

Part 1- Study of The Paranormal Phenomena-- Glimpses from the Ancient Indian Literature

Part II-- A Study of Paranormal Phenomena-- A FMRI Study

By

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Abstract

Part 1- Study of The Paranormal Phenomena-- Glimpses from the Ancient Indian Literature

Paranormal phenomena are the occurrences or events that are beyond the range of normal experiences or any existing scientific explanation. There has always been an interest in these intriguing phenomena worldwide, various efforts to understand them through studies and experimentation. With the advent of modern scientific theories, methodological approach and meticulous scientific scrutinisation there is an equivocal opinion regarding the subject as a whole. There has been an increasing interest in understanding these phenomenon among people in the present days.

This work tries to give a detailed description on the astasiddhis as mentioned in the texts of yoga for a better understanding of the concept of the same. There is also an attempt to view the subject in the perspective of the 'pancakos' or the five layered sheath concept of the self as dealt in the texts of the upanisads and also an attempt has been made to bring out the view of the upanisads on the attainment of the paranormal powers. There is an effort to understand the similarity in the perspectives of the upanisads and the yoga sutras to the attainment of these paranormal powers.

The Tantra sastras deal with the topic of paranormal powers in a elaborative way and give descriptions fo raccomplishing them through specific techniques. A few of them are dealt with here, t introduce the concept of these tantra sastras. There is also a glimpse of the subject of yantras and Dasamahavidya – as they deal with the subject of paranormal powers.

Parapsychology is dealt with for a better comprehensive understanding of the whole subject, both in the modern and ancient perspectives.

There is an honest effort to present the subject in a balanced way, to kindle one's interest for further studies in the arena of paranormal powers, and to inspire one to become an aspirant on the path of spirituality. Yoga here is a tool

for one's own growth and elevation in the path of their evolutionary journey of self-realization where the acquiring of these paranormal is mentioned as nothing but a by-product.

Conclusion

This study deals with glimpses of the study of the paranormal psychic powers as mentioned in few of our ancient texts. The acquiring of siddhis is an exhaustive subject, where each method or each siddhi may itself be the topic for an elaborative research study. The existence of paranormal phenomenon is well documented and also well-accepted, even in the West, where a number of studies have been conducted to prove their existence beyond doubts. There are many a claims which are fraudulent also and due to this it has not been accepted by all sections of the scientific community and more ever, to understand and accept certain phenomenon which exists beyond one's sensory perceptions is very difficult.

These powers are generally accepted as acquired through various practices over a period of time by a few and as instinctual or by birth in a few. This phenomenon has found its place in almost all literature of the world from the oldest texts of Indian origin to the most modern texts of psychology and all of them arrive at one single platform of the 'power of mind'. The concept of mind, its functions and capacities is the most intriguing one and poses most challenge to the research faculty who are trying to probe into the same. A lot of studies have been done to understand the mind and its functions also of the higher mental faculties with new insights being obtained each day.

Most of the paranormal powers enumerated are covered under the umbrella of the term the 'astasisiddhi. Though most of the studies done now are the powers of the physical dimensions, the astasisiddhis also cover a lot more of the mental phenomena.

The documentation of these powers is found in many a biographies and other works of great people of the modern times also. There are many instances which are witnessed by the authors and they are convinced of the integrity of the practices and the acquired powers, but they are most often not the ardent aspirants of spirituality or purnayogis. They are the ones who are exhibitionists, who materialize their powers either converting them to monetary benefits or use them for fame. All the revered Gurus did recognize these psychic powers which is evident in the form of a great variety of literature obtained on this topic and they all repeatedly warn the sadhakas to move beyond the

temptations and they helped out their students to overcome them also. The dealing of this subject in the upanisads is only in the form of enumeration, in which there is a mention of that the accomplishments are only milestones and indicators to illustrate that the sadhaka is on the right path to the attainment of brahmajnana. The study of these upanisads is in the higher realms where no importance is given to the attainment of the siddhis whatsoever. These attainments do not lure the yogi on this path and his desires and wants have changed their objectivity and dimensions. When one realizes Brahman then there is nothing beyond that one has to achieve and is relieved of all bondages and the sole purpose of the study of the upanisads is to elevate the sadhaka to the higher dimensions in spirituality and reach him to his goal of self-realization.

