

**Inferences from the Case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan:  
The Effect of Parental Questioning, of Meeting the  
“Previous Life” Family, an Aborted Attempt  
to Quantify Probabilities, and the Impact on His Life  
as a Young Adult**

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Ian Stevenson and associates (Stevenson et al., 1974, 1975, 1997) have compiled a large body of “Cases of the Reincarnation Type” from a variety of cultures around the world, asking the question “Do these cases indicate that reincarnation is the best explanation, or is some other explanation adequate to explain the phenomena?” Alternate explanations proposed include wishful thinking, the interpretation of the utterances of children on the basis of prior belief in reincarnation, that is, cultural construction, or even deception and self-deception (Chari, 1986; Mills, 1988, 1989; Stevenson et al., 1988).

It has long been recognized that the cases which are most significant in answering these questions are those in which the person identified as the deceased person the child is claiming to be (called the Previous Personality, or PP, by Stevenson) is someone initially entirely unknown to the child and his family. In some cases such a PP is later identified through a subsequent search made on the basis of the child’s statements. These cases represent a subset of the “solved” cases that Stevenson has amassed, as opposed to the “unsolved” cases, those in which a child makes a number of statements but no one is ever found who matches the statements of the child.<sup>1</sup> When a written record exists of the statements the child made before the case is solved, the possibility that familial knowledge about the deceased person has influenced the child’s statements and the presentation of the child’s utterances is eliminated. Cases with a written record before the two families meet are quite rare but have been reported by Stevenson (1975), Stevenson and Samararatne (1988), Haraldsson (1991), and Mills et al. (1994). Schouten and Stevenson (1998) have compared the small sample of cases with a written record made before the case is solved, which they call Type B cases, with those with a written record made after the families have met, or Type A cases. Because Type B cases are rare and deserve careful consideration, here I present an expanded description of the Type B case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan and consider some of the inferences from the case.

The case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan of northern India was previously published in a briefer form in the Chapter "Past-Life Experience" (Mills & Lynn, 2000) in the book *Varieties of Anomalous Experience* (Cardena et al., 2000). In Ajendra's case, the author took Ajendra and some of his family to visit the family of the Previous Personality for the first time when he was 13 years old. After presenting the case I evaluate it using the Scale to Measure the Strength of Children's Claims of Previous Lives (SOCS) developed by Tucker (2000), which grades this as a strong case; then I assess what the score on this scale would have been if Ajendra's father had not asked Ajendra questions, a process which produced the information which made it possible to solve the case. Next, I discuss my aborted attempt to assess whether the probability of Ajendra making this sequence of statements is beyond chance. Then I use the notes from the first meeting of the two families, and subsequent interviews with both families, to assess the degree to which cultural elaboration entered at this stage. I conclude that Stevenson's rigorous methods of documenting cases prevent later elaboration from being accepted as correct, while noting that slight elaboration did take place in the Ajendra case. Finally, I present data on the impact of the case on Ajendra based on a longitudinal study conducted in 2003.

### **The Case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan**

The case is one of the few in which the previous personality's family was unknown to Ajendra's family, a written record was made before the case was "solved," and the case was subsequently solved. The initial record was made by Mr. Gaj Raj Singh Gaur, a teacher in a junior college of northern India who has collaborated with Stevenson, collecting preliminary information on cases.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gaur then traveled the 75 kilometers to Fariha and succeeded in solving the case. I then reinvestigated the case, interviewing Ajendra and his parents and giving Ajendra and a boy from his community, matched as a control, some psychological tests. Then Mr. Gaur and I took Ajendra and some of his family members to meet the family of the PP, Naresh Chandra Gupta, in Fariha, some 75 kilometers from Ajendra's home. We also took this party to Shekhanpur, the PP's village. Neither Ajendra nor his family had been to Fariha or Shekhanpur before. This trip was 6 weeks after Mr. Gaur had first traveled to Fariha and solved the case. It was evident that the families did not recognize each other initially and had not met before.

G. R. S. Gaur recorded the litany of the subject's statements, as described by Ajendra's father when the subject was 13 years old in 1992 (Ajendra was born on August 8, 1978).<sup>3</sup> Ajendra made the statements between the ages of 36 and 60 months.<sup>4</sup> Below is a summary of the account Ajendra's father gave of the case before it was solved, from the notes Gaur wrote in Hindi, translated by a University of Virginia Hindi instructor.<sup>5</sup>

According to Ajendra's father, when Ajendra was about 3 years old he said, "Two water buffaloes used to give milk. I used to drink a bucket of milk, and you brought this little." This was said when he was offered only a small glass of milk at his aunt's home. He physically struck out at his aunt. Ajendra's father commented, "He is aggressive in nature. He is sulky and stubborn." According to his father, Ajendra said, "I used to have a mare also." He also said, "One time a *Punditine* [Brahmin widow] of fair complexion tried to mix poison in the food. Then I beat her a lot."

When Ajendra's father took his family to go to his natal village for Diwali, a Hindu festival, Ajendra said, "Daddy, don't go in the garden in the dark. *Dacoits* [gangsters] live there. Sometimes police get killed, sometimes *dacoits*." Ajendra's parents noted his phobia of the dark, which persisted until he was 13 years of age despite his aggressive nature.

Later, on a hot summer night when Ajendra was lying on his father's chest on the roof of their dwelling, Ajendra said, "Papa the *dacoit* [gangsters] came. I started shooting from the raised wall [*mundgari*] at the edge of the roof and the bullet hit me."<sup>6</sup> Ajendra mimed how he had crouched behind his father and shot at the *dacoits*. Ajendra was about 3 years old when this occurred.

Ajendra had never seen *dacoits*, nor did his father have a gun. After this incident his parents were convinced that he was talking about a past life, and his father began asking him a series of questions. In response to his father asking him where he lived, Ajendra said, "Fariha." Further questioning caused him to say, "There is a police office there. There are paved roads. One street goes into the town. On the corner of that street is the store of a merchant named Lala. Our groceries used to come from that store." When asked what his name was, he looked up in the air as if searching for a name and said, "Ashok Kumar Sharma lived in a village nearby." He also added, "There was a *pundit* widow [*punditine*] who has a 6–7 year old daughter. She used to cook our food." He also said, "One pair of pants is hanging in the room on a peg with some rupees in the back pocket. There is a gun in the wardrobe. The bolts of the rifle are pushed [he mimed the action to cock the gun]. Brass cartridges are used in the gun."

Although Ajendra's parents assumed that he was referring to a previous life, they did not pursue the case, fearing "that it might affect the brain of the child," a statement also translated as "affect him mentally."<sup>7</sup> They were not sure where Fariha was, never having been there, and originally assumed he was referring to Faridha, a town near Ajendra's father's natal village. After Gaur recorded the statements in 1992, he discerned there was a town named Fariha approximately 75 kilometers away from Ajendra's home, and he went there to see if a person could be found who matched the child's statements.

There Gaur was able to find a man named Ashok Kumar Sharma (actually called Tiwari—another Brahmin name).<sup>8</sup> He had been a close friend of one Naresh Chandra Gupta who was shot dead by *dacoits* on December 30, 1977, while taking position to shoot at them behind his father on the roof of their home in Shekhanpur. Shekhanpur was the Gupta family's native village, with

a population in 1981 of 1,301 (Census of India Series–22 Part X11: 50–51).<sup>9</sup> Naresh was 20 years old at the time of his death. In Shekhanpur the Gupta family had a home and buffaloes and fields, and his father had a small shop selling ghee (clarified butter). The family also had a home in Fariha, a town of 10,000, where Naresh's eldest son had a shop on the corner.<sup>10</sup> It was there that Naresh went to school with Ashok Kumar Sharma/Tiwari. The Gupta family shifted back and forth between these residences. Naresh's father, Kedar Nath Gupta, described the events that led to his son's death in Shekhanpur:

The *dacoits* came around 10:00 pm. In the room he and I we were lying on cots. Two guns were there and I said, "Take one and I will take one." Through the stairs we both reached the roof. When we knew about the *dacoits* we thought they were in some other house in the village—then the *dacoits* started to break down the door of my house. He put the gun on the edge of the roof [*mundgari*] and sat on the back side of me. *Dacoits* were firing from three sides and I was firing from the fourth. I asked, "Where are your cartridges?" He answered, "I left them on the roof." He asked if he should get it and I said, "No, stay behind me. Leave it." But he didn't follow my directions. So as he moved to take it, before reaching it, he was shot. I saw him shot. [The bullet entered] the lower part of the neck. When he fell down I thought he was dead. After a few minutes he died. Even then I knew my son had died but I remained firing. After some *dacoits* got injured and one was dead they left (Notes of June 24, 1992: 4).

Note that the circumstances that occasioned Ajendra to say that he was shot, and to mime shooting over a low wall or *mundgari*, were being on a roof with such a *mundgari* wall and being in close body contact with his father.

Kedar Nath Gupta confirmed that the Gupta family had water buffaloes, and their son, Naresh Chandra Gupta, drank a considerable amount of milk. They had owned a mare when Naresh was young. We were shown the gun Naresh was using at the time of his death, a Greener made in Birmingham, and the brass cartridges it used. It was bolted or cocked, as Ajendra had mimed when young, by pushing down on a shaft which bent out and by then bringing it up again. Streets were indeed paved in Fariha (as in many Indian towns, including the one in which Ajendra lived, but in contrast to Shekhanpur), and there is one road that leads into the town from the highway. In Fariha there is a police station (which had records of the murder of Naresh).

