

A Review and Analysis of "Unsolved" Cases of the Reincarnation Type: I. Introduction and Illustrative Case Reports¹

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ABSTRACT: Children who claim to remember previous lives make statements about those lives that vary greatly in the amount, specificity, and accuracy of detail. Most cases so far reported have included enough detailed statements to permit the identification of a particular deceased person whose life corresponds to the subject's statements. In some cases, however, the subject has given insufficient detail to permit such identification; we refer to these cases as "unsolved."

This first of two papers considers the importance of unsolved cases and presents some illustrative examples. Several ways are discussed in which the investigation and analysis of such cases may contribute to an understanding of all cases of the reincarnation type. Brief reports are given of seven unsolved cases in Lebanon, India, Sri Lanka, and Burma. In all seven cases, the amount and specificity of detail included in the child's statements seemed to warrant a search to identify the "previous personality"; but despite extensive inquiries, all seven cases remain unsolved. Following each case report, comments are offered about features of the case that may have contributed to the failure to identify a person corresponding to the subject's statements.

INTRODUCTION

The strength with which nearly all psychological conditions appear varies widely; thus one may speak about degrees of anger, amnesia, or depression. The phenomena studied by parapsychologists are not exceptions; they range from very weak manifestations of the phenomenon concerned to strong and compelling ones. For example, the perception of an apparition may include unusual de-

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tails of facial features or dress that unmistakably identify the form perceived with one particular person; or the apparition may consist only of a cloud-like shape recognizable as having the general appearance of a human being, but impossible to associate with any known person. Similarly, the statements of children who claim to remember previous lives differ to a great extent in the amount, specificity, and accuracy of detail. One of us (I.S.) has reported numerous cases illustrating such claims (Stevenson, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1980, 1983). With few exceptions the cases so far reported have been rich in detailed statements made by the subject, and most of these statements have been verified, by which we mean that they have been found to correspond to facts in the life of a particular deceased person.³ In the present paper we report and discuss cases of the same general type for which we have found no deceased person whose life adequately corresponds to the subject's statements. We call these cases "unsolved," because, in the absence of verified details, we cannot determine whether or not such cases consist primarily of fantasies. On the other hand, many of these cases resemble in important features those that have been verified, or "solved," and this leaves open the possibility that both types belong to the same genus, so to speak. If this is so, then unsolved cases may simply lie at one end of the whole range of cases and may remain unsolved not because they are wholly fantasies, but because the subject's memories have not included details sufficient for verification.

We shall present our information on this topic in two parts. In Part I we shall make some further introductory remarks about unsolved cases and present reports of seven representative cases of the type.⁴ These will show something of the efforts made to solve the cases; and they will enable us to mention some factors that may explain our failure to verify the cases, if they derive from real memories (or include some real memories) of previous lives and are not wholly fantasies. In Part II we shall consider data from a large number of solved and unsolved cases that will show some of the important similarities and differences between them.

Our allusion above to some cases as verified or "solved" needs

³ It has proven convenient to refer to the deceased person about whom the subject is talking as the "previous personality." The term can be used whether or not an actual deceased person has been found whose life corresponds to the subject's statements; and its use implies no commitment to any particular explanation of how the child obtained any correct knowledge he or she showed about a person who has been identified as corresponding to the child's statements.

⁴ For other reports of unsolved cases, see the cases of Ranjith Makalanda (Stevenson, 1974), Wijanama Kithsiri (Stevenson, 1977), Ornuma Sua Ying Yong, and Ma Tin Aung Myo (Stevenson, 1983).

amplification. Different observers may require different amounts of evidence before deciding that a case has been solved to their satisfaction. It is even possible for a pure fantasy to be regarded as a solved case by some persons. Suppose, for example, a young child says that he had children and was killed in an automobile accident. His parents may accept these statements as referring to the life of a neighbor they knew who had children and who died in an automobile accident; but the statements could be equally applicable to many other persons. Our own criteria for considering a case solved include enough verified statements to make us confident that taken all together they apply to one person only. For practical purposes this means that the subject should have given several or more proper names of people and places figuring in the previous life. In a small number of cases we have considered a case solved when one or two names, combined with other specifying details, point toward a single person as almost certainly being the person about whom the subject is speaking.

