

## **The Period Paradox: Evaluating Contemporary Indian Advertisements for Menstrual Pads**

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**Abstract:** Before the advent of modern medicine, menstruation was deemed supernatural. Nonetheless, it is paradoxical that menstruation is still shrouded in myths and taboos. Today, the primary mode of communication about menstruation often comes through advertising menstrual management products (MMPs). While menstruation encompasses physiological, psychological, and sociological aspects, advertising only overplays hygiene. Disposable menstrual pads are the most widely used commercial option among the products designed for menstrual flow management. Despite the proliferation of marketing and advertising for disposable menstrual pads over the years, the silence and shame surrounding menstruation are paradoxical. In this context, this study aims to critically analyse the content of advertisements promoted by MMP manufacturers, with the following objectives: (1) To identify the primary concerns, prominent themes and key messages in the advertisements of leading brands of disposable menstrual pads. (2) To evaluate the inclusivity of these advertisements through the lens of intersectionality. Using a qualitative approach, ten advertisements launched from 2022 to 2023 by Whisper and Stayfree, the top two brands of MMPs in India, were scrutinised from an intersectional feminist perspective using multimodal critical discourse analysis. The analysis exemplifies that the advertisements foreground menstruation as a hygiene concern and overlook taboos and myths about menstruation.

**Keywords:** menstrual communication, advertising, menstrual taboo, menstrual hygiene, intersectionality.

## **Introduction**

Menstruation, commonly known as periods, is an inevitable and integral part of human reproduction and sustenance. It is the cyclical removal of the outer layer of the endometrium of the uterus in the absence of pregnancy (Salamonsen et al). United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) claims that 1.8 billion girls, women, transgender men and non-binary persons menstruate every month. Apart from female homo sapiens, bats, rodents and other primates, including apes and monkeys, also menstruate (Catalini and Fedder; Mayor et al; Smith). Good Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) is vital for achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as "good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, decent work and economic growth, responsible consumption and production" (Sommer et al). Improving MHH will also help India achieve four of the seven Millennium Development Goals on maternal health, education, environment, and gender equality (Dasra).

Poor menstrual health and hygiene deteriorate sexual and reproductive health (Khanna et al). Menstrators with little or no awareness and resources use rags, sand, hay, ash, rice husk, plastic, paper, wood shavings, dried leaves, etc. to manage the menstrual flow. According to the Dasra report, about 88 per cent of Indian women use such unhygienic materials, leading to a 70 per cent increase in Reproductive Tract Infections (RTI). Adhering to unhygienic means to manage bleeding is detrimental to health by all means. Apart from RTI, cervical cancer, Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) etc., are some of the aftermaths of poor Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM). Better menstrual health practices cater to health and well-being and promote a healthy economy by creating a healthy and efficient workforce (Dutta and Das).

### ***Diverse implications of menstruation***

Since immemorial, menstruation has been a silenced subject (Delaney et al; Houppert; Kissling). Menstrual stigma has been demonstrated in many societies. Many cultures forbid menstruating women to enter a temple or kitchen, share a bed with husbands, or touch male relatives. These bans are only a few of the womb-to-tomb menstrual taboos (Crawford). Though menstruation is a physiological phenomenon, cultural and religious values mould its meaning and perception. Previous studies have observed how religion contributes to menstrual taboos (Bhartiya; Ganguly and Satpati; Gottlieb; Guterman et al; Kamat and Tharakan; Phipps).

Anthropologists have studied various cultural practices surrounding menstruation that impose severe social restrictions on menstruators (Knight; Mead; Shuttle and Redgrove). Montgomery theorises the origin of menstrual taboos in biological, psychological and sociological realms. Menstruating women are banned from religious rites, sex, and food preparation according to specific religious traditions, as menstrual blood is considered impure (Delaney et al; Douglas; Houppert; Knight; Mendlinger and Cwikel; Stein and Kim). Menstrual taboos are perpetuated to exert control over women (Prasanna). Apart from its biological concerns, menstruation is associated with many psychological and social issues, such as gender identity (Jean; Sarah), sexuality (Rempel and Baumgartner; Schooler et al), body image (Altabe and Thompson; Kaczmarek and Trambacz-Oleszak), reproductive rights (Johnston-Robledo and Stubbs; McLaren and Padhee), and social status ( Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler; Johnston-Robledo and Stubbs). Menstruation is experienced and perceived within a broader socio-cultural context (Johnston-Robledo and Stubbs; Kissling; Koeske and Koeske; MacPherson; Peterson and Taylor).

