

PSI IN COMMUNITIES AND OTHER INTERPERSONAL SITUATIONS IN THE EASTERN WORLD

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RAO: A legendary teacher belonging to the Advaita school of philosophy was teaching his doctrine, impressing upon the student how the whole world is unreal. The student, very much impressed, was deeply absorbed in his thoughts when an angry elephant came chasing them. The teacher immediately ran and climbed up a tree and called out for the disciple to follow him. But the student asked: "My dear teacher, I listened to everything you said and I am very much impressed, but why do you run away? The elephant is not real." And the teacher said: "You are right, the elephant is not real, so my climbing a tree is not real. Come and follow me."

I think this is the kind of situation in which a student of parapsychology finds himself. We talk about psi, about evidencing it, about controlling it, but when we have to say what it is, a surprisingly large number of us find it difficult, and we have to escape under a similar myth as the revered teacher.

In a country like India a lot of things go under the name of paranormal, spiritual, or psychic. Essentially permissive and excessively tolerant, Indian culture takes psi powers for granted and makes it easy for people to accept any out-of-the-way phenomenon as paranormal. However favorable this may look to us parapsychologists, this state of affairs is beset with serious problems that stand in the way of proper scientific pursuit of psi. It becomes relatively harmless and even profitable for charlatans to masquerade as psychics or even scientists. We

often find ourselves in the not enviable position of being unable to distinguish between credible and pseudo claims.

Today in India we find a variety of phenomena of apparent parapsychological interest, ranging all the way from street-corner demonstrations of pseudo-telepathy to God-incarnations. The street-corner demonstrators are often conjurers. While their tricks appear impressive to many uninformed laymen, it is easy for a sophisticated investigator to see through them. I satisfied myself on several occasions that no paranormal was involved. The divinity claimers pose a difficult problem. They are usually very influential people and have a considerable number of followers. Some of them keep under their spell high government officials and even scientists of great reputation. Among these divinity claimers are the miracle makers. We hear fantastic stories about them; one of the greatest, the Baba, is said to materialize objects and pass them on to his disciples. A scientist friend, who obviously believes in these powers, showed me a watch which was given to him by the Baba: he had materialized it out of nothing under conditions which apparently satisfied my friend. In fact, many colleagues seem to think that the Baba is a big gold mine, and that I am foolish to have ignored him for so long.

It is not easy to subject these divinity claimers to any systematic testing. The conditions under which the "miracle" phenomena are generally produced are too loose to render any evaluation reliable. It is almost impossible to tighten these conditions to meet any acceptable standards. We are often told that the Baba would welcome any scientific study of him, but we do not have any assurance that we can control the conditions. This explains why so far we have not ventured to get involved in any appreciable measure with these people. But the persistence of these phenomena undoubtedly poses a challenge which we cannot ignore for much longer.

There are a number of other reported experiences in which apparent parapsychological interaction takes place between a *guru* and his disciples. These *gurus* are generally either mystics, yogis, or the scholarly heads of the sacred seats of learning. I shall give a couple of examples of such experiences reported to me personally. One of my friends, who was not a follower nor even an admirer of a *swami*, head of a famous *pittam* in South India, happened to interview him. During the course of the interview, my friend asked him a question. The *swami* told him: "We will give you the answer at the appropriate time." Later one night my friend had a dream in which the *swami* gave the answer to that question. Subsequently when a person known to both the *swami* and my

friend happened to see the former, the *swami* told him : "Your friend asked us a question. We answered him. Please find out if he is satisfied with the answer."

In another case, a friend of mine, who is a trained physicist, reported that some people from a village came to see a *swami* and to spend the night in his *ashram*. When the *swami* saw them, at four o'clock in the afternoon, he told them that they should go back and spend the night in the village and not in the *ashram*. The disciples were obviously disappointed, but reluctantly went back to the village. That night the village was raided. We were told that but for the presence of these men who returned from the *ashram*, the whole village would have been robbed. The villagers, convinced that the *swami* saved them, returned to the *ashram* the next morning and fell at the feet of the *swami* in gratitude. When asked by my friend how he exercised these paranormal powers, the *swami* said that he does not exercise them, but these experiences occasionally "flow" out of him without any effort on his part. The implication is that these are spontaneous experiences. Their occurrence is perhaps facilitated by the rapport that exists between the *guru* and his disciples.

We hear a surprisingly large number of reports on some sort of telepathic transference of information and knowledge between *gurus* and disciples. The experiences reported by parapsychologically-oriented Western psychiatrists seem to indicate that a kind of rapport, very similar to that which is likely to exist between a *guru* and his disciples, also occurs between patient and analyst. However, in our situation the frustration component indicated by Dr. Servadio is presumably replaced by a crisis situation, which the disciple must undergo before he gets any enlightenment, any divine revelation, or any thought transference from the teacher. The teacher is not merely teaching something (a book can teach); a much stronger bond is generated out of this *guru*-disciple relationship. Presumably it is this bond that helps to promote parapsychological communication between them.

