

## Effect of Education in the Superstitious Beliefs of Tribals and Non-Tribals

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### ABSTRACT

Superstitious beliefs have been an influential factor in the lives of people over long periods of time. Even in the 21st century, superstition hasn't been eradicated from the entire world. Though the growth of science has influenced people to understand the truth behind superstitions, a half-belief in the concept prevails in the majority. The uncivilized, uneducated and traditional population within the countries have been a major source of propagation of such beliefs without accepting the changes and truth of science and technology. The present study thus focuses upon such tribal populations to know the influence of education in their superstitious beliefs. The difference in superstitious beliefs within the general and tribal population is analyzed in the study along with the effect of education upon the superstitious beliefs within the two different populations. A total of 175 samples including educated and uneducated tribal and non-tribals from Thrissur and Ernakulam districts of Kerala were considered for the study. The Superstition scale developed by Mahfuzul Huque and Ataharal Chowdhary were the tool used for the analysis and it revealed that Tribals was more superstitious than the general population. It also revealed that Tribals showed lower superstition than uneducated Tribals, clarifying that education is an influential factor in the superstition of both the general and tribal populations.

*Keywords: Tribals, Education, Superstitious*

Human beings have evolved drastically over long decades of time with great changes in the living standards and exploration of science and technology. The pattern of development of people and society has faced varying amounts of changes in different parts of the world over different periods of time. The increased thirst for scientific evidence by humanity has been the common base of development of the society as a whole. Superstitious beliefs are found to be influencing the life of individuals from an early era of life and what stays astonishing is the universal existence of such beliefs even in the modernized 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even though there is a comparative decrease in superstitious beliefs in the present, a complete wipe off hasn't occurred even after such far-reaching changes. The Oxford dictionary has defined superstition as "The belief that particular events happen in a way that can't be explained by reason of science, the belief that particular event brings good or bad luck". These beliefs are considered to be a precursor to an individual's

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attitude development and behavior. The terms like magical, paranormal, supernatural and religious beliefs are used synonymously to superstition while they're separated with clear variations.

Superstition is a manufactured social phenomenon that got developed from social contexts and conditions. These beliefs are evident to be propagated from the ancestral ages and carried forward generation after generations till date. They aren't a constant content as changes have taken place over ages and beliefs have varied across places. The major reason for the prevalence and existence of these beliefs is the ignorance for truth. People find the path to identify the truth to be an effortful one and thus chooses to continue in the beliefs of the majority by preferring superstitions for reasoning and imagination. Even children from their early ages get into the predispositions of superstitions as they grow in the families with such strong beliefs. Many of the superstitious beliefs are regional as they prevail only in certain demographic regions whereas others are universal. The belief of number 13 to be unlucky is such a universal superstition that is accepted in all cultures worldwide. Numerous studies have shown that traffic accidents increase significantly on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> (Hughes, 2002; Lewis & Gallagher, 2001). This superstitious belief has been potent enough to develop a phobia of 13<sup>th</sup> Friday called Paraskevidekatria phobia found in the US. Studies report that 21 million people are affected by it and people don't fix any ceremonies, make a trip, sail or even work on the particular day.

The major difference between modern and primitive superstition was studied and reported by Campbell. Campbell concluded that there lies a major contradiction between belief and non-belief in the modern superstitious beliefs. The construct that dominates in the present is the half-belief concept according to which people who intellectually reject superstition continue to remain in superstitious thoughts and actions. The primitive superstitious people are aware that they won't be able to give scientific support to justify their assertions or behavior but still are solely confiscated into their strong irrational beliefs. Such half-belief superstitious thinkers dominate the present nations, including India. Even though many laws exist in India against superstitious practices, it continues to remain a social problem among the Indian population. India has been a land of great diversity of culture. Studies reveal that the existence of superstition is due to the lack of education in the population while it can't be left unseen that even the educated ones are superstitious. Even though the right to education has been fundamental to the citizens of the country, there is still a massive population deprived of education. Much of this population includes the Tribals and the poor. Even though such children attend schooling, the influence of curricular education in their life is comparatively very minor than the community education they receive in their life. This poses a great issue for the strong transfer of unscientific and irrational thoughts and superstitious beliefs from generation to generation.

