Need for Menstrual Leave in India

Why in news?

The menstrual leave policy has been criticized for its short-sightedness in acknowledging the lasting impact it could have on the overall physical and mental wellness of citizens.

What are menstrual leaves?

- Menstrual leave refers to a specific form of time off for those who experience period pains.
- It recommends that workers be given leave from work while menstruating, just as they would for any illness.
- These leaves are not covered and are taken in addition to the usual sick leaves provided to all employees.
- In India, there is **no legislative provision** for menstrual leave.

How menstruation is neglected and tabooed?

- In India, menstruation is considered a taboo with **notions of purity and pollution**.
- Misinformation, superstitions, societal restrictions and poor access to sanitation facilities and menstrual products are all apparent indicators of the country's reality and levels of neglect.
- Due to the neglection, menstrual hygiene continues to be one of the most neglected issues that Indian women face.
- In a country where more than 355 million women are in the menstrual age, more than 75% of them use an old cloth during periods instead of safer and hygiene methods.

What is the need for menstrual leave?

- **Health** - In India, 20% of menstruators have PCOS and approximately 25 million suffer from endometriosis.
- **Disturbance to profession** - Many women advocate paid menstrual leave due to the excruciating pain and disturbance to professional responsibilities that period pain causes.
- **Opportunity for women to speak up** - Menstrual leave could be an opportunity for women to speak up about their menstrual cycle and to receive treatment for health issues related to it.
- **Humane working conditions** - It was not that women needed rest while menstruating, it was just the lack of humane working conditions that made labour

movements push for menstrual leaves.

What are the debates against the menstrual leave?

- **Fear of bias in hiring -** The introduction of mandatory paid maternity leave may lead to a bias in hiring due to the financial costs to employers.
- **Labour force participation of women** – The biased hiring may lead to the decline in the labour force participation of women.
- **Health complications** - In Maharashtra's Beed district, contractors in the sugarcane industry do not hire anyone who menstruates compelling more than 10,000 female sugarcane cutters to surgically remove their uteri to secure work.
- **Human rights violation** - They are now experiencing various post-surgery health complications which is equated to the human rights violation.

What steps were taken in this regard?

Government initiatives

- The **Menstruation Benefits Bill, 2018** which stipulates 2 days of menstrual leave and better rest facilities at the workplace is yet to receive assent.
- **Kerala -** The Kerala government recently announced that it will grant menstrual leave to female students at state universities.
- **Bihar-** Bihar is offering 2 days of menstrual leave a month since 1992.

Private initiatives

- Mumbai-based companies, Gozoop and Culture Machine, became the first private companies in 2017 to introduce the first day of period (FOP) leave in India.
- Zomato has introduced menstrual leaves for up to 10 days a year for its women and transgender employees.
- Swiggy and Byju's have also introduced similar policies.

International initiatives

- **Soviet Russia** - In the 1920s and 30s, Soviet Russia relieved menstruating women from paid labour to safeguard their reproductive health, thus originating the idea of formal menstrual leave policy.
- **Japan** - In 1920s, labour unions in Japan popularised the concept that has stood for more than 70 years now.

What is the need of the hour?

- Menstrual leave can easily allow a woman to **work from home** and work on her own terms, and at her own comfort and flexibility.
- It will in fact increase the productivity of the employee during this time rather than reduce it.
- Considering the sizable population of menstruators in India who face stigma, period leave cannot be dismissed anymore as a foreign concept.
- It is a pivotal step in ensuring proper **reproductive health equity** in India.

References

1. The Indian Express| No-room-for-debate-on-menstrual-leave
2. Deccan Herald | The case for a menstrual leave policy



IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering
A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative