

## Period. End of Sentence. (2018) [1]

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On 5 April 2018, the documentary *Period. End of Sentence.* premiered at the Cleveland International Film Festival in Cleveland, Ohio. In the documentary, Rayka Zehtabchi, the director of the film, documents the stigma surrounding [menstruation](#) [5] in India and follows a group of women in Kathikhera, a rural village in the Hapur district of India, as they manufacture and distribute sanitary pads. A group of high school students at Oakwood High School in Los Angeles, California, raised money to produce the documentary after one student was inspired by her visit to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York City, New York, which focused on the stigma surrounding [menstruation](#) [5] in low-income countries. *Period. End of Sentence.* draws attention to the obstacles impeding proper menstrual health management in low-income contexts by documenting the women of Kathikhera's journey to manufacture and sell sanitary pads.

*Period. End of Sentence.* explores menstrual hygiene management, or MHM, in Kathikhera. Menstruation is a process in which women and girls shed blood from the [uterus](#) [6] approximately once per month. In India, it is often difficult for women and girls to practice MHM, which the World Health Organization, or WHO, and United Nations Children's Fund, or UNICEF, define as women and girls having access to an absorbent material to collect menstrual blood, private water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities to change and dispose of those materials, and water and soap to clean their bodies during [menstruation](#) [5]. Those necessities are often lacking in India for menstruating women and girls, and cultural and religious beliefs that view [menstruation](#) [5] as taboo can impede necessary conversations about the need for resources from happening. In 2015, Muthusamy Sivakami and a group of researchers conducted an experiment to study the effects of [menstruation](#) [5] on girls' education in India. The researchers found that sixty-five percent of girls reported skipping school days due to their periods. The girls in that study noted that among other reasons, they skipped school on their periods because it caused concentration problems during class, pain or discomfort, or fear of staining their clothes or losing their cloth pad during school.

In 2013, Helen Yenser, who was a student at Oakwood High School in Los Angeles, California, at the time, visited the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York City, which focused on the stigma surrounding [menstruation](#) [5] in low-income countries. The World Bank, an international finance corporation, classifies countries as high, upper-middle, lower-middle, or low-income countries based on their national income per person. The US, for example, is considered a high-income country while India is a low-income country. At the United Nations, Yenser learned that it is common for girls in low-income countries to drop out of school due to a lack of access to menstrual supplies and services, like sanitary pads and clean water, hygiene, and sanitation facilities. Yenser's experience inspired her and eight other students, who participated in a club at their high school called Girls Learn International, to address those MHM-related challenges and provide sanitary pads for girls in India.

The Oakwood High School students collaborated with Action India, a grassroots [organization](#) [7] dedicated to empowering women in India, to reach out to the women of Kathikhera in order to establish The Pad Project. Those students at Oakwood High School raised \$55,000 in order to begin The Pad Project, which installed low-cost sanitary pad machines and provided menstrual education in Kathikhera. Arunachalam Muruganatham, a businessman from India, invented that sanitary pad machine in 2006 to provide women in India with an easy, low-cost way to manufacture sanitary pads, while providing those women with jobs, too. One Oakwood High School student, Ruby Schiff, and her father Garret Schiff, a screenwriter, asked Rayka Zehtabchi to direct a documentary about The Pad Project. Zehtabchi, a graduate of the [University of Southern California](#) [8] in Los Angeles, California, agreed to direct the documentary, and the group traveled to Kathikhera to document how the women of the village used the sanitary pad machines to make money, start conversations around [menstruation](#) [5], and provide their community with affordable resources to manage [menstruation](#) [5].

*Period. End of Sentence.* is divided into five main parts. First, the documentary explains the stigma surrounding [menstruation](#) [5] in India through interviews with people in Kathikhera. Next, the documentary highlights some of the consequences women face from living without access to sanitary pads through interviews with three women named Sneha, Rekba, and Shabana. In the third part, the documentary introduces Muruganatham's low-cost sanitary pad machine and explains how the machine works. Then, the documentary shows how the women of Kathikhera use the machine to create a sanitary pad company called Fly and make and sell their sanitary pads throughout the village. In the last part, the documentary shows women discussing the positive impacts of working for the sanitary pad company.