### ***Menstruation in the consumerist world***

In today's consumerist world, communication surrounding menstruation is mainly through advertisements for menstrual management products (MMPs). Though there are different products to manage menstrual flow, disposable menstrual pads are more widely used than alternative commercial MMPs (Babbar and Garikipati; Parent et al). In 1896, the first commercial disposable menstrual pads were introduced by Johnson & Johnson as "Lister's Towels" or "Sanitary Napkins for Ladies" in North America. However, tight restrictions were imposed on advertising, which prohibited the pads from being marketed (Linkletter). Despite the proliferation of marketing and advertising for disposable menstrual pads over the years, it is paradoxical that menstruation is still stigmatised. In this context, this study aims to critically analyse the content of advertising messages promoted by MMP manufacturers, with the following objectives: (1) To identify the primary concerns, prominent themes and key messages in the advertisements of leading brands of disposable menstrual pads. (2) To evaluate the inclusivity of these advertisements through the lens of intersectionality.

## **Theoretical framework**

Menstruation is a natural process that is experienced by people across various genders, ethnicities, races and classes. The taboo, stigma, shame and silence surrounding menstruation also lead to ignorance, misconceptions, health issues, discrimination, and oppression. The intersectional framework is most suitable for understanding discrimination against women and gender minorities, as it considers the interconnected nature of gender, race, class, etc. (Harnois). The repercussions of inequalities such as poverty, casteism, racism, sexism, etc., induced by long histories of violence and systematic discrimination intersect with each other, denying rights and equal opportunities to people and prevailing across generations (UN Women).

Kimberle Crenshaw, a Legal Studies scholar and Civil Rights Activist, is credited with coining the term intersectionality in 1989. Intersectionality is “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (UN Women). Crenshaw (1996) suggests that “intersectionality offers a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics.”

Though the term intersectional feminism is modern, the concept has been explored much earlier by Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Francis Harper, Ida B. Wells, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks (Soken-Huberty). The intersectional approach exposes how social identities can overlap and lead to compounding experiences of discrimination (UN Women). It is a critical tool that creates a consensus among feminists and prevents conflicts within the feminist movement (Carbin and Edenheim). Intersectional feminism is not only about fighting gender injustices but also about eradicating all forms of oppression, and it serves as a framework for building inclusive, robust movements that work to resolve overlapping forms of discrimination (UN Women).

## **Methodology**

While advertisements for MMPs dominate among the discourses surrounding menstruation, a qualitative approach has been adopted to meet the objectives of the study. The sample of the study consists of ten advertisements (refer to Table 1) launched from 2022 to 2023 by Whisper and Stayfree, the top two brands of MMPs in India. From an intersectional feminist perspective, the chosen advertisements are scrutinised by means of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA).

Kress and Leeuwen, who introduced MCDA, claim that multimodality is necessary to subdue the inadequacy of each mode in isolation. MCDA systematically studies the language and semiotic modes such as images, photographs, diagrams, or graphics in a media text (Coşkun). This analysis technique deals with multimedia presentations and unravels how images, photographs, diagrams, and graphics work together to give meaning. As communicative phenomena are multimodal, MCDA is rapidly growing in the domain of communication research (Geenen et al).