We should also emphasize that merely solving a case does not imply that it includes paranormal processes. Quite to the contrary, many solved cases are among the least impressive with regard to evidence of paranormal processes. Cases in which the subject claims to be the reincarnation of a person of his or her own family provide numerous illustrations of this point. Such cases are easily solved because the subject has apparently or explicitly referred to the life of someone who is well-known in the family and easily identified by them from a few remarks or behavior on the part of the subject; but the subject's family might also have talked about that person in the subject's presence, so that the subject could have learned normally all that he or she said concerning the previous personality. We are not saying that cases in this group never have paranormal processes, only that they rarely provide strong evidence of such processes. Such evidence occurs only when a case includes *both* verified information *and* a strong probability that the subject could not have acquired that information by normal means.

Some persons assume that all cases of the reincarnation type can be attributed to fantasies on the part of the child subjects. Others insist that reports of the cases are based on paramnesia—that is, the faulty memories and inferences of informants whose prior beliefs and expectations have altered their remembrance of the development of the cases, so that they later attribute to the subjects knowledge that they did not in fact have. And still other persons believe that all cases of the type derive from real memories of a previous life. To us, none of these explanations seems sufficient by itself for all cases. Solved cases cannot be attributable entirely to fantasies, since the subjects of these cases have made statements

referring to verified details in the lives of real people. Some cases cannot be explained by paramnesia based on prior expectations, since in these cases a written record of the subject's statements about the previous life was made *before* the statements were verified. And finally, not all cases can be explained entirely as deriving from real previous-life memories, because in some cases the subject has given correct details about the previous life together with other, clearly erroneous statements.

We should also not expect a single explanation to apply to each case. A few cases may belong in only one of the three categories we have mentioned; in many cases, however, two or even all three of these explanations may be appropriate for the same case.

The Importance of Unsolved Cases

Since many verified cases do provide challenging evidence of paranormal processes, some readers may ask why we spend any time at all on the investigation of cases that contain few or no verifiable details and that may, after all, be pure fantasies. To this query we would make the following reply.

Interpretations of a phenomenon should take into account all authentic cases of the type, from the weakest up to the most dramatic and evidential. (By authentic, we mean that investigators have determined, to the best of their abilities, that the case probably happened as reported by the informants, at least in the main events, if not in all details.) Apart from this rather obvious explanation for our interest in unsolved cases, they also seem to us to deserve investigation and analysis for other reasons.

Among these is the possibility that we may solve an unsolved case. When we reach the site of a case that is still unsolved, we hope that we shall be able to identify a deceased person adequately corresponding to the subject's statements. If we have first made a written record of everything the subject has said about the previous life, we may, if we do solve the case, add to the small number of cases in which there is particularly strong evidence of paranormal features because someone made such a record before the subject's statements were verified.⁵

The investigation and analysis of unsolved cases may also help improve our understanding of solved ones. First, they may illustrate ways in which memories become modified and have fantasies or errors accreted to them. Many cases, both solved and unsolved,

⁵ For a list of the 12 cases in this important group that had been investigated up to 1974, see Stevenson (1975).

contain details that are clearly erroneous, either because they are known to be errors or because they are incompatible with other details. The processes by which these errors are introduced into the cases may differ in solved and unsolved cases; to understand them we need to study the full range of cases, from those in which the subject makes statements that are all (or nearly all) accurate, to those in which the subject makes statements that are all (or nearly all) inaccurate or unverifiable.

Second, we may learn more about the motives of persons concerned in the cases. The subject of a solved case may have a motive for claiming to be a *particular* identified person reborn. The subjects of unsolved cases cannot benefit from such a motive, since the previous life about which they are speaking is that of an unidentified person whose existence is unproven; but they or their families may nevertheless have a motive for developing the subject's identification with an unknown person.

CASE REPORTS

The following seven cases illustrate unsolved cases of the reincarnation type in Lebanon, India, Sri Lanka, and Burma. In each instance we decided, after obtaining testimony from the subject and his or her family, that the subject had furnished sufficient details about the presumed previous life to warrant an effort on our part to trace a person corresponding to the subject's statements. In one case we spent only half a day in the area to which the subject's statements directed us; but in all the others we spent one or several days in the search for a qualifying family. In each instance we failed to find a family with a deceased (or living) person corresponding to the subject's statements.

