



REINCARNATION: HOW STRONG IS THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE?

by

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There is this doubt : When a man dies, some say that he lives on, yet others say that he doesn't; I wish to know for certain - what the truth is?
 --Nachiketa, in Kathopanishad [1].

If a man dies, will he live again?
 --Job, in Old Testament [2].

Who was I in my last birth and who I would be in my next birth?
 --A Jain saint, in The Acharang Sutra [3].

*You and I, Arjuna
 Have lived many lives.
 I remember them all :
 You do not remember.*
 --Krishna in Bhagavadgita [4].

Since time immortal man has been trying to decipher the *Book of Life* whose first and last pages are missing. Where from does he come? Where shall he go? He does not know. The one question -- a question of questions -- to which all human enquiry comes round in the end, is : What we are? Are we just conglomeration of certain physical forces, or we are a 'soul', a 'psyche', or an 'Atman'? Which belief is the correct one : From dust we came and to dust we shall return; or : We were in existence prior to the birth of our physical body and shall survive after its death? The belief which plays the most important role in our whole life is the one we consider to be true out of the two proposed above.

The idea of reincarnation is as old as human thought. References about it are found in Rig Veda of India which is considered as one of the oldest scriptures in the world : *When after death all the five elements dissolve among themselves, the "Jivatma" (individual soul) remains and this Jivatma takes to itself a new body* [5,6].

Besides, Rig Veda references are also found in other Vedas like Artharveda and Yajurveda. Later on, the idea was much elaborated in various Upanishads. Prominent among them are the Brihadaranyaka, Chhandogya, Prashna, and Kathopanishad. As a matter of fact, every Hindu scripture is full of references about it. The doctrine of reincarnation is a cardinal principle of Hindu religion. Same is true with regard to Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism -- though all the last three differ on many points with the Hindu-theory.

As Dr. Ian Stevenson writes, "...everyone outside the range of orthodox Christianity, Judaism; Islam and Science -- the last being a secular religion for many persons -- believes in reincarnation" [7].

As to the great writers throughout the world, Prof. Geddes Macgregor's observation seems quite appropriate -- "preoccupation with the reincarnational theme has been so widespread among notable writers, it might be easier to make an inventory of authors who show no interest in it than to make a list of those who do" [8].

Still, counting noses can never be recommended as a means for verifying any belief. Even if a belief is universal, it does not necessarily mean that it is true also. The truthness or falsity of any idea can only be determined by empirical evidence, for or against it, gathered through scientific methods.

Methodology

The first information of a case generally reaches me through personal communication, media report, or as happens many a times, the informants of one case report to me another case known to them. Reaching at the place for investigation, generally the place of the subject, is attempted as soon as possible. Very few investigators get successfully into a conversation with the subject with regard to the memories of his/her past life. Children are proverbially shy with strangers. I have seen some investigators making a compromise by recording what others said the child had told them. When I have to talk to a subject, (only when he/she is still recalling) I first make some visits during which I make some general conversation about unrelated issues and that too only with other members of the house. Only after two or three such visits do I start talking to the child. But in the beginning I only converse, I do not interrogate. Gradually, I divert the topic in such a manner that a sufficient stimulus stirs the child to talk spontaneously about the topics I want him/her to talk about. When the child starts narrating I become a patient listener putting small questions here and there. Many a times I find the child making one or two statements related to the past life and then playfully reverting to the present one. I wait till the 'spell' of the other life returns. Sometimes it does, some time it does not. During subsequent visits, again I first talk about general things and then I try without giving any indication that I am doing it purposefully, to lead him/her to the territory I wish to explore. During these visits the subject does not even know that I have come to meet him/her from some distant place and knows nothing what so ever about my purpose.

Still, before starting to interrogate other persons, the parents etc., I make few more visits just to observe subjects play and do other activities. This way sometimes I get first hand information with regards to the subject's likings-dislikings, manias-phobias, habits, attitudes and temperament etc. We need not, thus, depend only on reports of unusual behavior, untaught skills or unlearned language etc. attributed to the subject. Then visits are planned for interrogating other persons. I generally limit myself to those who were first hand witnesses for what the child had said or done. Besides the general unreliability of the informant some possible motives or bias due to some other reason may play an important role in distorting the real facts of a case. Keeping this in mind, I try to obtain information about the informants also. Repeated interviews and cross-examinations are also resorted to in order to gain reliable information. Many a times, it is very difficult, particularly in rural India, to obtain the exact date of birth of the subject. I try to look into horoscopes, personal-diaries, letters, municipal records, and school registers etc. for this.

