



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Should menstrual leaves be issued in educational institutions?

FARNAZ FAWAD HASAN

The government of Kerala in India has recently been making headlines for its announcement to undertake work on introducing menstrual leaves for educational institutions in the state. The announcement came following a decision by the authority at Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) to reduce attendance requirement by two percent (down from 75 to 73) for its female students.

Menstruation, one of the most normal bodily functions, has been branded as taboo since the beginning of time. Along with cramps and spasms, the debilitating pain is accompanied by other unpleasant symptoms like nausea, discomfort, impatience, and an overall sensation of malaise. Additionally, it's worth noting that periods can change over time and with age, and many women experience fluctuation in their menstrual cycles from month to month.

People are different, and so are their bodies. Not all women have the same experience during periods. While some women experience seemingly painless periods, for others, just standing up and going about with their day can be akin to a hefty sucker punch.

Yet, there is the concern that some individuals may abuse the privilege of menstrual leaves were they to be introduced, which in turn may perpetuate sexist beliefs and attitudes. In a country where menstruation is heavily stigmatised, a gendered leave might propagate gendered stereotypes and have a detrimental effect on the wage difference.

It is important to note that other countries have already implemented "Period Leave" policies. Japan, for example, has had a "Period Leave" policy in place since 1947 as a part of the Labour Standard Act, which states that an employee can't be made to work if she requests a leave of

absence due to menstrual complications.

However, a survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan found that only 0.9 percent of menstruators requested period leave. The survey found the main reasons for this to be the absence of period leave in employment regulations, low usage among co-workers, and discomfort in discussing menstruation with male managers. These findings highlight the need for clear policies and open communication to increase the use of period leaves.

Most educational institutions in Bangladesh have rigorous attendance policies, and many do not consider menstruation to be an acceptable excuse for missing classes. Women have been indoctrinated to put up with the discomfort associated with their periods, so they don't think it is okay to skip work or school unless there is a serious medical emergency.

By gaining an understanding of the current situation and barriers surrounding period leave, steps can be taken to address the social stigma attached to menstruation. It is necessary to start implementing this in schools, especially since menstruation is often thought to be dirty and embarrassing due to the lack of proper sex education. Introducing menstrual leaves in schools may encourage young girls to gain knowledge and understanding of how to properly manage and navigate through their periods more comfortably.

The topic of period leave has sparked both arguments for and against it. Although implementing this will not fully bridge the equality gap, it is worth a shot to normalise and re-evaluate the stigma surrounding this topic.

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Let's not interpret old media through a modern lens

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It is easy to scoff at the characters of a Jane Austen novel who happen to be whiling away their time drinking tea and taking care of estates in this day and age. Many people refuse to read Hemingway because of his portrayal of women as crude imaginings of what men believe women should be like. It is rare to find a Hitchcock film that does not show its female lead as being entirely encapsulated in the world of the male lead. However, because of these shortcomings, which are visible to us largely due to our modern sensibilities, should these works of art be abandoned altogether?

A book written in the 1800s or a movie from the 1940s will obviously depict things differently as opposed to how we might perceive them in today's context. But this does not mean that such forms of media are beneath being a source of entertainment for us.

If we hold our modern perspective and our sociocultural beliefs to the same rigorous standards, it is almost certain that we would come to hate every product of the past. Even if we could somehow get past these inhibitions, our discomfort regarding the outdated ways of thinking means that its value will depreciate for us. Characters, incidents, and the product itself will mean less to the audience. It will seem much shallower than it really is.



DESIGN: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

Historical backdrop and our understanding of the relevant historical backdrop are important when we try to study a material or even enjoy it. Jane Austen wrote about the English society as she witnessed it around her during that period. Hemingway's perspective on women was coloured by his own personal experiences. And while his view of them, in my opinion, should not be lauded, it resonated with the sentiments of the majority during that period of time, leading him to attain the recognition that he did.

Such beliefs aligned with the rest of society at the time and were deemed acceptable. It is only through understanding the society's views during that period that we can enjoy these forms of media. Although, we might do so with a grain of salt. Furthermore, through our consumption, we can receive a better idea of the evolution of sociocultural dynamics and popular media itself.

However, this does not mean we should not question the dubious qualities of art from the past. It is important that it is made very clear that certain practices are outdated.

Studying the impact of old media requires sincerity and the ability to distinguish between what was widely prevalent at the time of inception of said media, and what is widely prevalent today. The interpretation of old material, thus, presents a fallacy of sorts. On one hand, lies our instinct to disregard anything that goes against our beliefs, and on the other, is the want to do justice by the material. And the line between the two is very thin.

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