

BIRTHMARKS AND CLAIMS OF PREVIOUS-LIFE MEMORIES:
II. THE CASE OF CHATURA KARUNARATNE

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ABSTRACT

This case concerns a young boy in Sri Lanka who made several statements regarding a previous life, among them where he had lived and how he was killed when travelling in a truck through a forest. The boy associated two birthmarks with his claimed memories. His statements were recorded and published, and afterwards a person was found in the area whose circumstances had corresponded to the boy's statements. The birthmarks corresponded to the location of injuries of the person later identified as the previous personality.

INTRODUCTION

This case report concerns a child who spoke of a previous life from an early age and pointed to a birthmark which he claimed to be associated with his mode of death. A small percentage of children claiming memories of a previous life point to birthmarks which they associate with their mode of death. Stevenson (1997a, 1997b) has published detailed accounts of many such cases. The case of Chatura Karunaratne differs in an important way from the birthmark case of Purnima Ekanayake (Haraldsson, 2000). The present case is one of the relatively few cases in which the statements of the child were recorded before attempts were made to find a previous personality that might correspond to the statements made by the child. In such a case an assessment of the degree of fit between the child's statements and the life of the alleged previous personality is much easier. It is free of the various contaminations and distortions ('adjustments to the fit') that in other cases may complicate an objective assessment, and leave us with an uncertainty that may be hard or impossible to estimate.

Several such cases with prerecorded statements (statements recorded before the case was 'solved') have been published, three of them by the present author (Haraldsson, 1991; Mills, Haraldsson & Keil, 1994; Haraldsson & Samararatne, 1999). Only 33 such cases exist in the files of the Division of Personality Studies at the University of Virginia, the only large database of this kind (Stevenson, personal communication). They are only 1.5 per cent of the total number of recorded cases, which shows how rare they are. It is interesting, however, that in spite of potential contaminations and distortions in cases that were not investigated until after they were considered solved, Schouten and Stevenson (1998) found in a recent study that they do not differ from prerecorded cases in the number of correct statements.

THE CASE

Chatura Buddika Karunaratne was born on 20 April 1989, in the rural area of Metiyagane in the Kurunagala district of Sri Lanka. At the age of three Chatura started to speak about a previous life in the nearby Narammala area.

This case is of particular interest because the statements Chatura made

about his previous life were written down by three independent interviewers (two of whom published their reports) before a person was traced who corresponded to some of his statements so that the case was considered solved. The interviewers were local newspaper reporter Mudiyanselage Dingiri Banda, staff reporter Nandasena Suriyarachchi, and my co-worker Tissa Jayawardane.

M. D. Banda,¹ a local reporter, learned about the case from his wife. He visited the child's home along with the village headman, Mudiyanselage Jayaratne. M. D. Banda sent a report on the case to his newspaper, *Diuaina*, which is published in Colombo and has a nationwide circulation. A shortened version of his report was published on 7 June 1992.

On 12 June my co-worker Tissa Jayawardane visited the family and interviewed Chatura's mother. Around this time a journalist from *Divaina*, Nandasena Suriyarachchi, also visited the family, together with Banda. They took the boy to Narammala but failed to trace any person whose life and circumstances fitted Chatura's statements. This second *Diuaina* report was published on 14 June. Prior to this, Chatura's family had made inquiries and tried in vain to trace the person that Chatura seemed to be speaking about. Chatura's statements about his previous life are listed in Table 1.

HOW THE CASE WAS SOLVED

M. P. Martin, a retired farmer and mason in Henegedara, a rural area near the town of Narammala, overheard in a shop some people who were talking about the 7 June report that appeared in *Diuaina*. Martin got hold of the newspaper. After reading the *Diuaina* report he believed that the story of Chatura Karunaratne fitted his son M. P. Dayananda, who had joined the army in August 1985 and died on 18 April 1986, as a result of injuries suffered in a bomb blast. Dayananda's family had lived 12km away by road from Narammala in a house with a tiled roof. Close by there had been a hut with a shop which he owned and where his son used to sell groceries until he joined the army. Near their house was a small lake with tortoises living in it. All this corresponded to what Chatura had been saying.

M. P. Martin did not deem it appropriate to go to Chatura's home alone, and so he asked his local village headman (government official) to join him. They first visited the village headman of Chatura's locality, and then all three visited Chatura's family. The distance between the homes of the two families is 25 km by road in a forested area and in the opposite direction from Narammala. During this visit, and another with his wife the following day, Martin and his wife became convinced that Chatura was describing events in the life of their son Dayananda. This occurred about two weeks after the publication of the first *Divaina* report.

