INTRODUCTION

From ancient times, we have been fascinated by reported happenings which defy logical explanation. Be it, seeing a ghost; be it, premonition for an event and see it actually happening later; be it, feeling emotional turbulence and later knowing that a near one was dying at that time; be it, someone telling you exactly what is going in your mind without him actually communicating with you; be it, seeing something move by itself just by focusing one’s mind on it; - people get baffled.

These events cannot be explained by our known five senses—hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, and tasting. These events are grouped under categories of Extra Sensory Perception (ESP) or Survival after death or Psychokinesis (PK). Since these are not normal events, these are treated as Paranormal.

Let us take a look at the incidents reported from different parts of the world:

Vast literature is available narrating paranormal incidents. Moreman (2006), mentions that the ancient Greeks had frequently experienced contact with the spirit world by seeing them or communicating with them through mediums, (Dodds, 1959; Felton1999).

Krippner (2006), describes an incident when during his dream, his friend’s wife “Spotted Fawn” says that she will not be seeing him anymore and next morning he hears news of her death.

There is a reincarnation case of Sharada (a Bengali lady), (Stevenson, 1984) who, is reborn in Maharashtra as Uttara. Uttara began to have apparent memories of an earlier life when she was in her thirties.

These memories occurred during dramatic changes in personality, at which time she spoke, Bengali (Marathi was the only language she knew), which she apparently neither spoke nor understood in her normal state, and which, she apparently never had an opportunity to learn.

Grof (1988), tells about an incident in which Peter went on Scuba diving but did not return, his body was, also, not found. During a session with Grof, Penny (Peter’s wife), reported death communication (ADC experience) with Peter, who explained that he was, in fact, dead. Peter gave Penny specific instructions concerning each of their children and requested that she get on with her life. Peter then asked Penny to return a book that he had borrowed from a friend, giving Penny the friend’s name, the title of the book, and the location of the book in their house. All of this information was correct. Appearance and perception of dead people in form of ghosts or apparitions is happening through millennia. There have been occasions when people have seen and communicated with discarnate spirits. Most notable are the incidents concerning ghost of Abraham Lincoln who was seen by many distinguished leaders like Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, Queen Wilhemina, Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover and Harry Truman, and Winston Churchill. These events are described in a book by Judith Ennamorato (2006).

We all know about predictions of Nostradamus, coming true, even after centuries.

Thus, we see that, globally, people are experiencing the baffling incidents and lot of research is going on across the globe to probe into such happenings.

As is true for any baffling event, there will be skeptics, who would brush these events being unintelligible and, hence, reject
them outright. Attempts will be made to prove such events as trickery or have them fabricated through use of trickery.

It is, indeed, a fact that trickery was proved in many so-called paranormal incidents. The “Mediums” were using fraudulent methods to prove anomalous through trickery just to gain popularity, fame and for making fortunes. Hansen (2001) gives details of many seemingly credible paranormal events, which came crashing down after trickery was proved. One such event was of Fox sisters, which had very prominent impact on people, till trickery was admitted. Hansen has summarized various famous trickeries in a table which is presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performer</th>
<th>Reference with Report of Trickery</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fox Sisters*</td>
<td>Self-admitted, Earl Wesley Fornell (1964)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers#</td>
<td>Davenport John Nevil Maskelyne(1910)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Dunglas Home*</td>
<td>F. Merrifield(1903)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena Petrovna Blavatsky*</td>
<td>Vsevolod Sergyevich Solovy off(1892)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eusapia Palladino*</td>
<td>Self-admitted. Hereward Carrington (1909)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margery*</td>
<td>William McDougall (1925 &amp;1926/1967)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Ford</td>
<td>William V. Rauscher with Allen Spraggert (1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Ford</td>
<td>Allen Spraggett with William V. Rauscher(1973)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Dunninger**</td>
<td>David Price(1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kreskin*</td>
<td>David Marks &amp; Richard Kammann(1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don Juan Matus</td>
<td>Richard de Mille (1976,1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UriGeller*</td>
<td>Self-admitted, Uri Geller(1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sathya Sai Baba</td>
<td>Venu K. Kodimela(1992)</td>
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And there are skeptics like Wiseman (2011), who outright reject paranormality. In fact, he wrote a book to condemn it by propagating, “Paranormality --why we see, what isn’t there.”

