

Purnima Ekanayake (reincarnation case)

In her infancy, Purnima spoke of having lived before as a incense maker, saying she died when she was knocked over by a car while riding her bicycle to the market. As sometimes happens in cases where the previous life ended by violence, she had a massive birthmark on the location of the injury sustained by the previous personality. Less typically, she remembered having been of the opposite sex.

Purnima Ekanayake

Purnima Ekanayake was the daughter of teachers in Bakamuna in northern Sri Lanka. In 1990, when she was three years old, she began to speak about a past life as a manufacturer of incense, making a number of specific statements:

- She had been run over by a 'big vehicle' and killed as she was bringing incense to the market on a bicycle.
- She and her family were making incense and had no other job.
- They were making Ambiga and Geta Pitcha incense.
- The incense factory was near a brick factory and a pond.
- They had two vans and a car.
- To begin with, only their family members were making incense and later two people were employed.
- She was a man married to Kusumi, and later had another wife.
- Her mother's name was Simona and she had two younger brothers.
- Her previous father was not a teacher like her present father.
- He had been a bad man who thought there was no need for him to go to school, and that he could earn money by making incense.
- She studied only up to the fifth grade, attending the Rahula School, a two-story building unlike the one-story school in Bakamuna.

Investigation and Verification

Purnima said nothing about where she had lived or where her fatal accident had taken place. One evening the family was watching a television documentary about Kelaniya, a famous, centuries-old temple not far from Colombo that stands by a river of the same name. The temple is a popular destination for pilgrims. Purnima said: 'I lived there on the other side of the river.'

Around this time a new teacher, Sumanasiri, came to teach in the school where her father was the principal. He was from the Kelaniya area, and went home to Kelaniya on weekends.

Sumanasiri became interested in the case. One weekend he went with another man to the other side the river and enquired there about makers of incense. There had been two: one had stopped working and had become an alcoholic; the other was a man by the name of Wijisiri, in a family of incense-makers. Sumanasiri went to

interview him and learned he had previously had a colleague by the name of Jinadasa Perera. The pair had run a workshop together and had married each other's sisters. The brands of incense they produced were Ambiga and Gita Pitcha, exactly those that Purnima had previously mentioned. Jinadasa had been run over by a bus on his way to the market on his bicycle: one wheel of the bus went over his chest and he died instantly (this was in 1985, about two years before Purnima's birth).

Soon afterwards, Purnima and her parents visited the Wijisiri family unannounced. She first met his daughters and then recognized Wijisiri himself, saying (according to his own account), 'This is Wijisiri, he is coming. He is my brother-in-law'. He was at first puzzled and wanted to send her away, but after she had described details concerning the incense business, including changes made to the packet covers, he was inclined to believe her story. She also referred to an accident in which Wijisiri damaged his knee, and other intimate details of their relationship known to Jinadasa.

On the occasion of this visit, Purnima's mother said the girl whispered in her ear: 'This incense dealer (the one she recalled having been) had two wives. This is a secret. Don't give them my address. They might trouble me.'

Icelandic psychologist [Erlendur Haraldsson](#) carried out interviews with Purnima's parents and other witnesses during five visits between 1996 and 1999. He was able to verify many of the details in their testimony, including the fact that Jinadasa had left his first wife (Wijisiri's sister) and spent his last years living with another woman in a different part of the country (although in fact he was not legally married to either).

Of a total of twenty statements, fourteen fit the life of Jinadasa, three could not be checked, and three were incorrect.

Haraldsson reported his investigation in a journal paper and later a book.^[1] His investigation of Purnima's case is also featured in a television documentary, [Children's Past Lives](#).^[2]

Characteristics of Purnima's Case

Prominent Birthmarks

The bus driver was sued for careless driving. Haraldsson obtained permission to see the documents of the case, amongst them the autopsy of Jinadasa. This showed that the bus had driven diagonally across his chest, breaking the ribs on the left side and puncturing the lungs. Purnima had a cluster of birthmarks in the exact location of the injury.

Such [birthmarks](#) are not uncommon in children who claim past-life memories. The children usually explain such marks as wounds they were afflicted with and from which they died.

Sex-Change

The prevalence in reincarnation cases of [a change of sex](#) between lives varies cross-culturally.^[3] Only four of the 64 cases investigated by Haraldsson in Sri Lanka (6%) have this feature.

Between-Life State

About 20% of children with past-life memories say they remember something about their situation between death and rebirth, the [intermission period](#). Purnima said she floated in semi-darkness for a few days, observing people mourning for her, and maintaining sight of her body until and during the funeral. She saw many people like herself floating around. Then she saw a light, went towards it, and found herself 'here'.

General Characteristics of Sri Lankan Cases

The 64 cases Haraldsson investigated in Sri Lanka were found in the countryside as well as in the towns, from the palm-covered lowlands to the mountainous tea-growing areas and the dry lands further north. They were found in all religious communities: 57 were from Buddhist families, four among Christians, two amongst Muslims and one amongst Hindus (the paucity of the latter may be due to the civil war raging in the far north of the island).

Forty-two cases remained unsolved (that is, no deceased person could be identified whose life fit the child's memories). Twenty-two were solved, of which seven, including Purnima's, included an impressive number of specific verified memories.

Violence was the most common cause of death of the previous person, reported in 49 cases; natural death in four cases; mode of death not mentioned in twelve cases. Some 35 girls and 29 boys spoke about a past life. The cases were investigated by Haraldsson during several field trips between 1988 and 1998.

The children claimed memories of events that were close in time and space. They never spoke about a life that happened centuries ago or in faraway lands.

In addition to *Children's Past Lives*, about Purnima, Haraldsson's investigations in Sri Lanka are featured in [In Search of the Dead](#)^[4] and [Past Lives: Stories of Reincarnation](#).^[5]

Erlendur Haraldsson

Literature

Haraldsson, E. (2000). [Birthmarks and claims of previous life memories I. The case of Purnima Ekanayake](#). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 64/858, 16-25.

Haraldsson, E., & Matlock, J.G. (2016). *I Saw a Light and Came Here: Children's Experiences of Reincarnation*. Hove, UK: White Crow Books.

Endnotes

Footnotes

- 1.^ Haraldsson (2000); Haraldsson & Matlock (2016).
- 2.^ Produced by Laura Granditer (a Zenith North Production) for Channel Four, UK, October 2000.
- 3.^ Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 225-26.
- 4.^ Produced by Jeffrey Iverson in 1992 for BBC Wales in cooperation with PBS, WXXI-TV Rochester, New York, USA.
- 5.^ Produced by Andreas Gutzeit for Storyhouse Productions and broadcast in the USA on the Learning Channel (Discovery Communications) on 1 April 2003 and on Discovery International on 29 December 2003.