If the child had never been taken to the place of past-personality (pp as I shall be calling him, henceforth), I persuade the parents of the subject to take him/her with me. On reaching a spot which is only a little distant from the house or shop of the pp, I leave the child to find out the place. Here utmost care is taken that no body who is already acquainted with the place is present in the group following the child. Even a small gesture, whisper, or withholding of a breath -- consciously or unconsciously -- may give some clue to the subject. Same care is taken when the subject is supposed to recognize some person related to the pp. Leading questions, in general, are avoided. Without the subject knowing that it has been done deliberately some old photographs, clothes, toys, and some other items having significance for the pp are brought within the range of subject's view. During the entire visit the presence or absence of emotions displayed by the subject are also significant. For ascertaining exact date and mode of death etc. I try to search out the medical and postmortem reports. These become all the more relevant in the case in which a subject has some birthmarks/defects.

Mostly persons related to the pp are highly critical while examining the subject's claim since it is of immense importance in their life. If an investigator is less so, he stands defeated, rather, he ought to be a greater critic himself than anyone else.

The Brief Summary of Six Cases

From the files of 514 cases of reincarnation-type I am presenting brief summary of six cases. All these cases are from those I have myself studied; two of these had already been investigated by some other investigators and I did my study much later. In the remaining four cases I was the first to investigate them; at least three of these were studied by other investigators later.

The Case of Raghunath:

In the early hours of Jan 14, 1973 the body of a 40 year old man Ahamad Cheeta was found badly mutilated along the road near Sendra, a village in district Pali of Rajasthan. Ahamad was a drunkard, and it was assumed he had died in a brawl with a truck driver the night before. Just after eight or ten days, one Mitthu Singh Kathat of Sendra had a dream in which Ahamad appeared and announced that he would be coming to him. About nine months later Mitthu Singh's wife gave birth to a boy who was named Raghunath. One day, when the boy was two and a half years old, he became angry at his mother and cried, "I am going to my house" and ran towards a nearby river. When this happened several times, the mother got serious and asked, "Where is your house?" "There, that side," said the child pointing at the river. "Which village?," he was asked. "Kesarpura," the boy replied, referring to a village on the other side of the river. When Raghunath was queried by Mitthu Singh, he gave the names of his past life's father brothers, cousins, friends, and neighbors etc. When taken to Kesarpura he recognized the house and various other places related to Ahamad's life. One evening, Mitthu Singh was serving wine to guests at his house. Everyone but the boy was handed a glass of wine. Raghunath resented not being served. "It's not for you. You are just a child," someone said, "It's very bitter also." "No, I shall also take it, I have been taking it," the boy insisted. "O.K., give him a sip," his father said. Taking the tumbler, the child raised his hand high and shouted, "Jai Mata Ji," and emptied the contents without stopping. Those who knew Ahamad remarked that he also used to take wine in the same manner. When Raghunath repeatedly recalled correctly the incidents and persons related to the deceased Ahamad, Mitthu Singh's curiosity subsided but he gradually felt more and more uncomfortable within. He felt as though the son born to him after four daughters was being lost in the recesses of a past life in another family. Consequently he tried to dissuade the child from further talk of previous birth by showing cold indifference, by bitter

scolding, even thrashing the boy when he talked about being someone else. One day when Raghunath was in the lap of his father and they were just to cross two women coming from opposite side in the local market, the boy suddenly leaped toward them. When his father restrained him, the boy shouted, "Let me go, they are my wives." Stunned, the women stared at him unblinkingly. They were told that the child had been talking a lot about his past life as Ahamad. "All right, tell us which one of us is your married wife?" One of the women asked. The child immediately leaped toward the woman who's name was Mahphool. "No, not this one, it was that one," the father said. But the child insisted and leaped into Mahphool's arms and embraced her tightly with tears in his eyes. When he refused to let go the woman, his father took hold of the boy, who caught hold of a silver ornament around the woman's neck and cried bitterly. Mahphool was impressed but not quite convinced, so she later met Raghunath in order to talk with him alone. After talking with the boy, Mahphool put a garland around Raghunath's neck and offered him a coconut. I first studied this case in 1978 when Raghunath was about five years old. I interrogated several witnesses during my subsequent visits in 1979, 1981, and 1984. Ahamad did have two wives. When I asked both of them whether they were convinced that Raghunath was really their husband in his past life, they replied emphatically: "Of course, yes!" No lady would ever take a stranger as her husband unless completely convinced about the truth of the claim.

