

Are Reincarnation Type Cases Shaped by Parental Guidance? An Empirical Study Concerning the Limits of Parents' Influence on Children

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Abstract—The author conducted a systematic survey of cases of the reincarnation type in a region of northern India with an estimated population of 8611 persons. The 91 respondents informed about 19 cases, suggesting a prevalence rate of 2.2 per thousand in this area. In addition to the characteristics of the cases, the author learned about the range and extent of dissemination of information about such cases. Information regarding the occurrence of particular cases traveled a maximum distance of 75 kilometers; in 94% of the cases it never went beyond 25 kilometers. Information about the factual details of cases traveled even shorter distances. Cases occurring within the same family or the same village showed considerable variations in important features, making it unlikely that cases developed later had been modeled on ones occurring earlier.

Introduction

Some critics have asserted that all cases of the reincarnation type can be explained in terms of socio-psychological theories (Brody, 1979; Chari, 1987). In other words, in a culture where a belief in reincarnation prevails, parents not only accept the claims of their children about remembering a previous life but also tend to influence and guide such claims. Some parental influence is known to have occurred in some cases. The cases of Kenedi Alkan (Stevenson, Pasricha, and Samararatne, 1988) and Necati Çaylak (Stevenson, 1980) provide examples of such influences. Also, investigators have occasionally caught parents prompting a child as to what he or she should tell them. Nevertheless, we have little information about the extent of parental influence on the development of cases. I had an opportunity to study the possible occurrence of such influence in two groups of cases in India and report my findings in the present article.

In 1979 a colleague and I reported results of a systematic survey of reincarnation type cases conducted in a region (Fatehabad, District Agra, Uttar Pradesh [U.P.]) of northern India (Barker and Pasricha, 1979). (A brief summary of the survey follows.) Our report was mainly concerned with the methodology we used and the prevalence of reincarnation type cases that we found. It also outlined some of the characteristics of 19 cases identified during the survey (hereafter referred to as Fatehabad cases).

Our report of the survey in Fatehabad referred briefly to the hypothesis that the expectations of subjects' parents could influence the features of cases and

might account for the recurrence of similar features (for example, age of the subject at first speaking about a previous life, and previous personality's mode of death) in many cases. This recurrence of features seems well established (Cook et al., 1983; Pasricha and Stevenson, 1987; Stevenson, 1987), but its explanation needs further study. Does it derive from uniform pressure by parents guiding a child as to what he or she should say about a previous life? The hypothesis of parental influence supposes that parents may assign to, and even impose on a child the personality of a deceased person (Brody, 1979; Chari, 1987). It also presumes a detailed knowledge of such cases and the deceased person on the part of the parents who are providing a model for the child. In order to examine this hypothesis (that the parents can influence and succeed in guiding the features of claims of their children about a previous life), we should know (a) how far the information about the occurrence of such cases travels; (b) to what extent the details of features of other cases are known to the parents of a subject; and (c) how closely the features of cases found in close geographical proximity resemble each other.

Summary of the Fatehabad Survey

The Agra District is located in the southwestern region of the state of Uttar Pradesh. Fatehabad is one of the seven tehsils of Agra District. (A tehsil is an administration unit of a district, roughly comparable to a county in the United Kingdom or the United States.) Fatehabad is located about 35 kilometers east of the city of Agra. The Fatehabad block is composed of 96 villages, out of which we selected 9 villages and every 10th household in each village by appropriate survey techniques. I interviewed one informant (generally the head of each household, listed in the voters' registration lists, or the person available if the target respondent was not available) from each household concerning his or her knowledge of cases of the reincarnation type¹. In all, I interviewed 91 informants; 37 of whom mentioned one or two specific cases in their own village. We started the survey in 1978 by selecting 1975 as the base year for it and applied the following inclusion criteria for the selection of cases: (a) the subject must have been alive in 1975, (b) the subject's statements about a previous life must have been corroborated by one or more persons, and (c) the subject should ordinarily be residing in a survey village. (We did not include in the final count subjects who had died or moved out of a village before 1975.)