In the book, he argues that talking to dead happens due to power of your subconscious mind, displays how psychokinesis can be faked by doing some advance preparations(spoon bending using PK), thus, displays that, why seeing is not believing.

How psychology of suggestions manifests in attempts to talk with dead; how mind control experts manipulate your thoughts; how prophetic dreams can be explained by the science of sleep--- he maintains that dream come true events are mere coincidences. We dream almost daily but tend to forget the same next day, but, even one dream, when resembles, even faintly, with actual happened incident, it becomes a landmark.

Such ideas raise a question whether paranormality is a Myth or Reality?

For many years, Parapsychological researchers have been investigating paranormal phenomena; in fact, in 1882, the Society for Psychical Research was founded in London. The society was formed basically, to explore the possibility that the human personality survives death, and, can communicate with living humans. Frederick Myers was one of its principal founders. His book, “Human personality and its survival after death” published posthumously in 1903, is a landmark in theoretical detailing of the phenomena of precognitive dreams, trance states of mediums and automatic writings done by them in trance states.

Since then, Parapsychological Researchers are, also, investigating other incidents coming under ESP and PK.

On belief in paranormal, Sander Van der Linden (2015) comments “You might be surprised to learn that a recent national poll found that over 71% of Americans believe in “miracles”, 42% of Americans believe that “ghosts” exist, 41% think that “extrasensory perception” (e.g., telepathy) is possible and 29% believe in astrology.” i.e., there are sizeable population which believes in paranormal happenings.

But are the paranormal incidents real?

If paranormal research is accepted by mainstream science, this will be a solid proof that paranormality is real and debate will be closed.

Hence, let us examine, whether, paranormality can be considered as mainstream science.

The paranormal happenings have been sporadic, spontaneous and not localized and hence there have been difficulties in researching, more so, because, these differ from other scientific research where the theories could be tested in laboratories.

Still researches are being attempted. Attempts of doing laboratory research in ESP was started by J B Rhine during1932-40. Rhine and Zener (Zener developed Zener cards), conducted extensive experimental research through card guessing experiments in laboratory to attempt to prove that there is existence of ESP ability amongst people. Theory of probability was used to establish that there were people who could do card guessing with successes levels much above the chance levels ---these culminated in first book on paranormal experimental research e.g “Extrasensory Perception” by J B Rhine.

Rhine’s research was considered very important and credible but even his efforts could not bring parapsychological research on paranormal to be recognized as science because future researchers were not able to replicate his findings in their laboratory experiments.

There are other type of laboratory experiments done to study Telepathy. These are known as Ganzfeld Experiments.

In a typical ganzfeld experiment, a “receiver” is placed in a room relaxing in a comfortable chair with halved ping-pong balls over the eyes, having a red light shone on them. The receiver also wears a set of headphones through which (music called white noise or pink noise) is played. The receiver is in this state of mild sensory deprivation for half an hour.

This brings the receiver in a state where his psychic abilities are enhanced due to sensory deprivation. During this time, a “sender” observes a randomly chosen target and tries to mentally send this information to the receiver. The receiver speaks out loud during the 30 minutes, describing what he or she can “see”. This is recorded by the experimenter (blind to the target) either by recording onto tape or by taking notes, and is used to help the receiver during the judging procedure.
In the judging procedure, the receiver is taken out of the Ganzfeld state and given a set of possible targets, from which he selects one which most resembled the images he witnessed. Most commonly there are three decoys along with the target, giving an expected rate of 25%, by chance. Large number of experiments were conducted using same sender and receivers and success rates were recorded. If success rate occurrence was above 25%, the telepathy success was supposed to be statistically significant and the phenomena of telepathy was thought to exist. Ganzfeld experiments, also, could not be found exactly replicable and doubts were created on presence of some methodological flaws. However carefully we plan our research experiment, there remained a doubt whether we overlooked a methodological flaw. Hyman, (1996), was one amongst many, to point out experimental design flaws in seemingly impeccable Ganzfeld experiments.

While research is being pursued in paranormal happening but absence of repeatability; lack of continuity in research; lack of definition of subject matter; negative definition of paranormal (viz: events which cannot be perceived through known five senses) ; lack of physical explanation for it; and theorizing the event before it came out of data; were other reasons which prevented paranormal to be termed as scientific event (Alcock, 2003; Beloff,1980).

