

# **Aspects of Parapsychology relevant to Spirituality and Psychiatry**

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## **Introduction**

In the twenty-first century, there is extant a significant corpus of scientific literature that focuses on parapsychology. Cognitive scientists can no longer ignore this compelling evidence of research and learning.

Utts affirmed that all the basic phenomena of experimental parapsychology – encompassing extra-sensory perception, psychokinesis, precognition and others – have been statistically proven to be true as a result of recent developments in meta-analysis, even though there is no scientific consensus about how they fit into the scheme of things.<sup>1</sup> As a corollary of that, parapsychological views now merit sustained scientific attention.

Parapsychology helps us to develop a deeper understanding of mind, affording us fresh insights into psychopathology. A notable example is that it enables analysis of near death experiences, assisting in the study of the process of dying and it also illuminates the inner psychological life of the individual. Survival research has notable usefulness on account of its applicability in counselling grieving families and helping suicidal patients. Furthermore, it is relevant in a number of issues that are currently matters of debate, such as euthanasia. Parapsychology can also function as an effective mediator between religion and psychiatry. It is conceivable that it may assist in the testing out of some of the contentious aspects of religious belief.

## **History of Parapsychology**

Like all other sciences, parapsychology has gone through identifiable phases of development. The era before 1880 is acknowledged as being the pre-scientific period. It was succeeded by the early scientific period, recognised as having extended from 1880 to 1930; and subsequently by the mid-scientific period, from 1930 to 1970. It was in the late scientific period, postulated as beginning around 1970, that parapsychology emerged as a discipline. In the pre-scientific period, paranormal phenomena were regarded as coming within the ambit of observable phenomena. This applied right up to the time of the Enlightenment. The notion that life should be led by reason and not by dogma or tradition reached its apogee in the eighteenth century. Supernatural agents began to be discounted, and antagonism began to develop towards paranormal phenomena, along with all forms of what were regarded as magical thinking.

Franz Anton Mesmer came on the scene with his demonstrations of what was known as mesmerism, which may be equated to both hypnosis and animal magnetism. He attempted to evoke an interest in the paranormal but his efforts were effectively suppressed in 1784 by the French Academy of Sciences. Interest in the manifestations of mesmerism remained dormant, finding some expression in the newly emerging spiritualist movement, with the concomitant interest in mediumistic experiences.

In the early scientific period, the spiritualist Dawson E. Rogers determined to give a new kind of respectability to spiritualism and to that end

founded the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882. Branches of the SPR were shortly to follow in a number of European countries, and also throughout the United States.

What we may term the Rhine revolution was a notable feature of the mid-scientific period. In J.B. Rhine's experimental parapsychology laboratory at Duke University, researchers used statistical tools and were able to demonstrate that psychic phenomena are dormant in ordinary people, and not necessarily confined to people who overtly demonstrate such gifts. The term 'parapsychology' came into general use. The late scientific period has brought a flowering to what has transpired over the centuries, witnessing the merging of parapsychology and physics.

### **Psi phenomenon**

Paranormal phenomena go beyond the known laws of cause and effect. They refer to perception without mediation of the known sensory, or to movement without participation directly or indirectly of known motor process. Paranormal phenomena that have a direct bearing in the mind-brain relations are referred to as 'psi phenomena'. The study of such phenomena that cannot be explained by the known laws of physics and biology is parapsychology, the modern version of psychical studies. Thus psi is a generic term used for person-environment interaction which cannot be understood on the basis of known sensory, mechanical and energy systems.

Psi has sensory aspects - extrasensory perception (paranormal cognition - ESP, Psi gamma) and kinetic aspects - psychokinesis (paranormal action - PK, Psi kappa). ESP is passive and receptive including real time (telepathy and clairvoyance) and time-displaced phenomenon (pre-cognition and retro-cognition). Telepathy is thought transference and clairvoyance is extra-sensory awareness of objects or objective events. (Schizophrenic thought transference is an active phenomenon). Precognition is foreknowledge and retro-cognition is the knowledge of a past event that could not have been learned or inferred by normal means. Psychokinesis is projective and active. It is the influence of mind on external objects or processes without the mediation of known physical energy or forces.

### **The Invisibility problem**

Scientists have a tendency to discount the invisible, and therefore medical scientists have thus far been limited in their acceptance of an 'invisible' component in the mind and an imperceptible spiritual realm. Spirituality has its roots in an invisible realm and an invisible Omniscient entity. The view held by classical physicists that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time has also been a scientific block to the belief in the existence of a higher dimension associated with the brain. This view, however, is now being challenged by post-Einsteinian physicists<sup>2</sup>.

A radical revamping of sciences was thought to have been required to develop a more satisfactory picture of the nature of physical reality. However, it is now being increasingly recognised that modern physics and subtle realms are not mutually exclusive and such a view is helpful in appreciating an extra cerebral component in association with brain. De Broglie's discovery of the wave-like nature of matter can accommodate most of the alleged paranormal phenomenon.

