

Human Brain – A Marvellously Rich Storehouse of Memory

Indefinable source of distinct talents and uncountable potentials is embedded in the human brain. It is often referred to as "Pandora's Magical Box", "Amazing Wizard", or a "Celestial Computer" in view of the enormous mental functions, immeasurable hidden complexities and undeciphered impulses of consciousness processed through it. The role of their sagacious brain and mental eminence is most significant in what the great personalities of the world have accomplished rather than the support of circumstances, resources or anything else.

Mental faculties are most precious bequests of the Almighty bestowed upon us. However, the belief that we can't expand or elevate the God-gifted mental potentials we are born with – is not correct. The difference in people's intellectual and other mental abilities is only that of the degree of arousal and activation of the grand powers indwelling in the human self. This difference is not due to the structure of the brain, inheritance or destiny, etc. Rather; it is a reflection of the extent of dormancy or activation of its unlimited potentials.

Trenchant memory is seen to have a predominant impact upon the intellectual capabilities of the brain. Forgetful persons are, in general, not only deprived of deep knowledge in general, but they also suffer because of the negligence of necessary tasks in day-to-day life due to their short memory. The acquisition and future application of knowledge and past experiences becomes possible only with the help of memory. This is what affects the course of decision-making, resolution of problems in hand and further expansion of perspicacious attainments.

The power of memory was given preeminent importance in the learning system of the Vedic Age. Specific methods and practices were also devised for greater sharpening and augmentation of this faculty. The Veda-Mantras are called– "shruties" (meaning: perceived through hearing). The slokas of the Shastras are called "sm—aties" (meaning: retained in and retrieved from the memory). Thus memory was the only basis of generation and expansion of knowledge in those days. Despite the collection of "shruties and sm—aties" in book form in the later ages, the tradition of Vedic Schools has been to memorize the hymns and slokas and contemplate upon them analytical discussions. Memorizing Gita and Ramayana by heart is quite common among the Indian masses even today.

It is true that some people are born with supernatural memory but that does not mean that others lack the capability of awakening this natural potential of mind. Like any other field of life, success or failure in this regard would largely depend upon one's focused efforts and enthusiasm. The depth of mental domains can be traversed and explored most effectively by spiritual methods. Development of sharp memory and sane intelligence, too, is achievable through these modes of yoga-sadhanas. Adept psychological conditioning and positive attitude towards whatever we attempt in this direction is the first prerequisite for desired progress. Inspiration from the living wonders of memory also boosts this psychological transformation. Let us look at some historic expressions of

exceptionally sharp memory in different walks of life.

In his articles on mysteries of human mind, noted psychological scientist Professor Ferdinand Von Nue Triter has cited the case of a Lithuanian boy, who could recite any paragraph or stanza of any prose or verse in any language as it is just after hearing it once. In his concluding remarks the professor has mentioned that such live examples prove that what we used to regard as mythological or imaginary a hundred years ago (about the supernormal faculties of human mind) may come as real before our eyes today.

It was before the French Revolution that an innocent person was proved as guilty in a court. Renowned attorney Louis Bernard came forward to defend his case as per the request of some well-wishers. Although the court had ordered death sentence to the accused, Bernard appealed for a stay of five days on the grounds that the King, the ultimate appellate authority was out of town. However the court showed inability in staying the hearing any more. Then Bernard continued his defensive arguments for 5 days and 5 nights marshaling and citing his stupendous knowledge of law and justice across the world. His rigorous defense would have continued even longer, had the King not arrived by then! The latter too heard the case and granted mercy to Bernard's client on the basis of his Bernard's excellent defense.

Lord Macaulay had an exceptionally sharp memory. This erudite scholar of the 19th century had written the history of Britain in eighty volumes without opening any reference book for this purpose. He used to remember all the references, dates and venues of the events and the names of the people associated with those events since the day he met them or heard or read about them. Map of any place ever visited by him, names and addresses of the people whom he had interacted with at least once, information or knowledge of any kind ever required by him, were so easily recalled by him as if he had crammed them by heart a short while ago. People used to call him a 'moving library'.

Richard Porson was a nineteenth century classical scholar of Greek. He knew by heart all the books written in this language till his times and all the plays of Shakespeare. Mr. Richard Garnet, a one time assistant superintendent of the British museum had become the chairman of the publication section of another museum for about twelve years. The catalogue and locations of the books were so perfectly stored in his memory that without lifting himself up from the chair, he used to tell the exact location of the book asked for from the library's stock. Moreover, he was even able to give an oral report on the contents of the text inside the books.

