

Satwant Pasricha

Satwant K Pasricha is an Indian clinical psychologist known for her research on childhood past life memories and near-death experiences.

Education and Career

Satwant Pasricha earned her MPhil and PhD in clinical psychology at the National Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in Bangalore, India.¹ She joined the faculty in 1980 as a lecturer in clinical psychology, being promoted to professor and eventually to head of the department.

Following her retirement from the Centre in 2010, she worked at the Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India.² Currently she is a senior honorary clinical psychology consultant at the Psychological and Counseling Services Clinic in Dehradun.³

Pasricha has published widely on psychological and parapsychological topics, presented at conferences and served on local and national academic committees. She has received several awards in India and was recognized as a pioneer in mental health by the Delhi Psychiatric Society. She has long been affiliated to the University of Virginia's [Division of Perceptual Studies](#), formerly directed by [Ian Stevenson](#), and is international affiliate of the Parapsychology Foundation for India.⁴

Reluctance by Indian academia to fund parapsychological studies has obliged Pasricha to devote almost three quarters of her time to non-parapsychological work.⁵

Reincarnation Research

Pasricha describes her motivations for carrying out [reincarnation](#) research as follows:

I was not satisfied with the conventional explanations of certain paranormal or unusual behavior; so I wanted to learn more about these phenomena.⁶

I undertook the present investigation with the hope that it would contribute to the existing knowledge of human behavior, both normal and paranormal.⁷

Pasricha met Stevenson in 1973 at a time when, due to her scientific background, she was sceptical about reincarnation cases, which she had read about only in newspapers.⁸ Her curiosity aroused, she agreed to visit and interview informants for two cases, acting as interpreter. Impressed by Stevenson's approach, she accepted his invitation to study cases independently and, despite the obstacles involved in reaching remote villages, found herself drawn to the work, especially due to the strong case of [Manju Sharma](#).⁹

Pasricha decided to give up her job to help Stevenson investigate cases and enrolled in NIMHANS' PhD programme, basing her thesis on her own investigations of cases of spontaneous past life memories among young children. The 1978 thesis was expanded to include more recent work and published in 1990, then republished in 2019.¹⁰ It includes sample cases with thorough analyses, comparisons that show striking similarity between features in her cases and those reported by Stevenson, and a survey of laypeople showing closer resemblance in their reincarnation beliefs to the [patterns](#) discovered by Stevenson if they had been witness to a reincarnation case.

Pasricha also endeavoured to transcend four weaknesses she found in Stevenson's approach:

- long interval between case and investigation
- reliance on interpreters
- short and superficial interviews with the mothers
- short and superficial interviews with subjects¹¹

Pasricha mostly did not need interpreters in northern India as she is a native Hindi and Punjabi speaker.¹² Stevenson noted her interviewing skill and the willingness of shy Indian mothers to give her information they would be reluctant to reveal to him.¹³

Pasricha continued fieldwork, combining follow-ups on the cases used for her thesis and newly-found ones. Lines of inquiry she pursued include:

- a past-life claim by a schizophrenic based on memories that were probably distorted¹⁴
- a study of prevalence of past-life memory in northern India which concluded that about 1 in every 450 people experienced it; of the nineteen cases found, sixteen were 'solved', that is, the past incarnation was plausibly identified)¹⁵
- a study of unsolved cases and discussion of possible reasons they had not been solved¹⁶
- a study comparing solved Indian cases two generations apart, showing how their features were virtually the same, suggestive of a consistent phenomenon¹⁷
- two highly unusual cases: [Uttara Huddar \(aka Sharada\)](#), whose past-life persona resembled a multiple-personality alter,¹⁸ and [Sumitra Singh](#), a teenaged girl who had never learned to read and who appeared to die but revived with the personality of a different, literate, woman¹⁹
- seven specious cases based on deception or self-deception, usually on the part of parents but in one case a reporter²⁰
- whether parental attitudes influence children who claim to remember past lives²¹
- why, when reincarnation researchers are able to find so many cases in northern India, they have found virtually none in southern India²²