**Table 1. Chosen advertisements of menstrual pads by Whisper and Stayfree**

Sl No	Title	Brand
1	Stayfree Secure XL #DinTumhareSaathChalega	Stayfree
2	This Daughter's Day, tell your sons it's just a period	Stayfree
3	The Best Ever Stayfree Secure Extra Large #SochnaNahiAageBadhna Hai	Stayfree
4	Whisper Choice Ultra XL   No Darr Din Bhar	Whisper
5	Whisper Presents The Missing Chapter – For Moms   Keep Girls In School	Whisper
6	Whisper Bindazz Nights   Upto 0% leaks all night long	Whisper
7	New Whisper Choice Nights XXL   Daag Ka No Darr Raat Bhar	Whisper
8	Whisper Hygiene Comfort   Ab aur Heavy Flow leakage ki tension nahi	Whisper
9	Whisper: Ab din bhar daag ka no darr!	Whisper
10	The Missing Chapter   Keep Girls In School	Whisper

## **Analysis and Discussion**

Using the theoretical framework of intersectionality, three categories have emerged while analysing the chosen advertisements. The analysis is carried out using Multi-modal Critical Discourse Analysis by considering these categories to fulfil the objectives and gain an in-depth understanding. The categories are as follows: (a) Themes and taglines, (b) Character attributes and (c) Socio-economic status. Though intersectionality also looks into race, it has been excluded in the present study as all the advertisements are Indian.

### ***Themes and taglines***

Theme is the central idea or message that a discourse conveys (Admin). It plays a significant role in a narrative by giving direction to the rhetoric (Team). Reviewing the chosen advertisements (refer to Table 2), it is evident that the theme of the majority of the advertisements is “protection from leakage and stain.” Nonetheless, one advertisement by Stayfree urges the audience to talk to their sons about menstruation. Even today, menstruation is deemed a women’s issue and neglected mainly by men. Menstruation is a matter of shame and embarrassment, even among women. As it is hardly discussed, there is a lack of awareness. In India, more than half of adolescent girls are totally ignorant of menstruation until they attain menarche (Sharma et al). Thus, menstruation is cloaked in misconceptions, shame, and stigma. Even the very name of one of the popular menstrual product brands, ‘Whisper’ by P & G, hints at the embarrassment surrounding menstruation. Mostly, menstruation is either not discussed or discussed in whispers.

In India, the percentage of school absenteeism during menstruation exceeds 30%, even in metropolitan cities (Krishnaiah et al; Vashisht et al). More often, school absenteeism leads to school dropout. Adolescents, hence dropping out of school, are prone to early marriages and pregnancies. Besides, lack of education has detrimental effects on employability, economic status and standard of living. The longer a girl child stays in school, the lower the chance of child marriage and early pregnancy. More educated women have a better say in family planning, employability, economic status and standard of living. Keeping girls in school, thus delaying early marriage and pregnancy, potentially adds up to the GDP of India up to \$ 100

billion over their lifetimes (Dasra). Mothers' education also affects school absenteeism among girls during periods (Vashisht et al). Regrettably, many schools in India lack proper WASH infrastructure, which aggravates school absenteeism and the eventual dropout of pubescent girls. Krishnaiah et al and Vashisht et al observe that some of the reasons for school absenteeism are period cramps, fear of leakage and period staining, lack of privacy, and shame surrounding menstruation.

Two advertisements by Whisper advocate against school absenteeism, eventually leading to dropping out of school due to menstruation. However, they do not address the lack of WASH infrastructure in schools. Some schools do not have proper toilets. Whereas separate toilets for girls were present only in half of the schools in India (Sharma et al). Rather, one of the advertisements appeals to mothers to allow their pubescent girls to attend school even during periods. The other advertisement of the same series appeals to the school authorities to ensure that school children are taught about menstruation in school. Sharma et al claim that teachers were not a common source of information about menstruation in India. Discussing menstruation is deemed shameful even in classrooms, like in homes. So many teachers skip the chapter on menstruation. This escalates embarrassment and ignorance about menstruation.

Furthermore, no advertisement discusses fundamental health and hygiene issues related to menstruation, such as reproductive tract and urinary tract infections, itching, rashes, and pelvic inflammation that arise due to unhygienic means of managing menstruation. Alarmingly, some advertisements even claim that the product provides up to 12 hours of protection. However, changing the pad every four to eight hours is recommended to prevent the risk of bacterial growth and the subsequent chance of infection (Your Changing Body: Puberty in Girls). It has to be noted that no advertisement depicts mood swings or period cramps, despite their wide prevalence.

