CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF PREVIOUS WORK

Introduction

The subject of reincarnation has been dealt with from various angles since the beginning of civilization. Claims of reincarnation, like those of other paranormal happenings, have occurred all through the ages and in nearly every part of the world. Paranormal experiences of this and other types have played important roles in the development and practice of esoteric and religious systems and were usually viewed within this context as supernormal. Largely for this reason paranormal phenomena were not subjected to scientific investigation until the development, in the late nineteenth century, of that branch of science which is now called parapsychology. Volumes of literature from philosophical and spiritual points of view have been written about the subject. A review of all these writings is beyond the scope of the present study, since its aim is to deal with claims about reincarnation from a scientific point of view.

Definition and Brief History of Parapsychology

A paranormal phenomenon, by definition, is any experience of a person who can perceive or influence events at a distance without known physical means of communication or action. The
history of scientific investigation into these paranormal claims is of fairly recent origin. It is usually said to have begun with the founding in 1882 (in London, England) of the Society for Psychical Research. This was the first organization established for the scientific investigation of the phenomena now called parapsychological.

Surveys of American psychologists indicate increasing acceptance of parapsychology, especially among younger members of the profession (Warner and Clark, 1938; Warner, 1952, 1955). A recent survey by New Scientist in London (Evans, 1973) reported that more than 70 per cent of the respondents regarded extrasensory perception as either "an established fact" or a "likely possibility." This outcome was apparently unexpected and reflects increased serious attention to the field due in part to the admission in December 1969 of the Parapsychological Association as an affiliate of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Dean, 1970).

As psychical research (parapsychology) developed, it became divided into two main branches. The first consisted of the investigation of apparently paranormal events occurring spontaneously in what may be called everyday life. The second consisted of investigations conducted in laboratories. Proponents of the first group of investigations claimed, and claim, that they are studying important experiences as they occur naturally. Those who prefer laboratory investigations maintain that they can control conditions
and can also introduce variables, two features that are rarely possible in the study of spontaneous cases. In the early years of psychical research, the investigators emphasized spontaneous cases, but they also conducted some experiments. Later, experimentalists dominated the field, and spontaneous cases were rather neglected, although not entirely forgotten. Today, spontaneous cases are again being investigated, and the field seems again to have a better balance between its two main branches.

Brief History of Various Approaches to the Evidence of Reincarnation

On the basis of theoretical assumptions and logical thinking the concept of reincarnation has been treated by some as primitive magical thinking or as an expression of a massive denial of man's impermanence and an attempt to overcome his fears of death and the unknown. But since the late nineteenth century the claims of reincarnation have attracted the attention of some serious scientists who have conducted various experiments and studied the phenomenon in several different ways. Some of them prefer to study it under controlled situations—by inducing altered states of consciousness where the person experiences or recollects events of his "previous life"; others prefer to study the evidence that manifests itself under natural conditions. Approaches have been made from time to time to understand
the phenomenon by the use of various techniques that will be briefly discussed here.

Use of drugs. Memories of apparent previous lives may occur to persons under a variety of conditions. They have been reported both under natural and controlled situations. Under controlled situations, they have sometimes occurred as vivid images, such as during intoxication with certain drugs, for example, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide). Reports of experiences of individuals who survive clinical death and death-bed observations by physicians and nurses have shown great similarity to ancient descriptions of the phenomena of death. Research with psychedelic drugs has brought important additional data of a phenomenological and neurophysiological nature suggesting that experiences involving complicated mythological, religious, and mystical sequences before, during, and after death might well reflect an aspect of reality (Grof and Grof, 1976).

Carl Gustav Jung, as a result of his extensive studies in comparative mythology, unusual intuitive capacity, and his own personal near-death experience recognized the value of the Tibetan Book of the Dead and similar texts describing the after death experiences for the understanding of the human mind. He saw them as manifestations of archetypes, transindividual matrices in the unconscious, that form an integral part of the human personality and that can, under
certain conditions, find expression in powerful individual experiences (Jung, 1963). Aldous Huxley suggested that such concepts as hell and heaven represent subjective realities that are experienced very convincingly in the states of mind induced by drugs or other techniques (Huxley, 1954). Systematic clinical research with LSD has brought ample evidence supporting the ideas of Jung and Huxley.

