friend of mine wanted to go to Sabarimala, I approached almost all the women's groups for help. However, there the political parties threatened them and they withdrew. That is when I decided to go for a hike. But, when that person finally changed, I decided, I would go alone.

After the protesters were blocked, police took me to Chembazhanthi. Even though it was a religious institution, the people there recognized me and helped me. A group of fundamentalists within the religion unleashes controversies and uprisings.

Women will not get equality in religion. If women have to live without discrimination, they have to get out of religion. Religion collapses when women become independent. The basic principle of religion is that women are slaves. They will do anything for it. Discrimination can be reduced through legislation, and through the abolition of superstition.

The people who are ready to go to Sabarimala are not all atheists. The believers were into it too. Then they are not against faith. The people of Kerala's progressive movements all agree with the verdict.

After two persons entered Sabarimala, many believers came to us with the desire to enter Sabarimala. Because, for a long time they were slaves of men. The same thing is shadowed in this issue. I believe that there will be major changes in the system in the future. Many revolutionary changes on the part of the government, including the women's wall are highly anticipated.

The contents which distinguished as:

1. Taboo:

- **Subjections**
- **Limitations**

“From the onset of my menstrual cycle, the subjections and limitations that were imposed upon myself made my transition into a state of direct reactions”

- **Exclusion from Rituals (RS B)**

“Women excluded from the rituals of religions during menstruation. Religion only granted the second degree of citizenship to women.” (RS C)

- **Women couldn't recognize their rights (RS B)**

“However, the problems of male supremacy from the feudal system in India are creating the conditions for women to fall behind, which creates the causes of women's backwardness. Because of the existence of male supremacy, women do not recognize their rights and remain in the darkness of ignorance”

- **Loneliness (common)**

“I was forced to live in a particular room outside my house. I was not allowed to touch anything in my household and was not allowed inside the kitchen. Let alone food and water, I was not even allowed to go near a well. I was not supposed to take water for myself to drink.”

- **Denial of joys, celebrations, opportunities (common)**

“I have continued to argue that the joys, celebrations, opportunities, and circumstances that a human life has to offer are all indirectly related to our social system, which is denied only by being born as a woman”

- **Dependency Creation (RS A)**

“I was driven to a state where I had to depend on someone else when they were convenient enough to get me a glass of water to drink and that was my only option.”

- **Restricted socialization opportunities (RS A)**

“I was not allowed to go to gatherings, neither was I allowed to speak to people or nor was I supposed to tell anyone, my needs. I, along with all the girls of my age and time, were restrained from everything during our period.”

“I was not allowed to go to the place where men used to sit, not allowed to sit on the threshold, was not even allowed to walk that way, and was restrained from entering the kitchen. I had to sit in solitude without the right to do anything in my own home.”

Refrained from contacts (RS A)

“A life that was cut during menstruation, refrained from contact with the outside world”

- **Being forced to live in a particle room outside the house. (RS A)**

“During menses, I was forced to live in a particular room outside my house. I was not allowed to touch anything in my household and was not allowed inside the kitchen. Let alone food and water, I was not even allowed to go near a well. I was not supposed to take water for myself to drink.”

- **Post-marriage situation (RS A)**

“These were also echoed in the post-marriage situation. From my childhood, I was taught not to lie down beside my husband during menstruation. The statement that the elders provided as a reason was; that lying with your husband during menstruation will shorten the lifespan of your husband. Because of that, neither was I not allowed to lie down beside my husband nor was my husband ready to lie down with me during menstruation.”

- **Women taking the initiative to follow the rituals rather than men (RS B)**

“The history of India's social Environment can be traced back to the fact that it was women who took the initiative to follow customs including ‘Sati’ and Upper cloth movement (Channar revolt).”

- **Faith Matters (RS B)**

“Women cut their development as part of today's social situation. They practice it as part of their faith and their influence of the social system in which the way they live.”

- **Using women as a tool against women (RS B)**

“Though *sati* is a cruel custom, thousands of women have come out in support of it. Women were the force in the upper cloth movement. It is only through the use of women that people who are interested in such things come up against women. It was the same way before and it remains the same today”

- **Religion considering women as the slave of men (RS C)**

“It is customary in all religions to establish that women are below and behind the shadow of men. Men who are ignorant of women’s sexuality and fertility get knowledge from religion. Religion gives the knowledge that, women must be a slave and should be under the shadow of men”

- **Lack of Scientific Knowledge in man (RS C)**
- **Policymaking by government to overcome Ignorance of scientific knowledge (RS C)**
- **Family Perspectives.**
- **Upper caste supremacy (RS B, RS C)**

“All menstrual taboos are from upper caste supremacy. There were no menstrual restrictions in lower-caste families. Their living conditions were such. However, in the upper caste families, women were excluded and out of the rituals. As time went on, those upper caste rituals became the customs of a whole people.”

