

Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Northern India With Birthmarks and Birth Defects

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Abstract — In an effort to contribute to the understanding of the origin of birthmarks and birth defects from the perspective of reincarnation, cases of children with memories of previous life and congenital anomalies were investigated in India, mostly in the 1990s. Reports of ten such cases are presented. The principal methods of investigation were interviews with several first-hand informants on the subject's side of the cases as well as on the side of the deceased person whose life the subject claimed to remember. The birthmarks or birth defects were carefully examined. Their correspondence with the supposedly matching wounds on the concerned deceased person was independently verified, mostly from the medical records. Two subjects had major birth defects. One was born without his right hand and right forearm; another had a severe malformation of the spine (kyphosis) and prominent birthmark on the head. The remaining eight subjects had birthmarks corresponding to gunshot wounds, knife wounds, burns, and injuries in a vehicular accident. The birthmarks and birth defects closely corresponded to the injuries of the concerned deceased persons. The interpretations of chance, maternal impressions, super-*psi*, possession, and reincarnation were considered to explain the birthmarks and birth defects. The hypothesis of reincarnation seems best to explain all features of cases.

Keywords: birth defects — birthmarks — reincarnation

Introduction

The claims of children who say that they remember previous lives have been investigated for over three decades in many cultures (Haraldsson, 1991; Mills, Haraldsson, and Keil, 1994; Pasricha, 1990; Stevenson, 1974, 1997). I have been investigating such cases in India under the auspices of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore, India, since 1974, mostly in collaboration with the University of Virginia.

During my investigations, I have studied some children who, in addition to the claimed memories of a previous life, had birthmarks and/or birth defects that were attributed to marks, wounds, or other injuries they said they suffered in that life. A close correspondence in location between the sites of the birthmarks or birth defects on the body of the child and the wounds and/or injuries inflicted on the body of the deceased person whose life the child claimed to

remember has been established in numerous cases by the testimony of reliable witnesses and medical records. Analysis of 895 cases of the reincarnation type from different cultures showed the presence of birthmarks or birth defects in 35 percent of cases (Stevenson, 1993). On the basis of medical records, mostly postmortem reports, Stevenson (1997) found a concordance in location between wounds and birthmarks or birth defects in 43 (88%) of 49 cases for which adequate data were available.

In his recent review of cases with birthmarks and birth defects, Stevenson (1997) emphasized that little is known about the causes of birthmarks and birth defects. Different factors, some known and others unknown, contribute to these abnormalities.

The present study was undertaken in an effort to improve understanding of the etiology of birthmarks and birth defects from the perspective of cases suggestive of reincarnation. I have investigated nearly 45 cases of this type in the past few years. Ten of these have been studied with sufficient thoroughness to warrant a report at this stage. Most of the cases were investigated in the 1990s.

Subjects

All the cases occurred in four states of northern India: Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), Madhya Pradesh (M.P.), Rajasthan, and Haryana. The main language in these states is Hindi, sometimes with dialectical variations.

All ten of the subjects of the cases were Hindus; eight of them were males, two were females. Eight subjects claimed to remember previous lives as Hindus, and two said they were Moslems in the previous life. I began investigating all of these cases within 6 years of their development. The median age of the subjects at the time of my first meeting with them was 8 years and 7 months. Their median age at first speaking about a previous life was 31.5 months; the range was 15 - 54 months. The mean age was 34.5 months, which is slightly less than that (38 months) of a larger series of cases in India (Cook, Pasricha, Samararatne *et al.*, 1983).

Methods

The principal method of investigation was interviews. The persons interviewed on the subject's side included the subject, if he/she would talk with us, the parents if they were living and available, and other relatives, friends, neighbors, or school teachers, provided they qualified as firsthand informants. On the side of the concerned deceased person, surviving members of his/her family were interviewed, again, providing they were qualified witnesses. Information was obtained about the accuracy of the subject's statements for the facts in the life of the deceased person of whom he or she was thought to be the reincarnation. Careful inquiries were also made about any prior acquaintance between the families concerned in each case.

A detailed history about the mother's condition during pregnancy with the

subject was obtained and factors relating to the known causes of birthmarks and birth defects were inquired about. The subject's birthmarks or birth defects were examined, described, sketched, and photographed. What the subject said about the origin of these birthmarks and birth defects in a previous life was also recorded. Every effort was then made to verify independently the correspondence between the birthmarks/birth defects and the apparently corresponding wounds on the deceased person. Whenever possible, medical records (usually post-mortem reports) were studied and copied.

Case Reports

Case of Rajani Singh

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

Rajani Singh was born on November 16, 1991 in the village of Bhalaul in district Etah, U.P., to Virender Singh and his wife, Bimla. Virender Singh had completed high school but his wife was illiterate.

One of Virender Singh's cousins, Mithilesh, came to stay with his family to study for a high school examination that would be held at a college about 6 kilometers from Bhalaul. Mithilesh became involved with a boy of a different caste, and her family did not approve of this. She became depressed about the situation and committed suicide on October 6, 1991 by immolating herself.

Rajani was born without any complications of pregnancy or delivery, about one and a half months after Mithilesh's death. She had red marks all over her body, but they were most prominent on her head. Her mother and paternal grandmother noticed the marks on her head within a few days of her birth. They noticed the marks on the rest of her body within a month after her birth, when Mithilesh's mother, Rajwati Devi, came to see her. (Rajwati Devi had dreamed within one month of Mithilesh's death that Mithilesh was coming back to their family.) At this time Rajani was thought to be Mithilesh reborn. As mentioned, the two families concerned were related to each other; I shall describe their exact relationship later.

I investigated this case between December 1992 and December 1995. At Bhalaul, I interviewed Virender Singh's older brother, Satyabir, Rajani's mother, Bimla, Rajani's paternal grandmother, Shakuntala, Mithilesh's maternal aunt, Ganga Devi, who lived in Bhalaul, and another of Mithilesh's cousins, Gajraj Singh. On the side of Mithilesh, I interviewed Mithilesh's mother, Rajwati Devi, her father, Navratan Singh, her brother, Awdhesh Singh, his wife, Kamlesh, and Mithilesh's younger sister, Meena. I also visited the health center in Jaithra (the nearest town to Bhalaul) where Mithilesh had been taken for treatment of her burns; however, no records were available.

Mithilesh's Life and Death

Mithilesh was born in 1975. She was the third among four siblings. Her older brother was an advocate (lawyer) and an older sister was a teacher; her younger sister, Meena, was studying for her B.A. when I interviewed her in 1992. Mithilesh was the only one among her siblings who did not do well in school; therefore she was sent to her father's younger brother's home in Bhalaul for completion of high school studies. One of her cousins was teaching in a college there and her family thought this person would assist her in passing her examination. Mithilesh was considered to be generally stubborn and headstrong. As I mentioned, at Bhalaul she became involved with a boy of a different caste. Her family did not approve of the alliance, and she became very upset about it. On October 6, 1991, Mithilesh went out with her mother Rajwati Devi, who had come to visit her in Bhalaul and an aunt, Ganga Devi who was living with Rajani's family. On the return journey by a pony cart, Mithilesh got off first and arrived home ahead of them. She poured kerosene on her head and set herself ablaze. Then she ran to Bimla, who was pregnant with Rajani, for rescue. Bimla became scared and pushed her aside. By then Rajwati Devi and Ganga Devi had arrived home and they tried to extinguish the fire. She was rushed to the primary health center at Jaithra and died there. She had sustained wounds all over her body except on her waist and feet; however, her head was affected most, as that was where she had poured the kerosene and set the fire.

Connections Between the Families Concerned

The two families concerned were closely related. Mithilesh was Virender Singh's father's elder brother's daughter and was living with his family at the time of her death. Mithilesh's father, Navratan Singh, was employed in a government job and was living in Agra with his family. Virender Singh's mother, Shakuntala, was very domineering; Mithilesh used to feel sorry for Bimla (Rajani's mother) and was quite fond of her.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Rajani

Unlike many subjects, Rajani made fewer statements about her previous life (as sometimes happens in cases where the two families concerned are related). When Rajani could speak, she asked for Mithilesh's younger sister, Meena. When Rajani came to stay with Mithilesh's family at Mathura in November 1995, she showed a familiarity with the place and with persons there. Also, she addressed Mithilesh's parents as 'Papa' and 'Mummy' and insisted a few times that she be called Mithilesh.

Rajani's Behavior Related to the Previous Life

Even before she could speak, Rajani showed more affection toward Mith-

ilesh's family than toward her own immediate family, and towards her maternal aunt, Ganga Bai, to whom Mithilesh had been very much attached. Subsequently, she used to ask for Mithilesh's younger sister, Meena, with whom Mithilesh had also been particularly close.