Detailed phenomenological analysis of the content of LSD sessions of a larger number of individuals reveals that their experiences are not only identical with those found in eschatological mythologies but are frequently expressed in terms of specific symbolisms of culture areas basically alien to the experience (Grof and Grof, 1976). Psychedelic drugs have made it possible to study the deep parallels and unusual interrelations among actual near death and death experiences, make maps of the post-mortem journey developed by various cultures, and examine other aspects of death and rebirth. It has also been reported that some subjects under the influence of psychedelic drugs describe detailed sequences similar to aspects of Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain mythology; they may experience complex scenes, like those of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, of cultures to which they do not belong but of which they have some knowledge.

Experiments with drugs for the study of reincarnation phenomena suffer from important weaknesses. Individuals under the influence of drugs respond to suggestions, whether
implicit or explicit. Their experiences usually match the text with which they are familiar; they are not necessarily imaged memories of a real previous life. No doubt these experiences are helpful to an individual in preparing him to accept death more calmly, but they add little to the evidence of reincarnation, since they rarely give any verifiable details about a previous life.

Recall of previous life memories during meditation, and through hypnotic regression, has also been claimed, and these will be dealt with in the following passages.

"Life Readings" by Yogis and Mediums. Many persons have been reported to claim a new sense of hope, rejuvenation, and "reincarnation" on emerging from certain profound alterations of consciousness; for example, psychedelic experiences, abreacts, hypnotic regression, religious conversion, spiritistic possession fits, primitive puberty rites, and transcendental and mystical states (La Barre, 1962; Bucke, 1961; Ludwig and Levine, 1966; Ebin, 1961).

The next category of experiences bearing on the evidence of reincarnation comes from yogis who with certain practices not only can (or claim to) recall their own previous lives, but also claim sometimes to see those of others. There have been clear allusions to these capacities in the Indian scriptures, such as in Patanjali's yoga-sutras and the Bhagavad Gita.
However, no formal investigations have been reported in this area to verify the assertions about reincarnation made by these yogis. The difficulty with experiments concerning such claims is that of finding suitable subjects. Those who are "true yogis" do not like to indulge in practices that may induce paranormal powers, because they consider them an interference in natural processes and a hindrance in their spiritual progress; and other yogis may make claims that they cannot justify even if they are willing to be tested.

The claims of some yogis that they know about other persons' previous lives are similar to those made by some mediums or sensitives. Some persons have attributed importance to statements made by mediums and sensitives concerning "previous lives" of other persons. In nearly all instances of this type the statements of the persons claiming to have such powers consist mostly of unverifiable assertions about the allegedly perceived events (Sugrue, 1942/1974; Cerminara, 1950). However, occasionally a few sensitives have made the same (or very similar) statements about a presumed previous life of one person; and, also very rarely, mediums have made statements concerning the previous life of a person that are concordant with spontaneous memories of that person himself. Such cases, in Stevenson's opinion, provide (assuming no normal leak of information)
"evidence of extrasensory perception on the part of the medium or sensitive making the statements; but they are not necessarily evidence of reincarnation, although harmonious with that interpretation (Stevenson, 1977a)." In his opinion, this has by far the weakest evidential value in support of the reincarnation hypothesis.

**Use of Hypnosis.** Hypnosis, in its different forms, has been practiced for thousands of years and has interested scientifically oriented researchers for the past two hundred years beginning with Franz A. Mesmer in 1774 and his theory of "magnetic currents."

By about 1880, hypnosis had been recognized as primarily psychological in nature, largely through the experiments of French scientists of the late nineteenth century.

The technique of hypnotic regression is accepted by some hypnotists as a method having some value for investigating certain mental processes and aspects of memory.

Research in reincarnation by the use of hypnotic regression technique was probably an accidental development with some hypnotists. In 1893, de Rochas, in the sixth experiment with the first of his subjects, accidentally hit upon the possibility of regressing a subject to a possible earlier life; but it was not until 11 years later (1904) that, having regressed an 18-year-old girl at the time of
her birth, the idea occurred to him to continue the longitudi-
itudinal passes so as to take her back to a possible previous life (de Rochas, 1911, cited by Ducasse, 1961). Experiments with hypnosis have shown that recall of childhood memories sometimes becomes greatly increased with the recovery of surprising details previously forgotten but verified as correct (Reiff and Scheerer, 1959).

