A Case of the Reincarnation Type in Ceylon: The Case of Disna Samarasinghe

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Introduction

CASES SUGGESTIVE of reincarnation occur in many different countries of the world. They are found in Europe and North America, and reports of European and North American cases are in preparation. They are, however, found more abundantly in many countries of Asia. During the past seven years we have studied 28 cases of the reincarnation type in Ceylon. We have already published four reports of cases of this type and several other case reports are in preparation. One of us has written an article summarizing the main features of cases of the reincarnation type in Ceylon and in another article the Ceylonese cases have been compared to those found in Turkey and among the Tlingit Indians of Alaska.

The present case report is presented here in order to bring a rather typical case of the kind to the attention of readers not familiar with the specialty.

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2 Stevenson, I. Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation. Series II. (In preparation.)


literatures of parapsychology or Buddhism in which, up until now, all reports of Ceylonese cases suggestive of reincarnation have been published. We do not expect the present case or, for that matter, any other single case, to compel any particular interpretation of the data presented, but we hope that readers will be sufficiently stimulated by this case report so that they will wish to read other reports of similar cases published and in preparation.

Methods of Investigation

The methods used in the investigation of the present case followed those outlined in detail elsewhere\(^1\) and we will therefore not describe them fully here. Suffice it to say that our practice is to interview as many witnesses as possible first in the village or town of the subject and then in the place where he (or she) claims to have lived. We make detailed notes of all the testimony as the witnesses talk. As much as possible, we try to interview informants separately so that they will not contaminate each other’s memories or tend to harmonize their narrations falsely. We check the statements of one witness against those of others and against what he has said on another occasion if we interview him more than once. We then compare the statements and behavior attributed to the subject (or expressed by him to us directly) with the corresponding events reported for the deceased personality the subject claims to have been. In short, our methods of investigation and of analysis are those of lawyers, historians, and psychiatrists who try to reconstruct as nearly as possible what happened during particular past events.

An important component of our data consists of observations of the nonverbal behavior of the witnesses and particularly of the subjects of the cases as they talk about the various details. These nonverbal elements of behavior give valuable clues both to the reliability of the witnesses and also to the emotions, often very strong ones, which these cases generate in the participants for various reasons. Cases of this kind consist not only of the attributed statements and recognitions of the child, but also of the evidences shown by the child of behavior appropriate for the deceased personality.

We will give next a short summary of this case and of its investigation and in doing so will introduce the reader to its chief participants and witnesses.

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

The subject of the present case is Disna N. K. Samarasinghe, who was born in the village of Udobagawa, near Galagedera (about 20 miles from Kandy) on April 26, 1959. Disna is the second living child and elder daughter in a family with four living children. Her father is Mr. A. S. Samarasinghe, a grocery merchant of Udobagawa and her mother is Mrs. Seelawathie Samarasinghe, a teacher in a nearby school at Minigamuwa.

\(^1\) Op. cit. n. 3.