

Characteristics of Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Ceylon*

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Introduction

THIS report summarizes results obtained in the study of 40 cases of the reincarnation type investigated in Ceylon. It is part of the analysis of data collected on about eleven hundred cases of this type in various parts of the world. I have published one report of patterns in cases of this type occurring among the Tlingit Indians of Alaska.¹ And in a companion article to the present report I presented data from Turkish cases and also Tables comparing the data from three cultures, i.e., Ceylon, Turkey, and Alaska.² As the analysis of the data progresses I shall publish reports of characteristics of the cases in other cultures.

By a case of the reincarnation type I mean one in which a subject, nearly always a child between the ages of two and five, states that he remembers events and/or people and places connected with the life of a deceased personality³ who he claims to have been in a previous life. In nearly every case the subject shows associated behavioral traits which the informants report as corresponding with similar traits noticed or expected in the previous personality. There is, in short, a

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1 I. Stevenson, "Cultural Patterns in Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation Among the Tlingit Indians of Southeastern Alaska," *Journal of American Society for Psychological Research*, 60, 1966, pp. 229-243.

2 I. Stevenson, "Characteristics of Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Turkey and Their Comparison with Cases in Two Other Cultures," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 11, No. 1, 1970, pp. 1-17. This article included data from 28 Ceylon cases. The present article includes data from 40 Ceylon cases and so figures for different features of the cases differ from those previously published.

3 In my reports I usually refer to the subject of the case as the "present personality" and to the related deceased person as the "previous personality." The interval between the death of the previous personality and the birth of the present personality I call the "intermission."

personation of the behavior of the previous personality as well as a claim to a continuity of memories with him. Elsewhere I have reported the details of five Ceylonese cases of the reincarnation type.⁴

The Religions of Ceylon

A short review of the religions of Ceylon will help in understanding the features of the reincarnation cases which I shall describe. The majority of the inhabitants of Ceylon are of Sinhalese stock. These are an Indo-European people originally from northern India and speaking a Sanskritic language. Under Vijaya, a prince of India, the ancestors of the modern Sinhalese conquered the island probably in the sixth century B.C., although this conquest may have occurred later. About the middle of the third century B.C., The Emperor Asoka of India sent his son Mahinda to Ceylon and he converted King Devanampiya Tissa to Buddhism. The King's subjects followed their sovereign into the new religion.⁵ Since that time the majority of the Sinhalese have remained Buddhists, and about 65% of the total population of Ceylon today are Sinhalese Buddhists.

Tamils form a second major racial stock in Ceylon and now comprise about 20% of the population. The Tamils are a Dravidian people from south India. The ancestors of many of the Tamils came centuries ago with various Tamil conquerors who at times controlled most of the island. In the nineteenth century British tea planters brought over large numbers of Tamils from south India. And more recently Tamils from there have again migrated into Ceylon, often illegally, in order to seek work and better living conditions than they can find in south India. The Tamils are nearly all Hindus. They are concentrated chiefly in the north of Ceylon around Jaffna and in the highlands at the tea plantations.

Christianity came to Ceylon with the Portuguese who controlled the western coastal area between 1505 A.D. and 1656, at which time they yielded to the Dutch who in turn were replaced by the British in 1796. The Dutch never conquered the Kandyan kingdom of the Sinhalese in the interior highlands. The British succeeded in this (1815) and thereafter ruled the entire island until independence was granted to Ceylon again in 1948.⁶ The Portuguese

4 I. Stevenson, "Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation," *Proceedings of American Society for Psychical Research*, 26, 1966, pp. 1-362. See also: F. Story and I. Stevenson, "A Case of the Reincarnation Type in Ceylon: The Case of Warnasiri Adikari," *Journal of American Society for Psychical Research*, 61, 1967, pp. 130-145; I. Stevenson and F. Story, "A Case of the Reincarnation Type in Ceylon: The Case of Disna Samarasinghe," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 5, No. 4, 1970, pp. 241-255.

