

BOOK REVIEWS

Claims of Reincarnation: An Empirical Study of Cases in India, by Satwant Pasricha. New Delhi, India: Harman Publishing House. 1990, 304 pages.

This book is a careful, thorough report of the author's investigations of claims of young children who seemed to recall events of a previous life on earth. Some sixty cases from North India were investigated; fifteen were subsequently excluded from the sample, leaving forty-five, the results of which form the basis of the book. The author investigated these claims during the mid 1970s, and the results were reported in her **Ph.D.** thesis at Bangalore University in 1978. She is presently an Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences in Bangalore, India.

Pasricha defines the subject of a case as a person who seems to recall events of a previous life on earth. In all cases, the subjects made these claims when they were children, usually young children. The previous personality refers to a deceased person whom the subject claims to have been. The results of the investigations are emphasized rather than the individual cases themselves. Seven of the forty-five cases are described in summary form.

The author followed Stevenson's approach in interviewing the subjects, the subjects' families, neighbors, and schoolteachers, and the families, friends, and neighbors of the previous personalities. Municipality records of births and deaths were also used, along with police stations and hospitals for the dates and causes of death and for autopsy reports.

Pasricha has an important advantage over other investigators of cases in India in that she is fluent in the languages used in Northern India, and was thus in a position to conduct interviews without having to rely on interpreters. She was also able to establish contact in fifty-eight of the cases within six months of the receipt of their addresses.

The book presents a wealth of information. She reports that the children started talking coherently, on the average, at the age of two, and began talking about the previous life between two and four years of age. She analyzes behavioral features, such as unusual clothing and eating preferences, affections, and a desire to return to the previous personality's place of residence. The relative social and economic status and geographical locations of the subjects and previous personalities were analyzed. Phobias, animosities, and

birthmarks in the subjects were evaluated and showed significant associations with the modes of death of the previous personalities.

Reported changes of sex were rare. Only one of the 45 subjects claimed a previous personality of the opposite sex, the direction being from female to male. Change of religion was reported in only five cases.

The incidence of violent death in the reported previous personalities was 48%, as compared with 6.7% for the general population. This is consistent with the results reported by Stevenson, who speculated that a violent death may increase the probability of remembering a previous life.

Many of these children exhibited unusual animosities towards people still living. One little girl named Sunita was born in August, 1967. When she was barely two and one-half years old, she became frightened in the presence of a strange woman, running to her grandmother and clinging to her and saying, "She will kill me again." The woman who had frightened Sunita was later found to be the daughter-in-law of the person whose life Sunita was just beginning to remember. Sunita reported that her previous daughter-in-law had hired some "goondas" who had killed her, and described the futile efforts she had made to escape from the murderers. Sunita's mother said that when Sunita happened to see this woman later she would develop a fever. The name of Sunita's previous personality was Ram Dulari, and investigators later verified that she had been murdered in March, 1961.

Some subjects were born with certain marks on the body which informants said were related to wounds or other marks on the body of the previous personality. Most of these corresponded to fatal wounds inflicted on the body of the previous personality at the time of death. Information on birthmarks was available for sixteen of Pasricha's cases. In five of these cases, the correspondence between the birthmarks on the subject's body and the fatal wounds on the body of the previous personality was verified independently using sources such as autopsies or police reports.

In the case just mentioned, Sunita had two prominent linear marks running across the upper part of her right chest. Pasricha obtained the report from the autopsy performed on the body of Ram Dulari. The autopsy confirmed that she had been murdered by a bladed weapon, and the two lineal birth marks across the right upper chest of Sunita corresponded rather closely to two of the wounds inflicted on the murdered woman.

The reported duration of discarnate existence varied between 1 day and 224 months with a median of 14.5 months. There is an interesting sidelight associated with this. Members of the Jain religious sect claim that the period is nine months between the time of death and the time of rebirth. Two of the author's subjects reported previous personalities that were Jains (but reincarnated as Hindus). In both Jain cases, as well as another Jain case reported by Stevenson, the subjects followed the nine month rule. None of the other cases did.

The author includes a comparison of the results of the 45 cases she investigated with 50 cases studied by Stevenson. She also discusses the various alternative explanations for the behavior of the children: fantasy, fraud, genetic or inherited memory, cryptomnesia, paramnesia, extrasensory perception, possession, and finally, reincarnation.

Our understanding of certain aspects of human behavior may well benefit from investigations such as these. The author says, "If the results obtained in the present investigation support the hypothesis of reincarnation, they add to existing knowledge and understanding of human personality". It is just possible that an explanation for the occurrence of personality disorders, for which there is no present **satisfactory** explanation or treatment, may rest in investigations such as these.

The phenomenon of birthmarks is a subject that deserves the most careful study and thought because it may be the closest thing to empirical evidence for reincarnation that may ever be found. It may also point to a previously unsuspected mechanism at work in the process of evolution, whereby the death experience of an entity is reflected in physical aspects of a subsequent body in which the same soul is presumed to reside.

The organization of the book was mildly disappointing; the chapters were overly long and combined more results in a single chapter than I would like to see. The quality of the printing was poor, and there were a number of typographical errors in the text. The publisher should correct the typographical errors and print the book on a better grade of paper.

This book is a fine addition to the literature on the subject. I enjoyed reading it, and I recommend it without reservation to anyone who is interested in this phenomenon.

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Too Hot to Handle: The Race for Cold Fusion, by Frank Close. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, 376 pp.

Why would one want to read a book about "cold fusion?" First, to learn whether there's any truth to the scientific claim. Second, to learn what the episode has to teach about the nature of scientific activity in this scientific age and country where science and technology are so much in the public eye and enmeshed in arguments over public policy. Readers of this Journal will be interested for the corollary reason that arguments about anomalies display many points of similarity.