CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE SURVEY
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1 On key issues for rural women not using sanitary napkins

On December 4, 2006, Rama from Calcutta wrote in his article about the hardships and indignity faced by rural women in India because of them being unable to afford available sanitary napkins. He also noticed that the key challenge is to design an appropriate product and define the manufacturing technology and business model. He, in his article also emphasized on the localized production of affordable sanitary napkins across the country with poor women in villages and urban slums securing gainful employment from it. He also raised an important point of napkin disposal. As we know napkins are not bio-degradable currently and if rural women start using napkins which will be in huge quantities, the disposal of these napkins might pose a substantial problem in near future. He also emphasized that instead of designing, producing, marketing and advertising utterly useless products India should come up with this very basic necessary product, which will bring dignity to rural women.

2.2 On global demand of sanitary napkins and market potential in India

The article emphasized on the global demand for absorbent hygiene products which are over US $ 50 billion (including wipes). Feminine care was introduced over 100 years ago. Baby diapers were invented 60 years ago. Adult incontinence products appeared 30 years ago. The article discussed about the growing market of feminine hygiene and discussed very interesting facts and figures. The feminine hygiene products market has evolved over more than 100
years to a more than $17 billion industry. At present the production of about 900 mn pieces are manufactured in India and rest are imported. Total women in the age group of 15-54 years in India are about 300 million. Total menstrual periods/year is 13 that last for 4-8 days and an average of 3 pieces/day is used. Then consumption would be 58,500 mn pieces/year. Present consumption is 2659 million pcs, ie, 4.5% penetration while in Europe and USA it is well above 73 to 92%. Hence a growth rate well above 18 to 20% is expected in India. The Indian market is quite huge and as per reports available only 35% of India’s requirement is manufactured in India, as of now. A huge market, great potential and excellent profit margin is envisaged in manufacturing of sanitary napkins in India.

2.3 On the plight of rural Indian females and adolescent girls in regards to menstrual hygiene

Many rural Indian women make do with little more than scraps of old cloth when menstruating, often risking their health, said the article on the dismal state in which they are. Millions of women in the billion-plus country are forced to get by with the little they have - pieces of old clothes, rags quite dirty for household cleaning or nothing at all. Some women sit at home for five days a month and development workers say that ignoring this basic need for a product Western women take for granted is taking a toll on the health and self respect of Indian women. In the village of Rupaspur in northern Uttar Pradesh state, 260 kilometres (160 miles) from New Delhi, women talked about the discomfort of having each month to steal or salvage old cloth scraps. Even worse, they recalled deaths from doing just that during post-pregnancy bleeding when the risk of infection is high. The article discussed that how
shahnaz who lives in a muslim family used a piece of cloth from an old blouse during her periods and got tetanus as the blouse had a rusty hook. Shahnaz then started using napkins from Goonj a NGO. The pads cost two or three rupees for a packet of six but are free for those who cannot pay. In Rupaspur and surrounding villages, about 600 women now use the handmade prewashed cotton pads. Backed by Government officials in southern Tamil Nadu state, Goonj began working with women's village committees to help them buy machines to make sterile disposable napkins in self help groups and a movement has been started so that these women start living with dignity and pride and also get self employed in the process. Women who use cloth strips give greater weight to the embarrassment of letting the fabric dry outside in plain view than to the risk posed by using damp fabric rife with fungal or other organisms, the article said. The article mentioned the lack of knowledge in slum areas. Everyone considers menses dirty so people don't discuss it. Because they don't discuss it these things go on. It also emphasized that normal menstrual blood is neither infected nor dirty but when it gets contaminated by these dirty cloths, organisms start growing and there is the risk of infection. Lack of sex education in conservative India also leads to ignorant behavior of adolescent rural girls who are too shy to speak with their parents.

2.4 On the initiatives being taken by NGO’S for menstrual hygiene in rural India

More often than not, the women from the underprivileged sections tend to use rags, strips of sack, leaves, newspaper and even sand or ash during their menstruation, thus becoming [11] Vulnerable to infection. It's a serious health issue that's frequently missed out in healthcare programmes, activists feel.
Anshu Gupta, director, Goonj, a Delhi-based NGO observed that most females in rural areas do not have enough clothes to wear, finding cloth for those five days becomes an even tougher job and whatever dirty rags they can get their hands on invites infections. Plus, there is the issue of privacy. Poor women often have to walk to distant spots near a river or a lake to wash the cloth. As a result of which they run an increased risk of becoming victims of sexual violence. In addition to that, sun-drying the cloth is problematic as many wouldn't want men to see their 'shame'. As a consequence, most end up using damp cloth, raising the risk of infection. Also, girls are forced to miss school as they don't have adequate protection alternatives. The sanitary napkins available in the market are mostly beyond their means.