5 H. R. Perera, *Buddhism in Ceylon*. Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1966, pp. 7-16. See also: W. Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, 2nd Ed. Colombo, M. D. Gunasena and Co., Ltd., 1966, pp. 48-61; E. W. Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*. Colombo, M. D. Gunasena and Co., Ltd., 1946, pp. 49-72.

6 E. F. C. Ludowyk, *The Modern History of Ceylon*. London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.

converted large numbers of the inhabitants of Ceylon to Roman Catholic Christianity through the devices of torture and conferring the honor of a Portuguese name on the converted. The Dutch and British continued to promote conversions to Christianity by favoring Christians in appointments to the civil service and by the establishment of schools with a religious character so that a general education could hardly be obtained without exposure to Christian religious doctrines. Since educational achievement was required for advancement in the civil service as well as for success in business or for the professions, a large number of the educated people of the island became Christians during the centuries of these policies. Today the Christians number about 10% of the population of Ceylon.

About 6% of the population are Muslims who are for the most part descendants of Arab (so-called Moorish) traders who came to Ceylon from at least the eighth century A. D. Some are of Malay ancestry. The Muslims are mostly found in the areas around the cities of Colombo and Galle, and along the eastern coast, but there is an important Muslim community with three mosques in Kandy.

Buddhism in Ceylon. The Buddhists of Ceylon are members of the southern or Theravada branch of Buddhism whose members are found also chiefly in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. During the long period of European colonialism the Western rulers of Ceylon derogated Buddhism. Despite this, it never lost its hold on the majority of the Sinhalese people, but it did decline somewhat in vigor and became especially weak in relation to education in Ceylon. By the end of the nineteenth century nearly all the schools were in the hands of the Christians. At that time a Buddhist revival took place chiefly under the leadership of Colonel H. S. Olcott of the United States of America and a Ceylonese religious leader, the Anagarika Dharmapala. With the attainment of independence from the British in 1948, the relative influence of Christianity declined much more and Buddhism is now definitely the ascendant religion of Ceylon.

Theravada Buddhism in Ceylon has been to some extent modified in popular practice by the ideas and practices of Hinduism, as might be expected from the long contact between Tamil and Sinhalese peoples on the island. Ames has given an excellent description of Buddhism as it is actually practiced in the villages,⁷ but it is important not to confuse this popular and somewhat Hinduized Buddhism with the Buddhism transmitted in the Pali Canon.⁸

The Buddhists and Hindus of Ceylon all believe in reincarnation, or rebirth, as the Buddhists prefer to call their concept. The Christians and Muslims of Ceylon do not believe in reincarnation. These statements are broad generalizations with some exceptions, since I have found that some Christians in Ceylon are quite

7 M. Ames, "Magical-animism and Buddhism: A Structural Analysis of the Sinhalese Religious System" in E. B. Harper (Ed.), *Religion in South Asia*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1964, pp. 21-52.

8 *Selected Buddhist Texts from the Pali Canon* (2 vols.), Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1964. See also: F. Story, *Foundations of Buddhism: The Four Noble Truths*, Kandy, The Buddhist Publication Society, 1961.

open-minded on the question of reincarnation and a small number of nominal Buddhists assert (incorrectly) that the doctrine of rebirth is no part of Buddhism.

Sources of Data on Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Ceylon

Since 1961 I have made four visits to Ceylon for the purpose of studying cases of the reincarnation type there and have spent in this work a little less than three months on the island. During this time I was very ably assisted by the late Francis Story and several interpreters who have collected additional material between my visits. In an earlier publication I have described my methods of interviewing informants and the main lines along which I analyze the data and consider alternative explanations for the experiences reported.⁹ In the present report I am not considering the authenticity or interpretation of any *single* case which should only be done in the light of all the information available about a particular case. For detailed reports of individual cases which may permit judgments about authenticity and other interpretations, the reader is referred to my reports published elsewhere.¹⁰ In the present article I am assuming authenticity for all 40 cases considered. This is merely to say that the detailed analysis of the individual cases suggests that the informants are in general reporting accurately what they observed. I am not asserting that all cases are completely free of distortion in details due to lapses of memory or other factors. Of the 40 cases here summarized I have myself personally studied 31 cases and have drawn on reports of the remaining nine sent to me by Francis Story (6 cases) and Godwin Samararatne (3 cases). Information about the occurrence of cases was at first derived mostly from newspaper reports, but more recently, as my investigations have become better known, more cases have been brought to my attention or that of my associates in Ceylon through personal communications. It must be assumed that many cases of this type occur in Ceylon which never reach the notice of newspapers or investigators. I have no reliable information which would permit even a speculation about the actual incidence of cases in Ceylon.

