

Prevalence of Superstitions and Myths among the peoples in rural areas of Malda district of West Bengal in 21st Century: A Study of Cultural Geography

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Abstract:

Prevalence of Superstition and Myths in India is like a curse of new India. Superstitions in India are considered widespread social problems. Superstition is mainly prevalent among illiterates, uneducated and scientifically less advanced people and societies. Belief in charms, supernatural power, ghosts, evil spirits and spiritual healing etc. have their deep roots in superstitions. People often learn these beliefs from their culture and family. Belief and superstitions together are indivisible part of human society. Each society has its own traditional knowledge stored in their culture in the form of belief, custom and rituals. These beliefs are not based on human reason or scientific knowledge. This paper is an attempt to examine the major causes of superstitions, to find out the levels and categories of superstition prevailing in rural areas of Malda district. Malda district of West Bengal has been selected as the study areas. The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The result of the study shows that 26.88 percent of the respondents are highly superstitious. In this paper, superstition has been categorized into three parts i.e. common, death and health related superstitious behavior. The researcher suggested that Ministry of Rural Developments and Panchyati Raj should conduct Anti-Superstitions campaigns in rural areas to help peoples develop rational and practical mindsets in rural areas of Malda district in West Bengal.

Keywords: Superstition, Health, Death, Myths, Blind-Beliefs, Black Magic,

Introduction:

Superstitions are as old as the mankind. Superstition is defined as a blind belief in the supernatural powers. It is worldwide phenomenon which is prevalent everywhere and is not

confined to any particular country, race, religion, culture, community or civilizations. Living in 21st century, India still survives under thick cloud of superstitious beliefs. India being a land of diversity and varying social practices has a bunch of superstitions prevailing in the society. Superstitions is the beliefs in supernatural causality that one event causes another without any natural process linking with the events such as astrology, omens, witchcrafts, black magic etc. Superstitious person have faith in luck, prophecy, ghosts, evil, spirits, omens, supernatural powers, spiritual healing. Astrologers, priests, godmen, babas, tantriks, black magician, stragers, quacks contribute to the propagation of superstition in our society. There are fortunate and unlucky numbers, days, items, animals and birds among other things in the superstitions. Illiterate and weak minded people all over the world often are a prey to superstitions. Superstitious people's can be called as backward peoples. They tend to interpret every phenomenon irrationally.

In many parts of the country considering 13th number as an unlucky number, associated with bad luck and it is so common that many apartments and hotels omit 13th sector, some airlines fly without 13th row and even the planned city Chandigarh in Punjab sector has no 13th sector. Astrology is a part of Indian part of Indian culture. Even today majority of peoples prefer to do good things such entering houses, marriage related activities, admission in schools, colleges, starting new business or even launching a rocket etc as per astrologer's advices. The village people belong to different religion and caste having various social and cultural backgrounds. They have different views and perception about their daily lives. Some beliefs and practices are considered superstition by some and not by others. Superstition is often base on ancient beliefs or myths that have been passed down from generation to generation. **Swami Vivekananda said that be Strong, get beyond all superstitions, and be free.**

Review of Literature: The review highlights the distinction areas covered by the many researchers and academicians which may be helpful to understand the issues relating to the present study and it also helps to find out the research gap. The basic sources of literature review of my study areas are- published research papers, articles in the journal of national and international repute, books, Government reports, Research agencies reports etc.

Surabhi, Sartaj Ahmad and Taniya Gulia (2016) pointed out that we are living in 21st century, India still survive under a thick cloud of superstitious and beliefs. Their study reveals that majority of peoples believes in superstition those who are illiterates and outdated mind. Their results of the study shows that majority of peoples in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh are believes in health related superstition and general perception superstition. **Charanjit Kaur Dhillion (2014)** examined that in the age of modern science, space and technology majority of peoples are still are in the rip of superstition. Their study reveals that to reduce the superstition in our society government should organize various programs with regard to superstitions, special lecture, seminar, debates, panel discussion, plays and skits etc. **Bodising Narah and Ranjit Taka (2020)** insisted that superstition play a vital role in the field of society averse of beliefs. Their study reveals that superstitious beliefs can have a negative and positive impact on the social well being of people in our society. The results from their study show that superstition is a psychological aspects and behavior. **Hamid Manzoor Khan and Mudassir (2020)** observed that both educated peoples and illiterate's people's beliefs in superstitions and myths. Their study reveals that people in rural area more superstitious beliefs rather than urban areas. **Gurleen Kaur and Navreet Kaur (2019)** observed that superstition in India is considered a widespread social problem in Indian society in 21st century. Their study reveals that most of the superstitious activities are divided into three categories such as common superstitious activities, death related superstitious activities and pregnancy and new born related superstitious activities.

