

Beyond the confines of knowledge

By Wara Karim

Man is afraid of many things. When he cannot understand why certain things happen, especially if he feels frightened or is injured by them, he tries to explain it in some mysterious way. The belief in witchcraft was one way of explaining such things as a drought, thunder and lightning, and mental & physical illness.

Witchcraft had a firm hold on the imaginations of the common people hundreds of years ago. They lived in ignorance, superstition, & fear. But the surprising thing was that many educated people believed in them too. This was because it was a very easy way of explaining unforeseen disasters.

In early Christian times, witches were believed to have sold their souls to the Devil, a pagan god, or other evil masters, in return for supernatural powers.

In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII issued a papal bull formally condemning witchcraft, partly because the terrible plagues that swept Europe were blamed on Witchcraft.

During the 17th century, both Roman Catholics & Protestants began a witch-hunt that brought death to thousands. In England, there were professional witch-finders who went about the countryside looking for marks of witches & identifying persons as witches. Between 1647 & 1663, hundreds of people in Massachusetts & Connecticut were accused of witchcraft.

Today, doctors believe that many of the dreams & visions that were blamed on witchcraft were really the products of hysteria or mental illness.

SUPERSTITIONS:

What does the word superstition mean to us? When we try to define it becomes very difficult to do so.

Suppose, for example, you said that it was a belief in something that wasn't really so. Well there are many things all of us believe in that can't be proved. Besides, at certain times in man's history, everyone believed in certain things that we now regard as superstitions. And the people who believed in them weren't superstitious at all!

For example, they believed that the shadow of a person was a

part of the soul. So they considered that you would harm the soul if you broke anything on which this shadow appeared. Therefore, they considered it "unlucky" to break a mirror.

Today if someone considers it "unlucky" to break a mirror he/she is superstitious, because we no longer believe that a shadow is part of the soul. So a superstition is actually a belief that people cling to after new knowledge or facts have appeared to disprove them. That's why it's impossible to say when superstitions began.

In ancient times, when the sun, moon, the stars & the planets, & comets were mysteries to people, they made up explanations about them & followed certain practices to protect themselves from their "influence". That's why astrology was an accepted belief at one time. Even today people believe in horoscopes, and their position in the sun, moon & other planets. A Diamond, ruby or emerald is considered lucky for certain and unlucky for some. Many renowned newspapers bring out a regular column on horoscope everyday. These beliefs still exist inside us, among us & around us.

Even in today's world a black cat crossing one's way is considered unlucky. The hoot of an owl is a sign of death approaching & so on. There was a time when people believed that a comet was a sign that a war or a plague is coming. They also believed that if you gaze at the moon for a long time you would be "moonstruck". A handkerchief is never considered a gift because it's believed to introduce a quarrel between two people. The number 13 is still considered to be unlucky. Even today, the custom of christening a ship by breaking a bottle of wine over its prow is a throwback to an old superstition. The god of the sea was Neptune, & the wine was considered a sacrifice to Neptune. There are different origins of these superstitions but they all stems from people's desire to control them or from ignorant fear.

Even today, when the moon is considered to be the second home of mankind, cloning has become possible, the cure of cancer is only a matter of time, in certain primitive societies, as well as in the west people are growing interested in forbidden

customs. Especially the exposure of such things in mass media such as TV, books, magazines & newspapers are igniting people's desire to travel across the boundary to the contraband world of witchcraft & Satan worship.

It's believed that human beings came across the existence of both god & Satan at the same time. Although most people obey the supremacy of the god the opposite could have happened too. During the 16th century, Europe was teemed with such people. The various methods of their submissiveness to Satan or devil are what are known as Black Magic or Black Art. The common society could never comprehend the righteousness of such customs. It wasn't religion only; their war was against anything true, proper or divine. These Satan devotees believed that their subjection to Satan enabled them to acquire tremendous power & unlimited strength. They also believed that it's possible to summon the Satan in their various ceremonies but a good medium is required for that. Thus many perverted actions occurred. General people's disgust against them especially their apostasy led the then priests to take measures against the Satan worshippers & eventually many were burnt to death. Many innocent people died in the process.

After a long time in this 20th & 21st century, a little interdicted curiosity, greed & belief have once more inspired certain people to return to the worship of Satan. Nothing is illegal today so, why should there be any objections to the worshipping of Satan. But it wouldn't spread like before because most people of the west lead materialistic lives. Even an well-educated person of the west cannot imagine the broadness of the spiritual world that a mere farmer of this part of the world has.