There is a class of tribal people in the part of India where I live who are somewhat like nomads or gypsies, and move from place to place. The women among them make a living by allegedly communicating with deceased personalities and spirits in sittings with village housewives. This is very close to the Western mediumship phenomenon. The procedure usually goes as follows: The "gypsy" enters some sort of trance by ritual chanting. She holds in her hand a stick connected to the woman who wishes to have the reading. The "gypsy" in her trance invokes the spirit of a deceased person related to the

sitter. This entity begins to talk about himself or herself, revealing considerable information in the process. I have watched some of these sessions and was struck by the intense emotion they generate, not only in the woman having the reading, but also in the observers. While it is easy to see that something is going on, it is difficult to discover how much of this is due to feedback from the sitter, as there is always a dialogue between the two. Nevertheless, since these professionals are easily available for experimentation, they might constitute good subjects for research, as we have nowadays a number of methods to evaluate the verbal material we are likely to collect during such sittings.

Another type of professional practitioners are those who engage in black magic. They are alleged to cast evil spells and even cause death. Their practices are closely guarded secrets. Some are attributed to *tantric* practices. Their *modus operandi* varies considerably. One of the procedures involves making an image of the man against whom the cursing is directed. After performing complex rituals and chanting, needles are inserted into the image and mutilations are inflicted upon it. The cursed individual, it is believed, will gradually die. It is also not uncommon for an individual who believes he has become a victim of black magic to go to another practitioner to break the evil spell.

These practices are gradually becoming extinct. In cases where their outcome is successful, one might want to consider the hypothesis of psychokinetic effects at play. But the question remains as to how much is due to suggestion and belief rather than to parapsychological influences.

Another commonly believed phenomenon is the "evil eye." In most villages there are individuals whose presence is dreaded because they are supposed to cast an evil eye. For example, cases of cows who unexpectedly stop giving milk or of babies who refuse to nurse and fall ill are sometimes attributed to the evil eye. I do not know how far this may be true. If it is at all true, it would imply some sort of psychokinetic effect. What interests me here is that the individual accused of casting the evil eye has no evil intentions. He has no hatred toward the owner of the cow, and no desire that the cow should dry up. Why should it happen, then? Maybe we rationalize; we always want to find excuses for our failures. If really for some unexplainable reason the cow dries up, we say (post hoc) that so-and-so looked at the cow being milked and therefore this happened, an example of a fallacy in classical logic. If an unfortunate man happens to be involved in such a situation a number of times, he may be identified as one who has the "evil eye." Eventually a correlation is established between this evil-eyed man and bad events, only because your fear may in fact result in that effect.

Maybe your expectation is a kind of channel for the externalization of those powers.

Another kind of ostensibly psychokinetic phenomenon is that of miracle healers who profess to bring about parapsychological cures. I suppose these people are essentially not different from those you have in the West. While a number of these cures can be attributed to other causes, such as suggestion or drugs (since a patient seldom leaves himself entirely in the hands of miracle healers without taking some medication), there are some cures which came to my notice that warrant follow-up studies. The parapsychological cures of snake bites are well-known in India, even though we have little scientific evidence for them since no systematic studies were ever made.

Occasionally gifted individuals who practice divination turn up in far-off corners, and people go to them to find lost objects. These individuals did not train themselves to acquire psi ability, nor did they have it from childhood; all of a sudden they seem to find out that they have it. People start going to them from different parts of the country, seeking their help to find out, for instance, where their lost cattle are. Apparently, many people are satisfied, and so this divinatory activity goes on for a number of years. In general, though, it does not last the lifetime of the individual. After a few years, something happens and the individual loses his powers. I am not contending that these cases are genuinely paranormal, but they are worth looking into.

Another fascinating, but hard to believe, phenomenon is what is called *nadi* in the South of India and *Bhrigu Samhitha* in the North. There are said to be ancient books that contain information pertaining to a lot of people. A person goes to a *nadi* man who, from his date of birth or horoscope, finds an appropriate page in the manuscript carrying the person's name, the names of his parents, his place of birth, and some readings about his past and his future. A learned friend of mine, who is an engineer by training, went to consult a *nadi* man in Madras. He reported to me that the *nadi* man did find his name and details about his family written in an old Tamil manuscript. At the end of the interview, the man said that the manuscript would no longer be of any use to him and gave it to my friend, who still has it. My friend says that the paper as well as the writing on it looks very old and that the document could not have been produced in recent times. One could think of a number of explanations, but I will not speculate on it now: I have first to see it for myself.

