

Menstruation in Assam: Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract:

Assam, being the land of the bleeding goddess Kamakhya, holds a special scope for the researchers to look into different aspects of menstruation; people's perception towards it, associated beliefs and behaviours, such as prohibitions in some works to dos along with their reasons and so on. Menstruation although is a very much needed process for continuation of life, it is not at all considered to be a pure and pious phenomenon. Mother deity is worshipped in this *kshetra* (land) but simultaneously, physical distancing with menstruating women is practiced. Therefore it is necessary to get people's perception regarding this biological phenomenon. The process of bleeding every month is not only looked down upon by the males but also by the females who are subjected to go through it.

Keywords: *menstruation, practice, taboo, ritual, purity, pollution.*

Introduction:

The menstrual cycle is a natural monthly process from puberty to menopause affecting the female reproductive system. The length of the cycle varies, which can affect fertility. (Thiyagarajan, *et al.* 2024). One of the most important milestones in a female's life is her first period, or menarche, which marks the beginning of menstruation and this regular bleeding process continues till menopause. In India, girls typically get their first period between ages 10 and 16 and the average age for a girl to start menstruating is 13.5 years. Menopause, among Indian women on average, begins around the age of 51 (Sonowal, *et al* 2021).

Menstruation has been a mystery in human history, with women considered ritually impure and dangerous during this time (Delfin, *et al* 2017). In India and Assam, menstrual taboos silence girls from discussing serious health issues, forcing them to endure suffering alone. Menstruating women face widespread discrimination, viewing them as "impure" and "dirty." This stigma leads to their exclusion from various aspects of life, including kitchens, temples, shrines, and social and religious gatherings (Das, 2008, 2015; Patar, 2019). Most world religions, except Sikhism, have historically associated menstruation with impurity and uncleanness. These negative attitudes persist today, impacting reproductive health, psycho-social well-being, and participation in outside world activities

(Delfin, *et al* 2017). In recent history, there was a counter movement for defying these. The Sabarimala Women Entry movement in India in 2019 aimed to challenge menstrual taboos in religious places of worship. The Supreme Court lifted a ban on menstruating women entering the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala, sparking controversy with feminist activists and religious institutions. The UDF government has defended the right to practice religion for these devotees.

Trends of research:

Menstruation studies can be broadly categorized into two research approaches. The first approach investigates menstrual knowledge, hygiene and health within diverse cultural and socioeconomic settings (Baishya, 2017; Gopee, 2024). In contrast, the second approach delves into the intricate relationships between menstruation, ritual impurity, and religious prescriptions. This paper adopts the latter approach, examining the perceptions and experiences of Assamese women pilgrims visiting the Kamakhya temple, where they seek the Goddess's intervention, and solace in addressing the psycho-social challenges posed by the attainment of puberty and problems arising out of menstruations. In Assamese, attainment of puberty by girls is commonly referred to as *dangor howa* (to grow big) or *tuloni howa* (to rise socially) while menstruation is termed variously as *cuva* (to become ritually impure), *nowara howa* (unable to perform) and *kaxeria howa* (to become marginalized or sidelined).

Significantly, scholars like Sridhar (2017) and Dunnavant, *et al* (2017) after exploring menstrual concepts in various socio-religious traditions, including Indic, ancient, and Abrahamic religions have shown that although the themes of impurity and sacralise, are often seen as opposites are in reality seen as complementary in many religions including Indian and pre-Christian polytheistic cultures. This is true for Assamese Hindu society, where puberty rituals for a young adolescent girl were practiced mostly by the upper caste Brahmins and Kayastha communities in the past (Barua, 1999[1892]; Sarma, 1989) are now being popularly practiced by different castes lower in ritual status (Das, 2025).

Rationale:

In the context of Assamese society, there is a striking paradox. The *Ambubachi* festival (June 22-26) celebrates Goddess Kamakhya's menstrual cycle, symbolized by the Brahmaputra River's reddish waters during monsoon. This paradox highlights the contradictory attitudes towards menstruation, where a woman's menstrual blood is often stigmatized, yet the sacred garments worn by the Goddess, *angadhak* and *angabastro*, are revered as symbols of fertility and protection against evil (Kamat and Tharakan, 2021).