In addition, Rajani displayed certain behavioral features that were considered to be similar to Mithilesh's. For example, like Mithilesh, Rajani was said to be quite stubborn and would sulk if her demands were not met. Also like Mithilesh, Rajani was afraid of Shakuntala. Rajwati Devi noticed some facial resemblance between the two; both had large eyes.

Rajani's Birthmarks and Their Correspondence to Mithilesh's Injuries

Rajani had several birthmarks. Two of these were areas of erythema (increased redness) of the skin on her back and shoulder that were still visible in 1992. In addition, she had a prominent area on the right frontal region of her head that was hairless and hypopigmented. This was clearly visible as late as 1995 (Figure 1).

Other birthmarks had faded by then. Unlike other cases, we cannot claim in this one any close correspondence between Rajani's birthmarks and the burns

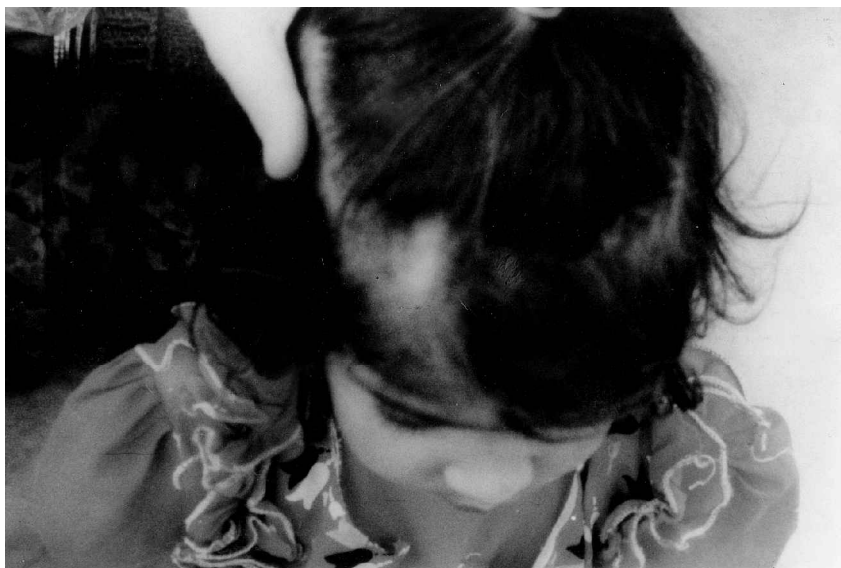


Fig. 1. Birthmark on Rajani Singh's head as it appeared in November 1995 when she was 4 years old. The birthmark was a hairless and hypopigmented area on the right frontal region of her head.

on Mithilesh, whose skin must have been badly burned in many places, although particularly on the head.

Case of Naripender Singh

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

Naripender Singh was born to Chanderpal Singh and his wife, Anar Devi, in October 1973 in the village of Nardauli in district Etah, U.P. They were Thakurs, a group of the second highest caste, Kshatriyas. Nardauli is a large village with a population of 8000 to 9000 persons, situated on the banks of the river Ganges.

Naripender's mother noticed a mark on his left chest soon after his birth but did not connect it with anything until he himself started speaking about a previous life between the ages of 2½ and 3. He also pointed at another mark above the right nipple, saying that he was speared there in that life.

A man called Ram Dayal Sharma, who had lived about 200 meters away from Chanderpal Singh's house, had shot himself accidentally while cleaning his gun. Naripender was born within a few days of Ram Dayal's death and later, when Naripender made statements about his previous life, he was identified by his family as Ram Dayal reborn.

I investigated this case between December 1980 and December 1992. On the subject's side of the case, I interviewed Naripender Singh, his older brother, Ravibhan Singh, his cousin, Shaitan Singh, and his parents, Anar Devi and Chanderpal Singh. On Ram Dayal's side, I interviewed his widow, Javitri, his uncle, Niranjan Lal, one of his friends, Chhajju Singh, and a neighbor, Gyan Singh.

Ram Dayal's Life and Death

Ram Dayal was the son of Munshi Lal and his wife, Devika. He was born around 1923 in Nardauli. Ram Dayal was a peasant farmer and married a woman named Javitri; they were Brahmins. I did not learn how many children they had but they had at least one son, Ramanand, who was murdered sometime in 1990. As a youth, Ram Dayal was said to have been a miscreant and to have engaged in robbery (called *dacoity* in India) with his friend, Chhajju Singh. Later, he mended his ways and became quite religious. About a year before his death Ram Dayal quarreled with a man called Bhanu Singh, and they fought with spears. In this fight Ram Dayal was wounded on the chest; he received treatment at the local hospital in Nardauli and recovered. On October 28, 1973 he had loaded his gun after cleaning it; the trigger was accidentally released and he was shot in the chest. He died at home within 15-20 minutes of the accident.

Connections Between the Families Concerned

The two families concerned belonged to different castes. As mentioned, Naripender Singh's family belonged to the *Kshatriya* caste; this was a step lower than Ram Dayal's family, who were *Brahmins*. However, both families lived in the same village about 200 yards apart. They had known each other for several years, although they were not friends. Nevertheless, one day before his death, Ram Dayal had stopped at Chanderpal's residence on his way back from the Ganges and rested there for a short while. On hearing about Ram Dayal's death, Chanderpal Singh went to see his body. Anar Devi stayed at home as she was pregnant with Naripender.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Naripender

Between the ages of $2\frac{1}{2}$ and 3, Naripender started speaking normally and at about the same time began talking about a previous life. He said that he was Ram Dayal and that he had shot himself accidentally while cleaning a gun. He was said to have recognized Ram Dayal's widow, Javitri, his uncle, Niranjan Lal, and a friend, Chhajju. As the house of Ram Dayal was not far away, Naripender used to go there by himself to visit Javitri and Niranjan Lal.

In addition, Naripender displayed correct knowledge of some private events in the life of Ram Dayal. For example, he told Javitri about the buried treasure in their house and mentioned to Chhajju the booty that they both had taken in a robbery, which they had committed together some 40 years earlier.

Naripender's Behavior Related to the Previous Life

Naripender used to address Ram Dayal's friend, Chhajju Singh, by name or as "friend" which was appropriate for an elderly person but inappropriate for a child of Naripender's age. Ram Dayal was described as a brave and daring person; Naripender was also considered to be a bold boy who, unlike his siblings, would go out alone in the dark at night.

When young, Naripender showed some habits characteristic of members of the Brahmin caste. For example, he would not eat from a used plate or eat left-over food; he was interested in the scriptures and observed fasts. He showed his dislike for Bhanu Singh, who had speared Ram Dayal, and avoided him when Bhanu Singh visited their house.

Javitri had moved out of the village in 1989 or 1990 and was living with her son Ramanand. Naripender continued to visit them and went alone to the police station at Ganjdundwara (about 25 kilometers away) to see the body of Ramanand, who was murdered in 1990.

Naripender's Birthmarks and Their Correspondence to Ram Dayal's Injuries

On examination of Naripender's chest in December 1980, I saw a mark on the left side of his chest, which was round in shape, slightly depressed and



Fig. 2. Birthmark on the left chest of Naripender Singh as it appeared in December 1980 when he was about 7 years old. The arrow points at the mark which was round in shape, slightly depressed, and hyperpigmented in the center. It was located below the left nipple toward the midline.

hyperpigmented in the center. It was located below the left nipple, slightly toward the midline (Figure 2). At birth it had been red; it was neither bleeding nor oozing. Its location corresponds well with a gunshot wound of entry, 2.5 centimeters by 1.2 centimeters on the left side of the chest, 8.9 centimeters below the nipple, and 3.8 centimeters away from midline, that was described in the postmortem examination report.

The second mark on the right side above the nipple was small, scar-like and elongated. This mark does not seem to correspond to the side where Ram Dayal was wounded during the spear fight. My only informant for this wound was Javitri who said that it was on the same side where her husband had been shot. However, confusion between right and left often occurs among informants and has been addressed at length by Stevenson (1997).

Case of Deepak Babu Misra

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

Deepak Babu Misra was born in March 1989, in the village of Mohkampur

in district Etah, U.P., to Kanahiya Lal and his wife, Vinita Misra. Mohkampur is a small village with a population between 1200 and 1500. Kanahiya Lal had completed high school and Vinita had completed junior high school.

Deepak was born with several bluish black marks on his back and scar-like marks on his face. He was about 2 when he started making statements about a previous life. He stated the name of the deceased person he claimed to have been, his place of residence, his occupation, and how he had been killed.

