

Superstitions

Essay No. 01

Superstitions are as old as man. The earliest men who had no scientific knowledge fell on easy prey to superstition. Thus, illiteracy and lack of knowledge and capacity to reason out are the hotbeds which generate and perpetuate superstition.

Mahatma Buddha was probably the first great man to expound and explain the value and significance of reason which eliminated superstition altogether. He emphasized that everything should be thoroughly studied, judged and tested before being believed. Later, many other great men like Guru Nanak and Kabir exhorted the people to shun superstitions.

Many people may believe that faith is also a form of superstition. But, as we can see if we think deeply, there is a difference. Faith is a positive factor whereas superstition is a negative factor.

Earlier, superstition was rampant in villages. The belief in ghosts was common. It was believed that these ghosts operated at night and that they were visible to some people and invisible to others. Taking advantage of this many clever men burned into tan tricks and controllers of ghosts. They cheated the gullible villagers. Unfortunately, even at present, such clever men are at work.

There are many kinds of superstitions which are observed by common people. The throbbing of eyes, a cat crossing our way, coming across a Brahmin-all these are believed to be inauspicious. The cawing of a crow indicated the possibility of a guest visiting our house that day. Similarly, if we come across a sweeper early in the morning, it is considered to be auspicious.

We should try to develop a scientific spirit of mind and judge everything on the basis of reason.

Essay No. 02

Superstitions

Superstitions are widespread. They are found throughout the world among people in some form or the other. They are more prevalent among illiterate and uneducated people. With the advancement of knowledge, learning and science, they are gradually losing ground, yet they hold their sway even among educated people of the society.

A belief based on ignorance or fear is a superstition. A superstition is never rational. It is always against the known laws of science and reasoning. Superstitions have many forms and practices. Beliefs in charms, omens, supernatural powers and beings, etc., have their roots in superstitions. What is mysterious, unknown, and inexplicable generally because fear, and fear in its turn generates superstitions and blind-beliefs.

Thus, they originate and thrive on human ignorance's and blind-faith in things mysterious and unknown. Psychologically, the sense of insecurity, fear of ill luck and the dread of inexplicable forces in nature give birth to superstitions. Superstitions may differ from place to place, community to community and country to country, yet they have common origins. They originate from fear and lack of knowledge of things. When some phenomena cannot be explained and understood, people start fearing them and assign them divine and mysterious origins. In ancient times all races and people were governed by superstitions.

Superstitions found rich and fertile soil in human ignorance and lack of scientific knowledge. The less a race is enlightened, the more it tends to be superstitious. Some vested interests like priestly class, etc., also exercise a great influence in spreading and maintaining superstitions. Many of our religious rituals and rites are blind beliefs and tricks played by the priests, etc., on the gullible people.

The superstitions have caused mankind a lot of positive harm. The hold of superstitions on mankind is still strong. In spite of advancement of science and technology people suffer from superstitions and complexes born out of them. Take, for example, the dread of the number "13" in the West. They regard it the most unlucky number. They avoid it at any cost because they think it ominous and fatalistic. It is a taboo for them. This superstition has its origin in the last Supper of Christ. When Christ supped last, there were 13 persons, and soon after that Christ was crucified.

Because of these superstitions many godmen priests, so-called astrologers, palmists and occultists are having roaring business. The gullible and superstitious people throng their shops and willingly get duped. Superstitions have various forms and manifestations. At some places it can be seen in the worship of snakes, animals, trees and the practice of witch crafts. At others it is observed in the form of animal and human sacrifices. Sometimes a superstitious person does not hesitate even in sacrificing his own son or daughter to propitiate a god or goddess. There is no limit a superstitious person can stoop to. Much of bigotry and fanaticism have their roots in our superstitions. Many times, a woman is burnt alive as a witch or sorceress. It reminds us of Joan of Arc of France who was burnt to death because she was considered a witch by the invading English army.

In many villages and towns there are houses, places, trees and caverns believed to be haunted by ghosts. The graveyards are supposed to be frequented by these spirits, and should therefore be avoided, at night and at odd hours. If anybody dares to go there at odd hours, he or she is bound to be possessed by the evil spirits. The only remedy available is rationality and scientific temper. The more the knowledge based on facts, the lesser the evils of superstitions. We must eradicate ignorance, fear of the unknown, the ideas of existence of evil spirits through dissemination of scientific knowledge and enlightenment in order to root out superstitions from our minds.

