

# Superstitious beliefs essay



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**SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS INTRODUCTION** Over a period of time, superstitious beliefs have rooted themselves firmly in our society, so much so that it is virtually impossible for the person to ignore them. They have made a place for themselves in all the walks of life, including politics and sports. Politicians resorting to the astrological predictions is not at all rare. On the other hand, examples of superstitions in sports include cricketers carrying a coloured handkerchief in their pocket, or soccer players putting their right foot first when they enter the field. Such superstitious practices are found all over the world.

Basically, superstitious beliefs and practices are illogical assumptions based on one particular incident, which are then followed. Much older superstitions usually involve supernatural forces like evil spirits, witches, etc. This paper discusses about various superstitious beliefs around the world. **ORIGIN OF SUPERSTITIONS** The origin of superstitions can be traced to beliefs people held, in the olden times. While most of them arise out of fear, some are meant to drive fear away. Superstitious beliefs are an outcome of ignorance and lack of rational thinking, but then they are beliefs after all.

Beliefs become notions, then become opinions, and then begin to prevail in society. For instance a cricketer who casually carried a red handkerchief in his pocket and played a magnificent innings that day is bound to believe that the good luck was brought upon him by this very handkerchief, and therefore carry it in his pocket every time he goes out to bat. With passing time, some superstitions were rendered false, while others ‘succeeded’ in establishing themselves as truths. Many superstitions become the basis of certain social customs and go on to become traditions.

Such is the power of superstitions that they turn from being false beliefs to becoming strong notions and masses start following them. MOST COMMON SUPERSTITIONS AROUND THE WORLD Black cats The origin of this superstition can be traced to ancient Egypt. Back then, their goddess Bast was a female black cat. Christians, at that time, wanting to eradicate all other religions from society, convinced people that black cats were demons. Also another reason that black cats are considered to be bad luck is, by the 17th century, the cats began to be associated with witchcraft.

Some believe cats can see spirits and can hence guard you against evil spirits. Thus the good luck or bad luck of black cats depends on where you live in the world. In Britain and Japan, it is considered good luck to have a black cat cross your path, whereas in USA, India and several European countries, it is bad luck to have a black cat walk by. It is also believed that if a cat walks toward you, it brings good fortune but if it walks away, it takes the good luck with it. Fingers crossed This is probably the superstition that is most widely used today. If one crosses their fingers, good luck will result.

Often used when hoping for a good outcome at a critical gambling, etc. the idea was that it was a shorthand way of showing the sign of cross, and therefore could be used to ward off evil spirits thus preventing the evil spirits from destroying our chances of good fortune. Lucky Horseshoes A horseshoe is one of the widely known good luck charms. It is considered lucky for its distinctive shape and function. The shape of a horseshoe, a typical U, similar to that of a crescent moon, is believed to bring good luck. Secondly, a horseshoe protects the horse, and is hence believed to protect humans too.

Since making horseshoes is related to blacksmithy, which is considered to be a noble profession, horseshoes are also associated with nobility and hence believed to bring good luck. Also it resembles the Greek letter Omega (Ω), the last letter of the alphabets, which was been painted on the walls of the house to protect against diseases. There is a Christian story of St. Dunstan, who once saw a devil and recognized it, and warned it never to enter a house which has a horseshoe hung outside. Superstition has that witches fear horses and hence horseshoes are believed to keep the witches away.

Horseshoes have been used as protection from the evil in many European and Middle Eastern households. **Covering a Yawn** Some ancient theorists feared that the soul could sort of slip out of the body during a yawn, creating an opportunity for evil spirits to get in and trash the place. Also some ancient man had observed that new-borns, struggling to survive, yawn shortly after birth (a reflexive response to draw additional oxygen into the lungs). With infant mortality extraordinarily high, early physicians, at a loss to account for frequent deaths, blamed the yawn.

The helpless baby simply could not cover its mouth with a protective hand. Roman physicians actually recommended that a mother be particularly vigilant during the early months of life and cover any of her new-born's yawns until they could learn to do it themselves. However, at present it is just considered rude not covering a yawn since it is contagious. **The Unlucky 13** Surveys show that of all bad luck superstitions, unease surrounding the number 13 is the one that affects most people today—and in almost countless ways. Ancient Egyptians associated the number 13 with death, which later led to the fear of this number.