In all, 26 cases were reported, by 37 of the 91 target respondents, of which 8 did not meet the inclusion criteria. The subjects of three cases had died before 1975, and the subjects of five cases had moved away and were living outside the survey villages. Of the remaining 18 cases, 4 parents denied the existence of a case in their family; we rejected a 5th case, since it appeared to be more a case of the possession type (the subject was born before the death of the previous per-

¹ I was accompanied by David Barker during the first two visits in 1978. Subsequently other colleagues accompanied me at different times.

sonality) than one of the reincarnation type. The remaining 13 cases met all the inclusion criteria. Six additional cases were reported by the relatives or friends of the subjects or by the subjects themselves, who met the inclusion criteria. Hence a total of 19 cases were identified in an estimated population of 8611 persons, during the survey, who were approached for further study.

Methods of Investigating Identified Cases

The methods of investigating these cases were the same as those that have been reported from the other parts of India (Pasricha, 1990a; Pasricha and Stevenson, 1979; Stevenson, 1974, 1975). In brief, they include interviews, often more than once, with multiple firsthand informants who are either related to a subject or qualify as well informed about him or her; similar interviews with persons knowledgeable about or related to the previous personality. (The term "previous personality" refers to a deceased person whose life a person [the subject of a case] claims to remember. The term has been used for convenience and does not imply any particular interpretation.) In addition, the examination of written documents, such as post-mortem reports, whenever these are available.

I investigated all the 19 cases in 1978 as thoroughly as possible. However, by the time of their investigation some of the cases were quite old, the subjects being already adults. Other cases were younger when I first contacted them. Their ages ranged between 3 and 64 years.

Subsequently, between 1979 and 1990, I interviewed several informants again in order to: (a) check the consistency of their information, (b) fill in the gaps in previously obtained information, (c) resolve discrepancies that became apparent from the review of previous data, and d) learn about the further development of the cases. I also interviewed some new informants when I thought that they could add useful information to the understanding of the cases. The present paper reports results from my later investigations combined with the information obtained during the survey.

Results

Characteristics of the Fatehabad Cases

All the cases were found in villages with a population of less than 10,000. Fifteen (79%) of the subjects were males and 4 (21%) were females; their median age at the time of the first investigation was 20 years (range 3¼ years–64 years).

The subjects started speaking about a previous life at a median age of 3 years and stopped talking about it spontaneously at a median age of 8 years. Information regarding social status for the subjects and the related previous personalities was available for 13 cases. Six subjects recalled a previous life in a higher socioeconomic class (the degree of difference being marked in one case, moderate in 4 cases, and slight in one case); 4 subjects remembered having lived in a lower socioeconomic class; and 3 subjects recalled having had the same socioeconomic circumstances in the previous life as in the present one. Twelve

(63%) subjects recalled the name of the concerned previous personality, 16 (84%) mentioned the mode of death in the previous life, and 8 (42%) remembered having died violently in it. The median age at death of the previous personalities was 41.5 years (range 9.5–80 years).

A person satisfactorily corresponding to the statements of the subject was found in 13 (68%) cases. Ten (77%) of these persons were known (at least by reputation) to the subject's family (one of the subjects remembered a previous life in the same family—the life of his older brother). In three cases, the families concerned had not heard about each other and lived between 20 and 40 kilometers apart. The median distance between the subjects' birthplace and the previous personality's place of death was 1.25 kilometers (range 0–1200 kilometers, 0 representing the same family). Except in one case where the previous personality died about 9 kilometers away from his village, the previous personality in all other cases died at the place of residence.

The Diffusion of Information About Fatehabad Cases

I questioned the informants who first mentioned a case about where the case was located and how they had learned about it. This permitted judgments about the diffusion of information concerning cases.

Of the 91 respondents interviewed for their knowledge of reincarnation type cases, 70 (77%) were generally aware that some people claim to recall a previous life. Fifty-one (56%) of them had known or heard of one or more persons who made such claims within or outside their village. In all, these respondents made 97 references to 58 cases. They made 47 references to 26 cases the subjects of whom lived in the respondent's own village; they made 18 references to 8 cases in which the previous personality lived in their village and was known to the respondents; and they made 32 references to 24 cases in which the subjects lived outside the respondent's village about which the informants had learned from different sources.