However, some organizations have been looking at low-cost alternatives. Some organizations are trying the simple concept of reuse and recycling. Old cloth is collected as donation, washed and sanitized to make 1 ft x 1 ft sanitary napkins. Then they are packed and distributed through a network of grassroots groups, self-help groups (SHGs) and panchayats, writes Saira Kurup in Times of India. Another approach has been to train women's self-help groups (SHGs) to make the napkins themselves and sell them at nominal prices. The two-year old 'Sugam' project by Arumbugal Trust (AT) in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district trains 12 such SHGs to make the napkins using surgical cotton and aqua pearl gel, a super-absorbing polymer, wrapped in non-woven fabric. They're sold for Rs 2 each. But bringing about behavioral change has been a tough process, despite holding classes on hygiene. Adding to it is the low priority a woman accords to her own health. However, in Angara block in Ranchi district, some women have amazingly moved on and
started purchasing branded napkins, says Rini Sinha, assistant director of the health programme at Society for Rural Industrialisation (SRI), Ranchi. In a project funded by the Department of Science and Technology, SRI trains SHGs in making napkins of cotton cloth, absorbent paper and cotton — all biodegradable materials to make disposal easier. They are sold under the brand name 'Mukti', and priced at Rs 15 for a pack of 10. "We are trying bring down the price to Re 1 each," adds Sinha. The project started after a medical camp was held in Angara at the instance of Dr Abdul Kalam when he was principal scientific adviser. Rini Sinha also added that more of husband counseling was done as they were the ones paying for the napkins. These innovations offered not just better health, but also greater decision-making and purchasing power to those at the bottom of the pyramid.

2.5 On the innovation made by A Muruganantham[12]

After undergoing this website and talking to him personally on the phone the researcher went to Coimbatore to see the machine and meet the man himself. A.Muruganantham (46) has designed, created, tested and implemented a sanitary napkin-making machine that operates on a small scale. Contrary to a large-scale production model which requires Rs.3.5 Crores as initial investment, Muruganantham’s sanitary napkin-making machine can be made available to a buyer for approximately Rs.75,000. This allows smaller players to adopt the business model propagated by him, and thus generates more employment and wealth in the most neglected sections of society. More specifically, an empowerment forum – such as a Self Help Group or a women’s group – can invest in a sanitary napkin-making unit to create a business that employs up to ten women. The new invention is capable to make
120 napkins per hour. This new invention mini sanitary napkin making machine was awarded the best innovation national award by President of India Prathiba Patil on 18th Nov, 09 at New Delhi.

2.6 On Government schemes

The article published in Times of India on 14-09-2013 mentioned that getting low cost sanitary napkins under Menstrual Hygiene Scheme of National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) is still impossible in the Varanasi as the district has no funds or guidelines to run the scheme in rural belts. The Central government initiated this scheme in 2011 under which subsidised sanitary napkins are being supplied to girls in the age bracket of 11 to 19 years in rural areas of the country. The cost was fixed as Rs 6 per pack. These are sold through Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) who are paid for it. The scheme took off in 107 districts of 20 states in the first phase and the napkins were supplied by Hindustan Latex Limited. A proposal was sent to state government, demanding funds and resources in the last financial year. No action was taken. The only sanitary napkins that the health department has procured is for women after delivering baby at community health centres, first referral units (FRUs) and post partum centres. The district health department has procured 15,750 packets of sanitary napkins in Arazilines, 11,000 packets in Sewapuri, 42,000 packets in Kashi Vidyapeeth block and 18,000 for Badagaon block. These are meant to be given to women after giving birth at health centers. According to a research on districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh by department of community medicine, IMS-BHU, in collaboration with European Union, use of sanitary napkins in rural areas is not more than 5 to 7%. The article stated that there were two reasons for this trend. One is the
cost factor while another reason is lack of awareness. The districts covered under this research were Varanasi, Azamgarh, Mau, Ghazipur, Chaudauli and others. It was revealed that many women use old cotton cloth during menstruation cycle. Ghazipur recorded most of those also reuse the cloth. This practice is more unhygienic as to merely washing the clothes does not imply proper cleaning. The clothes have to be sun dried to avoid chances of fungal infection, which does not happen in many households.

2.7 On social activism

Parsathy J Nath in The Hindu[17] wrote an article in which he mentioned that on Sept. 13, 2013, A comic book and a video went viral. Menstrupedia got everyone to talk about a topic that was once taboo. The book is scheduled to be launched in January 2014. Menstrupedia.com is a website that explains menstruation in an entertaining manner using cartoons and illustrations. The founders raised money for the book through crowdfunding. Almost 175 people have contributed to their project from 86 cities across the world. The book will be launched in Hindi and English and then in other regional languages, says Aditi and Tuhin the couple who have designed the portal.