All of the cases are of fairly recent origin. The oldest subject of the group was born in January 1947 and the youngest was born in 1966. Thirty-eight of the subjects were Sinhalese. Of these, thirty-seven were Buddhists and one Christian. Two subjects were Tamils, one a Hindu and one a Christian. Although Tamil and Sinhalese cultures are different in many respects, I have thought it permissible to include the two Tamil cases in this analysis.

Characteristics of Reincarnation Cases in Ceylon

Sex of the Subjects. Twenty-one of the subjects were males and nineteen females. This proportion of approximately fifty per cent of each sex is found for the subjects in the cases of most other cultures. The Turkish and Tlingit cases,

9 Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*.

10 *Ibid.* See also: Story and Stevenson, *Warnasiri Adikari*, and *Disna Samarasinghe*.

in which males preponderate among the subjects, are exceptional in this respect.

Identification of the Previous Personalities. In most Asian cases of the reincarnation type the related previous personality is traced by members of the subject's family if they have sufficient interest in doing so and sufficient information with which to succeed. When the families have not yet identified the related previous personality my associates and I have tried to do so in a number of cases. So far we have only succeeded in tracing one previous personality not earlier identified and we have failed in several other attempts. The number of still unidentified previous personalities among the Ceylon cases (23 out of the 40 cases) is very much higher than the number of unidentified cases among the Tlingit and Turkish ones. The following explanations for this finding may apply.

(a) In very few cases in Ceylon are the two personalities members of the same immediate family. The ostensible rebirth occurred in the same family only three times in the Ceylonese cases. In one other case the two families concerned had a distant relationship, but in all the others the subject and previous personality belonged to completely different families. This contrasts with the observation that in 40 out of 47 Tlingit cases the two personalities were related, usually closely and on the mother's side.¹¹ In the typical Ceylonese case the two personalities live in villages separated by many miles, often 50, 100 or more miles. The chances of identifying a person living that far away from the interested family are very much less than when the two families live in neighboring villages as they often do in the Turkish cases. (In Turkish cases, 45 out of 52 previous personalities have been identified.) Transportation is still very limited for most persons in Ceylon and the average family does not have the resources for extensive research in other communities.

(b) The subject may not give sufficient or sufficiently specific information to permit identification of the related personality. If the child does not state clearly the name of the village where he claims to have lived before, or does not give a family name, it may be quite impossible to trace any related previous personality. Even with several names given, the effort to trace the previous personality may fail. One child living in the highlands of Ceylon gave a great deal of generally plausible and accurate information about a previous life she claimed to have lived in a coastal town which she named. She gave the first names of her former mother, sister, and father, and her father's family name. But the town in question is a rather large one and after two lengthy efforts I was not able to trace any deceased person corresponding to the child's statements.

(c) The previous personality may have lived a long time before the subject's birth, with a corresponding erosion of the memories of persons who remember him as well as destruction of buildings or other landmarks connected with the presumed previous life. In the majority of cases in Ceylon, however, the interval between the death of the related previous personality and the birth of the subject is short. Data permitting the calculation of this interval or "inter-

11 Stevenson, *Tlingit Indians*, pp. 231-233.

mission" were available for 15 cases and the median interval was 24 months. But there was a considerable range for the "intermissions" and in the case of one subject it was 82 years. The related previous personality in this case was traced only with great difficulty.

(d) Some of the information attributed to the child may be inaccurately reported by the parents. There are grounds for believing that in one case the subject himself said rather little about a previous life and his father then seems to have embellished this somewhat with additions of his own. The case is by no means the entire invention of the father, however, since the child's sister corroborated much of what the boy was reported by his father to have said.

