

# A Preliminary Report on an Unusual Case of the Reincarnation Type with Xenoglossy

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**ABSTRACT:** The authors report a case of the reincarnation type with several unusual features. First, the subject began to have apparent memories of a previous life when she was in her thirties, a much older age than that of the usual subjects of cases of this type; second, the memories occurred only during periods of marked change in the subject's personality; and third, the new personality that emerged spoke a language (Bengali) that the subject could not speak or understand in her normal state. (She spoke Marathi and had some knowledge of Hindi, Sanskrit, and English.) A careful investigation of the subject's background and early life disclosed no opportunities for her to have learned to speak Bengali before the case developed. A final interpretation of this case cannot be made on the basis of present information and knowledge. The authors, however, believe that, as of now, the data of the case are best accounted for by supposing that the subject has had memories of the life of a Bengali woman who died about 1830.

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## INTRODUCTION

In typical cases of the reincarnation type (Pasricha and Stevenson, 1977; Stevenson, 1974a, 1975a, 1977a), subjects begin to claim that they remember a previous life when they are still young children—usually between the ages of two and four years. Furthermore, although the children subjects of such cases become more or less engrossed in the memories they claim to have, they nearly always preserve complete orientation for their present situations. The subject (an Indian woman) of the case we shall report here had no memories of a previous life when she was a child. These first occurred when she was in her thirties. And when she had them, a new personality emerged that entirely, or almost entirely, suppressed (during its phases of dominance) her normal

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personality. In this feature the case resembles instances of secondary personality, which in India are usually referred to as the "possession syndrome" (Alexander, 1956; Freed and Freed, 1964; Opler, 1958; Teja, Khanna, and Subrahmanyam, 1970; Varma, Srivastava, and Sahay, 1970).

The case also contains the unusual feature of responsive xenoglossy. Richet (1905-07) coined the term "xenoglossy" to refer to cases in which persons speak a real language that they do not know in their ordinary states of consciousness. There are two types of xenoglossy: recitative and responsive. Recitative xenoglossy refers to the repetition, as if by rote, of phrases and sometimes longer passages in a foreign language; for an example of apparently paranormal recitative xenoglossy, see the case of Swarnlata Mishra (Stevenson, 1974a). In responsive xenoglossy, on the other hand, subjects can converse intelligibly in the foreign language: they can reply to statements or questions spoken in the language with appropriate responses in the same language. Well-documented instances of this feat are rare, but one of us has reported two such cases in recent years (Stevenson, 1974b, 1976).

#### CASE REPORT

##### *Summary of the Case and Its Investigation*

The subject of the case, Miss Uttara Huddar, was born on March 14, 1941, at Nagpur Maternity Hospital, Nagpur (a city of west central India in the state of Maharashtra). So far as we have learned, there was nothing remarkable about Uttara's early life except a phobia of snakes that was unusual in her family. Uttara also had a somewhat stronger interest in Bengal than did other members of her family except her father, who also was much interested in Bengal and the Bengali people.

The present case developed early in 1974 when the subject was 32 years old. At that time a new personality, calling herself Sharada, suddenly emerged. Sharada could not speak Marathi (Uttara's native language) but spoke fluent Bengali. Although Uttara was (and is) unmarried, Sharada dressed and behaved like a somewhat shy, married Bengali woman. She did not recognize Uttara's parents or friends. She gave many details about her life and mentioned the names of places in Bengal with which she was familiar. From the information she gave, which we shall mention and discuss later, it seems probable that a person corresponding to Sharada's statements lived during the years between 1810 and 1830.

Two events that occurred in late 1973 and early 1974 may have stimulated the emergence of Sharada. First, Uttara was practicing

meditation with breathing exercises that induced to some extent an altered state of consciousness. (Uttara had, however, practiced meditation earlier without any noticeable change of personality and certainly with no effect like the appearance of Sharada.) Second, Uttara met a man to whom Sharada, after her emergence, felt strongly attracted.

Sharada remained "in control" for several weeks; Uttara then returned to her normal personality. But Sharada emerged again later, and she has continued to do so intermittently at least up to 1979.