Patanjali's yoga sutras and the Hathayoga pradipika are the most well read books on practice of yoga and they also devote few verses describing the siddhis. Patanjali's yoga sutras and the upanisads are from two different schools of philosophical thoughts yet, their approach to the subject is similar. Both of them recognize the attainments of the higher psychic powers on the path of their respective sadhana and also both caution that the sadhaka should not be lured with the magnificent powers that they acquire in the path and get stuck there. They advise the aspirant to proceed further in the chosen path of spirituality to attain greater heights of self-realization. The astanga yoga of patanjali is a preparatory step in the path of Rajayoga for the realization of Brahman. The teachings of the yoga sutras are practical, can be replicated and the results seen depending on the commitment and desire of the aspirant. The upanisadic knowledge of introspection and enquiry begin where the yoga sutras end.

The attainment of siddhis is dealt exhaustively in the Tantra sastras, which give various methodologies to attain them through the right-handed or the left-handed pathways. The right-handed path is the much accepted socially and is found widely in the worship of sricaka and in the form of srividya, the worship of the mother in her different forms the fierce to the most peaceful.

There are widespread quotations of the demonstration of the paranormal powers in our epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. In the Ramayana, Indrajitu, son of Ravana is described as an accomplished siddha who is acclaimed as an ardent tantric bestowed with various mystic, magical powers, which he uses effectively in his battles with the enemies. These powers were known to be possessed by many a demons by the power of their penance or their chosen

deities. Even in the Mahabharata the instance of sanjaya being able to witness the war without the aid of the normal senses is an example of clairvoyance and clairaudience. The list would become inexhaustible with the innumerable examples quoted in these epics and also the various puranas.

In the Indian approach of studies, the studies on the siddhis was never the object/subject or the topic of the study. They are always studied as the happening or the materializing of ones psychic powers on the path of the aspirants endeavor to self-realization.

Parapsychology deals with most of the happenings in the physical dimension, where as the topic of astasiddhis as dealt in the ancient eastern texts gives us an inexhaustible list of accomplishments as the gross and subtler manifestation of the powers of paranormality. The ones enlisted in the context of parapsychology studies are only but few in the vast range of subjects covered under this term. The parapsychologists of the present era are more keen on studying the paranormal phenomena as there is a growing interest and acceptance among people regarding these topics. Also research in the field of yoga, Vedanta and physics have forced the present day physicists and research fellows to rethink in an altogether new arena of “consciousness” and accept the fact of existence of planes of consciousness in a hierarchical manner. This acceptance has opened up newer frontiers in research to investigate the psychic powers in a more deeper and comprehensive manner systematically. The increased interest in the topic of these paranormal powers by many in general and also in the scientific fraternity has promised a deeper study in this aspect and the recognition of the ‘higher powers of the mind’ beyond the perceptible realm and the acceptance of something called as ‘consciousness’ has definitely opened up newer avenues in the study of these paranormal phenomena. Nonetheless, they would be better appreciated on an experiential level that demands commitment and hard work in the practice chosen. This study is aimed at ignite the fire of one’s interest in these topics and inspire them to trod the path of yoga and spirituality to use their bodies as the internal laboratories to experiment with themselves the hidden treasures of the ‘power of their own minds’ to serve the society in a more confident and stronger way.

Part II-- A Study of Paranormal Phenomena-- A FMRI Study

The paranormal phenomena of psychic powers have been recorded for ages now irrespective of the culture, place or sects. The ancient science of yoga has not only recognized this as a part of the benefits of its practice, but has also