Banda informed *Divczina* of this new development and they sent reporter Nandasena Suriyarachchi to the scene; he brought the three-and-a-half-year-old Chatura to the home of Dayananda's parents. His visit to the family of Dayananda is described in a third *Diuaina* report about the case, which was published on 5 July 1992.

¹ Initials preceding Sinhalese proper names are indicators of the family, and the given name comes last.

According to this report, the boy was given a warm reception by Dayananda's parents, who accepted him as their son. Dayananda's mother brought some old clothes that had belonged to her son. According to the paper, the boy complained somewhat angrily that only his long trousers were there and that they had been torn and worn by someone else.

Dayananda's mother asked the boy if he could remember the house where they used to live. Chatura said he had not lived in this house but in another one somewhere else, which was true of Dayananda. They had only recently moved to the present house, which is located on the same premises about 100 yards away. They went to the house where they used to live. There an old woman walked up to the boy and asked him if he could remember her. He looked at her for a while and then said she was his grandmother. Dayananda had lived longer with his grandmother than with his parents. Inside the house the boy made the comment: "Now you have electricity", something they had not had when Dayananda lived there. Hanging on the wall he saw the scales that had been used in the shop. He made the comment: "These are the scales we used to weigh things with. Don't you have the store now?" He then asked the late Dayananda's mother to take him to the store. It had been torn down, and he asked why. According to the newspaper report, Chatura also identified one of his old friends (his brother-in-law), Gamini, who was in the crowd.

The journalists asked Dayananda's father what he thought about the helicopter and Landmaster tractor that Chatura had mentioned earlier. Dayananda's father stated that he had said to his son that if he had a tractor he could plough the fields easily. Dayananda had told him that the army auctions tractors which they confiscate from the Tigers (Tamil rebels fighting for a separate Tamil homeland) and they could be bought cheaply. At the next auction he wanted to buy a tractor for his father. But Dayananda never came back. He was caught in a bomb blast and was flown by a helicopter to Polonnaruwa. Later he was transported to Colombo, where he died.

This, in short, is the history of the case as it stood when the author first met Chatura's family and other witnesses in late November 1992.

INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS OF CHATURA, 22 NOVEMBER, 1992

Chatura's father works as a clerk with a bus company and his mother is a nurse in a hospital of traditional (ayurvedic) medicine. Chatura was born in 1989 and has an older sister. A relative, Karunavati, took care of them during the weekdays when the parents were working.

Chatura's mother reported that he had first mentioned a previous life by talking about shooting. He said that he had been shot in two places and that he was taken to hospital by helicopter. He only mentioned one name related to his previous life, Narammala, near where his former parents live. If taken to Narammala, he said, he could find his house and his younger brother and sister. He also said, "My mother in Narammala is not like you [slim], she is fat".

Chatura was afraid whenever he heard a helicopter. He was also fearful of balls that children play with, thinking that they might be bombs. He often talked about army trucks, camps and soldiers, and liked songs about the army that he heard on the radio.

Chatura pointed to two birthmarks close to his left ear, one on his throat

below the ear, and another low on his jaw close to his ear (see Figure 1). He claimed to have been shot in these places.

We could not always be sure whether Chatura's mother was speaking about statements that the boy had made before Dayananda's family came on the scene, or was referring to statements made after that time. Some of the statements she mentioned were not included in the first two articles by the journalists. It is well-nigh impossible to ascertain which of the statements she quoted might have been moulded by knowledge obtained after meeting Dayananda's family. The following discussion will therefore be limited to Chatura's statements which were published before Dayananda's family came on the scene.

Both families stated that they had not known of each other before Dayananda's father read the account in *Diuaina*. We should also remember that the journalists had failed to help Chatura find the home where he claimed to have lived in the previous life. Hence there seems no reason to doubt that there had been no connection between the two families.

INTERVIEW WITH M. P. MARTIN, DAYANANDA'S FATHER, 23 NOVEMBER 1992

According to Martin he became quickly convinced that the report in *Diuaina* was referring to his son. At first, he said, he was full of doubts for he could not believe that a thing like this could happen. According to him, there was no statement in the report that did not fit his son.

