

YOGA AND PARAPSYCHOLOGY: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL ESSAYS. Edited by K. Ramakrishna Rao. Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2010. Pp. 516. \$74.00 (hardcover). ISBN 9788120834736.

As world political and economic events outside of the academy continue to ramp up the booty for the deepening of *real* and lasting East-West communication and understanding, it may be an especially propitious time to do so within the academy as well. K. Ramakrishna Rao has become a passionate and indefatigable leader in this great endeavor. He has published in recent years several important contributions toward an East-West bridge on academic topics, including *Consciousness Studies: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Rao, 2002), *Towards a Spiritual Psychology* (Rao & Marwaha, 2005), and the outstanding and sorely needed *Handbook of Indian Psychology* (Rao, Paranjpe, & Dalal, 2008). Now he follows this with an edited volume aimed squarely at the specific field with which his name was most closely associated for so many years—parapsychology. It is at once a parting shot—in the sense that it summarizes the locus of his life's work in this small field—as well as an opening shot in the sense that it includes the inaugural lectures Rao gathered to launch his Institute for Human Science & Service (IHSS) in Andhra Pradesh, India, in 2006.

In Rao's preface, he clearly states why he believes yoga and parapsychology need to be studied together: "A serious and scientific study of the two and the resultant synergy of their confluence could result in resolving many of the riddles that puzzle parapsychology today and be the harbinger of a vibrant science opening to new frontiers. Further, it could be seen as a productive East-West meet in a profound sense" (p. xv). But the real message lying just beneath the surface is that western parapsychologists need to pay more attention to eastern approaches to this topic. I couldn't agree more! Specifically, India offers a virtual treasure chest of gifts for the field of parapsychology, if westerners would only "wake up" to it. Some already have.

Rao takes on the role of guru to wake us up to the all-too-painful fact that western parapsychologists try to ignore in what must be the ultimate case of collective denial in the history of science. "Wake up," Rao seems to say, and open your eyes to the elephant in the room. Western science does not want us! How many carcasses of brilliant and creative colleagues must we see strewn by the roadside before we'll wake up? In fact, *real* parapsychology (as represented by the PA) is not wanted in the West by science, religion, or society (except perhaps as a titillating back alley for selling horror films through unbelievably bizarre fantabulations and distortions of psi phenomena). In India, on the other hand, real parapsychology is welcomed, respected, and even revered. Of course, I am stating this much more strongly than Rao does, but that is, in my opinion, the key take-away message of this tome.

Rao's introductory chapter, "Yoga and Parapsychology," sets the tone by reviewing the current state of parapsychological research separately

from western and eastern viewpoints. Rao here establishes the chorus that will be repeated throughout this book—that western science suffers from an assumptive base which rules out psi, thus forcing parapsychology into the paradox of using science to demolish the very assumptive base of science itself.

After Rao's intro, the volume continues with two substantial contributions from state-of-the-art western parapsychologists, Jim Kennedy and Jim Carpenter. I've always enjoyed Jim Kennedy's thoughtful work and this piece is no exception, although I was puzzled why it is featured in this compendium. Kennedy wrestles with the sticky problem of the evasiveness of psi in research settings, and then takes the reader on a tortuous romp through a hodge-podge of parapsychological topics in search of a crack in the wall that might shed some light on the topic. This leads to the connections between psi, mysticism, and spirituality, which is clearly relevant to the current volume. As I ponder Kennedy's chapter, I wonder if Rao chose this, in part, as an example of how "pure" western dualistic science deals with psi and spirituality. It is an excellent illustration of just that. For example, Kennedy concludes, "Further exploration of the relationship between spirituality and psi may find that the most appropriate model is to view the source of psi as largely external to living persons" (p. 60). By contrast, nondualistic Indian psychology is unlikely to highlight such separations. This is classic western thinking—the separation (analysis) into elements, the "who's doing it?" approach to psi.

What a fine choice Rao has made in selecting the next chapter, Jim Carpenter's outline of his "first sight" model of psi and the mind, which is a tour of Carpenter's many-mansioned and very deep mind. Carpenter certainly—and thankfully—puts the *psychology* back into parapsychology at a time when straight western psychology (whatever that is!) has all but abandoned mind, spirit, and consciousness to philosophers, physicists, and neuroscientists. Carpenter, a personality theorist and clinical psychologist, talks and listens to his human clients and engages in parapsychology the same way.