The Case of Neera

I first met Neera, his father, mother, and a neighbor at a village Chang, in the district of Pali, Rajasthan on July 2, 1976. Since then, I interrogated a score of others connected with this case in 1979, 1980, 1984, and 1985. Neera told me that his name in the past life was Kajja. He lived in village Shyamgarh. He had two sons and three daughters. His wife's name was Kalli. He and one of his sons Babu were killed in a family dispute over a piece of land. They were assaulted by axes and lathis. Neera recollected correctly the names of most of the relatives of Kajja but forgot some and in a few cases he was obviously incorrect. He recalled many events from Kajja's life which were mostly correct. He was reported to have correctly recognized the wife, son and some other relatives of Kajja. But during my investigations he failed to recognize some importantly related persons. At Shyamgarh I found that there had really been a family dispute over a piece of land in which Kajja and his son Babu were killed. I went

to the related police station and after a long search traced out the record of the crime in which Kajja and his son Babu were reported murdered by a number of persons. Five of these were sentenced for a life-imprisonment. The date of murder was June 20, 1970. Sometime later, when all the culprits were released after serving twelve to thirteen years of imprisonment, I searched out two of them. After a long persuasion I could get a detailed account of the entire quarrel from them. I was told that Kajja was assaulted by axes and lathis. "We broke his hands and legs. He did not die immediately but remained lying unconscious under a tree for some time," Roda, one of the murderers, told me. From the concerned hospital I got a copy of Kajja's postmortem report dated 21.6.1970. The report mentions a number of wounds and fractures. Neera was born with a stubbed left hand. It appears as if chopped off at the point of mid forearm. With the background of many details matching correctly, we would expect the postmortem report mentioning a chopped off left hand. But, it is not so exactly. The report mentions "a contused wound 1 inch by 1/2 inches, bone deep, back, left-hand mid forearm." Could it be so, that after being dealt a very severe blow at the mid of his left forearm, Kajja felt as if his hand had really been chopped off? He might have had died with this impression in his mind and that had caused -- if it was really so caused -- the birth defect which Neera bears. The correspondence of the location of the bone-deep wound on the left mid forearm of the deceased and Neera having his left-hand by birth grown only up to mid forearm may not be ignored. (I am reminded of a person whose hand got disjointed from his shoulder in an accident. When he was being carried to a hospital he pleaded his attendants to pick up the 'broken and fallen hand' from the place of accident).

The Case of *Radha*

Sohani, a girl of fifteen from a village Jhadali (in district Pali of Rajasthan) had come to her maternal aunt's village Saradhana on a casual visit sometime in December 1971. One day when she was cutting some tree-branches and leaves for some cattle she fell down and was fatally hurt on the head, about two inches from her forehead, by a pointed stone. She died within five minutes. Just a few days later, the maternal aunt Phundi dreamt Sohani telling her that she was coming to 'Juri'. Juri is a relative of Phundi and lives in the same village Saradhana. About nine months later, i.e. in August 1972, a girl was born to Juri. The girl was named Radha. When Radha started talking she declared that she was Sohani of the

village Jhadali. Once asking for more vegetables and not getting it she threatened her mother Juri, "Give me more or I will go to my village Jhadali." Subsequently she made several verifiable statements relating to Sohani's life, including the manner of her death. She also described having lived a short life as a bird - 'Kamedi' – prior to her birth as Radha. I met Radha and her various relatives in Saradhana and Sohani's relatives in Jhadali first in 1981 and later in 1986. In Jhadali, Sohani's mother Hanja gave the details of Radha's recalling of her past life as Sohani and addressing her as "Ya" (mother) when she saw her for the first time. She also told us that Radha's face resembles much with that of Sohani. "Her hair and lips are exactly of the same sort," she emphasized. Another important feature of this case is that Radha bears a birthmark which was clearly visible when I saw and photographed her in 1986. It is at the same spot where Sohani is reported to have suffered the fatal blow i.e. about two inches from her forehead.

The Case of *Suwa*

Suwa Bilat was born on November 11, 1953 in a village Kanecha about 17 km towards South-West of Beawar (Rajasthan). I got information about him when I was investigating Neera. It was in 1985. Suwa was already 32 when I met him in his village. But he still bore several birthmarks, at least four of which could be seen well. One was on his right thigh and one on both the left and right hand. The most prominent one was on the back of his neck. I interrogated a number of persons at Kanecha and other villages where persons knew of the case as first hand witnesses. An old woman of seventy-five who had helped the delivery of Suwa told my assistant Vidya Rawat that the body of the newly born baby was covered with a number of scars. When Suwa was two years old he used to get very upset and enraged on seeing two particular individuals named Moti and Nimba passing along a street in front of Suwa's house. When asked about this unusual behavior, the child used to say that those people had murdered him and he will take revenge. "His eyes seemed to become red hot and he used to fetch some rod or stick and tried to rush towards them murmuring abuses," told Ganga, Suwa's elder sister, when we met her in a distant village Rawatmal in order to verify the information we obtained in Kanecha. She is about seven years older than Suwa and used to act as a sort of baby-sitter for him. Thus Suwa had spent most of his childhood with her. Hence she was supposed to know more about Suwa's behavior in childhood

than anybody else. I also contacted an old landlord of the area about whom I was told that on hearing about Suwa's recalling a past life he had called him to his palace and had interrogated him. From police records I verified that in the early hours of March 28, 1952, Maida (the pp) was in fact murdered by two of his own brothers : Moti and Nimba.

