

Shanti Devi (reincarnation case)

Indian reincarnation case of the 1930s in which Shanti Devi Mathur, as a small child, described detailed memories of the life of a young woman named Lugdi Chaubey who had died some two years before the girl's birth. Lugdi's family having been identified from her statements, Shanti Devi was able subsequently to lead the way to Lugdi's house, where she recognized Lugdi's relations and displayed accurate knowledge about intimate facts relating to Lugdi's life. The case drew the attention of Mahatma Gandhi and was extensively investigated.

Background

On 18 January 1902, a daughter was born to Chaturbhuj Chaubey and his wife Jagti Devi in the town of Mathura, and was given the name Lugdi. She was married at age ten to Kedar Nath Chaubey, owner of a fabric shop. Their first child was stillborn. On 25 September 1925 Lugdi gave birth to a healthy son by Caesarian section at the government hospital in Agra; he was named Naunita Lal. Nine days later, on 4 October, she died of complications aged 23.^[1]

Shanti Devi Mathur was born on 11 December 1926 – one year and ten months after Lugdi's death – to the family of Babu Rang Bahadur Mathur of Delhi, which is about 145 kilometres north of Mathura.

First Words

The most detailed English account of Shanti Devi's early life was given by Swedish writer Sture Lönnerstrand in his 1998 book *I Have Lived Before: The True Story of the Reincarnation of Shanti Devi*,^[2] translated from the Swedish edition.

Shanti Devi did not speak or even babble as babies typically do until age four. Then she began speaking, in a dialect different from that of the family, of cleaning silverware, of a town named Muttra, of a picture of Krishna (which she wanted back), and of having a husband. With regard to fabric that was to be made into a sari for her, she told her mother the merchant had lied about its quality, which she knew because her husband owned a fabric store. She surprised a doctor with accurate details of Caesarian-section procedures. Her family, she repeatedly said, was not her real family, and her home was not her real home. Her habit of speaking from the point-of-view of an adult woman, one who lived in different circumstances, brought friction with her parents and siblings and much upset for herself.

At the age of six, Shanti Devi got into an argument with the twin sons of a prestigious neighbour, a lawyer named Tara Chand Mathur. The boys teased her about a drawing she was making of a temple, pointing out that the details were wrong (see [here](#) for illustrations by children of past-life memories). She told them it was not the local temple, with which they were familiar, but one in 'Muttra'. She then took the opportunity to ask a passer-by the distance to Muttra: he answered that Mathura (called 'Muttra' by its residents) was one day away by carriage or two by foot. Unconcerned about the the distance, the girl set off with a small suitcase. While Tara Chand Mathur intervened to bring her home, he heard her say that her husband was wealthy and owned several houses, and that she had danced for him wearing *chureys*, ankle-bracelets. Tara Chand knew these were called 'chureys' only in Mathura, and now realized that she might be recalling a past life.

First Contacts with Prior Family

This opinion came to be shared by the headmaster of Shanti Devi's school, Lala Chand. He convinced her to give him the name and address of the husband she spoke of: Kedar Nath Chaubey of 9 Chaubey Street in Mathura. Lala Chand wrote to Kedar Nath, and in time received an answer, followed by a visit from Kedar Nath's cousin Kanji Mal Chaubey. The girl immediately recognized him as her past-life husband's cousin, and began relating to him many correct facts of his own life, and hers.

Convinced of her authenticity, Kanji Mal now arranged for Kedar Nath himself to visit her. To test the girl Kedar Nath pretended to be his brother Babu Ram Chaubey, and sought facts from her that only he and Lugdi had known. With him he brought Lugdi's son Naunita Lal.

Shanti Devi was not deceived. She pointed out that Kedar Nath still had the moustache and facial birthmark that she had described to her parents. She threw her arms around Naunita Lal and cried as she never had before, saying that her soul recognized his soul.

