



Seriously Strange

A review of Seriously Strange in "The Pioneer," New Delhi, August 20, 2012

What Lies Beneath

Many might dismiss the idea in the name of superstition and ignore the extraordinary but the truth is that paranormal doesn't get unnoticed. There is a strange hidden fascination all of us have towards something unusual, something that gives us a hint about the existence of a parallel world and its creatures. There are many such issues and experiences that one will get to read in *Seriously Strange*, a second volume of a series called *Boundaries of Consciousness*, edited by Sudhir Kakar and Jeffrey D Kripal.

Nine intellectuals came together to shed light on some baffling experiences on record. The experiences are in the form of essays in the book. On the basis of selection of these essays and their compilation, Kakar says, "Some years ago, a German foundation asked me to run a series of seminars on any subject I wanted. My idea was to have the series on subjects where we had some knowledge but the phenomena were still mysterious. I could invite eight – ten scholars and researchers on the topic from all over the world. The first seminar was on dreams and dreaming. The second volume was on paranormal or psychic phenomena. The third one was on death and dying, and this year it will be on creativity. There will be four volumes."

The essays in the book tell us how extraordinary events can be decoded and interpreted to become the object of rigorous scientific study. The range is wide: essays that reveal how Freud and Jung engaged with the notion of the paranormal, to a provocative and humorous memoir of a physicist who spent over a decade running a secret psychic spying programme for the US government during the Cold War. "There are many intriguing ideas and research reported in this volume. A rigorous research experiment on long term meditators was able to predict what image a computer will throw up in the next second, the physicist who ran the US military programme on remote viewing reported of a psychic pinpointing the location of a kidnapped US general, or



another who was able to locate a nuclear plant in a far off place in the country,” informs Kakar.

He defines paranormal as “an extraordinary phenomena for which we have no explanation in the present state of our knowledge. Many so-called paranormal phenomena are mistaken perceptions, coincidences or outright hoaxes. However, there are still verified instances of remote viewing, telepathy or precognition – knowing before an event takes place, which are instances of genuine paranormal occurrences.”

The book also has accounts of practicing psychiatrists who recount the dramatic effects of the abnormal in their healing practice and a need for the renewal of professional parapsychology in the light of Patanjali’s Yoga-sutras. Patanjali talks of siddhis, another name for paranormal. The suggestion of Ramakrishna Rao, Chairman of Indian Council of Philosophical Research and a contributor to this volume suggests that we take Patanjali seriously and direct future research into paranormal, away from scientific experiments. We should involve subjects that through meditative practices have access to a transcendent mind, different from our normal biological mind,” shares Kakar.

The experiences mentioned in the book deal with common emotions like love and death, hurt and healing, myth and magic. Kakar says there is no significant message that he aims to convey through the book.

“There is no hidden message except one should not summarily dismiss the extraordinary but give it serious attention,” he ends.