Klauber states that two subatomic particles can exist together just as two waves rolling over the ocean heading in opposite directions and passing through each other unhindered, occupy the same area of water surface for a time. Physics theorises that all matter, at the basic level, is made up of energy which may be diffused as a field, or condensed as a particle. Human beings exist in physical space and in a personal mental space<sup>3</sup>. Minds in mental space may have the power to interact with other minds, including disembodied ones. Human beings may contain a sub-atomic/ non-atomic energy system, incorporated within an atomic energy system. Mind and brain may be coexisting in the same way that both water and sponge can exist in the same place at the same time.

### **Mind and lessons from neutrino physics**

The discovery of neutrinos has made a breakthrough in the thinking of post-Einsteinian scientists. These are tiny, subatomic particles without any electrical charges and because they do not couple with electromagnetic forces, their presence goes undetected. Most neutrinos pass through the earth unscathed and at typical reactor energies they can travel 25 light years in lead before deflecting. We perceive only when particles in our sense organs are coupled to the particles transmitting particular properties from the object and if there is no coupling, there is no perception. Trillions of neutrinos are passing through one's body every second and yet no one is able to detect them. They pass through matter virtually without our being aware of their presence. One can only imagine the existence of similar unknown particles not coupling with physical fields, constituting other worlds co-existing with ours. Only the left-handed neutrino (spinning in the counter clockwise direction) could interact through the weak nuclear force with another particle and have been detected while the right-handed neutrinos (spinning in the clockwise direction) would have still escaped detection, even though they may well exist. The right-handed electrons and quarks have been proven to exist. Thus, there may be a variety of neutrino-like particles, in the sense that they are tenuous and imperceptible and it may be conjectured that the extra-cerebral component of the 'mind stuff' may be partly or fully composed of such diverse particles but our bodies are made up of leptons and quarks, unobservable with the present day instrumentation. Subtle realms may be made of such 'particle families', coexisting with our physical world without our being aware of their existence. Thus, extra dimensions have been postulated based on elementary-particle physics evidence and the possibility of our consciousness drifting over to other dimensions has been speculated<sup>4</sup>.

Theories of mind are like fashions in the clothes industry or architecture; a new theory would be replaced by an old one. There is in fact no shortage of theories, but as yet no consensus among the theoreticians. Some of the popular theories that accommodate the paranormal may be discussed.

### **Compound theory of mind**

Professor C.D. Broad suggested that mind, as we know it, may be a compound of two factors, neither of which separately has the properties of mind<sup>5</sup>. One is bodily factor or the organic factor, the other a 'psychic factor or psi component'. The psychic component, he suggests, may persist after death

Inspired by the shadow matter theory of astrophysics, Wassermann proposed a Shadow Matter theory for living beings as having a twin body made of lighter shadow matter<sup>6</sup>. Given that the density of Shadow Matter universe is much less than the ordinary matter, the Shadow Matter body is immensely lighter than ordinary matter body. According to this theory, every quark in the nucleus of an atom can bind a corresponding Shadow Matter quark. So also every electron can bind a Shadow Matter electron. From this hypothesis it follows that every atom made up of quarks and electron can bind a Shadow Matter atom. Our ordinary matter brain will have a corresponding Shadow Matter brain bonded with the ordinary brain. The binding force of shadow Matter body and physical body is supposed to be the gravitational force.

### **Three fold division**

Dr Robert Crookall, the geologist turned parapsychologist, had offered a model of mind to scientists investigating the paranormal<sup>7</sup>. Dr Crookall proposed that in addition to our physical body, we have a psychical body which has three aspects: the Vehicle of Vitality, the Soul Body and the Spiritual Body. The Soul Body is a mirror body of the physical body or a psychical double with varying composition. The physical body could be the template of the soul body.

The third component of the psychical body is the Spiritual Body (Super soul) and is nested in the Soul Body. It interpenetrates and extends beyond the Soul Body and is super-physical or 'spiritual' in nature. It is the subtlest and the most pervasive. It is concerned with the awareness of all that is good, beautiful and true and capable of unconditional love, and allows the receipt of inspirations and intuitions. It is potentially capable of contacting the transcendence and is the extra-physical essence human reality. It is the vital principle or the animating force within living human beings and is capable of an incorporeal consciousness and contributes to our subjectivity; humans are not mere star dusts. Some of the psi properties may be confined only to the Spiritual Body and certain others may be shared between them.

### **Clinical parapsychology**

The contemporary field of psychopathology and parapsychology are riddled with controversy. Very little has been written about the role of parapsychology in clinical practice. Ehrenwald observed that psi phenomena are more likely to occur during deficit states of the organism, and postulated that psi develops as a compensatory phenomenon<sup>8</sup>. Medical scientists who adhere to a strict biological model of the mind tend to ignore the non-biological aspects of depression.