At the end of each case report we offer some comments about features of the case that may have contributed to our failure to find a family corresponding to the subject's statements, assuming that he or she was recalling a previous life. These comments are not meant to set aside the possibility that the case derives from fantasies only; but their placement at the end of each case history will assist our later discussion of the merits of competing hypotheses, including that of fantasy.

The Case of Husam Halabi (Lebanon)

Husam Halabi was born in Falougha on August 22, 1975. He first mentioned a previous life when he was two and a half years old; he was upset with his father and said that he wanted to go to his home

in Mazraat el Chouf, adding that his name was "Bu-Salah"⁶ Baaini. Eventually Husam mentioned the names of his three sons and two daughters, his wife, and his mother from the previous life. Husam described his house and some of his possessions, and he mentioned some other details about his family. He also said that he had been shot and killed in Mghaitheh by "Bouron," a cousin in Mazraat el Chouf who had tried to steal some money from him. According to his mother, Husam also began, at the age of two and a half to three, to hide food, explaining that it was for his children.

Husam's parents knew of the Baaini family (a large and rather widespread family), but they knew no one named Abu Salah Baaini. They had never taken Husam to Mazraat el Chouf, a village about 50 kilometers from Falougha, nor had they made any other attempts to trace a person corresponding to his statements. At the time of our interview, when Husam was four and a half years old, his parents were no longer allowing him to talk about the previous life (although they made an exception to this for our interview).

E.W.C. interviewed several members of the Baaini family in Mazraat el Chouf and in three other Lebanese villages in which Baainis live, but none of them could identify a person corresponding to Husam's remarks. E.W.C. was unable to visit the Djebel Druse in Syria, where many Baainis also live, but we hope to be able to conduct a search there as soon as possible.

Comment. Despite our failure to trace a person named Abu Salah in Mazraat el Chouf, Husam may still be correct in saying that the previous personality came from that village. If the case is one in which the interval between the death of the previous personality and the birth of the subject is unusually long, the previous personality may have died or moved from Mazraat el Chouf to Syria many years before the present residents of Mazraat el Chouf lived there, and so they might never have heard of him.

Husam's mispronunciation of names may also have caused difficulty in identifying the previous personality. One slight mispronunciation we have already mentioned is that he calls himself "Bu-Salah" instead of "Abu Salah." In addition, he identified the previous personality's murderer as "Bouron"; there is no name *Bouron*

⁶ "Bu-Salah" is probably Husam's mispronunciation of "Abu Salah." The Arabic word *abu* means "father of," and it is commonly combined with the name of a man's first-born son to form a new name by which the father may afterward become known. For example, if the oldest son of a man called Arif Souki is named Abbas, Arif Souki might become known (after Abbas' birth) as Arif Abu Abbas Souki, or even only as Abu Abbas. In many places in Arabic countries a man would be more readily identified by the *abu* reference than by his own given name.

used in Lebanon, but the name *Bourhan* is used there. Husam said he was killed in Mghaitheh, which is an area in the mountains above Falouha. But there are several other villages in Lebanon with similar names, such as Mghairiyé and Mghaira. Also, Husam said he was from Mazraat el Chouf; but there is a Maasser el Chouf not far from Mazraat el Chouf. These and other possible alterations of names by Husam or his parents may have misled us in trying to trace the previous personality.

The Case of Hariom Sharma (India)

Hariom Sharma was born in the village of Julaindi, District Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, in March 1971. When he was between two and a half and three years old, he began to talk about a previous life that he said he had lived in Govardhan, a town located about 18 kilometers from Julaindi. Two of us (S.P. and I.S.) learned about this case in October 1977 and took up the investigation of the case immediately, since we had been told that Hariom had never met the family of which he claimed to have been a member in the previous life. We recorded (on tape and in written notes) 16 statements that informants attributed to Hariom or that Hariom himself made to us. In addition to the name of the previous personality's town (Govardhan), Hariom was said to have stated the name he had had in the previous life, together with the names of his previous father (Panna), wife, and one brother. He also named one other (female) person, but we heard variant statements about whether this woman had been the daughter, wife, or sister of the person whose life Hariom seemed to be remembering. Most importantly—it seemed to us—Hariom said that his father was a grocer who had also owned both a cloth shop and a grinding mill. He further said that he (Hariom in the previous life) had died when he accidentally caught his head in the driving belt of the mill.