Uttara's parents were at first unable to recognize the language Sharada spoke, much less speak it themselves. Persons having some knowledge of Bengali provisionally identified the language as Bengali; Bengali speakers then made the identification definite.

Early in 1975 some reports of the case began to appear in Indian newspapers. One such report was published in the *Northern Patrika* on February 18, 1975. A newspaper clipping of this article was sent to one of us (I.S.) by a correspondent in India. We began our investigation of the case in June, 1975. In that month one of us (S.P.) went to Nagpur and interviewed informants during several days. Between then and the autumn of 1977, we made three visits together to Nagpur, each time spending three or four days on interviews. S.P. also made two shorter visits to Nagpur alone; and I.S. visited the villages in West Bengal mentioned by Sharada. (Some of the places Sharada mentioned are now in Bangladesh.)

We have had several interviews with Uttara in her normal state. Our knowledge of Sharada's behavior, however, derives almost entirely from the reports of other persons, principally the members of her family and P. Pal. On July 2, 1975, however, S.P. spent several hours with Sharada, and tape-recorded a conversation in Bengali between her and M. C. Bhattacharya.

From the beginning of our investigation, we attached great importance to the linguistic features of the case. We wanted to establish the extent of the subject's ability to speak Bengali and to be sure that she had not learned Bengali normally.

For the first objective P. Pal, a native of Bengal, proved a valuable colleague. He journeyed from his home in West Bengal to Nagpur on four occasions and had long conversations in Bengali with Sharada. (We also obtained testimony about Sharada's ability to speak Bengali from five other native speakers of that language.) In addition to the oral testimony that we obtained from Bengali speakers who conversed with Sharada, we have obtained two tape recordings of conversations between Sharada and Bengali-speaking persons. The first of these (mentioned above) was made by S.P. on July 2, 1975. The Bengali speaker was M. C. Bhattacharya. We

have obtained a partial, but not fully detailed transcription of this recording. R. K. Sinha made a second tape recording of a conversation he had with Sharada in 1976, but we have not yet had this transcribed. Each of these tape recordings includes some religious songs sung by Sharada.

For the second objective we interviewed the subject herself, both of her parents, two of her older sisters, and one of her two brothers. We also interviewed several friends of the subject's family and a number of other persons who qualified as firsthand informants. Altogether we interviewed 19 major informants and a few other less important ones. We interviewed seven informants twice, and some of them three or four times.

### *Characteristics of the Sharada Phases*

A premonitory sign usually preceded the phases during which Sharada manifested. Uttara first had a sensation like that of ants crawling on the top of her head. A few hours later, she changed into the Sharada personality. But sometimes Sharada appeared more quickly. And sometimes she emerged overnight; Uttara went to bed as her normal self and awakened in the morning as Sharada.

Sharada's behavior differed distinctly from that of Uttara. She dressed in Bengali style, woke up earlier than Uttara, took a head bath every morning, left her hair loose, and put a vermilion mark into the parting of her hair. (Only married Hindu women in north India apply such vermilion marks.) She behaved distantly toward Uttara's parents, and she shuddered when any male person—even Uttara's father or brother—touched her. She spoke in Bengali only, and did not know any language that Uttara knew, such as Marathi, Hindi, or English.<sup>2</sup> In the beginning, Sharada communicated with Uttara's parents by means of gestures. They eventually picked up enough Bengali to understand what she was trying to say or ask for, at least for her everyday needs. Since Sharada considered Marathi a "harsh" language and would not try to learn it, members of Uttara's family were obliged to learn some Bengali in order to communicate with her. (Later, Sharada did learn some Marathi.)

<sup>2</sup> Bengali and Marathi (along with Hindi and other languages of northern India) are descendants of vernaculars (*prakrits*) that were contemporaneous with classical Sanskrit, a language of kings, scholars, and priests. In their evolution Marathi and Bengali have become mutually unintelligible. They have, however, many cognate words and similarities of grammar and syntax. A speaker of one language of the northern Indian group can learn another language of the group more easily than he can learn a language of a totally different group. The "distance" between Marathi and Bengali is similar to, but perhaps rather less than, that between French and Italian or that between Swedish and German.

Her tastes in food were closer to those of Bengalis than to those of Uttara's family or of Uttara in her normal condition. Sharada requested various foods that are specialties of Bengal, but eaten little or not at all in Maharashtra.