The Case of Sunita

The case of Sunita Khandelwal is an important one for several reasons. First, it belongs to that rare group of cases in which much of what the subject said was recorded prior to any attempt for verification made. Second, the families of the subject and that of the pp were residing at a distance of 480 km i.e. a 17-hour bus ride. Third, Sunita did not give any specific family names or addresses yet the case was subsequently completely solved. Fourth, Sunita bears a birthmark at the spot where she was fatally injured in her past life. Sunita was born at Laxmangarh in Rajasthan near new Delhi on September 20, 1969. The case came to the notice of Dr. H. N. Banerjee on Dec. 17, 1974. He immediately contacted Sunita's parents and recorded 17 statements Sunita made with regard to her former life in Kotah (a town in Rajasthan). Only after great persuasion could Dr. Banerjee take Sunita along with her parents to Kotah. On reaching Kotah, Sunita made a correct choice of road leading to the shop of the previous father. The owner of the shop confirmed all the statements made by Sunita. When taken to the house, she could neither recognize the brothers nor the mother of Shakuntala but could very well spot out Shakuntala in a photograph and could also recognize the spot from where she had fallen down. Sunita has a large birthmark on the right side of her head that looks like the mark of a healed wound, corresponding to exactly where Shakuntala received her injuries when she had fallen down from the balcony of her parent's house. I studied her case in 1986 and in 1997. I was informed that some of the personality-traits in Sunita are like those of Shakuntala. Her brother Ram Babu Khandelwal told me in April, 1997 that the family members of Shakuntala still treat Sunita as one of them and invite her to all the functions and celebrations of the family. Interestingly, he also told me that the parents of Shakuntala had once offered lacs of rupees (quite a huge sum) in exchange of Sunita. Sunita's parents politely declined the offer.

The Case of Shanti Devi

Shanti Devi was born in Delhi on December 11, 1926. Since four years of age, when she started speaking, she started talking about her *husband and children*. She said that her husband was in Mathura – a town 145 km from Delhi – where he owned a shop in front of the Dwarkadheesh Temple; and that they had a son. She also said that she was a Chauben (Chaubey's wife) and her name was Lugdi Bai. Her parents ignored her claims but she persisted. They thought it to be a child's fantasy but she insisted for a visit to Mathura. The parents became serious when she talked repeatedly about her past life and over time narrated a number of incidents connected with her life in Mathura with her husband. By the time she was six years old, she gave a detailed account of her death following childbirth. The parents consulted a family physician, who was amazed how a little girl narrated so many details of the complicated surgical procedures involved in a cesarean section. Shanti, however, never mentioned her husband's name up to the age of eight or nine. It is customary in India that wives do not utter the name of their husband. Even when specifically asked, she would blush and say that she would recognize him, if taken there, but would not say his name. One day a distant relative Babu Bishan Chand told Shanti that if she told him her husband's name, he would take her to Mathura. Allured by the offer she whispered into his ear the name Pundit Kedar Nath Chaubey. He wrote a letter to Pt. Chaubey detailing all the statements made by Shanti and asked him to visit Delhi. Pt. Chaubey replied confirming most of her statements and suggested that one of his relatives Pt. Kanji Mal, who lived in Delhi, be allowed to meet this girl. A meeting with Kanji Mal was arranged during which Shanti recognized him as her husband's cousin. She gave him some more details about her house in Mathura and informed him of the location where she had hidden some money. Pt. Kedar Nath came to Delhi on November 12, 1935 with Lugdi's son and his present wife. On seeing Kedar Nath she told her mother, "Did not I tell you that he is fair and has a wart on the left cheek near his ear?" After dinner Shanti asked Kedar Nath, "Why did you marry her?" referring to his present wife, "Had we not decided that you will not remarry?" Kedar Nath had no reply. Before retiring for the night he asked to be allowed to talk with her alone and the next morning declared that he was fully convinced that Shanti was his wife Lugdi Bai. Shanti's story spread all over the country through the media. When Mahatma Gandhi heard about it he called Shanti and talked to her and then requested her to stay in his ashram. (When I interviewed Shanti Devi in 1986 she still had the

remembrance of the incident). On Mahatma Gandhi's advice, a committee of fifteen prominent people was constituted to verify the claims made by the girl. The committee persuaded her parents to allow her to accompany them to Mathura. They left by train with Shanti on November 24, 1935.