In addition to the above factors I think other even more important influences may account for the low incidence of identified previous personalities in Ceylonese cases. But I shall defer mentioning these until the Discussion following presentation of the data from the cases.

Age at Death of Previous Personalities. The uneducated people of Ceylon have little interest in the passage of time and their memories for dates are extremely poor. Accurate written records are also scanty. This has made it difficult to obtain reliable data about the ages at death of the previous personalities. Although in a few cases I have obtained information from official death certificates, I have relied mostly on the statements of the family of the deceased person whose life the child subject claims to remember. For the 17 cases in which I could confidently identify the related previous personality I had information that seemed adequately reliable about the age at death of the previous personality in 15 cases. For these 15 cases the median age at death was 30 years.

This figure, however, does not represent what I believe to be the true median age at death of the previous personalities. Many of the subjects who did not give enough information about the previous personality to permit identification of a deceased person corresponding to their statements nevertheless gave some indication of how old that person had been at the time of death. One could conjecture from the statements of many of the children subjects of the cases, that they were remembering the life of a person who had died young. For example, sometimes the child would say that the remembered being in a particular class at school when he died. Or the absence of any memories of the teens or adult years permitted the inference that the previous personality had died young. If then we add all the cases in which, even though we have not identified the previous personality, we have some basis for a reasonable conjecture about the age at death of that person, we have 35 cases altogether and the median age at death of this whole group is only 13 years. This median age is appreciably lower than the corresponding median age at death of previous personalities in Turkish cases (30 years) and Tlingit cases (25 years). And it is very much lower than the expectation of life at birth in Ceylon which in 1962 was 61.7 years.¹² There is thus among the Ceylonese cases a definite tendency for the

¹² *Demographic Yearbook*. New York, United Nations, 1966. p. 572.

previous personalities to have died when themselves children. But there is a considerable range of age at death of the previous personalities; for example, one of the previous personalities was 72 years old at death and two others were definitely over 65 years old.

Mode of Death of Previous Personalities. As already mentioned, there were 17 cases in which the related previous personality, whose life the subject claimed to remember, had been positively identified. In these cases (with one exception), the mode of death of the previous personalities has been independently verified. Eleven died natural deaths, five violent. In another twelve cases without identification of the previous personalities the subjects made rather specific statements about the mode of death in the previous life. And so did the subject of the case in which the previous personality was identified but without our obtaining information about how she had died. I think, therefore, that we can consider these thirteen additional cases in the analysis of a larger number of cases. In the remaining 11 cases I could make no satisfactory conjecture about the mode of death of the previous personalities. Of the 29 cases with information known or inferable, death occurred in 11 violently and in 18 from natural causes. In two cases death followed an accident, but as the accidents did not seem clearly related to the deaths I classified these deaths as natural.

Among the Ceylon cases with the cause of death of the previous personality positively known or reasonably inferable 38 % of the related previous personalities died violently. This percentage is not much below that obtained in an analysis of Indian cases which showed that 46.2 % of the related previous personalities had died violently. It is, however, considerably lower than the corresponding figures for Turkish and Tlingit cases. An analysis of Turkish cases showed that 76.5 % of the related previous personalities had died violently and in Alaska (Tlingit cases) 56 % of the related previous personalities had died violently.

Among the causes of violent deaths there were three drownings in wells, one drowning at sea, two highway accidents, one airplane crash, one death following burns, two murders (shooting and strangulation) and one judicial execution (hanging).

Among the subjects remembering lives with natural deaths of the previous personality, four said death had followed a quarrel and one that it had followed grief over the death of a son. (Informants of cases in other parts of the world have also reported deaths following or accompanying strong emotions.)

Birthmarks and Deformities. In four (10 %) of the 40 cases the informants reported birthmarks and deformities on the subjects that were apparently related to the previous personality. This is a low incidence of birthmarks compared to that among the Tlingit and Turkish cases in each of which group birthmarks or deformities were reported in approximately 50 % of the cases. The low incidence of birthmarks is harmonious with the low incidence in the Ceylonese cases of violent deaths of the previous personalities from knife, sword, and bullet wounds, circumstances which are found frequently in the Turkish and Tlingit cases.