Regarding the fair-complexioned widow of a *pundit* [called *punditine* in Hindi] who prepared the food and poisoned it, some of Ajendra's statements are correct, some incorrect. Naresh's food was prepared by his fair-complexioned elder brother's wife, called *Bhabhi*, like him of the merchant caste, and her daughter was about 2 (according to Naresh's father) or 3 or 4 years old at the time of Naresh's death, (according to Naresh's mother), rather than 6 or 7 years old, as Ajendra had said. There was a great deal of animosity between Naresh and this woman, and, according to Naresh's mother, his father, his friend Ashok Kumar Tiwari, and Naresh's younger brother, Naresh apparently did suspect her of trying to poison him. Apparently Naresh did beat her (his younger brother's comment was "This is common.") When we arrived in the Gupta home in Fariha, the sister-in-law, or *Bhabhi*, in question (Naresh's elder brother's wife)

stayed around long enough for me to see her light complexion but refused to be questioned, then and in a subsequent visit to Fariha. Similarly, her husband did not make himself available for questioning.

Neither Naresh's family nor Ajendra's family gave an explanation for why Ajendra referred to his food preparer as a *punditine* or Brahmin widow.<sup>11</sup> When I asked Ajendra's father if a *Punditine* figured in Ajendra's childhood, he said that at the time that Ajendra originally made these statements his family rented their quarters from a fair-complexioned *pundit* widow or *Punditine* who lived on the premises and also sometimes fed Ajendra. She had a daughter who was older than Ajendra, as well as a younger son. Whether there was animosity between Ajendra and this *Punditine* I did not ascertain.

Ajendra was definitely hot tempered, as Naresh had been. I was shown the scar on Ajendra's brother's lower back, which was caused by Ajendra, who, while angry, threw a knife, stabbing his elder brother in the back. I was also told (by Ajendra's father) that when Ajendra's elder bother fractured his arm in a fight, Ajendra went and cut off the digit of a finger of the boy who had attacked his elder brother. Another aggressive incident was described: when he began school, one boy hit him, and after school Ajendra hit him in the head with a rock. Table 1 below shows the statements made, as per the written record, before the case was solved and the verification of all but two of these pieces of information.

### **How to Assess the Strength of the Case**

In this paper I make use of Tucker's (2000) SOCS, which allows us to see the comparative strength of this case. Then we assess what the score would have been if Ajendra's father had *not* interpreted his son's speech as representing a case of reincarnation and had *not* asked his son questions. Next I describe my attempt to weigh the relative probability of the individual statements and my aborted attempt to evaluate the probability of the combined statements in this case. Learning from the comments of a referee for this paper, I see how difficult it is to make an assessment of the "combined probability" of these events. Next, I examine whether the intense interaction that the meeting of the two families entailed indicates that new information would be added to such a case on this basis. Finally, I report the impact of this case on Ajendra now that he is a young adult.

### **The Strength of the Ajendra Singh Chauhan Case Using Tucker's Scale**

Tucker's (2000) SOCS consists of 22 measures. Below I list the measures that are relevant to the case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan, citing only a few measures with regard to which Ajendra's case was not applicable. The remaining items (listed in the endnote) are not relevant, meaning that he received a score of 0 on them.<sup>12</sup> These non-relevant measures are also shown in Table 2.

TABLE 1  
Statements and Behavior of Ajendra Singh Chauhan (statements #1–12 said spontaneously without questioning)

Item: statements or behavior	Informants (source)	Verification	Comments
1. "Two buffaloes used to give milk."	Ajendra's father, Mr. Hari Raj Singh Chauhan & Ajendra's mother	Yes, according to Naresh's father, Kedar Nath Gupta	The Gupta family had and has water buffaloes, and indeed sells ghee from their milk
2. "I used to drink a bucket of milk, and you gave me this little?"	Ajendra's father, Ajendra's mother	Yes, according to Naresh's father	This was said to Ajendra's mother's brother's wife when she offered him only a small glass of milk at her home. Ajendra rebuffed the small glass of milk, hitting at it and his aunt is disdain.
3. Statement of Ajendra's father: Ajendra has an aggressive nature, is sulky and stubborn	Ajendra's father (and mother)	Naresh also had an aggressive manner, according to his father and mother, and friend Ashok Kumar Tiwari.	This was one of his father's original statements recorded before the case was solved.
4. "I had a mare also."	Ajendra's father	Naresh's father	Naresh had a mare when he was young.
5. "One time a <i>Punditine</i> [ <i>Pundit</i> widow]..."	Ajendra's father	No, Naresh's father disconfirmed that the person who cooked for Naresh was a <i>Punditine</i> . It was Naresh's elder brother's wife, or <i>Bhabhi</i> , who prepared his food when he was in Fariha. She was of the merchant caste and not a widow (= two bits of incorrect information).	Ajendra's father said that at the time Ajendra made this statement they were renting their quarters from a <i>Punditine</i> , who also lived on the premises, and sometimes fed Ajendra.
6. "of fair complexion..."	Ajendra's father	Yes, Naresh's father; observation of the investigator (A. Mills)	The <i>Bhabhi</i> [elder brother's wife] who cooked Naresh's food was of fair complexion. So was the <i>Punditine</i> who fed Ajendra when he was young.
7. "Tried to mix poison in the food."	Ajendra's father	Yes, according to Ashok Kumar Tiwari, Naresh's friend, Naresh's father & Mother said Naresh so believed	Naresh's family and friend agreed that Naresh thought she tried to poison him, but would not say that she did try to do so.

TABLE 1  
Continued

Item: statements or behavior	Informants (source)	Verification	Comments
8. "Then I beat her a lot."	Ajendra's father	Yes, Naresh's father; Naresh's mother, Naresh's younger brother	The family was a little reluctant to talk about this, but did acknowledge that Naresh and his <i>Bhabhi</i> were both of petulant temperaments and had a tempestuous relationship.
9. " <i>Dacoits</i> (gangsters) are in the garden in the dark."	Ajendra's father	Yes, Naresh's father	Naresh's father said that it was dark when the <i>dacoits</i> began shooting at them from outside their home at Shekhanpur.
10. "The <i>dacoits</i> came."	Ajendra's father	Yes, Naresh's father, police record	
11. "I started shooting from the wall."	Ajendra's father	Yes, Naresh's father	The <i>dacoit</i> were outside, Naresh and his father started shooting from the wall or <i>mundgari</i> .
12. "I got hit."	Ajendra's father	Naresh's father, police record at Fariha	
Statements made in response to father's questions: [13–27]			
13. [I am from] "Fariha."	Ajendra's father	Naresh's father	Naresh lived both at Fariha and at the family's natal village Shekhanpur, where he was shot. His family had homes at both places. In Fariha Naresh stayed at the home of his elder brother who had a shop there.
14. "There was a <i>Punditine</i> [ <i>Pundit</i> or Brahmin widow] who had a 6–7 year old daughter."	Ajendra's father	No, Naresh's father (see #7 above re: <i>Punditine</i> ). The person who cooked Naresh's food was his elder brother's wife or <i>Bhabhi</i> . Regarding the age of the <i>Bhabhi's</i> daughter, she was about 2 or 3 years old at the time that Naresh was alive.	The <i>Punditine</i> who sometimes fed Ajendra and was his family's landlady at the time Ajendra made these statements had a daughter as well as a younger son. The daughter was older than Ajendra which may be why he gave the age as 6–7.
15. "She used to cook our food."	Ajendra's father	Again, not <i>Punditine</i> but <i>Bhabhi</i> , according to Naresh's father, and Ashok Kumar Tiwari.	Naresh's food was cooked by his <i>Bhabhi</i> of fair complexion with a young daughter when he was in Fariha.
16. "One pair of pants is hanging in the room on a peg."	Ajendra's father	Most likely, according to Naresh's father	This item is true for so many people that it has little significance.
17. "There were some rupees in the back pocket."	Ajendra's father	Most likely, according to Naresh's father	Again this was not known for sure, and is not specific to Naresh.

TABLE 1  
Continued

Item: statements or behavior	Informants (source)	Verification	Comments
18. "There is a gun in the wardrobe."	Ajendra's father	Yes, Naresh's father	Ajendra's father did not own a gun.
19. "The bolt of the rifle was pushed."	Ajendra's father	Yes, Naresh's father	We were shown the rifle; a Greener made in Birmingham.
Ajendra mimed how the gun was cocked	Ajendra's father	Naresh's father	Naresh's father showed that the rifle was indeed cocked by pushing forward then back, as Ajendra had mimed the action.
20. "Brass cartridges were used in the gun."	Ajendra's father	Yes, Naresh's father	We were shown the brass cartridges.
21. "Ashok Kumar Sharma was my friend."	Ajendra's father	Yes, Ashok Kumar Tiwari, Naresh's father	Ashok Kumar Tiwari explained that Naresh called him Sharma because all the other Brahmins in Fariha were named Sharma. [Tiwari is also a Brahmin name]. They were classmates and close friends.
22. "A. K. Sharma lived in a village nearby."	Ajendra's father	A. K. Tiwari	In fact, A.K. Tiwari and Naresh got to know each other when living in Fariha so they could attend high school. They were from different natal villages near Fariha.
23. "There is a police office [in Fariha]."	Ajendra's father	Police station in Fariha.	The Police Station has a record of Naresh Chandra Gupta's death in Shekhanpur in its records.
24. "There are paved roads in Fariha."	Ajendra's father	Naresh's father; we noted the paved roads as well.	The roads are paved in Fariha as in Etah (Ajendra's hometown) but not in Shekhanpur.
25. "One street goes into the town."	Ajendra's father	We noted that one street diverges from the highway that goes to Firozabad into the town of Fariha.	
26. "On the corner of the street is the store of Lala" (a Baniya or person of the merchant caste).	Ajendra's father	Yes, according to Naresh's father	Naresh's father said that shop is no longer in existence, but at the time Naresh was alive, his brother's store was on the corner. Naresh's brother (as Naresh) were of the Merchant or Baniya caste.