A great discovery here is just how closely attuned Carpenter's thinking is with the Hindu Vedas. Carpenter's first sight conception of human nature is, "each person is not contained within personal, physical boundaries, but ontologically and epistemologically extends beyond that into intimate commerce with all the rest of reality, including all other persons" (p. 99). And like the Hindu scriptures, Carpenter's model does not deal with (or even concern itself with) "proof" of the existence of psi. Neither does he try to solve the problem of the connection between mind and body—rather, "the split between them is not assumed to begin with" (p. 72). By not assuming the separation, he has no conceptual problem with the "possibility" of psi phenomena.

This is *nondualism*, which is at the core of many East-West misunderstandings regarding mind and spirit. Stated simply, western dualists

tend to forget/ignore that “separation” is an assumption that is added on. Or, as Carpenter phrases it, “In a phenomenological approach, a dualistic split between the subjective and objective aspects of experience is eschewed, and the need for providing some sort of physical mechanism linking mind to world or present to future event is avoided” (pp. 100–101). This key foundational brick is right out of the Hindu Advaita Vedanta (= nondual philosophy), even though Carpenter is not a Hindu devotee, nor even an Indophile.

This chapter is the best and most compelling explanation I have come across of Carpenter’s first sight model. I look forward to the book Carpenter will soon be publishing on this issue, and I hope he’ll include reference to its reflections in eastern philosophy.

Now this volume comes to the most fascinating and challenging part of this East-West dialogue, a sequence of seven chapters that triangulate upon the nitty-gritty of the Indian perspective on psi phenomena. For a quick reading of this section, one could—without loss of generalization—read Richard Hartz’s piece on Aurobindo (*Normality of the Supernormal: Siddhes in Sri Aurobindo’s Record of Yoga*), then Sangeetha Menon’s magnificent philosophical summary of the Sutras, and then William Braud’s commentary on the Sutras from an experimental science perspective. The remaining chapters by Cornellison, De Zoysa, Nagendra, and Tripathy can be saved for later when you have more time, and you’ll want to come back to reread the former three pieces anyway, if you are at all serious about deepening your understanding of Yoga.

Taking these seven chapters sequentially, Cornelissen and Hartz both deal with India’s most famous philosopher guru, Sri Aurobindo, whose life story should be required reading for parapsychologists. Mattijs Cornelissen and Richard Hartz are westerners who are both affiliated with Aurobindo’s ashram in Pondicherry, India, where they assist in the editing of Aurobindo’s diaries for publication. In his chapter, Cornelissen lays out the problems of western experimental science as well as I’ve seen them laid out. He holds western science responsible for ignoring the empirical validity of psi. He challenges western science to look at itself, to coolly and objectively observe the limitations of its own theoretical framework. He attacks and taunts current “mainstream” western science because: “... the long period during which science has neglected the subjective domain has led to a conceptualization of reality that is almost unbelievably one-sided, and compared to the Indian viewpoint, its understanding of consciousness is amazingly naive” (pp. 137–138). Cornelissen likens the current western scientific mainstream view to the Flat Earth view of a few centuries back.

Cornelissen then provides a very interesting outline of Aurobindo’s philosophy, theory of knowledge, and interpretation of the Vedic view. However, he does not offer a serious alternative to western science. He concludes, weakly, that the “most appropriate technology ... is Yoga ... a time-tested psychological method for arriving at reliable knowledge about

the whole of reality, inclusive of the subtle domains that are not accessible to the physical senses on which modern science so far exclusively relies" (p. 146). In this way, he only widens the chasm along the troubled front lines of East-West discussion. He doesn't acknowledge the positive contributions of science, the shortcomings of yoga, or the possible synergy between them. This seems more like religion than science, much like western scientism.¹

On the other hand, Richard Hartz's chapter grounds us with the wonder of Aurobindo's homegrown quest for science. While Cornelissen leads us away from the deepening of East-West dialogue, Hartz brings us back. He grounds us with the nitty gritty facts, and this opens us to a new and healthier view of Aurobindo, who he was, and what he did that we should know about. For anyone who hasn't already encountered Aurobindo, be prepared for a brief but compelling glimpse of a delightful sage and seeker who will grab your attention, respect, and admiration. If this chapter doesn't make you rush to your bookstore to order your copy of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, nothing will.