The widely known story behind 13 being unlucky is that of Last Supper. We all know, Judas, the betrayer of Jesus was the 13th guest at the meal. In ancient Rome, witches reportedly gathered in groups of 12. The 13th guest was believed to be the devil. Also numerologists consider 12 a “complete” number. There are 12 months in a year, 12 signs of zodiac, 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles of Jesus, etc. Thus exceeding 12 by 1, 13 is associated with bad luck just for being a little beyond completeness. The number 13 is usually linked with Friday the 13th. It is traditionally believed that Eve tempted Adam with the apple on a Friday.

Tradition also has it that the Flood in the Bible, the confusion at the tower of Babel, the death of Jesus Christ all took place on Friday. Since then, Fridays the 13th's have been connected with all manner of ill events. Due to this fear of the number 13 known as Triskaidekaphobia oMore than 80% of high-rises lack a 13th floor around the world. oHospitals and Hotels regularly have no room number 13. oIn Italy, France the house between 12 and 14 is addressed as 12?. oMany cities do not have a 13th street or a 13th avenue. Breaking a Mirror Breaking a mirror can bring you seven years of bad luck, they say.

The origin of this superstition stems from the belief that your reflection in the mirror represents your soul or your ‘self’. Breaking of the mirror would cause this ‘self’ to break, indicating bad luck is near. Some believe, if the broken pieces are buried in the ground, bad luck can be kept at bay. In the olden times, if you were guilty of breaking someone's mirror, you had to be a servant in that house for seven years. It was in the times when mirrors were very expensive and rare, and breaking one meant spending a bomb to

replace it. God Bless You Saying ‘ god bless you’ when someone sneezes is one widely followed superstition.

The blessing of those who sneezes started when a great plague took hold of Europe. Sufferers began sneezing violently, and as such were found to die. The pope therefore passed a law necessitating the people to bless the sneezer. At the same time, it was expected that the anybody sneezing should cover their mouth with a cloth or their hand. This was obviously to stop the spreading of the disease, but many believed that it was to keep the soul intact, Sneezing ‘ into the air’ would allow the soul to escape and death would be imminent. WEDDING SUPERSTITIONS Wedding Jewellery

We all know the engagement ring is worn in the ring finger, but do we know why? Well, it is because it was once believed that the left ring finger is directly connected to the heart, making it the most appropriate finger for something like an engagement ring or wedding band. Even the use of pearls has a superstition behind it. The Greeks believed that a bride wearing pearls would have a happy marriage. The Wedding Gown and the Veil The history of the white wedding gown is quite interesting. It was after Queen Victoria chose to wear a white gown for her wedding, that it became popular with commoners.

White was also believed to be the symbol of virginity and purity. Thus the bride usually wears a white gown for wedding. The veil is believed to serve two purposes. One, it guards the bride against evil spirits. Two, it keeps the bride hidden from the groom until marriage, thus eliminating chances of his disapproval of the bride. It was the time when families decided the marriage

and feared that the groom may disapprove of the bride on seeing her, and thus arose the tradition of the bride covering her face with a veil. Wedding Day Seeing a rainbow, having the sun shine, meeting a chimney sweep on the wedding day are believed to bring good luck whereas seeing a pig, hare, or lizard running across the road, seeing an open grave, meeting a nun or a monk are believed as bad luck. •Certain days of the week, and certain months of the year are better than others for a wedding. Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth, Wednesday best of all, Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses, Saturday for no luck at all •If married on a year ending with an even number, it is said to bring good luck. The bride should not wear full wedding outfit before the wedding, or it is said to bring bad luck Wedding Gifts oThe first gift the bride opens should be the first gift she uses. oThe person who gives the third gift to be opened will soon have a baby. DREAM

**SUPERSTITIONS** There are many superstitions regarding dreams. A common saying goes “ a dream out of season, trouble out of reason ” . Some of such superstitions based on dreams are as follows Baby To see a baby in your dream signifies innocence, warmth and new beginnings. A love affair may be blooming for you in your near future. You will also make new and fun friends.

If a woman dreams she is nursing a baby, she will be deceived by the one she trusts the most Birth & Death If you dream of death it's a sign of a birth, if you dream of birth, it's a sign of death. Cats Dreaming of a cat is a generally unfortunate omen and it shows treachery as well as a run of bad luck. Cats attacking you represent enemies; if you succeed banishing them you will overcome great obstacles and rise in fortune and fame. Driving If you dream that you are driving a vehicle it is a sign that you should be

careful to take no chances with your money, such as gambling, in the next two weeks or so. If someone else is doing the driving you will find yourself in luck, money wise. Face To dream of a smiling face signifies pleasant new friends, experiences, and/or financial gains. To dream of unpleasant or grotesque (unless amusingly so) faces portend loss. To dream you are washing your face denotes a necessity to atone for some past indiscretion; better make amends! To see the faces of strangers signifies an approaching change of residence. Ice Creams Eating, making, selling or serving ice cream suggests that you are feeling contentment and satisfaction in your life.