Pasricha concurs with Stevenson that spontaneous cases, rather than cases obtained by use of drugs, hypnosis or psychic past-life readings, provide the most reliable past-life memories and, thus, evidence for reincarnation.²³ Like Stevenson,

she prefers children as subjects, in part because it minimizes ‘contamination of their experiences by all the information to which adults are exposed’; also, she writes, children are the best subjects for psychological or psychiatric studies ‘because an understanding of the child gives insight into the main characteristics of the adult and helps to clarify the foibles and idiosyncrasies of a person’s later years’.[24](#)

Echoing Stevenson’s paper on the explanatory value of reincarnation,[25](#) Pasricha notes that past lives can explain otherwise inexplicable mental symptoms in children such as ‘unusual and irrational fears, childhood animosities and vengefulness, and gender dysphoria’. She writes:

If we fail to trace the cause of a person’s deviant behavior to his genes or to his immediate environment, we may justifiably conjecture that it derives from events even earlier than those of childhood or infancy, namely those of a previous life.[26](#)

NDE Research

Pasricha has undertaken research on [near-death experiences](#), including collaborative work with Stevenson. In a 1986 paper, Pasricha and Stevenson compared the NDEs of sixteen investigated cases in India with a larger sample of American NDE cases. Similarities were found, including the appearances of deceased relatives, but also notable differences: for instance, Americans tended to see their corpses from a distance, Indians more closely. The envisioned reasons for returning to life differed: Americans tended to be called back due to the love of the people being left behind, or were told it was not yet their time to die, while Indians tended to learn that their brush with death was due to a bureaucratic error on the part of an underling of the death-God Yama writing down the wrong name.[27](#) Pasricha’s NDE-related papers were republished in her second book.[28](#)

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BBC (n.d.) [In Search of the Dead Part III](#) shows Pasricha interviewing informants for three cases: Lekh Pal Jatav, Manju Sharma and Sumitra Singh, 16:04-27:00.

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KM Wehrstein

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1.](#) Manashakti Research Centre (2019).
- [2.](#) Matlock (n.d.)
- [3.](#) Manashakti Research Centre (2019).
- [4.](#) Manashakti Research Centre (2019).
- [5.](#) [Parapsychology Foundation](#) (n.d.).
- [6.](#) Parapsychological Foundation (n.d.).
- [7.](#) Pasricha (2019), 230.
- [8.](#) Pasricha (2008), 110.
- [9.](#) Pasricha (2019), 82-7.
- [10.](#) Pasricha (2019). See [Society for Psychical Research](#) review [here](#).
- [11.](#) Pasricha (2019), 32-3.
- [12.](#) Matlock (n.d.)
- [13.](#) From the foreword, Pasricha (2019), xiii.
- [14.](#) Her study of this actually dates to prior to her PhD; see Pasricha, Murthy & Murthy (1978).
- [15.](#) Barker & Pasricha (1979).
- [16.](#) Cook, Pasricha, Samararatne, Maung, & Stevenson (1983a, b).
- [17.](#) Pasricha & Stevenson (1987).
- [18.](#) Stevenson & Pasricha (1980); Pasricha (2019), 253-56.
- [19.](#) Stevenson, Pasricha, & McClean-Rice, 1989; Pasricha (2019), 256-68.
- [20.](#) Stevenson, Pasricha, & Samararatne (1988).
- [21.](#) Pasricha (1992, 2011 a).
- [22.](#) Pasricha (2001a).
- [23.](#) See Pasricha (2019), 10-16.
- [24.](#) However she was willing to make exceptions for striking cases such as Uttara Huddar and Sumitra Singh.
- [25.](#) Stevenson (1977).
- [26.](#) Pasricha (2019), 242.
- [27.](#) Pasricha & Stevenson (1986).

- [28.](#) Pasricha (2008).

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