TABLE 1  
Continued

Item: statements or behavior	Informants (source)	Verification	Comments
27. "Our groceries used to come from that store."	Ajendra's father	Yes, according to Naresh's father	
Total number of statements: 27	Ajendra's father	Number of correct statements: $27 - 2 = 25$ ; number of correct bits of information, $27 - 3 = 24$	Calling the person who fixed his food a <i>Punditine</i> , and giving the daughter's age as 6-7 where incorrect. The term <i>Punditine</i> contains two bits of incorrect information: the <i>Bhabhi</i> (sister-in-law) who prepared his food was neither a widow nor a Brahmin.
Total number of correct statements: 25	Naresh's father		
Number of specific correct statements: 23			
Number of specific correct statements for which a probability can be calculated: 6		Number of specific statements = $25 - 2 = 23$ (#s 16 & 17 true for almost very 20-year-old male in India in 1977; not specific)	Approximate Probabilities can be calculated for 6 items, but only 5 can be considered independent
Total number of mimed actions: 2	Ajendra's father	Naresh's father	
1) Crouching behind low wall or <i>mund-gari</i> on the roof of a house, Ajendra mimed shooting in a position right beside his father			
2) Ajendra mimed the cocking of the rifle			
Number of times similarity of situation prompted statements: 4	Ajendra's father	Naresh's father	1) The <i>dacoit</i> attack was in the dark; note Ajendra's phobia of the dark
1) In the dark (both at Ajendra's father's village and later in the dark on the roof at Etah)			

TABLE 1  
Continued

Item: statements or behavior	Informants (source)	Verification	Comments
2) In a village setting			2) <i>dacoits</i> were mentioned when in a village setting, Ajendra's father's village, which has similarities to the village where Naresh was shot dead
3) In close physical proximity to his father, their bodies touching			3) Ajendra was lying on his father's body on the roof of their home in the dark; Naresh was in close physical proximity to his father as they were shooting.
4) On the roof with a low wall or <i>mundgari</i>			4) Naresh and his father were crouched behind the low wall or <i>mundgari</i> on the roof of their home in Shekhanpur; Ajendra and his father were on the roof with a low wall or <i>mundgari</i> when Ajendra described being shot.
Similarity of temperament of Ajendra and Naresh: Aggressive nature			

### *Measure 1. Regarding Birthmarks/Birth Defects*

Corresponding to fatal wound on deceased individual: Score = 0. Ajendra, according to his mother, had none. In the excitement of returning from the first visit to Naresh Chandra Gupta's family, Ajendra's elder sister and brother claimed that Ajendra had a birthmark on his neck at the place where Naresh was fatally shot that had subsequently faded. With no confirmation of the mother, this category has a score of 0.<sup>13</sup>

### *Measure 2. Regarding Birthmarks/Birth Defects*

Corresponding to nonfatal wound on deceased individual: Again, score = 0.

### *Measure 3. Disease or Infirmary Related to Deceased Individual*

Naresh Chandra Gupta suffered from grand mal seizures, according to his father, starting in 1973. Indeed, the severity of the seizures had increased and interfered with completion of his high school education. At this stage in his life his family sent him to Delhi, Agra and Kanpur for treatments. Naresh's father said that Naresh had recovered from the seizures about 8 months before his death in 1977. Ajendra had shown no such proclivity. There is, therefore, no score for this item.

*Measure 4. Statements About the Previous Life*

Subject claims to remember previous life: Using Tucker's scale, which gives 0 for child making statements, -2 for no statements, claim made only on the basis of other evidence; the score = 0.

*Measure 5. Statements About Places or People as They Appeared During Previous Life, These Appearances Having Since Changed*

Because Ajendra did not meet the family of Naresh Chandra Gupta (the PP) until he was 13 and therefore past the age of vividly (or even vaguely) recalling a previous life, he did not make statements about how things had changed. The one statement he did make after the excitement of meeting the Gupta family, which was not verified, will be described and discussed below. Score = 0.

*Measure 6. Statements About the Previous Life Verified as Correct Minus Incorrect Statements Made*

There were 24 statements, some containing more than one piece of information, making a total of 27 pieces of information. Two bits of information were incorrect; therefore, the number of correct statements is 25. Score = 8.

### **Behavior**

Of the 10 categories identified by Tucker, Ajendra had the following three.

*Measure 7. Unusual Dietary Cravings or Avoidances Related to Previous Life*

Liking for large quantities of milk: Score = 3.

*Measure 11. Unusual Skills or Aptitudes Related to Previous Life*

The PP, Naresh Chandra Gupta, was noted by his family to be hot tempered, as manifested by his beating his elder brother's wife. As stated above, Ajendra was also noted by his parents to be highly aggressive. Score = 3.

*Measure 13. Unusual Phobias Related to Previous Life*

Ajendra had a major fear of the dark, notable in an aggressive boy, related presumably to being shot dead in the dark (c. 11:00 pm according to the police record, c. 10:00 pm according to Naresh's father, who noted the dark, saying the dacoits had torches). Score = 3.

*Measure 17. Connection to Deceased Individual*

Identification of deceased individual by other investigators (G. R. S. Gaur, in this case): Score = 2.

*Measure 18. Connection Between the Two Families Before the Case Developed*

Total strangers unknown to each other: Score = 5.

TABLE 2  
The Strength-of-Case Scale (SOCS) in the Ajendra Singh Chauhan Case

Item	SOCS possible points	Ajendra points
<b>Birthmarks/birth defects</b>		
1. Corresponding to fatal wound on deceased individual		
Verified by medical records	8	0
Verified by friends or relatives of deceased	5	0
Claimed by subject but not verified	2	0
2. Corresponding to nonfatal wound on deceased individual		
Verified by medical records	5	0
Verified by friends or relatives of deceased	3	0
Claimed by subject but not verified	1	0
3. Disease or infirmity related to deceased individual		
Verified by medical records	4	0
Verified by friends or relatives or deceased	2	0
Claimed by subject but not verified	1	0
<b>Statements about the previous life</b>		
4. Subject claims to remember previous life		
Yes	0	0
No, claim made only on basis of other evidence	-2	0
5. Statements about places or people as they appeared during previous life, these appearances having since changed	5	0
6. Statements about the previous life verified as correct minus incorrect statements made		
>20	8	8
11-20	5	
6-10	3	
1-5	1	
0	0	
-1 to -5	-2	
-6 to -10	-5	
<-10	-8	
<b>Behavior</b>		
7. Unusual dietary cravings or avoidances related to previous life	3	3
8. Unusual methods of eating or table manners related to previous life	3	0
9. Unusual use of intoxicants related to previous life	3	0
10. Unusual phobias related to previous life	3	0
11. Unusual skills or aptitudes related to previous life	3	3
12. Unusual animosities related to previous life	3	0
13. Unusual phobias related to previous life	3	3
14. Behavior related to that of the opposite sex		
According to friends or relatives	3	na
According to subject or investigator only	1	na
15. Desire or reluctance to return to previous family or place		
Strong desire	3	
Moderate desire	1	
Neutral	0	0
Moderate reluctance	1	
Strong reluctance	3	

TABLE 2  
Continued

Item	SOCS possible points	Ajendra points
16. Memories of previous life expressed in play	3	0
Connection to deceased individual		
17. Identification of deceased individual		
By academic investigators	3	
By other investigators	2	2
By family or friends	1	
18. Association between the two families before case developed		
Close association or same family	-2	
Slight association	-1	
Knew about each other but no association	0	
Total strangers unknown to each other	5	5
19. Distance (in km) between child's birthplace and deceased individual's main residence		
0.0-1.5	0	
1.6-24.9	2	
25.0 or more	5	5
20. Difference in social status between child and deceased individual		
Slight	1	1
Moderate	2	
Great	3	
21. Difference in economic status between child and deceased individual		
Slight	1	1
Moderate	2	
Great	3	
22. Difference in caste of subject and deceased individual with score equal to difference in ranking by Brahmin-Kshtriya-Kayastha-Vaishya-(0 to 5) Sudra-Untouchable		1
	SOC highest score: 49 <sup>a</sup>	
	Ajendra score: 32	

Note: This table is adapted from Tucker's table 1 (2000: 574-575).

<sup>a</sup> The highest possible score on SOC is 84. The measures are those most pertinent to assessing the strength of a case. However, no cases have all of the features identified.

*Measure 19. Distance (in kilometers) Between the Child's Birthplace and Deceased Individual's Main Residence*

In fact, the distance between Ajendra's home and that of Naresh was more than 75 kilometers. Therefore, the score = 5.