Chhote Lal Gupta, aged about 55 years, had been murdered in February 1989, in the town of Jaithra, which is about 12 kilometers from Mohkampur. Deepak's statements and birthmarks corresponded to the life and death of Chhote Lal Gupta.

I investigated this case between February 1994 and March 1997. At Mohkampur, I interviewed Kanahiya Lal, Vinita, and Deepak. At Jaithra, I interviewed Gaya Prasad, the youngest brother of Chhote Lal, Gaya Prasad's wife, Vimla, and his mother. I was able to obtain a copy of the postmortem examination report conducted on the body of Chhote Lal.

Chhote Lal's Life and Death

Chhote Lal was born around 1934 in a village in the Mainpuri district of Uttar Pradesh. Subsequently, his family moved to Jaithra. Chhote Lal had a business of selling ghee (clarified butter) and grains. He married a woman named Rambeti, but they had no children. Chhote Lal was a religiously inclined person and contributed generously toward religious activities. One of Rambeti's nephews, Basant Kumar, came to stay with them to learn the skills of business because he belonged to a poor family. It is alleged that Basant Kumar hired some criminals to kill the couple in order to take possession of their property. On February 12, 1989, the criminals came to the house at night and murdered both Chhote Lal and Rambeti. No eyewitnesses were available. Gaya Prasad told me that knives, and a small staff used for washing clothes were used to kill the couple.

Connections Between the Families Concerned

The two families concerned lived about 12 kilometers apart and belonged to different castes and social classes. Deepak's family was Brahmin while Chhote Lal's family belonged to the lower, *Vaishya* caste. Deepak's father, Kanahiya Lal, went to a school at Jaithra and had some friends in that area but did not know Chhote Lal's family personally. Although the news of Chhote Lal's murder reached Mohkampur, Kanahiya Lal and Vinita did not go to see his body.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Deepak

Between the ages of 2 and 3, Deepak said that he was Chhote Lal of Jaithra and that he had been hit with the muzzle of a gun and stabbed with knives. He

also pointed at the birthmarks and said that he was “cut” there with knives. His statements also included the name of the relative who had allegedly been responsible for his murder. I was told that when the two families concerned met Deepak recognized Chhote Lal’s mother, younger brothers, and their wives, and behaved toward them appropriately. Once on a trip to Jaithra, Deepak recognized along the way a temple to which Chhote Lal had contributed.

Deepak’s Behavior Related to the Previous Life

Deepak was very affectionate toward Gaya Prasad, the brother of Chhote Lal, and his mother; he held and kissed her hands. He was afraid of Basant Kumar and also angry with him; he said that he would take revenge and shoot him when he grew older.



Fig. 3. Birthmark on the forehead of Deepak Babu as it appeared in February 1995 when he was 6 years old. The mark was 2.5 centimeters long, and 0.5 centimeters wide, longitudinal in shape and located slightly to the right of the midline.

Deepak's Birthmarks and Their Correspondence to Chhote Lal's Injuries

Deepak was born with several bluish black marks on his back. They were clearly visible for one year and then gradually faded. They were completely gone by the time he was 3. In addition, he had two scar-like marks: one longitudinal mark on the forehead, and another, transverse, mark on the bridge of his nose between the eyes. The birthmarks corresponded in location to two of the four injuries mentioned in the postmortem report of Lala Ram.

The birthmark on the forehead (Figure 3) was 2.5 centimeters long and 0.5 centimeters wide. It was slightly to the right of the midline and corresponded to a lacerated wound (described in the postmortem report) in the right frontoparietal region that was 11 centimeters by 2 centimeters. The mark on the nose corresponded to a lacerated wound at the root of the nose on the right side that was 4 centimeters by 1 centimeter.¹

Case of Krishan Chaudhri

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

The subject of this case, Krishan Chaudhri, was born on November 16, 1985 in the village of Palwan in the district of Jind, Haryana, about 125 kilometers northwest of Delhi. His parents were Jai Singh and his wife, Parmeshwari. Jai Singh owned and cultivated land and belonged to the upper middle socioeconomic class.

Within a few hours of his birth, Krishan's parents noticed a longish, purple-red mark on his face near the right ear. They thought perhaps he had scratched himself but when they saw it in the daylight, it looked like a sutured wound and the "stitches" appeared to be filled with blood. The mark oozed during monsoons and was still doing this at the time of my investigations of the case.

At the age of about 15 months Krishan began referring to a previous life. By the time he was 3, he had given details about the family of the previous life and the vehicular accident, which ended that life.

Krishan's statements were later found to correspond with events in the life of a young man, Vinod Goyal, who had been involved in a vehicular accident on November 26, 1980 and died almost instantly. Vinod had lived in a town named Narwana, which is 15 kilometers north of Palwan.

I investigated this case between February 1995 and March 1997. On Krishan's side of the case, I interviewed Jai Singh and Parmeshwari. On Vinod's side of the case, I interviewed his mother, Santosh, his father, Ram Prasad Goyal, his employers, Raj Kumar Jain and Chander Bhan Jain, and a friend, Mihan Singh, who was riding with Vinod at the time of the accident. I

¹This is one of several cases in which the number of wounds described in the postmortem report exceeded the number of birthmarks reported by the subject's parents. Space does not permit a discussion of this discrepancy here. Interested readers should consult Stevenson (1997). This feature occurred also in the cases of Yashbir Yadav, Kuldip Singh, Rambir Singh, and Giriraj Soni.

tried to obtain a postmortem examination report at various hospitals, the relevant police station, and the court, but could not obtain one.

Vinod's Life and Death

Vinod was born on August 23, 1956. His father, Ram Prasad Goyal, was an employee in the Revenue Department and his mother, Santosh, was a housewife. Vinod was the eldest and only son of their five children. He was not married and was working as a salesman in a private company. The family belonged to the middle socioeconomic class.

On November 20, 1980, Vinod was driving a motorcycle along with a friend, Mihan Singh, when they collided with a cart in front of them. Vinod was struck in the face by a wooden beam loaded on the cart. He fell down and was rushed to the hospital, where he was declared dead. The accident occurred about 17 kilometers away from his home and about 2 kilometers from Palwan.

Connections Between the Two Families Concerned

The two families concerned belonged to different social backgrounds and lived about 15-16 kilometers apart. Krishan's family was slightly better off economically than Vinod's and lived in a village; Vinod's family on the other hand, was better educated than Krishan's and lived in a town. The families were total strangers. Although Jai Singh knew people in Narwana he did not know or know about Vinod's family; neither he nor any other member of his family had heard about the accident. However, Mihan Singh, who had been a close companion of Vinod and was on the pillion at the time of the accident, lived in Palwan. His house was less than 10 meters from that of Krishan's family.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Krishan

When he was about 15 months old, Krishan used to sit on a suitcase and bang his feet on the ground as if he were starting a motorcycle. He also protested against being in his present family. He said that his parents were different, that his mother and father used to dress differently; his mother used to wear *saris* and his father used to wear trousers. (Jai Singh wore the loose fitting Indian *dhoti*, not trousers; and Parmeshwari did not wear *saris*.) Around the age of 3, he gave more details about his previous life, including those of the fatal accident.

Krishan was said to have recognized (when the two families concerned met) Vinod's parents and his sisters among a large crowd. He was also said to have recognized the site of Vinod's fatal accident.

Krishan's Behavior Related to the Previous Life

Krishan behaved appropriately toward Vinod's parents and sisters when he

met them for the first time. Unlike his other siblings, Krishan was noted to greet people in a manner that was interpreted by Ram Prasad Goyal as a feature of urban people. Krishan visited Vinod's sisters every year on the festival of *Rakhi*, (a festival wherein sisters tie a symbolic thread on the wrist of their brothers, and brothers in turn assure their sisters of security and protection).

Krishan's Birthmark and Its Correspondence to Vinod's Injury

On examining Krishan's face we saw a mark about 6 centimeters long, and 0.2 centimeters wide, beginning about 2 centimeters behind the right ear, continuing upward (encircling the upper half of the pinna) and then extending about 4 centimeters along the front of the ear on the right cheek. It was somewhat irregular in shape, slightly raised, and dark brown in color (Figure 4).

