Hidden Islands of the Human Soul

A Study in Parapsychology

Eversince the dawn of human history, no one had felt the need of proving that men were endowed with a special sense which did not fall within the purview of normal experience consisting of five commonly recognized senses. There were, in every age and in every society, saints, rishis, sufis magicians, oracles, visionaries and prophets having supernormal perception This does not imply that this type of perception was strictly confined to a particular kind of people only. In the past, it was believed that any body could become a recepient of it. Any body could have prophetic dreams or supernormal communications. It will be no exaggeration if I say that for the people of the past this type of experiences which we now call extrasensory, were not at all extra sensory or supra normal. These were perfectly normal; at the most these were regarded as unusual and uncommon. If somebody saw a ghost while travelling in the desert, it was not "extra" something; it was as normal an experience as coming across a lion or a snake, though it was not as common.

This belief was held by almost all people from the earliest beginnings until two three centuries ago. With the rise of scientific out-look people gradually grew sceptical as to the existence of the

Dr. Naeem Ahmad is presently Assistant Professor in the Department. The present article is reprinted from the 'Pakistan Times' dated Feb. 5, 1988.

existence of the 'sixth sense'. It was the seventeenth century philosopher John Locke who attacked the rationalistic and spiritualistic epistemologies of the past and those of his own times and said that mind prior to experience was a tabula rasa; it was like a blank slate on which nothing was written or like a white paper on which nothing was inscribed. For Locke experience, and exprience alone. was the sole source of knowledge. Subsequent empiricists carried the Lockean argument to its logical conclusion. Hume denied reality to all metaphysical and mythical entities. He believed that any idea which was not rooted in sense perception was a pseudo idea. Thus those sciences which developed under the impact of empiricism were predisposed to reject any source of knowledge which lay beneath or above the threshold of sense-perception. Only those observations and studies were capable of winning the title of "science" which were highly systematic, repeatable and open to public inquiry. This is why that against the context of Behaviouristic Psychology, humanp syche was reduced to deus ex machina.

In such an intellectual climate, it was not easy to make a case for a discipline that claimed to have emerged from a "para-empirical" source. Thus parapsychology faced innumerable difficulties to win itself a place in the scheme of knowledge.

Why Parapsychology?

One of the reasons that modern mind is reluctant to accept ESP as a genuine experience is its traditional and superstitious overtone. Clairvoyance, for example, could be regarded as the craftsmanship of a fraudulent fortune-teller in the street. Moreover its subject matter is highly elusive and improbable. Telepathy or pre-cognition in one case at one time may be astonishingly true; but in another case at another time, utterly wrong rather misleading.

These facts however, do not imply that such a branch of

knowledge as parapsychology is an impossibility. These, on the other hand, necessitate a serious and systematic research activity to discriminate between the real ESP phenomena and the fake and fraudulent tricks. Frauds and forgeries do take place in various walks of life, but these do not prevent people from making contracts and doing business. On the other hand, people become more careful and vigilant in their dealings. Similarly superstition, magic and fake fortune-telling do not minimize the importance of studying man's hidden and unrecognized faculty, sometimes called the 'sixth sense'. Conversely, these create a pressing demand for a systematic study of this faculty. This point was stressed as early as 1949 by Professor Sir Alister Hardy, while addressing to the Zoology Section of the British Association:

"There is another matter which I feel it only right to mention if one is not to be intellectually dishonest. There has appeared over the horizon something which many of us do not like to look at. If it is pointed out to us we say: No, it can't be there, our doctrines say it is impossible. I refer to telepathy—the communication of one mind with another by means other than by the ordinary senses. I believe that no one who examines the evidence with an unbiased mind can reject. It is perhaps unorthodox for a zoologist to introduce such a topic; but I do so for a reason. If telepathy has been established, as I believe it has, such a revolutionary discovery should make us keep our minds open to the possibility that there may be so much more in living things and their evolution than our science has hitherto led us to expect."