Govardhan is a medium-sized town (with an estimated population of 30,000 in 1977) in the Mathura District. When we went there we thought it would be relatively easy to trace the family of a miller called Panna who had had a son who died accidentally when he became entangled in the machinery of the family's grinding mill.

We learned of two families with sons who had died after being caught in grinding machinery. One had died about 25 years earlier and the other about 35 years earlier. But the names given by Hariom did not accord with those remembered for these families by the informants we met. Nor could we locate any other family that even remotely corresponded to Hariom's statements.

Comment. The two men of Govardhan who had died accidentally

when caught in grinding machinery had lived many years before Hariom's birth and also many years before our inquiries. The informants in Govardhan might have misremembered the names of the members of these families; and so might Hariom or (for some of the names) his parents, who were the chief informants for what he had said. In either case Hariom's statements and the events at Govardhan would not have corresponded, and so the case remains unsolved.

Some readers may think that we might have succeeded if we had pursued our inquiries further. We cannot exclude this possibility; but in extenuation of this omission, if it was one, we would like to mention a feature of small towns in India that may be unfamiliar to Western readers. This is that members of a trade group, such as the cloth merchants and the millers, always know all their competitors in the same town. Furthermore, in the bazaars of such towns crowds surround strangers and quickly learn and spread information about what the strangers are doing. We are confident therefore that if a family corresponding to Hariom's statements had been living in Govardhan *at the time of our visit*, we should have learned of its existence. This is why we are inclined to think that if Hariom's apparent memories were not fantasies, either he had recalled a previous life that was too remote in time for living persons in Govardhan to furnish verification about it or he had made a mistake about a critical detail, such as the name of the place where he thought he had lived.

The Case of Shahida Ansari (India)

Shahida Ansari was born on June 15, 1971, in the small town of Suket, District Kota, Rajasthan. Her parents were Sunni Moslems and so were not, by religious tradition, believers in reincarnation. Shahida's father was a government clerk of extremely modest means. When Shahida was between four and five (somewhat older than most other subjects of these cases), she began to refer to a previous life. She said that she had lived in "Patan." She did not mention any other names, but she described a life in a wealthy family having big shops, servants, a car, and a Jeep. She referred to gardens and said that her (present) father had plucked flowers from her (previous) family's garden. The life she remembered ended when she had an accident while riding in a car. She said that her house in "Patan" was near a mosque. Shahida also gave some indications of having been a member (in the previous life) of the Bohora sect of Shiite Moslems. She gave this impression because she talked about having worn embroidered clothes in the previous life and wanted her mother to provide these for her. (Bohoras

typically wear embroidered clothes more than the members of other Moslem sects do.) Also, she was stimulated to talk about the previous life when she saw Bohoras on the streets of her town. These habits earned Shahida the nickname "Bohoraji" in her family.

Two of us (S.P. and I.S.) investigated this case in 1979–1980. Although Shahida had given only one proper name ("Patan"), we thought that the other 19 statements attributed to her were sufficiently detailed to warrant a search for a Bohora family corresponding to them. Her family had some connections in a small city called Jhalarpatan, which is located about 30 kilometers south of Suket in District Jhalawar. This seemed an obvious place in which to look for the family about which Shahida had been talking because her father had lived in Jhalarpatan for a time and he recalled that he had plucked flowers from gardens there. Also, most people in the area generally refer to Jhalarpatan by the shorter name "Patan." We accordingly made an extensive search among the Bohora community in Jhalarpatan. Some of the Bohoras there owned large houses near a mosque, and some also owned substantial gardens at the edge of the city; but we could find none who had had a daughter or daughter-in-law who had died in an automobile accident. The daughter of a Bohora at Jhalarpatan had died from an accidental fall, but she had lived many years earlier. Her fatal accident had occurred in about 1946, and at that time no Bohoras of Jhalarpatan owned automobiles. We could find no other person in Jhalarpatan even remotely corresponding to Shahida's statements, and so the case remains unsolved.

Comment. We may have concluded too quickly that Shahida's "Patan" must have been Jhalarpatan. There are many towns in India with names ending in *patan*. Bohoras are rather widely distributed in western India, and Shahida might have remembered a previous life as a Bohora in some other city or town.

