

[Menstrupedia Comic: The Friendly Guide to Periods for Girls \(2014\), by Aditi Gupta, Tuhin Paul, and Rajat Mittal](#) ^[1]

By: Santora, Emily Keywords: [Menstrupedia](#) ^[2] [educational resources](#) ^[3] [period education](#) ^[4]

Menstrupedia published the comic book *Menstrupedia Comic: The Friendly Guide to Periods for Girls*, hereafter *Menstrupedia Comic*, in July 2014 in India. Aditi Gupta, the founder of Menstrupedia and a women's health activist, wrote *Menstrupedia Comic* while studying at the National Institute of Design in Gujarat, India, in 2013. Gupta worked alongside her husband, graphic designer Tuhin Paul, who provided the illustrations for the book. According to Menstrupedia, misconceptions and taboo surrounding [menstruation](#) ^[5] in India prompted Gupta to develop the book. Specifically, in Hindu culture, women and girls may feel embarrassed to discuss their menstrual cycles openly, because [menstruation](#) ^[5] is a process that some people consider impure. Published in eleven different languages, *Menstrupedia Comic* has become an educational resource for girls around the world to learn about their menstrual cycles.

Originally, Gupta wrote the book in English, but she later published the book in Hindi and nine other languages spoken in India, as well as Nepali, Spanish, Bulgarian, and Russian. The book is intended for girls ages nine and older, serving as an easy-to-read reference guide for them to learn about menstrual cycles. As of 2019, approximately 250 schools in India utilize *Menstrupedia Comic* to teach girls about their menstrual cycles. Also, some schools in Nepal, Nigeria, and various countries throughout South America have included the book in their curricula.

Gupta and Paul wrote and illustrated the book, respectively, while studying at the National Institute of Design in Gujarat, India. According to an interview with journalist Suyin Haynes for Time magazine, they produced *Menstrupedia Comic* to challenge misconceptions and stigmas surrounding [menstruation](#) ^[5] in India. In 2013, Gupta launched the [organization](#) ^[6], Menstrupedia, during her time at the National Institute of Design to diminish such stigma. In that same article with Haynes, Gupta attributed her personal feelings of shame and embarrassment regarding [menstruation](#) ^[5] as part of her inspiration for developing the Menstrupedia [organization](#) ^[6] and the succeeding comic book of the same name. Specifically, Gupta recalled being forbidden from attending Hindu religious practices while menstruating, as Hindu culture considers [menstruation](#) ^[5] to be impure. Furthermore, Gupta credited activist Gloria Steinem's essay, "If Men Could Menstruate," as another inspiration for creating *Menstrupedia Comic*. In Steinem's essay, she details an imagined society in which [menstruation](#) ^[5] is a phenomenon specific to males rather than females, describing [menstruation](#) ^[5] in that world as something that is celebrated rather than stigmatized. Gupta stated that, upon reading Steinem's essay, she realized that girls are taught to be ashamed of their bodies. Due to prevalent misconceptions and taboos about [menstruation](#) ^[5] in India, Gupta stated that she intended for *Menstrupedia Comic* to provide girls with a way to easily learn about their menstrual cycles in a shameless and comfortable manner.

Menstrupedia Comic is a comic book that Gupta divided into four chapters with associated illustrations. In the first chapter, "Growing Up," Gupta introduces the readers to the characters Priya, Pinki, Jiya, and Mira and describes the changes that girls experience during puberty. Then, in the second chapter, "What Are Periods," Gupta explains how the menstrual cycle works and its importance to human reproduction. In the third chapter, "When is My Next Period," Gupta details how to track menstrual cycles and the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome, which refers to physical and emotional changes in the body during the days leading up to a girl's menstrual cycle. Lastly, in the fourth chapter, "Taking Care During Period," Gupta teaches girls how to use sanitary pads and practice clean hygiene during their menstrual cycles.