*Measure 20. Difference in Social Status Between Child and Deceased Individual*

This score, as is the case with measures 21 and 22 below, is based on the Socio-Economic Status (SES) Scale Instrument for Rural India, which assesses

caste, occupation, education, social participation, land, house, farm power, material possessions, and family type. The difference is slight: Score = 1. Although Naresh's family is of the merchant caste rather than the warrior caste, which is considered to be a higher caste, Naresh's family had more buffaloes, more material possessions and a bigger (joint) house, etc. The difference is slight: Score = 1.

*Measure 21. Difference in Economic Status Between Child and Deceased Individual*

Slight: Score = 1.

*Measure 23. Difference in Caste of Subject and Deceased Individual with Score Equal to Difference in Ranking by Brahmin-Kshatriya-Kayastha-Vaishya-Sudra-Untouchable*

Score = 1.

The total score for the Ajendra Singh Chauhan case is 31.<sup>14</sup> See Table 2 for a summary of the SOCS score for the case of Ajendra. The range of scores in Tucker's (2000) sample of 799 cases was from -3 to +49, with a mean of 10.40, a median of 8, and a standard deviation of 9.48. The score in Ajendra's case of 31 would place it in the top 3% of the sample of 799 cases. In fact, the case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan was not part of that sample, but has been entered into the computer database since then. A calculation of the SOCS of the currently entered sample of 948 cases, in which the case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan is included, shows that Ajendra's case is in the top 5% of this larger sample.

**The Strength of the Ajendra Singh Chauhan Case  
(Using Tucker's Scale) if His Father Had Not Asked Questions**

Mills and Lynn (2000: 285) queried, "To what degree was the past life experience shaped by the culture-based expectations regarding past lives, along with suggestive, subtle influences that shaped the reactions of those involved in studying and documenting current and historical events?" This question can be answered by two methods. The first is assessing what the strength of the case would have been without the questions Ajendra's father put to him. Table 3 below summarizes this information and demonstrates that without the questions asked by Ajendra's father, the case would be unsolved and the score for the case would be 0.

When Ajendra initially repulsed the small glass of milk he was offered by his aunt (his mother's brother's wife), saying that he used to drink a bucket of milk and had water buffaloes, his family was amused and presumed that he was probably talking about a previous life. However, at that time they left it at that. They did not probe for further information. Similarly, when Ajendra showed fear that *dacoits* might appear when he was at his father's natal village and showed

a fear of the dark, his family assumed this related to a past life, since it had no reference to his current life, but again, they did not question him further.

It was the third incident, when Ajendra gave more detail, talking about having been shot by *dacoits* as they fired from the edge of the roof, that prompted further questioning on the part of Ajendra's father. Note that both this incident and the previous one in his father's natal village were elicited by the similarity of circumstance to what was apparently a previous life memory. Matlock has noted that similarity of context, or seeing something from the apparent previous life, is one of the triggers to past-life memory (Matlock, 1989). Note that the initial incident was a discrepancy between the current life treatment and his presumed past life treatment. The incident of being given little milk revealed what turned out to be similarities of temperament and behavior, namely a hot temper. However, no one would ever have known that this behavior matched that of a previous personality if Ajendra's father had not pursued what Ajendra said and mimed when they were on the roof of their dwelling. It was his father's asking him where he was from and what his name was that elicited the name of a town (Fariha) and the name of a friend (Ashok Kumar Sharma). It took these pieces of information for the case to be solvable. In knowing where to go and whom to ask for, Mr. Gaur was able to solve the case. Once the case was solved it was possible to ascertain how many of Ajendra's initial and solicited statements were correct. The number ( $27 - 2 = 25$ ) definitely contributes to this being in the highest quadrant of the 799 cases Tucker (2000) has analyzed.

### **An Aborted Attempt to Quantify the Probabilities of Ajendra's Statements Being Correct**

In Mills and Lynn (2000: 285) we wrote

It is difficult to assess what the combined probability of finding an Ashok Kumar Sharma (a common name), a town named Fariha (very uncommon), a man who shot at dacoits while on a roof close to his father, using a gun cocked in a certain way, and who was hit (the frequency of dacoit battles is difficult to ascertain for the area, but they are certainly not rare), combined with allegations of being poisoned by a fair-complexioned woman, and combined with the misinformation that she was a Brahmin widow.

The question is, can we fairly say that the probability of finding someone who matched 25 out of 27 items of information is beyond chance? Originally I thought this was an exercise that could produce meaningful results, even noting that the specificity of each of these individual items differs. As Table 1 shows, the statement about having a pair of pants hanging up (Item # 16) and the statement that there were a few rupees in the pocket (Item # 17) could apply to almost any 22-year-old male in northern India. Initially I thought that Items #1, #12, #14, #21, and #24 are the items that could be approximately quantified and that it was legitimate to try to make a calculation of their combined probability. On the basis of commentary by a reviewer of this article, I now appreciate more fully a) the difficulty of assigning a valid probability for these five different

TABLE 3  
The SOCS Score in the Ajendra Singh Chauhan Case Compared to the SOC Score if  
Ajendra's Father Had Asked No Questions

Item	If no questions	Ajendra points
<b>Birthmarks/birth defects</b>		
1. Corresponding to fatal wound on deceased individual		
Verified by medical records	0	0
Verified by friends or relatives of deceased	0	0
Claimed by subject but not verified	0	0
2. Corresponding to nonfatal wound on deceased individual		
Verified by medical records	0	0
Verified by friends or relatives of deceased	0	0
Claimed by subject but not verified	0	0
3. Disease or infirmity related to deceased individual		
Verified by medical records	0	0
Verified by friends or relatives of deceased	0	0
Claimed by subject but not verified	0	0
<b>Statements about the previous life</b>		
4. Subject claims to remember previous life		
Yes	0	0
No, claim made only on basis of other evidence	0	0
5. Statements about places or people as they appeared during previous life, these appearances having since changed	0	0
6. Statements about the previous life verified as correct minus incorrect statements made		
>20	0	8
11-20		
6-10		
1-5		
-1 to -5		
-6 to -10		
<-10		
<b>Behavior</b>		
7. Unusual dietary cravings or avoidances related to previous life	0	3
8. Unusual methods of eating or table manners related to previous life	0	0
9. Unusual use of intoxicants related to previous life	0	0
10. Unusual phobias related to previous life	0	0
11. Unusual skills or aptitudes related to previous life	0	3
12. Unusual animosities related to previous life	0	0
13. Unusual phobias related to previous life	0	3
14. Behavior related to that of the opposite sex		
According to friends or relatives	0	na
According to subject or investigator only	0	na
15. Desire or reluctance to return to previous family or place		
Strong desire	0	na
Moderate desire	0	na
Neutral	0	0
Moderate reluctance	0	na
Strong reluctance	0	na



TABLE 3  
Continued

Item	If no questions	Ajendra points
16. Memories of previous life expressed in play Connection to deceased individual	0	0
17. Identification of deceased individual		
By academic investigators	0	na
By other investigators	0	2
By family or friends	0	na
18. Association between the two families before case developed		
Close association or same family	0	na
Slight association	0	na
Knew about each other but no association	0	na
Total strangers unknown to each other	0	5
19. Distance (in km) between child's birthplace and deceased individual's main residence		
0.0–1.5	0	na
1.6–24.9	0	na
25.0 or more	0	5
20. Difference in social status between child and deceased individual		
Slight	0	na
Moderate	0	na
Great	0	na
21. Difference in economic status between child and deceased individual		
Slight	0	1
Moderate	0	na
Great	0	na
22. Difference in caste of subject and deceased individual with score equal to difference in ranking by Brahmin-Kshtriya-Kayastha-Vaishya-(0 to 5) Sudra-Untouchable	0	1
Ajendra score with questions asked: 31		
Ajendra score if no questions had been asked: 0		

Note: This table is adapted from Tucker's table 1 (2000: 574–575).

items and b) the unreliability of assuming that they are independent of each other and that a combined probability based on their multiplication is valid. I discuss the reliability, or lack thereof, of the probability of five of the items below and then return to the inapplicability of summing them into a combined probability.

Regarding Item #1 (“Two buffaloes used to give milk”), the question is how many people had two water buffaloes? Table 2 of the 1991 India Census shows that 67.7% of the people in India fall into the category of “Farmers, fishermen, hunters, loggers and related workers.” While people in this category *may* have water buffaloes, not all have one water buffalo, let alone two.<sup>15</sup> I had assumed that most people who have a mare (Item #3) also fit into this category, but some people who have mares may be in other occupational categories; therefore, I decided not to use Item #3 in any calculation. However, since originally feeling

content with the figure of 67%, I have become aware that the urban/rural distinction and many other factors impact who has and does not have two water buffaloes and that it is inaccurate to think that an accurate figure can easily be ascertained as to the probability of this circumstance applying to someone who died in Uttar Pradesh in the 1960s. These difficulties apply to most of the other items I thought significant.

Regarding Item #12 (“I got hit”), the probability that someone was shot fatally: the percentage of violent death in India in 1973 I calculated at 0.07% using the United Nations Demographic Yearbook (1979: 439).<sup>16</sup> However, death by violent means represents a much greater proportion of cases of the reincarnation type, in India as elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, not all violent death is due to *dacoit* or robbers. What proportion of violent death is due to robbers cannot be ascertained.