Professor A. D. Wiersman regressed a young woman of 25 to the age of eight. Under his suggestions she behaved "exactly" like an eight-year-old child. Von Kraft-Ebbing, in the late nineteenth century, regressed his subjects further back, to a still earlier stage of life. De Rochas carried Kraft-Ebbing's work further and, as mentioned above, regressed his subjects back by stages to a "previous life." But he met with the usual failures in such experiments. Either he could not identify the previous personalities mentioned by his subjects, or the subjects had some knowledge of the persons they identified themselves with, even though they had no conscious memory of this.

Several other difficulties arise in such experiments. The subject under hypnosis is in a condition of increased suggestibility and one wonders whether, when a subject is regressed to the age of a young child, he or she actually behaves as he (or she) originally did at that age or simply behaves as he imagines he would have behaved then. Similarly, when a hypnotist regresses the subject back to a previous
life the subject will attempt to make up a "previous life" to the best of his ability; it matters little how explicit the instructions are because the subject responds almost as obediently to implied suggestions as he does to verbalized ones.

The hypnotic state facilitates the mobilization of memories of all kinds that ordinarily remain unconscious. These may include forgotten memories of books read, films seen, or facts heard about the lives of other persons. Subjects under hypnosis may construct "previous lives" that are quite plausible and impressive, but completely imaginary. In some instances the previous lives may contain a mixture of fact and fiction. In a number of instances, the content of a hypnotically induced previous life has been traced to a book or other normal source of information to which the subject has been exposed. The subject is usually completely unaware of such exposure and hence such instances are indicative of cryptomnesia rather than conscious deception or fraud. In some cases, subjects under hypnosis even show appropriate emotions for the "previous life" they describe, but which has no verifiable details. This probably shows the dramatizing powers of the levels of the mind that ordinarily are not displayed but remain unconscious.

However, in a small number of investigations with hypnotic regression, the subjects have come up with some interesting information (Bernstein, 1956; Blythe, 1957).
Stevenson (1965-70) has conducted experiments in hypnotic regression with several subjects. Results were mostly negative (Stevenson, 1976a). The previous personalities that emerged during these experiments were usually fictitious. However, two good cases of responsive xenoglossy have emerged during experiments with hypnotic regression, and they may throw considerable light on our understanding of the phenomenon of reincarnation (Stevenson, 1974a, 1976b).

Spontaneous Memories Claimed to be of Reincarnation

The most important evidence bearing on reincarnation comes from the claims of certain persons, nearly always young children, who say that they spontaneously remember details of a previous life, or, rarely, details of two or more previous lives.

Early Reports of Spontaneous Memories of Previous Lives

The earliest available reports of spontaneous cases suggestive of rebirth appeared sometime in the late nineteenth century. However, such reports appeared rarely; and up to the 1960s only sporadic reports of such cases appeared, usually in single case reports, occasionally in small groups of reports.

Most of the case reports published between the 1890s and 1960s were included in books written for the general public or from the point of view of spiritualists. Hence, they fell outside the literature and growing tradition of psychical research which eventually developed into modern
parapsychology.

Over a hundred books have been written on the subject of reincarnation since the late nineteenth century. However, the purpose of the present review is not simply to list or outline every mention of the subject, but to describe the efforts of scientists who have contributed significantly toward the establishment of a scientific inquiry into the phenomenon of rebirth. Thus, the literature that deals with the subject from a fictitious or a non-scientific viewpoint will not be included in the present review.

Fielding Hall (1898), an English civil servant, who lived for many years among the Burmese people, published six brief case histories of Burmese children who recalled previous lives.

Gabriel Delanne (1924) published a book that included an extraordinary collection of reports about Asian and European cases of the reincarnation type. He reproduced in his book many original letters, newspaper reports, and other documents. This was a significant contribution toward the documentation of such cases that added to the authenticity of them. Unfortunately, his work has never been translated into English.