These are the views of an unbiased scientist. Much goes on in the physical world and in our own psyche that escapes scientific explanation. How do we memorize? How do we learn and unlearn? what does exactly happen in our nervous system when a thought occurs to us? How is mind related to body and how do they interact? What is the nature of that plane of existence atw hich one finds himself while dreaming? Why is one's memory extraordinarily exalted when his last hour is fast approaching? These and so many other questions hint at ultimate mysteries of life in face of which the scientist stands bewildered. Similarly many an event in the physical world is unique, strange and inexplicable. Gardner Murphy in his interesting article, "The Problem of Repeatability in Psychical Research" writes:

"Now repitition is not the only hallmark of science. There are unique events in the history of the stars and in the history of life on this planet, and, of courase, in the history of each one of us as individual human beings. The uniqueness must be honoured. Not by any means would we insist that order or lawfulness is universal in data marked and hailed as science There are of course, artifacts, unclassifiable events, "strays" we may call them, observations which we cannot subsume under any category. There are "flying saucer", so to speak, of physics and chemistry as well as of the mountaintop, the Loch Ness monsters, events which have neither a home nor a rationale."

What is PSI?

Psi is the twenty third letter of the Greek alphabet. The parapsychologists prefer to use this term instead of 'psychic' but in fact both psi and 'psychic' are co-significative terms. Rosalined Heywood defines psi:

"... it is now used as blanket name for the psychic in general; that is for the whole family of apparent phenomena and experiences real or alleged, for which no physical cause has as yet been discovered. It includes not only extra-sensory communication, for which the evidence is coercive, but other phenomena for

which the quality of evidence varies apparitions, dowsing, plotergeists, 'otherworld' experiences and certain psyhical phenomena which some people claim to produce by psychic means".3

In the beginning *psi* faculty went by the name of 'para-normal cognition'. But it was soon given up mainly for three reasons:

- (a) It was not appropriate to call *psi* phenomena over and above normal happenings because mass experiments (e.g. those of telepathy) have proved that it is widespread, though in varying degrees of certainty.
- (b) The word 'cognition' was not fully expressive because much of psi phenomena remain peripheral to the range of conciousness.
- (c) It did not refer to the active power of the human psyche which it was believed to have over material objects.

Later on, the term extra sensory perception was invented by Dr. Rhine to denote the 'psychic abilities'. This name is now in common use. But this relatively new branch of study is given some other names in different countries. The term 'psychical research' was coined by the English thinkers. The word parapsychology came from 'parapschologie' of German. In France the term 'metapsyche' is used.⁴

ESP is thus a form of psi and means the perception of things without the means of recognized senses. In order to deal with the question of ESP, the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was founded in London in the year 1982 by a group of illustrious scholars. No less a person than Henery Sidgwick was its first president. The American SPR was established three years later under the leadership of William James. Some of the philosophers

who have served either as presidents or as vice presidents of one or the other of these societies are A. J. Balfour, Henri Bergson, F.C.S. Schiller, Willinm McDougal, Hans Driesch, C.D. Broad, H.H. Price and C.J. Ducasse.⁵ Not only philosophers, but several scientists have also been associated with these societies. For instance, J.J. Thomson whose discovery of the electron had brought about a great revolution in physics, was also one of the pioneers of SPR.

Two Aspects of Psi

Psi phenomena could be divided into two types or aspects. those in which mind remains receptive and those in which mind becomes active and dominates material objects. The first type is known as extra sensory perception (ESP) and the second one as psychokinesis (PK). "The two main types of psi interaction, ESP and PK make up the entire field covered by parapsychology thus far. The two way communication may be called 'extrasensorimotor' to distinguish it from the sensorimotor interaction on which we mainly rely". Three main phenomena are subsumed under ESP; telepathy precognition and clairvoyanee. Similarly PK may be subdivided into three main categories; PK-MT, PK-LT and PK-ST. Let us consider these abilities of the mind in somewhat detail.