Among all of the birthmark cases from anywhere in the world known to me, and now numbering more than a hundred and fifty, I know of only one instance in which the birthmark occurred on a subject for whom the related previous personality was a person who inflicted (instead of received) a wound. In other words, birthmarks nearly always occur on subjects who claim to remember that in the previous life they were killed or murdered in circumstances which led to wounds corresponding in location and appearance to the birthmarks. It is the murdereed rather than the murderer who, on the hypothesis of rebirth, usually carries the birthmark when he is reborn. The single exception known to me is the Ceylon case of Wijeratne, reported in detail earlier.¹³ Wijeratne claimed to remember a previous life in which he stabbed his fiancée when she would not complete marriage ceremonies with him. He was born with a small and seriously deformed right arm and hand. When he was a very small child his mother heard him saying to himself that he had been born with a deformed arm because in his previous life he had killed his wife.

Claimed Recall of Events After Death of Previous Personality. One of the Ceylonese subjects had a good deal to say about events which she claimed to be aware of after her death in the previous life. She spoke at length about the experiences she had during the "intermission" between death and rebirth. I have reported this case in detail elsewhere.¹⁴ One other subject claimed to remember that after her death she came in a bus from the place of her death in the previous life to the place of her rebirth, a distance of about one hundred miles. (This did not correspond with any known event, such as the transportation of the deceased's body.) Only one other subject claimed to recall anything of the "intermission" period. She recalled details of the funeral of the previous personality and also spoke of two events that probably occurred after the death of the previous personality and before the birth of the subject.

Thus in all only three Ceylonese subjects claimed memories of events occurring during the "intermission" between death and apparent rebirth. Claimed memories of the "intermission" period occur much more frequently in Burma and Thailand, two other countries of Theravada Buddhism where I have studied many cases of the reincarnation type. In both these countries many of the subjects report memories of the "intermission" period after the death of the previous personality and before the births of the subjects.

Reasons Stated for Subject Being Born in a Particular Family. As already mentioned, three subjects were born in the same immediate family as that of the related previous personalities. In inquiring of the other subjects and informants about why they thought the subject had been born in a particular family, I usually found they offered no explanation. In three cases, however, the subject stated that she or he had been with a member of the family in a previous life. In one of these cases, the child said that her older sister had been a servant, an ayah, in the subject's previous life. This child insisted on treating this older sister as a servant, one liked

13 Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, pp. 134-150.

14 Story and Stevenson, *Disna Samarasinghe*.

and respected, but still a servant, much to the embarrassment of the sister in question. In the other two cases, the subjects (both boys) each claimed that an older sister had been with him in his previous life. In neither of these two cases did the sisters who were named as having been known before themselves claim to remember previous lives.

Difference in Sex Between the Related Personalities. In three (7.5 %) of the cases, the claimed previous personality was of a different sex from the subject. In each of these cases the subject was female and recalled a previous life as a male. This incidence of "sex change" is approximately that of sex differences between the related personalities in cases from most other cultures of the world. The incidence of "sex change" among cases in India is approximately 5 %. But it is 20 % in cases of Burma. And at the other extreme I have found no case of this type in cases of the Tlingits of Alaska, Alevis of Turkey, or Druses of Lebanon and Syria. In these last three cultures I have studied more than 150 cases of the reincarnation type, but have never found one in which the subject and related previous personality belonged to opposite sexes.

Difference in Country of Origin Between the Related Personalities. It is unusual in Asian cases of the reincarnation type for the subject to claim a previous life in a country different from his own. Nevertheless, six of the subjects of the Ceylon cases claimed that the previous life had been lived in another country. Three children claimed they had been English, one Indian, one Chinese, and one American.