Statement of Problems:

Superstitions are not only a common phenomenon in Malda district of West Bengal but all over the country. Due to diverse nature of Indian Society, superstitions are present in all the nooks and corners of the regions. The major causes of superstitions in rural areas of Malda district are – diverse culture, traditional societies, lack of education, fear of being called n outcast, local practices etc. In the district there is mixed religious both Muslim and Hindus are living. Majority of rural peoples in this district are practices various superstitions and myths beliefs. So, the researchers are very much keen interested to taken up this study particularly. The outcomes or findings from this study will be very helpful for administrators, policymakers, economists, sociologists, Researchers, Academicians, Journalists, NGO workers, and the Ministry of Culture,

Government of West Bengal as well as the Central Government of India for their various policy making.

Objectives of the Study:

Keeping in the view of the prevalence of superstitions and myths in Malda district of West Bengal in particular, the following objectives have been taken into consideration:

1. To know the major causes of prevalence of superstitions and myths among the peoples in rural areas Malda district of West Bengal.
2. To examine the common superstitions, death superstitions and health related superstition in rural peoples in the study area.
3. To give valuable suggestion for reducing the superstitions and myths in rural peoples in Malda district of West Bengal.

Database and Research Methodology:

The current research work is analytical, descriptive and empirical type of research work. The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through interview schedule based on well structured questionnaire with regards to objective in mind. For the collection of primary data a near about 305 respondents has been selected based on simple random and convenience sampling method. The survey was conducted during the month of July 2022 to September 2022. The survey has been conducted at different villages of 15 community development block of Malda district of West Bengal.

The secondary data has been collected from Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistic Government of West Bengal, District Statistical Handbook, Malda Collectorate, Books, Research Paper, Journals, Newspaper, Researchgate, Google Scholar etc. After the collection of data for showing the result Simple Percentage Method, SWOT analysis and Computer Cartography has been used.

A Geographical Outline of the study area:

Malda district of West Bengal has been selected as research study area. Malda district is entirely located in North Bengal, it is also known as “**Gateway of North Bengal**”. It lies in North Bengal on lower Indo-Gangetic plain. The latitudinal range of Malda lies between

24°40'20" North and 25°32'08" North, and the longitudinal range is 87°45'50" East and 88°28'10" East. For administrative purpose the district has been divided into 15 Community Development Block and two sub-division namely Malda Sadar and Chanchal Sadar. The district is very much famous for Mango Production, Litchi production, Jute Production and Sericulture activity (Raw Silk production), school educational sectors. This district is also known as **“Valley of Mango”**. Majority of the male population of this district are migrants labour, agricultural labour and Hawkers due none availability of any large scale, medium scale industries, majority of female population in rural are engaged in bidi making household industries. According to 2011 Census of India still 86.14 per cent population are belong to rural area.

