

**CONTEMPORARY MEANINGS OF MENSTRUATION:
GENDERED IDENTITIES, ANXIETIES, AND LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF RURAL AND URBAN ODIA WOMEN**

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**CONTEMPORARY MEANINGS OF MENSTRUATION:
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OF RURAL AND URBAN ODIA WOMEN**

by

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Dedicated to my parents - Nana and Bou

For believing in daughters and resisting patriarchy with grace and love

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Contemporary meanings of menstruation: Gendered identities, anxieties, and lived experiences of rural and urban Odia women,**” being submitted by **Swayamshree Mishra**, to the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is a record of the bonafide research work carried by her under my supervision. In my opinion, the thesis has reached the standards of fulfilling the requirements for submission relating to the degree. The contents of this thesis, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other Institute or University for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Abstract

The thesis adopts a feminist perspective and ethnographic methodology to understand contemporary meanings of menarche and menstruation practices in rural and urban Odisha. It highlights the changes and shifts in ideologies, practices and rituals associated with menstruation and their implications for existing caste, class, and gender dynamics in a society impacted by modernity but governed by traditional structures and practices. I explore the current status of menarche rituals and ceremonies and other practices associated with menstruation and the reasons behind their persistence/changes. The thesis forefronts women's voices across generations, castes, classes, and rural/urban locations to delve into the diverse meanings and contours of menstruation (the process/phenomenon) and menstruating (individual experiences and lived realities) in rural and urban Odisha. As I place my lens amidst the lives of women and look at their life journeys and embodied experiences I look for what it means for women to menstruate and what menstruating or not does for and to them. Through a detailed examination of contemporary menstruation practices and their transformation the thesis unveils reasons why women continue practicing them and the contexts that give meanings to such practices. The thesis explores the changing contexts of caste, class, and gender habitus as well as social processes of modernity and mobility within which these menstruation practices and rituals transform. By exploring the role of menstruation in creating gendered identities, the thesis also provides critical insights into the anxieties women face when they are unable to menstruate or menstruate irregularly since menstruation is socially and medically embedded in expectations of marriageability and fecundity.

सारांश

यह थीसिस एक नारीवादी दृष्टिकोन और इथ्नोग्राफ़िक विधि को अपनाती है जिससे ग्रामीण और शहरी उड़ीसा में मेनार्क और मासिकधर्म प्रथाओं के समकालीन अर्थों को समझने का प्रयास किया गया है। यह थीसिस में महामारी रस्में और अन्य मासिकधर्म से संबंधित विधियों और परिवर्तनों की वर्तमान स्थिति और उनके बदलने के पीछे के कारणों का पता किया गया है। जब मैं महिलाओं के जीवन में अपना दृष्टिकोण स्थापित करती हूँ और उनके जीवन सफर और शारीरिक अनुभवों की ओर देखती हूँ, तो मैं महिलाओं के लिए मासिक धर्म का महत्व और इससे जुड़े प्रत्याशा या अनुभवों की खोज करती हूँ। इस अध्ययन में वर्तमान मासिक धर्म संबंधी प्रथाओं की विस्तृत जांच के माध्यम से, यह थीसिस उन कारणों को उजागर करती है जिनके कारण महिलाएं इन्हें जारी रखती हैं और उन संदर्भों को जिनसे ऐसी प्रथाओं को अर्थ दिया जाता है।

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List of local Odia Words

Chapter 2

1. Didi - Sister
2. Bhala Jhia - Good girl/daughter
3. Luchiba - To hide/ hiding
4. Ghare basiba - Sit at home/ menarche
5. Ghare basiba bhoji - Menarche feast
6. Bada kanya haba - Becoming a grown-up girl/ big girl/ menarche
7. Gyana paigala/paigola - Gained knowledge
8. Bada heigala/heigola - Matured/ grown-up
9. Gharore rahigala/rohigola - Remained at home
10. Ghare - House/ home
11. Kandiba - Crying/to cry
12. Mana dukha kariba - To feel sad/ feeling sad
13. Osa – Fast
14. Baadi – Backyard
15. Danda – Front street/ front part of the house
16. Danda pinda – Raised platform in the front of the house
17. Badipata rasta – Path leading from backyard of the house
18. Dandapata rasta – Path leading from the front part of the house
19. Phalanti gachha – Flowering tree
20. Maara – Polluted
21. Gobara paani – Mixture of cow dung and water
22. Satti – Odia Folk Goddess
23. Sila – silupa – Stone used to grind food, a type of mortar and pestle

24. Chuaan – Unclean/polluted
25. Tungi ghara – Small room
26. Chota ghara – Small room
27. Kutumba – Extended relatives/ kin
28. Agana – Courtyard
29. Nana – Father in this context
30. Bou – Mother in this context
31. Pokhari – Pond
32. Tutha – Pond bank
33. Ana-tutha – Impure part of the pond bank
34. Bhoji – Feast
35. Bhala bohu – Good daughter-in-law
36. Kula debata – Ancestral Gods
37. Alekheni – Inauspicious
38. Tala jaati – Low caste
39. Tala jaati Jhia – Low caste girl
40. Bhala gruhini – Good homemaker

Chapter 3

1. Mandap – Raised platform outside the house to organize functions
2. Mamu – Maternal uncle
3. Puri – Fried puffy bread
4. Kheeri – Milk and rice pudding
5. Brataghara bhoji – Feast for thread ceremony
6. Brataghara – Thread ceremony
7. Sasana Gaan – Brahmin village

8. Kumkum – Vermillion powder
9. Maen – Maternal aunt
10. Bandhu padigala – In this context end of a bond
11. Baksa – Trunk
12. Baksa sajadiba – Accumulating gifts in a trunk

Chapter 4

1. Sahi – Neighbourhood
2. Gali- Narrow street/ lane
3. Menses – Menstruation
4. Periods – Menstruation
5. Masikia – Monthly/periods
6. Ghara loka – Family members
7. Chhuaan – Untouchable
8. Puja ghara – Prayer room in the house
9. Asubidha – Problem / menstruation

Chapter 5

1. Banjha – Infertile woman
2. Bandhya – Infertile woman
3. Purohita – Priest
4. Peer Baba – Spiritual leaders in a dargah
5. Guni garedi – Blackmagic
6. Manasika – Vows
7. Gua – Beetle nut
8. Dei – Sister
9. Bhala gruhini – Good home-maker

List of Abbreviations

1. ASHA - Accredited Social Health Activist
2. CDA - Cuttack Development Authority
3. NGO - Non-governmental organization
4. SC - Scheduled Caste
5. ST - Scheduled Tribe
6. UNGA - The United Nations General Assembly
7. WASH - Water, Sanitation and Health