When Sharada first appeared, she was completely unfamiliar with tools, instruments, and appliances developed after the industrial revolution. For example, she knew nothing about electric appliances, gas stoves, fountain pens, or modern vehicles such as automobiles and trains. The only modes of travel she knew about, other than walking, were horses, boats, bullock carts, and palanquins.<sup>3</sup> She was familiar only with utensils and vessels made of either metal or earthenware, and when Professor Pal showed her a glass jar used for holding pickles, she found it quite baffling.

Sharada at first took no part whatever in the housework of Uttara's home. (Later she helped Uttara's mother a little.) She spent almost all her time in religious exercises, such as prayers, the worship of Durga (a Bengali goddess), and the singing of devotional songs. She was shy and stayed in the interior of the house, being especially reluctant to meet men. The man (mentioned above) to whom Sharada felt attracted, and who she claimed was her husband (during the "previous life" in Bengal) was an exception; she was eager to see him again, although he did not reciprocate her interest, and had no memories of a previous life with or without Sharada.

The Sharada phase usually ended with a performance of *aarti*, a type of worship that includes moving candles or oil lamps in front of the image of a god or goddess. Toward the end of the *aarti* ritual, Sharada sneezed and Uttara's normal personality returned. Occasionally, the Sharada personality persisted for a time after the *aarti* ritual.

The Sharada phases have lasted from one day to about six weeks. We obtained reasonably accurate data about the duration of 23 Sharada phases that occurred between February, 1974, and April, 1977; these were almost all that developed during this period. The median duration was two days, but the average duration, because of two long phases lasting 41 and 43 days, was a little over eight and a half days.

The Sharada personality and Uttara in her normal state appeared, at least at first, to know nothing about each other. Uttara seemed to be completely amnesic for what had happened during a Sharada phase, and Sharada regarded Uttara's family as stran-

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<sup>3</sup> Palanquins are covered litters carried by four or six men. They were a common form of transportation, for those who could afford them, in India during the early nineteenth century, the presumed period of Sharada's life.

gers; she called them "these people," although she did say that they had been kind to her. But the boundary between the two personalities was not as impermeable as first appeared. Uttara was not totally unaware of events occurring during the Sharada phases, and Sharada sometimes behaved as if she vaguely remembered persons Uttara had met.

At first Uttara's parents did not observe any pattern in the occurrence of the Sharada phases, but later they noticed that four or five of them (in the first part of 1975) began on the eighth day of the waxing or waning moon every month. In the Hindu calendar, these days are called *ashtami* days.<sup>4</sup> The 23 Sharada phases mentioned above definitely tended to begin on *ashtami* days, although exceptions occurred. For example, in 1976, between the beginning of August and the end of October, seven *ashtami* days occurred, and Sharada emerged on five of these days.

### *Sharada's Account of Her Life*

Sharada said that her father's name was Brajanath Chatopadhyaya, her mother's name Renuka Devi. She also said that she had a stepmother called Anandmoyee. She was brought up by her maternal aunt, Jagatdhatri. She said that she was married at the age of seven.<sup>5</sup> She would not speak her husband's name, but she wrote it down in Bengali as Swami (husband) Vishwanath Mukhopadhyaya; she also wrote her father-in-law's name as Nand Kishore Mukhopadhyaya.<sup>6</sup> She said that her uncle had taught her to read and write; that she had gone by bullock cart from Burdwan (in what is now West Bengal) to Kalighat in Calcutta; that she had also gone to Shivpur (in the Khulna District of east Bengal [now Bangladesh]) with her husband; and that from Shivpur she had visited Tara Devi's temple at Shikarpur (also now in Bangladesh) by boat.

In addition to the foregoing information, Sharada mentioned that she had had two miscarriages, but had not given birth to any live

<sup>4</sup> *Ashtami* days had several specific significances for Sharada, which may account for her advent at these times. First, Sharada, like most Bengalis, was a devotee of the goddess Durga, who, according to tradition, said that *ashtami* days were especially suitable for her worship. Second, Sharada stated that she had been born on an *ashtami* day and also that she had been bitten by a poisonous snake on an *ashtami* day.

