

# Thusita Silva

Thusita Silva recalled a life in a town far from where she lived in Sri Lanka, that ended by drowning when she fell off a footbridge. Thusita's statements about her previous life were recorded by Professor Erlendur Haraldsson and his associates before they attempted to verify the details.

## Religions and Ethnicities in Sri Lanka

All the major religions are found in Sri Lanka: 70% are Singalese-speaking Buddhists, 15% are Tamil-speaking Hindus, 8% are Christians and 7% are Muslims. Rebirth cases have been found among all the religious communities in Sri Lanka. Thusita's family was Singalese-speaking and Buddhist.

## Investigation

Thusita (pseudonym) was born in 1982 in the small town of Elpitiya in southwestern Sri Lanka; her family moved later to Panadura near the western coast. At the age of two and a half Thusita started to speak about a life in Akuressa, a town some 30 miles distant from Elpitiya and 78 miles from Panadura.

Sometime after this, her only (and several years older) brother travelled to Akuressa but failed to find anyone that corresponded to her statements. On his return he scolded Thusita for telling lies.

In 1990, one of Haraldsson's associates heard about the case from a neighbor, met the girl and her mother and made preliminary notes. Later in the same year Haraldsson interviewed Thusita and her mother. (Thusita's father had died a few years earlier.)

## Statements by Thusita

Describing how the previous life ended, Thusita said she had fallen from a narrow suspension footbridge into a river and drowned. Her husband had thrown himself into the river to try to save her and had almost drowned. The footbridge was near her house.

Thusita made several further statements:

- she was pregnant at this time
- her father's name was Jeedin Nanayakkara
- she had lived in a larger house than the mud hut where her present family lived
- she had a yellow bicycle
- she had worked in a hospital
- her husband had been a postman
- they owned a car
- she had a sister who had a daughter
- there was a big gate in front of their house

Thusita mentioned more names, but neither she nor her family remembered them when Haraldsson interviewed them in 1990. By that time Thusita was eight and had forgotten some of her earlier memories, as is usual in cases of this kind.

Thusita's mother stated that they had no connections with Akuressa, and none of them had ever been there at the time Thusita was talking frequently about her previous life.

## Search in Akuressa

In the summer of 1990 Haraldsson's associate visited Akuressa, which has a population of about 20,000. He learned that a young woman with the married family name of Nanayakkara had drowned after falling into a river from a narrow suspension bridge. He was unable to meet any members of the woman's family.

A few months later Haraldsson visited Akuressa with another associate, Godwin Samararatne. They found that in 1973 Chandra Nanayakkara, aged 27, had drowned while she and her husband were crossing the bridge. A plank gave way, and she fell into the swollen river. Her husband jumped in to rescue her but almost drowned himself. Chandra's body was

found three days later some distance down the river. She had been seven months pregnant at the time. She had lived in the house of her in-laws some 100 yards from the bridge.

A document in the coroner's office confirmed that Chandra had died in December 1973 'by choking after swallowing water when the deceased fell into the River Nilwala from the suspension bridge' (this is the only suspension bridge in the area). After Chandra's drowning the bridge was repaired, but in 1990 it was back to its earlier state of disrepair. Several people had fallen into the river since, but no one had drowned.

Briefly stated, the inquiries confirmed some of Thusita's statements:

- there was a suspension bridge in Akuressa
- a married, pregnant woman, had fallen from it and drowned
- the name of the woman's father-in-law was Nanayakkara
- her family (the in-laws) had owned a car (uncommon in Sri Lanka) and a bicycle
- their house was larger than Thusita's home and had a big gate (made of bamboo)

Some of Thusita's statements, for instance that she had owned a brassiere, were too general to be useful. Others were partially or completely inaccurate:

- 'Nanayakkara' was the name of her father-in-law, not her father (however, in Sri Lanka married women commonly refer to their father-in-law as father)
- his first name was Edwin, not Jeedin
- the bicycle had been black, not yellow
- Chandra had never been a nurse (a cousin and close friend of hers had been a nurse)
- Chandra's husband had been a bus driver, not a postman (his elder brother was a postman)
- Chandra did not have a sister who had a daughter (although she had a sister-in-law who had daughters)

## Typical Features

This case has some interesting and typical features. Thusita started to talk about her memories at the age of two and a half, and did so persistently. The memories center around a violent death, as is often the case with children who remember a previous life. Also, Thusita's mother stated that her daughter had a phobia of bridges and water; again, such phobias are common among children with past-life memories, especially those who die by accident or violence.

Haraldsson and his associates planned to take Thusita to Akuressa for tests of recognition, but unfortunately her brother forbade that. This is the only case that Haraldsson investigated in Sri Lanka in which someone was uncooperative.

Erlendur Haraldsson

## Sources

Antonia Mills, Erlendur Haraldsson, & H. H. Jurgen Keil (1994). 'Replication studies of cases suggestive of reincarnation by three independent investigators.' *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 88, 207-219.

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