Shirley published a book around 1932 that included many cases cited by Delanne. He also included the case of Nellie Foster that was first reported in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat.
in September 1892; his book also described some other cases that were not mentioned by Delanne.

Rao Bahadur Shyam Sunderlal (1922-23) began the first systematic investigation of rebirth cases in India. In 1924 he published reports of four cases in the *Revue Métapsychique* published in France. One of his case reports appears to be quite strong, because it included a written record of the statements made by the subject about his previous life before verifications were attempted. The subject of one of his cases also had a severe deformity apparently related to the previous life he recalled.

In 1927 K.K.N. Sahay, a lawyer of Bareilly, U.P., published a little booklet containing reports of seven cases that he had personally investigated. One of the reports was that of his own son Jagdish Chandra.

A notable feature of three of the Indian cases published in the 1920s (Sahay, 1927; Shyam Sunderlal, 1924), was that a written record of what the subject had said was made before any attempt at verifying his statements was begun.

S. C. Bose published a book of case reports (in Bengali) in 1959. This included reports on 14 cases that he had studied in the late 1930s.

In 1957, Professor B. L. Atreya (1957) of Benares Hindu University published a book on parapsychology. He included in it a section on reincarnation and a rather full account of one case of the reincarnation type that he had
investigated (the case of Parmod Sharma). Stevenson later investigated this case and included a report of it in his first book of case reports (Stevenson, 1974b).

In 1960, Stevenson published a two-part paper in which he surveyed the writings of scholars on the question of reincarnation from antiquity down to modern times. He included in this article summaries of several cases from different cultures. Through this article he was able to show that the numbers and quality of at least some reports or cases suggestive of reincarnation justified a systematic investigation of any additional cases that could be located (Stevenson, 1960).

In the following year (1961), Stevenson began his field investigations in India and Sri Lanka and gradually extended them to many other parts of the world. The first results of his scientific endeavor were published in 1966 (Stevenson, 1966/1974b) with further articles and books following in subsequent years (Stevenson, 1970, 1974c, 1975a, 1977b; Stevenson and Story, 1970; Story and Stevenson, 1967; Pasricha and Stevenson, 1977).

In 1966, Stevenson published a book reporting cases suggestive of reincarnation that he himself had investigated. This book included seven cases from India, three from Ceylon, two from Brazil, seven from Alaska, and one from Lebanon. The 20 cases he presented in this book represented the range of cases he had encountered and the different facets of
evidence they presented. The cases ranged from weak to strong with regard to the evidence they presented for reincarnation.

The most noteworthy feature of Stevenson's research was that he systematically recorded and investigated a large number of cases (about 600 by the time he published his first reports) and took a greater number of explanatory factors into account than his predecessors had considered. The study of a large number of cases helped him to discern some recurrent features in cases of different cultures; these may give clues to underlying processes. The numerous details that he elicited in his inquiries helped in weighing each case with regard to different plausible hypotheses that may account for such claims. Although Stevenson did not arrive at any final conclusions on the basis of the evidence obtained from these cases, he considered reincarnation the best explanation for the stronger cases. He thought it preferable to the alternative hypotheses for these claims, namely, fraud, cryptomnesia, paramnesia, genetic memory, extrasensory perception and personation, and possession. (These terms will be explained in detail in the chapter on Discussion.)

In support of the reincarnation hypothesis Stevenson lays stress on some other evidential aspects. First, the unusual behavioral aspects of the cases. The subject of a case of this type often behaves in a manner that is strange
for his family, but that corresponds well with the life and personality of the deceased person he claims to have been. This unusual behavior may include similar eating and clothing habits, likes and dislikes, and phobias apparently derived from the previous life.

A second kind of evidence shown by these subjects is their demonstration of special skills or aptitudes similar to ones the related previous personalities possessed (Stevenson, 1974b, 1977c).

Third and finally, special importance has been attached to the occurrence in the subject of birthmarks, deformities, and diseases for which there is no obvious normal explanation. When these correspond, as they often do, to wounds or diseases of the concerned previous personality they add considerably to the evidence for reincarnation. In Stevenson's opinion, these physical correspondences between subject and related previous personality are probably the most important feature of the cases in which they occur.