I could not obtain a medical report in this case, and so I have had to depend on the testimony of the informants to judge the correspondence of location of Krishan's mark with the location of injury to Vinod. From the description of the informants, he did not suffer any major external injury. He was bleeding on the face and according to Ram Prasad Goyal, he had a minor injury of his right ear, which seems to correspond to the birthmark of Krishan. However, no



Fig. 4. Birthmark on the right cheek of Krishan Chaudhri as it appeared in March 1997 when he was 13 years old. The mark was 0.2 centimeters wide, irregular in shape, slightly raised, and dark brown in color, beginning about 2 centimeters behind the right ear, continuing upward, encircling its upper part and then extending downward about 4 centimeters along the front of the ear on the right cheek.

medical treatment was given to Vinod, who died before arriving at a hospital. No stitches were made on the injured parts. If the visible external injury of the ear was itself insufficient to cause death, we have to conjecture that Vinod died of severe brain injury, although this remains unverified.

Case of Yashbir Yadav

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

Yashbir Yadav was born in the village of Mastipur (population about 1100) in the Etah District, U.P., in October 1987. His parents were Rajinder Singh Yadav and his wife, Kusum Yadav. Rajinder Singh was a college graduate and his wife was functionally literate.

Yashbir's parents noticed two marks on his neck within 3 or 4 days of his birth. However, they did not pay much attention to these until Yashbir spoke about a previous life and pointed to the marks, saying that he had been shot there. During my investigations he also pointed at a mark on his abdomen. Kusum told me that the marks were red in color and more prominent when Yashbir was born; they had gradually faded.

Yashbir started talking about a previous life between the age of 1 and 2. His statements mainly included the name of a sister in that life, names of the persons who had killed him, and how they killed him.

A man called Durga Lal had been murdered in the village of Ranipur Gaur on July 7, 1985, a little over two years before the birth of Yashbir. Kusum's parents also lived in Ranipur Gaur, which is about 50 kilometers away from Mastipur.

I investigated this case in February 1995 and March 1997. At Mastipur I interviewed Yashbir's parents, Rajinder Singh Yadav and Kusum Yadav, and his paternal grandmother. All of Durga's relatives had either died or moved out of Ranipur Gaur. One of his distant cousins, Dr. Rajinder Singh Yadav, was available and I interviewed him in his clinic in a nearby town. In addition, I obtained a report of the postmortem examination conducted on the body of Durga Lal.

Durga Lal's Life and Death

Durga Lal was born about 1950. His father was a small farmer and his grandfather was the head of the village. Durga Lal had an older sister Moorkali who was married. Moorkali's in-laws ill-treated her and she came to live in Ranipur Gaur. Durga Lal married and had a son. His wife and son died, and he then lived alone in Ranipur Gaur. He was present during a quarrel being settled by the then headman, Jamadar Singh. Durga Lal indulged in an argument with Jamadar Singh, which was taken as an insult by Jamadar Singh's supporters; consequently they had Durga Lal shot on July 7, 1985.

Connections Between the Families Concerned

Both families concerned belonged to the same caste. Kusum's parents lived in the same village where Durga Lal lived and died. Durga Lal had friendly relations with Kusum's parental family. Kusum was visiting her parents when Durga Lal was murdered but she did not see his body.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Yashbir

At the age of about 1½, Yashbir said that he had a sister Moorkali and that Naresh and Kalyan had killed him with a gun. Yashbir also mentioned an uncle and aunt who were in Ranipur Gaur. When Yashbir visited his maternal grandparents (who lived in Ranipur Gaur) he recognized and spoke with Moorkali.

Yashbir's Behavior Related to the Previous Life

Yashbir was afraid of revolvers and guns up to the age of about 5 years. He also feared a man called Kalyan Singh, who was one of the accused in Durga Lal's murder.



Fig. 5. Birthmark on the neck of Yashbir Yadav as it appeared in March 1997 when he was 9½ years old. The arrow points to an area of approximately 1 centimeter by 1 centimeter which corresponded in location to a gunshot wound of entry on the neck of Durga Lal.

ashbir's Birthmarks and Their Correspondence to Durga Lal's Injuries

Figure 5 shows a hyperpigmented area 6 centimeters below the left ear as it appeared in March 1997. It was about 1 centimeter by 1 centimeter. It corresponds in location to a gunshot wound of entry on the left side of the upper neck; the postmortem report gave its dimensions as 4 centimeters by 3 centimeters.

A second mark on the lower abdomen was a round, slightly elevated hyperpigmented area about 1 centimeter in diameter. It corresponds in location to a gunshot wound of entry (also mentioned in the postmortem report) that was on the right side of the abdomen 2 centimeters above the right iliac crest. Its dimensions were given as 4.5 by 3 centimeters.

There was a third hyperpigmented area 5 centimeters below the right ear. It was about 1 centimeter by 1 centimeter in area. No wound corresponding to this mark was mentioned in the postmortem report.

Case of Kuldip Singh

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

Kuldip Singh was born on September 12, 1986 in the village of Osiyan, district Unnao, U.P., which is situated about 56 kilometers south of the large city of Kanpur. His parents were Kamal Singh and his wife, Baby. The family belonged to the upper middle socioeconomic class.

When Kuldip was born, he had several marks on his face and neck "as if attacked with knives." But the parents did not pay much attention to the marks until Kuldip himself pointed to them and said that he was attacked there, meaning in a previous life.

At the age of about 2¹/₂, Kuldip started talking about a previous life. He complained about the poor quality of his present house and compared it with the house in Chauthiyayi, where he said he lived in his previous life.

A man called Ashok Kumar, a resident of the village of Chauthiyayi, had been murdered on January 13, 1986 while returning home after shopping in Unnao. Kuldip, on the basis of his statements, recognitions, and birthmarks, was thought to be Ashok Kumar reborn.

I investigated this case in December 1995 and March 1997. At Osiyan, I interviewed Kuldip, his father Kamal Singh, his mother, Baby, and an informant named Guddi who came from a village near Chauthiyayi. At Chauthiyayi, I interviewed Ashok Kumar's parents, Bakhatbali Singh and Kalawati, his widow, and a cousin's wife, Uma Devi. I also obtained a copy of the report of the postmortem examination conducted on the body of Ashok Kumar.

Ashok Kumar's Life and Death

Ashok Kumar was born in July, 1955 in Chauthiyayi to his parents, Bakhatbali Singh and Kalawati. Bakhatbali was a jeep driver and also had land, which the family cultivated. Ashok had completed high school. He was married and had a child who died at the age of 8 months, six months after Ashok Kumar's death. The family belonged to the upper middle socioeconomic class.

Some time around 1980, there was a village dance in Chauthiyayi, which Ashok Kumar attended with his uncle Raguraj Singh. A man called Patangi Singh and his friends from the same village, who were also attending the dance, misbehaved with one of the dancers. Raguraj Singh and Ashok Kumar objected to their behavior; this led to a serious quarrel. The police came and arrested Raguraj Singh and Ashok Kumar and kept them in the lock up for interrogations. Bakhatbali later bailed them out.

Ashok Kumar was a sportsman and had participated in hockey tournaments at the state level. On January 13, 1986 he went by bus to buy some sports goods in Unnao, the nearest town. On the way back he was pulled out of the bus by Patangi Singh, who killed him with the help of some hired ruffians (called *goondas* in India).

Connections Between the Families Concerned

Both the families concerned belonged to the same caste, but they were not related. Baby said that she had not even heard about the village of Chauthiyayi or Ashok Kumar's death. The two villages, however, were about 5 kilometers away by a path. People from each village had married in the other one. Bakhatbali Singh had known Kuldip's grandfather and had told him about Ashok Kumar's murder.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Kuldip

Kuldip started talking normally around the age of 2 years and at about the same time began referring to a previous life. He began by comparing his present house with the previous one and treated his present parents as if they were strangers. He said that his name was Ashok and that his parents lived in Chauthiyayi. He added that his father's name was Bakhatbali and that Patangi Singh had him killed. He also mentioned details about the circumstances that led to the murder.

Some time in July or August 1993, Kuldip went with his mother to attend a wedding in their village. The bride, Guddi, happened to belong to the village of Hilgi, near Chauthiyayi. Kuldip recognized her and told her who he was in the previous life. The news reached Chauthiyayi and the two families met. First Bakhatbali came to visit Kuldip who was playing away from home. Kuldip is said to have recognized him immediately and ran home with joy to announce the arrival of his father (from the previous life). He told Bakhatbali

details about the quarrel during the dance in the village that eventually led to his death.

When Kuldip visited Ashok Kumar's family in Chauthiyayi, he is said to have recognized all the family members and persons known to Ashok Kumar and treated them appropriately. Kuldip pointed to a change in the structure of the house and also dug out some weapons from the garden that Ashok Kumar had buried.

