

SUPERSTITIONS AS A REFLECTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Gulshoda Rashidova

Independent researcher, UzSWLU

Abstract: *This paper explores the cultural significance of superstitions, focusing on their semantic and cognitive dimensions, as well as their socio-psychological functions. Despite the progress of science and rational thinking, superstitions remain deeply embedded in folklore and everyday life. Comparative examples from Uzbek and English traditions illustrate both the universality and cultural specificity of such beliefs. The analysis highlights that superstitions are not merely irrational remnants of the past but play an enduring role in shaping identity, reinforcing norms, and providing psychological comfort.*

Keywords: *superstition, folklore, cultural identity, semantics, cognitive approach, social norms.*

Introduction

Superstitions have always occupied a unique position within human culture. They appear in rituals, proverbs, taboos, and daily habits, offering a way to cope with uncertainty and unpredictability. According to Vyse (2014), superstitions persist because they provide psychological relief in situations beyond human control. Dundes (1999) emphasizes that they reinforce collective memory and identity. This study focuses on the semantic and cognitive aspects of superstitions, with particular reference to Uzbek and English traditions.

Literature Review

Scholars from anthropology, folklore, and psychology have examined the persistence of superstitions.

- Dundes (1999) argues that superstitions carry symbolic meanings that help preserve cultural continuity.
- Geertz (1973) views symbols as frameworks for interpreting social reality, and superstitions fall within this symbolic system.
- Vyse (2014) explains superstition from a psychological perspective, noting that people tend to seek patterns and causal explanations even when none exist.
- Simpson and Roud (2000) document numerous English superstitions, ranging from omens of luck to ritualized behaviors.

Together, these works suggest that superstitions are not random but serve cognitive, cultural, and social functions.



Analysis

In Uzbek culture, many superstitions regulate daily life. For instance, spilling salt is believed to cause quarrels, and whistling indoors is thought to bring poverty. Such beliefs discourage undesirable behavior and reinforce household harmony.

In English culture, breaking a mirror is said to bring seven years of bad luck (Simpson & Roud, 2000). Similarly, Friday the 13th is widely feared, influencing travel, business, and personal decisions (Radford, 2013). These examples show that although symbols differ across cultures, the underlying function of coping with uncertainty remains universal.

Cognitively, superstitions illustrate the human tendency to seek control. Schippers and Van Lange (2006) show that athletes often rely on rituals or lucky charms to reduce anxiety before competitions. This demonstrates how superstitions adapt to modern contexts while preserving their original psychological function.

Conclusion

Superstitions continue to play a vital role in cultural identity. They are not simply irrational survivals but active components of symbolic systems that define social norms and individual behavior. They provide psychological comfort, reinforce community values, and serve as cultural markers distinguishing one society from another. Future research should further explore their role in modern digital spaces, where old beliefs acquire new meanings.

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