Alternatively, Shahida might have remembered accurately some elements of a previous life as a Bohora in Jhalarpatan but mixed these with some imaginary scenes. As we have mentioned, some Bohoras there were rather prosperous, had servants, lived in large houses near the mosque, and owned gardens. If to the memories of such a life Shahida had added fictitious elements, such as a car, a Jeep, and a fatal automobile accident, the total picture that emerged from her statements would not have corresponded to the life of anyone whom our informants could identify. Her failure to give any names of persons figuring in her memories naturally made the task of finding such a family much more difficult.

The Case of Thusari Wijayasinghe (Sri Lanka)

Thusari Wijayasinghe was born at Kegalle on July 29, 1969. She was the elder of twin girls born 13 minutes apart. When Thusari was about two years old, she began to refer to a previous life, concerning which she eventually made numerous statements. One of us (G.S.) began investigating this case in February 1975, at which time he recorded no fewer than 32 statements attributed to Thusari by her parents or stated to him by Thusari herself. She said that she had lived in a town called Panadura, where her father had been a doctor and her mother a nurse. She gave numerous details of her (previous) house in Panadura, which she said was near the railway station. She said that she had been called Renuka (with the short form "Renu") in the previous life, and she gave the names of two of her brothers and a servant. She said that her father had owned an Austin Cambridge car (colored red and white) and that she had died in an automobile accident. She had gone to a church and attended a convent school. (These were indications of having been a Christian in the previous life; Thusari's "present" parents were Buddhists.) Thusari mentioned that "a god was burned," and she indicated the place where this had happened on a sketch she made of Panadura for G.S. in 1975. On the same sketch Thusari confidently located the railway station and her (previous) house.

Thusari's father was a mid-level employee of a bank. He owned a small house, and we judged him to be in the middle socioeconomic class of Sri Lanka. He certainly could not be considered wealthy. This makes more remarkable some features of unusual behavior in which Thusari differed from her twin sister. Thusari was fond of good food and good clothes. She avoided work. She was unusually clean in her habits and dressed carefully. She made slightly adverse comparisons between the house of the previous life and that of her parents: the former had a telephone and a refrigerator, which the latter lacked. In short, Thusari's behavior harmonized well with her statements concerning a family that was much more prosperous than her present one.

Although Thusari had given no family name for the person whose life she seemed to remember, her parents thought they would have no difficulty in tracing a doctor who had lived in Panadura near the railway station. Panadura is a town of about 30,000 inhabitants, 25 kilometers south of Colombo. (During a communal riot there in 1958 a Hindu temple was attacked and burned, and the temple's Hindu priest was killed. The temple's idol would have been burned in the fire, hence the correctness of Thusari's statement that "a god was burned.")

Her parents took Thusari to Panadura first when she was about

three years old (in 1972) and again when she was about five (in 1974). Yet on both occasions they failed to find a family corresponding to her statements. In 1975 one of us (G.S.) went to Panadura in the hope of solving the case, but he also failed. Finally, two of us (G.S. and I.S.) renewed the effort in November 1979. On this occasion we concentrated our attention on the doctors of the town, making extensive inquiries of members of some of their families and interviewing one older living doctor. He had lived in Panadura for 40 years and seemed justified in claiming that he had known every doctor in the community during that time. We again failed to find a family corresponding to Thusari's statements.

Comment. This seems like a straightforward case with many details stated by the subject; assuming the case is not one of fantasy, we are at a loss to understand why we have not solved it. We can think, however, of two possible explanations for the failure to find a family in Panadura corresponding to Thusari's statements. Thusari may have misremembered the cause of death in the previous life. Child subjects of solved cases who have stated numerous accurate details about the lives they remember sometimes mix up events of the last days and hours before the death of the previous personality.⁷ We can conceive that someone suffering from a serious illness who lost consciousness and died while being transported to a hospital in an automobile might associate the death with the automobile. Either the subject or the subject's parents might then mistakenly attribute the death to an automobile accident.

Panadura is predominantly a Buddhist city, but it has a sizeable (6%) Christian minority. It has occurred to us that Christian informants might have suppressed information about the daughter of a Christian doctor, if one had been killed accidentally as Thusari described. We noted that some of the Christian informants from whom we asked for information treated our inquiries with distinct reserve. We made no attempt to conceal the purpose of our search, and some of them evidently regarded the idea of rebirth as threatening to their religious beliefs. We have had evidence of the suppression of cases among Christians in Sri Lanka as well as in Lebanon and countries of the West. Nevertheless, we have no evidence of suppression in this particular case and mention the possibility as a conjecture only.⁸ We wish to emphasize also that

⁷ For examples of subjects of solved cases who made inaccurate statements about the cause of death in the previous life, see the cases of Sunil Dutt Saxena (Stevenson, 1975) and Warnasiri Adikari (Stevenson, 1977).