Kuldip's Behavior Related to the Previous Life

Kuldip met Bakhatbali Singh with great affection and behaved toward him as a son. He told his mother, Baby, when she was preparing some cold drink for Bakhatbali, that cold drinks did not suit his father (Bakhatbali); he tended to catch cold. Kuldip was afraid of policemen when he was young. He also used to scream in his sleep as if he were being beaten up.

Kuldip's Birthmarks and Their Correspondence to Ashok Kumar's Injuries

In December 1995 Baby Singh (Kuldip's mother) showed me several sites where Kuldip had marks when he was born. The most important of these were



Fig. 6. Birthmark on head of Kuldip Singh as it appeared in March 1997 when he was 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ years old. It was a 1 centimeter by 1 centimeter hairless, slightly hyperpigmented and scar-like area in the occipito-parietal region.

on the right side of the neck, below the right ear, and on the left side of the front of the neck, near the midline. She did not mention then any birthmarks at the top or back of the head. In 1997, however, she drew our attention to two prominent hairless areas of diminished pigmentation, both in the occipitoparietal area of the head and slightly to the right of the midline. She said these had been present at Kuldip's birth.

The birthmark on the right side of the neck had entirely faded by 1996. Its location, however, corresponded to an extensive incised wound described in the postmortem report on Ashok Kumar. The birthmark on the front of the neck was still visible in 1996, but it was faint and has not appeared adequately on photographs. It corresponds to another incised wound described in the postmortem report. The two scar-like, slightly hyperpigmented hairless areas in the occipitoparietal region correspond in location to two other wounds described in the postmortem report. (Figure 6 shows one of these birthmarks on Kuldip's head.) Thus, if we include the faded birthmark on the right side of the neck, there was a correspondence between four birthmarks and four wounds described in the postmortem report.

Case of Ramniri Jatav

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

Ramniri Jatav was born in the village of Rathaudiya, Rajasthan, in November 1986 to her parents, Siriya and Rampati. They belonged to the *Sudra* (*chamar*, "untouchable") caste and were in a distinctly low socioeconomic class. Rathaudiya is a medium size village with a population of about 3000 persons; it is about 250 kilometers southeast of Jaipur (the capital of Rajasthan) and 120 kilometers southwest of Agra.

Ramniri was born with a prominent mark on her left foot and another on her back. She started speaking at around the age of 3 and first referred to a previous life when she was 5. She gave more details when she was 9. She said that she lived in Hindaun (a town about 40 kilometers south of Rathaudiya), mentioned the names of her parents, and said that she had been run over by a vehicle in that life.

A small girl of about 4, called Radha, was run over by a bus while crossing a road near her house in Hindaun. Both her legs were crushed under the wheels of the bus and she was taken to the hospital. She died several days later.

On her repeated requests Ramniri was taken to Hindaun and recognized Radha's house as her own in the previous life. Subsequently, the two families concerned met each other and Ramniri was said to have correctly recognized several members and neighbors of Radha's family.

I investigated this case between June 1995 and March 1997. At Rathaudiya I interviewed Ramniri's parents, her paternal uncle, a maternal aunt and a schoolteacher, Ramesh. At Hindaun, I interviewed Ramesh and Kamla Patwa,

the parents of Radha, and Babu Lal Dhakad, a friend of the family who accompanied Radha's mother to the hospital following Radha's injury. In addition, I was able to obtain a copy of the available medical records from the hospital in Hindaun where Radha was admitted following the accident. I also interviewed and discussed the case with two medical doctors who had attended Radha in that hospital.

Radha's Life and Death

Radha was the fourth of five children born to Ramesh Patwa and his wife, Kamla. As I mentioned, they lived in the city of Hindaun, about 40 kilometers away from Rathauiya. Radha's parents described her as a very sensitive and intelligent child. She was about 4 when, on April 4, 1986, she was run over by a bus while crossing the road near her house. She died on April 7, 1986 on the way to Jaipur where she was being taken for better treatment.

Connections Between the Families Concerned

The two families concerned in the case did not know each other and lived about 40 kilometers apart. Ramniri's parents did not seem to know about the accident before Ramniri spoke about it. However, Rampati's parents lived in the village of Jharera, which is about 3 kilometers from Hindaun. She visited it occasionally and might have passed along a road which was also used by Radha's family.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Ramniri

Ramniri started speaking clearly when she was 3, but gave indications of a previous life around the age of 5 when she was being sent to school for the first time. She pointed in the direction of Hindaun and said that she lived there with her parents. Subsequently she gave more details around the age of 9. She was studying in the third grade. Someone at school referred to her as a *Chamar*, (low caste) and she resisted this. She said that she belonged to Patwa, a slightly higher caste, that her name was Radha, and that her parents were Kamala and Ramesh. She also mentioned that she was run over by a vehicle.

Ramniri's Behavior Related to the Previous Life

From her early childhood Ramniri was observed to be particular about cleanliness; she did not like to eat from a plate used by others or share her plate with others. She resisted helping with the household chores and kept some distance from her family members, indicating her superiority. She did not like to be called a *Chamar* and said that she was a *Patwa*. She was afraid of riding in buses, a fear that continued until she was about 3-4 years old.



Fig. 7. Birthmark on the foot of Ramniri Jatav as it appeared in 1995 when she was 9 years old. It was a distinct hyperpigmented, 10 centimeters long and 1 centimeter wide area on the medial surface of her left foot.

Ramniri's Birthmarks and Their Correspondence to Radha's Injuries

I examined Ramniri's birthmarks in 1995 and again in 1997. She had a distinct hyperpigmented area that was 10 centimeters by 1 centimeter on the inner side of her left foot (see Figure 7). This mark corresponded to the skin that had peeled off Radha's left foot, mentioned in the medical report of the hospital in Hindaun to which Radha was first taken.

I could obtain no information to explain the round, scar-like mark on Ramniri's back. If her mother had not insisted that it, like the prominent mark on Ramniri's foot, had been present when she was born, I would have thought it the scar of a furuncle (boil).

Case of Rambir Singh

In the last case of the group whose subject had birthmarks I found two important discrepancies in the testimony of informants, and also a puzzling ambiguity in the evidence from records about the wounds on the previous personality. Although the case is atypical in these respects, it is well for readers to be aware that such discrepancies do occur from time to time in these cases.

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

Rambir Singh was born in January 1984; his parents were Khamman Singh and his wife, Subhadra. The family lived in the village of Bhudarsu of the Mathura District, U.P., about 63 kilometers northeast of Agra.

Rambir was born with two prominent marks on his body, one on the neck and another on the abdomen. In addition, his right ear was slightly deformed. Subhadra noticed the marks and the defect on the third day after Rambir's birth when she was bathing him.

A man called Siriya had been murdered on December 18, 1979 in the nearby village of Shershah. Later, on the basis of his birthmarks and statements, Rambir was identified as Siriya reborn.

I learned about this case in February 1995 and investigated it between November 1995 and March 1997. On Rambir's side of the case, I interviewed Rambir's parents, Subhadra and Khamman Singh, Rohtang Singh (the headman of Bhudarsu), Kamal Singh (Khamman Singh's cousin), one of Rambir's aunts, Kamla, and Rambir himself. On Siriya's side of the case, I interviewed his younger brother Hardu and his oldest son Bhagwan Singh.

In addition, I was able to obtain both the police report describing the injuries and the postmortem examination report conducted on the body of Siriya.

Siriya's Life and Death

Siriya was born around 1922 in a Thakur family at Shershah. His father was a farmer and his mother a housewife. He was the second of four siblings. Siriya married a woman named Kasturi and had four sons and a daughter. The family owned ancestral land and cultivated it. Siriya became headman of Shershah. He was also a wrestler, and both his ears had been damaged during wrestling. He was said to have been good at setting fractures. He was a religious person and used to look after a temple in the village. On December 18, 1979 when Siriya was meditating inside the temple, he was shot by a man named Rajjo and died almost instantly. He was 55 at the time.

The first important discrepancy in the case occurred in the statement by Kamal Singh (a cousin of Khamman Singh), who said that Rambir was born the day after Siriya's death. Kamal Singh also claimed to have said at that time that Rambir was Siriya reborn. We can let the second assertion go, but the first is definitely wrong. We know from the postmortem report that Siriya was murdered on December 18, 1979. If Rambir had been born the day after, or even within a month or two of, Siriya's death, he would have been more than 17 years old in March 1997, when I last saw him. His parents said he was born in January 1984, and although they had no records of his birth, Rambir's stature in March 1997 was not greater than would be expected of a boy 13 years old. When Rambir began to speak about the life of Siriya, at least 7 years had elapsed since Siriya's death. At that time, Kamal Singh must have disremem-

bered dates, possibly with the unconscious motive of giving himself a prominent role in the case.