<sup>5</sup> Marriage at this young age occurred quite commonly in India during the early nineteenth century—the probable period of lifetime for a person corresponding to Sharada's statements and behavior.

<sup>6</sup> It was (and still is) considered improper for a Hindu woman to speak the name of her husband, or of her husband's father. This shyness about uttering the name of the husband is not peculiar to either Maharashtra or Bengal; it occurs all over India.

babies. She said that when she was seven months pregnant, a snake bit her toe while she was plucking flowers, and she fell unconscious. She never said she had died after the snake bite, but only that she had become unconscious. She said that she was 22 when this happened. She seemed to have no awareness that any time had elapsed since.

In addition to the places already mentioned among Sharada's statements, she named five other communities, all rather small, obscure villages in Bengal. She also mentioned four temples (in addition to the well-known temple at Kalighat in Calcutta), which she located correctly, for example in relation to villages or cities, or to other buildings. She showed detailed familiarity with one of these, the Hansheshwari Temple at Bansberia.

#### *Identification of Persons Corresponding to Sharada's Statements*

R. K. Sinha and P. Pal traced a family called Chattopadhyaya living in Bansberia, in the region of West Bengal where most of the places Sharada mentioned are located. The present head of the family, Satinath Chattopadhyaya, has a genealogy of his family that goes back to the early nineteenth century. The name of Brajanath Chattopadhyaya appears in this genealogy for the period (1810–30) when, from other indications, it seems likely that Sharada lived. When this genealogy was discovered, Sharada was asked (without being told about its details) whether she could give the relationships she had with members of her family other than her father. She mentioned 10 other male relatives and gave her relationship to six of them. On the assumption that Sharada was the daughter of Brajanath Chattopadhyaya (as she said she was), she gave the correct relationship she would have had to five of the male relatives of Brajanath Chattopadhyaya whose names appear around his on the genealogy.<sup>7</sup> For example, she gave her grandfather's name as Ramnath, and in the genealogy Ramnath is recorded as the father of Brajanath, who was, according to Sharada, her father. (The

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<sup>7</sup> Further details about the exact names given by Sharada and those figuring in the genealogy, together with additional information about her ability to speak Bengali and other aspects of the case, will be included in a monograph on new cases of xenoglossy that one of us (I.S.) is now preparing. We will add here, in the interests of strict accuracy, that the name of one person mentioned by Sharada did not appear in the genealogy, but the existence of this person was verified otherwise. This is Srinath Chattopadhyaya, a son of Brajanath Chattopadhyaya. Satinath Chattopadhyaya established the existence of Srinath by inquiries among members of other branches of his family. Srinath's name also figures on a document of a property settlement dated March, 1827; the agreement was between himself, a brother, and an uncle. Both the latter were mentioned by name by Sharada as her brother and uncle respectively, and both figure in the genealogy.

names of the five other persons Sharada mentioned do not appear in the genealogy.) The genealogy is exclusively a male one. Since no women's names appear in it, we cannot say that we have proved that a person corresponding to Sharada's statements existed. But the correspondence between the genealogy and her statements about the relationships of the male members of the family seems beyond coincidence. We learned that part of this genealogy (including the relevant portions) had been published in 1907 in a Bengali magazine with a local circulation in the area of Bansberia. We believe it virtually impossible for Uttara to have seen a copy of this magazine. It is most unlikely that any copy of it had ever gone out of Bengal, and she had never visited that state. Accordingly, we are confident that she had never seen the genealogy.

### *Observations Regarding Sharada's Ability to Speak and Write Bengali*

Professor Pal had long talks in Bengali with Sharada on four separate occasions. On one of his visits to Nagpur, he stayed with the Huddars during a Sharada phase. He was therefore able to spend many hours observing Sharada and talking with her. He noted that she spoke Bengali fluently.<sup>8</sup> Her intonation and pronunciation closely resembled his, and he attributed this similarity to their having lived in the same district (Burdwan) in West Bengal; he grew up in a community only eight kilometers from where Sharada said she had lived before her marriage. P. Pal also pointed out that, although modern Bengali, which he speaks, contains about 20 percent of English loan words (a development since the first third of the nineteenth century), Sharada did not use a single English loan word in the course of long conversations. Her Bengali had more Sanskrit words than modern Bengali has, as did Bengali in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

We obtained similar testimony concerning Sharada's ability to speak Bengali fluently from five other native speakers of Bengali. Of these the most important were R. N. Roy, Reader in English at Nagpur University, and R. K. Sinha, a homeopathic physician who lived in Nagpur. Some informants drew attention to imperfections in Sharada's Bengali, but none hesitated to say that she had an excellent command of the language.

