Power of the Brain

Pranab Mazumdar
He......never realized Sulochana would be so frightened. In her hurry to get away, she fell from the chair and banged her head against the steel frame. Then she crushed her head again against the hard floor. Sulochana was always very delicate....

After the brain arrived, Dr Shrivastava had lost all sleep. He was so excited that had it been within his powers, he would have spent 24 hours of the day in his laboratory. But that was not to be. The doctor had to attend to his patients and it was only late in the night that Dr Shrivastava could sneak into his lab and indulge in his passion.

He got up now and unmindful of the fact that he was only half dressed, hurried towards his lab. Once inside, he went straight to his favourite jar.

The human brain is the most fascinating organ – the walnut-shaped organ, weighing only around 1200 grams, controlled every aspect of the human life ... the thought processes and the physical movements. The body was a mere casing, the real individual was the brain. The doctor marvelled at the enormous power of the brain that could solve the most complex problems, recall incidents that had occurred long, long ago, and unleash the creativity in humans.

The doctor connected electrodes to the brain and set up his apparatus. The ammeter before him showed a slight deflection, signifying the electric impulses that the brain in the jar was yet capable of sending. The doctor was agog. He needed to amplify the signals that could be digitized and, then, converted into sound. The doctor would then know what the person, to whom the brain belonged, was thinking immediately before death. The doctor decided to halt his experiments for the day, rather for the night.

Thirty kilometres away, Shishir stirred in his sleep. Someone, it seemed, had called out his name. But that was probably his imagination and he was soon snoring peacefully again.

The next night, Dr Shrivastava had the apparatus ready to amplify the signals. He connected the electrodes to the brain. There was a greater deflection on the ammeter this time. The doctor was excited. Now, he thought, the only thing that remained to be done was to convert the electric signals into sound.

Thirty kilometres away, Shishir got up from his sleep. He was perspiring although it was a cold December night. The sound was distinct ... It was the voice of his sister and she was accusing him. "It is you who have killed me," the voice seemed to say.

The doctor removed the apparatus. His experiment had lasted only for 15 minutes this time. But, he could do no more tonight unless he had the equipment necessary to convert the electric signals into sound. Although reluctant, the doctor could do nothing but wait for the morrow when he would be able to
acquire that equipment. At this hour, there would be no one awake to cater to his requests.

The voice died down and Shishir went back to sleep.

To Dr Shrivastava’s chagrin, the equipment he needed was not available in his city. He would have to order the same from Mumbai, which was 200 kilometres away. It would take at least four days for the shipment to arrive. The good doctor resigned himself to his fate but carried on with his experiment in an effort to amplify the signals further and further.

Meanwhile, Shishir’s torment increased. Every night he would be rudely awakened from his sound sleep by his sister’s voice that grew shriller and shriller in her accusations. The duration of the torment also increased. On the first night that he had been so awakened, the voice had died away after only a few minutes and he could go back to sleep. But now, the voice persisted for hours together. Once it had died down, he could not go back to sleep but sat looking haggard on his bed, drenched in perspiration.

Shishir was in bad shape. Lack of sleep had reduced him to a deranged man. He had lost his appetite and was transformed into a derelict.

At long last, the equipment arrived. Dr Shrivastava could not wait to rush to his laboratory. The fruition of his years of research was in sight. It was a long agonising wait, but dusk did fall and after finishing his chores, the doctor entered the laboratory past midnight.

He set up the apparatus and arranged the powerful speakers. Tonight, thought the doctor, he would hear what no one had heard before. He would hear a dead person speak.

But, something was wrong. Probably, his research had not been so thorough after all. There was much greater amplification of the electric signals from the brain but the speakers were mute … not a sound came from them. Dr Shrivastava was dejected. He worked hard to get the speakers function but even as broad daylight pierced into the room from one of the windows, the speakers uttered not a mutter.

This particular night had been really bad for Shishir. “You have killed me, yes it is you who have killed me,” his sister’s voice harangued him ceaselessly. Shishir could take it no further. He rushed out of his bedroom in his sleeping gown and headed straight for the nearest police station.

Inspector Sharma was a happy man. He had no ambitions and even if he had any, this small town of Bhairavnagar would not have assisted him in his endeavours in any manner. Leave alone murders, Bhairavnagar had not even reported a theft for the past eight months. And here was a man who had disturbed his sleep at 7 am to tell him that he had committed a murder. The inspector was aware that Shishir’s sister had died one month back after she suffered a fatal fall from a high ancestral chair.

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“I did not wish to kill her. I just wanted to frighten her,” Shishir was telling the inspector. “She knew I was heavily indebted and my creditors were troubling me. Yet, she would not lend me any money although she had piles of it stacked away in her cupboard. I just wanted to scare her as an act of revenge,” he was saying.

“She suffered from ophidiophobia — she was just scared of snakes,” he went on. “The sight of the slimy creatures even on television terrified her. She liked to sit on this high ancestral chair and gaze out of the window.”

“Sulochana was so small that I had, on several occasions, warned her against climbing on to this chair as she could fall and hurt herself. But she would not listen to me,” Shishir was telling inspector Sharma. He told the police officer how he had acquired a rubber snake and flung it into the room through the window.

“It was only to scare her. I never realized Sulochana would be so frightened. In her hurry to get away, she fell from the chair and banged her head against the steel frame. Then she crushed her head again against the hard floor. Sulochana was always very delicate.” She had seen him commit the act before dying. He had removed the rubber snake immediately and had also taken away the cash from the cupboard to pay off his creditors. A dead woman has no use for money, he had thought.

Dr Shrivastava was crushed. His years of research had come to nought. The good doctor removed the jar and stacked it away with other specimens in his laboratory. There was no such thing as thought waves travelling in the air … it was just his weird theory that had been proved wrong. He dismantled the apparatus and vowed never to touch it again.

Thirty kilometers away, Shishir lay on the bare hard floor of the jail cell and yet he was in deep slumber. Hypnos, the god of sleep, had never been more kind on him before.

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