Information about the cases seemed to have spread over only a short distance. The maximum distance over which information about reincarnation cases was found to have diffused, was 75 kilometers. Of the 32 citations made by the respondents to the cases outside their village, 18 referred to cases within 10 kilometers, and 12 referred to cases within 10 and 25 kilometers of distance; only 2 respondents referred to cases 75 kilometers away from their place of residence. This means that in 94% of cases the information traveled no more than 25 kilometers, and the distance was often much less.

None of the respondents cited a case about which he or she had learned through the news media, and apparently none of the Fatehabad cases had been reported in the news media.

Parents' Knowledge About Details of Other Cases

If general information regarding reincarnation type cases does not spread far, information regarding details about them spreads still shorter distances. Even

within a subject's own village the information about his or her claimed previous-life memories did not reach every household.

To illustrate this point, I shall next present brief reports of several Fatehabad cases. I shall first present one case from each of two villages; after each of these reports I shall describe the main features of two other cases in the same village as the primary one. These examples will also show that when two (or more) cases occurred in the same village or even in the same family, the later cases differed from the earlier ones in important features.

Reports of Cases in Rasulpur

The village of Rasulpur is situated about 6 kilometers southwest of Fatehabad. Its estimated population in 1975 was about 1325. Three cases were reported from this village. The case of Daulat Ram, the first in the group, developed around 1945; the next case, that of Mahesh, occurred around 1970, and the last one, the case of Guddi, developed around 1976. I learned about all these cases for the first time in 1978. The subjects of the three cases belonged to the same extended family. In order to show the influence of earlier cases on the development of the subsequent ones, I shall present reports of these cases in the order of their occurrence.

The Case of Daulat Ram

The subject of the first case, Daulat Ram, was born around 1942 in a family of sweepers, one of the lowest castes in India. He was 36 years old in 1978. When Daulat Ram was about 3–3½ years old, he started talking about a previous life. He remembered the life of one Gainon Lal, a Brahmin (highest caste in the caste hierarchy), who lived about 200–300 meters away from the house of Daulat Ram. He made his first statements when Daulat Ram's father was making baskets for one Chet Ram, who lived next to Gainon Lal's house. Daulat Ram said, "Chet Ram is my neighbor." On further questioning he said, "I am Gainon." As the case had developed several years earlier, information regarding certain details, such as the duration of his continuing to talk about a previous life, was not available.

Gainon Lal died of some "illness" around the age of 80, after returning from a pilgrimage.

Other Cases in Rasulpur

In addition to Daulat Ram, two other members of his family claimed to remember previous lives. One was his son Mahesh, who was about 9 years old at the time of my first investigation; the other was that of his niece, Guddi, Daulat Ram's elder brother Ad Ram's daughter Guddi. In Table 1, I have summarized the principal features of the three Rasulpur cases: Daulat Ram's and the two that followed it. The second case might have been modeled on Daulat Ram's and the third might have been modeled on either of the earlier cases.

TABLE 1
Features of Cases in Rasulpur

Features/Subjects	Daulat Ram (Case 1)	Mahesh (Case 2)	Guddi (Case 3)
Year of occurrence	1945	1972	1976
PP identified	Yes	Yes	Yes
PP's age (yrs.) at death	80	65	72
PP's year of death	1942	1969	1974
S's year of birth	1942	1969	1974
Intermission	0	0	0
Sex of PP	Male	Male	Female
Sex of S	Male	Male	Female
Caste of PP	Brahmin	Thakur	Kachhi
Caste of S	Sweeper	Sweeper	Sweeper
Magnitude of change in caste	Marked demotion	Considerable demotion	Marginal demotion
Distance (yards) between residence of PP and S	200	50	300
S's age (months) when first spoke about PL	36	22	14
S's age (months) of stopping to speak of PL	N.K.	102	120
PP's mode of death	Natural	Natural	Violent
S recalled MoD	Yes	Yes	Yes
Did parents suppress S's memories?	N.K.	Yes	Yes
Did parents know of other cases?	N.K.	Yes, Case 1	Yes, Cases 1 & 2
Suggestion of paranormality	Nil	Nil	Nil

Note. S = subject of a case who claims to remember a previous life; PP = the deceased person whose life S claims to remember; PL = memories of previous life.

