

## AN INSIGHT INTO SUSTAINABLE MENSTRUATION

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### ABSTRACT

*As the stigma around menstruation is slowly, but undoubtedly, decreasing, a lot of menstruators today have turned towards using sustainable menstrual products in India. But as we move forward, a lot of new misconceptions with respect to menstrual products have started arising. Most of these misbeliefs shun other menstrual products that are in fact healthier for the body as well as the environment, and they highlight plastic pads as the only period product that is practical.*

As the stigma around menstruation is slowly, but undoubtedly, decreasing, a lot of menstruators today have turned towards using sustainable menstrual products in India. But as we move forward, a lot of new misconceptions with respect to menstrual products have started arising. Most of these misbeliefs shun other menstrual products that are in fact healthier for the body as well as the environment, and they highlight plastic pads as the only period product that is practical.

Statistically, one disposable pad is made up of ninety percent plastic, which is equivalent to almost four plastic bags. One menstruator uses 15-20 pads per month on average, maybe more if their flow is heavy. This means the waste is equal to a hundred plastic bags or more per month by just one menstruator! Every month, sanitary pads equivalent to 180 billion plastic bags are released into the environment. Besides, when it comes to the bodily impact, disposable pads are not only extremely itchy and uncomfortable, but they also often cause rashes or infections due to the amount of plastic and chemicals laced into them.

There are many reasons why disposable pads are preferred over sustainable period products like menstrual cups or cloth pads. Manufacturing companies mostly lean towards disposable pads as it is a more commercial product and has guaranteed sales throughout the year. Due to this, they are also very heavily advertised, thus, inclining major consumer demand toward disposable pads. Another barrier is that menstrual practices are passed down through generations. If one menstruator uses disposable pads, it is highly likely that they teach the same to their menstruating children or siblings.

Moreover, the stigma around menstruation makes people shy away from trying something new like reusable cloth pads or menstrual cups.

Reusable cloth pads are heavily stigmatised, as many believe it leads to infections and is unhygienic. When in reality, cloth pads are extremely comfortable and safe to use. They don't itch and are soft. High-quality cloth pads are made up of organic cotton which is safe for the environment too. The only aspect where people falter is maintenance. Cloth pads just need to be washed in the same way as underwear. Cloth pads may seem unusually expensive but are also more cost-effective in the long run than disposable pads.

Menstrual cups are mostly infamous due to the fear of an unfamiliar and unprecedented concept of inserting a device into the body (especially in a country like India with numerous taboos around the concept of virginity). But the feedback from menstrual cup users is surprisingly very optimistic, with many claiming that they don't even feel as if they are wearing or using any kind of device. Even rural menstruators have been remarkably accepting of menstrual cups. As they are subjected to quite a lot of physical labor, menstrual cups are more comfortable, and they also don't need to worry about their pad supply running out or not being available.

Menstrual cups can be used for almost eight hours at a go, and some clinical tests show that the cup can even be used for up to 24 hours without causing any issues. Additionally, one menstrual cup can last for more than 10 years. This means that every 10 years, a menstruator using a cup can save up to Rs. 52,000.

Products such as these are one of the best chances a menstruator has at reducing period waste and practicing safer, healthier, and more sustainable menstruation. However, changing traditional menstrual practices to more unconventional ones is a seismic shift, and it is recommended that every menstruator should talk about it with their gynaecologists or research a little before taking that transitional step. Comfort and convenience should always be the first priority for any menstruator and should never be suppressed under obligation, but it never hurts one to consider a change for the better of the environment and their health.