ABSTRACT

The primary aim of the present investigation was twofold: first, to examine objectively the claims of persons who spontaneously recall a previous life on earth; and second, to study the relationship between the belief in rebirth and knowledge of rebirth cases at firsthand. In addition, an attempt was made to ascertain how the environment facilitates claims to remember previous lives.

The main sample consisted of 45 cases of the reincarnation type in different parts of northern India. The subjects' ages ranged between three and one-half and 35 years. Seventy-one per cent of them when interviewed were under the age of 15. Most of them came from villages and towns. They belonged to different socioeconomic classes and had different educational backgrounds. The usual clinical methods of history taking and interviewing were employed in obtaining most of the data from informants. The subjects' statements were verified independently whenever possible. Also, various additional relevant sources were examined.

To fulfill the second objective, a Belief in Reincarnation Questionnaire was prepared and administered to two groups of persons consisting in all of 137 respondents. One group of respondents either had some direct contact with a case (for example, through being a member of a subject's family) or had
some less direct knowledge about a case or cases; the second
group had no firsthand knowledge of cases. The two groups,
however, could not be matched on other demographic parameters.
The analysis of the responses indicated nevertheless that
the belief in reincarnation and related concepts are probably
influenced and shaped by knowledge of a rebirth case.

The statements made by the 45 subjects of the reincarnation
type cases were objectively examined. In 38 (85%) of the cases,
the persons whose lives the subjects recalled were identified,
and most of the subjects' statements in such cases were verified.

Cases were examined and analyzed individually. In addi-
tion, the data for all the cases were analyzed together.

Certain common features emerged from the second analysis
(of the cases as a group) that were in agreement with results
of previous studies in other cultures. For example, the subjects
(usually) started talking of the previous life between the ages
of two and four years and stopped talking about it spontaneously
between the ages of six and eight. There was a high incidence
of violent deaths in the respective claimed previous person-
alities, and frequent mention of the mode of death—whether
violent or natural—among the statements of the subjects about
the previous lives.

Individual cases were examined with regard to both normal
and paranormal interpretations. The normal interpretations
considered included fraud, fantasy, genetic memory, cryptom-
nnesia, and paramnesia. Under paranormal interpretations
the hypotheses of extrasensory perception with personation, possession, and reincarnation were considered. When the merits and demerits of each of these interpretations are taken into account, the hypothesis of reincarnation appears to be the most adequate one to explain all the features of the stronger cases.

If the hypothesis of reincarnation is accepted as reasonable, it may add to the understanding of deviant behavior for which there is no presently adequate normal explanation.

However, it should be added that no claim is made that the data presented here are exhaustive or even representative.