Dayananda had been born and lived with his family at their home near Narammala until he joined the army in 1985. After leaving school he had worked as a mason (his father was a mason) for two years but did not like it; so his father built for him a small shop with a thatched roof. He had lived in a house with a tiled roof, only a few yards away from the small shop, where he sold groceries and sweets for about a year. He wanted to go abroad, but failing to do so, he decided to join the army.

Dayananda had only served eight months in the army when his parents were notified that he had been seriously wounded in a bomb-blast. They rushed to the Polonnaruwa hospital to be with their son, and accompanied him when he was transported to Colombo, where he died. Dayananda remained unconscious after the blast and was not able to speak to them.

Dayananda was given a military funeral at his home. A picture of him in his funeral bed shows his face uncovered and unharmed, but a bandage covers his head and neck, suggesting injuries in that area.

When we visited Dayananda's family we confirmed at first hand some of Chatura's statements, including those regarding the tile roof and the lake where Martin used to go swimming with his son. This lake, Sisira Watte Wewa, covers an area of about one acre and is some **15** minutes' walk away. Tortoises still live there according to Dayananda's father. Dayananda's family now live in a house with a thatched roof, but earlier they had lived in a house with a tiled roof that is only a short walk away and is also on their property. This was confirmed by close relatives now living in the house.

MILITARY DOCUMENTS REGARDING THE DEATH OF M. P. DAYANANDA

With the kind help of Major-General J. B. Pagoda of the Sri Lankan Army,

we were able to obtain a bio-data sheet about Dayananda and a document from a military court of inquiry, dated 19 May 1986, regarding the circumstances of his death. According to these documents Mutugal P. Dayananda was born on 17 August 1964, and resided in Henegedara, Narammala. After leaving school in March 1980, he worked as a mason until he joined the army on 13 August 1985.

On the morning of 15 April 1986 Dayananda was in a group of 14 soldiers in two army trucks who had been ordered to proceed on a route-clearing patrol from Wakaneri (close to the east coast of Sri Lanka) to the Poonani Post Office, and from there to the Namal Adi junction. On the way to Namal Adi one of the trucks was caught in a massive landmine blast. The patrol commander, R. A. N. P. de Alwis, reported that after the blast Dayananda was found unconscious near the vehicle, which had overturned and was completely wrecked. A few soldiers were killed and others severely wounded. Dayananda was taken by helicopter to a hospital in Polonnaruwa, and later by ambulance to Colombo. He never regained consciousness, and died on 18 April. From the report it can be inferred that there was no contact with enemy soldiers.

Chronology of the case of Chatura B. Karunaratne

20 April 1989	Chatura is born in Methiyagane, Sri Lanka.
Age 3	Starts to speak about previous life.
7 June 1992	Newspaper report in <i>Diuaina</i> by reporter Banda.
12 June 1992	Tissa Jayawardane interviews Chatura's family.
14 June 1992	Second <i>Diuaina</i> report by journalist Nandasena, who brings Chatura to Narammala. Fails to solve case.
Late June 1992	M. P. Martin visits Chatura's family and becomes convinced that Chatura is his son Dayananda reborn.
Beginning of July	Chatura is brought to Dayananda's family.
5 July 1992	Third report in <i>Diuaina</i> , about how case was solved.
22 November 1992	EH investigates the case.
11 May 1995	EH's second visit to investigate case.
9 November 1995	EH's third visit to investigate case. Further visits in 1998 and 1999.

Important dates in the life of Dayananda M. Pedidurayalage

17 August 1964	Born in Henegedara near Narammala.
13 August 1985	Joins the Sri Lankan Army.
15 April 1986	Injured when his truck is blown up by land-mine.
18 April 1986	Dies of injuries in Colombo General Hospital.

VERIFICATION OF CHATURA'S STATEMENTS

Table 1 lists all statements recorded before contact was established between the families of Chatura and Dayananda. There are 14 statements published in

Table 1

Statements Made by Chatura That Were Recorded in 1992 Before Search Was Made for a Previous Personality

