

Superstitions are a commonly witnessed phenomenon. They can be seen anywhere, anytime, whether at home, in office or on the way. People of every caste, creed or community are superstitious. Though the forms of superstition may vary, their presence can be felt in every society. It is a universal phenomenon. Even the people of highly rational West are superstitious. It is an integral part of human society.

To stop all of a sudden to see a cat crossing our path is a widely seen phenomenon in Indian society. It is almost universally believed that this is likely to bring failure to the mission of the person who is going to cross the road after it first being crossed by the cat. Similarly, the howl of the dog at the deadly hours of night instills a feeling of horror resulting from the fear of the death of some near and dear one.

The third very frequently practised superstition is that when someone sneezes at the departure time of a person, it is believed that he is going to flop in his mission. Such practices which do not have rational ground and are termed as superstitions.

Superstitions have been prevalent in society since time immemorial. They have their origin in illiteracy, i.e. lack of rational belief, scientific attitude and also lack of faculty to interpret certain events. Its origin can be traced back to pre-historic times when people did not have knowledge and exposure as we do have today.

Nor the people of those days had any control over forces of nature. In such a situation superstitions were born as a means to satisfy the causes and effects of some mishappenings. Such incidences are said to have been caused by some supernatural elements. Gradually, these interpretations of events in life received acceptability and were passed on from generations to generations. In course of time they became part and parcel to social life.

Evidences of superstitious practices can be found even in the earliest human settlements in the later Paleolithic and Neolithic periods. The presence of lots of things of day-to-day needs in the graves of those periods confirms the superstitious practices rampant in the contemporary society. Even in the highly developed civilization of Indus Valley, amulets were used possibly to ward off evil forces or unknown disasters.

Almost similar superstitions had also been practised in the Egyptian civilization. It has been found that a large number of things of day-to-day requirements, generally used by the person were put into the graves by the side of the dead who would need them all in his next life. Superstitions were also practised by the adventurous and courageous Aryans of the Rig Vedic period.

Repeated co-incidences helped in rooting the superstitions. For instance, if a person while going out on a certain mission comes across a particular animal, and by chance he is unsuccessful, he begins to believe that it was caused by the animal which he happened to see. If the incident is repeated this is established that animal is a bad omen. Or conversely,

success associated with a series of coincidental happenings also creates a superstition. Indian religious system also contributed in its propagation, by following totemism. This sometimes gives superstitions the status and sanctity of religion.

Superstitions are deeply rooted in society. Even with the spread of education and awareness superstitions could not be driven out of society. They hold the educated and uneducated alike. It has so strong grip over the mind of the people that despite scientific and technological advancement they could not make themselves free from them. Their presence is felt all across the globe despite technological progress made in various fields of life. But the spread of education has, undoubtedly, acted as a deterrent against superstitions.

Now they have developed the attitude to see and judge anything on the basis of logic and reason. Moreover, the fast-paced modern life leaves no space and time for superstitions. A person cannot heed anybody's sneezing if he had to be punctual on duty and cannot miss his train or flight. His busy schedule hardly leaves any space for such things. In addition, ever-increasing media coverage and people's accessibility to mass media have helped in creating awareness against the hollowness and harmful impact of superstitions.

It is ironic that advanced West is not free from the ills of superstitions. In China and other western countries, number '13' is considered to bring ill-luck. If this number is allotted to a car, the owner of the car hesitates to drive the car and he is always under fear and tension of accidents. A person, who gets the house of this number, hardly makes him free from the fear of death, disease, damage and destruction. Furthermore, passing under the ladder is considered unlucky by the people of western culture, but this is not the same in case of Indians.

The mode of practice of superstitions in India is different from that of west. In India it is a common superstitious practice to hang an ugly fearsome face usually painted on the back of an earthen vessel to the facade of the house, to save a newly-built house from the evil eye. In India people do not like to be called from behind or asked a question just as they are setting out for some work. Hanging artificial black shoes at the back of vehicles-a truck or bus is a very common sight in India.

Often there is an outbreak of epidemic disease in India; the imprint of cow dung at the doorway is a widely practised superstition in India, in urban and rural society alike. The sacrifice of innocent children in the name of certain religious practice is the gruesome form of superstition in India which very often catches the headlines of several dailies. In short, the culture of superstitious practice in India is very rich and varied.

Often the superstitions are very frightful and cruel in nature, particularly those related to human beings. In Indian society, a widow's plight is no secret. She is treated as an object to be hurt and humiliated catching sight of widow while on the way to somewhere is considered unlucky. Her presence is disliked on some auspicious occasions like marriage.

In India a bride often has to pay a heavy price if immediately after her marriage the death of her husband or any other member of her husband's family occurs. She is subjected to torture,

taunts and tribulation for the whole of her life. These superstitious practices undoubtedly bring about negative impact on the progress and development of society as well as individual.

Superstitions need to be eradicated from the society. Media has a significant role in this regard. Mass awareness campaign can help in combating this evil. No doubt, education has no substitute in this regard. Fortunately, the youth of India are not superstitious. They are educated and keep a scientific temper.

They believe that every action has a cause, and every cause leads to some consequences. Whatever is not based on rationality and reason should not be allowed to overpower our mind and create unnecessary fear. If you have worked hard, you cannot fail just because a cat has crossed your way. Superstitions are baseless and should be given up.