Shanti Devi referred to a sum of 150 rupees that Lugdi had hidden in the house, and asked Kedar Nath whether he had sacrificed the money to Krishna, as she had requested. She also wanted to know whether he had kept his promise, made on her deathbed, never to remarry (in fact he had honoured neither). She also asked her mother for two dishes that were Kedar Nath's favourites and mentioned a well in the courtyard of her former house where she had bathed.^[5]

When Kedar Nath still expressed doubt, she asked her parents to leave the room and shared with him some private information. Two versions exist of this exchange: first, that she told him she was aware he had been unfaithful to her, as she seen glances shared between him and a nurse, and later caught them in a dalliance;^[4] and second, that she recalled the positions and procedures he and Lugdi had used while having sex, as a means to procreate that overcame her incapacitation from arthritis.^[5] Kedar Nath was convinced. She forgave him and begged him to take her to Mathura, but her parents would not allow it.

Official Investigation

Media reporting of the case caught the attention of independence activist and political leader Mahatma Gandhi, who visited Shanti Devi's home and invited her to his ashram. Gandhi appointed a 'Committee of Inquiry' of fifteen prominent people to try to verify her memories. The body included national political leaders, congressional members, two notable lawyers (one of whom was Tara Chand Mathur), two journalists of national stature, distinguished businesspeople and government officials, all reputed to be of impeccable character.

Aged nine, on 24 November 1935, Shanti Devi realized her dream of returning to Mathura, accompanied by her parents and committee members. According to its subsequent report, as their train approached Mathura 'she became flushed with joy and remarked that by the time they reach Mathura the doors of the temple of Dvarkadish would be closed. Her exact language was, "Mandir ke pat band ho jayenge," so typically used in Mathura.'

Then, on the platform:

...an older man, wearing a typical Mathura dress, whom she had never met before, came in front of her, mixed in the small crowd, and paused for a while. She was asked whether she could recognize him... she at once came down from Mr. Gupta's lap and touched the stranger's feet with deep veneration and stood aside. On inquiring, she whispered in L Deshbandhu's ear that the person was her 'Jeth' (older brother of her husband). All this was so spontaneous and natural that it left everybody stunned with surprise. The man was Babu Ram Chaubey, who was

really the elder brother of Kedar Nath Chaubey.

Shanti was asked to guide the driver of the horse-drawn carriage to wherever she wished. She accordingly led the procession to the house where Lugdi had lived when she was first married, on the way correctly identifying landmarks and noting changes that had taken place since Lugdi had died. Among the people near the house, she accurately picked out Lugdi's father-in-law and recalled the exact words he had once said to Lugdi.

An apparent inaccuracy concerned the colour of the house, which Shanti Devi had insisted was yellow but in fact turned out to be white. However, the building's current occupant said it had been yellow and that he had had it repainted. Inside the house, she accurately described the previous arrangement of the furniture and correctly identified Lugdi's and Kedar Nath's bedroom. At this time she also demonstrated a knowledge of Mathura's dialect, correctly understanding the words 'jai-zarur' (commode) and 'katora' (a type of pancake).

The group then walked further along Chaubey Street towards the house in which Lugdi had lived prior to her death. Here, Shanti Devi ran up and hugged a young man, who turned out to be Lugdi's brother and who, having quizzed her, was convinced she had been Lugdi.

Shanti Devi appeared to be familiar with the layout of the house, for instance exhibiting disappointment at finding her clothes gone and her former worship-room being used for storage. Handed a jewellery box, she distinguished what had belonged to Lugdi from that owned by Kedar Nath's present wife. Outside in the courtyard she was confused to find only stones where a well had been, but when these were removed the old well, now almost dry, was revealed.

Shanti Devi was asked by committee members about the 150 rupees she said she had hidden. She took the party back to her room and, the report stated,

She cast her eyes around and put her foot in a corner, saying that the money lay hidden underneath the spot. The spot was dug up and about a foot deep under the spot an old-fashioned 'galla' – an arrangement for keeping valuables underground – was found but there was no money.

The girl would not believe; somewhat later on we learned that the money [about 150 rupees] was taken out by Lugdi's husband Pandit Kedar Nath Choubey after her death.