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<sup>8</sup> We emphasize the word "fluently" because Sharada's command of Bengali, according to our informants, deserves this adjective. In this respect the case contrasts markedly with those of Jensen (Stevenson, 1974b) and Gretchen (Stevenson, 1976) the subjects of which spoke Swedish and German (respectively) haltingly, as well as imperfectly.



As mentioned earlier, we have not yet obtained complete transcriptions of two tape recordings made of conversations between Sharada and Bengali-speaking persons. Although we do not ourselves speak Bengali, we can tell from listening to the recordings that when a speaker said something to Sharada she answered at some length. In one tape recording we can notice a certain amount of urging and repetition on the part of the interviewer; nevertheless, when Sharada responded she did so in a manner that makes the word “fluent” apposite. As to intelligibility, the summary transcription that we have (of one recording) leaves no doubt that Sharada answered most of the questions put to her with appropriate answers that showed she had understood the question and could make a suitable reply.

Our informants agreed that Sharada could also write Bengali, although opinions differed about her competence at this, one informant saying her Bengali writing was excellent, another that it was correct but child-like.

#### *The Probable Period of Sharada's Presumed Life*

Three types of data independently indicate the period of 1810 to 1830 as the most probable one for Sharada's presumed life. First, she had no knowledge of objects and vehicles developed after the industrial revolution. Second, there are the special characteristics of her Bengali—being free of the English loan words that the language acquired later and containing more Sanskrit words than modern Bengali does. And third, the genealogy referred to above indicates that the male persons in it mentioned by Sharada lived during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

#### *Further Information about Uttara's Background and Early Life*

Uttara's father, G. M. Huddar, is a Maratha and speaks Marathi most of the time. He knows some Hindi and has an excellent command of English, but he said that he knew no Bengali prior to the development of the case. Uttara's mother, Manorama, although of South Indian extraction, was raised in Maharashtra and speaks only Marathi and some Hindi. She also knew no Bengali before the case developed. The family has always lived in areas inhabited by “pure” Marathas. During Uttara's childhood, family members spoke Marathi most of the time, though occasionally Hindi and English were spoken.

Uttara was the fifth of six children born to the Huddars. Her mother, when pregnant with Uttara, dreamed rather often that a

snake was biting her on the toe; each time she had such a dream she would kick the snake (in her dream) and wake up in terror.

Uttara's developmental milestones were, according to her parents, normal. During the first 10 years of her life, the family lived mainly either in Wardha, a town about 80 kilometers south of Nagpur, or in G. M. Huddar's native village, Sirsi (in the Nagpur District). They had no Bengali neighbors in these places, and they had no regular acquaintance with any Bengali-speaking persons. Uttara's father did have occasional visits from Bengali-speaking persons, but since he did not know Bengali, they never spoke Bengali while with him.

Uttara had lived all her life in the area of Nagpur and Wardha. She traveled in western India, but never visited Bengal.

In school Uttara was an average student. She participated in dancing and dramatics. She studied Sanskrit for three years (1956–59) in high school, and was privately tutored in Sanskrit for one more year. She took and passed a special examination in Sanskrit. In college, however, she abandoned Sanskrit and took up science. Still later, she changed again and studied English and public administration. (Eventually she obtained a double M.A. degree in these two subjects.) After graduation from college, she became a part-time lecturer in the postgraduate Department of Public Administration at Nagpur University. She still held this appointment at the time the Sharada phases began.

It is pertinent to add that G. M. Huddar had a great admiration for the Bengalis. He was active in the Indian nationalist movement during the last years of the British Raj, and he thought the Bengalis showed more initiative in resisting the British than the Marathas did. Uttara shared her father's interest in Bengal and his respect for the Bengalis, and she liked to read Bengali novels in Marathi translation.