In India there are many superstitions. Beliefs in ghosts, witches, omens, spirits, age old rotten customs and traditions are to be found almost everywhere in India. For thousands and thousands of people in India superstitions are synonymous with religion because they are weak-minded and rationally not developed. They are victims of the superstitions and irrational rotten faiths in the guise of religion, traditions and rituals. Not long ago small-pox was considered as the result of the wrath of a goddess. Still in many villages and towns the goddess Shitala is worshipped as the authoress of small-pox. Similarly, sneezing at the start of a work or a travel is considered as an evil portent. The crossing of a cat while you are going for some work is also regarded as equally ominous. In such an event it is presumed that the work is sure to end in failure. The barking of a dog, the crying of a cat, the howling of a jackal and broying of an ass are also taken as ominous. But a man or woman, with a pitcher full of water, crossing your way, a sweeper sweeping the road before you, are looked upon as auspicious.

There are certain days and hours which are auspicious. The people of India have set beliefs and want to perform work accordingly. They consult an astrologer or a priest for an auspicious movement to start an important work or a journey. The time and date of a marriage, inauguration, foundation laying of a house, start of a business, etc., are fixed according to the positions of the planets and stars. There are certain inauspicious days and months when no good and important work can be undertaken.

For the Indians the sun-eclipse, the sight of a comet and a shooting star are very ominous. They signify some disaster or national tragedy to them.

“When beggars die there are no comets seen, The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.”

Essay No. 03

Superstitions

Superstitions had their origin in the element of fear in man. Whatever could not be explained by reason was looked upon as an object of terror and was worshipped. However even now, when civilization has progressed and education has spread, superstitions are current all over the world. Superstitions reduce a man's efficiency and, therefore, should be done away with.

Superstitions cut across caste, communal, and even national boundaries. People all over the world have superstitions, though they may differ from country to country and region to region. Not even the educated are free from superstitions. In some cases, superstitious beliefs are very deep-rooted. In spite of all evidence to the contrary, people continue to hold fast to them and allow their lives to be regulated by them.

The origin of superstitions can be traced to the element of fear (which is anti-rationalistic), the urge for security and material welfare. Human beings cherish a deep-seated wish for their physical well-being. They would go to any length to ward off, real or imaginary, danger to their bodies and falling prey to diseases and death. Also the desire for success; in projects involving material welfare is so great in human beings that even the thought of failure unnerves them. They, therefore, believe in certain superstitions. Some of the superstitions involve either positively doing certain things or avoiding certain situations or happenings; Superstitions are a legacy from the Stone and Wood ages. The primitive men then did not understand a large part of the natural phenomena. Their reason was not highly developed. They attributed their success or failure, or physical calamity to irrational beliefs. Also superstitions came into vogue through repeated coincidences. For example, if a person often met a particular type of animal, while going out on a mission, and each time he was unsuccessful, he began to regard that animal as a bad omen. Or conversely, success associated with a series of coincidental happenings; also created a superstition.

In the Western civilization, one of the most well-known superstitions the ill-luck number thirteen is supposed to bring. A person getting number thirteen for his car will shudder to drive his vehicle for fear of accidents. A house with this number will fill the inmates with fear of disease and death. But such is not the case in India. Also, in the West, passing under a ladder is considered unlucky. This superstition also is not current in India.

There is, however, a long list of superstitions which are prevalent in India. A black cat is one of the worst omens. (In the West, too, it is

thought so). If a black cat runs across someone's path, it is believed, he either fails in his job or meets with an accident. Owl is another illomened bird. Hooting of an owl is supposed to bring disaster in the neighborhood or to the particular house he is sitting on at the time of hooting. Cawing of crow announces arrival of SOW guests. Wailing of a dog foreshadows death. If one meets a Brahmin immediately on setting out for a job, one is Most likely to fail. On the Other hand, if one meets sweeper/sweepers, it is supposed to bring success in job. (It is a rather contradictory superstition. Shudras are regarded as low and Brahmins as twice-born high caste beings in Indian society). Looking at alt empty Vessel at the time of corning out of the house is also supposed to bring failure. If someone sneezes, when one is getting ready to go out to accomplish a task, he is likely to fail, People don't like to be called back and asked a question when they are setting out for some work. Women's braids are hung at the back of vehicles, sometimes even cars belonging to the posh people. A newly-built house has to ward off the evil eye. This is done by hanging, on the facade of, the house an ugly, fearsome face, usually painted at the back of an earthen vessel.