In the first chapter of *Menstrupedia Comic*, "Growing Up," Gupta introduces the reader to the main characters of *Menstrupedia Comic* and explains the physical and emotional changes that girls may experience during puberty. In the beginning of the comic, three girls, named Pinki, Jiya, and Mira, celebrate Pinki's ninth birthday party at her house and wait for Priya to arrive to the party. Priya is Pinki's older sister and a doctor. When Priya arrives to the party, she expresses to Pinki that she is excited to see Pinki grow up. When Jiya questions why people grow up and what causes them to grow, Priya explains the concept of puberty to the girls, which she states occurs between the ages of eight and thirteen. Priya tells the girls about the [pituitary gland](#) ^[7], which she describes as a pea-shaped gland found at the base of the brain that releases [hormones](#) ^[8], which are substances that regulate bodily functions like [menstruation](#) ^[5]. Those [hormones](#) ^[8] release into the body, which causes people to grow. Priya then describes the physical changes associated with puberty to the girls. Those physical changes include an increase in height, the appearance of acne on the skin, breast development, and hair growth in the underarm and genital regions. In addition, Priya explains the emotional changes that girls experience during puberty such as romantic feelings towards others.

Also, in the first chapter, Jiya experiences her first period. At the party, Jiya experiences a wet feeling in her underwear and excuses herself to the bathroom. In the bathroom, Jiya discovers blood in her underwear. Confused and scared, Jiya calls for

Pinki to come to her aid. Pinki is confused as to how Jiya bled in her underwear and advises Jiya to seek help from Priya, since Priya is a doctor. Pinki tells Priya of Jiya's situation, and Priya reassures Pinki that the blood in Jiya's underwear is simply her period, and then gives Jiya a sanitary pad. The next day, Priya returns to Pinki's house to teach Pinki, Jiya, and Mira about periods.

In the second chapter of *Menstrupedia Comic*, "What Are Periods," Gupta uses Priya's character to explain how the concept of [menstruation](#)^[5] relates to human reproduction. The book contains illustrations of Priya explaining to the girls that periods occur when blood is released from the [vagina](#)^[9] once a month for three to seven days. She then describes [menstruation](#)^[5] as an important step for [pregnancy](#)^[10]. Then, Priya explains that what she calls babies, which are technically called embryos or fetuses until they are born, grow in the [uterus](#)^[11], which is in the lower abdominal region of the body. Priya provides a diagram of a [uterus](#)^[11]. Priya uses the diagram to show that the [uterus](#)^[11] includes two ovaries attached on each side, and each of the ovaries contains [egg](#)^[12] cells. Priya explains that one [egg](#)^[12] cell is released from one of the woman's ovaries per month, and if the [egg](#)^[12] cell comes into contact with a male [sperm](#)^[13] cell, then the [egg](#)^[12] and [sperm](#)^[13] cells combine in order to form an embryo. Priya explains that the embryo eventually grows into a [fetus](#)^[14] within the [uterus](#)^[11].

Also, in the second chapter, Gupta utilizes Priya's character to describe the concept of [menstruation](#)^[5]. Illustrations appear alongside Priya's narration in order to help girls conceptualize how [menstruation](#)^[5] occurs within the body. First, Priya explains that the [pituitary gland](#)^[7] releases a [hormone](#)^[15] in order to cause the ovaries to release an [egg](#)^[12] cell each month, which is a process called [ovulation](#)^[16]. She tells the girls that the [ovulation](#)^[16] process only occurs in the female body. Then, Priya explains that the [egg](#)^[12] cell travels into the [uterus](#)^[11] through the fallopian tube, which is the bodily structure that connects the ovaries to the [uterus](#)^[11]. Priya further explains that the [uterus](#)^[11] prepares for the possibility of [pregnancy](#)^[10] by developing a lining of soft tissue filled with blood inside of the [uterus](#)^[11]. If the [egg](#)^[12] cell comes into contact with a [sperm](#)^[13] cell and an embryo is formed, then the lining of soft tissue inside of the [uterus](#)^[11] provides nutrients for the embryo to grow into a [fetus](#)^[14]. However, if the [egg](#)^[12] cell does not come into contact with a [sperm](#)^[13] cell, Priya explains, the lining of the soft tissue and blood is shed and expelled through the [vagina](#)^[9], a process called [menstruation](#)^[5] or a period. Priya states that [menstruation](#)^[5] typically occurs once a month, but cycles may vary in length among girls. Also, Priya tells the girls that during the first instances of [menstruation](#)^[5], the girls' experiences may be irregular as their bodies adjust. A brightly-colored, yellow box appears in the book, which advises girls to seek medical attention if their menstrual cycle stops for more than ninety days after becoming regular, as that may be a signal of complications within the body.