In Sangeetha Menon's chapter, we come to the *piece de resistance* of this seven-chapter sequence on yoga philosophy—*The Rain Clouds of Mind Modifications and the Shower of Transcendence: Yoga and Samadhi in Patanjali Yoga-Sutras*. This chapter is really central and pivotal in this volume. The reader who has moved sequentially through this book has been "spoon-fed," so to speak, like the infant whose digestive system must adapt step by step into this new kind of food. Ready or not, philosopher Sangeetha Menon now takes us for our first full meal. It is a stunning experience as enlightening as it is humbling, and will no doubt leave some western readers feeling like babes in the woods. Here we glimpse just how complete, complex, and bottomless Indian philosophy is. This will also—correctly—raise questions in the western mind because Indian philosophy often lacks—or seems to lack—well-defined boundaries. There are exceptions to everything. A foundation stone of Indian thought is that the perceived world is unstable, in flux, and always changing. Any specific "truth" may be true at some time, or from some perspective, but not from others. If "A" is true, it may be that "not-A" is also "true." So Menon acknowledges that there are a variety of different interpretations of the Yoga-Sutras and they are all just fine and "correct" in this relativistic sense. She is clear to cite Samkya as the source of her interpretations, but even that is subject to interpretation! The western mind might feel as if the ground beneath it has been pulled away. The Indian philosopher might tell the westerner that there never was any ground to begin with! It was only an illusory assumption, an assumption which Indians do not make, or feel a need to account for or correct.

Wisely, Menon points out that the serious study of consciousness and/or psi demands a prerequisite—one must first specify who's asking the question, who's listening, and to whom is this question addressed. That

¹ Scientism is the idea that natural science is the most authoritative worldview or aspect of human education, and that it is superior to all other interpretations of life (Sorell, 1994).

is, any understanding or interpretation of psi phenomena is necessarily a function of the underlying philosophy from which it sprouts, just as the fruit of a plant reflects the earthy environment in which the plant grows. In this chapter, there are several other key concepts for the western scientist to ponder, bespeaking the rich, diffuse, varied, and precise thought left by ancient Vedic thinkers. This, of course, is not a new idea. Buddhist psychologist B. Alan Wallace (Wallace, 2000; 2006) makes the point of showing how eastern sages long ago dealt more deeply with the topic of "attention" than does modern western psychology, which sees it simplistically as either normal or abnormal, completely ignoring the enormous potential of attentional training, hyper-normal states, and the impact of these on learning, creativity, problem solving, interpersonal communication, health, and productivity. In fact, Wallace's writings make for good reading to supplement Rao's book.

Next up, sequentially, is de Zoysa's piece on *Self, Non-self, and Rebirth: The Buddhist Outlook*. This is a short contribution reminiscent of (and actually using) some of Ian Stevenson's reincarnation case collection. It is based in Buddhist philosophy, according to which there is no "essence" or permanence to anything in this world, including the human *self*. This contrasts with the orthodox Hindu view that the "self" has an immortal part, *Atman*, that's part of an infinite and immortal *Brahman*.

H. R. Nagendra, a former mechanical engineering researcher at the University of British Columbia, Harvard, and NASA, writes about *The Panca Kosas and Yoga*, in which he outlines the Indian theory of the five layers or sheaths of which the human being is composed. Nagendra is currently president of Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Sanshana (VYASA), having returned to India to deepen his involvement with Yoga. The emphasis here is that contemporary science and classical Indian thought "... are not mutually exclusive, as both are interdependent and play an equal role in understanding different aspects of the world" (p. 213). While this chapter fills in another interesting aspect of Hindu philosophy, it fails to bridge the East-West divide because it does not cite any data that the western researcher can sink his/her teeth into. Instead, the author shows how the Integrated Approach of Yoga Therapy (IAYT), which is practiced at VYASA, makes use of the ancient understanding of the five sheaths (*panca kosas*). Although this chapter is of possible interest for healing, remote sensing, or other research involving physiological assessment, I found myself disappointed that a researcher with Nagendra's impressive West-East connections, failed to provide a taste of experimental data, testable hypotheses, or suggestions for future research.

The next chapter, *Cognitive Processing as Depicted in the Yoga Sutras* by K. M. Tripathi, similarly contains a great deal of interesting information with no handle for the western scientist to grab hold of. It comprises 14 info-packed pages belying a reference section with a measly five entries. Here, Tripathi interprets the orthodox Hindu concepts of consciousness, being,

and becoming, in the physical, mental, and spiritual domains, as laid out in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. The discussion includes such fascinating topics as mental phenomena, psychic states, components of cognition, awareness, and super-cognitive states. The strict western research mind will ask, "Where is the data to support this? Where is the documentation? Where is the critique? Where are the limitations and delimitations?" Here we come into grand central station for East-West misunderstanding. In Indian science, I suggest, the documentation is actually built into the internal process that the interpreter(s) go through in putting this down on paper. It's not an externally rule-based system but an internal, contemplative one. One must trust one's guide and guru, trust the process.

