

## Superstitions around the world: A truth about Myth

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### Abstract

Superstitions is a part of human life since time immemorial. Superstitions began centuries ago when our ancestors tried to explain mysterious circumstances or events as best as they could with the knowledge they had. Superstitions can be defined as “Irrational beliefs”, especially with regard to the unknown”. This belief can be based on fear, ignorance, trust in magic, coincidence, or a prior experience with a similar situation.

The objective of this paper is intended to focus on why do people still follow these beliefs? Superstitions which are considered Good in India, Superstitions which are considered Bad in India, Main superstitions that followed in India, Superstitions that around the world. The study also focuses on common superstitions around the world.

**Keywords:** superstitions, belief, India and world

### Introduction

Though the Indian society is fast progressing, there are many people who are still superstitious and have a strong faith in these local beliefs. Superstitions are deemed as pertinent in India because these, generally, hint at future occurrences and can be either good or bad. Though we try to believe these are baseless beliefs, somewhere deep inside our hearts, we are stuck to our roots and still believe in some of the superstitions, if not all.

### What is superstition?

According to dictionary, superstition is a belief in something not justified by reason or evidence. It means to believe in something blindly without verification.

### Why do people still follow these beliefs?

- It is an interesting question. With the progress of science and popular awakening, many of the superstitions have already lost their hold on the minds of the people. But many of them are so deeply rooted that no amount of knowledge or science can weaken their hold or fully shake them off.
- They belong to both the present generation of youngsters and the older generation. Though most of them don't want to believe them, they are not prepared to take the risk of ignoring them. Those who had ventured to ignore them had already faced some serious problems, which made them stick to the age-old beliefs again.

### Superstitions in India

#### Superstitions which are considered Good in India

These are some of the superstitions which are considered as good omen.

- While one is going out of the house and see a married lady with flowers on her head and kumkum on her forehead it is believed that the trip will be successful.

- If someone sees an elephant on their way while going somewhere, their purpose of going will be fruitful. It is believed that Lord Ganesh, the elephant God of Indian mythology, removes all the obstacles on the way.
- Seeing a peacock on a journey is also considered lucky.
- If someone notice a crow cawing near their house they are likely to get visitors to their house.
- Eating sweet curd before exams brings good luck.
- If the girl's horoscope is matching well with the boy's horoscope, when they get married, they will have a successful married life.
- When a discussion is going on if someone hear a lizard making a noise on the ceiling or on the wall, it is a good omen to let them know that it is true.
- There is also a strong belief in the power of dreams, as divine warnings. Dreaming of gods, demons, auspicious animals or any other auspicious thing is good.
- Continuous hiccups are considered a sign of someone close badly remembering them.
- Mirror, a pot full of water, flag, light, a pair of fish and turmeric are auspicious articles. On getting up from the bed in the early morning, if a person is lucky to see any of these auspicious articles it will bring him good luck. He is also fortunate if he sees first a lotus flower, gold, the ruler, light, the sun, fire, the sea, a temple tower, a hill with signs of rain a cow and a calf, his own right hand, a lunatic, a black monkey, an elephant or a percussion instrument called Mridanga. Seeing his wife's face is also considered a good omen.
- To avoid seeing anything unpleasant in the morning, many people look at the palms of their hands as soon as they awaken and recite this invocation: In the tips of the fingers resides Goddess Lakshmi; in the middle, Goddess Saraswathi; in the palm of the hand resides Goddess Parvathi;
- The colour, spots, stripes, chirping or twittering of the

lizard and where it falls on a person's body are said to indicate future happenings.

### **Superstitions which are considered Bad in India**

There are several superstitions considered as **bad omen** in Indian society. Many people even these days avoid these as much as possible, whether they believe in it or not, for they are not prepared to take the risk.

