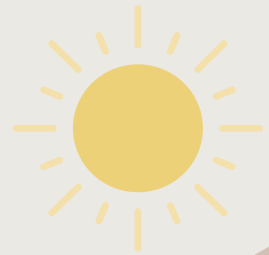


# MERI PEHLI MAHAVARI





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In a country with a population of 691 million people who do or will menstruate, menstruation in India continues to be a taboo topic, rarely discussed openly. A lack of discussion around menstruation and menstrual health and hygiene only perpetuate myths around it, and impacts the dignity and bodily integrity of menstruators. A first step towards gender equality, then, is building a safe and inclusive environment where open discussions on menstruation can occur and correct information on it can be given.

Since its inception, the Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) has been working with adolescents to foster a new generation of leadership to counter sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination. A crucial part of our work with adolescents is to demystify menstruation for youth of all genders, so that a safe and enabling environment can be created for menstruating youth.

On the occasion of World Menstrual Hygiene Day, MFF organised events in four of our field locations in Delhi-NCR on 27-28 May 2024. The events aimed to challenge menstrual taboos and break the stigma attached to menstruation.

During these events, adolescents facilitated activities that encouraged open conversations about menstruation and engage community members in learning about menstrual health.

Menstruating adolescents also reflected on their first period, illustrating their feelings and apprehensions, and the advice and help they received from others. Here are stories of their first period.

One Sunday morning, I woke up early and found my panties were wet. I cried and stayed in the bathroom for two hours out of fear. My mom knocked on the door, but I didn't respond. After a while, I went to my mom with my panties in hand. She reacted calmly, gave me a pad, and told me to change.

I didn't know how to use it and managed to figure it out myself. I wondered if I was dying and spent the day on the roof.

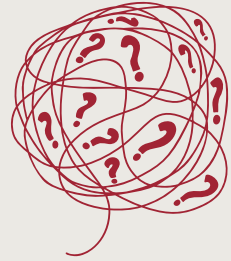
My mom didn't discuss it, and I didn't ask. The next day, I was sick and had trouble walking and talking. I gradually learned about periods from TV and mobile ads.

My family never stopped me or restricted me from anything. Now it doesn't bother me, but I still find it difficult to talk openly about this topic. I can't talk openly about it.

- AARTI







## I can never talk about periods with my father

I was in the hostel when I got my first period. I didn't know anything about it beforehand, so I was very scared and told my friend. She took me to our warden, who taught me how to use a pad.

I was 10 years old at that time. When my mom found out, she got worried. She told me that during my periods, I shouldn't pray or touch the Quran. I felt very embarrassed in front of my dad, so I shared everything with my mom instead.

Now, I don't have any problems. I've learned how to use a pad, and I'm really happy that I never experience any pain.

**-AJMIRA**



not to wash my hair



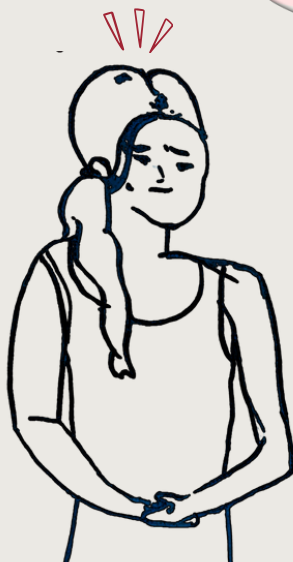
not to go to school



not to pray, as I am impure



not to talk about periods in public



**I have been told**

It was Monday, the morning of September 15th. I thought I might have gotten hurt somewhere. I checked, and then I wondered if I might be sick.

I told my mother, and she said that this is not an illness; it happens to every girl. My mother taught me how to use a pad.

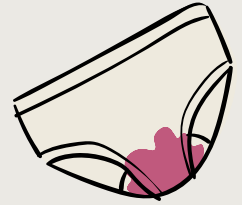
I have often been told not to pray, not to eat pickles, and not to drink milk during my period. I have tried it, but it never made any difference, and I don't believe in these things.

**-TINA**





I got my first period at school. I was very scared and didn't know what to do. I told one of my friends, but she didn't say anything. It seemed like she didn't know anything about it, so I told another friend and she informed the teacher. The teacher told me to take off my sweater and tie it around my waist, and then she allowed me to go home. While walking home, I kept worrying if anyone could tell that I was on my period. I was scared the whole way.



When I reached home, I told my friend Srabanti that I got my period and didn't have a pad, and I didn't even know how to use one. I asked her what I should do. She listened to everything and gave me a pad, then explained how to use it.

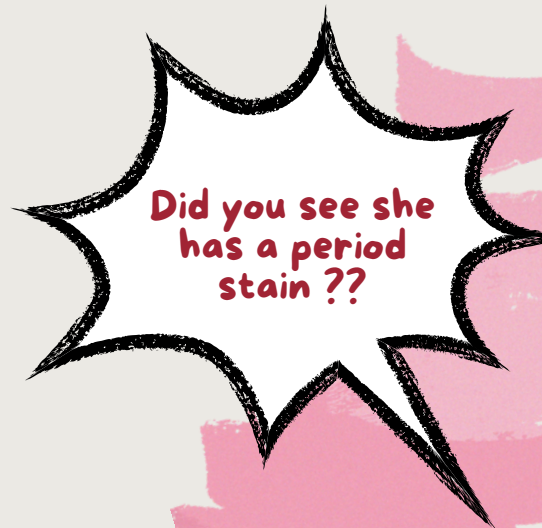
My father asked me, "Why are you home so early today?" I told him that I had a headache, so I came home early, because I didn't know how to tell him the real reason. I was 12 years old when I got my first period. When I have stomach cramps, I like to eat chocolate.