Shanti was asked to guide the tonga from station to her house. On her way she described the changes that had taken place since her time (as Lugdi) which were all correct. She could reach to her house unguided. There, and later in the day, at Mathura she recognized both the father and mother-in-law of Lugdi and also her own parents, sisters, and brother etc. When asked about the money she had hidden, Shanti took the party to the second floor and showed them a spot where they found a flower-pot but no money. Later on, it was learnt that the money was taken out by her husband Pt. Chaubey after her death.

Shanti was then taken to the Dwarkadheesh Temple and to other places she had talked of earlier. Almost all her statements were found correct. The publication of the committee report attracted world wide attention. Many learned personalities, including saints, parapsychologists, and philosophers came to study the case, some in support and some as critics trying to prove it a hoax. I met Shanti first in February 1986. Dr. Stevenson had taken me to her (Dr. Pasricha was also with us) and then in December, 1987, alone. I interviewed her in detail about her past life memories and her recollections of Mathura-visit (in 1935). Then I went to Mathura and asked the various relatives of Lugdi Bai to describe the entire scene of Shanti's first visit to them in 1935. Lugdi's brother told me that Shanti after seeing some women there remembered her old friends and inquired about them. Similarly, Lugdi's sister informed me that Shanti told a number of womenfolk about Lugdi having lent them some money, which they accepted. I recorded all these interviews on video cassette.

During my investigations, a friend of Kedar Nath, 72-year-old Pundit Ram Nath Chaubey, told me of a very significant event, which I confirmed from other sources. In the late night interview -- mentioned above -- Kedar Nath had asked Shanti that when she was suffering from arthritis and could not even get up, how could she conceive a child. Shanti, a nine-year-old girl, described the exact position of intercourse with him. This left Kedar Nath in no doubt that Shanti was really his wife Lugdi in her

previous life. When I mentioned this incident to Shanti Devi she said, “Yes, that is what fully convinced him.”

Strong Features

Cases such as described above represent only the tip of an iceberg. We have a collection of 514 cases. Dr. Stevenson has a collection of more than 2500 cases. How do we explain them? Besides reincarnation, there are several other alternative hypotheses to be considered. Dr. Stevenson has discussed these in all his major works. The main among these are fraud, self deception, cryptomnesia, paramnesia, inherited or genetic memory, extra sensory perception, and possession [9].

For arriving at the best interpretation eliminating alternative hypotheses is one approach. A negative approach in a way. I am proposing a positive one i.e. of highlighting some aspects of these cases which could only be explained by the hypothesis of reincarnation.

1. *Remarkable uniformities* : Though cases are found in vastly distant countries and contrasting cultures, remarkable uniformities have been observed from case to case. The age of recall, age of forgetting, mode of death, emotional expressions, and longing for the relatives of former life etc., are some of the examples in which we find similar information in different countries.

2. *Profuse recalls and recognitions* : In some cases we find an abundance of correct recalls of events and recognitions of persons and places related to the pp. In our small collection we have 10 cases in which these recalls and recognitions exceeded fifty and in 2 cases the figure crossed one hundred.

3. *Knowledge about intimate, or secret events* : As we have seen above, Shanti Devi (at the age of nine) could demonstrate the special sexual position adopted by Lugdi and her husband in order to conceive since Lugdi was suffering from arthritis. A boy in Turkey [10] (studied by Dr. Stevenson) indicated a spot on the thigh of his wife of past life. A boy in India (studied by me) surprised everybody by saying that his wife had a mole on her thigh. Raghunath could also satisfy Mahphool his past-life wife, on the basis of intimate knowledge he gave to her when she met him alone. We have 23 cases on record in which the knowledge of some hidden objects, generally money or ornaments, was revealed by the subject apparently hidden by him/her in past life. In Rajasthan, where I worked for about 20 years, I found people flocking towards the subject as soon as a word reached to them, about the rebirth – usually

of an elderly person – hoping to obtain information about some treasure hidden by the pp and I learnt that sometimes the efforts were successfully rewarded also.

4. *Unusual behavior and habits* : When Rakesh Gaur (whom I first studied in 1976) was only 3 or 4 years old, his parents noted that when it rained heavily in the night he would suddenly get up and murmur, “O, Ram! What difficult situation my wife and children would be in, it is raining torrentially !” Similarly puzzled were the prosperous parents of a little girl in Sri Lanka when they noticed that she would put a little sugar in the palm of her hand and lick it as she drank the tea [11]. Later on, it was found that in the poor family of the pp it was the usual way of drinking tea. In India, the very idea of taking meat is highly repulsive to Brahmins, yet a little girl born into this family was asking for 'pork'. Her personal habits were also very dirty. She had memories of a past life in an untouchable caste [12].