At times, superstitions are stretched too far. Particular people are regarded as ill omened just. because a death or a serious crippling accident took place to a family member after they appeared on the scene. In the Indian setup, the newly-married brides often have to pay a heavy price. If immediately after the brides entry into her in-laws house the death of her husband or father-in-law or even some other member of the family occurs, she is blamed for it. For the rest of her life, the daughter-in-law is subjected to taunts and torture for no fault of hers.

Some of the superstitions, however, are meant to bring about social good or lessen the pain or feeling of loss. For example, finding of a and carrying it along is considered a sign of good luck. The action, thus performed, actually Proves beneficial to satiety: The horse-shoe, an otherwise dangerous thing, which could hurt a human or damage a wheel removed from the road by the picker. Similarly the breaking of crockery on the occasion of a marriage ceremony is considered auspicious. The superstition is again calculated to lessen the feeling of loss that would otherwise be caused on account of a financial loss.

Superstitions, to say the least, affect human conduct. They ,fill, men with unnecessary anxiety and fear, which lead to nervous strain. They reduce the capability of men to perform certain tasks or delay the accomplishment of jobs. Many a man go back home because they have encountered some

ill omen. Superstitions sour human relationships. Sneezing is a biological need likewise. Asking a question when somebody- is about to leave for some job is a natural curiosity of human beings.

The purpose of education is to reduce the area of darkness and instill among people courage, self-confidence, and thereby free the society from the tyranny of superstitions. Although superstitious beliefs are still current, with the spread of education, many of the superstitions have died. Since most of the superstitions hinder positive action; the elders can play a crucial role in freeing the youngsters from the yoke of superstitions. They can explain, to them the futility of believing in them. Also, they can set an example by themselves not falling victim to superstitious beliefs.

Essay No. 04

Superstition

“Superstition”, said Burke, “is the religion of feeble minds”. It is belief that has no basis in reason. It is the daughter of Ignorance and Fear. The word means, literally, standing over—standing still at a thing in fear and awe. Superstition, said Pascal, “is founded on fear or ignorance, and leads men to form false ideas of duty, to dread chimeras, and to lean on a broken reed.” Belief in omens and oracles; servile attachment to ritual, usage, form of words; and seeing the supernatural in every incident of life—all these come under Superstition.

In religion, superstition means irrational fear of the mysterious, and reverence for objects that are no proper objects of worship. Ignorant savages have no scientific knowledge of what we call the forces of nature. They think the sun and the moon, fire and wind and wailer, are governed by super-natural beings, who sometimes seem kind, but more often terrible and cruel. These they fear and worship, and try to propitiate them with offerings, sacrifices and senseless rites. And their imagination peoples the universe with imaginary beings—demons, ghosts and fairies.

A tree is judged by its fruits; and the fruits of superstition are all evil. It has been responsible for a vast amount of cruelty, misery and madness. In old times men offered up human sacrifices to appease imaginary gods. In the Middle Ages, the belief in witchcraft led to the persecution of poor old women, who were believed to be in league with the Devil. The Spanish Inquisition tortured and burnt thousands of innocent people, at the bidding of superstition. And even in civilized countries today, superstition produces narrow mindedness, bigotry and needless mental suffering.

Superstition is a thing of darkness; it cannot stand the light. It is a child of ignorance; it hates and flees from the face of knowledge. As knowledge increases, superstition decreases. Science, which has discovered the real forces of nature, has banished the old bogies of superstition—demons, ghosts, and goblins, and all the creations of fear and ignorance which once made men afraid. But superstition dies slowly; and even to-day silly bits of superstition still linger. There are still people who consult fortune-tellers, think the number thirteen unlucky, will not walk under a ladder, nor start a voyage on a Friday. As knowledge spreads, however, superstition will dwindle till it disappears altogether.

Essay No. 05

Superstitions

Superstitions betray human weakness, ignorance and fear of the unknown and mysterious. They are the irrational belief in things which remain inexplicable, mysterious of sufficient knowledge and unravelled because of lack scientific temper. Superstitions are on the decline because of spread of education, reasoning and scientific advancement. However, even educated and advanced people have their superstitions. It has also been seen that while many old superstitions are dying, new ones are being born. Primitive instincts, fears and beliefs present a fertile land for superstitions. Emotional instability, religious orthodoxy, blind belief in irrational rituals, customs and practices make people an easy prey of the superstitions.

