

# Essay on Superstition

*"Superstition involves beliefs, practices, and procedures based upon conscious or unconscious assumptions usually concerned with the nature of cause and effect." The Oxford dictionary defines Superstition, as a thoughtless fear of something unknown or mysterious especially in connection with a religious belief based on fear or ignorance.*

Since times immemorial superstitions prevailed on this earth and millions of people believe in it, while many laugh and ignore it. Dr. Betty, explaining the origin of the superstition, says that all the mysterious practices together with magic and superstition come from the primitive man's feeling of insecurity in a world he could not understand and be powerless to control. So he looked for any means of foretelling the success of his hunting or farming and invented rituals that were supposed to avert evil and misfortune.

Many people believe so strongly in the superstition that no business is started, no task is commenced unless the omens, day, and time are lucky as per the calculations of pundits and ojhas.

In many countries, Owl is considered a signal of misfortune and death. But in Persia, the Owl is looked upon as a bird of luck. As per the belief of Persians, if one rubs with the feathers of the Owl, one is supposed to ward off evil spirits and enemies. Owl's soup is also recommended as a cure for whooping cough. Not only this the Owl is very helpful to man as it destroys mice and birds that harm crops.

Superstition mysteriously connects unrelated incidents and coincidences with each other. Walking under a ladder is believed to be an unfortunate sign. Sneezing is also considered a bad omen by

many people. Some consider two or four sneezes lucky, a single sneeze or three is supposed to be a bad omen. The Chinese believe that a sneeze on New year's eve means bad luck.

If one sneezes at the time of going out, or when a male member sneezes it is considered a bad omen and if a woman sneezes, it is considered to bring good luck. The superstition for sneezes with numbers prevailed in many parts of the world as per the following:

One for sorrow

Two for joy

Three for a letter

Four for a boy

Five for silver

Six for Gold

Seven for a secret never to be told

Also, there is another rhyme for sneezes:

If you sneeze on a Monday, you sneeze for danger;

Sneeze on a Tuesday, kiss a stranger;

Sneeze on a Wednesday, sneeze for a letter;

Sneeze on a Thursday, something better;

Sneeze on a Friday, sneeze for sorrow;

Sneeze on a Saturday, see your sweetheart tomorrow.

Sneeze on a Sunday, and the devil will have domination over you all week.

The breaking of the mirror is supposed to bring bad luck to the family. Superstition regarding colors is also very interesting. According to the Chinese, the blue and white colors are signs of bad luck, some find Red color a sign of danger and violence, but there are many, who consider Red color, a color of agility and life. Interestingly number 13 has been feared in many European countries, a

member of gross misfortune and unluck. In hotels and houses, number 13 is not found either they have 12 A or 14. But there are many cases on record to show 13 is just a very lucky number. Touch Wood is another widely accepted superstition. The primitive believed that evil spirits lived on trees and so they paid their respect and homage to them by touching the trunks of trees.

See the superstition for counting crows:

One's bad,  
Two's luck,  
Three's health,  
Four's wealth,  
Five's sickness,  
Six is death.

Fear of ill omen makes a man undecided and nervous. Superstition destroys peace of mind and creates insecurity in the minds. "Superstition makes, a man fool," says Fielding, "and skepticism makes him mad."

One of the widely known and well accepted commonly believed superstition is the Black Cat crossing one's path while going for a journey. But Mr. Gordon Richards, a leading jockey of England, considered a black cat crossing his path brings him luck. Some say the absence of ants near an anthill is a warning of bad weather, but if we consider it logically, it is not based on superstition, but on the instincts of insects. How can ants be out near the anthill, when rainy weather would spell their dooms?

"Why are we superstitious ?" asks John Sanders, "Is there anything we can do about it ?" Actually, we are conservative and hold very tightly the old ideas and customs long after. We have learned better

and long after their original purpose has been lost or forgotten.”