Gradually Stevenson's investigations and findings led him to isolate patterns of cases in several cultures (Stevenson, 1966, 1970, 1973, 1975b) and to compare these with each other (Stevenson, 1970). For instance, he compared the characteristics of Turkish cases with those from Ceylon with regard to various factors such as predominant sex of the subjects, the familial relationships, the circumstances of death of related previous personalities, and the occurrence of various other features. He began to correlate those features with the beliefs in reincarnation held by people in different cultures.
Since the investigation of these cases is mainly dependent on the testimony of the informants, the information may be defective and at times unreliable. To overcome this weakness Stevenson tried the modified techniques of more careful recording of data obtained from a large number of firsthand informants and interviews with the same informants at different occasions. He also proposed to follow these cases up to observe the later development of the subject and in some cases to elicit further evidence bearing on the authenticity of the cases. In 1974, he revised his work on 20 cases published in 1966 (Stevenson, 1974b). The new edition included a chapter that summarized results of follow-up interviews with 18 of the 20 subjects of the cases included in the book.

In subsequent years it has been possible for him to publish reports of cases in various cultures separately (Stevenson, 1975a, 1977b).

With the expansion of his investigations and his increased confidence in the hypothesis of reincarnation, Stevenson has presented a comprehensive article on the explanatory value of the idea of reincarnation (Stevenson, 1977c) that has received considerable recognition by its publication in a widely circulated and highly reputed academic journal. The same journal devoted much of another, later number to the study of reincarnation. The first mentioned article suggests a new approach in understanding
various aspects of human personality that are not adequately understood in the light of currently available theories. The author suggests the idea of reincarnation as a "potentially unifying theory that can make intelligible a number of disparate and seemingly unrelated observations in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, biology and medicine" (Stevenson, 1977c). However he offers reincarnation as a supplement to existing knowledge and not the only solution to all the incomprehensible aspects of human behavior. For example, it might help to understand the presence of infantile phobias, philias, and attitudes of vengefulness in children for which no apparent obvious factors available in the immediate environment can account.

**Improved Methodological Features of Recent Investigations**

The methodology of investigation into the claims of reincarnation advanced very slowly from simple verification of statements of the children of these cases to a fully developed scientific inquiry. The early investigators, even when they were careful in documentation, were mainly concerned with verifying the statements made by the subjects. On the basis of these verifications, they would either accept a case as that of reincarnation or reject it as a hoax without considering other possible interpretations for such claims. Secondly, the number of cases investigated up to 1960 by all these investigations put together did not exceed 50. It was therefore difficult to look for any particular
patterns in such a small number of cases studied by different investigators using different techniques. Although their cases did have some of the features found in later investigations, such as a high incidence of violent death and birthmarks (Shyam Sunderlal, 1924), these were not emphasized particularly by the investigators themselves.

The credit of lifting the subject of reincarnation out of the realm of anecdote to that of responsible scientific inquiry goes to Stevenson, who has been investigating such cases since 1960. The crux of the problem lies in the verification of cases that depend on the oral testimony of the informants, which may lead to grave errors of recording and invalidity of the whole information if proper measures are not taken. For the first time, he introduced scientific precautions to consider the reliability and validity of information obtained through various sources. The advances made in the methodology of investigation of rebirth cases since 1960 can be summarized as follows:

1. The more systematic collection and recording of data from a large number of cases. This has permitted the search for recurrent features in the cases that may give clues to underlying processes.

2. The more careful recording of data obtained from firsthand informants. This includes also appraisal of the competence of informants and the reliability
of documents

3. The analysis of each case with regard to interpretations alternative to reincarnation

4. The increased attention given to observations of the physical and behavioral resemblances between subjects and related previous personalities of the cases

5. Follow-up interviews (when feasible) with the subjects and some other informants for the cases. These have permitted observations of the subjects' later development and also (in some instances) further accumulation of evidence bearing on the authenticity of the cases

The present investigation has made possible some further methodological improvements. These will be indicated in the following chapter on Present Study.