- If someone are going somewhere and see a cat, especially black, is considered as a very bad omen.
- While a serious discussion is going on, a black cat comes that way. It is considered as a bad omen.
- While leaving home, sighting a widow or a barren woman is not lucky.
- Nails should not be cut in the night for fear of evil spirits.
- While leaving someone's house, hearing the shrill sound of a peacock is considered bad.
- Sweeping the house at night is not good.
- The sitting of an owl over the house-top is a sure sign of approaching ruin and destruction.
- When there is a birth or death in the family, the members are not supposed to go to a temple or light a lamp at home, for 15 days.
- If a female's right hand is scratching it is not good. It is an indication that she is going to get some bad news On the other hand, if it is left hand it is good. But, if a male's left hand is scratching it is not good. It shows that he is going to cry soon. He is lucky if his right hand is scratching.
- If the left eye of a woman twitches it is not good, and the right eye twitching for a man is also not good.
- If someone see a family member leaving the house for some purpose, and happen to ask him or her "where are you going?" the individual won't like it because asking such a question is considered a bad omen.
- A number of activities are avoided after sunset such as - cutting of one's hair or nails, giving of dirty linen to the dhobi, mention of words to denote snake or the barber, lending or giving needles, salt, butter, milk or white articles, lending a matchbox or fire.
- After a man's death, his widow should not wear colorful sarees or bindis on her forehead. (This practice is rapidly changing in almost all cities of India today.)
- If somebody is leaving home for the day's work and someone sneeze thrice, it's a bad omen.
- Footwear's keeping upside down brings fights in family.
- In some parts of the country, it is believed that Monday is not an auspicious day for shaving and cutting hair.
- Thursdays and Saturdays are not good for washing hair.
- Tuesday is believed to be not good to reach any body's home from a journey.
- Saturday is considered bad for purchasing metal or leather, as it brings bad luck in terms of financial prosperity.
- Wearing of white clothes by a married woman is considered inauspicious.
- If somebody hear a dog whining at night it will bring bad luck, especially when someone in their family or neighborhood is sick.
- Many people do not make payments on Fridays, except giving small coins to beggars.
- Food is not cooked in a house where death has occurred.

### **Main superstitions that followed in India**

#### **1. Hanging lemon and 7 green chilies**

It is believed in India that 'Alakshmi', the goddess of misfortune can bring bad luck to the shop owners or business. Since, she likes sour, pungent and hot things, shop owners in India hang lemon and 7 green chilies at their door so that the goddess eat her favourite food, satisfy her hunger and leave without entering the shop.

#### **2. If a black cat crosses their path, it's a bad omen**

Just because they are black cats? Not just in India but this is a popular belief in the west too. The origin of this superstition has come from the Egyptians who believed that black cats were evil creatures and they bring bad luck. In India, black colour is generally associated with the Lord Shani.

#### **3. If a mirror breaks it brings seven years bad luck:**

In olden days, mirrors were extremely expensive and of also very low quality. To avoid carelessness when handling them, the years of bad luck was used as a scare tactic. They also believed that the reflection in the mirror was the person's soul itself and that it takes seven long years for a broken soul to replenish itself. They even avoided using mirrors and preferred pools and ponds.

#### **4. Do not sweep after sunset**

Goddess Lakshmi will walk out of people house if they sweep their place after sunset. In a country, where people pray to goddess Lakshmi so that she bestows wealth on them, any idea that leads to her walking out is considered inauspicious. Why sunset? This is because, it is believed that the goddess generally pays a visit after sunset so, if they sweep their place after sunset, she won't come in.

#### **5. Don't go near a *Peepal* tree in the night**

*Peepal* is one tree the ghosts like to hover around and if you sleep around a *peepal* tree at night, the ghosts will kill people. Do they know that plants and living beings keep a balance in nature? In the morning, when the photosynthesis is occurring in them, they absorb carbon dioxide, change it into energy and give out oxygen in the air which we breathe in but in the night, the opposite reaction occurs. At night, plants exhale carbon dioxide while there is lack of sunlight.

#### **6. One should take a bath after attending any funeral:**

When a person dies, the body starts to decompose. This is basic biology. And when people attend a funeral, they are exposed to the germs, bacteria and the chemicals released by the body and present in the air due to decomposition.

