



## Invited Editorial

# Femtech and India's Healthcare Future: Breaking Taboos, Building Solutions

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## INTRODUCTION

The global rise of Femtech (technology designed for women's health) has equal potential to revolutionise India's healthcare system. With 709 million females in India, it is not just an ethical imperative but also an economic necessity to improve their care, and yet issues such as deep-seated taboos, lack of awareness and gender disparities create obstacles in achieving this goal.

The current projection is that by 2030, the growth of the Femtech market will touch \$103 billion, although the share of India in the current market is still relatively small! We should not just see it as a challenge but also as a great opportunity. Femtech has a great potential to bridge the gaps in women's healthcare with menstrual health, obstetric care and reproductive and sexual health. For Femtech to reach its full potential in India, we will have to overcome issues such as societal taboos, regulatory challenges, and accessibility and acceptance of Femtech.

## CURRENT STATE OF WOMEN'S HEALTHCARE IN INDIA

We've come a long way with the provision of women's healthcare, yet there's so much more to achieve and many more gaps to be bridged. The article by C. Meh *et al.*<sup>[1]</sup> shows an improvement in maternal mortality rates from 398/100000 in 1998 to 99/100000 in 2020; however, access and quality remain to improve for the marginalised, rural and underserved populations.

Speaking about menstruation is still taboo, and access to menstrual hygiene products, although improving, is still not 100%. S. Biswas *et al.*<sup>[2]</sup> showed that use of menstrual hygiene products in urban areas was 89.37%, whereas in rural areas it was 72.32%. The lack of awareness of menstrual hygiene and access to the appropriate products leads to health complications, psychological distress and loss of income.

There is a lack of awareness about basic anatomy, menstrual health and gynaecological issues. This leads to the normalisation of their symptoms, which, along with limited healthcare access, allows many common conditions, such as endometriosis and polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), to remain undiagnosed and untreated for some time, leading to more complex medical issues in the future.

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## **BREAKING TABOOS: THE ROLE OF FEMTECH IN INDIA**

Traditional mindsets, patriarchal societal norms, and cultural hesitations have been the main factors that suppress the discussions around reproductive and sexual health and menstruation. Femtech has the potential to challenge these taboos by normalising conversations around women's health, increasing awareness and improving access to health education and care.

Femtech startups like Peesafe and Naree are providing an app and AI-assisted analytics, which helps in improving healthcare education and destigmatisation of taboo subjects, allowing women to have safe, personal, and evidence-based healthcare.

Naree, an upcoming comprehensive women's health app, is currently providing menstrual tracking, AI-assisted symptom analytics and early detection of conditions like endometriosis. It is also helpful for mental health and menopausal symptoms, and the aim is to encourage education and awareness and help women across the board from adolescence to menopause.

## **KEY CHALLENGES TO FEMTECH GROWTH IN INDIA**

Despite its potential, Femtech in India faces several barriers that hinder its widespread adoption.

### **Cultural Stigma and Resistance to Change**

Many households, urban as well as rural, have hesitation in discussing reproductive health, mostly due to social conditioning and lack of awareness, leading to the stigmatisation of the topic, which may be responsible for the adoption of Femtech solutions.

### **Digital Divide and Accessibility**

According to global system for mobile communications association (GSMA), smartphone access for women is expected to increase to 37%, which is still not a huge percentage compared to 51% for men. This may affect the rural and underprivileged population in accessing Femtech solutions.

### **Lack of Medical Integration and Regulatory Frameworks**

The healthcare system in India is fragmented, and most Femtech solutions lack integration with the private and government hospitals.

Currently, the regulatory guidance for Femtech solutions, especially when AI-driven, is scarce and may raise concerns regarding data privacy, handling and safety.

## **Affordability and Economic Barriers**

Many Femtech solutions are focusing on urban populations, and their costs are high too, which limits their accessibility for the underprivileged population, limited or non-existent, whereas this is the population in most need of such solutions to reduce the healthcare gap.

## **OPPORTUNITIES: THE RISING SCOPE OF FEMTECH IN INDIA**

Even with these challenges, India has tremendous potential, not just for developing the Femtech but also for revolutionising healthcare for everyone.

## **Government Support and Policy Reforms**

Initiatives like Ayushman Bharat and Startup India are focusing on digitalising healthcare, and the Femtech solutions can integrate with them.

The Indian government is pushing for digital growth, creating a favourable environment for the Femtech startups.

## **AI-Driven Diagnostics and Personalisation**

AI-driven analytics for symptoms and, menstrual cycle can aid in the early diagnosis, the apps can help in improving awareness and education, aiming for primary prevention and platforms like Naree can help in redefining early intervention strategies.

## **Increased Investment and Funding**

The investors across the globe have identified the potential of India in such ventures and are keen to invest in the projects, which is a welcome sign, and this opportunity should be used to its fullest to develop a robust healthcare system.

## **Expansion Beyond Urban Areas**

Femtech solutions which are affordable will be able to reach under-represented and underserved populations who currently have limited access to healthcare.

The development of telemedicine, chatbots, and multi-linguistic platforms will help to overcome literacy and language barriers and allow everyone to access healthcare education, working towards primary prevention.

## THE FUTURE OF FEMTECH IN INDIA

### Digital Health Ecosystem and Interoperability

We would need to develop Femtech systems which will easily integrate into currently available systems to allow easy transfer of data to improve healthcare outcomes.

### Education and Awareness Campaigns

Femtech will need to work in close collaboration with the government, non-governmental organisations NGOs, and medical societies to increase awareness to break the taboos, and improve public engagement and acceptance of the Femtech solutions.

### Data Privacy and Ethical AI Implementation

The Femtech solutions will need to ensure that data privacy, safety and handling are of the highest standard to gain the trust of users and increase their acceptance across the board.

### Affordability and Localised Solutions

With the help of government funding bodies, it is possible to develop affordable Femtech solutions suitable for use by a wider population and increase their acceptance.

## CONCLUSION

The rise of Femtech has the potential to transform India's healthcare landscape, which will not only challenge the societal

taboos and hesitations but will also empower women to take control of their health and work towards primary prevention.

Platforms like Naree, with their AI-driven analytics, will help to improve education and awareness about women's health and bridge the gaps to provide accessible healthcare for all.

If we want to make use of such a powerful tool, we need a collaborative approach between startups, government, NGOs, medical societies and policymakers to increase awareness, improve accessibility, promote innovation and embrace the change to our advantage!

We have the potential to lead the Femtech so we can develop a solution which is accessible to every woman, irrespective of their geographic location or socioeconomic background.

The future is digital, inclusive, and women-centric—it is time for India to embrace Femtech fully.

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