



## Why it's 'Not Just a Piece of cloth' ..



“Two-three days before I got my periods, I used to feel ill, thinking what to use during those days because there was no cotton cloth. Whenever I think about it, I get a headache. When my periods start I take any thing from my house. I have spoilt cushions, pillow covers, bed sheets to use for periods. Due to that many times I have been scolded and even beaten up by my mother but what do I do? Once in anger I didn't have food for two days. When I asked my classmate for pads, she said, these are not for free. These are very costly. She had got them from the market. I feel sick and often pray to God to stop my periods forever.” Daughter of a Tangewala (horse cart) Shalu lives in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh. Her father's income is barely enough to meet the daily needs of the family. The unbearable trauma in Shalu's words makes you think; if she had enough cloth, would menses still be a monthly disaster for her?



Many Shalu's in India and the rest of the world have similar stories...of desperation, shame, unhealthy practices, compulsion and silence. We know what menses is but most of us don't know the shame and indignity women go through because they don't have a piece of cloth for this basic need.

Here is a series of 3 stories of change on menses and NJPC covering various aspects of why it's 'Not just a piece of cloth' Women constitute 72%, of India's rural population but remain the most marginalized. Struggling for the basics of life, a sanitary napkin

is the last thing on the mind of most. A vast majority faces great hardships & indignity, besides health risks due to lack of access, awareness, un-affordability, unhygienic practices with whatever she uses for menses.

About a decade back Goonj was the first to bring this taboo need into the larger public discourse... opening up the subject. In the midst of fancy market products; ultra thin to Xtra large wings, we turned the humble piece of second hand discarded cloth into a powerful tool to reach women who didn't even have enough to cover themselves. Today Goonj's MY Pads and NJPC initiative is a voice to attack age old taboos on menses..

It was actually another disaster that helped us evolve a solution to this ongoing disaster for countless women. Back in 2005 when we found tons of cloth lying abandoned in the Tsunami struck areas of Tamil Nadu we took up the task of channelizing more than 100 trucks of this material in a dignified way to the people in need. The un-wearable cotton cloth was segregated and converted into much needed cloth sanitary napkins under our initiative Not Just A Piece of Cloth (NJPC). It's here that we fine tuned the indigenous process of making cotton cloth sanitary pads. Today thousands of MY Pads are not just used as products but more as a tool to change practices and get the masses to talk about menstruation. MY Pads are probably the cheapest, easy to make, replicate, reusable and eco-friendly sanitary pads..



For generations our mothers and grandmothers have used cloth as a sanitary pad.. It's only in the last few decades that the big brands took over in the name of convenience of use and throw. But ask a woman in a village how many saris she has and you will know that even today there isn't enough to cover her up. What she does for menses every month, for years at end is anyone's guess? That's not just in India it's the plight of half of human race on earth.

Farzana, a 19 year old-girl from Mazara, UP, broke into tears, when she got MY Pads for the first time. "No one has ever talked to me on this subject. I had so many questions going on in my mind but I could never share it with anyone." She adds "I remember how my mother used to buy old clothes from Mangal bazaar (Tuesday market) for all my sisters to use during menses which meant that she would have to cut down on other expenses." For us these are priceless rewards for the hard work involved in starting a dialogue on this highly sensitive issue.



That's what a piece of cloth is for a woman... Sanitary napkins that are practical, affordable and environment friendly are still on an experimental level. Village India still survives on old cloth. Most rural women find MY Pads simple and familiar because it's like cloth. Instead of trying to introduce a new product or design, these pads are an improvisation and mass scale replication of the existing usage patterns/practices. We are simply removing the risk elements of the existing practice and doing a lot of value addition in terms of cleanliness and awareness.

Imagine if this simple piece of cloth was available to the masses, many incidents of helplessness

and indignity wouldn't have become the stories, people often share with us.. and that is why we call it 'Not just a piece of Cloth', as for us- it is a solution which is practical, a product- which is affordable, easy to use and is environment friendly . Above all it is a tool to open up the most taboo subject, revive the traditional old practice and make a dent on the shame and silence attached to the issue- which is not a Woman issue but a Human issue !!



Do follow the next 2 stories; One on the journey of My Pad; from a simple piece of unwanted cloth piece to a solution and the other one on the simple numbers on this NON issue- so far !! meanwhile do follow- <http://njpc.goonj.org/>