⁸ Disbelief on the grounds of incompatibility with one's religion is not the only reason for suppressing information about a case. Two other motives for suppression deserve mention. First, informants for a case (on either the previous personality's or

some Christian informants in Sri Lanka and elsewhere have been most helpful to our investigations.

The Case of Chandini Dhanasekera (Sri Lanka)

Chandini Dhanasekera was born in Badulla on November 30, 1962. Her father was a government clerical worker. At the age of two and a half Chandini began to refer to a previous life that she said she had lived in Alutgama. Badulla is in the highland area of central Sri Lanka; Alutgama is on the western coast, south of Colombo. Chandini stated numerous details about the previous life, including the name of her (previous) father, Seethin Singho, her mother, Hamini, and her younger sister, Piyaseelie. She did not mention the name she had had in the previous life. She gave a rather detailed and accurate account of coastal life in which she described the beach, ships at sea, and the catching of fish. (Members of her family were familiar with such details from reading, but coastal life is not part of the everyday talk of an upland family in Sri Lanka.) She said that she had attended a secondary school to which she was driven in a car; the family dog also rode in the car. Among other statements, Chandini said that her younger sister had drowned when she fell off a bridge and that she herself had died in a hospital of burns (perhaps electrocution) when her hand touched a live electrical wire while she was cooking. She said she was 14 years old at the time.

As have many other subjects of these cases—both solved and unsolved—Chandini showed behavior that appropriately corresponded to her statements about the previous life. When she carried a doll, she would say that she had a younger sister, like the doll, who had died. She had a phobia of crossing bridges and once pulled her mother away from the side of a bridge with the remark that her younger sister had died from going too close to the side. She said: "I was big in those days. Now I am small." She made unfavorable comparisons between her parents' house, which she called shabby, and that of her previous family (whose members, she insisted, had treated her better). Chandini also had a phobia of electrical equipment, but this was not unusual in her family, since her parents were also cautious about electricity.

the subject's side) may not wish it to be verified and studied further for fear of renewing animosities that have developed during clan feuds, insurgencies, or civil wars. Second, members of the upper socioeconomic classes may not wish to have other persons believe that a member of their family has been reborn in a lower-class family, since this may imply some demerit on the part of the deceased person or may involve the deceased person's family in an uncongenial association with persons of lower classes.

We made notes of 42 separate statements attributed to Chandini by her mother and grandmother. Then, during the years 1968–1970, we spent much time in Alutgama in an effort to trace a person corresponding to these statements. We searched the records of two hospitals and the registry of the secondary school, and we enquired at the police station about accidents. These efforts were all unsuccessful; the police records before 1963 had been destroyed, the records at one hospital for the years 1958–1961 had been mislaid, and the secondary school had admitted no girls before 1962 (the year of Chandini’s birth). We also interviewed numerous persons in Alutgama, presenting them with the details mentioned by Chandini, but we learned of no person whose life corresponded adequately to Chandini’s statements.

Comment. We may not have searched far enough back in the hospital records at Alutgama, but we were hampered by not having a first name for the deceased person to whom Chandini was referring (although we did have a name for her father). It is also possible for a child injured in Alutgama to be taken to a hospital in some other town or city, such as Colombo, if a family is prosperous and owns a car, as Chandini said her previous family did.

Many persons in Alutgama heard about our search. It seems unlikely therefore that we would not have learned of a person corresponding to Chandini’s statements, if such a person had lived in Alutgama within the period remembered by persons still living there during the years 1968–1970.

We cannot exclude the possibility that Chandini mixed up the personal names included in her statements, and if she did this our search may have been misdirected. Yet even without the correct names, we ought to have learned of the deaths of two sisters who had each died accidentally, if such a double tragedy occurred to one family within recent memory in Alutgama.

We should also consider as a possibly misleading factor a confusion on the part of Chandini between the name *Alutgama* and the name of some other town in Sri Lanka. For example, there is a small town called Aluthwala, which is in the coastal area south of Colombo, although it is not on the sea. In addition, many places in Sri Lanka have names ending in *gama*. Two of them, Baddegama and Rathgama, are in the same general area as Alutgama.