The 'Guinness Book of World Record –1981' had published the records of exceptional memory in arithmetic. The record of recalling a number of 28013 digits in 9 hours 14 minutes was broken that year by Mahadevan, a Bangalore based student, who could recall and write the numbers up to 31811 digits in 3 hours and 40 minutes only. Shankuntala Devi of South India had also gained global recognition in the 1970s and early '80s for her amazing ease with arithmetic operations that could beat even the fastest computers of that time.

Alaibda Baghdad was a great writer. Despite losing his eyesight, he had completed the thirt-two volumes of his treatise on Arabic just with the help of his exceptional memory.

Renowned French philosopher August Comte (b1790-d1857) used to thoroughly assimilate his thoughts in his memory before expressing them orally or in writing. So marvelous was his memory that he did not have to refer to any books, notes or other sources, in order to complete his 6 volumes (running into 4,712 pages) of "Positive Philosophy" during 1830 to 1842. So fluent was his writing as though a prerecorded cassette was fixed in his brain.

Distinguished psychologist Prof. Bartlett suggests that deep interest in the subject matter of importance, its thorough study and pondering over the benefits of retaining it in the memory help its vivid storage in the long-term memory. The above examples seem to affirm such possibilities.

Savants like Galesburg find oral or written repetition also as a supportive tool in this regard. They consider the ancient system of cramming by heart as quite efficient. Prof. Eveguards adds that it will be easier and faster to memorize and recall something if its key points are also attempted to be visualized or imagined and its meaning or implications are also considered while reading, listening or studying it. Some people seem to have naturally built-in mechanism of such optimal links to memory.

A courtier named "Shrutidhar" of King Bhoj of Medieval India had made place in history because he was able to recall and reproduce, without any error, any subject matter or verbal discussion in any language heard by him for 24 minutes or lesser duration at a single stretch of time.

Swami Ramtirath was revered for his exceptional mathematical skills and memory. In one peculiar incident, when he was going to America, two British men travelling in the same ship fought with each other one day. Swamiji was also sitting nearby. The dispute led to a court case where Swamiji was also asked to depose as an eyewitness. He said — "I do not know who is guilty but I can narrate the entire discussion exchange of words between the two fellows". He indeed did that in the same language in which the duo had quarreled and thus helped in arriving at a fair judgment.

General Stumptas, former Field Marshal of South Africa had also developed extraordinarily sharp memory. He used to remember the location of every book kept in his town library. Contents — page by page, word by word of each of the books ever read by him were known to him by heart.

About a century ago, a major market in a city of Denmark was caught in devastating fire; all the records and cash of a bank's branch were charred into ashes. By the next day the anxious depositors began to crowd around the bank premises in panic. The supramental memory of a clerk in that bank saved them from the unprecedented crisis. This man could recall the names, account numbers and the latest bank balance in the accounts of thousand odd customers of his bank. His information was found correct by appropriate

inquiry with the customers and police investigations. He was soon honored by the post of chairman of the corporate group of that bank.

Renowned Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle (b1795-d1881) had given the first handwritten manuscript of his book on the French Revolution to noted scholar John Stuart Mill for editing. By mistake, the latter's servant burnt many pages of this manuscript in the cooking fireplace. When Mill apologized before the author, this shocking news did not perturb him at all. Because of his extraordinary memory and dedication to the work, Carlyle could reproduce the revised version of the manuscript with new enthusiasm.

It is said that our interest and attention in the subject and the importance and influence of an event or assimilated knowledge plays a predominant role in registering of the associated matters into deeper folds of our memory which can be retrieved by sincere practice. According to Carl Emil Seashore, a noted American psychologist of the 1890's, an average man uses only about 10% of his natural memory. Remaining 90% is left unused in a haphazard or dormant state. This is why one generally remains intellectually deprived or dull. If one is alert and systematically attempts to awaken and adeptly use the natural memory, the latter would be activated creatively and offer intellectual benefits of higher order.

Some people are endowed with exceptionally sharp memory since the time of birth. Their extraordinary mental potentials often startle others. John Fielding was one such gifted person. He lived in Gloucestershire, England during 1901 to 1960. This man was born blind. His memory was so vivid that he could easily remember the names and addresses of over ten thousands persons whom he had ever met or interacted with. He was able to recollect this information without any mistake just by hearing the voice of any of these people.

Another Englishman, Montugues also had similar memory. Incidentally, he too was blind since birth. The British Government had selected him for the job of a postman because of his exceptional memory. He used to sort out and arrange the deliverable letters with the help of an assistant. The latter used to read the addresses loudly - this was sufficient for Montugues to store the entire sequence of corresponding addresses in his mind. This is how he was able to distribute, on his own, hundreds of postal articles every day. There was never any mistake on his part or any complaint against him during his tenure as a postman.