Garden To see a vegetable garden in your dream symbolizes increased prosperity will come your way through diligence and care. It also suggests of stability and inner growth. To see a flower garden in your dream foretells of tranquility, comfort, true love and happy home in your future. To see a sparse, weed-infested garden denotes that you have neglected your spiritual needs. Killing If you dreamed of killing someone, whether intentionally or by accident, it signifies a period of severe emotional stress during which you must make a heroic effort to control your temper. Ocean

If you dream you are standing on shore and watching the waves foam up as they break over the beach foretells that you will have some narrow escape from an accidental injury. If you are far out on the ocean and hear the waves as they lap against the hull of the ship, you will have setbacks in your business and a troubled domestic scene. To sail on a calm ocean is always a good omen for all concerned. Owl To dream of an owl denotes a narrow escape from desperate illness or death. Snakes To see a lone snake and feel



threatened by it shows that you have a bad enemy that is working against you, it also a warning against bodily harm from an enemy.

To dream of many snakes in a pit is the foreboding of much bad luck in love or business. Should you overcome and kill a threatening snake in your dream shows that you will overcome your adversary and win out. Spiders All spiders except tarantulas are omens of good luck. The larger the spider, the bigger the rewards. If you see a spider climbing the wall you will have your dearest wish come true. If you see a spider spinning a web you will have an increase in your income due to hard work. Water

Dreaming of clear water is a sign of great good luck and prosperity, a dream of muddy water foretells sadness or sorry for the dreamer through hearing of an illness or death of someone he/she knows well. Dirty water warns of unscrupulous people who would bring you to ruin. GIFT GIVING

**SUPERSTITIONS** There are many different superstitions about gift giving. And within these superstitions are different versions. Many of the superstitions have been carried down from generation to generation and as time passed the interpretations change, hence the different versions. Some of these are specific to the occasion, and others are general in nature.

Here are a few that are found interesting! Knives/Scissors If somebody gives you a knife, pair of scissors, or anything with a sharp edge, it means that the relationship will soon be severed or cut. To keep this from happening you must present the gift-giver with a coin to 'pay for' the gift. Historically, people have given these items with a penny taped to the blade, and the recipient would remove and return the coin to the giver to keep the

relationship safe. Along the same line, scissors or knives should never be given as a wedding gift, as this would indicate that the giver thinks the marriage will soon be severed. Cash

In India, giving cash is considered fine as long as it is gifted in an odd amount – Rs. 5, Rs. 11, Rs. 51, Rs. 101 etc. In Japan, it is inappropriate to give amounts beginning in four, which phonetically sounds like shi — or death — in Japanese. When you give somebody a purse, wallet or change purse, be sure to also put some money in it (even a penny). Otherwise, the gift will be bad luck for the recipient. Additionally, by including the gift of money you ensure that the recipient will always have money. Wrapping In Hong Kong, do not give a gift wrapped in blue. Along with white, blue is considered a colour of mourning.

The colour red is considered a lucky colour in Hong Kong. In the Moroccan culture the colours pink, violet, and yellow are avoided, as they are associated with death. Handkerchief Do not give handkerchiefs as a gift. Since they are used for wiping away tears and sweat and, a handkerchief gift implies that you expect the recipient to be doing a lot of crying in the future, or wipe away sweat from frustration. Shoes It has been said to never give anyone a pair of shoes as a gift. This is so because it is thought that the shoes would make the person you give them to walk away from you.

Suitcase

Giving somebody a suitcase is said to encourage someone to pack up and walk out of the relationship. HUMAN BODY SUPERSTITIONS There are a lot of superstitions based on the human body. Some of such superstitions are

given below Hair Hair, the ‘crowning glory’ is one of the most indestructible parts of the body. As such, a sudden loss of hair is unlucky, forecasting a decline in health, loss of property or failure in business, or the death of a closely related child. Red hair is associated with fiery-tempered people black and dark brown hair indicate strength; fair hair implies timidity.