Also, in the second chapter of *Menstrupedia Comic*, Gupta outlines common symptoms girls experience with [menstruation](#)^[5] through Priya's character. Priya explains that pain in the abdominal region is one of the most common symptoms of [menstruation](#)^[5]. On the other hand, Priya debunks what she calls a widely-held misconception within Hindu culture concerning [menstruation](#)^[5], which states that the loss of blood through [menstruation](#)^[5] causes women to be extremely fatigued. Priya explains that the amount of blood girls lose through [menstruation](#)^[5] is a very small amount, approximating it at about two tablespoons, making extreme fatigue rare. Another yellow box appears in the book, which advises girls to seek medical attention if their menstrual cycles are heavy and cause them to change their sanitary pads every hour.

In the third chapter, "When is My Next Period," Gupta describes how to track menstrual cycles and the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome. Premenstrual syndrome is a wide set of symptoms girls and women may experience in the days leading up their period. First, Priya explains that if a girl's menstrual cycle is regular, then she can calculate the date of her next period by adding the day of her last period and the length of her usual menstrual cycle. Additionally, Priya explains that a girl may be able to further anticipate the date of her next period if she experiences symptoms of premenstrual syndrome. The book provides illustrations of the various physical and emotional symptoms associated with premenstrual syndrome, which include acne, headaches, abdominal cramps, and changes in mood.

In the final chapter of *Menstrupedia Comic*, "Taking Care During Period," Gupta explains through Priya's character menstrual hygiene management. First, Priya demonstrates that a girl may place a disposable sanitary pad inside of the underwear in order to collect menstrual blood. Then, she advises the girls to change and dispose of the sanitary pad approximately every six hours. Second, Priya explains how to use a cloth pad, which is the same as a sanitary pad, but the girls can reuse it multiple times if they wash it after every use. Third, Priya explains how a pad can be made at home if a girl is unable to afford or access either a sanitary or cloth pad.

Furthermore, Priya explains what a girl should do if she gets her first period at school and is unprepared. Priya encourages girls to seek help from and talk to their parents, female teachers, or school nurses about their menstrual cycles rather than miss school. Jiya asks Priya what would happen if she feels embarrassed about her period. In response, Priya explains that [menstruation](#)^[5] happens to most girls, and that it is nothing to be ashamed of. Throughout the final chapter, there are illustrations which demonstrate various hygiene practices such as showering once a day, using clean underwear, and changing sanitary pads regularly.

Last, at the end of the fourth chapter, Gupta addresses misconceptions and stigmas surrounding [menstruation](#)^[5]. One of the girls, Mira, asks if it is true that girls should not enter religious institutions, pray, or touch sacred objects during their menstrual cycles, citing a cultural belief that [menstruation](#)^[5] causes a woman to be impure or dirty. In response, Priya responds that [menstruation](#)^[5] is a normal human process and there is nothing impure about it. Mira reacts happily and indicates that she is not

embarrassed of her period anymore following the discussion with Priya.

Following its publication, *Menstrupedia Comic* influenced people and organizations to address the misconceptions and lack of education regarding [menstruation](#)^[5] in India. Whisper, a sanitary pad manufacturing company that is a subsidiary of the larger company, Always, and supporter of *Menstrupedia Comic*, launched a project titled Touch the Pickle. That campaign encouraged open and comfortable discussion of [menstruation](#)^[5] in India despite the widespread misconception that [menstruation](#)^[5] is impure. It was named after the misunderstanding that women and girls should not touch objects such as pickle jars during their menstrual cycles, since many people believed women to be impure during that time. That campaign influenced girls to challenge such minute misconceptions like touching pickle jars in order to help fight back against other taboos such as praying and practicing other religious activities during [menstruation](#)^[5].

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