

Is Reincarnation Real? The Case of Parmod Sharma

The remarkable case of a 5-year-old boy who recalled detailed events from an Indian man's life, as documented by Ian Stevenson.

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Parmod Sharma was born on October 11, 1944, in Bisauli, India. When Parmod was about two and a half, he began telling his mother not to cook his meals for him any longer because he had a wife in Moradabad who could cook.

Moradabad was a town about ninety miles northeast of Bisauli. Between the ages of three and four, he began to speak in detail of his life there. He described several businesses he had owned and operated with other members of his family. He particularly spoke of a shop that manufactured and sold biscuits (cookies) and soda water, calling it "Mohan Brothers." He insisted that he was one of the "Mohan Brothers" and that he also had a business in Saharanpur, a town about a hundred miles north of Moradabad.

Parmod tended not to play with the other children in Bisauli but preferred to play by himself, building models of shops complete with electrical wiring. He especially liked to make mud biscuits which he served his family with tea or soda water. During this time, he provided many details about his shop including its size and location in Moradabad, what was sold there, and his activities connected to it, such as his business trips to Delhi. He even complained to his parents about the less prosperous financial condition of their home compared to what he was used to as a successful merchant.

Parmod had a strong distaste for curd, which is quite unusual for an Indian child, and on one occasion even advised his father against eating it, saying that it was dangerous. Parmod said that in his other life he had become seriously ill after eating too much curd one day. He had an equally strong dislike for being submerged in water, which might relate to his report that he had previously "died in a bathtub."

Parmod said that he had been married and had five children--four sons and one daughter. He was anxious to see his family again and frequently begged his parents to take him to back

Moradabad to visit them. His family always refused his request, though his mother did get him to begin school by promising to take him to Moradabad when he had learned to read. Parmod's parents never investigated or tried to verify their son's claims, perhaps because of the Indian folk custom that children who remembered a previous life were fated to die early.

News of Parmod's statements, however, eventually reached the ears of a family in Moradabad named Mehra which fit many of the details of his story. The brothers of this family owned several businesses in Moradabad including a biscuit and soda water shop named "Mohan Brothers." The shop had been started and managed by Parmanand Mehra until his untimely death on May 9, 1943, eighteen months before Parmod was born. Parmanand had gorged himself on curd, one of his favorite foods, at a wedding feast, and had subsequently developed a chronic gastrointestinal illness followed later by appendicitis and peritonitis from which he died. Two or three days before his death, he had insisted, against his family's advice, on eating more curd saying that he might not have another chance to enjoy it. Parmanand had blamed his illness and impending death on overeating curd. As part of his therapy during his appendicitis, Parmanand had tried a series of naturopathic bath treatments.

While he had not in fact died in a bathtub, he had been given a bath immediately prior to his death. Parmanand left a widow and five children--four sons and one daughter. In the summer of 1949, the Mehra family decided to make the trip to Bisauli to meet Parmod, who was a little under five years old at the time. When they arrived, however, Parmod was away with his family and no contact was made. Shortly thereafter, Parmod's father responded to an invitation from the Mehra family and took him to Moradabad to explore his son's compelling remembrances first hand. Among those who met Parmod at the railway station was Parmanand's cousin, Sri Karam Chand Mehra, who had been quite close to Parmanand. Parmod threw his arms around him weeping, calling him "older brother" and saying, "I am Parmanand." (It is common for Indians to call a cousin "brother" if the relationship is a close one, as was the case for Parmanand and Karam.)

Parmod then proceeded to find his way to the "Mohan Brothers" shop on his own, giving instructions to the driver of the carriage which brought them from the station. Entering the shop, he complained that "his" special seat had been changed. (It is customary in India for the owner of a business to have an enclosed seat--a gaddi--located near the front of the store where he can greet customers and direct business.) The location of Parmanand's gaddi had in fact been changed some time after his death. Once inside Parmod asked, "Who is looking after the bakery and soda water factory?" This had been Parmanand's responsibility. The complicated machine which manufactured the soda water had been secretly disabled in order to test Parmod. When shown it, however, Parmod knew exactly how it worked. Without any assistance, he located the disconnected hose and gave instructions in its repair.