Even in our country & our neighboring country India there are *Shadhus* & *Kapalks*, who are believed to follow many perverted customs. These include the sacrifice of children, preparation of so called holy (!) liquids from toads, vampires, flesh of children etc. But many of the truths behind them still remain shrouded in mystery...

THE KNIGHT WHO WAS SCARED

By Adnan Habib

Colchis Martel, tired and frustrated, went home and closed the door. He had just come from his work. Everyday he came home at this time with a tired face. He then cursed his luck for getting the knighthood. He thought all these works he did for the whole day were of no use. He made the nobles happy but the nobles did not make him happy.

Anyway, as usual, just as Colchis entered, a voice spoke out, "Who is there?"

"Oh no!" murmured Colchis and quickly performed the act of Holy Trinity. "I... its me."

"So, you have come," boomed out Clara, Colchis' wife. "And what have you brought? Nothing! What else can you say? You are no good as a knight. Look at Sir Murphy or Richard Dexon. Everyday they bring back sacks of wheat, vegetables and so many other things. Why do the nobles give them so much? Because the nobles like them but not you." That ended the long speech of Clara.

"Now look Clara, let me explain everything. Actually..."

"I don't need any explanation. No supper for you today," said Clara and marched to the kitchen.

Colchis stood there speechless. After such hard work now he would get no supper. He could not even protest since he was very scared of his wife, his own wife. He did not know why but his conscience told him 'Don't go against this lady'.

Since there was no supper, Colchis had to go to bed early, while Clara was having her supper. Sometime in the middle of the night Colchis woke up. His stomach rumbled with hunger. He turned to his right and saw Clara fast asleep. So he got up quietly and went towards the larder. He opened it and brought out a bowl of cereal. Just as he was about to take a spoon, he heard Clara's voice, "What are you doing?"

Colchis gulped once. "I-I was, as a matter of fact, mmm..."

The lantern was lit and Clara came up to him. "Oh no!" she cried. "I made this cereal for my father and you... you ate it up."

"I didn't eat them," interrupted Colchis.

"Stop it! I don't want to talk to a thief. You stole my father's cereal. I won't even sleep with you. Take your pillow and get out! Out, I said!" shouted Clara and pointed at the door.

Colchis timidly took his pillow and went out. Clara slammed the door behind him. Colchis sighed. 'At least I am saved from Clara for sometime,' he thought. Then he went downstairs and chose to sleep in the shed close to the stable. He put his pillow on the small wooden bed and lay down. Beside the bed was a small window through which he could see the stable and the sleeping horses clearly.

Soon Colchis was fast asleep having dreams of Clara, nobles and horses. At dawn he was suddenly woken up by a hard slap on his face. Colchis quickly sat up and looked around. No one was there.

"Who slapped me?" asked Colchis to himself. Suddenly his face went pale. He dashed upstairs and knocked at the door. "Clara! Clara open the door!"

The door opened and a sleepy Clara came out,

"What's wrong with you?"

"A g-g-ghost in the shed," replied Colchis gasping.

"What nonsense! Stop making jokes and go back. You are not allowed in the house."

"But there was a ghost, Clara. It slapped my face."

"Well, then thank the ghost for me. It has done something good," said Clara and slammed the door.

Colchis sighed, feeling really scared. He soon changed in his knight suit and went to work. The whole day Colchis could not concentrate on his work. Whenever he thought of the ghost he shivered. He could not understand why the ghost slapped him.

Luck did not favour Colchis that night. He was forced to sleep in the shed again. At first he was really scared but once he was asleep, he forgot everything. However, Colchis got the same hard slap again at dawn. This time he was convinced that it was a ghost. He promised to himself that he would not to sleep in the shed again. He thought the shed was cursed. Whoever slept in the room, he or she would get a slap from the ghost.

Colchis discussed this matter with his close friend Richard Dexon. "Surely there can't be anything as ghosts in this world. You must have made a mistake," he said.

"No I have not," said Colchis. "I got a slap yesterday and I got a slap today. Since there was no one around, it should be a ghost."

"Okay, I'll get an answer for this to you by tomorrow."

"I hope you can do something to the ghost."

That night Colchis slept on the stairs. It was hard for him sleep there. But still he lay down trying to sleep.

Just before dawn a voice called out, "Colchis! Colchis are you there?"

Colchis turned around and saw Richard waving at him. "I'm here wide awake."

"Then let's go," Richard said.

"Where?"

"To the shed to see who actually slapped you."