Superstitions are not confined to a particular a particular part of the globe, people, race or community. They are ubiquitous and found throughout the world, in one form or another. There is only a difference of degrees. They are more prevalent among illiterate, uneducated and scientifically less advanced people and societies. Superstitions are being passed on from one generation to another, through religious practices. No doubt they are gradually losing ground with the advancement of rationality, scientific approach to things and globalization of the world, yet, superstitions may not be eradicated for a long time.

Belief in charms supernatural powers, ghosts, evil spirits, and spiritual healing etc., have their deep roots in superstitions. They are common among the people of all classes. For example, the eclipse of the sun and moon, sighting of shooting stars and comets, cries of certain birds like owls, revanes, and wiling of dogs mewing of cats, howling of jackals and braying of the ass at certain hours are still regarded as ominous in many communities all over the world. The fear of number 13 is another example of our blind belief. All superstitions have their origin in the human psychology of fear of ill- luck, insecurity and the dread of inexplicable forces in

nature. When some phenomena cannot be explained and understood, people start fearing them and assign them divine, supernatural and mysterious origins.

In ancient days, all races and people were governed by superstitions. They found rich and fertile ground in human ignorance and lack of scientific knowledge. The less a community is educated and enlightened, the more it tends to be superstitious and backward. Some vested interests, like the Priestly class etc., also exercise a great influence in spreading, maintaining and generating new superstitions. Many of our religious, sectarian and family rituals and rites are based on blind beliefs, and tricks are being played on gullible people by the so-called godmen, priests, quacks, charlatans, astrologers, palmists, star and crystal gazers. There are many religious cults thriving today throughout the world only because of human ignorance, blind faith and irrationality. Even the developed countries are no exception. In spite of advancement of science and technology, the hold of superstitions on mankind is strong and man continues to suffer from these evils and complexes born out of them. In India, sneezing when someone is about to start work, is considered inauspicious. Similarly, the crossing of the path by a cat, especially a black one, is regarded as boding ill-luck. Like these ominous signs, there are lucky ones as well, which are regarded as harbingers of good luck, fortune and success. Man's ingrained fear of the unknown and the inexplicable has invented ominous signs, portents and premonitions.

Sacrifice of birds and animals to please the gods and goddesses, and to atone for one's sins, is a common practice among many communities all over the world. 'Many women are still lynched because they are mistaken for witches. People still resort to magicians and godmen to exorcise the so-called evil spirits and their harmful influences, and are being willingly fleeced and duped in the process.

Superstitions are thriving in an organized way under various cults, religious sects, godmen, priests, and so-called prophets and representatives of gods. They are successfully leading the masses by the nose. We have actually failed to draw a line between religion and blind faith, bigotry and spiritualism and between prayer and useless incantations. We regard certain hours and days as inauspicious and so consult astrologers, priests and godmen to know the auspicious days and hours to start- our work, projects and journey. Likewise, the time and date of marriage, inauguration, foundation-laying ceremonies are fixed according to the advice of astrologers and the positions of the planets and stars.

The need of the hour is to cultivate more and more objectivity, rationality and scientific spirit in our approach to things, including those which are inexplicable and, in some way, or other mysterious. We need not give up our ideals, imagination, emotions and impulses and become living robots, but we must be alert and watchful so as not to allow these to dominate and dictate our faculties of

reasoning, logic and analysis. Religion is certainly blind if not blended with science and reasoning; and, science is lame, unless guided by conscience and emotions. Our only hope is in sanity, balance and cultivation of scientific outlook and temper.

Essay No. 06

Superstitions

Majority of people are superstitious blindly. Superstition is a sign of ignorance and backwardness. Thus, superstitions do not have any place in science. But people not only in India but in other countries also are superstitious. The number thirteen is regarded as an ominous figure by people in some countries. Even the French architect Le Corbusier, who designed the Indian city Chandigarh, was superstitious for he did not create Sector-13, in Chandigarh. Similarly, Europeans consider it lucky if they find a horse shoe on the road. Other popular superstitions are that the howling of a jackal, sight of an owl bodes evil. Some people believe that a journey undertaken in a particular direction, on a given time is inauspicious. Sneezing when a person is ready to leave is considered a bad omen. Similarly howling of a dog is thought to indicate death of someone. But due to the impact of science, people have started questioning popular superstitions. Science sees everything rationally and it will serve people well if they examine these things rationally. People should turn a deaf ear to these superstitions and only then they will progress in their life.