	Banda, Divaina (7th); Tissa Jayawardane (12th)	Nandasena, Divaina (14th); 7th June	14th June	12th June	
1	He lived in a village near Narammala.	x	x	x	Y
2	He lived in a house with a tiled roof.	x	x	-	Y
3	Close by there was a thatched hut.	x	x	x	Y
4	In the hut there was a small store.	x	x	x	Y
5	The store was run by his father.	x	-	-	Y
6	Near the house was a lake.	x	x	x	Y
7	Tortoises lived in the lake.	x	x	x	Y
8	He had been going through the forest in a truck.	x	x	x	Y
9	A group of people had fired at him. (People surrounded the truck and started to shoot.)	x	x	x	N
10	He was hit in the neck.	x	x	x	Y
11	The crowd trampled on him and walked away. (Then they fled, trampling on our heads.)	x	x	-	N
12	The wounds were treated at his home.	x	-	-	N
13	He was in the army.	-	x		Y
14	His face was bathed in blood.	-	x	-	Y
15	He fell down and pretended he was dead.	-	x	-	?
16	A helicopter arrived and took them to the doctor.	-	x	x	Y
17	The house where he lived was pink.	x	x	-	Y
18	His family had a Landmaster tractor.	x	x	x	N
19	He ploughed paddy fields (with Landmaster tractor).	-	x	x	N
20	They had a parrot at home in a cage. He could talk.	-	x		Y
21	Mother loved it, gave it food mornings and evenings.		x	-	Y
22	My father's name was Perera.	-	x	x	N
23	My mother's name was Mangalika.	-	x	x	N
24	Mother was fair and round like a ball, not like the present mother.	-	x	x	?
25	Our house had three rooms.	-	x	-	N
26	Kumari was his sister.	-	x	x	N
27	Kumari occupied the corner room.	-	x	-	N
28	He had an elder brother.	-	x	-	N
29	His brother's name was Mahesh.	-	-	x	N
30	He switched on cassette recorder and danced at home.	-	x	-	Y
31	His mother didn't make oil cakes for the New Year. She made (Western) cakes.	-	x	-	N
32	His name was Suduputha.	-	-	x	N
33	There was a red flash lamp where he stayed.	-	x		N
	Y = correct N = incorrect ? = unverifiable	14	29	17	

Divaina on 7 June 1992, and 29 statements published in the same paper on 14 June when the journalists took the boy to Narammala, where he believed he could find his home. The third set of statements was recorded by my associate, Tissa Jayawardane, who interviewed the family on 12 June.

The following nine statements are mentioned in all three reports (see Table 1) :-

- He lived in a village near Narammala.
- Close by there was a thatched hut.
- In the hut there was a small store.
- Near the house was a lake.
- Tortoises lived in the lake.
- He had been going through the forest in a truck.
- A group of people had fired at him.
- He was hit in the neck.
- His family had a Landmaster tractor.

These may be considered the core items. Probably the item about the helicopter (item 16) can safely be added to this list as Karunavati, who nursed Chatura, and his mother both report that Chatura mentioned, very early on, that he had been in a helicopter.

Seven of the nine core items match the life of Dayananda. Only two do not match; namely that a group of people had fired at him, and that his family had a Landmaster tractor. This, however, did not diminish Martin's conviction about the case, as his son Dayananda probably never knew the reason for the blast and was seriously wounded and rendered unconscious almost immediately, and because Dayananda had planned to buy a Landmaster for his father at a military auction.

The total number of statements is 33; 16 are correct for Dayananda, 15 are incorrect for him and two are indeterminate. The correct items refer primarily to Dayananda's circumstances at home, and the circumstances surrounding his death. As is almost the rule in Sri Lankan cases, all personal names are incorrect. The scenic or visual memory items are more likely to fit than the verbal memory ones. So far, our evaluation concerns only Dayananda's statements, namely the memory aspect of the case.

THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN CHATURA'S BIRTHMARKS AND DAYANANDA'S WOUNDS

Another aspect of the case concerns the match between Chatura's birthmarks and Dayananda's wounds. Chatura has two birthmarks close to his left ear, each about a centimetre in diameter. They have darker pigmentation than the surrounding skin. One is on the lower part of the jawbone and the other is on the neck/throat below the jaw. The closest edges of the two birthmarks are about two centimetres apart. Another birthmark, also darker than the surrounding skin, is on the inside of his right upper arm.

According to his mother, when Chatura started to talk about a previous life, he stated that he had been shot in two places and pointed towards the birthmarks in the two locations near the neck and ear.

An autopsy report for Dayananda would have given greater certainty about the location and nature of his wounds, but none is available. Prof. N. Kodagoda, former Dean of the School of Medicine at Colombo University, had an extensive search made for the autopsy report on Dayananda but it could not be found. Dayananda's death occurred during a declared state of emergency in Sri Lanka. Most probably no autopsy report was written, as it was not required during the state of emergency.