(i) ESP:

(a) Telepathy:—Telepathy is defined as the direct awareness of another person's state of mind without the sensorimotor mediation of language, code clue or other physical signalling. This may be regarded as a pure transfer of "mental message" or "thought-transference". Dr. Rhine releates the following incident of a father who had a very violent and indubitable experience of telepathy:

"One day the father was driving home by automobile along a New Jersey Highway. Suddenly with no warning he

felt a crushing pain, so severe he thought he would die, shoot through his chest. He somehow managed to stop the car. After a shortwhile he recovered: There seemed nothing the matter with him, then he drove home. While telling his wife about this strange experience the like of which he had never had before (nor, for that matter for many years that have passed since), and discussing the need of a medical examination, the telephone rang. It was a message stating that his son in Colorado had been killed in a head-on collision of the car which he had been driving. The time of his son's death coincided with that of his own violent chest pain. The son was crushed against the wheel."

There is a famous incident related in the histories of Islam. Hazrat Umar, the second Caliph of Islam, had sent an army to Syria under the command of a well-known general Sariah. On a friday, Hazrat Umar was delivering his 'khutba' in the 'Masjid-i-Nabvi', While delivering his Khutba' normally, he, all of a sudden shouted, "يا ساريس" (O, Sariah! Move to the mountain). He repeated these words three times and then resumed his sermon. The people were very much puzzled and could not make head or tail of this abrupt remark. After a few days, a massenger came from the battlefield and reported to the Caliph in these word, "O, Ruler of the faithful; One day when the army was just at the verge of defeat a voice was heard thrice urging Sariah to move to the mountain side. We obeyed and retreated to the mountain for protection. As a result, with God's grace, We inflicted a crushing defeat on the non-believers".

(b) Pre-cognition: In a precognitive experience, one becomes

aware of the events which have not yet taken place and are going to happen in future. It may be called the fore-knowledge of the future. It may be objected that the scientists and politicians also predict the events of the future and in most of the cases, these turn out to be true. Do they have extra sensory powers? No! their assessments and predictions are based on definite data, whereas the technical term of precognition as a form of *psi*, involves no rational inference. A Similar knowledge of the past is known as 'retrocognition'.

The Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him), while delivering his last sermon, the celebrated Khutba Hajjatul Wida' had a very clear precognition that after that year he would not be with his people to perform Hajj. He says:

ایها الناس اسمعوا قولی فانی لا ارانی و ایاکم ان نجتمع فی هذا المجلس ولا احج بعد عاسی هذا .

"O people! Listen to my words, for I do not know whether we shall ever meet again and perform Hajj after this year".

The Prophet (peace be upon him) not only predicted his owndeath but also the death of *Hazrat Zainab*. The victories of Khyber, Yemen, Iran, Egypt, Constantinople and Turkey were also foretold by him He had forewarned people of the civil war between Ali and Ayesha Siddiqa as also between Ali and Muawiya. He had vision about the reconciliation of Imam Hassan and about the martyrdom of Imam Hussain He is reported to have said "By God I see the hidden objects just like those present before the eyes".

Precognition or prophecy is the most popular and spectecular form of ESP. It may be regarded as the most important ingredient of the religions of the past. The Hebrews never liked fortunetelling and astrology that were popular with the Babylonians. "But they did believe that God revealed his plans in dreams and prophets". The Pharaoh (described as Aziz by the Quran) had a dream of seven fat kine whom seven lean ones were devouring, and seven green ears of corn and seven others withered. None of his paid soothsayers and wizards could interpret the dream. Then the Hebrew prisoner Joseph (يوسف) was summoned and asked to interpret it. Joseph warned the king that Egypt would have seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of drought and hardship when the famine stricken people would eat up what was stored during good seven years.

In Hakayat-i-Aulya, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi relates the story of a majzoob named Hafiz Abdul Qadir who lived in Delhi in 1857. One day the reporter of the testimony was following him when he abruptly stopped and started crying, "Beware! beware! "Then pointing to his chest said, "I am hit by bullet here!" Hardly about five weeks had passed when the sad events of 1857 started and the seer was hit by a bullet in the chest exactly in the same way he had prophecied. 10

Precognition is not confined to prophets and seers. A layman can also have premonitions. In every one's life certain hunches and dreams turn out to be true. British Society for Psychical Research has officially published a number of ESP cases. Following is an interesting and dramatic case of precognition:

"Being at length tired, I sat down to rest upon a rock at the edge of water. My attention was quite taken up by the extreme beauty of the scene before me. There was not a sound of movement except the soft ripple of water on the sand on my feet. Presently I felt a cold chill creep through me, and a curious stiffness of my limbs. as I could not move though wishing to do so. I felt frightened, yet chained to the spot, and as if impelled to stare at the water straight infront of me. Gradually a black cloud seemed to arise, and in the midst of it, I saw a tall man, in a suit of tweed, jump into the water and sink.