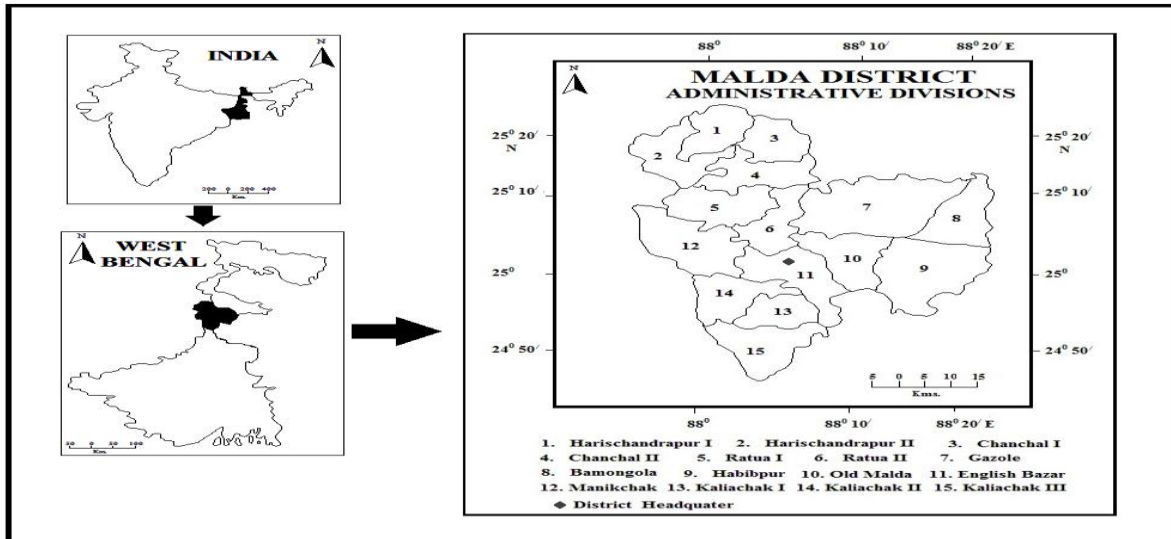


Figure 1: Location map of the Study Area

Result and Analysis:

Superstitions are nothing but a blind belief. There is no logic or scientific reason behind it. These beliefs sometimes go against the law of nature. Even in 21st century, superstition exist in civilized or educated countries peoples. Superstious peoples are generally illiterate, ignorant, credulous and gullible. They ate exploited by Astrologers, priests, godmen, babas, tantriks, black magician.

Table 1.1 Gender- Wise Respondents

Sl. No.	Gender	Number of Peoples	Percentage (%)
1.	Male	112	36.72
2.	Female	193	63.27
Total		305	100.00

Source: Computed by Researcher from Field Survey Data, July-September, 2022

Table 1.2 Percentage of Respondents under different levels of Superstitions

Sl. No.	Level of Superstitions	Number of Peoples	Percentage (%)
1.	Highly Superstious	82	26.88
2.	Superstious	78	25.57
3.	Moderate	35	11.47
4.	Non- Superstious	46	15.08
5.	Highly Non-Superstious	64	20.98
Total		305	100.00

Source: Computed by Researcher from Field Survey Data, July to September, 2022

Table 1. 3 Major Causes of Superstition among the respondents in rural areas of Malda district

Sl. No.	Major Causes of Superstition	Number of Peoples	Percentage (%)
1.	Illiteracy / lack of Education	106	34.76
2.	Blindly follow Culture-tradition and Strict Rituals of Society	62	20.32
3.	Deep Faith in Supernatural Power	43	14.09
4.	Fears	71	23.27

5.	To put blame on Luck	23	7.54
Total		305	100.00

Source: Computed by Researcher from Field Survey Data, July to September, 2022

Table 1. 4 Prevalence of Common superstition in Rural Areas of Malda district

Sl. No.	Prevalence of Common Superstition and Myths	Maximum Response	Percentage (%)
1.	Sneezing during the time of departure, people consider it unlucky	Bring bad luck and harmful for health	84.61 %
2.	Eating curd and Sweet before the start of any job/exam/interview is Considered auspicious	Brings Good Luck and Positive Energy	80.07 %
3.	Not using the broom after sunset	Brings Poverty in Home	75.02 %
4.	Not opening the scissors without cutting anything	Brings enemy with relation	77.81%
5.	Not looking at oneself in a broken mirror	Brings Poverty in Home	51.91 %
6.	Not cutting nails at night	Bring bad luck	68.43 %
7.	Use of lemon and chilies outside house door removes evil eye	To reduce evil effect	61.78 %
8.	Not washing hair on Tuesday or Thursday	Unluck	67.93 %
9.	Stopping and waiting to someone else to cross while black cat crosses the path	Brings bad luck and harmful for health	54.23 %
10.	Women not allowed to enter	Unluck	64.76 %

	kitchen and temples during menstruation		
11.	Fallen hair around house not considered good	Brings Poverty in Home	72.54 %
12.	Not to sleep with head facing north	Not considered for good health	78.12 %
13.	Not opening umbrella inside house	Brings bad luck	83.23 %
14.	Not going near Peepal tree at night	Peepal tree have ghost around it	72.90 %
15.	Adding one rupee coin to gift sum	It considered as blessing	65.76 %
16.	Saturday is considered Unluck day to starting a work	Unluck day	75.87 %
17.	Walking under a ladder	Bad Luck	51.76 %
18.	Using Horseshoe	Being good luck and protect from evil spirits	80.53 %

