

## GST Council makes sanitary pads tax-free



After paying 12% GST for more than a year, all those who bleed every month across India can sigh in relief as the GST Council has finally decided to lift off tax on sanitary pads, making them tax free; may we bleed without tax.

Unfortunately, Gloria Steinem's *If Men Could Menstruate* is equally relatable in 2018, as it was in 1978 ? "sanitary supplies would be federally funded and free". Leaving aside the idea of federally funding it, the GST Council of India announced on Saturday that sanitary pads would be exempted from GST and made tax free. This is a victory of its kind for the activists and feminists who had been opposing to make sanitary napkins tax free for a year - since July 2017. And, the women of India are rejoicing over the *lagaan maafi* (tax exception), considering the sanitary items to be a basic necessity and undoubtedly in no sense, is a luxury.

From campaigns to protests to petitions and rallies - it lasted for a year and now the *lahu ka lagaan* has finally ended and Indian women can "bleed tax-free". As rejoicing as the exemption is, the fact that women paid not 2.5, not 5 but 12% tax for a year to buy something as basic as sanitary pads cannot be unseen. Bundling up, the Gloria Steinem-worthy part is that *bindi, sindoor and kajal* (or items that are "*sanskaari se bhaari*") were made tax free way before pads are.

And with changes comes new questions - why MNCs dominate the sanitary items market? What about the environmental cost of sanitary napkins? Will the companies actually increase prices of the pads to compensate for the lack of input credit tax? The only hope was that the pack of 10 that costs around Rs 100 would now cost Rs 88 from July 27, but seems like the tax credit chain can't really be broken off, sisters. However, for now, let's just rejoice that menstrual hygiene is finally taking baby steps towards Gloria's idea - even if it is just momentary.