Then, of course, we have yoga. Yoga is not originally intended to gain any parapsychological powers. Yoga means union. You try to get

rid of all fluctuations of your psyche and to achieve liberation and identity with the ultimate. Certain exercises and practices, certain types of meditation are prescribed so that you can achieve this state. While you are doing these exercises in concentration and meditation, you tend to get certain paranormal abilities from which you are warned to guard yourself, lest you lose your ultimate aim. Therefore psi will always be a secondary phenomenon for a yogi, not the aim toward which he is really working, and any attempt to investigate yogis is beset with this main problem. If a yogi accepts working with you to test his parapsychological powers, he is presumably an individual who wants to show off and is not doing what he is supposed to do; therefore, he will not be a reliable subject. If a yogi has really achieved paranormal powers, he will not cooperate because it would deviate him from his main objective.

These difficulties notwithstanding, the study of yoga offers an irresistible challenge to parapsychologists. I am afraid that the concept "yoga" is used these days rather indiscriminately. It must be emphasized that there are several kinds of yoga. The ones relevant to parapsychologists might be the *Hatha* yoga, the *Raja* yoga, and the *Tantra* yoga, which are supposed to be various roads leading to the same goal. One would have to choose the most appropriate to his temperament and inclinations. The *Hatha* yoga, involving primarily bodily exercises and breath control, could be called the physiological approach, and the *Raja* yoga, which consists mainly of mental exercises and meditation, the psychological approach. My own feeling is that they seem to meet at some point, insofar as they seem to produce more or less similar effects. With modern sophisticated electronic instruments it should be possible to isolate and identify the states obtained through yoga practices. The few studies we have on yogis and zen masters seem to indicate that the practice of yoga and meditation appears to somehow affect the human mind. While it has not yet been established whether these changes are in any significant way related to psi, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize possible relationships that could be verified experimentally.

Taking the lead from the traditional ideas in our country and from the latest developments in the alpha feedback studies of Kamiya and others, we at Andhra University are planning to study practitioners of yoga and meditation, to identify the peculiar physiological concomitants of these practices and to eventually relate them to psi. We believe that this is an extremely important area, and we are not deterred by the difficulties of finding genuine yogis: they are not entirely insur-

mountable. We may not be able to obtain the ready cooperation of the highly-developed yogis, but I hope that we shall find other practitioners who can produce effects detectable by our instruments.

I have personally interviewed a number of people who have acquired some proficiency in these practices. If I filter out from the descriptions of their experiences all the individual predilections and the theological and religious connotations, what seems to emerge is a state which may be loosely described as relaxation. If we could physiologically identify this state of relaxation, and, by means of feedback and other techniques, train individuals to produce such a state voluntarily, we may come very near to achieving control over psi. I am obviously assuming that these states are somehow related to psi. Surely this is not too wild an assumption to make.

I left out other practices one hears about in India which might be of interest to parapsychologists, as haunted houses, teleportation, levitation, entering other people's body (*parakaya pravesa*), making oneself small, light, and even invisible, etc.

In conclusion, I am tempted to give the example of a much publicized yogi who claimed that he could walk on water. A test demonstration was arranged in Bombay and tickets were sold at hundred rupees each. As it turned out, the yogi, whose courage was undeniable, *did* attempt to walk on water, but could not and had to swim to save himself from drowning.

MARGENAU: Thank you, Dr. Rao. We now have approximately thirty minutes available for discussion. Do you, Mrs. Garrett, wish to tell us about your experiences? Can you discriminate between veridical and non-veridical insights?

GARRETT: You must remember that I have had long years of training in working with my subconscious. The training has left me highly skeptical. Nevertheless, there are many moments in which I get a very strange feeling here in my stomach. It then moves through to the back, and in a moment I have a flash of knowing something. I make a note of it, but I do not know from whom it comes. It invariably comes because somebody has been thinking of writing to me, or has been wanting help, and maybe that same afternoon, or two days later I will get the answer. This is what I call veridical telepathic feeling. Telepathy is "knowing" something that is going to happen outside of myself.

In the clairvoyant perception I actually see, I visualize. For instance, when Aldous Huxley's house burnt down I had a dreadful feeling of looking out of my office window, and seeing a picture of Aldous

standing quite still, almost as though looking on terrific flames right there on Fifth Avenue. I made a long distance call to California, to ask whether there had been anything of the kind happening, and heard from Aldous himself that everything he owned had burnt down.

One evening, when his wife, of whom I was very fond, was very ill, I was coming out of a theater. I suddenly had the feeling that somebody pushed me, and said, "Move over; it is all over," and the voice was exactly that of Maria. I was so hurt by this, that I had to find out. I called his son Mathew first, and he did not know, so I again called California: she had passed out precisely at the moment when that feeling came to me. This is what I call clairvoyance, evidentially so.