- **Lack of rational acts in the political interest (RS C)**
- **Copying tendency of religion**

“Many taboos that have never existed in Christianity have been made. Here I am commenting on the spread of these taboos and rituals after so many changes happened in the educational and science field. I do not have any experience with menstrual taboos, but I have learned directly from the experience of many other people. Christianity trying to imitate other religions in many ways, including rituals, also trying to bring menstrual impurities with them.”

2. Sabarimala Experiences

- **Family’s disapproval (RS A)**

“If my family got to know about my decision, they wouldn’t let me because I was born and brought up in a conventional religious family. My family will not let me go if I tell them that I was joining the women who were constantly struggling for a month or two.”

- **Mob attack (Common)**

“Several women came forward with struggles and protests. They tried to climb the ‘Sabarimala’. But, all of them were driven away by a group of people with brutal and outrageous behavior. The women had to return without fulfillment.”

- **Political Agenda (Common)**

“When such a situation came up, I felt the urge to give it a try. I also felt the need to demolish the political agendas of BJP” (RS A)

“First of all, this is politically motivated, when you look at the circumstances that have led to the Sabarimala issue becoming a controversial issue. We think of it as a *Shudra* Rebellion. There the riot happened when the RSS- NSS group of upper came together. (RS C)”

“When the verdict came, many political parties welcomed the verdict and later used it in the name of political interests. There have patriarchy and male dominancy along with political interest and power.”

- **Embarrassment (Common)**
- **Humiliation (Common)**
- **Abuse (Common)**
- **Power disparity (Common)**
- **Role Domination (Common)**
- **Patriarchal viewpoint (Common)**

- **Political Intrigues (Common)**
- **Superiority of men (Common)**
- **Anti-Women Actions (RS A)**
- **Harassment by using social media (Common)**
- 3. **Changes Expecting from Society**
- Expecting changes
- **Impact of Nuclear family (RS A)**
- **Changes through Younger Generations (RS A)**
- **Undefined Issues (RS A)**
- **Changing Customs (RS A)**
- **Feminist Politics (RS A, RS C)**

“I was ready to go to Sabarimala as a part of my Feminist Politics”

- **Women have to get out of religion (RS C)**

“Women will not get equality in religion. If women have to live without discrimination, they have to get out of religion.”

- **Impact of legislation**

“Religion collapses when women become independent. The basic principle of religion is that women are slaves. They will do anything for it. Discrimination can be reduced through legislation, through the abolition of superstition”

DISCUSSION

In this closing chapter, I drew together existing literature and the central findings of this study and demonstrated how this study fits into the previous research studies and how it helps to future references on the menstrual taboos of religion with special reference to Sabarimala Temple Entry. Formulating the findings used a narrative approach and manual thematic analysis.

Overview of the Study

This study has taken a narrative approach to analyzing the menstrual taboo experiences of three women who directly participated in the movements of Sabarimala Temple Entry. In addition, it has also explored the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of women about the menstrual taboos of religion?
- What are the experiences of women about the Sabarimala temple entry?
- What are the perceptions of women about the menstrual taboos of religion?
- How these experiences are influencing their beliefs?
- What changes they are expecting from society to address women's issues?

I took a qualitative, narrative approach to this research, as the experiences of women who directly participated in the movements of Sabarimala Temple entry and the first women who entered into Sabarimala Temple. Further, the majority of existing research has been conducted with more focus on theological feminism. The various perceptions of religion about menstrual taboos, how they restrict women from their religious practices, also how various religions treat women when they are in their menstrual periods in the historical and theological descriptions. Also, there are studies that critically evaluating the ideological differences of religions on menstruation as a taboo.

Summary of major findings

1. Impact of Taboo:

The first theme of this research draws a relation to the topic. The various literatures reviews show that every religion possesses certain taboos concerning menstruation. But it doesn't show how it affects a member, especially a woman in those particular religions. So, by analysing the first theme of the study, broaden the knowledge in the area; the impact of taboos on the members. However, the stories shared by the participants in this study portrayed more complex and dynamic perspectives on the impact of taboos than in much of the existing literature.