Mahesh was born in 1969. His parents were Daulat Ram, the subject of the just described case, and his wife Kapoori. According to Mahesh's parents (who disagreed about his exact age) he was still an infant when he first made remarks about a previous life, which were stimulated by witnessing a fight in the neighborhood. His mother had taken him on the roof to see a fight between the sons of Hodel Singh and Khajan Singh. Mahesh cried and said, "Khajan has beaten up my sons." He claimed to have been a Thakur called Hodel Singh (Thakurs are members of the second highest caste). Hodel Singh had lived close to their house, and had died of some unspecified illness around the age of 65.

Mahesh stopped speaking about Hodel Singh's life at the age of 6 or 7 when his parents took measures to suppress his memories. (It is widely believed in north India that children who remember a previous life, die prematurely. Therefore parents take different measures to suppress memories of a previous life in their children.)

The last subject, youngest among those cases in Rasulpur, was Guddi. Unlike the other two subjects in the family, Guddi was still talking about her previous life when I first began investigating her case. Guddi was the daughter of Ad Ram and Soan Devi, who had a low socioeconomic status.

Guddi was born at full-term after a normal delivery in November, 1974. At the time of birth her respiration was so weak that she was at first considered to be stillborn. Subsequently, she began to breath an hour after her birth, and was a healthy child afterward.

When Guddi was about 3 days old, her mother had a dream about an old woman of the village called Deva who had died about one hour before the birth of Guddi, told Soan Devi that her (Deva's) daughter-in-law had lulled her by strangling.

At the age of about 1½ years, Guddi claimed to have been Deva. Guddi described how her daughter-in-law had first snatched away from her hand bread that she was eating, and then choked her to death. In all, Guddi made 10 different statements, seven of which were found to be fully correct for the life of Deva. One of her statements was incorrect in that she said that her house of the previous life was made of bricks, whereas Deva's house was actually made of clay. One statement was partly correct; she said that her previous husband was 'in a ta1' (a tank, a stationery body of water), whereas Deva's husband had drowned in a river and died. And finally, her statement regarding the mode of death in the previous life may or may not have been correct. Deepa, Deva's grandson, said that Deva had died a natural death; but some of the informants, including the headman of Rasulpur and a daughter of Deva's, said that there had been a rumor to the effect that her daughter-in-law had choked Deva to death. Guddi stopped talking spontaneously about the previous life at the age of 10.

Deva belonged to a kachhi subcaste of the Sudra caste which is the caste of vegetable gardeners, and in the hierarchy of castes it is only fractionally higher than that of the sweepers. She lived about 300 meters from Guddi's home and died around the age of 72.

Comment

Mahesh had his father as a model in the family. Out of the seven features on which information for both cases was available, his case resembled that of Daulat Ram on three features namely, the intermission between the previous personality's death and the subject's birth, mode of death, and recall of mode of death of previous personality; but it also differed on four other features. Mahesh started speaking about a previous life at an earlier age, remembered the life of a person who lived closer to their house, belonged to a relatively lower caste, had had a lower socioeconomic status and had died at a younger age than the person whose life Daulat Ram remembered.

As Guddi was the youngest in the group, it may be thought that she might have modeled the previous life she claimed to recall, on the earlier cases of Daulat Ram and Mahesh. However, her case differed from Daulat Ram's in five features and from Mahesh's in six features. She claimed to have died a violent death and to have belonged to a caste only fractionally higher than her own. Daulat Ram and Mahesh remembered natural deaths and lives in much higher castes.