Indian superstitions vary in its harmful impacts and can be majorly categorized as astrology, animals, luck and auspiciousness, ghosts and other supernatural beings, and sexuality and reproduction. Belief upon astrological predictions of future, Rahu kalam and mangal dosha are major superstitious beliefs related to astrology. Many irrational beliefs related to animals also exist which includes the belief that snakes drink milk and hence feeding snakes milk which leads to its death, seeing a peacock before a journey is a good omen, three lizards heading towards someone shows a nearing marriage and the heading of four lizards show's upcoming death, crossing of black cat leads to bad luck, puppy pregnancy syndrome, etc. In the hope for luck and auspiciousness people believe that adding one rupee with a gift sum is auspicious, widows are inauspicious, married women should wear red vermilion for the

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safety of the spouse, looking at a broken mirror brings bad luck, hanging lemon and chili totems protects from evil eyes, shaking legs bring bad luck and falling of lizard on one's head is considered auspicious. Indians also have strong superstitions about spirit possessions and peepal tree-abiding ghosts and maintain superstitions on sexuality like masturbation cause health problems including impotence, menstrual taboo and Dhat syndrome.

The present study focuses on the tribal population which is more embedded in their rituals, customs and beliefs with very little changes over time. "A tribe is a group of distinct people, dependent on their land for their livelihood, who are largely self-sufficient, and not integrated into the national society" (Sethi and Narayan, 2019). They continue in the primitive lifestyle and thus are more vulnerable to superstitions. Education is the only way through which changes can be expected to occur in their lifestyle. India is a country with a good population of Tribals scattered within different states including Kerala. The effect of education among the tribes and the non-tribals upon their level of superstitious beliefs are investigated in the present study.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researchers have been of keen interest in the topic of superstitious beliefs and its influence upon the life of individuals. Many studies have focused on the psychological and environmental factors that influence superstition. Gender has been revealed to be an influential factor as females are considered to be more superstitious than males through a variety of study reports (Barbara. J, Zebb, Michale. C. Moore, 2003). Many other factors have been similarly found to influence superstitious beliefs like lower intelligence level, higher suggestibility (Zapf, 1945), emotional maladjustment (Muller & Lundeen, 1934), longer cognitive abilities (Musch & Ehrenlorg, 2002), irrational belief tendencies (Tobacyk & Milford, 1983), the need to cope up with the life's uncontrollability (Edis, 2000; Hughes, 2002) and external locus of control (Irwin, 1994). Religiosity has been another concept that has been widely studied in relation with superstition and many studies concluded no relationship between these factors (Stanke & Taylor, 2004) and some studies were able to find a negative correlation between them (Torgler, 2003). Christian community was given more focus and a study reported that they aren't superstitious at all (Wong-McDonald & Gorsuch, 2004), even though counter studies prevail. The concept of education was also given importance and was studied by Karl Peltzer, and it revealed that university students were least superstitious when compared with secondary educated students. Studies could also reveal that psychokinesis, astrology and magic led people to believe in superstition (Mowen & Brad Carlson, 2003) and explained that the fear and anxiety generated within the people led to a reduced level of performance leading to stress and health problems (Hughes, 2002). Studies also revealed superstition to have a positive correlation with pessimism (Rudski, 2004) and a negative correlation with perfectionism (Sica, Caterina & Novara, 2002). A significant result was generated through a study by Dr. Roli Tiwari on the tribal students of Chhattisgarh revealing that the college students belonging to the tribal community were highly superstitious and were suggested to provide them with counselling to get rid of the ill effects of superstition. This is clear evidence that education doesn't produce great changes in the superstitious belief among the tribal community. The present study thus tries to compare the effect of education upon the superstitious beliefs of the educated and uneducated tribal and non-tribals.

#### *Aim*

To understand the effect of education in the superstitious beliefs among educated and uneducated tribal and non-tribals.

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### *Need and significance of the study*

We're living in an advanced, modern and educated world, but still the irrational beliefs are being transferred from generation to generation. The existence of superstitious beliefs even in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is an important matter to be dealt with by recognizing the strength of the roots of these evils. Superstitious beliefs are potent enough to create a lot of difficulties in society as it could harm an individual physically, psychologically, emotionally, socially and financially. It even creates harm to animals and hence is a social evil. Understanding the effect of education upon these beliefs makes us aware of a key way to reduce the impact of superstitions and similarly by understanding if education could bring about changes even within the Tribals who lives a primitive life could help in developing further interventions to bring changes in the uneducated Tribals who plays the role of a major source of superstitious beliefs as part of their culture.