Connections Between the Families Concerned

The two families concerned lived about 2.5 to 3 kilometers apart. Rambir's family belonged to a slightly lower caste than that of Siriya. However, they were acquainted and used to attend social functions in each other's village.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Rambir

Between the ages of 2¹/₂ and 3 Rambir began talking normally, and at about the same time started talking about a previous life. He mentioned the name Siriya and the names of all five of Siriya's children. In addition, he mentioned how and by whom Siriya's life was terminated.

When Rambir was about 6 or 7 years old, a man called Lal Singh, who was an ice candy seller and a resident of the village of Shershah, passed through the village of Bhudarsu. Rambir is said to have recognized him; Lal Singh then informed Siriya's family about Rambir, and the two families met. Rambir was credited with having correctly recognized Siriya's daughter and many other members of the family and the village.

Rambir's Behavior Related to the Previous Life

As a young child Rambir used to perform certain exercises like those of wrestlers. None of his brothers had any interest in wrestling. Rambir also showed an inclination toward religiosity by quickly learning to recite Hanuman Chalisa, a religious poem, which no other child in family knew or recited. Rambir was afraid to go alone to Shershah until February 1995.

Rambir's Birthmarks and Their Correspondence to Siriya's Injuries

Rambir's mother, Subhadra, noticed two marks on his body within the first three days after his birth. One was on his neck and another on the right side of his abdomen. Figure 8 shows the birthmark on the abdomen.

In addition, the cartilage of the upper part of his right ear seemed defective. It is important to mention here that Subhadra noticed no other birthmarks on Rambir. As I shall explain, Siriya had a wound in the left buttock, but Rambir had no birthmark there.

There was a second discrepancy here, in Subhadra's testimony about the location of the birthmark on the neck. In February 1995 she pointed to a mark in the middle of the front of neck, but when I returned in March 1997 she pointed to a mark on the right side of the neck. She said that she was sure that both the birthmarks and the deformity of the ear were on the same side and that I might earlier have mistaken another mark for a birthmark. It is possible that she pointed at the wrong mark when I first met her and later realized her mistake. I

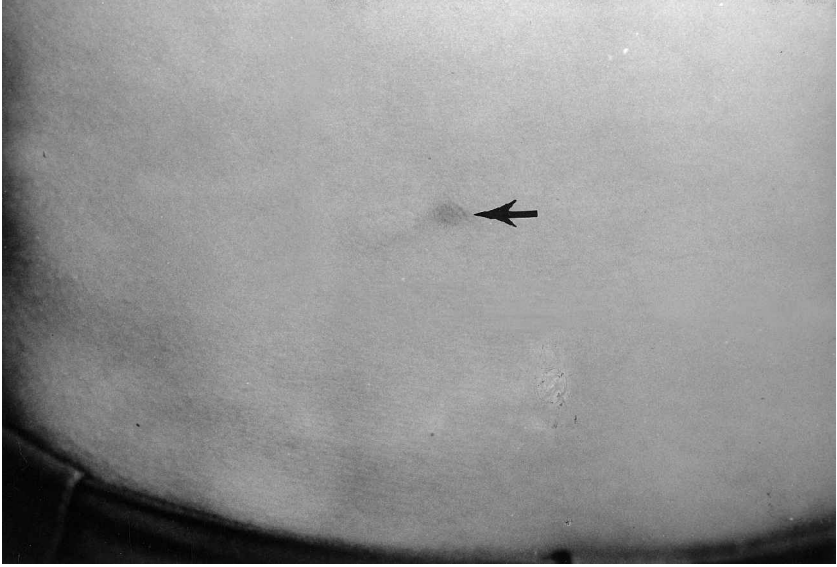


Fig. 8. Birthmark on Rambir Singh's right abdomen as it appeared in March 1997 when he was about 13 years old. It was 0.3 centimeters by 0.5 centimeters, hypopigmented and slightly depressed in the center

find it difficult to believe that she obtained information about the location of the wounds on Siriya's body and later showed me another mark that corresponded to a wound on Siriya.

The birthmark on the right side of Rambir's neck was still barely visible in March 1997. (It has not become visible in photographs.) It corresponded in location with one of the shotgun wounds described in the postmortem report as being on the upper and outer part of the neck, 4.5 centimeters below the right ear.

The physicians who perform autopsies on persons murdered in Indian villages are usually civil surgeons employed in government hospitals; they are not trained in forensic pathology. Their task is to determine the immediate cause of the victim's death. They do not try to understand the order in which several wounds were made. They do try, however, to distinguish wounds of entry and wounds of exit.

In the present case, the police examined the body and sketched the locations of wounds on the right side of the neck (the one described above), on the right side of the abdomen, and on the left buttock (gluteal region). It seemed to the police that the wound on the abdomen was the wound of entry and that in the buttock the wound of exit. The postmortem report gave a contrary opinion, stating that the wound on the right side of the abdomen was a wound of exit and that on the left buttock the wound of entry.

As mentioned before, I learned from informants that Siriya was meditating when he was killed. He was therefore sitting down, probably with his legs crossed in front of him. If this is correct, he could not have been shot in the buttock before being disabled. He might have been shot first in the neck. He would probably have rolled over onto the ground and a second shot could then have been aimed at the buttock. A shot entering the left buttock and exiting the right abdomen would require one or the other of two conditions. Either Siriya, after being wounded in the neck, somehow landed on his right side and stayed there until the second shot was fired from above him into his exposed left buttock; or he fell on his face and the assailant then crouched down and delivered the second shot into the left buttock.

Neither of these reconstructions seem plausible. What would be the point of shooting Siriya in the buttock? It makes more sense to suppose that the murderer aimed first at Siriya's abdomen, shooting from above down. This shot would have disabled him and the second shot could have been aimed at his head or neck. This reconstruction of the crime helps us to understand why Rambir had a birthmark on the right abdomen but none in his buttock.² I should emphasize, however, that the sequence of shots that makes most sense to me does not agree with the postmortem report, although it does agree with the police report.

Other Physical Similarities Between Rambir and Siriya

In addition to the birthmarks there were some other physical resemblances between Rambir and Siriya. According to Bhagwan Singh, the oldest son of Siriya, Rambir resembled Siriya in complexion (both were darker than other members of their families), in general body build, and in the shape of their noses. Both were of medium height and both had a style of walking with head and eyes down.

I shall next present case reports of two cases wherein the subjects had prominent birth defects. Birth defects (as opposed to birthmarks) require special consideration as to their etiology. Unlike birthmarks, much is known about physical factors that can induce birth defects: genetic factors, teratogens such as alcohol and other drugs, and infectious diseases such as rubella (German measles). In both these cases I checked for these factors, and others, such as any trauma or exposure to X-rays during pregnancy. There was no evidence of any of these factors.

²Stevenson (1997) has discussed the importance of the first wound, occurring as a shock, in the generation of birthmark in these cases. He described a case parallel to that of Rambir. That of Yahya Balci, who had a birthmark corresponding to the gunshot wound of entry in the person whose life he remembered but none (or possibly a faint one that faded away) corresponding to the wound of exit.

Case of Giriraj Soni

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

Giriraj Soni was born in March 1979 in the village of Morhi, in the district of Shajapur, Madhya Pradesh. He was the youngest son of his parents, Madan Lal Soni and his wife, Kamla Bai. Altogether they had seven children: 4 sons and 3 daughters. Giriraj's delivery was normal; a midwife under the supervision of a trained nurse conducted it at home. He was born with a severe defect of the back (kyphoscoliosis) and also had birth marks on his head, abdomen, and arm.

Giriraj started speaking between the ages of 2 and 2½ years. He began standing and walking late, at around 4 years, due perhaps to his birth defects. At about the same time he started making statements about a previous life. Giriraj said that he was Subhan Khan of Amla and that he had a wife and children there.

Subhan Khan, a resident of Amla, had been murdered in July, 1978 along with his oldest son. His murder became well known in the locality. Amla is 27 kilometers southwest of Morhi.

Hoorai Bai, the widow of Subhan Khan, heard about Giriraj's claims and went to meet him at his house in Morhi. Giriraj is said to have recognized her and displayed certain behavior and knowledge of events which convinced Hoorai Bai that he was her husband reborn. She continued to visit Giriraj's family for almost 10 years until the family went to live with his grandparents in the village of Boorha Fatehgarh, in the district of Jhalawar, Rajasthan.