The military document regarding Dayananda's death states only that the patrol commander found Dayananda near the overturned vehicle, which was completely wrecked. He was unconscious but no external injuries were to be seen, although when Dayananda's

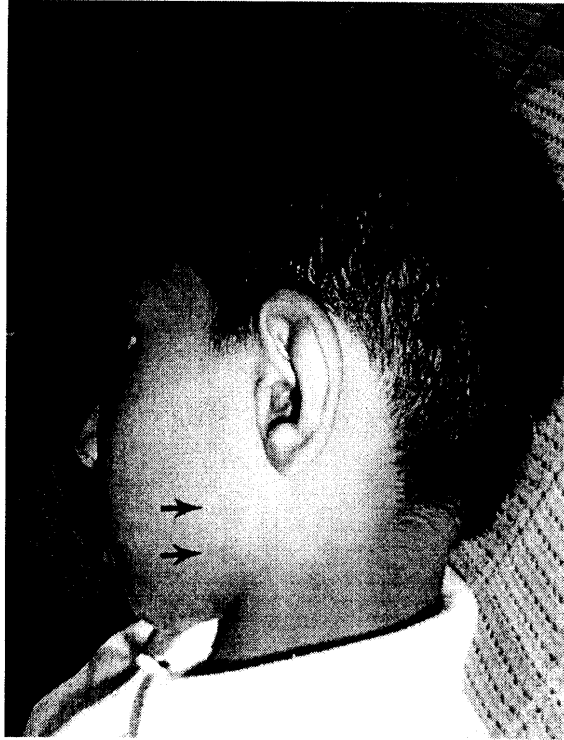


Figure 1

parents visited him in the Polunaruwa hospital he had a bandage around his head and neck. The physicians told them that he had injuries to "the nerves of the smaller brain". This is the cerebellum, which lies beneath and behind the cerebrum. Bandages covered his left ear. They were told that he had broken his left arm, and that was covered with bandages. A photograph of Dayananda's body at his funeral shows his face bare, but his head and neck are covered with bandages, and also his left ear, which suggests that he suffered injuries to this area of his body.

DISCUSSION

After making five rounds of interviewing and re-interviewing most of the witnesses over a period of more than six years, I feel confident that I have succeeded in finding and reporting the important facts about this case.

There are two aspects to the case: the memory aspect and the birthmark aspect. Let us consider first the memory aspect. In most cases, the statements made by the child may have been moulded by knowledge of the facts in the life of some person who was later identified as the previous personality of the child before the investigator comes to the scene. In this process those statements that were found not to fit may have been dropped or may have undergone some change to fit the alleged previous personality better. Also, some new fitting statements may have been added.

In the case of Chatura we can be certain that such a contaminating moulding

process has not taken place because the statements were recorded before a potential previous personality was found. This leaves us with two basic hypotheses regarding the memory aspect, chance or extra-chance (paranormal) interpretation. The extra-chance hypothesis seems to suit the memory aspect better when we consider the nine *core* statements, but the chance hypothesis fares better when we consider the totality of statements given to the three independent interviewers. Chatura seems to have added on statements as people repeatedly asked him about his previous life. Perhaps he was being unduly pressured to respond. Table 2 shows that the number of verified statements drops from **71%** in the interview with Banda to 52% and 47% respectively in the interviews that followed. That is all we can say about these memories.

Table 2

Number of Correct, Incorrect and Unverifiable Statements Made by Chatura in Three Reports Recorded Before the Case was Solved

	Correct	Incorrect	Unverif.	% Correct
9 statements recorded in three reports (core statements)	7	2	0	78%
9 statements recorded in two reports	3	5	1	33%
15 statements recorded only in one report	6	8	1	40%
Total of 33 statements	16	15	2	58%
14 statements recorded by M. D. Banda	10	4	0	71%
29 statements recorded by S. Nandasena	15	12	2	52%
17 statements recorded by Tissa Jayawardane	8	8	1	47%

Let us turn our attention to the birthmark aspect of the case. Chatura's birthmarks on the rear of his jaw and on his throat, both close to the left ear, are close to the location of the internal head injury that brought Dayananda to death, according to his parents. This injury is most likely to have been caused by a small metal object or objects (splinters from a bomb and/or some other objects) that entered his body somewhere in the area of his neck or the rear part of his head, depending on the direction of the trajectory of the objects, Chatura's birthmarks lie within this area of possible impact.