### *Hypotheses*

- There are no significant differences in the intensity of superstitious beliefs among the normal population and tribal population.
- There are no significant differences in the superstitious beliefs among educated and uneducated non-tribals
- There are no significant differences in the superstitious beliefs among educated and uneducated Tribals

### *Sample*

A sample of 175 participants from the districts of Thrissur and Ernakulam were selected for the study. A total of 99 Tribals consisting of 69 females and 30 males, out of which 18 were educated and 81 uneducated were considered as the tribal sample. The size of the non-tribal sample was 76, including 28 males and 48 females out of which 52 were educated and 24 were uneducated ones. The entire sample consisted of people above the age 18.

### *Instruments*

One measure were used in this study,

**Superstition scale:** The 20-item Superstition scale developed by Md. Mahfuzul Huque and Ataharal Huq Chowdhary were the tool used to measure the degree of superstition among different people. The split-half reliability and the test-retest reliability were calculated and the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient( $r$ ) between 2 sets was found to be 0.847, at 0.01 levels (split half reliability). The test-retest reliability method gives a reliability of 0.97 with 0.01 significance. The items had high discriminative power and thus had content validity and concurrent validity.

### *Procedure*

The superstition scale was distributed among both educated and uneducated tribal and non-tribals and their responses were collected. The collected data was scored and analyzed using independent sample t-tests to reach the conclusion.

To analyze the difference in the superstitious beliefs among tribal and non-tribals and its difference among educated and uneducated ones in the two populations, t-tests were conducted and its results were as follows.

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**Table 1: Comparison of superstitious beliefs among general population and tribal population**

	Population	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Superstition	General	76	19.36	15.89	6.006**
	Tribal	99	41.87	19.28	

\*\**. Difference is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed).*

The table 1 shows the mean value of superstition among the general population (N= 76, M= 19.36, SD= 15.89) and tribal population (N= 99, M= 41.87, SD= 19.28). The independent sample t-test resulted in a statistically significant effect of superstition on the general and tribal population ( $t(174) = 6.006, p = .01$ ). The results show that the Tribals is very much superstitious than the general non-tribal population with nearly double the strength. Tribals are people who live in geographically isolated areas which include those remote, cloistered, inhospitable and exclusive areas such as hills and forests. The lives of these people are based on agriculture and live a poor life with low literacy rate and health status. They continue with the authentic lifestyle, culture, religion, tradition and language of humans with very little changes over time. This lack of changes in thoughts and concepts that they follow generation after generation would be the major reason for the prevalence of superstitious beliefs at a higher rate in them than the normal population, even in this 21st century.

**Table 2: Comparison of superstitious beliefs among higher educated and lower-educated people in the general population**

	Education	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Superstition	Education above high school	48	16.11	17.758	2.431*
	Education up to high school and below	28	27.71	17.304	

\*\**. Difference is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed).*

Table 2 shows the mean value of superstition in general population among individuals with education above high school level (N= 48, M= 16.11, SD= 17.758) and individuals with high school and below education (N= 28, M= 27.71, SD= 17.304). The independent sample t-test resulted in a statistically significant effect of education on the superstitious beliefs of the general population ( $t(76) = 2.431, p = .01$ ). People with higher education show a significant decrease in the superstitious beliefs than the lower-educated ones in the general population. Education can be expected to bring the ideas of science and technology and the search for scientific reasons behind the superstitions which could help them to reach proper conclusions about such beliefs.

**Table 3: Comparison of superstitious beliefs among higher educated and lower-educated people in the tribal population**

	Education	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Superstition	Education above high school	20	16.06	14.241	6.2**
	Education up to high school and below	79	43.15	16.756	

\*\**. Difference is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed).*

The table 3 shows the mean value of superstition in Tribals with education above high school (N= 20, M= 16.01, SD= 14.241) and individuals with high school and below education (N= 79, M= 43.15, SD= 16.756). The independent sample t-test resulted in a

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statistically significant effect of education on the superstitious beliefs of tribal population ( $t(97) = 6.2, p=.01$ ). The results clearly show that educated Tribals possess a superstition level equivalent to that of the general population while a higher level of superstition is shown by the lower educated Tribals. This clears the effect of education in the Tribals as a great change has been made possible through education in their superstitious beliefs and make them sensible like the general population of the 21st century. Providing education can thus be considered as a feasible and effective way to wipe away the existence of superstitious beliefs within the tribal population in the country, thus eliminating the major source of continuation of such irrational beliefs in the society.

### CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there is a great difference in the superstitious beliefs among the general population and the tribals with the latter being higher. Education has been revealed to be an important factor that influences superstition with the better educated being less superstitious within both the general and tribal population. Educating Tribals can thus be concluded to be a great way to lighten the superstitious beliefs within the Tribals.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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