#### *Uttara's Knowledge of Sanskrit and Bengali*

As mentioned above, Uttara studied Sanskrit during the years 1956–59. Thereafter, she did not study it systematically. She did, however, retain some knowledge of Sanskrit, so that in her thirties she could still read it well enough to understand what she was reading. One of her older sisters had studied Sanskrit much more. She had won a gold medal in the subject, taken an M.A. in it, and had become a lecturer in Sanskrit in Nagpur University.

For a short period, when she was in the eleventh class of school, Uttara took lessons in reading the scripts of some Indian languages

other than Marathi, including Bengali.<sup>9</sup> She acquired a rudimentary knowledge of the Bengali script and, by the time she stopped this study, could read some words, although not sentences, in Bengali; but she did not learn to write or speak Bengali. The man who taught her to read the scripts was a Maratha and could not speak Bengali himself or even pronounce the words as a Bengali would. He taught his students in Marathi and pronounced the letters of the Bengali script with Marathi sounds, not Bengali ones.

As already mentioned, Uttara's family did not speak Bengali, and her parents denied that she had had any significant exposure to Bengali-speaking persons when she was a young child or later. Two of Uttara's older sisters, whom we interviewed, similarly denied that Uttara had been exposed to Bengali-speaking persons when they were children. Since there are at least 10,000 Bengalis in the city of Nagpur (which has a population of about 1,000,000 people), we cannot exclude the possibility that Uttara could have had some contact from time to time with Bengali-speaking persons. From the evidence we have obtained, however, it seems most unlikely that she had any significant association with Bengali speakers until the onset of the Sharada phase.

Uttara's brother, Satish Huddar, had worked from 1969 to 1972 in Orissa, a state of eastern India that adjoins Bengal. While he was in Orissa, he had picked up some Bengali from the numerous Bengalis who live and work there. He returned to Nagpur in 1972. But he said that he had never spoken Bengali to Uttara or with colleagues or friends in her presence.

During our investigations in 1976, we devoted much of our time to inquiring about, and interviewing, persons who might somehow have communicated to Uttara a knowledge of the Bengali language. We particularly searched for such persons in the town of Wardha, where Uttara had spent most of her early childhood. These efforts

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<sup>9</sup> Here occurred the only important discrepancy in the testimony we recorded. The teacher who taught Bengali script to Uttara told us that she (Uttara) and a classmate had come to him for tutoring in the Bengali scripts and scripts of other Indian languages once or twice a week for three or four months. Uttara's classmate said he remembered going to this teacher for lessons for about two months. Uttara herself insisted that she had only gone for lessons in Bengali script twice. She thought that the teacher had confused the lessons in Bengali script with some lessons he had given her the following year in other subjects. The number and duration of the lessons in Bengali script that Uttara had are relevant to a judgment about the origin of Sharada's ability to read and write Bengali, but not to that of her ability to speak it. We wish to emphasize also that although the informants disagreed about the number and duration of lessons that Uttara had taken in Bengali script, they all agreed that she attained only a rudimentary knowledge of it and that when she terminated the lessons she could read a few words of Bengali at most.

failed to turn up any evidence of Bengali-speaking persons from whom Uttara might have learned Bengali.

#### DISCUSSION

Sharada showed a remarkable knowledge of places in Bengal as well as of the food and customs of Bengal that seems to us far outside the range of information a woman living in Maharashtra would ordinarily have. Her knowledge of the details of the obscure genealogy of the Chattopadhyaya family of Bansberia in West Bengal has also impressed us. However, we consider both these types of knowledge—of Bengali life and of the Chattopadhyaya genealogy—of less importance than Sharada's ability to speak Bengali responsively.

We believe that Uttara had not learned Bengali prior to the manifestations of Sharada, who spoke Bengali fluently. Our confidence in this derives mainly from the uniform statements of all our informants who testified on this point. They agreed that, with the mentioned exception of her brief effort to learn Bengali script, Uttara had never tried to learn Bengali and had never been in a situation where she could have done so casually and without effort on her part. Additional assurance on this point is provided by the English-free and Sanskritized Bengali that Sharada spoke. If Uttara had learned Bengali—accidentally or fraudulently—she would have acquired modern Bengali, not that spoken 150 years ago.