No medical records relating to his injuries could be traced, but photographs taken at Dayananda's funeral show bandages on his left ear. This indicates injuries quite close to the location of his birthmarks or possibly in the same place.

According to the testimony of Dayananda's parents, his left arm was broken, but Chatura's other birthmark is on the inside of his right upper arm. There is no testimony to indicate that at an early age Chatura did associate the birthmark on his arm with his previous-life memories. According to his mother, it was not until they and Chatura learnt that Dayananda had broken his arm that Chatura drew attention to the birthmark on his left upper arm (Dayananda had broken his right arm), so this birthmark can be excluded from the question of the correspondence.

In this and a previous paper, on the case of Purnima Ekanayake (Haraldsson, 2000), I have presented two birthmark cases that I have investigated in Sri Lanka.

These are the best birthmark cases that I have found in Sri Lanka. I have in fact found only three among the verifiable cases, and I decided not to include the third case because it was so difficult to determine the facts with reasonable certainty (neither previous recording of statements nor a post-mortem report was available).

At this stage the reader is likely to ask, Can the facts that have been presented about the cases of Purnima and Chatura be seen as evidence of a previous life? The correspondences we have found seem to be beyond chance for both the memory (core statements only, for Chatura) and the birthmark aspects, although a remote possibility always remains that these uncanny correspondences are due to chance. Besides, it is impressive that *both* aspects show a relatively high degree of correspondence and thus give further support for a paranormal interpretation (again referring only to Chatura's core statements).

To complicate the issue, a paranormal interpretation can take several forms. Here we obviously lack consensus of criteria by which to judge, and hence the answer must depend on personal evaluation and a sense of what may and what may not be possible, and on our basic philosophical assumptions and convictions about the ontological nature of reality and consciousness.

Let us keep our reservations about what may or may not be possible to a minimum. If we do that, the various features of the case seem to fall into the most meaningful pattern when we consider the possibility that a consciousness of the past or in the past has made a mark on another consciousness and physical body. This new organism and consciousness is in its formative phase and beginning a physical life.

The inevitable question follows, Can the newer consciousness be considered a continuation of the old or previous consciousness, and are the previous and present bodies in some way connected through the influence of consciousness or mind? Stevenson has argued that the best of the cases-and the Purnima case can be regarded as such-are 'suggestive of reincarnation'. For these best cases I tend to agree.

This conclusion inevitably leads to the question of what can be done about the many poor cases, for which-in spite of much effort-we do not succeed in finding a matching personality. In some instances the statements given may be too few or too general. In others the statements may be numerous and some of them definitely checkable but proving to be incorrect (such as a statement about a certain name of a street in a given city which is found not to exist). The obvious counter-argument is that memory is never perfect, even at the best of times, and that we are making unrealistic demands.

A further concern arises when we find new cases of comparable content and number of statements. We still cannot predict which case (after careful investigation) will prove poor and which strong. So far we can only predict statistically that in Sri Lanka most of them will prove poor and remain 'unsolved'. This applies to the statements, or memory aspect.

What about the evidence from the birthmark aspect? Alleged memories may

be moulded by cultural expectations and beliefs during verbal interactions taking place between the child and those around it. Birthmarks cannot be moulded in any such way, as they start to form during the development of the embryo before the child is born. Birthmark cases are relatively few, and meaningful statistics are therefore harder to get. However, judging from my collection of 60 Sri Lankan cases, the 'correspondence rate' seems higher, both of the two verifiable cases showing a reasonable degree of correspondence. Birthmarks apparently give stronger evidence than claimed memories.

Research into the area of 'rebirth cases', as they are popularly called in Sri Lanka, has many pitfalls and uncertainties which may be hard to avoid or exclude, and hence our interpretations must be tentative. In spite of that, a great wealth of data has been collected since Stevenson (1960) started his pioneering studies that opened up a whole new field of research. The phenomenology of the cases has become well established, and so have some cultural factors that influence them. The enigmas and the problems that this research has unveiled have come more clearly into view. No one who has spent time researching these cases doubts that we are dealing with real puzzles, which are indeed very perplexing at times.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by a grant from the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene in Freiburg, Germany. Particular thanks go to Major-General J. B. Pagoda, the late Prof. N. Kodagoda, A. B. Ratnayake, Godwin Samararatne and B. A. Rohana Kumara for valuable assistance.

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