Science kind Superstition:

All humans believe in the existence of connections or relationships between things. This is not something that can be proved or proved false (to use Popper’s test). That things consistently follow each other does not prove they are related in any objective, “real”, manner – except in our minds. This belief in some order (if we define order as permanent relations between separate physical or abstract entities) permeates both Science and Superstition. They both believe that there must be—and is—a connection between things out there.

Science limits itself and believes that only certain entities inter-relate within well defined conceptual frames (called theories). Not everything has the potential to connect to everything else. Entities are discriminated, differentiated, classified, and assimilated in worldviews in accordance with the types of connections that they forge with each other.

Moreover, science believes that it has a set of very effective tools to diagnose, distinguish, observe and describe these relationships. It proves its point by issuing highly accurate predictions based on the relationships discerned through the use of said tools. Science (mostly) claims that these connections are “true” in the sense that they are certain—not probable.

The cycle of formulation, prediction, and falsification (or proof) is the core of human scientific activity. Alleged connections that cannot be captured in these nets of reasoning are cast out either as “hypothetical” or as “false”. In other words, Science defines “relations between entities” as “relations between entities which have been established and tested using the scientific apparatus and

arsenal of tools". This, admittedly, is a very cyclical argument, as close to tautology as it gets.

Superstition is a much simpler matter: everything is connected to everything in ways unknown to us. We can only witness the results of these subterranean currents and reduce the existence of such currents from the observable flotsam. The planets influence our lives, dry coffee sediments contain information about the future, black cats portend disasters, certain dates are propitious, certain numbers are to be avoided. The world is unsafe because it can never be fathomed. But the fact that as limited as we are—can not learn about a hidden connection—should not imply that it does not exist.

Science believes in two categories of relationships between entities (physical and abstract alike). The one in the category of direct links—the other that of links through a third entity. In the first case, A and B are seen to be directly related. In the second case, there is no apparent link between A and B, but a third entity, C could well provide such a connection (for instance, if A and B are parts of C or are separate,

English Essays 165

but concurrently somehow influenced by it). Each of these two categories is divided into three subcategories: causal relationships, functional relationships, and correlative relationships. A and B will be said to be causally related if A precedes B, B never occurs if A does not precede it, and always occurs after A occurs. To the discerning eye, this would seem to be a relationship of correlation ("whenever A happens B happens") and this is true. Causation is subsumed by the 1.0 correlation relationship category. In other words: it is a private case of the more general case of correlation.

A and B are functionally related if B can be predicted by assuming A but we have no way of establishing the truth value of A. The latter

is a postulate or axiom. The time-dependent Schrodinger Equation is a postulate (cannot be derived, it is only reasonable).

Still, it is the dynamic laws underlying wave mechanics, an integral part of quantum mechanics, the most accurate scientific theory that we have. An unproved, non-drivable equation is related functionally to a host of exceedingly precise statements about the real world (observed experimental results).

A and B are correlated if A explains a considerable part of the existence or the nature of B. It is then clear that A and B are related. Evolution has equipped us with highly developed correlation mechanisms because they are efficient in ensuring survival. To see a tiger and to associate the awesome sight with a sound is very useful. Still, we cannot state with any modicum of certainty that we possess all the conceivable tools for the detection, description, analysis, and utilization of relations between entities. Put differently: we cannot say that there are no connections that escape the tight nets that we cast in order to capture them. We cannot, for instance, say with any degree of certainty that there are no hyper-structures that would provide new, surprising insights into the interconnectedness of objects in the real world or in our mind. We cannot even say that the epistemological structures with which we were endowed are final or satisfactory. We do not know enough about knowing.

So far, so good for superstitions. Today's superstition could well become tomorrow's Science given the right theoretical developments. The source of the clash lies elsewhere, in the insistence of superstitions upon a causal relation.

In general, one who believes in logic does not believe in superstition. The primitive men were superstitious because they could not understand why certain things happened, also because they were

afraid of the unknown. They couldn't analyze things logically and scientifically. Modern men know the advancement of knowledge has explained mysteries of the past. Now we can analyze the happenings of things logically, scientifically, technically so there is no reason to continue to be superstitious.