

MENSTRUAL CUSTOMS

- Armaity Dhalla

While working at Radiation Medicine Centre (BARC) Parel, I came across an unbelievable striking similarity between our age old custom of menses and patients treated with radioisotope for therapeutic use or for cancer thyroid patients.

I^{131} an isotope of iodine with half life of eight days, having thirty to two hundred fifty curi (the dose is decided by the health physicist) is given to the cancer thyroid patients.

Iodine lodges in the thyroid and so the radioactive iodine I^{131} also goes to the specific part namely the thyroid and destroys the cancer cells.

Now the radioactivity keeps emanating out from the body of that patient. This pollutes the surrounding atmosphere and gives large amount of radioactivity to the neighbouring people who come in contact with him or be in the same room with him.

So depending upon the amount of radioactivity given to that patient, he is kept in a separate room away from the healthy individuals for one to six days.

His clothes are bundled and kept in an isolated place unfrequented by the living for about ninety days, a time given for about ten half lives of radioactive iodine I^{131} to pass so that the radioactivity in the patient's clothes is then taken as zero and only then the defiled clothes are passed on to the hospital laundry. A person serves food to this patient and then leaves him alone so as to get minimum contact with the radioactivity emanating from that patient.

As far as possible the patient has to lie in bed or stay in his allotted room so that he does not mix freely with the other individuals spreading his unseen radioactivity in the environment.

In fact these patients have a separate ward away from the other patients who are in hospital due to some other disease, other than to have radioactive treatment!

This radioactivity has to come down to a level of permissible limit when he is given the

discharge from the hospital so that no harm is done to the healthy individuals. This isolation of patients who are given radioactivity, is done in this era of modern science; in this very 21st century!

Is following the custom of menstruation rules barbaric or ultramodern? What a similarity! The menstruating lady sits isolated from the whole family, her clothes are treated separately, she is served food by a person without coming in contact with her, she is not allowed to mix freely with the society. She has to stay away from water, food, fire, soil, holy men and all household things!

It is indeed remarkable how thousands of years ago the Zoroastrians recognised the influence of the menstruating woman and the unseen defilement that she would cause to the environments around her knowingly or unknowingly, if she did not follow the segregation rules of the religion.

Radioactivity is an invisible yet physical energy and so it can be measured with a gamma counter which converts the unseen radioactivity into visual counts on the counter. More the radioactivity more are the counts shown on the counter. But our ultraphysical and spiritual parts of the body are invisible to our naked eye and to date science has not made a counter to convert this unseen part into counts. When we do not see and understand the invisible parts of our body, then how shall we see and notice the defilement caused in it?

Here we have to keep faith in our glorious religion in the same way that the patient treated with radioactive iodine keeps faith in his health physicist who treats him. He observes all rules and regulations though he can not see anything coming out of his body which would cause damage to other healthy individuals and the surrounding environment.

In the same way the woman has to follow the rules and regulations of segregation so as to keep the fire, air, soil and other healthy

individuals and the environment undefiled by the unseen negative influence emanating from her body.

In both the above cases there is one and only one aim and that is to contain the defilement to a room so as to take care of the living, healthy individuals and the immediate environment through observing the rules of purity.

Once the radioactivity is injected to a patient, whether he likes it or not it keeps coming out from his body in the immediate environment. He has no control over it and so the unseen defilement keeps taking place and hence this defilement has to be contained to a fixed room only and hence the segregation of such a patient is necessary; just as the segregation for a menstruating lady is necessary and valid.

Menstrual Customs among the Zoroastrians

a) Visible defilement is recognised by our five senses as foul smell or dirt, mud, smoke on clothes, body or environment. Steps can be taken to purify them.

b) Invisible defilement can be once again sub-divided into (1) which cannot be perceived by our five senses but can be detected by modern powerful instruments, (2) which cannot be perceived by our 5 limited senses nor can it be detected by the most sensitive, modern instruments. e.g.

(a) The electromagnetic disturbance in the air goes unnoticed by our senses but we get a distorted, blurred TV picture when a kitchen mixer is operated !!!

(b) The cash register in a departmental store jumps calculations and misbehaves when another gadget is operated nearby causing voltage fluctuation beyond its tolerance limits!

(c) A remotely operated crane carrying molten metal can suddenly stop or drop the molten metal half way through due to the operation of an arc welding equipment nearby!

We know these are not fairy tales but facts and these interferences can cause serious accidents.