The Case of Anusha Senewardena (Sri Lanka)

Anusha Senewardena (pseudonym) was born on December 1, 1964. Her father was a well-educated, prosperous man who held a responsible position as director of a government institution. Her

mother was a teacher. The family were members of the upper middle class in Sri Lanka. When Anusha was about three years old, she began to speak about a previous life. She said that she had lived this life in a nearby village, to which she would point. This place, which is called Horaduwa, is only about 10 kilometers from the town of Badderakele, where the Senewardena family was then living. Anusha appears never to have used the word *Horaduwa* when she talked about the previous life, but her repeated indications of that village when she passed it (on the road while riding in the family car) left no doubt in her parents' minds about the place to which she was referring. She used to point from a distance toward the temple in Horaduwa and say her (previous) house was near it.

Anusha said that she had lived with her father and grandfather. Her mother had been wicked and had left the family; she was brought up by her grandmother. Anusha also referred to a younger sister, a baby (sex not specified), and an uncle. Her father was some kind of artisan, perhaps a mason. He was called "Mahattaya,"⁹ and she herself was called "Seela." (This would have been a short form for the name *Seelawathie*.)

Anusha vividly described the poverty of the previous family. The house they lived in was a small one with a loft reached by a ladder. It had no chairs, only benches and stools. The family had little food, and she brought her bun back from the school and gave it to her younger sister. (This detail permitted dating the life to which Anusha referred; free buns were distributed to schoolchildren of Sri Lanka during some years of the 1950s, but not before or after.) Anusha did not say how she had died in the previous life; but since she never talked of events in the life of an adult, her parents assumed that the person to whom she referred had died as a rather young child, but one of school age.

Anusha showed some unusual behavior that accompanied her statements about a previous life in extreme poverty. She appreciated the rich food served in her family, commenting that in her previous life she had not eaten such food. She liked the company of servants. She was more generous in sharing with other persons than her siblings were.

Anusha sometimes talked to herself about the previous life. She clearly distinguished her present father from the previous father by using different Sinhalese names for each; and she similarly had two

⁹ The word *Mahattaya* is used rather widely in Sri Lanka as a term of respect for older persons and supervisors. Not infrequently it becomes the sole name by which a man is known; it thus comes almost to have the status of a proper name. For another case in which the honorific *Mahattaya* figured, see that of Disna Samarasinghe (Stevenson, 1977).

different names for the present and previous grandmothers. She said that she would like to return to Horaduwa in order to bring the younger sister of the previous life to live with her family, but otherwise she did not wish to go there. Yet it was evidently much on her mind, if we may judge by her frequent references to the previous life and her pointing out the village when she saw it from the road that passed near it.

When we learned about the case in 1970, Anusha's parents had not yet been to Horaduwa, and so we spent half a day there trying to find the family to which Anusha had been referring. Horaduwa is a small village of fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, and among our informants was a schoolteacher who had lived in the village for 18 years. No one, however, could identify the Seelawathie to whom Anusha seemed to be referring.

Comment. Horaduwa, as we have said, is a small village, and we are reasonably confident that enough persons in the village learned of our inquiries so that if a person corresponding to Anusha's statements had lived there within recent memory we should have learned about her.

The detail of the free school bun may have misled us to think that the previous life had been lived at least partly in the 1950s. If this detail was incorrect—perhaps added as an embellishment by Anusha—the previous life might have been farther back in time, perhaps before the period of time remembered by informants still living in 1970. Also, a family as poor as that described by Anusha might have lived only transiently in the village and attracted little notice before moving elsewhere. Still another possibility is that the appearance from a distance of Horaduwa with its prominent temple may have stimulated incomplete memories in Anusha of another, similar village, and she may thus have mistaken Horaduwa for this other village.

