

The Concept of menstruation of women and its symbolism with menstruation of The Earth and Rivers.

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Received Date: 02-08-2017

Accepted Date: 09-08-2017

Published Date: 14-08-2017

ABSTRACT

During this Modern Era, women are pursuing achievements in different sects. But when the question arises about the ritualistic approach towards religious activities, they are having lot of questions in their mind regarding their menstruation. Some women in the society were not ready to perform religious acts during their menstruation. This is a socio-religious problem within society. Our culture put forth the idea of menstruation of The Earth and Rivers and interoperated it as a useful one for plenty of crops which is needful to survive the society. In this paper, I want to discuss the symbolism of menstruation of women with Rivers and The Earth ; which finally ends with the idea that ; it is a natural phenomena and people can have approach towards this as a useful reproductive system for women and do not consider women as inauspicious during her menstruation cycle. This paper also deals with the ecological approach towards menstruation of the earth and Rivers.

Keywords: Hindu Tradition, Religion, Women, Menstruation, Rivers, The earth, untouchable.

INTRODUCTION

From adolescent age, usually every girl experiences her menstrual cycle every month and it is a natural phenomena which plays an important role in giving birth to a child. From ancient times, during this menstrual phase ; woman is considered as impure and untouchable. During these 4-5 days; they were not supposed to participate in any household duties, religious ceremonies etc.¹

Ayurved suggested rest for woman during these days but it is not meant to treat woman impure or inauspicious during this time, but this concept shows care for her. Unfortunately during the course of time, this concept became troublesome tradition for woman.

Ancient scholars mentioned that, during the first three days of menses, every woman has to follow the rules for her impurity. On the fourth day, after having bath, she can participate in her household work, worship of God and ancestors.⁴

This concept of untouchability during menses, emerged from the thought of cleanliness and it leads to give rest to woman during these day of menstruation.

If one doesn't follow these rules, an obeisance have to observed by woman in form of a fast on the day of Rushi Panchami. This leads to show the gratitude and honour to seven sages and to get purified from Rajasvala Dosha.⁵

In Indian folk tradition, as well as in Hindu religion; The Earth and the rivers are considered impure during their menses. The Earth and the rivers are considered as woman and symbolises the menstruation exactly as woman's menstruation cycle. With reference to Sanskrit grammar , The Earth means पृथ्वी and the river means नदी considered as feminine words.⁶

VEDIC LITERATURE

In Rigveda, (ऋग्वेद) The Earth is treated as Mother Goddess. The concept of The Mother Earth as the source of all plants, animals and human lives is perhaps the oldest and the most important concept from Indian tradition. Some rituals related with folk tradition also describe the symbolism of fertility of woman and the Earth .Hymn of Goddess Shree(श्री) represents the same idea. She is having wetness (Aardra-आर्द्रा) which leads to create mud and moisture

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which is necessary to sow seeds.^{6.1} Without wetness in land, no seed can be able to germinate, and it is a necessary procedure to grow any crop in agricultural phenomena.

In Shreesukta (श्रीसूक्त); a guardian deity of the farmer means The

Earth (Shree) is able to generate crops because of Mud (चिक्लीत) and Moisture (कर्म).^{7.}

OTHER TEXTUAL REFERENCES

A Sanskrit text related with agriculture named Krushi-Parashara

(कृषि-पराशर) mentioned that, at the end of Mruga (मृग) constellation and in the first quarter of the next star i.e. Aardra(आर्द्रा) The Earth reverberating with the sound of water is stated to be in "menstruation". These three days must be avoided (for sowing). If at all a farmer going to his farm undertakes sowing he can never reap the fruit of his labour and hard time awaits him.^{8.}

Devi Bhagvat (देवी भागवत) Stated that during the Ambuvachi (अम्बुवाची) period means menstruation period of the Earth; if any person dig the earth; after his death he reaches to hell named krumidansh (कृमिदंश) and suffered their badly for four Yugas.^{9.}

All these references showed the importance of menstruation process of The Mother Earth for reproduction.