Oh no!  
every one is  
looking at me



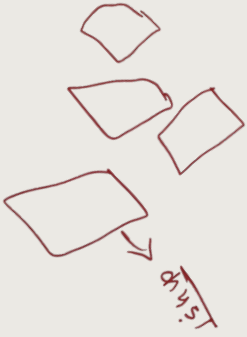
-RITA

Did you see she  
has a period  
stain ??





I couldn't manage my periods. There would be stains on my clothes repeatedly, and I had to change them every time. It was very irritating.



When my periods started, my mother began treating me differently. She said, "Now you have grown up, don't go outside, and don't wear short clothes."

During my periods, I felt very embarrassed to face anyone or do anything. It's been four years since I started having periods. I can manage them now, and I can openly talk about periods. I go out of the house and wear the clothes I like.

**-DEEPIKA**



**Oh no!!  
Now I have to stay  
at home for seven  
days.**





Mummy said it's normal



When I got my period for the first time, I was 10 years old.

When I went to bathe, I was very scared about what had happened. I told my mother, and she said there's nothing to be afraid of; it's normal. My mother explained how to use a pad.

- SONIA



Sorry God, I didn't  
listen to my mother  
and ate pickle,  
please forgive me!



When I got my first period, I told my grandmother. She explained to me that I am old enough now, which is why I am getting periods.

My grandmother told me not to go near God or touch anything related to God, and definitely not to eat sour foods. She said there is no need to be too scared; you will have stomach pain, but don't be afraid. Eat warm foods and take care of yourself.



-SHRABANTI

East Healthy







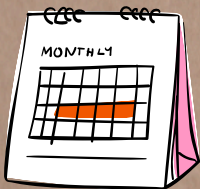
Maa said,  
I am growing,  
but it's painful



When I got my first period, I didn't understand why blood was coming from between my legs. I thought I had a cut down there, but the bleeding wouldn't stop. I told my mother, and she said, "You've grown up now, and you're having your period. Every girl experiences this." Then she gave me a pad and taught me how to use it.

But I was in a lot of pain. I was 13 years old, and I remember it was May 30, 2020.

When I got my period, my mother told me not to go to the temple, not to touch anything in the temple, not to touch the pickle jar, and she also didn't allow me to go out. But I didn't like all of this, and it made me very angry. However, over time, I realised that these beliefs are wrong.



- KHUSHBOO

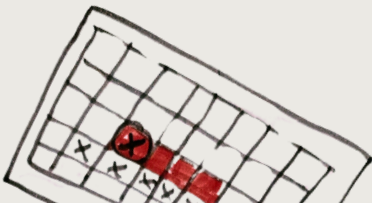


How will I go out with my sticky hair as, I haven't washed them for seven days due to menstruation.

March 25, 2019, was the worst day - I got my periods. I had no idea when it happened or how it happened. I couldn't understand how this thing happened to me. When I woke up in the morning and went to the bathroom, I saw something red. I thought something must have happened. Later, when I went to take a bath, I saw the same red thing again. I was very scared.

Even though I already knew about periods, I was still scared. After taking a bath, I told my mother, 'Look, something red is coming out.' My mother was surprised; I don't know why. Then she taught me how to use a pad and told me not to wash my hair until my periods were over and not to go to the temple.

-KALYANI





I got my first period on during the summer holidays. I was at my aunt's house, and I had gone to the washroom to take a bath. I started feeling strange and a little pain began. I wondered why I was suddenly feeling this way. I thought maybe I had a fever, which was causing this feeling. But after a while, I started feeling very weak.

After I finished bathing and went to change, I saw that I was bleeding. I thought about it for a moment and then went to my younger aunt because she's like a friend to me.

She taught me how to use a pad and explained that I should stay away from boys and not eat or touch pickles. I asked why, and she just said, "Just don't do these things." Since then, I stopped going out of the house, but it made me feel bad because I couldn't meet anyone. At first, I felt very embarrassed and had a lot of pain, but now I don't have any issues.

-YASMIN



When I first got my period, I was alone at home and didn't know what was happening. I called my mother, and when she came home, I showed her, but I didn't have pain that day.

The next day, I had a lot of pain and felt unwell for a month. My mother told me not to eat pickles, go to the temple, or wash my hair, and I also missed school due to feeling very sick and vomiting. She insisted I stay home during my period.

-MOHINI



## Martha Farrell Foundation

Founded in 2016, the Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) is committed to creating a gender-just society by eliminating sexual and gender-based violence.

MFF envisions a world in which all formal and informal learning and working spaces are safe and gender equitable.

MFF works towards ensuring that all individuals feel safe and dignified in their learning and working spaces. We do this through:

Education: Co-design learning programs to inform, make aware and empower individuals and institutions on safety and gender equity

Research: Develop new knowledge on gender equity and the prevention of gender-based violence in learning and working environments

Advocacy: Influence diverse stakeholders to design and implement effective policies, institutional practices and laws

An important aspect of our work has been with adolescents, harnessing their potential to become leaders of change to discover their inner potential, learning skills, knowledge and develop their individual and collective voice and agency, to take collective action to counter sexual and gender-based violence in their lives.





End the stigma  
Stop the shaming