Regarding Item #14 (“I am from Fariha”), the question I initially sought to answer was, how many Farihas are there and how many people live in Fariha?<sup>18</sup> The chances of anyone in Uttar Pradesh living in Fariha are 3,026 out of 139,112,287, or .0002175. However, while it is unlikely that Ajendra made up Fariha as being a place in which he lived in a previous life, I now recognize the difficulties in ascribing either the 1/710 or the .0002175 figure as meaningfully addressing the chances that Ajendra would claim to come from there.<sup>19</sup> Further, the first reviewer notes that as I calculated it, “Fariha would be just as unlikely where Ajendra had heard of it or not . . . the important issue becomes not what percent of people live in Fariha, but rather, what are the odds that the events the child described could have happened in Fariha.” That is even more difficult to calculate, and to compare to Etah, where Ajendra lives.

With regard to Item #19 (“The bolt of the rifle was pushed”), originally I did not consider Ajendra’s statement that the rifle was cocked in a certain way to be quantifiable, but a series of circumstances put me in contact with Graham Greener of the W. W. Greener Company that made the rifle that Naresh Chandra was wielding at the time of his death.<sup>20</sup> Mr. Greener surmised that the rifle that Naresh was using was either a Facile Princeps model or an Empire model:

From 1880 to 1965 we made some 45,000 guns and about a third were Facile Princeps models. Most of our guns were exported so to get some idea of the likelihood of how many were in India we need to know how many guns were exported to that country. A rough guess would be 2.5% so this would mean that there would be just over 1,000 guns of this type in India. We frequently see early examples so they can last many lifetimes but inevitably some would be destroyed or damaged beyond repair and some I know have found their way back to England after India obtained its independence. At independence the country was split so some of these guns would be in what is now Pakistan or Bangladesh. So how many does that leave in India? My guess would be about 500. Secondly, other similar guns were made by us—Empire model, Emperor model and Sovereign model—about 10,000 in total and probably 95% were Empire models. I would expect a similar number of Empire models to be in India as Facile Princeps model. In terms of the A&D models, we made about the same number of these as Facile Princeps models, they were less expensive to make so were usually at the lower end of the range of guns made by our company. Similarly I would expect similar percentages of A&D

models. No other company made the Facile Princeps type of gun to our knowledge since it was for many years protected by patents (Greener, e-mail of July 4, 2001).

After further consideration, Graham Greener noted that there are other rifles that are cocked in a similar way. Mr. Greener noted that they also made a greater number of Lee Speed/Lee Enfield rifles as well as the Belgian Mauser rifles as part of the war effort:

All these have sliding bolts which cock the weapon and all have breeches that open laterally. I do not have the number of mausers produced but production of the Lee Enfields reached 1,500 per week in 1916 and remained at that rate until the end of the war. This puts the likely numbers made at more than 200,000 . . . . Of the 200,000 or so numbers made it is not known how many would have ended up in India. You could use the same percentages as I indicated for the Facile Princeps but I think the likelihood is for the number to be very much less (Greener, e-mail of July 14, 2001).

The relevant question is whether the pushing or pulling motion with a lateral opening of the cocking mechanism applies to other guns, or guns that Ajendra might have seen in movies when he made his statement when preschool age. One can see the problems of trying to calculate that probability. Using the most conservative figures, the estimate is that there were 500 Facile Princeps; 500 A&D rifles; 111 Empire rifles; and 5,000 Lee Speed/Lee Enfield rifles and as many mausers as Lee Speed/Lee Enfield rifles in India at the time of Naresh's death. Naresh was using one of approximately 11,111 such guns in India. It is indeed very difficult to assess what the chances are that Ajendra would mime that type of action for a rifle.

Regarding Item #21 ("Ashok Kumar Sharma was my friend"), what is the probability that a person in Uttar Pradesh had a friend named Ashok Kumar Sharma/Tiwari? Ashok was a popular Emperor in India, and the name occurs fairly commonly as a first name. Kumar means essentially male child and is a common middle name or accompaniment to a first name for males in India. In the Election Commission of India General Elections for '98 plus the Election Commission of India General Elections of 1999 List of Contesting Candidates, there are a total of 35 names of candidates.<sup>21</sup> None is named Ashok Kumar Sharma, none is named Ashok Kumar, and one is named Ashok. In another sample of 35, that of the cases of children said to recall a previous life in northern India studied by Mills (see Mills, 1989, 1990, 1993; Mills et al., 1994), one of the children is named Ashok Kumar; none are named Ashok Kumar Sharma. Therefore, I originally concluded that the percent of Ashok Kumars is probably not greater than .03, and that if one makes the conservative estimate that no more than one third of the people in UP are Brahmins, then the probability of being named Sharma (or Tiwari) and the chance of being named both Ashok Kumar and Sharma would be no greater than .01.<sup>22</sup> However, the counsel of Reviewer 1 indicates the difficulties in assuming that "two lists of 35 names can accurately be used to conclude that fewer than 3% of individuals would have a given name."

Regarding Item #24 (“There are paved roads in Fariha”), initially I thought that there are several ways to begin to quantify this statement. One way I tried was to count the number of towns and villages that are shown on the Map of District Mainpuri, which is the frontispiece to the Census of India 1981 Series—22 Part XIII—A Village and Town Directory, District Mainpuri. This technique reveals that 24 out of 35, or 69% of places named, are on paved roads. Obviously this is the conservative estimate, as there are a great deal more villages in District Mainpuri than are shown on that map. The maps of each Tahsil, roughly equivalent to a county, show the density of villages, and the same volume lists them. For the Tahsil Jaserana, in which Fariha was classified in 1981, there are 274 villages. There are four towns on paved roads in Tahsil Jaserana, according to the map cited above, Fariha being one of these. If one considered the total number of possible places to live in that Tahsil alone, the probability of being on a paved road shrinks to 4 in 277, or .01. I have not used this figure because many people, like Naresh Chandra Gupta, come from a natal village but also have established households in the neighboring town and administrative center. Ajendra identified Fariha as such a center, noting (Item #23) that there is a police station in Fariha. I have not found a list of police stations, but suspect that they exist in the four towns on paved roads in Tahsil Jaserana.

With regard to the impossibility of quantifying other items, the other items are even more challenging to quantify. What is the combined probability that someone was shot by *dacoits* when crouching behind a *Mundgari* or low wall, in close physical proximity to his father? We did not count the number of roofs with a *Mundgari* in either Ajendra’s native town of Etah or in the village where Naresh Chandra Gupta was killed; without these percentages there is no way to factor this part of Ajendra’s account into the equation. Again, I have no idea how many households have rifles (Ajendra’s did not).

Ideally the probability of the above features would also be factored with the probability of having an aggressive nature and of suspecting the person who prepared his food of trying to poison him, and of her being fair, while effectively quantifying that she was not a *Punditine* and that her daughter was younger than the age Ajendra (at the age of 3) gave.

I made an attempt to quantify the probability of Items #1, 12, 14, 19, 21, and 24. Originally I thought that one could calculate the combined probability for the five items for which I had made some kind of a rough estimate, using in each instance the most conservative figure. That probability was  $.68 \times .07 \times .0014 \times .00009 \times .01 \times .69 =$  [according to my calculator] is  $3.7848 \times 10^{-10}$ , or virtually 0. If one decides that paved roads were part of the reason that Ajendra mentioned Fariha and eliminates that item (#12) from the calculation, the probability of making these statements is still very small. I concluded that the chances of the pieces of information Ajendra specified applying to a random sampling of the population was negligible, on the basis of the bits of information that are quantifiable. However, I am grateful for unidentified Reviewer 2 of this article, who pointed out that a) it is difficult to accurately quantify the items; b) it is

difficult to know if the discrete items are independent of one another; and c) the larger the number of probabilities multiplied together, the smaller the probability just on this basis.<sup>23</sup> Reviewer 2 noted “An attempt to quantify the likelihood of a match by chance is admirable, but many of the most impressive parts of the cases (such as the knowledge that the PP thought a woman was trying to poison him) would appear to be unquantifiable . . . [because] much of the value of the case cannot be quantified.”

Indeed, it is difficult to assess the chances that 25 out of the 27 items of information Ajendra gave were accurate. Note that the probability alone of Ajendra saying he was from Fariha, a town in a different district from his own, at a considerable distance from his home town of Etah, to which Ajendra and his parents had never been and of which his parents had never heard, in itself cannot be explained as likely or as fantasy. Ajendra’s identification with this narrative requires careful examination of the possibility that his memory included events that did indeed occur to a different deceased person. Nonetheless, after the time-consuming diversion of attempting to calculate a numerical value of the probability, I have not advanced beyond the conclusion made by Mills and Lynn (2000: 285):

It is difficult to assess what the combined probability of finding an Ashok Kumar Sharma (a common name), a town named Fariha (very uncommon), a man who shot at dacoits while on a roof close to his father, using a gun cocked in a certain way, and who was hit (the frequency of dacoit battles is difficult to ascertain for the area, but they are certainly not rare), combined with allegations of being poisoned by a fair complexioned woman, and combined with the misinformation that she was a Brahmin widow.