I learned about this case in November, 1986 and began investigating it in November, 1987. I continued to work on the case intermittently until March 1997. I interviewed Giriraj, his paternal grandmother, Bhanwara Bai, his maternal grandfather, Gopi Lal, his mother, Kamla Bai, his sister, Radha, and his maternal uncle, Ram Lal. On the side of Subhan Khan I interviewed his widow, Hoorai Bai, and his cousin, Imran Khan.

I interviewed the nurse who had supervised the delivery of Giriraj, and three independent informants who were acquainted with or knew of Subhan Khan. The informants in this case were scattered over different parts of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. I was also able to consult with an orthopedic surgeon and a physician regarding Giriraj's principal malformation. In addition, I was able to obtain both the police report describing the injuries and the postmortem examination report conducted on the body of Subhan Khan.

Subhan Khan's Life and Death

Subhan Khan was born around 1918 in Agar, M.P. He was a Moslem. After his first wife died he married Hoorai Bai. He lived with his family in Amla until the end of his life. He had one son, Mohammed Hussein, from his first marriage and nine children from the second one. He was quite healthy and had no

physical defect. Subhan Khan belonged to the weavers' community but never worked at his caste occupation. He had some cultivable land which he had taken by force. He was not educated and mainly indulged in robbing and bullying other persons. He had even attacked some police officers and been convicted for that. Many people were troubled by Subhan Khan's misconduct, but were not able to fight him individually. Finding a suitable opportunity on July 11, 1978, several people got together and attacked him and his eldest son, Mohammed Hussein, with heavy batons (called *lathis* in India), stones, and swords; both of them were killed. Subhan Khan was about 60 years old at the time of his death.

Connections Between the Families Concerned

The families concerned lived about 27 kilometers apart and belonged to different religions. Giriraj's family were Hindus and that of Subhan Khan were Moslems. Because of his notoriety Subhan Khan was known in Morhi and had some relatives there, but the two families were not acquainted. However, when Subhan Khan was murdered, many people from Morhi, including Giriraj's parents, went to see his dead body. Also, Giriraj's parents occasionally passed through Amla when they traveled to Agar.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Giriraj

Giriraj started speaking about a previous life between the ages of 2 and 2½ years. He mentioned the name of the person he had been as Subhan Khan and also the name of the place where he lived with his wife and children in that life. He also described despicable activities he indulged in as Subhan Khan and how he had been killed. He recognized the house of Subhan Khan when he passed through Amla with his father. Giriraj stopped talking spontaneously about the previous life around the age of 7. Nevertheless, when I met him in 1994 — he was then 15 — he still claimed to remember how he had been killed in the previous life.

Giriraj's Behavior Related to the Previous Life

Giriraj showed behavior that was unusual in his family. As a young child he used to assume the posture of saying *Namaz* (Moslem prayers); he continued to do this up to the age of about 7 years. Giriraj was considered quite crude in personal habits by his family members. "He breaks bread with both hands and eats like uncivilized persons." Although the family is vegetarian, Giriraj used to ask for meat and told the family how to cook it. Unlike other members of the family, he was stubborn and wanted things his way. He also had the habit of stealing articles from home; none of his other siblings did this. He had no interest in going to school and left it after the first two years; all his brothers had completed middle school. According to Hoorai Bai, there also was some facial similarity between her husband and Giriraj.

Giriraj's Birthmarks and Birth Defects and Their Correspondence to Subhan Khan's Injuries

Giriraj had two upper and two lower teeth when he was born. He was also born with a prominent deformity of the back and chest. I sought the opinion of a senior orthopedic surgeon at the civil hospital, Jhalawar concerning his case. An X-ray of the spine (taken on February 2, 1994) was interpreted by the surgeon as "congenital (idiopathic) cervico-thoracic-lumbar scoliosis with kyphosis." On the advice of a physician in the same hospital, I arranged to have an ultrasonographic examination done of Giriraj's internal organs. This was grossly normal, except for the left lung, which was smaller than the right one. Giriraj was judged to have a 60% disability and to be unfit for any regular occupation.

The anterior part of Giriraj's left chest looked as if it had been battered in. The pelvis was tilted so much that the left iliac crest was abnormally elevated (Figure 9). The concavity of the left anterior chest corresponds to fractures of the left 5th and 6th ribs reported in the postmortem report on Subhan Khan.

Giriraj had another birth defect in the midline of the occipital region of his head. The abnormality was a soft, protruding mass, measuring about 3 centimeters in width and 2 centimeters in length. It was hairless and painful when pressed. (Giriraj experienced pain in this mass when he slept on his back.)

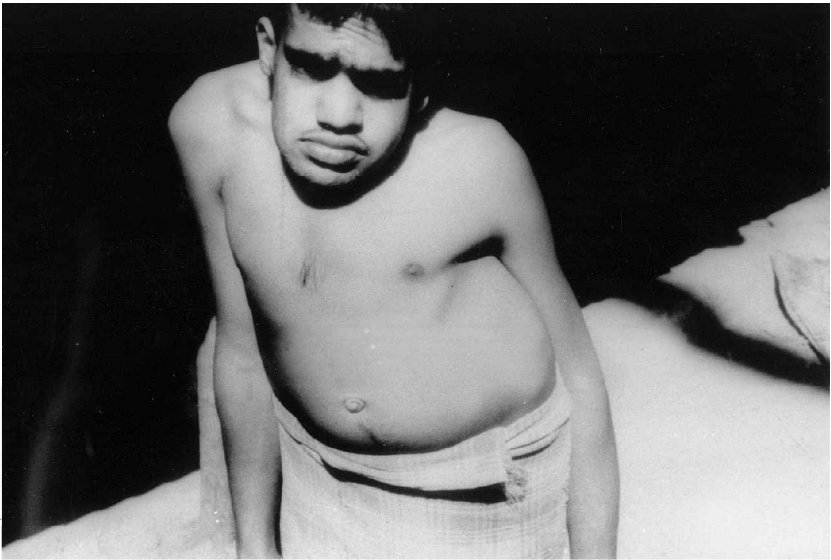


Fig. 9. Giriraj Soni's left chest as it appeared in March 1997. The anterior part of his chest appeared badly impaired.

This defect may be a meningocele, and I hope to have this conjecture verified (or replaced by another diagnosis) when arrangements can be made for Giriraj to be examined at a medical center. This defect corresponds in location to an incised wound noted in the postmortem report “near the midline on the occipital region of the head.” It is shown in Figure 10.

Giriraj also had two scar-like hairless areas on the left parietal region of his head. One was roundish in shape and about 2 centimeters in diameter. The other was lenticular in shape and measured about 1 centimeter in length and 0.2 centimeters in width. These birthmarks correspond in approximate location to two incised wounds described in the postmortem report as being 5 and 8 centimeters from the left ear, one in the occipital region, the other in the parietal region.³



Giriraj was born circumcised. This congenital circumcision counts as a

Fig. 10. The back of Giriraj Soni's head as it appeared in March 1997. There was a soft hairless, protruding mass, measuring 3 centimeters by 2 centimeters in the midline of the occipital region of his head.

³There were therefore three birthmarks on the top and back of Giriraj's head; the postmortem report described five incised wounds in the same region of Subhan Khan's head. One might then expect some correspondence by chance between five wounds and three birthmarks. In this case, however, the report was more precise than such reports usually are in locating the wounds on Subhan Khan's head; and the correspondence in location of three of them to birthmarks on Giriraj seems adequately close to exclude

⁴Stevenson (1997) has described other cases of congenital circumcision in both Moslem and Hindu subjects who have claimed to remember the previous lives of Moslems.

significant birth defect. Subhan Khan, as a Moslem, would have been circumcised. Hindus are not ordinarily circumcised.⁴

Case of Ranbir Singh

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

Ranbir Singh was born on December 23, 1990 in the village of Basai, district Etah, U.P. His parents were Shiv Singh and his wife, Mithilesh; they were Hindus. Ranbir's father had completed high school; his mother was functionally literate.



Fig. 11. Ranbir Singh at his home in February 1994. His right hand and distal fourth of his right forearm was missing. His left hand was normal.

Ranbir was born without his right hand and the distal fourth of his right forearm (Figure 11). His parents thought that this defect was God's will, and they did not connect it to a previous life until Ranbir himself, at the age of about 2, began to make statements about one. His statements included the names of persons related to a deceased man named Idrish whose life he claimed to remember, as well as the name of the village where Idrish had lived.

Idrish was a Moslem who lived and died in the village of Gadka, about 2 kilometers from Basai. He worked as a farmer and laborer. On an occasion when he was working with a fodder-cutting machine, his right hand became caught in the machinery and was badly mangled. As a result of his injury he lost a major part of that hand. He recovered, however, and later worked as a watchman in a brick kiln near Basai. He died of unrelated causes on June 15, 1983.