In India, rivers are also considered as women. They are not regarded only as merely a flowing mass of water but as life-bestowing and life nurturing protecting mothers. During monsoon, muddy redish water of river treated as menstrual blood of river. Religious texts related with Dharmshastra (धर्मशास्त्र) warn against bathing the river in this particular period. (As they forbid men to have sex with woman who are menstruating)^{10.}

Some religious texts mentioned that rivers who are considered as Nada(नद)(Masculine) are not considered as rajasvala. Only feminine rivers are treated as menstruating means Rajasvala.^{11.}

(Narayanan vasudha) wrote- "When the Kaveri is swollen after the early monsoon rains, I have heard the resident of Shirangam say "she was pregnant." This is a wonderful celebration of her life-giving potential. The surging river rich with the monsoon waters, sweeps into the plains, watering the planted crops in the Tanjavur delta and giving birth to the food that will nourish the population."^{12.}

On the fest of Pattitam perukka, the eighteenth day in the Tamil month of Adi (July 15- August 14) all those who live on the banks of Kaveri in Tamilnadu, celebrate the rivers pregnancy craving ! In some families, the oldest woman throws a handful of colored rice to satisfy the Maccakkai (food craving during pregnancy) of the swiftly flowing Kaveri- as she hastened to the Lord's House.^{13.}

With consideration of mentioned references it is noticeable that menstruation of The Earth and rivers are symbols of menstruation of woman. It is a necessary natural phenomena for creation. The Earth and rivers are important natural elements from agricultural aspect also. Ambuvachi festival of The Earth is related with the menstruation of the Earth. Ambu means procreative water and bachi means to blossom. In folklore, it is considered that the Earth is capable to carry the womb of crop after the phase of ambuvachi only.^{14.} Term Ambuvachi itself explains the ability to carry the womb as it symbolises the carrying capacity of woman.

When culture established on the banks of the river, people are dependent on river for their day to day life. Rivers fulfil the need of water of the society for different type of day to day activities. In monsoon, during heavy flood; people were not supposed to enter in river because it leads to an accidents and death accordingly. Here untouchability appears as a part of care of people.

Ancient experts of Hindu theology tried to take care of woman during her menstrual phase. When any woman is suffering from her menstrual days, husband forbidden to have sex with wife who are menstruating because it is unhygienic and causes gynecological diseases for her. on the other hand, if this type of intercourse takes place it will not fruitful because the seed from the husband goes waste and wife could not be able to fertile. This concept shows nothing but care for women.

This concept exactly reflects in the menstruation of the earth. If farmer sow seeds in heavy rain, it will not germinate; it flows with heavy water and the earth do not be able to grow the crop. This symbolism between woman and the earth reflects the idea of fertility.

CONCLUSION

At the end, The mother Earth and Rivers symbolises as woman in reference of Rajasvala Dharma. It is clearly a procedure of reproduction within the Earth, Rivers as well as woman. In Indian tradition and folklore menstruation means phase of Ambuvachi is

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celebrated as a festival of creation or reproduction. The Ambuvachi festival of Goddesses Kamaakhya treated as auspicious one.¹⁹

As per this whole discussion, at the end ; want to put forth the thought – Menstruation is nothing but necessary purification of woman's body which helps her for better health. Every person have to respect her this capacity of creation of new life. From last many centuries The Mother Earth and Rivers are treated as woman with due respect though they are also suffering from menstruation every year. This symbolism of capacity of reproduction of The Earth and rivers treated auspiciously from different sectors of society and even from women. Just like the same without any hesitation in mind, every woman as well as all sectors of society try to respect the concept of menstruation of woman as it is a natural gift for her to give birth to new generation. Every woman should take care of herself during these crucial days of menstruation.

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- [10] Prof. Feldhaus Anne,(Professor of religious studies at Arizona State University, Teme, USA) mentioned –“ People in Maharashtra, toss Haldi and kumkum powder into the water of river as they would put these on the forehead of a married woman. People fill the lap of a river by putting coconut, grains, flowers, a piece of cloth as places in woman's pal to wish her fertility and happiness. Such a woman accepts the offerings in the part of hr sari that hangs directly over her womb in a relatively graphic response to the rite's expression of good wishes for fertility. Oti bharanam of river is mostly typically performed also to imply a desire to appease the river and to urge it not to cause harm. Finally there is a hint that rivers are not just a female but psychologically female.”Feldhaus Anne, 1995, Water and womanhood,(religious menaings of rivers in Maharashtra) Oxford University Press(P.43)
- [11] Vsudevsharan Agarval stated that –“ (In Asyavamiy Sukta of rigveda) this mantra * paid attention to nature's process of Motherhood made manifest in each female. In her period of puberty, some secretions as menstrual flow appear, which make her ready for the babe to come in her womb. As soon as the woman has her period, she becomes adhorrent, that is not worthy of being touched or seen. Waters are spoken of as the mother, and unless those secretions become turbid i.e. imbued with the principle of matter, which was said to be the rajasvala form of the woman. The doctrine of the muddy waters is clearly mentioned in the Rigveda.

Citation: Dr. Aaryaa Ashutosh Joshi " The Concept of menstruation of women and its symbolism with menstruation of The Earth and Rivers" *International Journal of Research in Humanities and social Studies*, vol 4, no. 6, 2017, pp. 36-38.

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