Ironically, menstruators depicted in ads are happy and energetic, devoid of any discomfort, mood swings, or period cramps. Their only concern, or rather "fear," as shown in the advertisements, is period staining and leakage. It is disappointing to realise that concerns such as myths and taboos related to menstruation remain unaddressed. Instead, these advertisements reinforce the notion of shame attached to menstruation by problematising the presence of visible signs of menstruation. They attempt to empower consumers by erasing the visible signs of menstruation, such as stains and leakage, thereby reducing a complex

phenomenon into a matter of disgust.

Taglines are concise phrases that appear in advertisements to convey messages quickly and for easy recall. They convey the most significant trait or benefit that an advertiser wants to say about a product (Danesi). Analysing taglines (refer to Table 2), it is evident that advertisers regard menstruation as a terrible affair. Frequent usage of words like fear, tension and worry in taglines exposes this intention of advertisers. It also indicates the presence of fear appeal in these advertisements. Though menstruation is a natural occurrence, a tendency to portray menstruation as gruesome has been observed. The same can be seen in our homes, too. Mothers tell their daughters that menstruation has to be concealed. Hence, children grow up thinking that menstruation is disgusting.

**Table 2. Themes and taglines**

Sl. No	Title	Theme	Tagline
1	Stayfree Secure XL #DinTumhareSaathChalega	Let period not hinder your work outside the home	Your day, your way
2	This Daughter's Day, tell your sons it's just a period	Breaking the silence on menstruation among boys	It's just a period
3	The Best Ever Stayfree Secure Extra Large #SochnaNahiAageBadhnaHai	Let period not hinder your growth	Don't worry, move ahead
4	Whisper Choice Ultra XL   No Darr Din Bhar	Fear of stain	No fear, all day long
5	Whisper Presents The Missing Chapter – For Moms   Keep Girls In School	Silence around menstruation and school dropout	Keep girls in school
6	Whisper Bindazz Nights	Fear of leakage at night	My life, my rules

	Upto 0% leaks all night long		
7	New Whisper Choice Nights XXL   Daag Ka No Darr Raat Bhar	Fear of leakage at night	No fear, all night long
8	Whisper Hygiene Comfort   Ab aur Heavy Flow leakage ki tension nahi	Tension caused by heavy flow and leakage	Now, no tension about leakage
9	Whisper: Ab din bhar daag ka no darr!	Embarrassment caused by period stain	No fear, all day long
10	The Missing Chapter   Keep Girls In School	Silence around menstruation and school dropout	Keep girls in school

### ***Character Attribute***

The description of the traits of the characters represented in the chosen advertisements is referred to here as character attributes. It is crucial to examine those narratives through various attributes such as gender, age, ability, body type and skin tone. In this study, character attributes are studied to get a comprehensive insight into the intersectionality of the chosen advertisements.

### ***Gender, age and ability***

Gender refers to the socially, culturally and psychologically constructed attributes, roles and behaviours sanctioned by society to individuals based on their sex assigned at the time of birth (World Health Organisation [WHO]). It is distinct from sex, which is biological in nature (Newman). Examining the gender, age and ability (Refer to Table 3), it is evident that most lead characters in the chosen ads are cisgender girls or women. However, in one ad by Stayfree, there are both cisgender boys/men and cisgender girls/women. Though menstruation is not unique to cisgender girls or women, there is no representation of intersex, transmen, non-binary people, or other gender diversities. These advertisements make menstruation appear like it is

unique to girls and women, which is very misleading.

According to intersectional feminism, age is a fundamental aspect of identity that intersects with other social categories. Ageism is the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination based on age (WHO). It is important to recognise how ageism contributes to exclusion and discrimination. In this context, it has to be noted that the menstruators portrayed in these advertisements are adolescents or young adults (refer to Table 3). Though menstruators approximately belong to the age group of 10 to 50, only a narrow section of this population is represented. The group of menstruators in these advertisements are mostly teens and young adults. This might evoke a sense of exclusion among other menstruators who fall outside the age category represented in advertisements.