I investigated this case between February 1994 and November 1995. On Ranbir's side of the case, I interviewed his father, Shiv Singh, and his mother, Mithilesh. On Idrish's side of the case, I interviewed Idrish's widow, Vakilan, one of his daughters, Tehmin, and some other members of his family. At Gadka, I also interviewed three more informants, including Idrish's earlier employer who owned the fodder-cutting machine involved in Idrish's injury.

Idrish's Life and Death

Idrish was born about 1923. He married a woman named Vakilan and had four sons and two daughters. He was employed as a helper to feed fodder into an electric chopping and grinding machine.

In 1962 his right hand was caught in the fodder-cutting machine and his fingers were badly mangled. He was sent to Fatehgarh, a large city where the medical facilities were better than those in nearer towns. The injury was treated there but his hand was left severely deformed. He lost all his fingers up to the palm. They were either torn off by the machinery or amputated during the repair. (I did not obtain a medical report in this case.) Idrish did not, at least publicly, brood much over the loss of his fingers. Although he was able to carry out essential activities using his deformed hand, he apparently could not use it for heavy work. Therefore, he started working as a watchman at a brick-kiln near Basai. He died at the age of about 60 of an unspecified gastrointestinal illness.

Connections Between the Families Concerned

The families concerned in this case lived about 2 kilometers apart. Although himself a Moslem, Idrish made friends with Shiv Singh's parents when he started working as a watchman near Basai. He used to visit them sometimes and deposit part of his savings with Shiv Singh's mother. His daughter, Tehmin, was also married in that village.

Statements and Recognitions Made by Ranbir

Ranbir said that he was Idrish, and that he came from the village of Gadka. He added that he had a wife who was hard of hearing and that they had five sons and two daughters. (Idrish's family mentioned only 4 sons; it is possible that they had lost a son which they did not mention; I did not check about this.) He said that he was a watchman at a brick kiln. All these statements were correct for the life of Idrish.

On Ranbir's insistence, Shiv Singh informed Tehmin, Idrish's daughter, about Ranbir's claims. She came to see Ranbir and the two families concerned thus met. Ranbir was said to have correctly recognized members of Idrish's family and behaved appropriately toward them.

Ranbir's Behavior Related to the Previous Life

Ranbir asked for meat whereas other members of the family did not eat meat; they ate eggs only. Ranbir could recognize the Moslem prayers when they were started in the village and also assumed the posture of saying *Namaz*. In addition, he did not mind eating left over food from other persons' plates or drinking tea left over in a cup. His family considered this a Moslem characteristic. Ranbir was particularly affectionate toward Tehmin. Idrish had been fond of Tehmin.

Ranbir also asked his grandmother to return money that he claimed to have deposited with her (as Idrish in the previous life).

Ranbir's Birth Defect and Its Correspondence to Idrish's Injury

Idrish's right hand was mangled in the machine; only a part of his palm and thumb remained intact. Although medical records were not studied, all informants agreed about the extent of damage to Idrish's hand. Ranbir was born without his right hand and the distal part of the right forearm (Figure 11). The extent of damage was far greater than Idrish's deformity.⁵

Discussion

I believe that the cases reported in this paper were authentic, by which I mean that the informants gave me accounts that were adequately close to what actually happened in the events they were reporting.

Certainly some of the details, such as the dates of birth of the subjects, might have been unreliable in some cases as no written accounts were kept. Other dates, however, were precise because many of them were derived from medical records, such as postmortem reports. Also, I found the accounts of

⁵Stevenson (1997) has suggested that a disturbance of a morphogenetic field may account for cases in which the birth defect is more extensive than the damaged tissues to which it corresponds. He described several cases for which this concept may be applicable, including that of Lekh Pal Jatav, also in India, who had a birth defect of one hand that corresponded to amputations of the fingers by a fodder-cutting machine.

different informants for a single case to agree in general, even though they may have disagreed about some details.

I believe that there is a satisfactory correspondence between the birthmarks (and birth defects) on the subjects of these cases and wounds on the persons whose lives the subjects claimed to remember. In 7 of the 10 cases here presented a medical document described the location of the corresponding wounds. How are we to explain such correspondences? I propose to consider several possible interpretations: chance, maternal impressions, super-*psi*, possession, and reincarnation.

The hypothesis of chance supposes that because nearly everyone has one or several birthmarks, a correspondence between a birthmark and a wound on a deceased person could be expected to happen, perhaps quite often without need for another explanation. The parents of children who show such a correspondence would then make up a previous life to account for the correspondence and impose that on the child. The child might come to believe that he really had lived the previous life ascribed to him.

There are, however, three important weaknesses to this hypothesis. First, the parents of the children concerned in these cases lack both the time and the interest to devise an imaginary previous life for a child and even less time in which to coach the child to accept such an imposed previous life.⁶ Second, the birthmarks concerned in these cases are, with some exceptions, not like the "ordinary" birthmarks that almost everyone has. The ordinary birthmarks are usually small areas of increased pigmentation (macules), which are sometimes elevated. The birthmarks of the cases I have described are sometimes larger than the ordinary ones or of unusual form. (Those of Krishan Chaudhri and Ramniri Jatav are examples of such unusual birthmarks.) Others of the birthmarks I have described are hairless, scar-like areas. Third, in several instances a correspondence has existed between two or more wounds and two or more birthmarks; obviously the probability of a correspondence of two or more birthmarks with two or more wounds is much less than the probability of a matching between a single wound and a single birthmark.

The hypothesis of maternal impressions is based on the belief that a shock or other strong impression in a pregnant woman can produce a mark or other defect in her baby (Stevenson, 1992, 1997). This hypothesis could explain the cases where the two families concerned knew each other and the pregnant woman had seen the defect or wounds on the body of the concerned deceased person. It may be plausible to consider this hypothesis for five of the cases I have described. In the cases of Rajani Singh, Deepak Babu Misra, Yashbir Yadav, Ranbir Singh, and Naripender Singh the families concerned lived within a short distance of each other; in the case of Rajani, Mithilesh was actually living with Rajani's family. Except in the last case, however, none of the mothers remembered having seen the wounds on the concerned deceased per-

⁶It is nevertheless possible occasionally for an enthusiastic parent to impose a false identification on a child. The case of Kenedi Alkan provides an example (Stevenson, Pasricha, and Samararatne, 1988).

sons. Furthermore, this hypothesis requires some unusual motivation on the part of the subject's parents for imposing the identity of a person who might have been killed under unpleasant circumstances or who belonged to a different caste or religion. It also fails to account for the child's knowledge of events that were not known to members of his or her family.

The hypothesis of super-*psi* supposes an extraordinary ability on the part of the subjects (or their parents) to obtain all the necessary information from the minds of surviving relatives of a deceased person with whom the subjects are identified. The subjects described in this paper, however, did not show any knowledge of events outside what was known to the deceased; nor did they know of the events that had taken place after the previous personality's death. If the subjects had the ability to access information paranormally, they might be expected to learn about events occurring after the person in question had died. This hypothesis also fails to account for the presence of birthmarks and birth defects, which certainly cannot be explained by paranormal perception alone.

The hypothesis of possession implies that the subject becomes possessed by a discarnate spirit or entity which imposes its identity on the child. However, since the subjects would have been born with birthmarks or birth defects long before they started talking (and behaving) like the possessing personality, the hypothesis of possession cannot explain the presence of birthmarks or birth defects.

The hypothesis of reincarnation supposes the knowledge of events and other information displayed by the subjects as a continuation of the subject's own personal life, albeit at another point in time, and with only partial expression of the previous personality. The other normal and paranormal explanations have some merit, but none of them seems entirely satisfactory when account is taken of all the details of each case. The cases have much more to them than the birthmarks or birth defects. Any complete interpretation of a case must account also for the subject's cognitive and behavioral memories. If we consider the features in totality, reincarnation seems to take account of all features including congenital marks and defects. The reincarnation hypothesis offers a different, and perhaps better, perspective in understanding congenital marks and defects along with cognitive and behavioral features.

I wish to emphasize, however, that the purpose of this paper is not to press any explanation for the cases on my readers. Instead, I aim to put on record additional instances of correspondences in location between wounds on a deceased person and birthmarks (or birth defects) on a child who will later say that he or she remembers that person's life. The best explanation for these correspondences will emerge from further research. It is particularly important in further research for investigators to reach the cases sooner after their development than has usually been possible up to the present. Earlier investigations of the cases would permit interviews with the informants when their memories

were fresher; and they would also permit observing and recording the birthmarks before any significant fading or shifting in their locations has occurred.

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