The book features three adolescent girls undergoing different stages of puberty. One has attained puberty, another gets her periods as the narrative progresses and third is on the verge of getting there. A character is also created called Didi; a doctor, who clears their doubts without sounding preachy. The conversations take place in the drawing room, not in a clinic to create a friendly ambience and put forth the point that menstruation is not a disease; that it needs to be talked about. The comic is designed like a textbook so that children can use it for reference.
The idea of menstrupedia occurred to Aditi and Tuhin, when the couple was studying in National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. Tuhin found it disturbing to see Aditi go through a painful phase every month. After doing some research on the internet, they found that very few sites presented information in a simple manner. That’s when they decided to launch Menstrupedia.

In just about a year, the online platform has met with good response. They have an interactive page where one can post queries and get them answered by experts. Their two-and-a-half minute video, Beauty of Red has gone viral on Facebook and Youtube. The video shows how the colour which is associated with joy in childhood, becomes the color of shame during periods. There is a sense of negativity one associates with periods. There are so many dos and don’ts - don’t go to the temple, do not enter the kitchen and do not sit with others. Aditi and Tuhin want to break these taboos.

2.8 On NRHM’s scheme

This Government website mentions Scheme for Promotion of Menstrual Hygiene which aims at ensuring that adolescent girls in the target group have adequate knowledge and information about menstrual hygiene and the use of sanitary napkins, that high quality, safe products are made available to them, and that environmentally safe disposal mechanisms are readily accessible. The scheme has been launched as part of the Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH) component under RCH II.

In the first phase, the scheme is expected to cover approximately 25% of the
country’s adolescent girl population (aged 10 to 19 years), i.e., 1.5 crore girls in 152 districts across 20 States. Out of these, supply of sanitary napkins in 107 districts was envisaged initially in a Central supply mode, wherein sanitary napkins were to be supplied by the Government of India. The supply of sanitary napkins in the remaining 45 districts was envisaged in a Self Help Group (SHG) mode, wherein SHGs were to manufacture the sanitary napkins that are to be sold to adolescent girls. Procurement of sanitary napkins, whether through Central supply by the Government of India, or through SHGs, has to be done at a fixed price of Rs. 7.50/- per pack of six sanitary napkins. The sanitary napkins are provided under NHM’s brand, ‘Freedays’. These napkins are being sold to adolescents girls at the rate of Rs. 6 per pack of six napkins by Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs). From out of the sale proceeds, the ASHA gets an incentive amount of Re. 1 per pack, besides getting a free pack of sanitary napkins per month and the balance Rs 5 is to be deposited in the State/district treasury. The scheme has taken off in 107 districts in the 17 States that are being supplied sanitary napkins through Central procurement.

Supply of sanitary napkins in 107 districts initially is being done in a Central supply mode, wherein sanitary napkins are being supplied by the Government of India. The supply of sanitary napkins in the remaining 45 districts is to be done through Self Help Groups (SHG), wherein SHGs are to manufacture the sanitary napkins that are to be sold to adolescent girls.

2.9 LITERATURE REVIEW
In the extensive literature review of the past ten years, it was found that the rural females not only in India, but in underdeveloped and developing economies are not using sanitary napkins. The other methods being used during menstruation are
extremely unhygienic and may lead to serious diseases and reproductory tract infections.

Most of the adolescent girls are missing their classes and don’t want to talk about it. Many females are still not allowed inside the kitchen if they are menstruating.

Also, it was found that menstruation is still considered to be a” social taboo” in our rural society.

These revelations imposed the following main problems as to why a rural Indian female is not using the sanitary napkin:

- Complete unawareness about the product
- Non-affordability of the product
- Non-availability of the product
- Hesitation to ask for the product

### 2.10. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

It is yet not clear from the review that what is the main reason for the rural females not using sanitary napkins. Until and unless the major issue is not understood, it will be difficult to make them use the napkins.

In the review it was also noticed that the problems identified are vague and doesn’t clearly describe or propose a viable solution to the problem. Moreover, the stress has been more on addressing the problems of adolescent girls and their absenteeism from school because of that whereas in researcher’s opinion the real problem supposedly lies with the mothers of these girls who need to understand the importance of sanitary napkins who in turn will educate and encourage their daughters to use napkins.
However, some people are determined to change all that. Mr. Arunachalam Muruganantham is one of them. He has invented a low cost high quality sanitary napkin making machine for which he was given the reputed presidential award for innovation in 2009 by the then president Hon. Mrs. Pratibha Patil.

But there is a problem here also Mr. Muruganantham is not clear as to how to make a sustainable business model for his product. He believes that installing these machines in various parts of the country will solve the problem. But the real problem is, how will these napkins be sold??

This again goes back to the four main problems mentioned above.

The review of literature revealed two gaps in the relevant area. One gap lays in the problem area which is to find out precisely and accurately the main issue for non usage of sanitary napkins and second gap is in the solution area. No doubt Mr. Muruganantham’s idea is very good but it needs to be refined to a stage where it becomes a sustainable business model for whoever buys his machines.