#### **7. Why Indians throw coins in holy rivers:**

Throwing coins in fountains and other water bodies for good luck is now done all over the world. Again, there is a scientific reason for why this started. In ancient times, the coins were made of copper, which is an essential element for our body's well-being. Rivers used to be the main source of drinking water. When the copper coins remained in the water for long, it became beneficial for those who drank it. Copper also helps to kill bacteria present in the water.

### 8. Cutting Nails and Shaving after Sunset

In the olden days there was no electricity and shaving or cutting nails would result in cuts after sunset because of darkness. Hence our ancestors advised not to cut nails or shave after sunset. In Later days it was believed that the night spirits will be awaken and come in the search of flesh. People have been warned to get attacked by these evil spirits in the darkness of night if people cut nails or shave hair after sunset which continues as a superstition.

### 9. Twitching of the eye is inauspicious

The superstition is different in different cultures. It is considered good luck in some cultures and bad in some other. It differs according to gender as well. Since it is related to eyes, there are many scientific reasons behind the twitching of the eyes. Eye twitching could be due to stress, alcohol, tiredness, allergies, strain or just dry eyes.

### 10. Adding one rupee to a gift sum

On weddings and special occasions, we Indians generally like to gift money and it won't be 100 or 1,000 but 101 or 1,001. We add one rupee coin to the entire sum. It is considered a blessing, love and luck. But, the main reason to add that extra coin is to make the entire sum an odd number and it will be indivisible, it is good for the married couple. If we don't add one rupee coin, the sum will end in a zero which means 'the end'.

### 11. Removing evil eye (*Nazar Utaarna*)

Putting a little dot of kohl on the side of a child's forehead is very common in India. The practice is called *Nazar Utaarna*. It is done to protect the little kid from any evil eyes and prevent anyone from putting a negative vibe over the kid. The evil eye can cause severe damage to which it turns. It is said that putting a black spot on a child's forehead will make the child look ugly to the evil powers and hence, the kid will stay protected.

### 12. Widows are unlucky

This is perhaps one of the saddest superstitions still prevalent in India. The deeply embedded patriarchy in our country found one more way to assert its superiority over the 'weaker sex' by delegating widows as unlucky and inauspicious. Widows are not allowed to remarry, they must always wear white, and they must not wear jewelry, not participate in festivities and so on and so forth. The social stigma of being a widow in India is a comment upon the way the mindset of our country still functions. Widowers, on the other hand, face no such social constraints. It is even considered unlucky to see a widow while going out- it might signify that the work people are going out for will not be completed successfully. The superstitions regarding widows are evidently wide and many, and need to be addressed.

## Superstitions that among the world

### 1. In Afghanistan

The number 39 is linked (inexplicably) to prostitution, and anyone whose phone number or license plate ends with 39 is a social pariah. People who're 39 years old often say they're "one less than 40" just to avoid the embarrassment.

### 2. In Nigeria

- a) Never kiss a baby on the lips, or they'll drool when they grow into adulthood. Even if this isn't true, they shouldn't really be kissing babies on the lips anyway.
- b) If a man is hit with a broom, he will become impotent and/or his genitals will disappear. Some believe this can be countered by hitting the offender back with a broom no fewer than 7 times.

### 3. In Turkey

It's a commonly held local belief that chewing gum at night is akin to chewing down on the flesh of a dead person. A minty-fresh dead person.

### 4. In Japan

- a) Stabbing chopsticks straight up into their bowl of rice will cause the whole dinner table to murmur in disapproval, as this is generally only done during funeral ceremonies. Passing food from chopstick to chopstick is a no-no for much the same reason: at funerals, family members pass the bones of the dead person with chopsticks.
- b) Children are warned to hide their stomachs during thunderstorms, especially before sleeping. It is believed that if they are not careful, Raijin (the god of thunder) will steal and eat your belly button during a storm.

### 5. In South Korea

Going to sleep with a fan on in an enclosed space can straight up kill them. This unfounded belief is so prevalent that electric fans are often sold with timers, to prevent accidental death due to... suffocation, somehow?

### 6. In Serbia

It's a good idea to spill some water behind a person who's going to a job interview, headed out on a journey, or about to attempt any sort of endeavor at all. The movement of water's said to symbolize fluidity and motion; just don't spill it on their pants, as that probably won't have the same effect on the interview.