Besides, this dichotomy raises a poignant question, why is menstruation celebrated as a sacred and positive phenomenon in the context of goddess worship, yet simultaneously stigmatized and isolated in the everyday lives of women? The *Ambubachi* festival at the Kamakhya temple attracts devotees

from across India, each carrying unique wishes and problems they seek to resolve through Mother Goddess Kamakhya's blessings. Given the festival's focus on menstruation, this paper explores the experiences and concerns of devotees who visit Kamakhya, particularly during *Ambubachi*, with the hope of receiving divine interventions on problems arising out of their menstrual cycles.

Objectives:

The main focus of the paper is as follows:

- i. Identify the menstrual-related problems that women seek to resolve through the Goddess's intervention.
- ii. Locate the contemporary status of Assamese magico-religious beliefs, and practices connected with menstruation.
- iii. To locate the significance of a girl's puberty ritual called *tulonibiya* or *santi biya* in the changing milieu of contemporary Assamese Hindu society

Background and Research Process:

The subject matter of this research paper evolved concurrently with the first author's PhD research on various dimensions of the Kamakhya temple and its rituals and religious performances. Data for the present paper was collected between 2021 and 2022 during the *Ambubachi melas*. Initially, the first author collected data on the wishes that devotees, irrespective of gender and marital status, sought to be fulfilled by seeking the blessings of the Kamakhya Devi which revealed notable gender differences between socially expected wishes for men and those specific to women, with most wishes centring around life cycle events, such as, pregnancy, childbirth, the birth of a male child, barrenness, finding suitable marriage partners, besides other common issues like health, jobs, prosperity in business and life, family and business-related court cases, to counter black magic, redemption for breaking taboos, or death. However, wishes seeking divine interventions for problems like delayed or non-occurrence of puberty (or primary amenorrhea when a woman has not had her first period by the age of 16), and other menstruation related problems and health issues like PCOs were not expressed openly by the women devotees at first. These were revealed much later with caution. It seemed that cases of secondary amenorrhea were not taken seriously, particularly after the birth of a child. Taking a cue from such information, the present paper tried exploring the experiences and concerns of women devotees who visit Kamakhya, particularly during *Ambubachi*, with wishes related to their menstrual cycles.

Samples and tools of data collection:

The *Ambubachi Mela*, a three-day annual festival, unfolds in June, attracting devotees from far and wide, many of whom arrive before the official commencement. To capture the essence of the event, fieldwork was conducted for five days in 2021 and 2022, starting a day before the *Mela* (fair) began and ending a day, after its formal conclusion during the *Ambubachi* fair. Following the collection of data on the wish patterns of male and female pilgrims, in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 120 Assamese women devotees, representing both rural and urban backgrounds, using a standardized interview schedule. Non-Assamese devotees were not covered. After further refinement, a total of 47 devotees were excluded from the study due to various reasons, including failure to return for a second interview (17), unwillingness to participate (23), physical disability (4), and young age (3), leaving 73 devotees in the list. It was decided to take 50 percent of the devotees from the first three categories and thereafter 65 percent from the 4th category of devotees randomly. The sample for the study finally emerged as below:

Table 1: Preliminary Scrutiny and Sample Size

Sl. no.	Categories of pilgrims		
		Original List	Sample of participants N=43 (%)
1	Aged women above age 45	08	04 (09.30)
2	Newly married	10	05 (11.63)
3	Adult women between 25-45	12	06 (13.96)
4	Girls between 15-25 years	43	28 (65.12)
	Total	73	43 (100.00)

It may be observed that the proportion of unmarried girls between ages 15-25 years is maximum (65.12%); followed by adult women between 25-45 years (13.95%); newly married couples (11.63%); while the lowest proportion is represented by aged women above age 45 years.

In the present work, the term participant is used for the Assamese devotees who have come to offer prayer seeking divine blessings and intervention regarding their menstruation-related problems. These women participants generally come with their families, mostly mothers.

Tools of data collection:

A comprehensive interview schedule, cum guide, served as the primary tool for data collection. To ensure reliable and nuanced data, standard anthropological tools incorporating structured and unstructured

interviews, and case studies, tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the participants were used. Data verification was conducted through telephone and personal follow-ups.

Findings:

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants:

Age Structure: This sample is distinct in that it encompasses a wide age range, spanning from 12 to 50 years old, effectively capturing the experiences of women from the onset of puberty to the potential onset of menopause.