**Surveys of Belief in Reincarnation**

The belief in reincarnation has existed down the ages in various parts of the world at different periods. In certain cultures it still continues strongly and in others it seems to have ceased although it may once have existed there at some stage. The belief has usually been associated with the southeast Asian countries, but many persons, even educated ones, do not know that even in modern times numerous groups of people outside southeast Asia have believed in
reincarnation, and still do so. The subject has attracted the attention of modern thinkers and a comprehensive compilation of such beliefs has been published (Head and Cranston, 1967, 1977).

Islamic sects of western Asia, such as the Alevis (Stevenson, 1970) and Druses (Stevenson, 1966/1974b); numerous natives in North America, especially of the north-west area, including Alaska (Slobodin, 1970; Stevenson, 1966/74b); many tribes of east and west Africa (Beals and Hoijer, 1965; Besterman, 1968; Noon, 1942; Parrinder, 1954-56; Thomas, 1968; Uchendu, 1964; Zahan, 1965); the Trobriand Islanders of the South Pacific (Malinowski, 1954; the northern tribes of Central Australia (Spencer and Gillen, 1904; Durkheim, 1965); and the Ainu of northern Japan (Munro, 1963) are some of the groups among which the belief in reincarnation has been reported.

A belief in reincarnation has been reported in widely geographically separated countries; and yet it is sometimes absent among people living close to those who have it. For example, recent inquiries have revealed that the Alevis of Anatolia do not believe in reincarnation (Bayer, 1970-71), although other Alevis who live in south central Turkey do. Similarly, the Ismailis, an Islamic sect of the Shiite branch, no longer believe in reincarnation (Makarem, 1972, 1973) although their ancestors once did. The Cunas of Panama also do not believe in reincarnation (Van de Castle,
The absence of any physical means of communication and similarities of claims in widely separated cultures suggests that the belief originated independently in various regions of the world.

Approaches to Reincarnation by Western Philosophers

India is said to have been one of the greatest sources of religious and philosophical developments for at least the last four millenia, and it has significantly contributed toward various concepts that deal with life after death (Parrinder, 1976). The idea of reincarnation is generally associated with southeast Asia, but it is important to note that a large number of Western philosophers have also approached the subject through philosophical reasoning. They have come to think that reincarnation is at least sensible, and perhaps even necessary. The German philosopher Schopenhauer was a leader in this respect. He argued that it was impossible to think that the soul was immortal without also thinking that it had had an existence (and hence, terrestrial life or lives) before its present life. (It appears that Schopenhauer was influenced by the Eastern writings that were beginning to come to Europe during his lifetime.)

Several other Western philosophers, notably Hume (1881), McTaggart (1915), Ducasse (1961), and Broad (1962/1971) have
taken reincarnation seriously and defended it.

David Hume, a skeptical philosopher, argued for the reasonableness of the idea of reincarnation. He emphasized on the one hand the weakness of the metaphysical and moral arguments for the immortality of the soul, and on the other, the strength of the physical arguments for its mortality. He concluded that, "metempsychosis is therefore the only system of this kind that philosophy can hearken to."

John McTaggart, another British philosopher, pointed out that the doctrine of reincarnation would be in any case the most probable form of the doctrine of immortality. He further argued that if both pre-existence and immortality are true, then, "each man would have at least three lives, his present one, one before it, and one after it." In his opinion this doctrine of pluralities of life is more probable even on a theory of immortality that did not include pre-existence.

C. D. Broad, a distinguished Cambridge philosopher, considered the theory of pre-existence and plurality of lives as one, "which is of sufficient theoretical interest and prima facie plausibility to deserve considerably more attention from psychical researchers and from philosophers who concern themselves with the nature and destiny of human beings than it has hitherto received."

C. J. Ducasse, another eminent philosopher, in his book on life after death, devoted a full section containing seven
chapters to the doctrine of reincarnation. At the end of his discussion of the empirical arguments which may be presented in support of the reincarnation hypothesis, he states: "If the reports [of the claimed reincarnation cases] are accurate, which we have of them and of other cases where memory likewise spontaneously extends to a period earlier than the birth or conception of the present body—they provide the best conceivable evidence that the person having those memories is a reincarnation of one who had died earlier."