**C D Broad (1949) suggested that paranormal events tend to violate basic principles of science, namely:**

- General principle of causation
- Limitation on the action of mind on matter
- Dependence of mind on brain
- Limitation on ways of acquiring knowledge

Thus, the impediments on way of parapsychological research (which is investigating paranormal events) becoming science, are, gigantic and extremely difficult to overcome, hence, till date, the paranormal events could not be recognized as science.

As argued earlier, if paranormal could gather support of science, it would have closed the debate, which is not the case; Paranormal could still be real if there were no trickeries involved or these were not only creation of mind.

While trickery is a factor, there is another thinking that, seemingly anomalous events could really be not happening at all but getting wrongly perceived as happening.

**In following paragraphs, we shall examine this:**

**OBE---Out of Body Experience**

Instances are reported wherein, a person is experiencing himself getting detached from body, float in space and see own physical body lying below.

Blanke suggests “Recent neurological evidence shows that out of body experiences can be related to an interference with Temporo – Perietal Junction of the Brain. This is the part of the brain, which gives a person sense of self hood. Stated in simple language - In a normal state, we know exactly, where we are in relation to our body and its surroundings, we sense ourselves to be inside our physical body. Once there is an interference to Temporo – Perietal junction of the Brain, the above sense of self being inside the body gets disturbed, and, we, start thinking or sensing ourselves to be out of our body. In other words, out of body experience could be nothing but Hallucination.

Similar view is expressed by Ramachandran (2010) in his book, where he states, “Damage to the right Front Perietal region, disrupts the inhibiting circuits, which, maintain balance of the self in body. As a result, you get feeling that you have actually left your body and are watching it from outside. The embodying circuits are vulnerable to lack of oxygen in brain, which could explain why such sensations are common in near death experiences. Valentine Low (2008) observed, “Researchers have used magnet studded helmets to generate sensations in mind to experience sensation of floating outside the body or to be possessed self in other’s body” Thus, there is a school of thought which maintains that OBE may not be really happening, but being host falsely perceived.

**Ghosts / Apparitions or After death communications:** Appearances of ghosts and apparitions have been baffling mankind. However there are views that these are not appearing in reality but may be result of some aberrations of mind.

Canadian neuroscientist, Mr Michael Persinger, had demonstrated that the application of electromagnetic field to temporal lobes of the brain could provide haunting experience viz: perception of a presence of a person, or, a sensation of touch, when, in reality, there is no presence or no one has touched.

Mr Shangeand his team from Clarkson university in US, observed that fungal pore can cause perception of haunting. Supernatural perception can also arise from brain’s reaction to toxic substances -such as carbon mono-oxide, formaldehyde and pesticide. It is also suggested that fungal hallucinations caused by toxic mold could stimulate haunting related perceptions. This may explain why ghosts sighting, often, seems to occur in older buildings. This means that toxic molds can trigger significant mental or neurological symptoms which create perceptions, similar to, those reported during haunting experiences.

**Other paranormal happenings:** Infrasound ---audio frequency below the range of human hearing is also thought to be able to result in perception of bizarre sensations wrongly interpreted as anomalous happening

Pareidolia is another phenomenon where mind is wrongly perceiving things---normal as well as Paranormal

Let us understand what Pareidolia is

**Pareidolia** is defined as a psychological phenomenon that causes people to see patterns in a random stimulus. This often leads to people assigning human characteristics to objects.

Susana Martinez Conde (2018) maintains that human brains are attuned to perceive faces – an entire region of the brain, called Fusiform Gyrus, is dedicated to it. The face detection skill by this portion of brain, coupled with, our brain’s compulsion to extract meanings from the sensory chaos that surrounds us, drives us to see faces where there aren’t any. Pareidolia can also result in perception of two things from a single image. This visual illusion created by Pareidolia can be
But is it, really, so?

Pareidolia is often taken as logical explanation for apparitions seen in vague forms in low illuminating environment. Pareidolia could be the reason, which, made me feel to see my deceased mother (presumably an instance of After Death Communication), on the day my father expired – Learning about his death, when I came out of ICU and glanced over the benches where relatives of other patients were sitting. I could not believe my eyes when I saw a lady resembling my mother sitting there on the bench. I told this to my brother, and, he, also, exclaimed that Ma has come to take away daddy! But my sister did not experience this phenomenon.