Reports of Cases from Partapura

Partapura is situated about one kilometer northeast of Fatehabad. It had an estimated population of 1463 persons in 1975, out of which 16 target respondent were selected. In all, five cases were reported from Partapura in 1978. The five cases were those of Harpiyari Parsar, Ram Babu Sharma, Mukesh Sajet, Ginna, and Dinesh Sharrna. Their cases occurred in 1926, 1959, 1968, 1971, and 1975 respectively. The case of Harpiyari Parsar was the oldest in this group. She was about 56 years, Ram Babu was about 21 years, Mukesh was 15, Ginna was 9, and Dinesh was about 6 years old when I first began investigation of these cases.

The Case of Harpiyari Parsar

Harpiyari was born in a family of Brahmins and lived in a village of Tiwaha, 12 kilometers southeast of Fatehabad. She moved to Partapura after her marriage around the age of 14 to live with her husband. Most of the adult informants for her case had died many years before I learned of this case, and the informants who were available were young children when it developed. From the available sources I learned that Harpiyari was about 3 years old when she first made statements about her previous life. She remembered the life of one Chhatariya, who had lived and died in a village about 14 kilometers from Tiwaha. Chhatariya was a Mallah (ferryman), a subcaste of Sudra caste, and died of "some illness" in her 40s.

When Harpiyari was about 3 or 4 years old, she told her husband of the previous life, about the money and gold she had buried, as Chhatariya in her house. (Chhatariya's son told me that their family did find gold and money buried in the house which they took out after Chhatariya's death.) Although the distance between the two families concerned was only 14 kilometers², the two families concerned had no acquaintance with each other and were widely separated socially. The knowledge of the buried money and gold on the part of Harpiyari was an indication of her having it through paranormal (non-normal) means.

The Other Cases in Partapura

In addition to the case of Harpiyari, four more cases were reported from Partapura. However, since reports of three cases have been presented from Rasulpur, an equal number of reports will follow from Partapura; for the purposes of showing the influence of earlier cases on the later ones, the reports of three cases would suffice. (Readers interested in features of all the cases are referred to Table 2 which provides features of all five cases from Partapura.)

Like the reports of cases in Rasulpur, I shall briefly summarize the features of the first two cases that developed after the earliest case (the case of Harpiyari), in order of their occurrence.

² The Western reader should note that 14 kilometers (about 9 miles) is really a long distance especially when one depends on his feet, a bicycle, or a bullock-cart.

TABLE 2
Features of Cases in Partapura

Features/ Subjects	Harpiyari Parsar Case 1	Ram Babu Sharma Case 2	Mukesh Sajet Case 3	Ginna Case 4	Dinesh Sharma Case 5
Year of occurrence	1926	1959	1968	1971	1975
PP identified	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
PP's age (yrs.) at death	40-45	14	38	65+	N.K.
PP's year of death	N.K.	1957	1958	1969	N.K.
S's year of birth	1923	1957	1963	1969	1972
Interval	N.K.	15 days	5 years	3 days	N.K.
Sex of PP	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male
Sex of S	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male
Caste of PP	Mallah (Fer- ryman)	Brahmin	Brahmin	Koli (Weav- er)	N.K.
Caste of S	Brahmin	Brahmin	Jatav	Sweeper	Brahmin
Magnitude of change in caste'	CP	Nil	CD	Mild D	N.K.
Distance (km.) be- tween residence of PP and S	14	0	25	1	N.K.
S's age (months) when first spoke about PL	36	18	60	15	30
S's age (months) of stopping to speak of PL	N.K.	84	120	36	66
PP's mode of death ²	Natural	Natural	Violent	Natural	Violent
S recalled MoD ²	Yes	No	Yes		Yes
Did parents suppress S's memories?	Yes, strongly	Yes, strongly	No	Yes, moder- ately	
Did parents know of other cases?	N.K.	Yes, Case 1	No	Yes, in an- other vil- lage	Yes, Case 3
Suggestion of para- normality	Yes	No	Yes	No	N.K.

Note. S = subject of a case who claims to remember a previous life; PP = Previous Personality, the deceased person whose life S claims to remember; PL = Previous Life; N.K. = Not Known.

¹ CD = Considerable Demotion; CP = Considerable Promotion.