On the way to the Dwarkadish temple, Shanti Devi stopped the carriage at the house that her family had occupied when she was a child. There, she at first mistook Lugdi's aunt for her mother, before recognizing both her and Lugdi's father accurately. Sharing memories with the couple, including those of promises not kept, she convinced them she had been Lugdi.

Finally, the girl was taken to the Dwarkadhish temple and other places she had mentioned previously, where almost all of her statements were verified.

The Committee published its report in 1936 in a 26-page booklet, concluding that Shanti Devi was the reincarnation of Lugdi. The report includes an account by Kedar Nath's cousin Kanji Mal Chaubey of his first interview with Shanti Devi.^[6]

Other Investigations

This report aroused interest in India and abroad.

Shanti Devi visited Mathura again on 2 April 1936 at the request of writer Saint Nihal Singh, who took her to places she had known that had not been included in the Committee's trip. Here too, most

of her memories were discovered to be accurate.

Sushil Chandra Bose interviewed Shanti Devi and her father in Delhi and Kedar Nath Chaubey in Mathura, publishing the transcripts in a 1952 monograph.^[7] His greatest interest was her [intermission memories](#) (see below).

Ian Stevenson investigated the case, stating in a 1960 paper, 'The accounts available to me indicate that Shanti Devi made at least 24 statements of her memories, which matched the verified facts'.^[8]

Indian reincarnation researcher KS Rawat met Shanti Devi first in 1986. He also interviewed her younger brother Virash Narain Mathur, Kedar Nath's close friend Ramnath Chaubey, and other relatives of Lugdi, reporting the information in multiple publications. Rawat can be seen in [this video](#), which also has interviews with Lugdi's son, brother and sister, who reveal even more of what Shanti Devi remembered.

Intermission Memories

In a 2005 paper, 'The Life Beyond', Rawat and fellow reincarnation researcher [Titus Rivas](#) give transcribed excerpts from five interviews with Shanti Devi on her intermission memories, conducted by: Bal Chand Nahata (22 February 1936); hypnotist Jagdish Mitra (13 April 1936); Sushil Chand Bose (25 and 26 July 1936); Rawat, Stevenson and [Satwant Pasricha](#) (3 February 1986); and Rawat (30 October 1987). Shanti Devi's accounts had these common features:

- No pain at the time of death.
- Experience of profound darkness at the time of death. Seeing a dazzling light.
- Coming out of the (physical) body in vaporous form.
- Coming of three or four young people wearing saffron or yellow robes.
- Put in a square or rectangular vessel. Feeling of going up and up.
- Seeing an extremely beautiful garden on the way up. Coming across a river.
- Passing through three planes, ultimately taken to the fourth. Absence of an open space on the fourth plane.
- Absence of any sense of time at the fourth plane. Presence of Saints on all the four planes.
- Presence of a bright (Godly) entity on the fourth plane.
- Reading of a review of the actions performed in earthly life on the fourth plane.
- Reading of a review of the actions performed in earthly life by this Godly entity.
- Put on a staircase of silver (and gold), which was very bright, for descending back, by the same people who took her up.
- Coming down to a dark cell.
- No feeling of hunger or thirst in the black cell.^[9]

Criticism and Controversy

Indian sceptic Bal Chand Nahata interviewed Shanti Devi and some others, then wrote in his report, 'Whatever material that has come before us does not warrant us to conclude that Shanti Devi has former life recollections or that this cases proves reincarnation'.^[10] This view was countered by philosopher Indra Sen, who, in a paper presented at the Indian Philosophical Congress in 1938, commented that it was 'strange' that Bal Chand Nahata should have arrived at such a confident conclusion on the basis of so little research.^[11] From his own studies, Sen noted the seriousness, untypical of small children, with which Shanti Devi described her past life.^[12]

Later Development

Shanti Devi continued her schooling, but, to the despair of her parents, decided never to marry since she was in effect a widow, and Hindu custom requires that widows not remarry. At the age of 21 she went through a dark phase, possibly awakened by investigators asking her what she remembered of the between-lives intermission. During this time she had frequent dreams of Lugdi's death and could be heard crying at night.