Table 2: Age Structure of the Participants

Age Range (in years)	Nos of Participants	PC
12-20	22	51.16
20-30	14	32.56
30-40	03	06.98
40-50 and above	04	09.30
Total	43	100.00

The majority of participants (51.16%) fell within the 12-20 age range, closely followed by 32.56% in the 20-30 age range. Collectively, these two age groups accounted for 83.72% of the total sample.

Case 1: Youngest participant Priyanka Das, a 12-year-old participant studying in class V, came from a rural area near Mangaldoi, did not attain her puberty at the time of data collection. But her mother had been dreaming repeatedly that Ma Kamakhya told her to visit *Ambubaci mela* together with her daughter before she attained puberty. Their family astrologer prompted the parents to hurry and seek blessings of the great Goddess before her puberty.

Case 2 : Moina Boro 44 year old married participant, who attained puberty at the age of 17, but her periods were always irregular. Her menstrual cycle was very erratic and painful. She was married at the age of 29 but was unable to conceive until she was 37 years old. She often faked having periods to avoid stigmatization due to her irregular menses. Hers was a joint family where her two sisters-in-law (husband's brother's wife) were all having regular menses. When she was unable to conceive, her husband took her to a fertility clinic, and there he came to know about her condition. He was furious at her charade and took her to Ma Kamakhya for a special puja after *Ambubachi*. On the day of *Ambubachi Mela*, she promised her husband that she would not lie about her periods. She collected the red-coloured holy cloth from *Ambubachi Mela* and placed it at the family altar. Two months after visiting *Ambubachi Mela*, she had conceived, and a son was born in due course. After two years, a girl was also born. Since the birth of her son, she has been attending *Ambubachi mela* regularly so that she would continue to have her regular menses. Presently, at the age of 44 years, she is facing apprehension about her approaching menopause. She fears that once her monthly periods stops, she will not be loved by her husband but also lose the blessings of Ma Kamakhya. Therefore, she now prays to Ma Kamakhya, so that her menopause will be delayed as far as possible.

Rural-urban composition:

It may be mentioned here that for categorization, participants' families were classified as urban if they had resided in towns or cities for at least three generations, regardless of their current rural residence for work-related purposes. Conversely, participants who had recently migrated from rural areas to urban centres were categorized as rural.

Table 3: Rural-Urban Background of the Participants

Locality	No.s of Participants	PC
Rural	17	39.53
Urban	26	60.47
Total	43	100.00

The results showed that 39.53% of the participants hailed from rural areas, while 60.47% were from different urban areas of Assam including Guwahati. The difference between rural and urban participants may be attributed to sampling fluctuations. Moreover, ten participants are from Guwahati.

Case 3: Mrs Lily Pator, a 42 year old married participant from a rural area of Morigaon district came to get relief from her severe menstrual cramps and pains which she developed after the birth of her two sons aged 6 and 3 years.

As per the prediction of her family medicine man, she has been on the target of some neighbours, who were practicing black magic. She had visited a number of local shrines but to no avail. Therefore, on the advice of the local medicine man she has come in search of a Khasia magician who generally visits *Ambubaci mela* regularly. She had already contacted him. The magician will perform a ritual after the Mela is over. But gynaecological examination revealed that she had developed a bulky uterus for which hysterectomy was suggested. But she wanted to avoid surgery and therefore had come to seek some divine remedy.

Puberty status of the participants:

At the time of the survey, 69.77% of the participants had already reached puberty, whereas 25.58% had not yet attained puberty. Notably, the latter group falls within the typical age range for the start of puberty.

Table 4: Puberty Status of the Participants

Whether Attained Puberty	Nos of Participants	PC
Already attained	37	86.04
Yet to attain	04	9.30
Others	02	4.65
Total	43	100.00

The two participants categorized as other” exceeded the typical age range for puberty onset, with one being 26 years old and the other 27 years old.

Marital status of the Participants:

A significant majority of the participants (60.47%) were unmarried. This was largely due to the presence of a substantial number of younger devotees in the sample. The percentage of unmarried participants is 34.88. There were a few participants in the sample who were separated or divorced.