Later at Parmanand's home, Parmod recognized the room where Parmanand had slept and commented on a room screen that he correctly observed had not been there in Parmanand's day. He also identified a particular cupboard that Parmanand had kept his things in as well as a special low table which had also been his. "This is the one I used to use for my meals," he said. When Parmanand's mother entered the room, he immediately recognized her and addressed

her as "Mother" before anyone else present was able to say anything. He also correctly identified Parmanand's wife, acting somewhat embarrassed in front of her. She was, after all, a full-grown woman and he was only five, though apparently possessing at least some of the feelings of an adult husband. When they were alone, he said to her, "I have come but you have not fixed bindi," referring to the red dot worn on the forehead by Hindu wives. He also reproached her for wearing a white sari, the appropriate dress for a Hindu widow, instead of the colored sari worn by wives.

Parmod correctly recognized Parmanand's daughter and the one son who was at the house when he had arrived. When Parmanand's youngest son who had been at school showed up later, Parmod correctly identified him as well, using his familiar name, Gordhan. In their conversation Parmod would not allow the older Gordhan to address him by his first name but insisted that he call him "father." "I have only become small," he said. During this visit Parmod also correctly identified one of Parmanand's brothers and a nephew. Parmod showed a striking knowledge for the details of Parmanand's world.

While touring the hotel the Mehra brothers owned in Moradabad, the Victory Hotel, Parmod commented on the new sheds that had been built on the property. The Mehra family confirmed that these had indeed been added after Parmanand's death. Entering the hotel Parmod pointed to some cupboards and said, "These are the almirahs I had constructed in Churchill House." Churchill House was the name of a second hotel the Mehra brothers owned in Saharanpur, a town about a hundred miles north of Moradabad. Parmanand had, in fact, had these cupboards constructed for Churchill house during his life. Shortly after Parmanand's death, however, the family had decided to move these cupboards to the Victory Hotel.

On a visit to Saharanpur later that fall, Parmod spontaneously identified a doctor known to Parmanand in that city. "He is a doctor and an old friend of mine," he said. During that visit he also recognized a man named Yasmin whom he insisted owed him (Parmanand) money. "I have to get some money back from you," he said. At first Yasmin was reluctant to acknowledge the loan, but after being reassured that the Mehra family was not going to press for repayment, he admitted that Parmod was quite right about the debt.

Stevenson reports that he has collected over 3,000 such cases, but has published only a small percentage of the cases investigated. He throws out most of the cases because they do not meet the highest criteria of credibility. For example, he dismisses any cases where the family of the second personality has profited in any way from contact with the family of the first personality, either financially or in social prestige or attention. (Stevenson himself never pays his sources.) He also throws out cases where the two families are linked by a person who might have inadvertently transmitted information from one family to the other. Furthermore, some cases turn out to be explainable in terms of cryptomnesia, or "hidden memories." In these cases, someone acquires information through entirely natural means, such as overhearing a conversation or reading a novel, and then forgets the circumstances in which they learned it. Later something triggers the information which subjectively appears to come "out of nowhere." Perhaps from a former life, we think. Yet in hypnotic regression, the true source of the

information is revealed. Case dismissed. Cases where testimony is inconsistent, where witnesses are of questionable character, or where there is even the slightest indication of possible fraud are also immediately dropped.

Stevenson has published only the strongest cases, those involving no gain, no evidence of ulterior motive, no previous connection between families, generous recall of details which can be confirmed by associates of the former personality, and ideally the opportunity to bring together the second personality with persons known by the first personality. His cautious skepticism and critical methods have earned him the attention of even quite conservative professional journals. In 1977, the distinguished *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* devoted almost an entire issue to his research. In an editorial justifying this attention, Dr. Eugene Brody wrote: "Our decision to publish this material recognizes the scientific and personal credibility of the authors, the legitimacy of their research methods, and the conformity of their reasoning to the usual canons of rational thought." Two years earlier, in a review of the first volume of *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Dr. Lester S. King concluded that Stevenson had "painstakingly and unemotionally collected a detailed series of cases in India, cases in which the evidence for reincarnation is difficult to understand on any other grounds....[H]e has placed on record a large amount of data that cannot be ignored."

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