The documentary begins by highlighting the stigma surrounding [menstruation](#) [5] in India through interviews with several young girls, older women, and young men from Kathikhera. Two young girls begin to giggle when the interviewer, Mandakini Kakar, asks about their period. Another girl mentions that she is too shy to talk about her period, while a different girl remains quiet. Then, a few older women provide their views as to why [menstruation](#) [5] happens. One woman states that only God knows why [menstruation](#) [5] happens, but she believes that [menstruation](#) [5] is when dirty blood leaves the body. Another woman states that menstruating women do not visit the Hindu temple during [menstruation](#) [5], as elders often say that God does not hear menstruating women's prayers. Then, the documentary provides interviews with young men from Kathikhera. When Kakar asks about what the men know about periods, one man asks if Kakar means a class period when the school bell rings. Kakar clarifies that she means to ask about [menstruation](#) [5], and the men make a general agreement that [menstruation](#) [5] is an illness that mostly affects girls. Following those interviews, the documentary features a girl, who mentions that she dropped out of middle school when she first experienced her period. The girl mentions that it was difficult to change her sanitary napkin during the school day, because she had to travel far to find a private area to change the sanitary napkins. While [menstruation](#) [5] is a normal biological process and not an illness, this part of the documentary highlights the confused and shameful feelings that girls often have about [menstruation](#) [5] and underscores society's negative views toward [menstruation](#) [5].

The next part of the documentary showcases some of the consequences that living without access to resources necessary to MHM and living with the stigma around [menstruation](#) [5] have on women's lives. The documentary does that through the viewpoints of three women from Kathikhera named Sneha, Rekba, and Shabana. That section of the documentary begins by showing Sneha performing her daily chores as her conversation with Kakar about issues women face due to [menstruation](#) [5] plays in the background. Sneha tells Kakar that girls in Kathikhera do not have much freedom to work or become independent from their families. Sneha states that, while girls are expected to get married, she would prefer to join the police force and not find a husband. Then, Sneha explains that her society believes that it is wrong for menstruating women to enter the temple because it is considered dirty, and expresses that she thinks that belief is unacceptable. Then, the documentary introduces the viewers to Rekba, who tells Kakar that menstruating women and girls struggle to find supplies that are clean and suitable for collecting menstrual blood. Rekba states that women and girls often find any clothing around the house to use during their periods, and they throw the clothing away in the middle of the night, when no one else is around, to avoid embarrassment. Then, the documentary provides a scene of a group of girls meeting together with an older woman, Shabana. Shabana instructs the group of girls that they should wash clothing used for collecting menstrual blood and it should never be dirty. Shabana mentions that, while sanitary pads would be a better alternative than clothing, they are not accessible to the women and girls of Kathikhera. Shabana tells Kakar that a lot of change needs to happen in the village so that women and girls are able to better manage their menstrual cycles.

In the third part of the documentary, the viewers learn how the introduction of a low-cost sanitary pad machine in Kathikhera begins to change aspects of the women's lives there. That portion of the documentary begins with an interview with Arunachalam Muruganatham, the inventor of the sanitary pad machine. Muruganatham articulates that people in India never discuss [menstruation](#) [5], not even mothers and daughters, and that he believes [menstruation](#) [5] is one of the biggest taboos in India. Muruganatham explains that at the time of the interview, less than ten percent of menstruating women and girls had access to sanitary pads. He states that his goal is to use the sanitary pad machine he invented to raise that rate so 100 percent of the women and girls in India use sanitary pads. Then, the documentary shows more interviews with young girls, and Kakar asks them about sanitary pads. Some girls say that they have never heard of sanitary pads, and other girls say that they have only seen sanitary pads in the media. When Kakar shows a sanitary pad to the girls, they look excited.