In the last of this seven-chapter sequence, *Patanjali Yoga-Sutras and Parapsychological Research: Exploring Matches and Mismatches*, William Braud advances the work of bridging the cultures. This isn't an entirely new contribution as a similar earlier version appears in Rao's *Handbook of Indian Psychology*, and an even earlier and more extensive version is available on the Infinity Foundation website (http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/inner_sci_essays_frameset.htm). This chapter provides the (largely) western research data that supports the Yoga-Sutras. After a brief intro to the sutras and to the aims of parapsychological research, Braud discusses at length the relationships among the sutras, yoga practices, and psi research, documenting the extensive matches between the scientific research and the yogic philosophy. This is a good read, and quite focused on this topic (unlike his rambling piece on the Infinity Foundation website). Braud has a special message for western researchers. Stop trying to prove psi; understand that the *siddhis* (psi powers) "may serve very different purposes for different times, cultures, persons, and phases of life"; be mindful that using yoga-related processes to produce psi for your laboratory is like stealing jewels from temples; and, be prepared for (and welcoming of) changes in yourself that should and probably will accompany your sincere and open-minded immersion in Indian perspectives. This chapter is a "must-read." It is truly a bridge between eastern and western approaches to parapsychology.

The next two chapters deal with survival research. Rao, not especially known for survival research, starts his chapter with a nice historical review of parapsychology's attempts to deal with the problem of survival, including a more-extensive-than-usual consideration of reincarnation studies. Then the chapter turns to the yoga perspective on survival, with special focus upon karma and rebirth. Rao departs from typical summaries of survival research by elaborating on some potentially misunderstood issues around karma, discussing its many types ("twelve kinds of karmas, distinguished from three different viewpoints"), outlining Hindu and Buddhist differences, and ending with a special tribute to Carl Jung's fascination and struggle with reincarnation and karma. This is an excellent contribution which I hope Rao will soon make available to a wider audience.

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S. N. Arseculeratne's *Approaches to the Study of Reincarnation* is a brief but lively, thoughtful, and creative piece. He suggests an alternative approach to reincarnation investigation, which he himself has already embarked upon: correlating present life circumstances with the Indian *ola* leaf horoscopes, "... which give remarkably accurate statements on the lives of the subjects up to the time of the reading." Interesting as this may be on the surface, it seems to me to be at best a horizontal advance rather than a vertical one, another variation on proving psi again (anomalous information transfer), and rife with methodological and philosophical penumbras.

Next up is a hodge-podge of four chapters by western parapsychologists. Roger Nelson's update on his Global Consciousness Project (GCP) clearly belongs here, given its hypothesis of "global consciousness," or mind-field. Nelson's work also departs from proof-oriented research, although not much—it may be simply an extension of "proof" of individual psi to "group" psi. Nelson briefly outlines the highly significant overall results of the first 8 years of GCP, for a total of 226 "major events" for which formal predictions were made.

It is less clear why Suitbert Ertel's profound reminder is in this book: "Parapsychologists have not yet realized that proper test construction in their field is a crucial demand" (p. 348). Ertel takes a full frontal assault on this issue, but hardly resolves it. The issue may be irresolvable given psi's lack of positive definition, with "extra-chance" outcomes being its primary indicator. We can't tell if an individual "hit" is chance or extra-chance. Summing across trials gives us some comfort, but when we come right down to it, even an exceptional performance (such as Ertel's 32% hit criterion) still has a nonzero probability of occurring by chance alone. Ertel discusses the minutiae of run-by-run and trial-by-trial scoring by the participants in his trademark ball-drawing ESP test. Ertel's numbers are impressive, especially his split-half reliabilities, but seem to cry out for interpretation as a sophisticated experimenter effect, which Ertel doesn't mention. While it's a welcome reminder of the importance of psychometrics, it's really not clear how this essay fits into this book.

May, Paulinyi, and Vassy present a fine, if highly technical, chapter on their continued studies of *Anomalous Anticipatory Skin Conductance Response to Acoustic Stimuli*. This fits nicely into this volume because they find support in this data for their Decision Augmentation Theory (DAT), that experimenters use their own intuition to sort the data so that the experimental results mimic a physiological response. This is a detailed description of their experimental series, as well as a good explanation of the DAT model. It exemplifies where research melding Indian and western perspectives might move—to the investigation of the role of experimenter. However, it doesn't go far enough East, in my opinion. The authors still stand at a proper western dualistic distance—engineer-like—from that which they investigate. They refuse to explore themselves (as Braud and Menon suggest) or to make use of subjective assessments of any sort. Thus,

they discuss “intuition” and experimenter effects as vague, undefined, and essentially mechanical effects from which they—the researchers—are divorced.