Source: Computed by Researcher from Field Survey Data, July to September, 2022

Table 1. 5 Prevalence of Death Superstition in rural areas of Malda district, West Bengal

Sl. No.	Prevalence of Death Superstition	Maximum Response	Percentage (%)
1.	Dog crying at night indicating death	Indicating someone death in surrounding areas	93.71 %
2.	Eagle flying over a house indicating death	Indicating someone death in surrounding areas	85.34 %
3.	Taking bath after attending funeral	Protect from bad spirits	88.63 %
4.	Dead person family does not	Harmful for family	75.32 %

	cook food until funeral ceremony completion		
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Source: Computed by Researcher from Field Survey Data, July to September, 2022

Table 1. 6 Prevalence of Health Superstition in rural areas of Malda district, West Bengal

Sl. No.	Prevalence of Health Superstition	Maximum Response	Percentage (%)
1.	Not sleeping with head facing North direction	Brings bad luck and harmful for health	81.72 %
2.	Avoid drinking water while standing	Harmful for Stomach and others	75.52 %
3.	Sleeping under the tree during night leads to mental ill health	Harmful for health	85.64 %
4.	Not giving bath to new born baby, it lowers body temperature	May lower body temperature	86.42 %
5.	Pregnant woman should not come out of the house during an eclipse	Protect unborn baby from any deformities of body organs	64.80 %
6.	Drinking milk and eating fish causes skin diseases	Harmful for health	76.52 %
7.	Not to drink cold water after having a hot tea	Harmful for health	78.45 %
8.	Believe in evil eyes for occurrence of any illness	Harmful for health	83.31 %
9.	First milk of mother is bad for baby	Harmful for new born baby	78.45 %
10.	Not eating papaya during pregnancy	Hot in nature	85.45 %
11.	No Keeping new born and mothers	Someone may do black	46.31 %

	clothes outside after sunset	magic	
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Source: Computed by Researcher from Field Survey Data, July to September, 2022

Suggestion and Policy Implications:

1. Ministry of Culture Government of India and Government of West Bengal should be organize special lectures, seminars, debates, panel discussion, plays, nukkad natak, awareness Programmes etc to reduce the superstitions in rural areas of Malda district in West Bengal.
2. Ministry of Rural Developments and Panchyati Raj should conduct Anti-Superstitions campaigns in rural areas to help peoples develop rational and practical mindsets in rural areas of Malda district in West Bengal.
3. The Central Government as well as state Government should also make the existing laws more strict and practiced. Strict punishments should be granted to the people violating it. Apart from it new laws should be built against superstitions.

Conclusion:

Superstition is an illogical belief that something will bring good luck or bad luck. Superstition can motivate people to work harder and achieve goals. Sometimes Superstition can also lead to fear and anxiety as people may worry that their actions will lead to bad luck or misfortune. Many governmental and Non Governmental Organizations are trying to tackle this problem at various levels by raising awareness among the people. In a country like India with such great diversity and people of different cultures living together, it will be a difficult task to deal with it. Passing various laws merely will not help, rather there is a need to change the mindset of peoples. For dispelling superstitions from our society majority of peoples beliefs in themselves, remove the fears from the mind, more open minded, rigorous more hard work to become successful in their life's and follows truths. So in this way we can remove the superstitions and myths from our society.

Superstitions lead to various crimes and stunts civilizations growth. The effects of superstitions are seen more among women and in those who are emotionally vulnerable. When the world is moving towards progress with the help of new technology, we are limiting our self by following superstitious beliefs. Therefore superstition is a great hindrance to overall

development of the country. Education is the best solution to remove the superstitions from our society. It is necessary to educate people to get rid of superstitions. It is also necessary to teach them scientific truths. **Adam Smith said that “Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition”.**

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