### **Non-Significant Elaboration of the Case after the Two Families’ Meeting: Observations from Taking Ajendra to Meet the Family of Naresh Gupta**

Ajendra was 13 years old when he traveled with his father, his elder sister and brother, Mr. Gaj Raj Singh Gaur, Dr. L. P. Mehrotra and myself to visit the village and town occupied by Naresh Chandra Gupta, the person identified as the PP. This is well past the age when children spontaneously remember previous lives. Nonetheless, Mr. Mehrotra was hopeful that going to the sites of the previous life might still elicit previous-life memories. Indeed, occasionally adults traveling to a new scene for the first time will have strong *deja vu* or recollections of a previous life (Mills, 1989; Stevenson, 2001). This did not prove to be the case with Ajendra.

The author videotaped the trip, which was first to the village of Shekhanpur, where Naresh died, and then to Fariha, where Naresh is said to have beaten the woman he thought poisoned his food. In both contexts we sought to see if Ajendra could lead us to the house where Naresh had lived.

In the first instance, in the village of Shekhanpur, Ajendra certainly took turns I would not have (he has, however, been to more Indian villages than I) and walked past the place where the Gupta home used to be. In fact, the dwelling had been torn down since Naresh's death, so the same structure in fact did not exist to be recognized.<sup>24</sup> This inability to determine where Naresh had lived also continued in Fariha.<sup>25</sup> Repeatedly Ajendra was asked if he recognized where he was, or where his house was. He would shake his head, saying "No." This inability to make recognitions also included people. When finally at the Gupta home in Fariha, Ajendra was unable to select his father from a spontaneously formed line-up of family members. Similarly, he was not able to recognize Ashok Kumar Sharma, although he was fairly brimming with eagerness to be so acknowledged.

Once the parties knew who each other were, the interaction between them during this initial visit was intense. While I interviewed Naresh's father about the events in Naresh's life of which Ajendra had spoken (see the items in Table 1), Ajendra and his brother and sister were whisked off to the upper story of the house, my notes say, to

... the women's quarters where they were made much of. Although Ajendra never claimed to recognize anyone, there was (I am told [I did not witness this]) much weeping and emotion in seeing Ajendra, and when he came to the van he was visibly pleased and smiling at the attention. He said he would definitely return to Fariha again. His father had come to the van a bit before Ajendra, whose leave taking was delayed by all the ladies; [there] the father smiling said, "I am an emotional person. This is why I never came before, because I wanted to avoid all the emotion." Ajendra's brother and sister had greatly enjoyed the excitement and drama of the event ... (Notes of June 25, 1992: 13).

As we drove away from Fariha, Praveen, Ajendra's elder sister, said "the *Bhabhi* [Naresh's elder brother's wife] admitted trying to poison Naresh. He had beaten her 'cruelly' and then did not eat in her house for three days. When he came back she tried to poison him. G.R.S. Gaur says [this was because] she was afraid of him. He [M. Gaur] said he had not been sure that this sensitive issue could be asked about, but the *Bhabhi* accepted it as final proof that Ajendra was Naresh Chandra reborn" (Op. Cit).

These are indeed sensitive issues, and ones about which one cannot necessarily expect everyone to make frank disclosures. I returned a second time to Fariha, without Ajendra and his family members, to check several statements, one being whether what Praveen reported was indeed true. In my presence no one was willing to make such bold statements. Ashok Kumar Tiwari said "I heard about it [the poisoning]. Naresh told me, 'There is a dispute with my *Bhabhi* so she wanted to poison me.'"<sup>26</sup>

In response to my question, "Had you ever heard that Naresh thought the *Bhabhi* was trying to poison him," Naresh's mother said, "Yes, this is a fact." She smiled but would not expand. Naresh's younger brother said, when asked if there was any question of poisoning, "He suspected that: 'my elder sister-in-law poisoned me.'<sup>27</sup> Both were hot tempered and so they quarreled. I was not here

when the poisoning quarrel took place—I was in the village at that time.” Naresh’s father only said, “I was in the village. Naresh went from Fariha to the village before the [fatal] fight took place.” The wife of the elder brother, the *Bhabhi* in question, declined to see us, as did her husband.

Five days after the initial trip Ajendra’s father said:

The mother of Naresh took Praveen aside and said it was no fair complexioned Brahmin woman who cooked his food and poisoned him but my elder son’s wife, and once she tried to poison Naresh and when that came to his notice he beat her very badly.

The 5-year-old daughter of the *Bhabhi* and Naresh were sitting to eat a meal, when the 5-year-old girl spilled the vegetable. A dog ate it and died—from this Naresh knew she was trying to poison him and he beat her bitterly. (Notes of June 30, 1992)

It is implausible that this statement of Ajendra’s father was more accurate than what I ascertained because the *Bhabhi* is most unlikely to have tried to poison her own daughter. It is possible that Praveen was recounting what was said by people in the assemblage who may never have heard about the original incident, or if they had, had not witnessed it. Perhaps the statement was an elaboration of Ajendra’s father.

June 30, some 5 days after our initial trip, two more items that bear mention were reported on this post-trip meeting. Ajendra’s father said, “When we came back, Ajendra was asleep and when I woke him up he said, ‘When I went to the village I didn’t remember anything and then when we passed the place where the old house was [in Shekhanpur], something disturbing came to my mind—a mental image. There was a pit in the roof, on the roof where Naresh was, which has been destroyed.’”

This image may have been part dream, part visual filling in of a scene that has been described, the way anyone with a visual imagination fills in the image from reading a book, often to have it affronted by seeing a movie rendition of the same book. When I later inquired of Naresh’s family (July 7, 1992) about the contours of the roof on which Naresh met his death, they explained that the roof was not as Ajendra “dreamed or imagined” it to be. The younger brother, also present during the fatal fight with the *dacoits*, said there was “no pit, but the roof of the house was on two different levels. Perhaps it seemed to him there was a pit.” Although my translator thought this was a confirmation, this would be so coded by neither me nor Dr. Stevenson. Naresh’s reputed post-trip statement is not to be confused as one of the initial statements about the case, and therefore its inaccuracy has no more significance than his failure to find Naresh’s home, fields, or to recognize his relatives.<sup>28</sup>

The second elaboration reported to us June 30, 1992, by Ajendra’s father was that according to “The *Bhabhi* and other ladies Ajendra recognized things well, but not in front of Naresh’s mother and father, therefore they said not. They [the ladies] said that when they told him to go on the roof he went straight to the door and went up.” In fact when I returned to Fariha July 7, 1992, Naresh’s relatives

said that the second floor had not been added to the house until after Naresh's death. Ajendra's "familiarity" would not be counted as an item in any case. It is because such minor elaboration based on enthusiasm often accompanies the meetings that Stevenson accords little weight to the reported recognitions made in such settings. The high score for this case necessarily does not include, and is not based on, the accounts of recognitions made at the time of the meeting or thereafter. Nor would the post-trip or 2003 reminiscences that Ajendra as a baby or young child had a birthmark be counted.<sup>29</sup>

Like any court of law, we can only base our conclusions on what witnesses report to us. The version we accept is represented in Table 1. The experience of taking Ajendra to Naresh's natal village and town confirmed the importance of Stevenson's meticulous examination of the source of information and its validity. The emotion surrounding a case may elaborate details, but careful checking can ascertain which ones are not correct. Perhaps the finding that there are more incorrect statements in Type A cases, where there is no written record made before the case is solved (Scouten & Stevenson, 1998), is explicable because it is easier to attribute to the child statements that in fact are part of an elaboration that may take place surrounding a case or accurate information learned after the two families meet.

### **Impact of the Case on Ajendra as a Young Adult**

In 2003 I had the opportunity to return to India to conduct a longitudinal study of the young adults whose cases I had investigated when they were children. Ajendra was then 25 years old and working for a multinational agricultural company, having completed his B.COM and an MA in Economics with 1<sup>st</sup> Class standing. He said that he no longer remembered the previous life and does not talk about it spontaneously. He no longer has a phobia of the dark (as he did as a child and as a 13-year-old).

Ajendra and his family reported that contact has been minimally maintained with the previous-life family: the previous-life family had been invited to his elder brother's and sister's weddings. Similarly, Ajendra and his family had been invited to a wedding in the previous-life family, and Ajendra and his elder brother had gone to Fariha once for such an event. Ajendra said that it had been helpful to remember a previous life and that he (like 64% of the 28 subjects who answered the question) would like his (future) child to remember a previous life as well (he is not yet married). He said he prefers his present life to the past one. His score on the absorption scale was 14, compared to a score of 12 by the matched control person. I found that the young adults who had remembered a previous life as a child scored significantly higher on absorption than the control group tested in 2003 (Mills, 2003b). There was also a significant relation between Tellegan Absorption score and being concerned with Hindu Moslem reconciliation concept studied by Ashis Nandy (2002). Ajendra is concerned about reconciliation, saying, with regard to the Hindu Moslem conflict at and after



the demolition of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya, "Our leaders should be practical to solve this problem. They should not give excited statements to people." By contrast, the matched control person said he had "no interest" in the issue. Ajendra's response to the question "What should be at Ayodhya, a Mosque, Temple, Neither, or Both?" was "Both Temple and Mosque." His control made no reply. Ajendra showed every sign of being a well-adjusted young adult.

### Discussion

The case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan demonstrates again the importance of having a written record of the child's statements before a case is solved, as an antidote to possible elaboration; but it also shows that the after-the-fact embroidery can be checked and that it is in this instance, as in others, less accurate than the child's initial statements.