Survival researchers have contributed to our understanding of the discarnate realm. The non-physical component of the mind influences the brain through internal psychokinesis. The mind can also be influenced by other external, non-physical entities. Such a view has great bearing in the understanding of depression. Psychiatrists unanimously admit that depression has a social aspect. The spiritual realm, which includes discarnate spirits and unknown spiritual forces, becomes another facet of this social spectrum of depression. Just like living beings contribute to the causation of depression, the interaction of the human mind with the non-physical world adds to the

stress of day-to-day living. In depression, the 'agent blue' may also have a non-biological origin. The 'coup' leading to cognitive revolution as suggested by Beck may be initiated due to paranormal causes.

The telesomatic concept is gaining ground in the para-scientific circles. According to this concept, a physical or mental illness can be equivalent to a resisted telepathic message<sup>9, 10</sup>. In simple physical terms, the telesomatic concept is analogous to throwing a light object to a preoccupied person, who is not listening to verbal messages, in order to catch his attention more urgently. When discarnate spirits fail to communicate with the living, they occasionally use telesomatic methods. They are doing so either for the benefit of the living or for their own benefit. It is this attempted communication that can result in illness. Parapsychological research is now beginning to validate scientifically some of the intuitive truths of primitive cultures<sup>11</sup>.

### **Discarnate Survival**

One of the intelligent questions humankind can ask is what happens after physical extinction. This subject has great bearing in counselling the bereaved, suicidal patients and over issues like euthanasia. A belief in life after death adds to the sanctity of earthly life. Most religions promise eternal existence after death where as 'survival research' of the parapsychologist implies only continued conscious existence in disembodied form at least a time after bodily death; it is different from the religious concept of immortality, even though it is not ruled out. There are philosophically-oriented parapsychologists<sup>12</sup> and parapsychologically-minded biologists<sup>13</sup> who think that life after death is a near certainty, yet many others think that there are only as many evidences for discarnate survival as there are evidences of the historical existence of dinosaurs. This evidence is based on near-death and other out-of-body experiences, pre-death visions, apparitions, memories of previous lives and certain cases of mediumistic communication

### **Evidence for Discarnate Survival**

- A. Near death experiences
- B. Pre-death visions
- C. Apparitions,
- D. Certain cases of mediumship
- E. Children remembering previous lives

Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidences. It is a question yet to be answered whether survival researchers have found extraordinary evidences for discarnate existence. The study of Marian apparitional occurrences prompted the Croatian neuropsychiatrist Dr Stopar Ludwick to develop a concept of Theistic parapsychology that can link science with religion.

Miller and Lipsett list mainly four stages after death in which the majority of the world cultures tend to coincide in belief.<sup>14</sup>

- A. The waiting place, where the newly discarnate soul becomes familiar with its new state as a spiritual entity and gets adjusted to it.

B. The Judgement Phase or the Summation. In this phase the individual's life is summoned and in some cultures, judgement of some sort is passed on the soul. At this point the future of the soul is determined.

C. The realm of possibilities in which the results of the judgement are endured or enjoyed, or when judgement is not a significant issue, simply exists, or where the post-mortem survival state is even one of 'vegetation'.

D. The return, in which the soul is reborn in the new body in the physical or some other plane (e.g., purgatory), or is released altogether from the wheel of life and is united with Divine totality.

## **Discussion**

Are paranormal phenomena inconsistent with the laws of physical theory? The answer is that physics theories remain unfinished. For ESP and PK to be true, the fundamental laws of science would have to be broken. Conventional scientists are sceptical. However, parapsychologists believe that majority of psychic phenomenon are outside the realm of current scientific methods. Some believe that breakthroughs in particle physics may one day provide explanations for psi phenomenon.

The human mind has limitations in accepting new ideas. Every new idea is a disturbance to the tranquillity of mind and we have a threshold beyond which we cannot stretch the mind. 'Boggle threshold' is the point at which we exhaust our willingness to believe and scepticism takes over. It also reflects our preconceived notion about what can and cannot happen in the world. Our mind rejects ideas beyond our boggle threshold. Yet it has no place in scientific endeavour and a true scientist has to set his boggle threshold at infinity. Parapsychology is beyond the boggle threshold of many mental health professionals. Parapsychology is the spice of psychiatry but is not given its due recognition in psychiatric practice.

While enjoying developments in the parasciences, we cannot ignore the potential dangers. There are warnings against too readily making metaphysical and particularly parapsychological speculations on the basis of particle physics<sup>15</sup>; the present author heeds them, accepting that human beings are not mere macroscopic quantum systems. Human beings are electrical animals, and quantum beings as well as spiritual personalities; the spiritual is the subtlest and the most pervasive. Particle physics might unravel certain aspects of mind which will continue to be shrouded in mystery. After all, Quantum Mechanics is only a rock bottom theory of matter. Particle physics might invoke as many problems as it would solve. The paraphysical dimensions physicists conjecture may not be equivalent to the eternal spiritual dimensions referred in the Bible or other world religions. In the years to come, due to certain pernicious developments, parasciences may be perceived as contributing to a world crisis of religious faith. Experimental physicists have always been critical about speculative physics and they would like these issues to be left to the philosopher and the theologian.

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