"No, I am not going in there."

"Come on Colchis, don't be a coward. You are a brave knight, remember?"

Colchis blushed with pride when he heard Richard calling him 'brave knight'. So he and Richard went in the shed and hid under a table. They waited for the so-called 'ghost'.

They waited and waited but no ghost came. The birds woke up and started chirping. The sun rose and the horses woke up. But no ghost appeared.

Suddenly, they saw a horse coming up to the window and peeping in. Then it turned around to leave. As it turned around, its tail flicked in through the window and slapped the bed.

Colchis was very embarrassed when he saw that it was no ghost but a horse's tail, which used to slap him at dawn. Richard talked to Clara and persuaded her to allow Colchis sleep in with her, much to the relief of Colchis. He could never have talked to Clara like the way Richard spoke, because he was the 'Knight who was SCARED'!

Dedicated to my cousin SAMIRA HABIB

The Untold Love

By Sub-Inspector



Nishita was an ordinary teenager like you and I. There was nothing special about her. And this was the quality that made her more special. At 5' 2", she had short silky hair creating a wave on her forehead. The sparkling of her eyes was enchanting. Today's story is about this special girl whom we all may be similar to.

Nishita joined a new school when she was a student of class nine. Being a pupil of a Girls' school, she used to get scared of all the boys around her. Once a male classmate asked her about the new class routine. Nishita started to stammer while giving him an answer. And from then on, she was known as "Totly Buri" in the class. This was the worst thing that could happen to a new student. Once you have become a laughing stock in your class, you will never be popular with those students. But Nishita was lucky because she managed to overcome the situation. She took part in a debate competition and proved that she was not a thing to disdain. She was talented. In the wallpaper made by students, she wrote a tragic love story that surprised everyone. In her story the hero and the heroine could never rededicate their feelings. They could never be together in their lives. That was the best part of the story. Nishita got many compliments from her classmates. A few of the boys started to talk to her. And gradually, Nishita became everyone's good friend.

But all that I have written, isn't the real story. The real story begins now. Nishita had a pure heart. She believed that "LOVE" is a wonderful feeling that comes only once in a lifetime and one can love only a single person with all her/his heart. So she waited till she became mature and decided her life partner by herself.

Then something happened and changed all these thoughts. Nishita had an American classmate in her class named Ugine. Ugine's father came here to research. Once Nishita helped Ugine by giving him her practical book. And they started to talk a great deal from that day. Whenever Ugine cracked a joke in the class, Nishita used to laugh loudly. She really liked Ugine's sense of humor. They used to make notes together; they spent time in the afternoon together. If one couldn't answer a question asked by the teacher, then the other one used to help from behind. Before Ugine could realize anything, he fell in love with Nishita. He always used to think of her beautiful eyes and meek smile. Then they got promoted to the 10th standard. One day, Nishita was laughing with some of the girls of her class in a long corridor. Suddenly she saw Ugine standing in a distance, looking at her. Ugine had a peculiar look in his eyes. But when Nishita's eyes fell on his, he turned and looked in another direction. Nishita was surprised. That night she thought about Ugine a lot. And she had a strange feeling in her heart. It was both a heavenly and painful feeling. All the happy days spent with Ugine appeared before Nishita. She realized that she was in love for the first time in her life. But she couldn't be sure whether Ugine felt the same way or not. She got scared that if she had told Ugine about her feelings, he would refuse her and she would loose a good friend. Moreover there was a big difference between their religions. It was the last month of their school year. The students arranged a party. After the dance with pop music, it was slow dancing time. All the Romeo and Juliets picked their partners. Nishita had no one to pick except Ugine. This song was being played:

"How do I get through a night without you?

If I had to live without you,

What kind of life would that be?

If you ever leave, baby you would take away everything.

Without you, there be no sun in my sky, there be no love in my life

There be no world left for me..."

Ugine said: "Nishita, I am going away for good after my O'levels."

Nishita was silent. She couldn't say that she loved the wonderful person who was dancing with her. Nishita's eyes filled with tears. She tried to hide it. Ugine also knew that she was crying. But he didn't say anything. Ugine also couldn't tell her about how much he loved her. After his exam, Ugine went to America. Ugine didn't give his address to Nishita.

People say that real love is such that one can't get in his/her hands on it. Nishita also couldn't reach for the first love of her life. It would remain only in her mind as both a sweet and a painful memory. I also have some similarity with Nishita's experience. I know that many teenaged readers may also have such experiences. This article is a tribute to those persons who could never express their first love.