What is the probability that 25 out of 27 items of information would be accurate, and accurate enough to find someone who matched the description that Ajendra had given? Cultural acceptance of the rebirth explanation, or the socio-psychological interpretation, does not alone account for the accuracy of Ajendra's initial statements. Tucker's SOCS scale provides a tool for assessing the strength of this Type B case, as of cases that do not have a written record before they were solved. Only a small proportion, 1.3%, of the top 10% of Tucker's sample of 799 cases, are examples of cases with written records before verification.

In fact, the case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan demonstrates the importance of the cultural interpretation of Ajendra's behavior being based on a past-life memory; for until the questioning of Ajendra's father, Ajendra had not given information specific enough to make it possible to learn whether his statements corresponded to the life of an actual person. Only the direct questioning of the father produced the pieces of information, the name of the town and the name of a friend, that made this case solvable.

Parents of children 2 and 3 years old who are making statements similar to those Ajendra made and who are showing behavior that seems equally inappropriate, who are not used to thinking in terms of a reincarnation paradigm, seldom think of asking questions that might elicit such specific information. One American mother said to me recently that when her daughter was 3 years old she said to her, as they sat looking out at the ocean, "Do you remember when I was the Mother and you were my child?" The mother could not, she said, think of a thing to say, or of a thing to ask. Even more elaborate or numerous or insistent statements by children in a culture that is unused to thinking in terms of the possibility of past-life reincarnation seldom occasion the parents to query the child in such a way that the child expands upon what she or he has already said. Many similar statements are interpreted for the child as "imaginary" or simply invalid or inaccurate (cf. Mills, 2003). One mother reported that she would persistently tell her son, when he was 2 and 3 years old, he should not confuse

people by telling about events as if he had experienced them when he had not. There may be as much cultural unconscious suppression of possible cases as cultural elaboration.<sup>30</sup> Stevenson (1983) and Bowman (2001) have noted that a high proportion of the reincarnation cases reported from North America are same-family ones. This may well be because it is only when the statements and behavior of a child elicit memories of a well-known deceased family member that the parents begin to ask the child questions in the manner that Ajendra's father did. When the statements do not fit into any context the parents are familiar with, they are unlikely to ask any further questions. The second mother cited on the previous page never asked her son a single question about his encounters with bears, assuming it was pure fantasy. Perhaps she would have if she had a deceased relative who had had encounters with a bear. Cultural deconstruction must be at least as potent as cultural construction in interpretation of such cases.

### Conclusion

As Mills and Lynn note (2000) the spontaneous cases of possible past-life memories that have been documented to date necessarily reflect a special subset of possible past-life memory, because the emphasis has been on "solvable cases" with a relatively short interval between the present and a previous reported life. Type B cases such as Ajendra Singh Chauhan's are especially useful in showing the accuracy of young children's statements and provide a check for the possibility of cultural elaboration based on acceptance of the case and information learned only after initial contact. Tucker's SOCS (2000) has been used to show how important parental questioning can be in eliciting the information necessary for solving a case. Indeed in this instance, the score for Ajendra's case would have been zero without the father's eventually asking his child for more information. Same-family cases may potentially have a high score if they have other features, such as one or more birthmarks that correspond to wounds on the previous personality.<sup>31</sup> The case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan demonstrates the difficulties in calculating the combined probabilities of the bits of information applying to another deceased person. Even while documenting the difficulties of making such a calculation, the case presents a number of pieces of information and of similarity of behavior that cannot be lightly dismissed. Further, the case suggests that Stevenson's vigilance in examining the accuracy of reported past-life statements made after the families have met minimizes the addition of further elements to such a case. The same care used in taking children's testimony about other issues than a past life (Bruck et al., 1998) needs to be exercised in assessing testimony some children give about apparent past-life memories. Finally, the principle of similarity of stimulus that impacts memory within one life seems to be active in Ajendra's case in his recall of memories from 8 months before his birth, of the violent death of another individual whose family Ajendra's did not know. The Ajendra case ranks high on Tucker's SOCS scale (2000), and the probability that the statements would

randomly fit anyone are definitely not high, even if it is difficult to accurately quantify this probability. Such cases definitely deserve careful consideration.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Cook et al. (1983) have noted the basic similarity of solved and unsolved cases. It is in pursuing the investigation of unsolved cases that some are eventually solved. Cases of the reincarnation type in which the child and the Previous Personality are in the same family (called “same-family cases”) are necessarily those that are most readily “solved.” They are also the cases that present a less convincing amount of evidence, because there is no way to ensure that the child had not heard about the previous personality through normal means in the course of growing up. In cases where the previous personality was unknown to the child and his family, some are subsequently solved and some are not. The number of specific names the child mentions is a factor in whether a match can be found that fits the child’s statements.
- <sup>2</sup> Gaj Raj Singh Gaur has acted as translator for me on three trips to conduct research into such cases, the most recent one being in the summer of 2003 to conduct “A Longitudinal Study of Young Adults Who as Children Were Said to Remember a Previous Life, With or Without a Shift in Religion (Hindu to Moslem or Vice Versa).” This study was funded by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute affiliated with the University of Calgary, whereas my former studies were funded by the Division of Personality Studies of the University of Virginia, which gratefully acknowledges support from the Institute of Noetic Sciences. IONS also contributed to the Longitudinal Study of 2003. Mr. Gaj Raj Singh Gaur had in 2002 published a book on reincarnation cases called *Beyond Death*.
- <sup>3</sup> In general, the record is made when the child is at the stage of still speaking from the point of view of the Previous Personality, that is, between the ages of 2 and 7 years old. The fact that the written record was not made until Ajendra was 13 years of age could be expected to decrease the reliability of the record of the child’s initial statements. The fact that the case receives the top score for number of correct statements, minus the number of incorrect statements, indicates that the long delay before the written record was made is not a significant factor. Stevenson and Keil (2000) found that cases investigated 20 years after an initial investigation showed no addition of paranormal features. “Some new details were added, but generally, more details were lost” (Stevenson & Keil, 2000: 381). In the Ajendra case, one of the incorrect pieces of information was not considered significant by any of the parties; another was given an alternate explanation by Mr. Gaur, but not by the parents of either Ajendra or the Previous Personality, Naresh Chandra Gosh (see Table 1).
- <sup>4</sup> Mr. Gaur was told of the case by a relative of Ajendra’s family who was the proprietor of Singh Electricals in Jaithra, where Mr. Gaur lives. After inter-

viewing Ajendra's father and writing down the account, Mr. Gaur felt encouraged to take the two bus trips required to reach Fariha.

- <sup>5</sup> The notes of Mr. Gaur were also translated by Dr. L. P. Mehrotra, a psychologist who administered the psychological tests to Ajendra, the matched child, as to other subjects of cases and the matched control person (Mills, 1992). I am assuming that Ajendra's father may have said "He started shooting," referring to his son (in this case also the previous personality) and then switched to the first-person rendition, saying "and the bullet hit me."
- <sup>6</sup> The translation of the notes of G. R. S. Gaur by the Hindi Instructor at the University of Virginia is, "The *dacoit* came. He started shooting from the wall and I got hit." The wording in the text is from the translation of Dr. L. P. Mehrotra.
- <sup>7</sup> The translation "affect the brain of the child" was made by Gaj Raj Singh Gaur; the translation "affect the child mentally" by Dr. L. P. Mehrotra. The relation between the brain and the mental qualities of a person is at the core of psychology, Western as well as East Indian. This paper is indeed seeking to translate the different conceptions into a framework so that questions about the nature of the psyche can be addressed from these differing viewpoints.
- <sup>8</sup> Mr. Gaur has clarified for me that "Tiwari is the specific surname of Brahmin Caste while Sharma is the general surname of the same caste . . . Here I also want to make clear that Ashok Kumar Tiwari told me, 'He always called me Ashok Kumar Sharma while I was Tiwari.'" (Letter of January 22, 2003). In the same letter Mr. Gaur said that Ajendra had referred to Ashok Kumar as his friend long before the case was solved.
- <sup>9</sup> Mr. Kedar Nath Gupta, Naresh's father, estimated the population of the village of Shekhanpur to be about 2,500. He gave an estimate of the population of Fariha that is much greater than the population given in the 1981 Census of India. Obviously the Census figures are the most accurate.
- <sup>10</sup> Note that Mills & Lynn (2000: 284–285) stated that only "at least at the time of investigation, the Gupta's shop, where most of the family's food comes from, was not located on a corner." What is significant is that the Fariha shop was located on a corner during Naresh's lifetime.
- <sup>11</sup> G. R. S. Gaur, the translator, surmised that perhaps he (Ajendra) was referring to someone who prepared Naresh's food when he (Naresh) went away for treatment for the seizures from which he suffered, first to Delhi, then to Agra, and finally to Kanpur. This is an example of trying to make sense of the account. Shroder (1999) has given an example of how he similarly mentally constructed a scenario that would account for elements of a case he observed Stevenson investigating. Shroder noted that Stevenson himself did not try to overinterpret the case.
- <sup>12</sup> The other measures in Tucker's scale on which Ajendra's case received a score of 0 are 8) Unusual methods of eating or table manners related to previous life; 9) Unusual use of intoxicants related to previous life; 10) Unusual phobias related to previous life; 12) Unusual animosities related to previous life; 14) Behavior related to the opposite sex; 15) Desire or