Difference of Religion Between the Related Personalities. In three cases the previous personality (related to a Buddhist subject) was definitely (or probably) a Christian and in one case almost certainly a Muslim. The single Tamil Hindu subject remembered a previous life as a Christian. Although I obtained no definite indications concerning religion from the subjects of the cases in which a previous life in England was claimed, I think we can assume that the three related personalities of these cases were also Christians. In one of these three cases the subject was born into a Christian family, in the other two the subject was born into a Buddhist family. In another case the subject (born into a Buddhist family) recalled a previous life in India in the State of Manipur (near Burma). This child gave no indications of the religion of the previous personality, who was probably a Hindu, but might have been a Buddhist. It seems equally reasonable to suppose that the previous personality of the subject who claimed to live in the United States of America had not been a Buddhist. About the previous personality of the subject who claimed to live in China we have insufficient information for any judgment as to his religion. But taking those cases for which we have definite information about the religion of the previous personality, or grounds for reasonable conjecture about his religion, we reach a total of (at least) eight cases of the 40 in which the subject and related previous personality had different religions.

Difference of Social and Economic Circumstances Between the Related Personalities. By comparing the actual living circumstances of the subject's family and those of the previous personality, I could sometimes form a clear judgment about significant differences in the social and economic circumstances of the two

families. In a few other instances in which the previous personality remains unidentified, justifiable inferences about such differences could be made from remarks of the child about his claimed previous family and from his corresponding behavior. For example, a child born into a peasant family having almost no possessions would talk of how in the previous life he had owned an automobile or perhaps estates. He might additionally complain of the humble food served in his family and say he was used to having meat or better food when he wanted it. In most cases, the circumstances of the two families showed no clear differences. Peasant is ostensibly reborn as peasant. But in ten instances definite social and economic differences between the two families occurred. In seven of these cases the related previous personality lived in social and economic circumstances distinctly higher and in three instances distinctly lower than those of the subject's family. The differences were sometimes extreme. One peasant child recalled a previous life as a very wealthy businessman and proprietor of estates. Another peasant child recalled a life in which he had owned elephants (very much a luxury for private owners in Ceylon) and also an automobile (also a luxury). In contrast, one child of rather prosperous parents (her mother being a schoolteacher) recalled a life in a lower class family of definitely inferior, almost squalid circumstances. And another child born in a family of well to do, well educated professional persons remembered a life as a child in a peasant family living at a level of bare subsistence in a village not far from where she was born.

Claims of Previous Lives as Subhuman Animals. The belief that human beings may be reborn as subhuman animals and vice versa forms an important part of Buddhist doctrine. A recent attempt to suggest that this is not an integral part of Buddhist teaching¹⁵ has been refuted by Story in a lengthy review of this subject.¹⁶ Whatever may be the position of Buddhist scholars on the subject of animal rebirth (and nearly all agree that it is a part of Buddhist doctrine) there is no doubt that the ordinary Buddhist thinks it quite credible. Under the circumstances it has been somewhat surprising to me to find so few claims for memories of previous lives as animals presented among the material here summarized about claims of human rebirth. In only one case did the subject claim to remember a previous life as an animal. This subject said he recalled three lives as a human. For two of these lives the informants furnished information verifying the accuracy of the child's statements and other evidence strongly indicates that the child's knowledge of these two previous lives was gained in some paranormal¹⁷ fashion. This child also claimed to recall a previous life as a hare which was shot.

15 W. Roos, "Is Rebirth in a Subhuman Kingdom Possible?", *The Maha Bodhi*, 75, No. 1, July 1967, pp. 238-242.

16 F. Story, "The Buddhist Doctrine of Rebirth in Subhuman Realms," *The Maha Bodhi*, 76, No. 3, March 1968, pp. 28-39, and 76, No. 4, April 1968, pp. 58-70.