5 *Phobias found in childhood* : Phobias for such simple things like water and curd, were also noticed in some children along many others displaying a marked fear for airplanes, lorries, knives, pistols, guns, and fire etc. (the list is very long). In Shamlinei Prema of Sri Lanka (studied by Dr. Stevenson) the parents noticed that “even before she could speak she. showed a remarkable fear of being bathed; she resisted with screams and struggling any attempt to immerse her in water... (about the mode of death in past life she said) that she went to buy bread in the morning ... the road was flooded. A bus splashed water on her and she fell into a paddy field” [13]. Sangeeta of Ajmer (Rajasthan) was reported to get frightened when any attempt was made to bathe her and whenever she saw a lot of water, e.g. a lake or a river. Usha, the pp, had been my student and I knew personally the tragic incident of boat capsizing in which she was one of the victims.

6. *Unusual craving in the mother of the subject for a particular food item during pregnancy* : A subject I studied in Jodhpur, Rajasthan showed an unusual fondness for spinach. His mother too had developed a strong craving for spinach during her pregnancy with the subject. The maternal grandfather, whose life the subject recalled, also had the same unusual liking for spinach. Dr. Stevenson has reported to have found the same phenomenon in Sujith Lakmal Jayaratne [14] and Gamini Jayasena [15] of Sri Lanka; Bonkuch Promesin [16] and Ornuma Sua Ying Yong [17] of Thailand; and Kumkum Verma [18] and Gopal Gupta [19] of India.

7. *Untaught skills* : In 1996 I studied a boy of about four years who could read fluently from books in Hindi and English and from scriptures in Sanskrit. His mother was illiterate and father also did not study beyond middle school. We have records of 38 cases of child prodigies, but out of these only six had some memories of a past life and these too not quite specific. But we do have reports of many children showing unusual talents/skills and having at the same time remembrance of a pp who had corresponding talent/skill. Bishan Chand of Bareilly, U. P. India played with ease on tabla (during his first visit to Pilibhit, the place of pp) although he had never seen them before [20]. "Playing well on tablas requires discipline and practice," Dr. Stevenson comments [21]. Corliss Chotkin Jr. of Alaska also displayed more than a mere interest in engines. He was never taught, but had some skill in handling and repairing them [22]. Pps of both Bishan Chand and Corliss Chotkin Jr. were reported possessing the similar skills

8. *Unlearned words and languages* : Laxmi Kathat uttered words of Gujrati language, which she could not have learned in a remote village of Rajasthan State. But most astonishing is the case of Ultra Huddar of Nagpur, Maharashtra. I first met her in Nagpur in 1976. She, under the spell of the pp (a Bengali woman who had lived and died in Bengal about 150 years ago), could speak and write in Bengali language. Interestingly, her vocabulary contained many a words which were in vogue only during that period and are almost obsolete now. (Uttara's case forms a part of a book in which Dr. Stevenson has discussed only one more case of Xenoglossy) [23].

9. *Prediction of rebirth* : Victor Vincent of Alaska, about a year before his death told his niece: "I am coming back as your next son. Your son will have these scars" [24]. Then he showed her two scars – one on his back and other on his nose on the right side of its base. About eighteen months after his death the niece gave birth to a son "who had two marks on his body of exactly the same shape and location as the scars pointed to by Victor Vincent in his prediction of his rebirth" [25]. Later the boy spontaneously recognized several persons whom Victor Vincent had known and also displayed some skills corresponding to Vincent's personality. Shri Nandan Sahay of UP, India died of a sudden illness at the age of nineteen years. His wife was two months pregnant at that time. One night she saw her deceased husband in her dream who told her that he will be born to her but would not take feed from her breast. He also said that he (in his new birth) will have a mark of a scar on his head. The scar was found on the

head of the boy who was born about seven months later. He didn't take his feed from his mother's breast and even vomited out milk when given to him collected in spoon from her breast. At the age of five he told his mother that he was her husband reborn.

10. *Departure dreams* : Sita, a girl of about sixteen years was drowned in a river. A few months later she appeared in the dream of her mother and told her not to grieve since she was coming soon as a daughter to the "Lala" (a shopkeeper of a nearby village). Her brother, who was in service in a distant town, also had a dream of the same content. The wife of Lala was pregnant at the time of the dreams and later delivered a female child. When I investigated the case I found that the girl had some memories related to Sita. According to her parents she also had some habits and manners of behavior not found in her other siblings. Dr. Stevenson has also described several cases in which departure dreams were reported.