- reluctance to return to previous family or place, and 16) Memories of previous life expressed in play.
- <sup>13</sup> Note that the first investigator, Gaj Raj Singh Gaur, underlined “Birthmark” on the Preliminary Investigation form, adding “(less visible)” beside that notation. As stated above, Ajendra’s mother did not mention any birthmarks when I interviewed her.
- <sup>14</sup> This score was calculated by the author (Antonia Mills). The case had already been entered into the Division of Personality Studies database (currently, N = 948). It was not entered in the sample of 799 cases Tucker (2000) had used. Since then the case was entered with a score of 32.
- <sup>15</sup> The other categories in the 1991 India census are Professional, technical and related workers (3.6%); Administrative, executive and managerial workers (1.0%); clerical and related workers (3.4%); sales workers (5.8%); service workers (1.8%); production and related workers, transport equipment operators and laborers (15.5%); and workers not classified by occupations (1.2%). (Source of data: Census of India 1991 *Table C-1, Part B -19(F)—Economic Tables*. This is online at <http://www.censusindia.net/cendat/data-table21.html>.) In terms of occupation, Naresh Chandra Gupta’s family was also representative of the merchant caste, selling both ghee and, in Fariha, groceries and pots and pans.
- <sup>16</sup> There is no single category of violent death in the United Nations tally (*Demographic Yearbook* 1979: 343). I arrived at this figure by adding two categories: “all other accidents” (BE48), which excludes B47 “Motor vehicle accidents,” and “all other external causes” (BE50). I considered including “suicide & other self inflicted injuries” (BE49) because I have noted in the 35 cases I have studied in India that the killing of a bride or married woman for not supplying more dowry can be reported as suicide; bride burning has been noted as a problem in India. However, the percent remains .07, the same, with or without the inclusion of “suicide and other self-inflicted injuries” in the calculation of violent death.
- <sup>17</sup> The percentage of violent death in cases of the reincarnation type is significantly greater than this: Cook et al. (1983: 128) reported a violent cause of death in 49% of the solved cases in India (N = 193). The percentage was even higher (85%) in unsolved cases in India (N = 40). Cases suggestive of reincarnation having a violent cause of death showed a shorter interval between death and birth than ones having a natural cause of death, and also had a significantly lower age of first speaking about a previous life (Chadha & Stevenson, 1988).
- <sup>18</sup> I decided to limit the search to Uttar Pradesh. I originally made this decision based on the analysis of 948 cases of the reincarnation type from India entered into a database at the Division of Personality Studies at the University of Virginia. That analysis shows that the mean distance between the subject’s birthplace and the place the previous personality died is 117 kilometers, the median distance is 14.25 kilometers, the mode is 50, and the range is 8,850

kilometers. This extreme range is due to the case of Vinita Jha; it is an unsolved case in which the subject in India claimed to have lived in England in the previous life. When this case is eliminated the range is 1,600 kilometers, the mean 82 kilometers, the median is 14 kilometers, and the mode is again 50 kilometers. If one draws a circle with a radius of 82 kilometers around Etah, Ajendra's birthplace and home town, the circle fits entirely within Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh itself is a huge state of 294,411 square kilometers, divided into 63 districts, with a population (in 1991) of 139,112,287 (Census Data of India *Online Table 1: Area, Number of Districts, Tahsils, CD Blocks and Villages*, 1991; Census of India Data *Online Table 2: Number of Households and Population*, 1991). A search of the Census of India (1981 and 1991) and of online possibilities available at [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) shows that in all of Uttar Pradesh (in 1991) there were 710 statutory towns and 112,803 inhabited villages. Only one is called Fariha. That is the town of Fariha, where Naresh Chandra Gupta lived, in the District Mainpuri, Tahsil Jasrana. The population of Fariha, according to the 1981 Census of India, was 3,026. It is no wonder that Ajendra's father had not heard of Fariha before his son claimed to have lived there. In other words, the chances are 1 in 710 that anyone from Uttar Pradesh was from the town of Fariha, and less if one considers that the majority of the population (111,506,372 out of the total population 139,112,287) live in rural rather urban settings in that state.

<sup>19</sup> I am most grateful to Dr. Ed Kelly for alerting me to the fact that the type of gun might be quantifiable. Then I happened to see someone reading the *Blue Book of Used Gun Values*, which gave me information for contacting the Greener Company, whose web site is located at <http://www.wwgreener.com>. I am much indebted to Graham Greener, author of the book about the Greener guns, for answering my e-mail enquiries and permitting me to quote him.

<sup>20</sup> The Election Commission of India General Elections '98 List of Candidates is found at the following website: <http://www.eci.gov.in/elec98/candidates/staewise/S24/cndcnstd69.html>. The Election Commission of India General Elections 1999 List of Contesting Candidates is found at the following website address: <http://www.eci.gov.in/ge99/pollupd/pc/states/S24/Pcnstcand69.html>.

<sup>21</sup> McEldowney tried the experiment of searching in Google.com for how many Ashoks, how many Kumars, how many Sharmas there are, and how many with all three names with and without specifying Uttar Pradesh. There are 13,000 hits for Ashok Kumar Sharma (in any order), of which 1,890 are specified as being in Uttar Pradesh. (By contrast, there are 109 Philip McEldowneys, and 181 Antonia Mills, without specifying any locality.) McEldowney noted that such a search includes many problems, such as duplication of the name of one person or name (as the four hits for the one town of Fariha) and the serious limitations of the web in establishing links with all people. These names are the ones randomly present on the web rather than ones drawn from a list of names in a census. If one used the figure of 1,890 Ashok Kumar Sharmas in UP, the percentage of Ashok Kumar Sharmas out of

the total population in Uttar Pradesh is .0000135; significantly smaller than my estimate of .01. Because of the inaccuracies associated with web hits, and in order to err on the conservative side, I am using the .01 estimate.

<sup>22</sup> The unidentified reviewer wrote: “Simply obtaining a small number by multiplying probabilities together is not an argument that something is beyond chance. If I take reasonable probabilities for some of my characteristics (gender, age, occupation, marital status, number of children) then the ‘probability’ of reviewing this paper is  $2.4 \times 10^{-8}$ . This does not mean that there must be some other explanation than chance for the fact that I am reviewing it.” The analogy is not completely apt, as the linkage the reviewer has to this journal is not dependent on the features cited. The telling point is that it is difficult to provide a meaningful calculation for the probability that Ajendra would have made reference to the items he did without some connection to the personage of the previous personality. The number of items that Ajendra stated were a product of questioning, and the fact that 25 out of 27 were accurate for a person that the child and his family did not know, requires some kind of explanation.

<sup>23</sup> Buildings in India made of bricks piled on each other, even with mortar, are deconstructed far more often than we are used to in North America. In short, the deconstruction of Naresh’s home was not an unusual event in India, where the Gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva represent, respectively, creation, maintenance and destruction.

<sup>24</sup> The Hindi on the videotape was translated into English by Hindi instructors at the University of Virginia.

<sup>25</sup> In response to my query “Did he say she had tried [to poison Naresh]?” Ashok Kumar Tiwari answered, “He said ‘She tried to poison me.’” This, he said, was about 2 years before Naresh’s death. Ashok Kumar Tiwari said Naresh hadn’t ever said anything to him about beating the *Bhabhi*, nor did he know anything about such an incident.

<sup>26</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Robert Hueckstedt, Chair of Oriental Languages and Professor of Sanskrit/Hindi at the University of Virginia, for translating two sentences in Hindi that Mr. Gaur, my translator, wrote down during this interview. Mr. Gaur had translated what Naresh’s younger brother said as, “Naresh suspected that, doubted, feared that the *Bhabhi* was going to poison him.” In the text I have used Dr. Hueckstedt’s translation.

<sup>27</sup> Ajendra’s father elaborated a bit more on June 30, making it seem that Ajendra had said and recalled more than was noted on the videotape. He claimed that “the servant of the Gupta family [whom we met in Shekhanpur] asked Ajendra, ‘Did you have a servant that time?’ And Ajendra thought, ‘You are the servant,’ but he didn’t say so because he thought the servant might have taken it ill.” Obviously such a thought would not be counted as a recognition. Equally unconvincing was the father’s statement of June 30: “When we asked the boy to see the field, he said ‘Something came to my mind but then was lost. I can’t remember what it was.’” This represents the

kind of elaboration that may take place; note that it adds nothing to the case, nor should it be considered to detract from it either.

- <sup>28</sup> Ajendra's elder brother and sister commented on the birthmark in the excitement of returning from the trip to Fariha, as noted above. In 2003 Ajendra's father said, when I commented on the birthmark on his youngest pre-verbal grandson, that when Ajendra was born he had a birthmark on the neck, touching his own neck slightly to the left of center just above his tunic. The location of the fatal shot to Naresh may have been mentioned during our trip to Fariha. Again, such a statement would not be given weight.
- <sup>29</sup> I have reported several such North American cases where the parents did little to no questioning, although they sometimes came to interpret their child's startling statements as emanating from a previous life (Mills, 1994a).
- <sup>30</sup> A calculation of Tucker's SOCS score for the case of Jeremy Holder (pseudonym), reported in Mills (1994b: 219–224), produces, coincidentally, the same high score of 31 that Ajendra's case received, despite this being a same extended family case. The correspondence of the pierced-ear birthmark to intentionally made marks on the ears of the PP, the recognitions and statements account for the high score, despite the fact that the SOCS scale does not give credit for the prediction of rebirth or the two announcing dreams (as elements that are pertinent particularly to same family cases).

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