Participants shared how they often struggled with the imposition of taboos on their family and society. From the experience of RS A; in her childhood days she faced isolation and limitations. In all life experiences these limitations imposed upon them made a transition into direct reactions. By analyzing the varied participant perspectives, it is commonly shared that, women face direct and indirect exclusion from all ritual practices during the time of menstruation.

According to the onset viewpoint of RS B; the problems of male supremacy from the feudal system in India are creating the conditions for women to fall behind, and which creates the causes of women backwardness. Because of the existence of male supremacy, women do not recognize their rights and remain in the darkness of ignorance. On their experiences, they were forced to live in a particular room outside their own houses, and not let them touch anything in their household.

Participants often talk about how they even came out with a movement by struggling with their experiences. In the three participants, RS A came into the field of movement through the influence of their childhood and post-marriage experiences. In the words of RS B, she even fought with the situation of men dominating women, and the religion always supported this and considered women as a slave. So, she came to this movement to help women understand that women are the main indirect force holding back their freedom of.

According to the statements of RS C, she is not a member of the Hindu religion and didn't have any experience of menstrual taboos from her religion or that religious society. But she came to know about the situations of her friends and other women talking about the taboos of her religion which did not exist but currently existed, and which drove her into the face of freedom movements. In her words, all menstrual taboos are from upper-caste supremacy.

There were no menstrual restrictions in lower-caste families. Their living conditions were such. However, in the upper caste families, women were excluded and out of the rituals. As time went on, those upper caste rituals became the customs of a whole people. Also, she is talking about the lack of scientific knowledge in men and the influence and importance of government in the current scenario. From the overview of the above-mentioned studies, every religion at some point exerts some or another kind of taboo on women.

In Hinduism, menstrual impurity starts on the first day of menstruation and ends on the fourth day. But from the onset of the given narratives, it is clear that it is not just a four-day restriction but also affecting the overall mental and physical stability of a girl from her childhood days. They even can't go or touch anything in the household and attend any kind of family functions or other programs and used to sit in a room where there no one from outside can't interacted.

Participants also described the impact of menstrual taboos creating, girl's dependence over others and these dependency tendencies will follow their teenage, youth, post-marriage, and motherhood. These restricted their socialization opportunities. Also, they commented, on the copying tendency of various

religion; by saying that most of the rituals, and taboos never existed have been made, and trying to bring them to other religions also.

2. Sabarimala Temple Entry Experiences

Participants in the study also spoke about how they struggled during the controversial period. After they decided to participate in the movements of Sabarimala Temple Entry, they had to face so many problems from the society and family also. They opened up about their experiences. From the participant's statements, all their family members were diametric opposite to their decision and they had to know that their family would not support them; so, they didn't even utter a single word about their plans to go to Sabarimala.

Coming to speak about the mob attack they had to face, there were women who also tried to attack them. All three participants spoke about the political agendas, and flipped in the controversy. They said that all the activities from various parties are politically motivated. The circumstances are created for political benefits. One of the participants commented that they considering this as a *Shudra rebellion*. Another participant spoke that; When the verdict came, many political parties welcomed the verdict and later used it in the name of political interests. There is patriarchy and male dominance along with political interest and power.

In their words, they had to face a lot of embarrassment and humiliation from the people who were claiming believers and fundamentalists. The words of one of the respondents "Several women came forward with struggles and protests. They tried to climb the 'Sabarimala'. But, all of them were driven away by a group of people with brutal and outrageous behaviour.

The women had to return without fulfillment" is pointing towards the mob attack they had faced during the time controversy. They have also shared all their pre and post-entry experiences with very diplomatic statements. They commonly commented on the influence of power disparity, role domination, patriarchal viewpoint, and the political intrigues in the movements. Also, they spoke about harassment using social media.

3. Changes expected from society.

Changes are very essential in every aspect even if the system is not interested. In addition to the two major themes, participants shared the changes they are expecting from society. One of the participants spoke about the impact of the nuclear family; because in the current scenario, more nuclear families are emerging rather than joint families. In these nuclear families women do not get affected by the taboos, because it will affect the entire family when women are forced to live in a particular room, and it will distract the family functioning also. The majority of the participants are expecting and hoping for changes through younger generations.

Also, they are keeping their hope on feminist politics and encouraging the various activities that are promoting this feminist politics. They expect a radical re-ordering in the entire socio-political context. One among the participants spoke that; "Women will not get equality in religion. If women have to live without discrimination, they have to get out of religion." They are hoping that legislation can bring changes and commenting that; Religion collapses when women become independent. The basic principle of religion is that women are slaves. They will do anything for it. Discrimination can be reduced through legislation, and through the abolition of superstition.

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