Ability comprises both the intellectual and physical capacity of a person to carry out any action. Ability and disability are seen as binary concepts. Ability is often contrasted with disability and is used to challenge traditional notions of normalcy (Campbell). In the selected advertisements, only able-bodied people are depicted (refer to Table 3). People with physical and/ or intellectual disabilities menstruate, too, and it is more challenging for them. However, there is no room for people with disabilities in advertisements for menstrual pads.

**Table 3: Gender, age and ability**

Sl. No	Title	Cast			
		Role	Gender	Ability	Age
1	Stayfree Secure XL #DinTumhareSaathChalega	Lead	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young
		Support	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young
2	This Daughter’s Day, tell your sons it’s just a period	Lead	Cis-gender boy	Abled	Teen
		Support	Cis-gender girl, Cis-gender man, Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young, middle-aged, old

Sl. No	Title	Cast			
		Role	Gender	Ability	Age
3	The Best Ever Stayfree Secure Extra Large #SochnaNahiAageBadhnaHai	Lead	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young
		Support	Cis-gender woman, Cis-gender man	Abled	Young
4	Whisper Choice Ultra XL   No Darr Din Bhar	Lead	Cis-gender girl	Abled	Teen
		Support	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young
5	Whisper Presents The Missing Chapter – For Moms   Keep Girls In School	Lead	Cis-gender girls	Abled	Teen
		Support	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young
6	Whisper Bindazz Nights   Upto 0% leaks all night long	Lead	Cis-gender girl	Abled	Teen
		Support	Nil	Nil	Nil
7	New Whisper Choice Nights XXL   Daag Ka No Darr Raat Bhar	Lead	Cis-gender girl	Abled	Teen
		Support	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young
8	Whisper Hygiene Comfort   Ab aur Heavy Flow leakage ki tension nahi	Lead	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young
		Support	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young

Sl. No	Title	Cast			
		Role	Gender	Ability	Age
9	Whisper: Ab din bhar daag ka no darr!	Lead	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young
		Support	Cis-gender woman	Abled	Young
10	The Missing Chapter   Keep Girls In School	Lead	Cis-gender girls	Abled	Teen
		Support	Cis-gender women	Abled	Young, middle-aged

*Body type and skin tone*

Body type refers to the physical characteristics, such as shape and size, of an individual. In society, there is a tendency to idealise certain body types and shame others. Due to body shaming, people face a lot of psychological distress and eating disorders (Kaushik and Batra). It has to be noted that the body types of the characters in the advertisements are mostly ideal (refer to Table 4). The lead characters are especially slim. Nevertheless, in one ad by Whisper, the lead cast is a plus-size model. That is the only advertisement among the ones reviewed that focuses on heavy menstrual flow. It appears that the advertisement implicitly hints at a link between body size and the nature of menstrual flow, which is misleading to a large extent. So plus size representation in this advertisement is only backfiring as it sends a wrong message to the viewers. In reality, heavy menstrual bleeding has various implications and is not necessarily associated with body weight. So the depiction of a plus-size character to sell a menstrual management product for heavy bleeding is highly inappropriate.

Skin tone refers to the colour or complexion of the skin. Indians’ notorious obsession with light skin tone dates back to the colonial era (Mishra). Sadly, even decades after the end of colonialism, the trend has not changed much. Consumer capitalism and the boom in the cosmetic market further reinforced the affinity for light skin tones. After analysing the

advertisements, it is evident that there is no representation of dark or very dark skin tone (refer to Table 4). Most of the characters have light skin tone; some have medium skin tone, and rarely do we encounter people with a dusky skin tone. The appearance of skin in these advertisements is flawless and far from realistic. Even adolescents in these advertisements have clear, blemish-free skin, though the occurrence of pimples is common during the teenage years. Period acne is another prevalent phenomenon linked to menstruation. Nevertheless, portraying menstruators with flawless skin free from period acne is unrealistic. Besides, it again reinforces the beauty ideals set by the advertising industry. Even when some of the cosmetic brands are trying to do away with some beauty ideals, menstrual management product brands should at least not neglect the skin conditions associated with menstruation.