11. *Birthmarks/defects* : Numerous are the cases in which birthmarks/defects have been found on the body of the subjects corresponding to the wounds on the body of the pp. Dr. Stevenson's latest work in two volumes presents and discusses such cases from the world over [26]. I have 51 cases of birthmarks and 5 of birth defects in my collection. The cases of Neera, Radha, Suwa and Sunita I have already described. A case of peculiar type is that of a boy Mukul Bhausar of village Soyat Kalan, M. P. whom I studied in 1986. This boy was born with his penis without foreskin. He recalled a past life as a Muslim and also remembered how he was circumcised. (Dr. Stevenson and Dr. Pasricha were also with me.) In 8 cases there were two birthmarks, in 2 cases three birthmarks were noticed, and in 3 cases there were even more than three birthmarks on the body of the subject. In two cases 'internal birthmarks' (i.e. presence of a physical ailment in the subject corresponding to some ailment suffered by the pp) were found. In 4 cases I found 'experimental birthmarks' i.e. birthmarks corresponding to the marks deliberately made on the body of the deceased.

12. *Explanatory Value* : The strength of a hypothesis also depends on its explanatory value for certain problems and complexities which currently accepted theories are unable to solve or clarify. The hypothesis of reincarnation provides explanations for puzzling problems like phobias of childhood, skills not learned in the present life, abnormalities of child-parent relationships, differences between members

of a mono-zygotic twin pairs, gender identity confusion, birthmarks and genetical defects, uniqueness of the individual etc. [27] Long back in 1915 Shri Aurobindo wrote : "It's a luminous key which we can fit into many doors of obscurity" [28].

Conclusion

Now, to what conclusion do we arrive at? In other words : How strong is the scientific evidence with regard to the hypothesis of reincarnation? Do we have enough legitimate basis for accepting the doctrine of reincarnation?

Right in the beginning of his journey in 1960, Dr. Stevenson pleaded convincingly "Reincarnation (is) the most plausible hypothesis for understanding of the case of this series." And, quickly added, "This is not to say that I think they prove reincarnation. Indeed I am quite sure they do not." He further wrote, "Investigation of apparent memories of former incarnations may well establish reincarnation as the most probable explanation of these experiences" [29]. He did not hope to prove and he seems to have arrived at what he expected. After collecting more than 2500 cases from all over the world and spending a life time (37 years) researching, he writes, "No case is perfect; all have flaws. Nevertheless I believe that reincarnation is the best interpretation, although by no means the only one, for the stronger cases without birthmarks or birth defects" [30]. In the list of strong cases he would "probably count only about 50" [31]. But, they are, however..."... not the only ones for which reincarnation seems to me to be the best interpretation. In this category I include also those numerous cases in which the subject had one or more than one unusual birthmark or birth defect that corresponded closely to a wound (or wounds) or other mark (or marks) on a deceased person whose life the subject remembered or with whom others identify him or her" [32].

Even after putting 'about 50' plus other 'numerous cases' in the category of cases for which the best interpretation is reincarnation, Dr. Stevenson does not say that these cases "prove" reincarnation or that reincarnation theory is now worthy of being "acceptable." Why? Perhaps, because "No case is perfect; all have flaws." He could imagine a *perfect case*, but as he confessed in 1997, "I do not expect to find it, and I doubt whether my successors ever will." Let us discuss the very necessity of there being (or our finding it out) a '*perfect case*' in order to prove or accept a phenomenon. Almost every text book on

Principles of Sociology carries a dictum by Aristotle : "*Man is a social animal.*" In order to 'prove', or 'accept' it, is it necessary. for us to discover some or even a single 'perfect' social animal? Can we find him anywhere? Similar would be the fate of our search if we set ourselves to find out a 'perfect' man from physiological or psychological perspective. As at parody what Dr. Stevenson said we may say: "No man is perfect; all have flaws." Even in the absence of perfection, existence is to be accepted. Moreover, what do we mean by a 'perfect case'? Would Dr. Stevenson expect all others to agree with his characterization of a 'perfect case'? It is worth noting that in 1961, while describing an 'ideal' case he had himself used some different criteria. In the end of his presentation he asked, "Do we have any cases which meet the criteria I have proposed?" and had quickly answered, "I think we do have few" [33]. Indeed, it is one's privilege to imagine differently at different times. I think that the very chase for a 'perfect case' is futile if not entirely meaningless.

It is true that taken individually every case would seem weak and would not provide us any 'proof'. But if we have a large group of cases displaying some recurrent features the *principle of faggot* may well be applied. The combined strength of a large group of cases from diverse sources is like a faggot of sticks, individually taken every stick may have weakness somewhere but when many sticks are bound together their strength increases many folds. Similarly the evidence, from a single case of reincarnation type may not carry much weight, but when combined together in a large body of thousands of cases, it becomes almost compelling. On the basis of all the huge and impressive evidence collected my conclusion is that reincarnation hypothesis may now be taken as scientifically. "acceptable" if not "proved" to the satisfaction of all.