According to Zoroastrian Science the human body is divided into 9 parts. The first three are physical, the next three are ultraphysical and the last three are spiritual.

By taking care of the physical body, i.e. purity of skin, hair and nails by regular bath, purity of blood by exercising in fresh air and taking good food and sunlight, one keeps the physical body clean so that no visible defilement takes place. But what about the ultraphysical and spiritual purity?

Today's science is yet baffled by the working of the brain and thought forces. Its behaviour is very often found to be entirely inexplicable by any physical standard when science can not explain the third part of the physical body how can we expect science to think or talk or form laws and theories about the ultraphysical and spiritual purity??

The invisible disturbance around the physical body, namely the Aura or the counterpart body of energy has been noticed by Kirlian photography. In an unhealthy state, its shape is distorted or colours fade. It is affected by all our thoughts and emotions and we know that a lady in menses is emotionally disturbed. And under disturbed bodily conditions, it is proved that the Aura is disturbed.

All these above defilements could be noticed just because there were some scientific instruments that converted the invisible to visible range or from a non perceivable level to a level where we could perceive, our brains could understand and analyse.

But, as seen above, the other ultraphysical and spiritual defilement can neither be perceived by our limited senses nor there can be any modern scientific instrument to convert the ultraphysical and spiritual to physical level for us to understand.

Remember, the slightest defilement or impurity, seen or unseen, affects the smooth running of the universe. Our religion has always emphasised on purity. For us, purity is the highest good. We are told in our holy Gathas and Vendidad at several places that 'Purity is

the best thing for man after birth'. This is purity, O Zarathushtra!, the Mazdayasnian Law. He who keeps himself pure by good thoughts, good words, good deeds.

Let us not challenge our age old custom as this defilement will not be visible but will remain unseen and unnoticed by our limited five senses.

Science has discovered an emanation from the eyes of animals and humans and the energies coming from human and animal eyes vary with emotions and environmental conditions!

Are we surprised, therefore, when a lady in menses is not allowed to enter the places of worship or even glance at people in worship? In fact, it is believed that her very look vitiates the purification of the padyab and consecrated things.

Just wait and let science catch up with our age old customs.

F) In fact, once again taking ecology into consideration a lady in menses was made to sit on the direct ground or use metal stool and bed for her use during the period.

Purity is the main criterion while following any custom in our religion. Any seen or unseen impurity emanating from the lady in menses has to be least injurious to the other living being and also to her very self.

We are all aware that earth and metals are good conductors. And the same principle of lightning conductor or an earthing wire can be applied here, to conduct away the unwholesome effluence emanating from her down into the earth leaving the surrounding environment clean and pure.

In fact, because of this conducting property of metal and human body a brass rod held in the hand cannot apparently be electrified by friction. The charge is actually produced but is immediately taken away by the body to the earth. However, if the same metal rod has a glass handle or the hand has a rubber glove, the conductor metal can be electrified by friction!

Are we surprised hence, for allowing the use of metal during the period and disallowing the use of non-conductors and non-metallic things during the menses?

G) In the holy Vendidad the quantity and quality of the food to be given to the lady in menses is stated (F-XV).

Today, there are write ups about the nutrition and the menstruating lady. It is known that a lady in menses has to avoid sugary food or carbohydrates as increase of these levels may be accompanied by a degree of fluid retention as well as bring about disturbance of Calcium level in the blood which is the key factor in cramp-like pains associated with dysmenorrhea! (painful menstruation).

Last, but not least, always remember that nonsense is only when we have yet not found that view point from which it makes sense. Nonsense is something which cannot be understood by our limited five senses. Nonsense is something that does not fit into the already existing idea, theory or reality.

But, do we perceive reality? No, we do not and hence very often sense is bound to be nonsense to us. In that case, the only solution is faith.

Our religion has stood like a solid rock in this modern scientific era and passed all acid tests of science. May Dadar Ahura Mazda bless us with 'Vohu Mano' so that with full faith in our Zoroastrian religion, we carry on the rituals and our age old precious, most scientific and ultra modern religious customs for ever.

Atha Zamyat Yatha Afrinami.

'Philosophers do not carry into effect all that they teach' No; but they effect much good by their teaching, by the noble thoughts which they conceive in their minds; would, indeed, that they could act up to their talk: what could be happier than they would be? But in the meanwhile you have no right to despise good saying and hearts full of good thoughts. Men deserve praise for engaging in profitable studies, even though they stop short of producing any results.