Next, the documentary shows a man installing a sanitary pad machine inside of a home where a group of women eagerly await. A woman named Suman takes notes as the man teaches them how to use the machine. First, the man shows the women the raw materials for sanitary pads. The man fills a container with the raw material and snaps the lid of the container shut. He turns the machine on to process the raw material in the container, and the machine whirrs. Then, he opens the container to reveal the processed raw material, which resembles cotton. Next, the man transfers the material into a tray and uses another part of the machine to press the material into rectangular molds three times. He wraps the pressed material around a board to create a thick pad made out of layers of the pressed material as he instructs the women to wrap the material approximately ten to twenty times. The man then uses another part of the machine to cut the end of the pad, and then the sanitary pad is finished. After watching the entire process, the women begin making sanitary pads using the machine by themselves.

The next part of the documentary shows the beginning of the women of Kathikhera's journey starting a business to manufacture and distribute sanitary pads. Suman explains that one of the biggest obstacles for the sanitary pad production process is electricity. The electricity comes and goes randomly, sometimes even being gone for two days at a time, so the women of the village often end up working at night to adapt. Despite that obstacle, the documentary demonstrates that the women have fun working together as it shows them laughing while working. Next, Suman reveals a storage space filled with sanitary pads that the women had manufactured. She guesses that the women have about 18,000 pads in that building. Lastly, the documentary shows the women packing the pads into boxes decorated with the logo Fly. The women explain that they have decided to name their company Fly because they want women to rise and soar above the stigma surrounding [menstruation](#) [5].

After the women package the sanitary pads, the documentary shows that the women are eager to sell their product throughout the village. They travel to different stores in Kathikhera, but the men who work in the stores are unsure of their product. Suman states that women and girls may find it difficult to buy sanitary pads from men, so she offers that it may be easier for the women to directly sell their products to other women. The documentary shows the working women traveling door-to-door to try and sell the pads and hosting demonstrations and workshops. One scene shows the working women demonstrating the absorbency of their sanitary pads to a group of women, explaining that Fly's sanitary pads are less expensive, better quality, and more environmentally friendly than the pads sold in stores. At the end of the demonstration, some women in the crowd shyly purchase sanitary pads. The working women excitedly count their

money and announce that they have earned a total of 180 rupees, which is the official Indian currency. That amount equates to approximately two US dollars.

The last part of the documentary discusses how women in Kathikhera felt empowered by working to produce sanitary pads and why the women of the community believe it is so important to feel empowered. One woman states that she has gained respect from her husband since she has started working, and another girl talks about how she bought her brother a suit with the money she earned from working. A principal of a school in Kathikhera smilingly proclaims that women are the basis of society, but they do not always realize how much power they hold. The documentary ends with an interview with Sneha, one of the women from the beginning of the film. Sneha confidently asserts that the world is moving forward because of women, and that the world could not go on without them. Sneha explains that her experience manufacturing sanitary pads empowered her to pursue a career with the police force and fulfill her dreams. The ending credits state that Sneha had used the money that she made working for Fly to fund her training with the Delhi police.

*Period. End of Sentence.* is a short documentary that lasts twenty-five minutes. The documentary premiered at the Cleveland International Film Festival on 5 April 2018. Originally, Zehtabchi and the production team released the documentary in Hindi. In February 2019, the documentary became available on the streaming service Netflix in English, Spanish, French, and German. Later that month, on February 24, 2019, *Period. End of Sentence.* won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short, which allowed the film to become more widely recognized.

Following its win at the 2019 Academy Awards, *Period. End of Sentence.* was met with praise and critique from public health researchers. In particular, Marni Sommer, a public health researcher at [Columbia University](#)<sup>[9]</sup> in New York City stated that while she was glad that the film helped to open a discussion regarding MHM in low-income countries, the documentary only focuses on access to pads, and does not address other important aspects of MHM whatsoever. For example, the documentary does not address the lack of clean water, hygiene, and sanitation facilities, which impede a woman or girl's ability to adequately manage her menstrual cycle in private. Sommer explains that researchers, activists, and policymakers concerned with [menstruation](#)<sup>[6]</sup> ought to address those other obstacles in the future to help eradicate stigma surrounding [menstruation](#)<sup>[5]</sup> and better MHM in low-income countries.

*Period. End of Sentence.* addresses stigma surrounding [menstruation](#)<sup>[5]</sup> in India and draws attention to the obstacles impeding proper menstrual health management in low-income contexts.

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## Subject

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## Topic

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