² In cases where a person corresponding to subject's claims could not be identified, or cases where the Mode of Death (MoD) was doubtful, I have accepted the subjects' statement about the MoD.

The subject of the second case, Ram Babu Sharma was the son of Chandan Singh and Harpiyari (not to be confused with Harpiyari Parsar, the subject of the above case); he was born in 1957. One of his older brothers, who was also named Ram Babu (hereafter referred to as Ram Babu I), had died fifteen days prior to the birth of Ram Babu (hereafter referred to as Ram Babu II). Ram Babu I was said to have died of "acute stomachache" at the age of 14, following a brief sickness of about 12 hours. Ram Babu's younger sister Mahadevi had died and another daughter was born to his parents after her death, but she had no memories of a previous life. The family belonged to the Brahmin caste and enjoyed an upper socioeconomic status.

The night before Ram Babu II was born his mother had a dream in which two messengers of God came to return Ram Babu I to his parents. She also had another dream a few days before the birth of Ram Babu II in which God told her: "Why are you crying now? Your son has been sent back to you."

When Ram Babu II was about 1½ years old, he is said to have correctly recognized some photographs and other articles in the house. When he was about 3 years old, on questioning from his grandfather, Ram Babu II was said to have correctly led him toward the family orchards. Ram Babu II kept talking about the previous life until the age of 7, at which age his parents began to suppress his memories of the previous life. For this purpose he was rotated counter-clockwise on an oil-crusher. (This is one of the measures often taken in north India by parents who wish to suppress memories of a previous life in their children.) His mother had heard about one of the earlier cases in Partapura, that of Harpiyari Parsar.

The third case in Partapura was that of Mukesh Sajet. He was born in November 1963 in a Jatav subcaste (higher than the sweepers) family. Mukesh started talking about a previous life at the age of five and continued to talk about it until the age of about 10. He claimed to remember the life of one Shiv Charan, a Brahmin of a village of Nagaria, which is about 25 kilometers from Partapura. He said that he had died of poisoning in Calcutta (about 1250 kilometers from Agra), where he was employed. The statement regarding his mode of death could not be verified because Shiv Charan had been living in Calcutta, away from his family where he had died several years earlier.

Mukesh told one of Shiv Charan's younger brothers when he came to meet Mukesh in Partapura about the location of a tamarind tree near their house in Nagaria. (The tree had been cut after Shiv Charan's death.) This was considered paranormal knowledge on the part of Mukesh by the previous family as neither Mukesh nor any of his family members had ever visited Nagaria, before or after the development of the case.

Shiv Charan's sister Sushila, had married a man of Partapura and was living there, close to Mukesh's house. However, the wide socioeconomic gap between the families concerned in this case prevented any social connections between them.

Comment

Ram Babu Sharma's mother knew about the case of Harpiyari Parsar and yet his case differed from Harpiyari's case on seven of the eight features compared. In both the cases the concerned previous personality had died naturally. However, the two cases differed on other important features. Harpiyari remembered the life of a woman who had lived several miles away, in a family of much lower caste than her present one, and this woman had died as an adult. Ram Babu, on the other hand, remembered the life of his own brother, who was living in the same socioeconomic circumstances, and had died during childhood.

Mukesh had two cases available to him on which he could have, in principle, modeled his case. However, his case differed from both these earlier cases on six and nine features respectively.

Discussion

Several hypotheses for the claims of reincarnation have been put forth and discussed (Pasricha, 1990a; Stevenson, 1974, 1987). The hypothesis examined in the present article is that the cases of the reincarnation type occur due to parental guidance of a child to speak or behave like a particular deceased person. It supposes that in a culture with a strong belief in reincarnation parents may assign to, and even impose on a child the personality of a deceased person.

The influence of parents in shaping their children's behavior is recognized among developmental psychologists (Hetherington & Parke, 1986; Holden & West, 1989). Little is known, however, about the extent of this influence. In order for us to attribute a case of the reincarnation type to the influence of parental guidance, the parents of the subject should: a) know, or at least know about, the presumed previous personality and/or his family; and b) know the details of the feature of other cases.