On a man, if the hair grows low on the forehead and back above the temples he will have a long life; if a woman’s hair grows in a low point on her forehead (‘widow’s peak’) she will outlive her husband. If a woman suddenly develops curls on her forehead her man has not long to live. Lank hair = a cunning nature; Curly hair = good natured, full of fun; Long hair = strength and luck. It is said to be unlucky to have your hair cut when the moon is in the wane as this will cause it to fall out and lose its lustre. Cutting your own hair will tempt fate. Twitching Eyes Eye twitching is something we all are familiar with.

In India, left eye twitching is considered bad omen while the twitching of your right eye is considered as a good sign. In the Chinese tradition, this superstition is the other way round. Africans believe in the twitching of one’s lower eyelid as being a sign of impending sorrow. The medical reasons behind left or right eye twitching are stress, lack of sleep or eye problems. Ears If your right ear itches, someone is speaking well of you. If your left ear itches, someone is speaking ill of you. The Teeth If you bite your tongue while you are eating then you have recently told a lie.

A large gap between the teeth = lucky in life; Large teeth = physical strength; Small, regular teeth = careful and methodical in your habits. It is

not good for a child to be born with any teeth showing. It causes bad luck to count your teeth. If you throw away a tooth and an animal finds it, your new tooth will be like a tooth of that animal. The Hand It is a symbol of power and an instrument of healing, justice and blessing. The right hand is lucky and the left unlucky because the Devil is supposed to have sat on the left-hand side of God before being cast out of heaven.

Large, thick hands = strength of character; Small, slender hands = weak and timid character; Long hands = ingenious nature; Short ones = careless and foolish nature; Hard hands = rudeness; Soft hands = wit; Hairy hands = a person who likes luxury. A damp hand = an amorous disposition; while ' a cold hand means a warm heart'. If the palm of your right hand itches you will receive money; if the left palm, you will lose some (' left, lose; right, receive'). Two people should never wash their hands together in the same water - this will lead to a quarrel between them.

Long fingers = artistic; Short, thick fingers = intemperate and silly; a crooked little finger = omen of wealth; the first finger (the ' poison finger') should never be used to administer medicines; the third finger (the ' wedding' finger) is said to be linked directly to the heart. It is unlucky to cut fingernails on a Friday or Sunday. Specks on the nails: yellow = death; black = ill-luck; white = good fortune to come. If a woman cuts the nails of her right hand with her left hand she will have the upper hand in marriage. The number of X's in the palm of your right hand is the number of the children you will have. The Feet

The feet also have their own superstitions. An itching foot indicates a journey to somewhere new and Flat feet indicates bad temper. Do not enter a building left foot first, to avoid bad luck. If you go anywhere and stumble, you are not welcome there. If your second toe is larger than your big toe, you will rule your mate. Moles A mole on the right side means good luck where as a mole on the left side brings bad luck. A mole on your left leg is the sign that you have a very bad temper. Mole on your arm, you are a gentleman's charm. A mole on the face (especially chin or neck) represents wealth

### SUPERSTITIONS IN INDIA

Indian is chained by superstition. Even after so many years, these superstitions are creating hurdles. These superstitions' some time are supported by religious belief and some time they are just there without any knowledge. People are blindly following it without any solid reasons and grounds. It is true that people, who have been educated and moved into a very different lifestyle, do not much believe on all this. But still majority of Indian's still have these beliefs. Here are some evergreen Indian superstitions! Do not ever leave home without consulting an astrologer.

Rahu and Ketu, two ominous planets, are waiting to ruin things for you. Wait for the shubh mahurat, based on the Hindu calendar. This also holds true for weddings, naming ceremonies, housewarming rites and everything in life! Consult a horoscope before getting your children married. Go ahead only if the virtues and gunas match perfectly. Seeing an elephant during a journey is auspicious as Ganesha, the God who removes obstacles will ensure success. Looking at mother's face or picture of God as soon as you open your eyes in the morning will bring good luck for that day Never ask the question

“ where are you going? while they are leaving house, its purpose will not be fulfilled. A dog howling at night chills the blood – a portent of approaching death. When leaving home, it is auspicious to see a bride, a Brahmin or an religious idol. However, sighting a widow or a barren woman is not lucky! A new bride is judged by the fortunes or misfortunes that occur in her new family for a year after marriage. She enters her new home putting her right foot first. Coconut tree, Ashoka Tree, Banyan Tree etc are considered sacred Pregnant women are not allowed to travel alone at night or enter an uninhabited home because ghosts might possess them.