Moreover, if we continue studying *more of the same kind* we would not be able to give much benefit to the man kind. There has been almost a surface research only so far. We need to dive deeper to find answers to many questions related to reincarnation. We have enough of 'What'; now we should explore the 'How' and 'Why' also. Most important area for future research, to my mind, would be the doctrine of *Karma*. (The word 'Karma', or in its neuter form, Karman, is a Sanskrit word from the root Kri, meaning 'to do' or 'to take'). The doctrine of Karma expressed in most concise form is : *What a man does, to such*

an existence he attains. Jesus said, "The measure you give will be the measure you get" [34]. St. Paul also said, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatever you sow that shall you reap" [35].

Are we really spinning, every moment, our own fate for good or evil as William James [36] believed or shall our deeds, in fact, follow us after our death, as CG Jung [37] thought for himself? Manu, the ancient most law giver of Hindus, said, "Some wicked men suffer change of their (natural) appearance in consequence of crimes committed in this life and some in consequence of those committed in a former (life)" [38]. But is it in fact, so? Where is the scientific evidence?

Loftus Here wrote, "A man becomes what he does. Can this doctrine be refuted? If it is true it is the most important and most neglected truth in the world. If it is false, no body has ever attempted to prove it so neither any better solution to the "*Riddle of Life*" has been offered so far" [39]. The sad tact is that no one, so far as I know, has ever attempted its verification from scientific point of view. Let us do it.

The operation of law of karma is indeed very complex and highly mysterious. No one so far has been able to explore it. Let us direct the '*Path finder*' inwards and bring light of love to the entire humanity and save it from the dark vices of hatred and violence. If the stone we intentionally hurl against the universal life is cast back at us and may crush, maim or injure our own mental and physical being, would not every act of love and compassion also boomerang to create love and compassion in our own life too?

If the present conference is able to make some efforts towards the realization of this, it would really be a great achievement for the benefit of humanity.

LOVE AND LIVE; LIVE AND LOVE. This is the only Mantra!

Notes :

1. Chapter i; verse 20.
2. *Book of Job*, 14 : 14
3. The first verse.
4. Chapter iv; verse 5.
5. *Rigveda*; 10.16.5.

6. For some other references in *Rigveda* see : 1.64.19; 1.164.30; 7.33.9; 7.33.10; 10.14.8; 10.16.3; 10.65.5; 10.57.5; 10.59.6; and 10.59.7.
7. Stevenson, I.: *Children Who Remember Previous Lives -- A Question of Reincarnation*; Charlottesville : University Press of Virginia., 1987; p 26.
8. MacGregor, Geddes : *Reincarnation in Christianity*; Wheaton, Illinois : Quest Books, 1978; pp. 67-68.
9. He has again reviewed some of these in his *Reincarnation and Biology* on pp. 1140-1145.
10. *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*. (cited above n7) p 158.
11. Described by Roy Stemman in his *Reincarnation: True Stories of Past Lives*: London., Judy Piatkus., 1997 p 157.
12. *Ibid.* pp. 81-82.
13. In *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*. (cited above n7). p 62.
14. In *Cases of Reincarnation Type Vol. II*; Charlottesville : University Press of Virginia., p 272 fn.
15. *Ibid.* p69.
16. In *Cases of Reincarnation Type Vol. IV*; Charlottesville : University Press of Virginia., 1983. p129.
17. *Ibid.* p197.
18. In *Cases of Reincarnation Type Vol. I*; Charlottesville : University Press of Virginia, 1975. pp. 227-228.
19. *Ibid.* p 96.
20. In *Reincarnation Verified Cases of Rebirth After Death* by K. K. N. Sahay on p 11.
21. In *Cases of Reincarnation Type Vol. I* (cited above n38) p199 fn.
22. *Children Who Remember Previous lives* (cited above n7) pp. 58-59.
23. Cited above n21.
24. *Children Who Remember Previous Lives* (cited above n7) p58.
25. *Ibid* p100.
26. *Reincarnation and Biology* (cited above n20).

27. Stevenson, I : *Explanatory Value of the Idea of Reincarnation* in Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, May 1977.
28. Sri Aurobindo : *The Problem of Rebirth*; Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1990. p 35. (First ed. in 1952).
29. *The Evidence for Survival from Claimed Memories of Former Reincarnations.*, 1961. p43 (Previously published as an article with the same title in Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research in 1960).
30. In *Reincarnation and Biology* (cited above n20) p2065.
31. Ibid p2065.
32. Ibid p2065.
33. *The Indian Journal of Parapsychology Vol. II* No. 4 1960 pp. 150-155.
34. Matthew 7 : 2.
35. Galatian 6:7.
36. James, William : *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* London and New York : Longmans Green., 1899.
37. Jung, C. G. : *Dreams, Memories, Reflections* : New York : Pantheon., 1963.
38. *Manusmriti* 11:18.
39. Quoted by Christmas Humphreys in *karma and Rebirth*; London : Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1943. p9.