Allusions to Reincarnation in Indian Scriptures

In India, where the present study has been conducted, there is a long history of belief in reincarnation. Scholars debate about the date of the earliest Indian scriptures in which reference is made to reincarnation. Some find passages of Rig Veda that can be interpreted as referring to reincarnation (Ranade, 1926; Radhakrishnan, 1953); others believe the first clear allusions to the subject occur in the Upanishads (Schweitzer, 1957). Definite mentions of reincarnation occurred in the Aitareya, Chhandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Katha, Mundaka and Praśna Upanishads. One also finds in some of the Upanishads definite allusions to the concept that is now generally known as that of karma, the idea that good or bad conduct in one life will influence the conditions and circumstances of a person in another life.

Scriptures have the authority derived from their
ascription to Divine inspiration. They are said to be based on the direct knowledge of the perceiver. The Upanishads assert truths about reincarnation; they are the records of empirical facts based on the personal experiences of the ancient seers. They, however, contain nothing that modern scientists would call "evidence."

In some other ancient scriptures (Puranas, for example) one occasionally finds a story about some experiences that appeared to influence the next life of a person. These examples might be considered a type of case history, but they contain little detail and are hardly more than anecdotes. Their main value today lies in telling about the duration and depth of the belief in reincarnation among Indians of two thousand or more years ago.

It appears that the belief has been carried to modern ages through various systems which believed in rebirth and pre-existence. When Indian thinkers of various schools began to develop their own notions of survival, diverse opinions were expressed and there was no imposed orthodoxy. The belief in reincarnation served different causes. The concepts of rebirth and karma have been used as a moral or social law in Manu's Dharamshastra.

Gradually heterodox schools of Indian philosophy and religion arose with their own scriptures, but some of their basic doctrines concerning life after death parallel or supplement Hindu teachings. Buddhism and Jainism, now small
in numbers in India, profess ancient and in some ways divergent beliefs. The Sikhs arose much later, but in their concepts of life after death, they share much with their Hindu neighbors (Parrinder, 1976).

The Jains have an ancient Indian religion. It has been suggested that the Jains and Buddhists preserved ideas current in the ancient, pre-Aryan Indus Valley civilization. Both religions reject the gods of the Hindus; or rather they may include them as secondary figures but they repudiate creator gods, since, for them, the world goes round in endless cycles. Both, however, believe in reincarnation.

The Jains believe in countless souls in human beings, animals, and plants. These souls are entangled in matter by good and bad karma, and salvation is the liberation of the soul from matter in the bliss of eternal isolation.

Buddhists, especially of the Theravada branch, not only deny or ignore God but also deny the existence of a soul. According to Buddhism, when a person dies, the accumulated effects of his actions set in motion a further train of events which leads to other consequences, one of which may be the birth of another terrestrial personality. Different schools of Buddhists subscribe to somewhat different concepts regarding what persists after death, but they agree among themselves in believing that the conduct of one personality can affect events in the life of another, later personality that is related to the first one through the process of
rebirth. The Buddha himself is said to have passed through hundreds of births. One of the most popular books in Asia is the Játaka (birth stories), which contains some 550 accounts of previous births of the Buddha in various human and animal forms, in each of which he performed his role perfectly.

The Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak in the fifteenth century A.D. Sikhs are monotheists, but although perhaps in some ways they were influenced by Muslim monotheism and mysticism, they are within the Indian (Hindu) tradition. In Sikhism also, the theory of karma explains the present sad or happy lot of man, although it can be changed by good deeds and the grace of God (Ādi Granth).

From the study of patterns of belief in India it appears that they have been diverse in nature and the diversity has been increased from time to time. There could be several factors responsible for this change. First, different people have different experiences relating to reincarnation, and these may add to or modify existing beliefs. Second, long after writing had come into use, the Samhitas, Brahamanas and Upanishads were only handed down orally. (It was felt that as sacred matters they must not be published or uttered before members of lower castes.) By great feats of memory they were retained until eventually they were written sometime in the Christian era. It is likely that in the process of passing down the messages the doctrines were modified and took different forms.
So far, the concept of rebirth has been dealt with from an historical point of view. Now some of the existing beliefs will be reviewed that have been inquired into by some earlier students of reincarnation.