"In a moment the darkness was gone, and I again became sensible of the heat and the sunshine, but I was awed and felt eerie—it was about four O'clock or so—I cannot remember either the exact time or date. On my sister's arrival, I told her of the occurrence; she was surprised, but inclined to laugh at it. When I got home, I told my brother; he treated the subject much in the same manner. However about a week afterwords a Mr. Espie, a bank clerk (unknown to me) committed suicide by drowning in the very spot. He left a letter for his wife indicating that he had for sometime contemplated his death. My sister's memory of the event is the only evidence I can give. I did not see the account of the inquest at the time, and did not mention strange experience to anyone saving my sister and brother." 11

(c) Clairvoyance:—The direct awareness of things or objective events without sensory means has been allowed to retain its traditional name 'clairvoyance'. "The individual who has such an experience may know of the presence of a hidden object that he could not perceive in any sensorial way and that could not be identified by reasoning, or he may be aware of a physical process or action such as the distant sinking of a ship."12

Clairvoyance differs from telepathy in so far as in it the information originates from a physical object while in a telepathic experience the information arises from the mind of another person. J.B. Rhine, of the Duke University, made a valuable contribution to isolate a clairvoyant experience from a telepathic one. In 1930, Rhine selected a group of 30 students and asked them to write a number from 0 to 9 while he fixed his gaze on a specific number on a numbered card. In approximately one thousand trials no one scored high enough to warrant further investigation. Then Rhine used the cards with the letters of the alphabet and other symbols on them. But despite several trials the results were not encouraging.

The cards with symbols deserve special attention, because the subsequent success of Rhine's experiments much depended on them and their use in ESP experiments has become very important. These cards were originally named Zener cards, after K.E. Zener, an early collaborater of Rhine. The five boldly printed symbols on the face of the cards are a star, a circle, a plus sign, three wavy lines, and a square. A deck of a total of twenty five cards having five symbols. These symbols were chosen for the simple reason that they were distinct and easy to remember. Rhine says:

"...the symbols used were five simple designs: circle, rectangle (or square), plus sign, star and wavy lines (0, [], +, *,). These were mainly chosen by Dr. Zener, with a view to avoiding undue overlapping, complication, difference in familiarity. They are still in use. (We have once substituted a 'heart' for the 'waves' figure but later returned to the latter. I shall hereinafter call these cards the ESP cards.)" 13

The ESP cards could be used in a number of ways for the clair-

voyant perception tests. In a standard test, the pack is shuffiled and cut and placed face downward. The subject, then, attempts to guess the first card, which is removed and placed in a separate pile. He then attempts to guess the second card. This process goes on until the pack is finished. After that the cards are turned over and compared with the guesses. In a telepathic test, the technique is slightly changed. The agent looks at the card and telepathically tries to communicate the symbol to a second individual, the percepient.

In the beginning, Rhine faced many difficulties in conducting test of clairvoyant and telepathic types. But gradually his experiments met with increasing success. Most notable of all is the experiment at Duke University in which the subject was sent to a building 100 yards away from that in which the experimenter handled the target cards. These were isolated one at a time at one minute intervals and the card order was not recorded until after the run of twenty five trials. The cards were kept facedown throughout the run, and the subject in the other building recorded his guesses as he made them. Duplicate records of both the cards and calls made double independent checking possible. With the completion of a planned series of 300 guesses, under these conditions over a sixtyday period, the results were so highly and uniformly successful that there was no doubt the results could not be due to chance. In 300 guesses 60 hits were expected on the basis of pure chance, but with 119 hits the odds were 1,000,000 to 1 against such results occurring by chance alone.14

Thinkers have put forward certain hypotheses to explain ESP. These are of two types; physical hypotheses and non-physical hypotheses. Physical hypotheses are more numerous, popular and elaborate. But almost all of them take traditional wave theory of energy as the fundamental explanatory principle, Some theories have tried to explain telepathy on the supposition of brain-waves.