### 7. In Spain

Instead of kissing someone when the clock strikes 12 on New Year's Eve, they should eat 12 grapes in rapid succession. Not only does this ensure the coming year will be a lucky one; it also gives them delicious grape.

### 8. In Russia

Carrying an empty bucket, or even *seeing* someone carry one, is a bad omen. This is likely due to the fact that Tsar Alexander II was assassinated by a man with empty buckets for hands.

### 9. In Britain

When they wake up on the first day of the month, saying the word "rabbit", or "rabbits", or "white rabbits", or any combination of these, gives good luck for the whole month. Make sure it's the *very first* word(s) they say, though, otherwise the whole things pointless and silly.

### 10. In Iceland

They are advised to avoid knitting on their doorstep during the later months, as this will bring about a long winter. Why they

would choose to knit outside in the dead of winter at *all* is anyone's guess.

### 11. In Vietnam

Many foods are avoided by students hoping to do well in school or on exams. Bananas, for example, are avoided by students because they are slippery, and the Vietnamese word for "slip" sounds exactly the same as the Vietnamese word for "fail."

### 12. In Yemen

A pregnant woman can determine the gender of her unborn baby by throwing a dead snake up in the air. If the snake lands on its back, the baby will be a girl. If it lands upright, the baby will be a boy.

### 13. In the United States

Particularly around the state of Vermont, many 19th century farmhouses were built with slanted "witch windows," due to the commonly-held belief that witches could not fly their brooms into a tilted opening.

### 14. In the Philippines

Sun-showers, or rain with clear skies, are believed to signify the wedding between *tikbalang* (demon horses).

### 15. In Lithuania

Whistling indoors is forbidden, since it is believed that doing so will summon wee devils that will terrorize them.

### 16. In France

It is good luck to step in dog poop with their left foot, but bad luck to step in it with their right foot.

### 17. In Egypt

It's viewed as frightfully bad luck to open and close scissors without cutting anything, and even worse to leave them open. However, the Egyptians also believe that scissors under a pillow can cure a person of their nightmares.

### 18. In Denmark

Broken dishes are collected and saved year-round, to be thrown at the houses of friends and family on New Year's Eve. The bigger the pile of porcelain, the more good fortune the recipients will have in the New Year.

### 19. In China

The number 4 and all iterations thereof (14, 24, etc.) are incredibly unlucky, as the Chinese pronunciation of the number is nearly identical to that of the Chinese pronunciation of the word "death." Coupled with the Western beliefs about 13 and 23, it makes navigating high-rises in China a uniquely confusing experience.

### 20. In Brazil

It's bad luck to let their wallet or purse hit the floor, as it means they will lose money.

### Common superstitions around the world

- Breaking the mirror it brings a bad luck
- Cut the nails after the sunset
- Most of the countries avoid the number 13

- Chewing the gum at nights they believes it's a flesh of dead persons
- A cat crossing path
- To open an umbrella in the house is to bring bad luck.
- Walk under a ladder, will have bad luck.
- Bad luck comes in threes
- Cross fingers hoping for good luck.

### Conclusions

It is clear that Superstitions leads to the most adverse & serious ill effects as far as human civilizations concerned. They exist due to our ignorance of scientific facts and truths. Education can be best solution to this problem. Women are more superstitious due to their inferior position in male dominated society which leads to poor mental & physical health, in order to ensure safety & security of her own family, they get trapped into this vicious circle of blind faith& rituals. Better public outreach program, involving various sects, caste & religion of society will be very useful to eradicate superstitions. The help of modern technology & electronic media makes such outreach program more involving & interesting for masses. In spite of advances and science people are still superstitious. Many people still practice the old ways even common people practice a little. Superstitions are a part of our every day lives and always have been.

About 80% of our population lives in villages and half of them are illiterate. Superstitions should not be confused with tradition and culture. Conducting programmes on how miracles are not possible will go a long way in dispelling the belief. Movies and media should take up the challenge of fighting against this evil.

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