Table 5: Marital Status of the Participants

Marital Status as on date of Interview	Nos of Participants	PC
Married	15	34.88
Unmarried	26	60.47
Separated/ Divorcee	02	04.65
Total	43	100.00

This demographic composition is advantageous for our study, as it aims to explore the socio-cultural nuances associated with various stages of the menstrual cycle, and it increases the likelihood of gathering more comprehensive information.

Participants’ visit to Kamakhya:

The participants were asked about their total number of visit to Kamakhya and the purposes of such visits. The responses are scrutinized and presented below:

Table-6: Number of times the Participants Visited Kamakhya

No of Times visited	Nos of Participants				Grand total	
	Attained Puberty	PC	Yet to Attained Puberty	PC	Total	PC
01	09	24.32	03	50.00	12	27.91
02	13	35.13	01	16.67	14	32.55
03	07	18.92	02	33.33	09	20.93
05	08	21.62	-	-	08	18.60
Total	37	100.00	06	100.00	43	100.00

Table 6 shows that eight participants visited Kamakhya as many as 5 times along with their parents and all of them attained puberty. The majority of the participants made 2 visits (32.55%) followed by

one visit (27.91%) by 12 participants and three visits by 9 (20.93%) participants. It may be observed from the table that among those who are yet to attain puberty 50 percent of them have visited the Dham once followed by 33.33 percent who visited three times.

Motivations and Mentors:

Table-7: Motivations and Mentors: Who Advised Participants to Visit Kamakhya Dham on Ambubacimela

The persons who advised participants to visit Kamakhya	No.s of Participants	PC
Local Baba/ sanyasi	05	11.63
Dream	04	09.30
Family Astrologer	18	41.86
Family Friends/ Relatives/ neighbours	11	25.58
School Teacher	02	04.65
On our own	03	06.98
Total	43	100.00

The primary motivation for visiting Kamakhya Dham, cited by 41.86% of participants, was to seek the goddess's blessings following advice from family astrologers. Recommendations from relatives, neighbours, and family friends were the second most common motivation (25.58%). Additionally, 11.63% of participants credited local spiritual leaders, such as, *Babas* or *Sanyasis*, for inspiring their visit while 9.30% were inspired by dreams which prompted them to visit Kamakhya. Many believe that offering puja immediately after *Ambubaci* yields miraculous results, drawing devotees to the temple during this time and creating a surge of activity upon the reopening of the temple doors on *Ambubaci Nibritti*.

Reasons for Visiting Kamakhya during Ambubachi:

The participants disclosed four types of problems for which they visited Kamakhya and were praying for a divine solution

Table 8: Problems of the participants

Sl No	Initial Problem	Nos of Participants	PC
1	Non-occurrence of menarche	19	44. 18
2	For regular menstruation/ health issues like PCOS of the unmarried daughter	15	34.88
3	Psychological Trauma	06	13.95
4	Others (evil eye, infringement of taboos, black magic)	05	11.62
	Total	43	100.00

It may be observed that as high as 44.18 percent of participants have come to seek blessings from Mother Goddess, so that they may attain menarche. In Assamese Hindu society, the attainment of puberty is often celebrated as a life-cycle rite. It has become much more popular in contemporary rural and urban spaces which the parents tend to celebrate with much pomp and gaiety spending huge sums of money. Besides, the traditional objective of observing *tulonibiya* of marking the womanhood of their daughters and parents; today they have another motive behind it. They fear that in the contemporary complex situation, the parents fear that their daughters may elope without a formal wedding ceremony. Therefore, the parents prioritise on observing *tulonibiya* even if it means incurring significant expenses or debt.

It seems the mela attracted a large number of young unmarried participants who came with the hope of getting married soon. However, a number of these young participants have not attained puberty or have some other menstruation related issues that have come in the way of getting married.

Case 4: Indrani, an unmarried 18 year old participant from a rural area of Jorhat, has an affair with a local boy who was her classmate since their high school days. As she has not attained puberty to date her *tuloni* is still to be held. In a rural area such information becomes a public affair. She is facing problems from the boy's side.