Some think that some kind of waves emanate from the things themselves so that they become clairvoyantly perceptible. These waves may be regarded as magnetic, 'telluric' or 'rhabdic' emanations of Sir William Crookes and Prof. Ostwald are well known for physical hypotheses. But there are certain thinkers who do not support this point of view. Sir William Barret believes that telepathy, precognition and clairvoyance, are psychical phenomenon. He frequently quotes Myers, Mrs. Sidgwick and other eminent scholars. More comprehensive theories are those of Hyslop, Forel and Tischner. Hyslop belives that spirit or incorporeal personality is the 'carrier' of mental states or stimuli that the recepient receives. for both telepathy and chairvoyance. Tichner thinks that a 'superindividual' or 'collective mind' serves as a common reservior and makes the three phases of ESP possible through a sort of 'subconscious telephonic connections'. Forel explains the ESP phenomena on the basis of an electron theory. "The electron comes either from the brain of the agent or from the object, and when they come off in certain complexes they convey to the brain of the percepient the stimulation which leads to perception."15

It should be noted that there are myraid examples of ESP, not only in the reports of SPR, but also in religion, literature and even in day to day life. In view of such examples which could be found in all ages and in all societies, it seems difficult to deny the reality of these phenomena. These, in fact call for more serioas and scientific investigation. Though scientists have tried to give ESP an hypothetical rationale, yet it is not adequate at all. This is why Dr. Rhine has said "that the evidence for general ESP is good but the theories are bad."

(2) PK PK(psychokinesis) is defined in the glossory of the Journal of Parapsychology, as "the direct influence exerted on a physical system by a subject without any known intermediate physical energy or instrumentation".

PK, unlike ESP, is mind's ability to influence external material environment without the motor system of the body, and without any transfer of physical energy. PK is relatively newer branch of study and despite the valuable research contributions of Mr. Fisk, Dr. R.A. McConnel, Dr R.H. Thouless and Dr. J.B. Rhine, it has not yet come up to the level of ESP, both in the quality and quantity of evidence.

Like ESP, PK too, has three subdivisions. These subdivisions are made in accordance with the three states of matter on which mind has to take effect. One should not, however, think that these states of matter are the same as the common notion of solid, liquid and gas. These cannot be likened to the mineral, vegetative and animal levels of matter either. In PK matter is divided into three main categories, the moving, the living and static. These divisions are made particularly for the testing of PK. For example, it is thought much easier by some people to influence moving objects such as a rolling dice or a flying arrow than to move a static body. Rhine was the first to devise a test for PK by throwing dice. It so happened that the desired face came uppermost in a number of cases by Just 'willing'. The results were to a great extent positive. Thus dice-throwing became as much a game-like test as the guessing of the ESP cards.

So far in parapsychology no particular term has been coined to stand for the PK test on a moving target. It is commonly referred to as PK MT. Similarly impact of the mind on static targets is known as PK-ST. Living matter exhibits characteristics fundamentally different from inanimate matter whether moving or static. Some people believe that they can mentally influence the living matter, in both plants and animals, in its special functions of growth, healing and the like. This would be PK-LT.

In mythological and religious literature one finds countless examples of all the three kinds of PK. Even in newspapers from time to time, reports of poltergeist phenomena appear. Poltergeist means "noisy, rattling spirit". It signifies disturbances characterized by unexplained physical happenings, such as loud noises, sudden movements and breakage of household objects, usually for a short duraation and limited to a small area, such as a house. It is true that trickery and faulty observation are very common in poltergeist cases. But it is also genuine and call forth a big question mark. What, then is a poltergeist? "Most theorize in a very general way that the poltergeist is a psychic force that either emanates from or is released by, the troubled individual who seems to be the centre of the phenomena. It is almost as if the emotions of the person trigger uncontrollable psychokinetic activity." One can bring forward a number of hypotheses to explain PK, but it is a fact that as a branch of parapsychology it is still at a very initial stage and its experimental evidence is too inadequate.