described the precise methodology to acquire them. With this background this experiment was done to investigate the neural basis of the psychic phenomenon of telepathy using fMRI. We examined. A matched control subject without this special ability was also examined under similar conditions. Mr.Gerard Senehi [Mr.GS] (46 years) is well-known personality with abilities to perform various paranormal phenomena like telekinesis, mind reading and telepathy, Mr.JS, the comparison subject, is a 43 years old male, who was aware of various paranormal phenomena including telepathy, but did not have any paranormal abilities to the best of his knowledge. Both the subjects were matched for their age, education, general health & presence of any illness. One of the investigators (PNJ) drew an image in the presence of other investigators during which time the subjects sat in a separate room. After drawing the image, the investigators during which time the subjects sat in a separate room. After drawing the image, the investigator crumpled the paper and kept it with him and none knew what the image was. The subjects was then shifted to the MRI scanner and the investigator (PNJ) was seated in the MRI console room (about 15 feet away). During the scan, the subject was instructed to perform the act of telepathy to think about and identify the probable image that would have been drawn by the investigator during the designated epochs of “activation” and not to engage in this task during the periods of “rest”. The subjects were visually cued (using a mirror attached to the head coil which reflected the cues projected on a screen) by green and red star to indicate the respective onset of activation and rest epochs. During the “activation” periods the investigator (PNJ) also was engaged in transmitting the image to the subject in the MRI scanner and stopped doing so during the periods of rest. After the scanning, the subject was asked to draw the image that he was able to obtain by telepathy task. Both the subjects were scanned on the 3rd day of the lunar cycle & at the same time of the day (1400 hours IST) separated by a 3-month interval period. The mentalist demonstrated significant activation of left inferior frontal gyrus. The findings are suggestive of a limbic basis for telepathy and warrants further systematic research.

Summary and conclusion

The paranormal phenomena of psychic powers have been witnessed and recorded for ages in all parts of the globe. The increasing interests of people in this subjects the changing paradigms and theories in physics call for further investigation into the existence of these phenomena.

The functional imaging studies of the brain offers methodological advantages of real time imaging to study the neuro-anatomical correlates of the same during a task performed. It is non-invasive, safe and non-radioactive and has opened up newer avenues for investigations into the functions of the brain. The ancient science of yoga has recognized and documents the phenomena of psychic powers from time immemorial and put forth precise methodologies to develop them.

There have been neuro-physiological studies in the past to study the neuro-anatomical correlates of various tasks like meditation, telepathy, including the ones on people with 'special abilities'.

The present experiment was done to investigate the neural basis of the psychic phenomenon of telepathy using the fMRI scanning. The experiment was done in NIMHANS Bangalore. An accomplished 'mental' was examined while performing a telepathy task using the 1.5 T scanner. A matched control subject without this special ability was also examined under similar conditions.

Mr. GS is a well-known mentalist with abilities to perform various paranormal tasks like telepathy, mind reading and telekinesis. Mr.JS, the comparison subject did not have any paranormal ability to the best of his knowledge. Both the subjects were matched for their age, education and general health.

One of the investigators (PNJ) drew an image in presence of other investigators during which time the subject sat in a separate room. After drawing the image, the investigator crumpled the paper and kept it with him and none knew what the image was. The subject was then shifted to the MRI scanner while the investigator was seated in the console room. During the scan, the subject was instructed to perform the act of telepathy to think about and identify the probable image drawn by the investigator during the 'activation' epochs and not to engage in this task during the 'rest' epochs. The investigator was in the mean time engaged in 'transmitting' the image to the subject during the activation periods and disengages during the rest periods. Both the subject and the investigator were visually cued. The subjects after the scans drew the images as perceived by them. The image produced by the mentalist showed a striking similarity to the one drawn by the investigator. This was not the case with the control subject.

The mentalist demonstrated a significant activation of the right parahippocampal gyrus with successful telepathic task. This was also suggested by the earlier studies done on people with special abilities (Roll et al 2002, Persinger et al 2002b). The observation of the present study is in correlation

with the earlier studies and they suggest that there might be a relationship between the paranormal powers and right cerebral hemisphere.

The control subject showed activation of left inferior frontal gyrus during an unsuccessful telepathic task. This area of the brain is implicated in 'theory of mind' i.e., the way one conceives of a mental activity in others.

The present study findings can only suggest a significant correlation between the right hippocampal haemodynamic changes with telepathy. The results obtained have to be interpreted with caution, as there were a few limitations:

1. It would have been more rigorous if Mr.GS had replicated the successful telepathic task with similar brain activation.
2. Examination of single control.
3. Examination of another test subject with known ability of telepathy would be more implicative of the neuro-anatomical correlation.

It is suggested for future studies – that advanced fusion imaging techniques employing simultaneous recording of electrical as well magnetic field changes might offer better and vital information to understand the basis of neuro-anatomical correlates of telepathy.

Keywords:Paranormal Phenomena,Glimpses, FMRI Study.