The example of Mr. Nebur of Germany is rarest of its kind. Exceptional memory of this man had made him known across the world only in a single day. Once the office where he used to work as a clerk caught fire. Many important papers and files were burnt. Nebur's supernormal memory came into light when he successfully reproduced the lost records in a short span of time. Many of these records, reference numbers etc, were verified against the copies available with the clients and no mistake or slip of memory (on Nebur's part) was detected. His hidden talents were also recognized on many other occasions after this amazing incident.

Mr. Joseph Burnheart Duncan had nine secretaries for different languages when he was the director of the national library of Munich. He had such a control of mind and command over several languages that he used to dictate official letters and other deliberations in nine different languages to all his secretaries simultaneously. He had also memorized the Bible by heart and was able to reproduce the corresponding sections completely whenever asked from any page of the Holy Scripture. Recalling the location of the millions of books in the library was so easy for him as if the catalogue was kept open before his eyes. It was popularly said that his brain (intelligence) would 'weigh' more than any amount of linguistic knowledge and stock of information existing on the earth.

Rebi Elisa of Lithuania was popular for her exceptional mental power. However, for want of proper direction and control her talents could not be used for anything significant. In her lifetime she memorized about two thousands books just after one reading. You open any page from any of these books and ask her, she was able to repeat every line, every word of it without any mistake.

In the days of emperorship in Germany, the royal library was located in Prasa. Its Librarian Mathurin Bessire had unique hearing memory. In one of the planned tests of his exceptional memory, twelve ambassadors of different countries visited him at the same time. One after the other, they spoke twelve different sentences in their languages before him. After a few moments, Bessire repeated the same sentences without flaw although he did not know any of those languages.

Benjamin Schultz had translated the Holy Bible in three Indian languages. He was able to speak and read about hundred languages of the world. He remembered and used to sing devotedly the Christian prayer hymns and their translations available in as many as 215 languages and dialects.

A French Minister of yesteryears Monsieur Leon Meijere was also endowed with outstanding memory. Just after hearing them once, he remembered the speeches of even the leaders of the opposite parties. He was also able to narrate the data of the national budgets of the past ten years like those retrieved from a computer-memory.

A former teacher of the Harrow School of England remembered the Latin works of the Roman poet Lucan by heart. The printed version of this work would add up to about 2600 pages. During one of the excursion trips of about sixteen miles, he entertained his colleagues by singing around eight thousand hymns of the historic epic "Pharsalia" (written approx. in AD61-65), which appeared to have been registered like a recorded tape in his memory...

The annual report of the French Army used to be published since the 12th century. It contained the name, date of birth and rank of each officer and soldier. Interestingly, a waiter of a military canteen remembered the whole of this annual report of the year 1856. This man, named Felix Martini could tell the details of each of the 26208 records in this

report whenever asked for.

Piere Moschutz of Geneva had successfully memorized the eighteen lacs words printed in the seventeen volumes of the French Encyclopedia. Hedian, the celebrity emperor of Rome had a multitalented personality. He could write and converse simultaneously. Not only that, at times he even used to dictate letters along with these two simultaneous jobs. Equally amazing was the fact that he remembered the names and permanent addresses of all the pensioners of his empire.

Meglia Vinnie of Italy was the chief librarian in the city library of Florence in late nineteenth Century. The information referring the title, price, publisher, of each of the thirty thousands books in his library was always ready on his lips. Not only that, he even remembered the location of each book correctly.

Justice Hardayal Singh of former Delhi Court seemed to have multiple layers of memory. It is said that once he simultaneously read four books of four different languages written by different authors on separate topics. The reading was carried out in a peculiar manner – some portion of one book was read for some time followed by some other in continuation, and so on in the respective sequence. At the end of this session, he had orally reproduced the text of each of these books correctly without opening a single page of any book.

The advanced models of electronic brains (computers) are far ahead of the normal memory of humans. But the above wonders of astonishing memory do illustrate the superiority of Nature and make us realise that what we know about our brains is only a small fraction of its marvellous potentialities.

The potentials of human brain are indeed limitless. It is a pity that only a few of us make adequate use of this invaluable gift of God. Its immense powers remain dormant or ignored in most of us and we usually employ its faculties only in earning and eating and in the routine chores of expanding and raising our families. We ought to awaken, activate and illuminate our dormant mental faculties of memory and other talents and enrich the quality of our lives.

Mahatma Gandhi was on a fourteen-day fast without water in Sough Africa. After fasting for four days he received a telegram from a German friend, Kellen Bake, offering his nursing services during the period of fast.

On the fifth day of fasting Gandhiji, along with his associates, walked three miles to the railway station to receive his friend. He said that Kellen's nobility of character gave him the energy to walk to the station.