We have discussed two aspects of psi each with a threefold division. It should, however not be understood by the categorization of psi, that there are hard and fast boundaries between its various forms. Separation of psi abilities was only relative and due to the requirements of experimentation. But the more they were studies and separated, the more they exhibited a basal and essential character. One may have a psi experience which is both clairvoyant and psychokinetic. Keeping in view the unity of psi, it is sometimes oddly enough, called the "sixth sense".

Mediumistic Communication with the Dead:—In the beginning, it was thought that the chief objective of physical research was also thought that the communication with the dead through a medium was one phenomena and ESP an other, and efforts were made to explain the former on the basis of the latter. But later on medium-

istic communication came to be regarded as a form of ESP. Some parapsychologists consider it telepathy originating from the deceased people and call it "spirit telepathy". For Lord Rayleigh, Crookes, Myers, Mrs Sidgwick and Pondmore, it is the only plausible ground on which human survival can be accepted. Following is an example of mediumistic communication:—

"A Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University who is now dead, had once a chance of going to the U.S. and being a scientist, with a curiousity to know, went to a seance. There he wanted to know how his relatives were whom he had left at Lahore. Immediately, he was told by a medium that his mother's spirit had come to communicate. On hearing this, the Vice-Chancellor felt disturbed as he had left his mother alive when he departed from Lahore. Hence he said to the medium that that was wrong for his mother was alive. The medium however, insisted that that was what the spirit said. As the Vice-Chancellor could not believe and wanted the medium to have the correct information, the medium was asked by the spirit to enquire from the Vice-Chancellor, if he had an auntie whom out of love, he called 'mother' and for the benefit of whose soul he arranged a 'fatehal six months ago. The Vice-Chancellor corroborated it and remembered his auntie whom he loved like mother and for the benofit of whose soul he occasionally arranged 'Fatehas''.17

The medium had no knowledge of the Vice-Chancellor prior to this meating. She could not have the knowledge she supplied from the spirit through ESP as it was knowledge which was not in the conscious mind of the Vice-Chancellor.

Philosophical Implications of PSI

If the findings of parapsychology are given due importance, a number of problems as to the nature of causality, perception, time memory etc. will arise¹⁸. But Flew is not prepared to accept that *psi* phenomena have any important implications for philosophy and even for science. He thinks that we should stick to the established scientific postulates as *heuristic* maxims even if they are violated by *psi* phenomena, *psi* phenomena, inview of their rarity and inconsistency, should be segregated as those awkward facts for which nature has not provided discoverable law. It can, however, be easily noticed that this attitude is unscientific. "If physicists had ignored magnetic phenamena or the results of Michelson-Morley experiment and had been content to say that the principles of Newtonian mechics remained as 'heuristic' maxims, physics would be very different from what it is today". 19

The view that psi paenomene have philosophical implications is held by many. (A detailed discussion of these implications is to be found in "Philosophy and Parapsychology" edited by Jan Ludwig, Prometheus Books, Baffaio, New York, 1978), H.H. Price is a vehement advocate of this view. He thinks that scientific postulates are at a loss to explain psi phenomena, and that the findings of parapsychology necessitate a psycho-physical dualism (unlike Descartes' dualism). But C. J. Ducasse takes a contrary view. We writes:

"that matter may have sub-atomic canstituents, and that these might have properties capable of accounting for ESP and PK is of course at present pure speculation. I introduce it only to make clear that reality of these and other kinds of paranormal phenomena would not in principle require abandonment of materialistic conception of the universe—a type of conception which, of course, has been marvelously fertile—but only call for materialism liberal enough to include a level of materiality still more tenuous than the presently recognized sub-atomic one".20

Wether one sides with Price or Ducnsse, one thing is certain, that Parapsychology has raised certain fundamental problems as to the ultimate nature of life, mind and matter, and that these must be probed into without any bias.

Finally, it is noticeable that valuable advances have been made in the field of Parapsychology not only in Anglo-American World, but also in Soviet Russia. Even in India, the study of paranormal is being encouraged and financed by the government. It is very unfortunate that in Pakistan, this branch of knowledge is to tally neglected. It is the need of the hour to set up a state sponsored institute of parapsychology after the model of National Institute of Psychology.

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