I can daydream and see all kinds of images, but these have nothing whatever to do with clairvoyance. I know a great many things by looking at any of you, but this is purely intuition: I have learned how to look into, not at. I can listen to your voice and know the kind of thing that you are doing, but this again is due to my long training in being silent and in observation.

These are not miracle things. They have come out of long experience. As you well know, I have been a guinea pig now for fifty years; I have gone through all kinds of analyses, beginning with Adolph Meyer, to understand what goes on in my deep subconscious. I therefore *feel* when what I see is veridical. I do know the difference because I know it from my own emotional being. Does that give you a clue?

MARGENAU: It does give me a clue. It tells me that there is a possibility of systematic investigation of this kind of psi. I had been rather taken aback by a variety of claims made by workers in this field that when psi happens you never know it.

GARRETT: I see ghosts, and I do not know they are ghosts until they disappear.

MARGENAU: But there is this affidavit of veridicality which attaches itself to your experience.

GARRETT: Oh, absolutely.

MARGENAU: If this were not so, any investigation of ESP would be extremely difficult.

GARRETT: I have seen many ghosts, and I have felt very eerie when I have seen them. In one instance I have been really frightened. I had just come home from a hospital and my doctor had recommended that

I go to sleep without drugs. I had had a very bad abdominal operation. About two o'clock in the morning I woke up and I saw a man warming his hands by the gas fire. I could see right through his hands, and I saw initials on his ring. I said, "What are you doing here?" He looked at me, and I thought he said to me, "If I died here, it was because of the terrible dampness. If you do not get out of here, you will be very badly affected by the telluric rays." With that, he got up and walked around the corner. I told my doctor the next morning, and he said that the man who owned the apartment before me had died six months earlier of a very bad pneumonia. From the moment he came to live there, he was always complaining, because he felt that he was living over water and that the dampness affected him.

Many years later I told this story to Professor Tromp at Leiden University and I asked him, "Would you mind telling me what are the telluric rays?" And he said, "You get this kind of malignancy from a large amount of damp mud." The house was actually built on the delta of a canal. It had taken me fifteen years to discover what the man meant. In any case, he scared me so that I left the place. I remember the episode today as though it just happened. When I feel that these things are veridical, then I must accept the fact that they are as real as any of the objective things in my life. When I see things that are supposed to happen to other people, I do not accept them less for that: I make notes about them and await the moment when somebody will make them happen. Does that give you a feeling?

MARGENAU: I think this is most revealing. Thank you very much, Mrs. Garrett. Are there any other comments? Dr. Servadio?

SERVADIO: The phenomenon of black magic with a statuette, which Dr. Rao described, is traditional in Europe, in occult circles. It is still practiced nowadays.

Some years ago a girl in a tramway in Genoa had a box in her hands and the box fell open. Inside there was a heart transfixed with many pins. Everybody was shocked, and the girl was brought to the police station. Trembling, and of course embarrassed, she explained that it was a spell. She had gone to a certain man asking him to cast a spell on another man, and he had taken the heart of an animal and performed a sort of ceremony upon it, finally transfixing it with pins.

I am sure you all know that Southern Italy is the land of the "evil eye." I do not know about other countries, but I think that the evil eye is widespread all over the world. It would perhaps be worth studying the phenomenon also from a parapsychological viewpoint. Who knows?

I wonder if it would not also be interesting to investigate the occult

practices of some esoteric circles, which often in a very childish way, but sometimes very seriously, think that the ceremonies they perform bring about results which would certainly be of high interest for us parapsychologists. These investigations would be difficult because if they are "occult" circles, this means they are not very eager to communicate what they do. . . . Nevertheless, there might be some possibility in that direction.

MARGENAU: I found, implied in statements of Dr. Krippner and Dr. Servadio, a theoretical aspect of psi, presented as a sort of teleological thesis affirming, perhaps not in these words, that need breeds psi ability. You have to have a need for it in order to be able to achieve it. I have wondered about the scientific credibility of such an affirmation. It reminds me of the daddy who told his small son a bedtime story about the puppy that was chased by a bear. The bear came closer and closer, and finally the puppy felt his hot breath and in final desperation, the father said, the puppy climbed up a tree. At that point the child said, "But daddy, puppies do not climb trees." Whereupon the father pounded the bedpost with his fist, and said, "Well, this one did. He had to."

I am sure this is not the spirit in which you advanced your thesis. I can however see some methodological importance in it. At least it might allow you to isolate circumstances in which these things are more likely to happen. There are after all scientific areas in which teleology is espoused as a valid doctrine of explanation. In biology we have many instances in which we can say nothing better than, "This had to happen because evolution enforced it." We hope that the teleological explanation will some day be converted into a causal one, but there are many sciences in which teleology has actually preceded causal understanding.