The Case of Maung Soe Ya (Burma)

Maung Soe Ya was born in Rangoon on June 9, 1961. His father, U Than Aung, was a lawyer whose training equipped him to attend carefully to what his son said about a previous life. Maung Soe Ya began referring to such a life when he was about two years old. He gradually gave a rather detailed account of that life, in which he said he had been called Soe Paing and had been a doctor living principally in Mandalay. He said that he had resided at No. 64 B Road in Mandalay, had been married, and had had two sons and two daughters. One of his daughters was also a doctor of medicine, and one of his sons was an engineer. He had owned two motor vehicles, an Austin and a Jeep. In addition to the house in Man-

delay he had also owned a house in Amarapura, which is a small town about 10 kilometers from Mandalay. He had died at Toungoo (a city located about halfway between Rangoon and Mandalay). Maung Soe Ya had mentioned the names of his previous parents, wife, and children; but by the time we investigated the case in 1980, he no longer remembered anything about the previous life, and his father could remember only one of these names (that of Thin Thin Khine, one of Soe Paing's daughters).

Maung Soe Ya asked to be called Soe Paing. When he was about five years old, he was taken to a moving picture that included scenes of Mandalay. His father said that he seemed to recognize streets and other details of Mandalay in the moving picture. Maung Soe Ya often asked to be taken to Mandalay. As a young child he played at being a doctor.

Maung Soe Ya's parents had no connections with Mandalay, had made no attempts to verify his statements, and had never even been to Mandalay until 1978. Therefore, in February 1980, two of us (U.W.M. and I.S.) spent a major part of two days in a search in Mandalay for evidence of a Dr. Soe Paing. Since Jeeps were not known or owned in Burma until the end of World War II, Maung Soe Ya's mention of a Jeep meant that Dr. Soe Paing, if he existed, must have died after 1945. We interviewed many older doctors and residents of the neighborhood in which Maung Soe Ya said he had lived; of 14 apparently qualified informants, only one doctor vaguely recalled hearing of a Dr. Soe Paing from his father, and one elderly woman recalled seeing, as a young girl, a signboard in the neighborhood that read "U Soe Paing, L.M.P. [Licensed Medical Practitioner]." Although it might seem unlikely that none of the other informants would have recalled such a person if he had lived in their neighborhood, Mandalay is a large city, and it is not unusual for many doctors to remain unknown, even within their neighborhoods, to persons not among their patients or personal acquaintances.

We also interviewed residents of Amarapura and several physicians who had graduated before World War II from different classes in the government medical school at Rangoon; we wrote to two older medical practitioners in Toungoo; and we attempted to consult registration records for medical practitioners, only to learn that all such records had been lost during World War II and were not again kept with any reliability until 1962. None of these efforts proved successful in identifying a Dr. Soe Paing.

Comment. It is possible, but perhaps not probable, that the elderly lady who remembered seeing Dr. Soe Paing's signboard in the 1930s was correct and most of the other informants had forgotten or been unaware of his existence. A slight confirmation for the

first informant's recollection came from the doctor who remembered (rather vaguely) hearing about Dr. Soe Paing from his father. This then may be a case in which the previous life occurred too far back in time for the person concerned to be remembered by most living informants.

How then do we account for the detail of the Jeep, which, if not added as an embellishment, means that the previous personality lived on at least until after 1945? To accommodate this detail we have to suppose that Dr. Soe Paing retired and lived his later years obscurely and perhaps away from Mandalay.

It seems unlikely that Maung Soe Ya or his parents would have confused the name of Mandalay with any other place name. It is possible, however, that he misremembered the name *Soe Paing*, the first part of which is similar to that of Maung Soe Ya's own name. Such a confusion of names would have prevented a successful verification of his other statements, if they were accurate.

Still another possible explanation of the case—assuming that Maung Soe Ya was remembering some facts in a real previous life—is that Soe Paing was not a fully qualified medical practitioner. Some pharmacists (compounders) and some persons who had taken part of a course of medical training without fully qualifying did set up as medical practitioners, particularly during the period following World War II when registration was incomplete and inaccurate; this occurred much more rarely after 1962, when registration of doctors again became regulated. Fully qualified doctors and persons who did not actually consult these unqualified practitioners professionally would not have remembered them as doctors. If Maung Soe Ya recalled the life of such an irregular medical practitioner, but promoted the person concerned so that in his imagination he became fully qualified, our efforts to trace Soe Paing would have been misdirected.

In the present part of this paper we have drawn attention to the importance of cases of the reincarnation type that are unsolved (unverified) and have presented some illustrative examples. We shall defer our general comments about the cases and our discussion of the main interpretations for them until Part II of the paper, in which we shall present data from large numbers of unsolved cases and compare their features with those of solved cases.

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