

Book Review

Mahavari Swasthy: Aao Apne Shareer Ko Jaane

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Introduction

Every student, teacher, and parent who is keen to be more aware of female health and the reproductive system should read this book *Mahavari Swasthy: aao apne shareer ko jaane* at least once, especially children who are going through their puberty period. The book is written by two authors, Madhu Kushwaha and Aabha Maurya, and was published in 2022 by Manda Publishers, Delhi. The cover is designed by Tanmay Raj Anand and Tanaya.

Mahavari Swasthy: aao apne shareer ko jaane is a book written in the Hindi language for adolescent children (11-13 years). Menstruation is a natural biological process, but in our society, it is still stigmatized as a taboo topic to be discussed openly. This taboo affects the self-image and mental health of children who menstruate in a negative way. Especially when they are facing some problems related to menstruation, they feel afraid to talk about it. Menstruation education is mostly an avoided topic in school subjects, and very few educational boards discuss it in their textbook openly. Considering the needs of adolescent children, the authors have tried to shed light on the topic through three chapters: the first provides factual knowledge about menstruation, the second focuses on menstrual management, and the third aims to debunk the misconceptions related to menstruation. The book begins with a situation where a girl sees a sanitary pad advertisement, which makes her curious about what it is. Later, at school, a member of an NGO addresses the students' questions

and discusses various topics related to menstruation. In the very first chapter that includes growth and various glands and their impact on the body, the difference between puberty and adolescence, the ovulation process, anatomical description and even male reproductive organs. In the second chapter, the conversation moves toward menstrual management. It discusses not only the use of sanitary pads but also tampons, menstrual cups, hygienic practices, dietary habits, and other essential measures that menstruating individuals should follow. The third chapter focuses on debunking myths and misconceptions, such as whether menstrual blood is impure, resistance to doing puja, and taboos like avoiding temple visits or not touching holy basil (Tulsi) during periods. All these misconceptions are addressed and clarified in this chapter.

The readers, especially those who menstruate, can relate to how female-bodied individuals experience the lifelong burden of taboos and the stigma of impurity. The authors have used several illustrations to portray factual knowledge and common misconceptions. Although the story initially begins within a family setting, it later shifts to a school environment where the questions and curiosity of a girl child about her body are depicted through discussion. Many unheard and often ignored stories are expressed here. The ingrained misconceptions among students are shaped by our socialisation processes where media advertisements play a crucial role, showing blue droplets in pads, addressed in the book. Through the conversation, the book shows how the

mobility of female-bodied individuals is restricted due to biological processes, for example, being made to lie on the floor during menstruation, being restricted from participating in religious rituals or entering the kitchen, etc.

This hidden constant process of labelling female bodies as inferior leads to a deep internal question: Is there something wrong with having periods? Even today, in many parts of India, talking about menstruation remains taboo. The act of buying menstrual products wrapped in black paper is only gradually becoming normalized, yet the lingering sense of shame and impurity continues to impact the self-image of those who menstruate.

A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to get introduced to this book. That's when I truly realised how we continue to normalise misconceptions surrounding menstruation and how, even today, many of us are not fully aware of our bodies. Alongside that realisation, I would like to share a personal experience. At my educational institution, I was associated with free pad distribution initiatives taken by my guide. What I observed was that most of the girls approached secretly for the pads, only to female students, not to any

male teacher, and always in a whisper. This reflects how deeply ingrained the idea is that menstruation is something that should not be discussed openly. Sometimes, even teachers seem uncomfortable addressing the topic, as the authors also mention in the book.

Without a doubt, Mahavari Swasthy: aao apne shareer ko jaane should be considered an essential resource not just for children but also for teachers and parents. It provides factual knowledge and actively works to debunk the myths, especially for readers from the Hindi-speaking belt. Teachers and parents should take the initiative to explore this topic with children and encourage questions about their bodies. Too often, we assume there is nothing to teach about menstruation, but that is simply not true. We build our prejudices in silence. There are only a few books like this available. Another example is *A World of Equals: A Textbook on Gender* (Edited by: Susie Tharu; A. Suneetha; Uma Maheswari Bhrugubanda), which also includes a section on reproductive organs and sexuality education for young people. Books like these don't just correct misinformation; they expand our understanding and open up important conversations.