After that four-chapter sequence (the missing one is my own chapter, with Serena Roney-Dougal, on *Psi Performance of Experienced versus Novice Yoga Practitioners*) the book moves on to its final three chapters, all of which are very much back on topic. Rao himself chimes in once again, this time with the chapter *Cognitive Anomalies: Developing Tests for Screening and Selecting Subjects*. Although Rao doesn't specifically bill it this way, this chapter is essentially a model or example of what East-West collaborative research might look like. Rao takes a very Indian approach by assuming that psi exists, develops a novel, well-conceived, and methodologically water-tight ESP test involving both free response and forced-choice responses, administers it to large samples in groups (total = 1,600+) together with a 10-minute Yoga relaxation exercise, and presents detailed and exhaustive statistical analyses of the item-by-item outcomes. The net result is overall statistically significant extra-chance, itself an anomaly with this large unselected sample. This is the early phase of an ongoing long-term attempt to select “star” subjects, presumably for practical applications that Rao argues are imminent. This chapter is good reading and stimulates interest in more projects like this one.

The final two chapters, by Jackson and Marwaha, and Hill-Clark, are a natural continuation of Rao's chapter. Jackson and Marwaha piggy-back on Rao's above-mentioned large sample study, but focus on the participants' self-reported religiosity, paranormal experiences, and Myers-Briggs questionnaire responses. Lynne Hill-Clark replicates the Jackson and Marwaha study, administering the same questionnaires to 282 primarily Christian university students in the southeastern United States. She addresses the same hypotheses as Jackson and Marwaha, but with vastly different results.

This pair of chapters may be well suited to end this volume because they leave the reader confused and in “a cloud of unknowing,” to borrow the title of a famous anonymous text on Christian mysticism. The truth is that doing a definitive cross-cultural study of religiosity, psi beliefs/experiences, and cognitive styles is like jumping willingly into a bucket of worms. As just one of many possible conundrums, I note that the 218 Christians in the Jackson and Marwaha study did not at all resemble the Christians in Hill-Clark's study. The latter were probably native English speakers and members of the dominant socio-religio group in their society, while the former were probably not native English speakers, nor were they part of the dominant socio-religio group in their society (according to a 2001 census, India is 80.5% Hindu, 2.3% Christian, and 13.4% Muslim. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html>, accessed Nov. 1, 2010). These factors may make measurable differences in cognitive style self-reports, openness to anomalous experiences, and even perceptions

of one's own religiosity (e.g., Thompson, Bogen, & Marsh, 1979). This is one of the places where standard western research methodology breaks down and where East-West collaboration may be especially beneficial. Greater understanding may bloom from the marriage of self-reflective, contemplative activities with western science.

In summary, the prospect of deepening East-West collaboration in the pursuit of a parapsychological breakthrough is very exciting. I am grateful to Professor Rao for producing this book. It addresses a *huge* topic, whose time, I believe, is nearing. Rao's personal contributions to this volume are consistently excellent and the other chapters were, on the whole, well written. However, I hungered for transitions or summaries from Rao. I hungered for a section describing why these particular chapters were selected and how he envisioned them to push the agenda forward. I longed for a chapter devoted to nondual science, a burgeoning topic these days, and especially important for deepening East-West understanding.

This book reminds me once again that I need to take a course in Sanskrit, and I longed for a chapter or section on the importance of Sanskrit to Indian thought and philosophy. Sanskrit is like a communal well from which cultural sustenance is drawn. It quenches the thirst for a language that facilitates the expression of psychospiritual philosophical ideas we thought we had no words for.

I also longed for the craftsmanship of this volume to be more enduring. The physical quality of the book was disappointing. My review copy is already tattered, binding coming unbound and ink noticeably lightened on some frequently referenced pages (e.g., table of contents). In addition, it is in desperate need of English editing, although I must admit that this was more of a curiosity than a distraction in my reading. In the entire volume, only once or twice did I have a serious question about an author's intended meaning. Still, one expects more from Motilal Banarsidass, one of the premier Indian publishers of English language books about India.

Despite these issues, I applaud this book and recommend it to parapsychologists, Indologists and forward thinking philosophers and scientists. It should at least have a place in one's personal or corporate reference library as it has a great deal of material which is not easily found elsewhere. But I would hope that it would not just sit on a shelf, but be widely read and discussed. The topic is timely, I believe, especially as the need for improved East-West communication deepens daily.

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