Analysing the attributes of characters in these advertisements, it is observed that a norm has been set by advertisers with regard to gender, age, ability, body type and skin tone. In short, the menstruating body has been idealised. Also, the agency of the menstruators has been determined by the advertisers. Menstruators are expected to conceal any signs of menstruation. They are devoid of any blood stains, mood swings, period cramps or any other discomforts. Moreover, they are even expected to be energetic and physically active. This portrayal is very distant from reality. .

**Table 4: Body type and skin tone**

Sl. No	Title	Cast		
		Role	Body type	Skin tone
1	Stayfree Secure XL #DinTumhareSaathChalega	Lead	Slim	Light
		Support	Slim	Light
2	This Daughter's Day, tell your sons it's just a	Lead	Slim	Light,

Sl. No	Title	Cast		
		Role	Body type	Skin tone
	period			medium
		Support	Slim, heavy built (man-sports coach)	Light, medium
3	The Best Ever Stayfree Secure Extra Large #SochnaNahiAageBadhnaHai	Lead	Slim	Light
		Support	Slim	Light
4	Whisper Choice Ultra XL   No Darr Din Bhar	Lead	Slim	Light
		Support	Slim	Light
5	Whisper Presents The Missing Chapter – For Moms   Keep Girls In School	Lead	Slim	Light, medium
		Support	Slim	Light
6	Whisper Bindazz Nights   Upto 0% leaks all night long	Lead	Slim	Light
		Support	Nil	Nil
7	New Whisper Choice Nights XXL   Daag Ka No Darr Raat Bhar	Lead	Slim	Light
		Support	Slim	Light
8	Whisper Hygiene Comfort   Ab aur Heavy Flow leakage ki tension nahi	Lead	Curvy	Light
		Support	Slim	Light
9	Whisper: Ab din bhar daag ka no darr!	Lead	Slim	Light

Sl. No	Title	Cast		
		Role	Body type	Skin tone
		Support	Slim	Light
10	The Missing Chapter   Keep Girls In School	Lead	Slim	Wheatish/medium
		Support	Slim, average	Fair, medium, dusky

### ***Socio-economic status***

The setting is the location where the advertisement takes place. It also sets the context for the narrative. Moreover, it helps us identify the socio-economic background. Most of the selected advertisements are shot in an elite, urban setting (refer to Table 5). The houses shown in the ads are well-furnished with cosy furniture and embellished with luxury home decor and accessories. The schools and colleges portrayed are also affluent. Apparently, in light of the settings of the advertisements, they target mostly urban elites. As all other sections of society are left out without any representation, it seems like other sections of society are not targeted. Only two of the ten ads depict a semi-urban, middle-class setting. Those advertisements advocate against school absenteeism and dropouts related to periods. Sadly, the rural poor population finds no place in such advertisements, though they are more prone to school absenteeism and dropout. Menstruation is not an urban elite phenomenon; it happens to the poor, the middle class and the rich; it happens in rural, semi-urban and urban areas.

Socio-economic status is determined by a combination of social and economic factors, such as income, social standing, etc. Lower socio-economic status often contributes to oppression and a lack of agency. In most of the advertisements, the socio-economic status of the characters is that of urban elites (refer to Table 5). Only in a couple of advertisements can we come across semi-urban middle-class people. Sadly, rural poor people are out of sight in these advertisements. It suggests that the advertisements target a specific demographic group.

It also indicates market segmentation. The poor population struggles to earn their daily bread. So they cannot afford menstrual management products. Besides, in most households, the male member of the family is the head and the decision-maker. So how money has to be spent is determined by them. Men are mostly ignorant about menstruation, or they care less about it. Hence, menstruators at home have no choice but to do away with menstrual management products. Such people mostly end up using various other means, often unhygienic, such as rags, sand, ash, etc. Though this is astonishingly prevalent, it is scandalous that advertisers don't address this concern. None of the advertisements discuss the problems associated with unhygienic means of managing menstrual flow. The advertisements problematise issues that are very superficial, but the actual concerns related to menstruation are deep-rooted and linked to the physiological, sociological and psychological realms.