I think it was Pareidolia at work which created an illusion in our minds (mine and brother’s), so, our minds could perceive our mother through a wrongly morphed face of our mother on the lady’s face because of external stimuli of thought. Sister did not experience it as there was no stimuli to her brain as we had not shared our feelings to her.

Thus, mind under external stimuli, can lead to perception of anomalous happenings which, actually, have not happened but is creation of mind under external stimuli.

I wonder, why is it that we have evolved to experience the impossible. On one side our mind has helped to rid the world of terrible diseases through advancement of medical science, put a man on Moon, and begun to figure out the origin of universe an d cannot be generalized to be universally true.

Thus, scepticism, at best, can remain an argument but cannot take place of a solid evidence.

On many counts, the above arguments do not hold ground -I dwell on these

Trickery was proved in many cases. But, is it that trickery happened in all the paranormal cases across the world. We cannot be sure about that. Overwhelming instances are being reported across the globe and those are spontaneous events. There is no time for planning a trickery in most of the cases. We can question their causality, we can argue whether the events can be explained by scientific means or not, but we cannot outright reject that events did not happen. They, actually, did happen, hence, they are real!!

- The negative arguments given above for apparitions and ghosts or for Pareidolia, are, all, for specific situations. Is it logical to extend the reasoning of an occasional happening to all similar incidents i.e., can these be extended universally across all happenings? Certainly not! ---this is the biggest flaw against the arguments put forth in foregoing paragraph.

- The narration in Wiseman’s book is very absorbing but if we try to correlate actual incidents, which are so vast in number, and which are spontaneous, that his logic does not seem to hold ground so firmly. All events are not trickery because there is no opportunity to do advance preparation (as done in Knife bending event). Even psychology of suggestion by mind, could not reveal facts which were known only to the dead (above case of Peter scuba diving). Wiseman’s theory seems far-fetched if we apply the same to dream of Spotted Fawn who, as discarnate, connects the experiencer in dream. How does incarnation get explained; how could Uttara start speaking Bengali when she had no opportunity to learn it. The visible stunning facts cannot be explained by any Wiseman type logic.

Lastly, it is not my intention to summarily reject all negative arguments, for example, OBE (out of body experience) or NDE (Near Death Experience) are logically true as state of mind, persons may reach that state of mind where the sense of self is lost. This can be true in all cases of OBD / NDE. Even dream come true may be coincidence as suggested by Wiseman. But, on flip side, it may be that, there, are causes other than chance, which may have caused the dream come true instance; as has been proved in case of “Telepathy,” or “Remote viewing,” which when tested under controlled conditions in laboratories, have yielded results, which were statistically proved to be happening by causes other than chance. Other negative theories put forth are instance specific and cannot be generalized to be universally true.
Conclusion

Summarizing, we have witnessed that paranormal cannot come under science due to several gigantic impediments.

But still, it does not negate the possibility that paranormality is real. We, also, saw that there could be possibility that some of so called, paranormal events, actually, were nothing but trickery. Wiseman argued about faking the paranormal by doing advance preparation. Trickery needs preplanning, and, hence, its presence across all paranormal events, is ruled out because of spontaneous nature of paranormal events, where there is neither time, nor scope, to do advance preparation for trickery.

Wrong perception / pareidolia cannot be true en-block for all apparitions or ghosts. These can be isolated cases but cannot be true universally for all cases.

It will amount to stretching logic too far to believe that all haunting cases are experienced only in old dilapidated buildings; also, there may be instances where Pareidolia was absent, but, still anomalous made its presence.

So, it will be unfair to claim that Paranormality is a myth and not reality.

Maybe, we need to take a cautious view, and say that Paranormality is a reality, with a rider, that there is a need to find out a way to weed out those specific so called paranormal events which could relate to perceptual error or mistaken behavior of mind. Only real paranormal events should qualify for further research.

However, one thing is sure, that Paranormality is not a Myth

Future research in mind working, may reveal some factors, presence of which, results in wrongful perception, which is not in sync with actual happening of event, and researchers, will have to factor in those aspects, while designing future Paranormal Research experiments, so as to remove the aberrations affecting the research.

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