This last point bears also on the possibility that Sharada learned Bengali from the Bengali-speakers with whom she conversed before we began our investigation of the case. We have already mentioned that Uttara's family called in some Bengali-speaking persons who first identified Sharada's language for them and then acted as interpreters between Sharada and her family. Other Bengali speakers, like R. N. Roy and R. K. Sinha, came to the Huddars' house in order to examine Sharada's ability to speak Bengali. We cannot say how many hours of Bengali all these persons spoke with Sharada, but we will not claim that they were a few only. We may, however, point out that if Sharada learned Bengali from these persons, she would have learned a modern Bengali. And yet when P. Pal first spoke with Sharada in October, 1975, he noted that her Bengali was free of English loan words and much more Sanskritized than is modern Bengali.

Since Bengali contains many Sanskrit words and derives from a vernacular contemporary with classical Sanskrit, it might be objected that Uttara's knowledge of Sanskrit could alone account for Sharada's knowledge of Bengali. But this is not true. Only 44 percent of the words in Bengali are similar to Sanskrit words

(Chatterji, 1970). The remaining 56 percent derive from related languages, but the words of this group are sufficiently removed from Sanskrit so that a knowledge of Sanskrit would assist little or not at all in using them correctly. Furthermore, the Sanskrit words in Bengali are pronounced differently than they are in Sanskrit itself. Uttara's older sister, who taught Sanskrit at Nagpur University, could not understand Sharada's Bengali.

If we admit that Sharada can speak Bengali responsively and that Uttara cannot do so, we have to account for the subject's ability to speak a foreign language not normally learned. In agreement with Ducasse (1962) and Polanyi (1958, 1962, 1966), one of us (I.S.) has argued (Stevenson, 1974b, 1977b) that skills cannot be communicated either normally or paranormally—that is, by extrasensory perception. One can only acquire a skill through actual practice. If this argument is accepted, and if Uttara did not learn Bengali after her birth, then it follows that the Bengali spoken through her derives from some other personality which must have learned the language previously. This personality would be Sharada, and the question then arises of who Sharada was or is.

Since the statements (and language) of Sharada point to a life around 1810–1830, it is conceivable that Uttara could be a descendant of Sharada and that the Sharada personality could represent some manifestation of inherited memory. In most Asian cases of the reincarnation type, the interval between the death of the related previous personality and the birth of the subject is so short—usually less than five years—that the subject could not possibly be descended from the deceased person whose life he or she remembers. In the case of Uttara, however, a much longer interval between the death and presumed rebirth occurred so that, in principle, Uttara might have “inherited” Sharada's memories, including her ability to speak Bengali. This hypothesis requires us to believe that memories of events and linguistic abilities can both be inherited. In this particular case, it further requires us to discard Sharada's own statement that she had no children.

The somewhat rapid onset and cessation of the Sharada phases, as well as the marked difference of personality that occurred when the phases changed, strongly resemble behavior observed in cases of the possession syndrome (Alexander, 1956; Freed and Freed, 1964; Opler, 1958; Teja, Khanna, and Subrahmanyam, 1970; Varma, Srivastava, and Sahay, 1970). Similarly, the amnesia each personality appears to have had for events occurring to the other, even though it was not total, suggests the possession syndrome more than a case of the reincarnation type. The feature of responsive xenoglossy, however, indicates that this is no ordinary case of the possession syndrome, but might instead be one of true “pos-

session.” This implies that Sharada is a discarnate personality—that is, that she consists of surviving aspects of a real person who lived and died in the early years of the nineteenth century, and who, almost 150 years later, came to dominate and control Uttara’s body.

Other details, however, are consistent with the interpretation of the case as one of reincarnation. First, Uttara had a phobia of snakes when she was a small child, and later, she showed a liking for Bengal and Bengalis. (The first of these traits is not specific, and the second might have derived from Uttara’s copying her father’s interest in the Bengalis.) Second, although the Sharada personality appeared quite different from Uttara’s normal personality, some overlapping and sharing of information occurred between them. This overlapping increased in 1976 so that the two personalities seemed to be slowly fusing. Yet the union was far from complete during 1977 and 1978, when Sharada still emerged as her distinct self.