In most similar cases, the child's past-life memories start to fade at around five, and by the teen years have virtually disappeared. That was apparently not the case with Shanti Devi, for whom they continued into adulthood, obliging her to live two lives simultaneously. Only growing maturity and the passing of time allowed her to grasp that she was recalling two different periods of her multi-life existence.^[13]

Speaking with Swedish author Sture Lönnerstrand, Shanti Devi identified Lugdi's overwhelming desire to cling to life as the cause of her current incarnation. She stated, 'I was not empty enough ... I had so many desires and yearnings ... I wanted to come back to Earth ...'^[14] If I hadn't longed so desperately to come back, I would not have needed to incarnate again, but would have been reunited with Brahma and eternal life.'^[15]

Shanti Devi gave Lönnerstrand a lengthy description of the process of her death, which she described as being more gradual than it had seemed to observers. She also recounted having witnessed her own funeral, existing as a tiny speck while entirely discarnate, with no sense of time or space but with the feeling that all the universe and all her lives were contained within her. Then she felt herself 'wedged in between something' which she later realized was her mother's womb.

Shanti Devi dedicated her adult life to teaching Hindu religion and philosophy, sharing her experiences and spreading the word about reincarnation. She died aged 61 on 27 December 1987, four days after being interviewed by the Indian researcher Rawat.^[16]

KM Wehrstein

Literature

Bose, S.C. (1952). *A Case of Reincarnation*. Ligate: Satsang.

Gupta, L.D., Sharma, N.R., & Mathur, T.C. (1936). *An Inquiry in the Case of Shanti Devi*. Delhi: International Aryan League.

Lönnerstrand, S. (1998). Kippen, L. (trans.) *I Have Lived Before: The True Story of the Reincarnation of Shanti Devi*. Huntsville, Arkansas, USA: Ozark Mountain Publishers. Originally published as *Shanti Devi, en berättelse om reinkarnation*. Sweden: Larsons Förlag (1994). Digitized by the Internet Archive 2017.

Nahata, B.C. (n.d.). *Punarjanma Ki Paryalochana*. Calcutta: Buddiwadi Songh.

Rawat, K.S. (1997). [Shanti Devi's Past](#). *Venture Inward*. March/April, 18-21.

Rawat, K.S., & Rivas, T. (2005). [The life beyond: Through the eyes of children who claim to remember previous lives](#). *Journal of Religion and Psychical Research* 28/3, 126-36.

Sen, I. (1936). Kumari Shanti Devi and reincarnation. *Chitrapat* (Hindi), 4 July, (trans. K.S. Rawat).

Sen, I. (1938). *Shantidevi Further Investigated*. Proceedings of the India Philosophical Congress.

Stevenson, I. (1960). The evidence of survival from claimed memories of former incarnations. *Journal*

of the American Society for Psychical Research 54/2 (April), 51-71. [Summary of Shanti Devi case: 66-67.]

Endnotes

Footnotes

- 1.^ Rawat (1997).
- 2.^ Lönnerstrand (1998). All information in the next two sections is drawn from this source except where otherwise noted.
- 3.^ Rawat & Rivas (2021).
- 4.^ Lönnerstrand (1998), 54-55.
- 5.^ Rawat & Rivas (2021), 60, 157.
- 6.^ Gupta, Sharma, & Mathur (1936), as cited by Rawat (1997) and Rawat & Rivas (2021). All information in this section is drawn from the latter two sources except where otherwise noted.
- 7.^ Bose (1952).
- 8.^ Stevenson (1960).
- 9.^ Rawat & Rivas (2005).
- 10.^ Cited by Rawat & Rivas (2005).
- 11.^ Sen (1938).
- 12.^ Sen (1936).
- 13.^ Lönnerstrand (1998). All information in this section is drawn from this source except where otherwise noted.
- 14.^ Lönnerstrand (1998), 111.
- 15.^ Lönnerstrand (1998), 105.
- 16.^ Rawat & Rivas (2021), 61.