All her peers and even her younger sister has attained puberty and in all their *tulonibiya* she had participated in a folk practice of holding a sacred bundle called *konai*, consisting of figs or betelnut, whichever is available along with a few beads of gold and ruby on a strand of necklace. It is believed that those young girls who hold it on their lap will be attaining puberty soon. On advice of her aunt, she also slept with her sister while having her periods. But in Indrani's case, these were not helpful. Her family has consulted both allopathic and homeopathic medical practitioners. She is in tremendous psychological trauma. On the advice of a local astrologer, she has come to seek blessings from Ma Kamakhya

Case 5: Ms. Meena Devi, a 36-year-old unmarried lady, disclosed that she attained puberty at the age of 17 years. All her classmates and cousins were having their periods regularly, including even her own younger sister. This put immense stress on her and her family. Everyone; friends, relatives, and neighbours, was putting mental pressure on her and her family. Everyone was interested in why she was late in having her periods. Her mother took her to a gynaecologist, who diagnosed it as dysmenorrhoea and gave her medicines.

However, her grandmother arranged a special worship at Kamakhya dham. After the first worship, she was undergoing regular fasting on Mondays and Fridays for one year. She attained her menarche a few days after her 17th birthday. At present, she is working as a teacher in primary school. She has been visiting Kamakhya on *Ambubachi* regularly since then.

Case 6: Mridusmita Das, 26-year-old unmarried participant has been visiting Kamakhya for the last 5 years as she has not attained puberty. At first, the participant only told about her irregular periods and the presence of uterine fibroids. However, her mother secretly confided to the researcher that Mridusmita has underdeveloped genitals since her birth and has hormonal problems, which she does not want to disclose openly. At present Mridusmita is working at a private bank in Guwahati. Her

mother is worried about her daughter and is consulting medical and magico-religious practitioners at the same time. A visit to Kamakhya during *ambuvachi* was suggested by a local medicine man six years ago.

Case 7: Karishma Saikia a 16-year-old participant from Lakhimpur is having tremendous social and psychological pressure as most of her peers as well as her younger sister have already attained puberty. She has performed many magico-religious practices including holding the *konai* of all the recently held puberty rituals called *tuloni*. To explain what a *konai* is, her mother described the details of a *tulonibiya* or puberty ritual among Assamese Hindu families, which defines the rules, prescriptions, and taboos related to menarche and monthly menses, is presented here.

The findings of the study reveal a complex intertwining of psycho-social and health issues arising out of menstruation-related problems of Assamese women pilgrims who visited *Ambubachi* during 2021-2022. No doubt, late or non-occurrence of puberty is a matter of worry for the parents for the health status of their daughters. However, it is the non-performance of the puberty ritual *tuloni* that brings embarrassment to the family and the girl. In villages and certain older urban neighbourhoods, people know each other quite intimately. Therefore non-performance of such rites attracts social attention. Similarly, late menarche also causes awkwardness amongst peer groups of young girls. Besides, various folk beliefs and folk treatments related to irregular menstruation are provided within the *tuloni* ritual. A brief description of the *tuloni* ritual was gathered from the participants from different regions of Assam.

In the past, when pre-puberty marriage was in vogue, this puberty ritual was part of the wider marriage ritual among the higher castes like the Brahmana and Kayastha. After the first marriage rite, the child bride was ceremoniously taken by the groom's party for a few hours to the groom's house and again brought back to her parent's house where she was allowed to stay till she attained puberty. This practice, known as *ghar -gachakowa* (stepping into the husband's house) is still practiced in a modified form in connection with contemporary wedding ceremonies.

During the present study, although regional variations could be noticed among the participants, the rite broadly follows a common pattern as follows.

When the first indications of menstruation were detected, the girl often confided in her mother. She was immediately confined in a secluded chamber for a period ranging from a few days to a month, as recommended by the astrologer, who decided the duration of her seclusion and vows (*vrata*) depending on the timing of the first menstruation. After the proper period of seclusion (often seven days), the girl was brought out and ceremonially washed to the accompaniment of songs performed by the gathering womenfolk of the village/ neighbourhood.

In some areas, a bundle containing seven wild figs and a few coral and gold beads fastened together in a piece of cloth is made. If figs were not available, a few betel nuts or branches of pomegranate were used. This bundle called *Konaai* (may be the corrupt form of the colloquial and popular Assamese

name *Kanai* of boy Krishna), symbolizing a male child, is placed on the lap of the girl who was ceremonially bathed and was made to sit in an assembly of female relatives and neighbours. She gives it over to her mother, or, to some other respectable female relations, who delivers it to another. In this manner, all the females present receive the *Kanai* in their arms by turns, and in doing so, each one pays some money, which becomes the exclusive property of the girl. The ceremony concludes with a reception provided for the guests by the girl's guardians. The bundle or the *konai* is kept carefully after the ritual is over. In the past, the *konai* was kept safe until the *santibiya*, (sprinkling ceremony). The ceremony takes place at a time, when the groom comes to take the bride to her new home.