If the case is best explained as due to the periodic eruption of memories of a previous life, it differs markedly from the usual cases of the reincarnation type known to us in India (Stevenson, 1974a, 1975a) or elsewhere (Stevenson, 1966, 1970, 1975b, 1977a). For one thing, Uttara’s memories of a previous life first occurred much later than the usual age for the onset of such memories. Most subjects of these cases begin to talk about the previous lives they claim to remember when they are between two and four years old. It is exceptional, although not unknown, for memories of a previous life to occur spontaneously after the age of 10.<sup>10</sup> It is also unusual in cases of the reincarnation type for the memories to so dominate the subject that the ordinary personality seems to become completely suppressed. We have, however, known a few cases of this type in which the subject’s memories of a previous life appear to “take over,” at least for some hours or even days, and mask the child’s ordinary personality. During such periods, the subject may be as oblivious of his surroundings as Uttara seemed to be of hers during the dominances of Sharada. The cases of Prakash Varshnay, Parmod Sharma (Stevenson, 1974a), and Indika Guneratne (Stevenson, 1977a) illustrate such temporary “taking over” of a subject by intense memories of a previous life. The present case differs from these in the long duration of the Sharada phases, which, as mentioned earlier, have sometimes lasted several weeks.

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<sup>10</sup> For examples of subjects of cases suggestive of reincarnation who first had apparent memories of previous lives after the age of 10, see the cases of Suleyman Andary (Stevenson, 1973) and Edward Ryall (Ryall, 1974).

The idea of memories “taking over” and appearing to possess a person may appear strange to many Western readers. Yet the concept is not unfamiliar to psychopathologists. Memories of earlier events may intrude and completely dominate some patients who, under the influence of hypnosis or drugs, vividly recall past events. These events have usually been extremely stressful ones, such as experiences in battle. As the patient’s recollection extends and deepens, he may adopt the present tense in speaking and seem to relive the past events as if they were still happening, or somehow happening again. While in this condition he appears completely oblivious of his present surroundings. Dane and Whitaker (1952) and Schneck (1954) have reported striking examples of this phenomenon.

Even more pertinent examples come from certain cases of multiple personality. In the more familiar type of multiple personality, the secondary personality knows what the primary personality does and can remember this afterward, although the primary personality has no memories of the conduct of the secondary personality (Congdon, Hain, and Stevenson, 1961; Ludwig, Brandsma, and Wilbur, 1972; Thigpen and Cleckley, 1957). In another, less well-known variety of multiple personality, the patient shows alterations of behavior and memory related to different chronological periods of his life (Franz, 1933; Hodgson, 1891; Maddison, 1953; Plumer, 1860). Each personality, during its phase of dominance, remembers nothing of events occurring during the dominance of the other personality. (Cases of this type with bilateral amnesia may have only one phase when the secondary personality manifests (Hodgson, 1891; Maddison, 1953), or the two personalities may alternate in dominance over many years (Franz, 1933; Plumer, 1860).

We believe the present case resembles this second type of multiple personality—with the important difference that the intruding secondary personality remembered events from a life that ended before the subject’s birth. Cases of multiple personality of the second type, and also the therapeutically-induced returns to earlier periods of time, may be considered instances of the temporary return and control by a previous personality of the *same* life; Sharada may be similarly regarded as an instance of the temporary return and control by a previous personality of a *previous* life. We cannot say how Uttara obtained these memories of a previous life; but the feature of responsive xenoglossy tells strongly against the interpretation that she acquired them by extrasensory perception. We are therefore entitled to conjecture, at least provisionally, that Sharada was a previous incarnation of the person now identified as

Uttara. If that is so, then the Sharada memories are a part of Uttara, but one that remained hidden until they began to emerge periodically when she was in her thirties.

In conclusion, we wish to emphasize that we adopt the foregoing interpretation of the case only tentatively. Since it is unique in our experience, we can find no guidance by comparing it with any other similar cases. The study of other such cases, when they can be found, or the further investigation of this one, may lead us to favor another interpretation for it.

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