For assigning the personality of a deceased person, the previous personality should have belonged to a higher socioeconomic class than the subject's (this providing at least a motive for linking the subject's family to that of the previous personality); and the interval between the previous personality's death and subject's birth should be short so that memories of the details of the previous personality's life and death would be fresh in their minds. Another motive for parents for imposing the personality of a deceased person on their child, may be their wish to have a family member back. However in the Fatehabad series only one subject belonged to the same family to which the previous personality also belonged.

Six cases (of the 19 here considered) satisfied these criteria. In five of these cases the previous personality lived within the same village; hence the previous personality was known, at least by reputation, to the parents of the subjects. The concerned previous personalities in these cases belonged to a higher socioeconomic status. All the six subjects were born within 2 weeks of the death of the previous personality (four subjects were reported to have been born within one day, one within 3-4 days, and another one within 2 weeks of the death of the previous personality). It is widely believed in the Fatehabad area that reincarnation should occur immediately or within a few days of the death of a person. The interval in the cases of the Rasulpur area was in agreement with this belief; whereas in those in Partapura it was not.

For the knowledge of cases, we need to examine the criteria set in the introduction namely, the distance over which the information about these cases travels; the extent of features of other cases known to the parents; and the resemblance in features of cases found in close geographical proximity.

We have seen, however, that information about most cases does not spread far and accurate information about specific details spreads even shorter distances. The results show that all the subjects of cases started talking about a previous life between the ages of 2 and 5 (a feature commonly found in other cases investigated in India and elsewhere), and they all stopped talking about it below the age of ten³. In other features, however, the cases differed: they varied, for example, in the length of the claimed interval between death and presumed rebirth, in the ages at death of the previous personality, in the relationship with the previous family before the development of the case; and in the modes of death in the previous life. The hypothesis of parental guidance could account for similarities in features of these cases but an explanation is needed for the differences observed in them

From the case reports and the Tables presented above, it can be seen that some parents of subjects did know of other cases, and it can be assumed that later cases could, in principle, have been modeled after the earlier ones. Nevertheless in spite of prevalent belief in reincarnation and occurrence of cases in the same general area (or even in the same family), the cases manifested some different features. Some or all of the differences could arise if the cases are in fact independent of each other and best interpreted as instances of reincarnation with different factors influencing the processes in different instances.

Another reason why it is unlikely that parents shape and guide the child's statements or behavior, is that in many cases in which the previous life presented by a child is uncongenial and even annoying to the parents. In many instances, such as those of change in religion (Mills, 1990a, 1990b), sex change, those having major caste differences between the families, and those having large economic differences between them, the child's statements may be considered undesirable. Also unacceptable are those in which the child talks openly about murders and village feuds in a way that may easily be communicated to murderers or enemies of the child's parents.

Furthermore, although Hindu parents of northern India almost all believe in reincarnation, most of them believe that a child who remembers a previous life will become ill and even die prematurely. An earlier study (Pasricha, 1990a) revealed that 23 percent fathers, and 27 percent mothers took various measures to suppress memories of previous life in their children.

In the cases examined in this paper, the parents of subjects had knowledge of what might have been a model case in six (32%) of the 19 cases. Yet, even in these cases, parental guidance, assuming it occurred, does not provide an adequate explanation for all the data. (For example, paranormal knowledge of the objects and events on the part of the subjects.) While taking up various interpre-

³ In another study I asked three questions from the respondents who were not related to the subjects of the cases. The questions pertained to the ages of the subjects when they would start talking about a previous life and when they would spontaneously stop talking about it, and to the mode of death associated with the recall of a previous life. Their answers to the first two questions were significantly different from the features of actual cases. Their answer to the question of mode of death and recall of previous life, however, was in line with the findings of actual cases (Pasricha, 1990b).

tations for the cases, the hypothesis of parental expectations should be considered seriously. In doing so, however, care must be taken not to interpret certain features in isolation. The best interpretation should be one that adequately explains most (if not all) of the features of a case and different explanations may be appropriate for different cases.

Notes

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