

# LEGAL AWARENESS EVENT ON 'DESTIGMATISING MENSTRUATION'

Report on *Nukkad Natak* held on  
March 24, 2023 at Symbiosis Law  
School, NOIDA.

**ABSTRACT:** The event was conducted on the issue of taboos regarding menstruation in rural areas. It involved organising a street play consisting of nine members and three acts. The event was a collaboration between the Legal Aid Centre and the Millennium Fellowship Project 'All the Rights, Right Now'.

Conducted by:  
Ms. Vibhuti Rao,  
Paralegal Volunteer

Under the Guidance  
of:  
Ms. Charvi Kumar,  
Administrator -  
Legal Aid Centre,  
Symbiosis Law  
School, NOIDA

## **I. Concept Note**

India, a lower middle-income country, faces an acute problem of period poverty. Along with a lack of access to facilities, there is a severe dearth of awareness regarding sexual health and bodily functions. Per UNICEF India, 71% of adolescent girls in the country reported being completely unaware of menstruation before their first period, leaving them ill-equipped regarding information and resources. Women often substitute menstrual hygiene products such as pads and tampons for readily available, often unclean materials, ranging from old, torn rags and sand-filled socks to hay, dung, grass, etc. Societal stigma and lack of knowledge and hygiene facilities discourage menstruating women from participating in society, with one out of five female students dropping out of school once they start menstruating.

Cultural factors within the country also hinder access to education and other facilities. A 2018 study by UNICEF supports this, stating that 70% of Indian mothers believed menstruation to be 'dirty.' The same study also found that this regressive attitude influenced adolescent views, with around 50% of adolescent girls also carrying the same belief, resulting in 40% of female students choosing to take a leave of absence during their menstrual cycles, due to the unavailability of menstrual hygiene facilities at schools. Unfortunately, there are more repercussions to the same than stigma—menstruating women are not allowed to touch others, enter the kitchen, or eat with others, and in some cases, are even forced to stay outside of the village area in huts. These huts are often improperly maintained, resulting in a lack of hygienic facilities, further exacerbating period poverty.

Creating awareness of taboos around menstruation is therefore crucial for several reasons, and as such, Say Yes to Cups aimed to bring about awareness for the same in a poignant yet easy-to-

digest manner, leading to the idea for a street play based around the same.

## **II. Objectives**

The main objectives of this event were twofold:

1. To raise awareness about the way rural menstruating population faces added challenges in menstrual health management due to taboo and superstition around the subject.
2. To showcase how menstrual cups can be an affordable and easy to use option for such women

## **III. Preliminary Preparations**

Before conducting the event, the organisers made the following preparations:

1. Conducted research on the issue and invited student volunteers to participate in the play.
2. Wrote and rehearsed a script for the street play.

## **IV. Conducting the Event**

The event was spearheaded by Ms. Aastha Maurya, Ms. Oishiki Bansal, and Ms. Vibhuti Rao, and participated in by Ms. Archisha Dhar, Ms. Arushi Srivastava, Ms. Deeya Janavii Chand, Ms. Isha Agarwal, Mr. Khushal Bharadwaj and Ms. Varnika Bharadwaj, learners of Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA.

The event was conducted in the offline mode during Symbiosis Law School NOIDA's Sports Fest, Aparajit's Pre-Fest Event, on

March 24, 2023. The audience was formed of learners from the same, ranging from first to fifth year.

To conduct the event, prior preparation had been started a month in advance, involving daily practices, writing and rewriting of the script, as well as coming up with parody jingles of popular songs to be used to transition between scenes. The play consisted of three acts, covering the life of a girl living in a rural area in India, where taboos regarding menstruation and alternative menstrual health management are extremely prevalent.

The first act featured the situation in most rural schools, where when a girl gets her first period, and the same is treated in a suspicious yet disparaging manner. The second act features a classmate of the same girl who inquires about menstruation to her mother, where she is rebuked for the question and told how menstruation is essentially a kind of sin, and outdated practices such as sleeping outside and not entering the kitchen during the same are instilled into her. The third act features a grown woman who develops reproductive tract infections due to improper menstrual hygiene management and visits a gynaecologist for the same. It also shows how society as a whole and her husband are dismissive of these problems and blame her for them. The play is interspersed with facts regarding period poverty in India and throughout the world.

## **V. Response of the Target Population and Outcome**

The SYTC contingent was successful in helping create a discussion and provoke thought on the matter. The play as a whole received an extremely positive reaction. Audience members especially mentioned having positively awed reactions to Ms. Varnika's

emotional monologue at the end of the play. Overall, the event was a success where everyone's hard work paid off sufficiently.

The beneficiaries and SYTC volunteers actively interacted with each other. The volunteers, while delivering their lines, engaged actively with the audience as well, creating. The audience was also enthusiastic and came up to SYTC members with further questions after the play was completed.

The event had an audience of around 50 people, most of whom reported having learned something new following the performance.

## **VI. Future Plan of Action**

The team plans on staging this street play in several parts of the city, and hopefully, the rest of the country once the performers return to their hometowns. This will have the twin advantages of both raising awareness and recruiting people to the cause of menstrual health.

## **VII. Conclusion**

This event was successful in large part due to the intuitive understanding of the target population that menstruation is not, in fact, some sort of social taboo, but a natural part of the system. Since the target audience this time consisted of educated persons from well-off backgrounds, the real struggle will begin when the same play is staged for persons who have been raised to internalise misogyny and a deep-seated fear and hatred of their own reproductive cycle.

## GLIMPSES OF THE EVENT