17 By "paranormal" I mean information acquired without the use of the known sensory channels.

The subject gave no evidence for this claimed recall of a life as an animal.¹⁸

In another case, a cobra invaded the garden of a family in which the related previous personality (a schoolboy) of the case had recently died. Some persons of the neighborhood thought that perhaps the deceased child had been reborn as this cobra. But the present personality, the subject of the case later made no claim to remember any life as a cobra or any other kind of sub-human animal. He did, however, provide persuasive evidence of remembering the life of the child who had died.¹⁹

Attitudes of Informants Toward Rebirth Cases. Nearly all the informants were Buddhists and as such, they believed in reincarnation or rebirth. They were thus disposed in general to accept the possibility that a child could remember a previous life and found nothing incredible or abnormal in such claims. Confronted with an actual case, however, they sometimes took up attitudes of skepticism or antagonism towards the child's claims. Sometimes the child's complaints of having lived a better life previously were irksome to poor parents struggling to provide for their children as best they could. In other cases, the child might make invidious comparisons between his claimed previous parents and his present ones and hint or threaten that he would run away to the previous family. The parents of such children often found such statements quite threatening and were inclined then to discourage or actually suppress the child from speaking about the previous life. Other parents, more certain perhaps of their own affection for the child, adopted accepting attitudes and even encouraged the child to talk of the previous life if he wished to do so. In general, the Ceylonese parents were much more permissive and accepting of statements by children about previous lives than are parents of European or American children who make similar statements.

Discussion

Since I have only begun the analysis of large blocks of cases of the reincarnation type from other cultures it would be premature to reach firm conclusions about the differences between the Ceylonese cases and those found elsewhere. I have felt justified, however, in drawing attention to some marked differences which have become apparent from the comparison of the Ceylonese cases with those found among the Turks and Tlingits. I have mentioned, for example, that the Ceylonese cases show no preponderance of male subjects and three instances (7.5%) of sex differences between the present and the related previous personalities. The Ceylonese cases also show a definitely younger median age at death of the related previous personality in comparison with Turkish and Tlingit cases.

18 I previously reported this case in detail (Story & Stevenson, *Warnasiri Adikari*) but in my report I did not mention the claimed animal rebirth of the subject because I did not wish to broach this complicated subject in a single case report.

19 A full report of this case will be published in *Forty Cases of the Reincarnation Type* now in preparation. This book will also include detailed case reports of another eight Ceylon cases of the reincarnation type.

If the Ceylonese cases are taken all together they show a large percentage of differences of circumstances between the related personalities. Thus in 21 of the 40 cases there was a difference of either sex, religion, social and economic circumstances, or native country between the present and previous personalities.²⁰ In five cases differences occurred in two of these circumstances. Some of these differences are perhaps to be expected in an island which has been for centuries a meeting place for four major religions and many racial stocks. At the same time, if we accept that reincarnation is the best explanation of these cases, they accord well with Buddhist attitudes towards rebirth. For Buddhist doctrine supposes that one is born again in different circumstances until one finally escapes from "the wheel of rebirth" through the realization that life is inevitably tied to suffering and the abandonment of all desire for its repetition. Pending the attainment of the Nirvana state in which all desire for personal existence has ceased, the Buddhist accepts rebirth in a wide variety of conditions, including, the subhuman animal form, as the result of his past desires and actions, what Buddhists and Hindus call "karma." "Karma" is a Sanskrit word (Pali: "kamma") meaning "action" and is the technical term used by Hindus and Buddhists to denote the effects in one life of causes in a previous one. Buddhists then are prepared for a wide variety of merited changes in their next lives. In this respect they contrast with the much more rigid Tlingits, Druses, and Turks, who cannot accept, for example, that a person could have a different sex in his next life. The Druses cannot even accept that a person could not be a Druse again when reborn, although a change of national and religious group is accepted as a possibility by Turks and Tlingits.

For devout Buddhists what one has been matters less than what one is trying to become. They do not attach much importance to remembering previous lives. Indeed, they regard the effort to remember a previous life as a vain distraction from the task of ceasing to be reborn, a goal held to be achieved best through the steady practice of meditation. Their attitude contrasts with the strong attachment to previous identity found among the Tlingits. Many Tlingit children of reincarnation cases remember the personal tribal name of the previous personality and want to be called by it. The same is true of Turkish subjects of reincarnation cases, although somewhat less so. In contrast, few subjects of the Ceylonese cases remember the name of the related previous personality and none have insisted on being called by it, as have many subjects in Turkey, Alaska and elsewhere.