The Hinduism of Indian villages differs markedly from what a scholar consulting the Hindu scriptures might expect. Dube (1955) pointed out that the Hinduism in villages is markedly different from that of the educated classes in the towns and cities. He showed that the religious practices of Indian villages have deviated from the classical philosophical systems of India and have become reduced to only fasts, feasts, and festivals in which prescribed rituals cover all the major crises of life. Worship and propitiation of gods and spirits follow the annual round of festivals and rituals of the human life cycle. Diseases and other difficulties may also necessitate invoking assistance from these sources.

Several field workers from different disciplines have carried out systematic inquiries concerning the religious beliefs and practices of their informants, including their acquaintance with the traditional Hindu teachings on reincarnation.

Carstairs (1957), who worked in a village of Rajasthan, found that high caste villagers had a thorough familiarity with the doctrines of reincarnation and karma; but the lower caste groups seemed to him to know much less about the belief
in reincarnation.

Elder (1959) made inquiries in a village of Uttar Pradesh and reported that 88 per cent of the persons he interviewed believed in reincarnation; the percentage of believers in reincarnation in his group was higher among the low caste people than among the higher ones.

Other surveys have revealed much lower incidences of belief in reincarnation among the lower castes. Harper (1959) reported from his observations in a village of Mysore that lower caste people showed complete unfamiliarity with the concept of rebirth.

Lewis (1958) interviewed 25 villagers in a village near Delhi. Only 14 of his respondents expressed a belief in reincarnation. He reported that the belief was stronger among the extreme social classes (i.e., Brahmins and Sudras) and was weaker among the intermediate ones.

Cohn (1959) made similar observations in a village of Uttar Pradesh. While discussing the matter of life after death with chamars, he found they were absolutely ignorant about the traditional Hindu concepts of life after death and rebirth.

Kolenda (1964) carried out an inquiry with sweepers (low caste villagers) in Uttar Pradesh. They were familiar with the concept of rebirth and karma but did not relate their present status (low caste) to any sinful deeds in past lives.

There have been some surveys of the belief in reincarnation
in Western countries. For example, in 1968 a Gallup Poll showed that an average of 18 per cent of respondents in eight countries of West Europe believed in reincarnation. In the United States, a similar survey showed that 20 per cent of the respondents believed in reincarnation. And a survey in Canada showed that 26 per cent of the respondents believed in reincarnation (Gallup International, 1969).

In a survey of a wide range of paranormal experiences conducted by Palmer and Dennis (1975) in a small city of the United States, 12.3 per cent of the respondents claimed that they had had what they believed were memories of a previous life. (Examination of their statements suggested that these were almost certainly fantasies and not similar to the cases of the reincarnation type with which the present study is concerned; some such cases do occur in the United States, but none were elicited in the survey by Palmer and Dennis.)

The above mentioned surveys in Western countries were conducted by sampling methods different from those used by the investigators, mostly anthropologists, who made inquiries about the belief in reincarnation in Indian villages. The results obtained in India and in the Western countries should therefore be compared only with an awareness of these methodological differences. So far as the results from the two regions are comparable, however, they show that the percentage of persons believing in reincarnation is appreciably
greater in India than in the West. (A later section of this thesis will contribute further support to this conclusion.)

The Belief in Reincarnation and Its Importance to the Study of Cases

It has been suggested, and probably rightly so, that cases of the reincarnation type nearly always—but there are exceptions—have been reported in cultures and families having a strong belief in reincarnation. This appears to be an important aspect that has not been dealt with scientifically. It is necessary, therefore, to examine and understand this belief, its strength, and its variations, in order to evaluate the cases themselves. The present study aims at examining the claims of persons who say they can recall spontaneously a previous life in relation to the strength of the belief in reincarnation.

A major assumption of this work, for which some evidence will be presented, is that the belief in reincarnation promotes the cases or at least facilitates their development and expression; at the same time the cases strengthen the belief in reincarnation among persons exposed to them, either directly or through reports of them published in news media.

The present investigation includes a study of the belief in reincarnation (in India) by means of a questionnaire on this subject to which 137 persons responded.