**Table 5: Settings and Socio-economic status**

Sl. No	Title	Setting	Cast	
			Role	Socio-economic status
1	Stayfree Secure XL #DinTumhareSaathChalega	Urban-elite	Lead	Upper class
			Support	Upper class
2	This Daughter's Day, tell your sons it's just a period	Urban-elite	Lead	Upper class
			Support	Upper class
3	The Best Ever Stayfree Secure Extra Large #SochnaNahiAageBadhnaHai	Urban-elite	Lead	Upper class
			Support	Upper class
4	Whisper Choice Ultra XL   No Darr Din Bhar	Urban-elite	Lead	Upper class
			Support	Upper class
5	Whisper Presents The Missing Chapter – For Moms   Keep Girls In School	Semi-urban Middle class	Lead	Middle class

Sl. No	Title	Setting	Cast	
			Role	Socio-economic status
			Support	Middle class
6	Whisper Bindazz Nights   Upto 0% leaks all night long	Urban-elite	Lead	Upper class
			Support	Nil
7	New Whisper Choice Nights XXL   Daag Ka No Darr Raat Bhar	Urban-elite	Lead	Upper class
			Support	Upper class
8	Whisper Hygiene Comfort   Ab aur Heavy Flow leakage ki tension nahi	Urban-elite	Lead	Upper class
			Support	Upper class
9	Whisper: Ab din bhar daag ka no darr!	Urban-elite	Lead	Upper class
			Support	Upper class
10	The Missing Chapter   Keep Girls In School	Semi-urban	Lead	Middle class
		Middle class	Support	Middle class

## **Conclusion**

Examining the chosen advertisements, it is clear that all of them predominantly focus only on managing leakage and period stains. None of the advertisements address the aftermath of lack of menstrual hygiene, such as reproductive tract and urinary tract infections, itching, rashes, and pelvic inflammation. While changing menstrual pads every four to eight hours is

widely recommended for menstrual hygiene, as prolonged usage of pads soaked in menstrual blood leads to bacterial growth and infection. Contrary to this, some advertisements even claim that their menstrual pad provides protection for up to 12 hours. This is a matter of concern and dismay. Besides, common symptoms such as mood swings and period cramps are totally excluded from these discourses. The portrayal of menstruators as happy and energetic, devoid of any discomfort, mood swings or period cramps, is shockingly contradictory to reality. The only concerns foregrounded in these advertisements are period stains and leakage. Nevertheless, these are very superficial concerns with little or no consequences. It seems like the advertisers are trivialising menstruation as a matter of stain and stigma. The actual concerns about menstruation are related to taboos, myths, physical health and mental health. Eventually, it is disappointing that all these concerns are overlooked. By attempting to empower consumers by erasing the visible signs of menstruation, such as stains and leakage, the advertisers are reinforcing the notion of shame attached to menstruation.

In the context of inclusivity, there is no representation of gender minorities, people belonging to different age groups, abilities, body types and skin tones. Hence, it continues to reaffirm notions of gender and beauty. Besides, the socio-economic status of the characters is that of urban elites, which further alienates and deprives rural populations of considering menstrual pads as a basic necessity rather than an elite commodity. Focusing only on a very narrow segment of society in advertisements for MMPs potentially excludes the lion's share of the menstruating population. This is likely to perpetuate the notion that MMPs are only for a particular section of society.

To conclude, though advertisements for menstrual products, especially disposable menstrual pads, are aired through mainstream media on a day-to-day basis, the silence surrounding periods in everyday conversation is paradoxical. Even today, advertisements on menstruation are limited to discourses on period stain and leakage and further clouded by prevailing myths, taboos and misconceptions. Ultimately, whether these advertisements consciously or unconsciously produce stigma, shame and silence about this natural physiological phenomenon remains a paradox.

### **Disclosure statement**

*The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.*

### **Funding statement**

*The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.*

### **Ethical considerations**

*There are no human participants in this study*

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