Perhaps here lies another possible explanation for the high incidence of unidentified previous personalities in Ceylonese cases. Since on the whole Buddhists (and Hindus) care little about who they were, they do not attach much importance to remembering such identifying details of personality as would

²⁰ I wish to emphasize that for some of these cases we have not found a related previous personality and so for some cases our information about the religion, social and economic circumstances and native country of the previous personality derives exclusively from the subject's statements and related behavior.

lead to an easy identification of a previous personality. They remember a previous life, but often forget its nominal attachments. And here also we may find the explanation for the almost complete absence of "announcing dreams" among the Ceylonese cases.²¹ These are the prime indicators (with birth-marks) of the previous personality in cultures which attach importance to the former identity, such as do the Turkish sects believing in reincarnation and the Tlingits.

We cannot, however, attribute the low incidence of remembered proper names in Ceylonese cases solely to the detachment from terrestrial life inculcated by Buddhist teachings. For in two other countries of Theravada Buddhism, Thailand and Burma, I have found a comparatively high incidence of proper names remembered by the children subjects so that identification of the related previous personality has been possible in most cases of these countries. A relevant factor separating Ceylon from the other Buddhist countries may be the reluctance of the Sinhalese to use given names in addressing each other. Brothers and sisters call each other, for example, "younger brother" or "older sister" instead of by their given names. And even, or perhaps especially, husbands and wives do not mention each others names if they can help it. The avoidance of pronouncing personal names in Ceylon amounts almost to a taboo. One finds the habit also among many people of India, and it certainly has nothing to do with Buddhism since the Burmese and Thais have no reluctance to use personal names. But whatever the origin of the habit, since we remember best what we say or hear most often (other things being equal) the Ceylonese place themselves at a disadvantage for remembering personal names if they survive physical death and are reborn.

In mentioning the comparative disinterest of the Ceylonese for personal identity I did not mean to imply that all Ceylonese subjects of these cases showed contentment with the present life. On the contrary, many complained of the changes of social condition from one life to another, and many showed persistent habits of sex, religion, or nationality appropriate for the previous life, but not for his or her present situation. And some of the children assumed the airs, and even demanded the prerogatives, of adults. To the extent that they acted in these ways, they often appeared somewhat odd and even downright alien in their families.

This, incidentally, seems to me a point which supports the authenticity of the cases. For among Sinhalese Buddhists there is nothing creditable in remembering a previous life as a Christian, a Muslim, an Englishman, or a person of inferior social class. (There is nothing particularly discreditable either.) Nor for that matter is it creditable to remember a previous life as a wealthy person when one

21 I have published elsewhere (Stevenson, *Tlingit Indians*) descriptions and analyses of "announcing dreams" which usually occur to the mother during pregnancy with the present personality and are held to signify the identity of the previous personality about to be reborn. They occur very frequently in Tlingit and Turkish cases.

is now poor. Anyone inventing a previous personality for himself or for his child would almost certainly devise a previous personality who would fit harmoniously into the Sinhalese culture instead of being a Christian, Muslim, or foreigner.²²

22 Western persons unacquainted with details of specific cases of the reincarnation type sometimes assert: (a) that the previous lives allegedly remembered are all of superior socio-economic circumstances, and (b) that this is evidence that the claimed memories are wish-fulfilling fantasies exploited by a child to relieve the discomfort of his present unhappy circumstances. The first of these statements is incorrect since in fact many subjects remember previous lives in definitely inferior socio-economic circumstances. Three of the Ceylonese subjects whose cases I have included in this report remembered lives in markedly inferior socio-economic circumstances compared to those of their families. And the second statement is a misleading interpretation since the remembrance of a previous life in superior circumstances is not creditable to the Buddhist or Hindu. For they believe that one's present life circumstances derive from one's conduct in a previous life, although not necessarily in the immediately preceding one. Therefore, to be reborn in inferior circumstances must somehow mean that one's previous unmeritorious conduct has led one downward in the social scale at this rebirth.