However, it is also believed that a prepubescent girl may attain early puberty by holding the *konai* of another girl. There is another magico-religious belief that a girl who is late in having her monthly period is often asked to sleep with a currently menstruating girl. This may be an instance of contagious magical belief.

Tulonibiya is still quite popular in many rural and urban households while going for much pomp and extravaganza as compared to yester years. This, according to many older participants, is due to a feeling of insecurity amongst parents regarding the possibility of holding a proper marriage ceremony in the future. For many parents, the future is full of uncertainty as the cases of love affairs and elopement are on the rise. Such rising popularity of publicly highlighting menarche leads to much embarrassment for those who are suffering from primary and/or secondary amenorrhea.

According to traditional Assamese beliefs, the time of a girl's first menstruation influences her personality and fate. Astrological readings classify pubescent girls into a few categories based on their time of attaining puberty (Das, 2008). These are as follows:

Padmini Kanya: A girl who menstruates at dawn is thought to lead a serene existence.

Siprani Kanya: Menstruation between 9 a.m. and noon denotes a naughty and mischievous nature.

Ugro Kanya: Afternoon menstruation represents fury and a quick temper.

Hostini Kanya: Evening menstruation is regarded the most difficult, as stress and strain can lead to irritation.

Penance and Fasting:

Astrologers suggest penances and fasting to help girls overcome any impediments in their marriages. Fasting lasts from one week to a year, depending on the girl's *jog* or fate and the timing of her first menstruation.

Taboos :

The life of a girl after attaining puberty seems to be full of restrictions and taboos that continue for the rest of their life. These include not going to school, not sleeping in bed but may sleep in a separate cot or room, having only vegetarian food, avoiding meat and eggs; not attending marriage or other sacred

ceremonies; not entering the kitchen, and using kitchen utensils; among countless others. On the third day of each monthly cycle, a ceremonial bath including a hair wash is mandatory.

In the book, *Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Turner, 1967: 93- 110) anthropologist Victor Turner studied female puberty customs as part of *rites de passage*. These rituals symbolize a girl's passage into womanhood representing a significant turning point in her life. Female puberty rites often include ceremonies, rituals, and educational elements aimed at preparing girls for their new duties, while being culturally specific. All the three phases mentioned by Turner (1967) could be observed in respect to Assamese *tulonibiya*. *Tulonibiya* presents as a classic example of Turner's three phases of rites-de-passage. These are as follows:

- i. Separation: in which the girl is disengaged from her early years. She achieved family relationships.
- ii. Liminality: the period of transition in which the girl is neither a child nor a woman.
- iii. Reintegration: is when the girl is reintroduced as a lady into the society

Conclusion:

The present paper reveals certain inconsistencies in the lives of Assamese women who have come to seek divine blessings from Mother Goddess Kamakhya to resolve their problems related to their non-commencement or irregular menstrual cycles leading sometimes to major health issues as well as socio-psychological pressures. In Assamese culture, puberty is a significant milestone that marks a girl's shift to fertility. However, this milestone is inextricably linked to the ingrained patriarchy that pervades daily life. Women, in particular, play an important role in maintaining these societal standards, frequently indirectly reinforcing current power dynamics. For pre-pubescent girls, this tacit expectation can cause emotions of guilt and obligation. As a result, the onset of menarche provides a sense of comfort by validating their femininity and fertility. Simultaneously, the drive to attain menarche becomes a multidimensional force, influencing young females on many levels and for a variety of causes.

The impacts of problems arising out of establishing their femininity, the participants have sought diverse parallel solutions from allopath, homeopathy, magic, home remedies and seeking the religious path by coming to the Goddess. Goddess Kamakhya is like their own mother who also has Her celestial annual menstruation. The pieces of crimson cloth soaked in her menstrual blood as a holy symbol of Her powers which the pilgrims carry back with them gives them hope and confidence to continue their daily lives with their own challenges.

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