They should read religious books and watch inspiring movies so that the child grows up to be a good person. Hiccups indicate someone is thinking of you. But an itchy eye refers to someone maligning you, or your envy of someone. Never ask the question “ where are you going? ” while they are leaving house, its purpose will not be fulfilled. Sneezing once when you make a statement indicates that what you said is true. If a lizard makes a sound when you make a statement, it indicates that what you said is true. A barber shop remains closed on Tuesday as hair is not cut on that day. Nails should not be cut at night for fear of evil spirits.

Never wash the front courtyard immediately after someone leaves the house. 31. Open the front door during dusk, so that Lakshmi (fortune) enters the house Never sweep the house during night time or Lakshmi (fortune) will not enter your house. Cutting nails, hair-cutting, shaving or stitching cloth after sun set is a bad practice, (obviously coz of no electricity during old times, doing these in the dark could be dangerous, but its still believed to be

a bad practice), Taking a teaspoon of curd with little sugar before exam will bring good luck Twitching of the eye is highly inauspicious.

An eclipse occurs when Rahu and Ketu swallow the sun, and people avoid eating anything, and go and take a dip in rivers after it is over. When there is a birth or death in the family, the members are unclean, and do not go to the temple till the stipulated period is over. These colourful customs, no matter how absurd, keep the religious folk busy and the irreverent ones in mirth.

**SOME MORE INTERESTING SUPERSTITIONS** Apple Think of five or six names of boys or girls you might marry, As you twist the stem of an apple, recite the names until the stem comes off. You will marry the person whose name you were saying when the stem fell off.

If you cut an apple in half and count how many seeds are inside, you will also know how many children you will have. Baby To predict the sex of a baby: Suspend a wedding band held by a piece of thread over the palm of the pregnant girl. If the ring swings in an oval or circular motion the baby will be a girl. If the ring swings in a straight line the baby will be a boy. Bee If a bee enters your home, it's a sign that you will soon have a visitor. If you kill the bee, you will have bad luck, or the visitor will be unpleasant. A swarm of bees settling on a roof is an omen that the house will burn down. Bell

The sound of bells drives away demons because they're afraid of the loud noise. Broom Do not lean a broom against a bed. The evil spirits in the broom will cast a spell on the bed. If you sweep trash out the door after dark, it will bring a stranger to visit. If someone is sweeping the floor and sweeps over your feet, you'll never get married. Never take a broom along when you

move. Throw it out and buy a new one. To prevent an unwelcome guest from returning, sweep out the room they stayed in immediately after they leave.

**Butterfly** If the first butterfly you see in the year is white, you will have good luck all year.

**Three butterflies together mean good luck.** **Eyelash** If an eyelash falls out, put it on the back of the hand, make a wish and throw it over your shoulder.

If it flies off the hand the wish will be granted. **Salt** Bad luck will follow the spilling of salt unless a pinch is thrown over the left shoulder into the face of the devil waiting there. Put salt on the doorstep of a new house and no evil can enter. **Salty soup** is a sign that the cook is in love. **Shoes** Do not place shoes upon a table, for this will bring bad luck for the day, cause trouble with your mate and you might even lose your job as a result. It's bad luck to leave shoes upside down.

**Umbrella** Dropping an umbrella on the floor means that there will be a murder in the house. It's bad luck to open an umbrella inside the house, especially if you put it over your head. **Wood** Knock three times on wood after mentioning good fortune so evil spirits won't ruin it. **Pencil** If you use the same pencil to take a test that you used for studying for the test, the pencil will remember the answers. **Wishbone** Two people pull apart the dried breastbone of a chicken or turkey until it cracks and breaks, each one making a wish while doing so. The person who gets the long half of the wishbone will have his or her wish come true. **Pepper**

If you spill pepper you will have a serious argument with your best friend.

**Photograph** If 3 people are photographed together, the one in the middle will



die first. Cemetery You must hold your breath while going past a cemetery or you will breathe in the spirit of someone who has recently died. Clock If a clock which has not been working suddenly chimes, there will be a death in the family. You will have bad luck if you do not stop the clock in the room where someone dies. CONCLUSION In conclusion, these superstitions are merely for your general knowledge. Some sound silly, some are freaky while some look fun but they may or may not be true.

Even the educated and the aware cannot necessarily get over superstitions entirely. We all are superstitious in our own small ways. We all have these little notions of a particular colour, number, object or person being lucky for us and we believe these small things can go good for us. Hence none of us is completely non-superstitious. How much ever we argue and reason against superstitious beliefs or boast of being rational, these superstitions remain to be what they strangely are, our little support systems. Thus superstitions about every aspects of life have existed since the beginning of time and will always be with us.