

Twins Reincarnation Research

Some documented cases of the reincarnation type involve twins who recall having been closely associated, often as marriage partners, siblings or friends. Such cases hold implications for understanding the factors involved in personality development and behaviour, suggesting that past lives play a role in addition to heredity and environment. They also point to the possibility of individual choice in the circumstances of a future incarnation.

An Early Burmese Twin Case

The first recorded case of twins who remembered past lives occurred in Burma and was reported by Harold Fielding Hall in 1898.^[1] ^[2] The boys' names were Maung Gyi and Maung Nge, and they were born near the beginning of the British occupation, a time of unrest. As Fielding Hall describes it, 'The country was full of armed men, the roads were unsafe, and the nights were lighted with the flames of burning villages'.^[3] The village of Okshitgon was in one of the worst-affected areas, so the twins' father, Maung Kan, fled with his wife and two baby sons to another village, Kabyu, where the boys grew up.

When they learned to talk, the boys began calling each other Maung San Nyein and Ma Gwin—names their parents recognized as those of a couple they had known in Okshitgon, now deceased. This man and woman had been born on the same day, probably in 1848,^[4] played together as children, married for life and had died on the same day. They are known to have died one year after the start of the occupation, which began in 1885, in other words some time in 1886.^[5]

To test the extent of the twins' memories their parents took them to their former village. As Fielding Hall describes: 'The children knew everything in Okshitgon; they knew the roads and the houses and the people, and they recognized the clothes they used to wear in a former life'.^[6] The younger boy even remembered borrowing two rupees from a local woman, Ma Thet, and leaving the debt unpaid, which Ma Thet confirmed was true.

Fielding Hall met Maung Gyi and Maung Nge when they had just turned six, and observed that the twin who had been the man was 'a fat, chubby little fellow' while he who had been the woman 'is smaller, and has a curious dreamy look in his face, more like a girl than a boy'.^[7] They recounted intermission memories: 'they lived for some time without a body at all, wandering in the air and hiding in the trees', then were reborn after what appears to be a short intermission of 'some months'. The elder told Fielding Hall that his memories were fading as he grew older.^[8] This case has many of the same features as twin cases Stevenson observed nearly a century later (see below).

Further case studies are given below. The following section addresses scientific research carried out in cases of twins who remember previous lives.

Ian Stevenson's Analysis of Forty-Two Twin Pairs

Francis Galton first suggested in 1875 that the study of twins would illuminate the relative weight of heredity versus environment in forming a human being.^[9] Since then, much research on twins has been undertaken to examine the 'nature vs nurture' question.

Ian Stevenson and other reincarnation researchers argue for past-life influence as a third factor. Stevenson addresses the issue in detail in Volume Two of *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*, and in a more summary way in a later work, *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*. He performed an analysis of 42 pairs of twins, of which he and his colleagues investigated 40. The majority were from Burma and the others from India, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Lebanon, Italy and England.

Zygoty

In only six of these cases were the investigators able to determine through blood tests the twins' zygoty, that is, whether the twins were monozygotic or 'identical', grown from one egg, or dizygotic, 'fraternal', from two eggs. For most pairs, they had to rely on physical similarities such as whether the twins were the same sex, or had very similar faces. The former indicator is only reliable in that twins of differing sex are certainly dizygotic; the latter indicator is not reliable. In his review of the literature on zygoty and facial resemblance, Stevenson cites a finding that some five per cent of monozygotic twins do not look identical despite their genetic material being identical.^[10] Based on the assumption of earlier twin researchers that dizygotic twins of the same sex should number the same as dizygotic twins of different sexes,

Stevenson estimated that about eighteen of the 42 pairs of twins were monozygotic.

Relationships Between Previous Persons

Of the 42 pairs in Stevenson's study, the previous persons of both twins had been identified in 31 cases, based on statements made by one or both twins in early childhood. Of every one of these 31 pairs, the previous persons had known each other in some way. Five pairs had been married to each other, eleven had been siblings—two of them twins—six had been relatives of other kinds and nine had been friends, acquaintances or business associates. A similar pattern was found in the cases in which only one previous life had been identified, or neither, on the basis of the available information, though there were some exceptions.^[11]

Stevenson also found that the previous persons were often known to the parents of the twins: out of 84 parents, 52 were either related to one or more previous persons or were friends or acquaintances. Another six had heard of the previous persons without knowing them personally.^[12]

Mode and Timing of Death

With respect to mode of death, the twin cases showed the typical tendency in reincarnation cases for previous lives to have ended by violence.^[13] Out of 34 twin cases for which the timing of death is known, 21 (62%) died on the same occasion or by the same cause. In the cases of those who died separately, the interval between deaths ranged from three days to 30 years with four years as the median.^[14]

Past-Life and Current-Life Dominance

Stevenson also found that where it was known which twin was the dominant personality in twin pairs and pairs of previous persons, or where this could at least be surmised, the dominant previous person became the dominant twin every time, regardless of which twin had been born first.^[15]

Some Case Studies in Stevenson's Analysis of Twins

Sivanthie and Sheromie Hettiaratchi

These Sri Lankan dizygotic twin girls were born in 1978. Sivanthie had a prominent dark birthmark on her upper abdomen. When the twins were two and a half, Sivanthie began speaking of her previous life, giving many details. She said that she had been shot to death while jumping into the sea, and pointed at her birthmark as the place where the bullet entered. About a year later she said that her name had been Robert. During the insurgency in Sri Lanka in 1971, the police had shot a young man named Robert^[16] as he was trying to escape from them by jumping into the sea. Word of Sivanthie's statements reached Robert's family and the family of AK Nandadasa, better known as Johnny, Robert's love-partner and fellow insurgent, who had been killed by police on the same day. When Johnny's brother visited the Hettiaratchi family, Sheromie, who had never spoken of a previous life before, said 'My younger brother has come', and began to give more past-life details.

The twins recognized places they had been in their past lives, and people in their previous families. They displayed past-life-related behaviours such as phobias of khaki uniforms and Jeeps (both of which are used by Sri Lankan police) and loud noises. Masculine behaviours displayed by both girls included dressing in masculine ways and urinating standing up, also climbing trees and riding bicycles (both considered masculine activities in Sri Lanka). They engaged in quasi-adult behaviours such as pretending to smoke cigarettes, play cards, and even make bombs. Their behaviours matched their past-life selves in other ways, as did their physiques.^[17]

Indika and Kakshappa Ishwara

This case is unusual among twin cases in that the twins' previous persons, only one of whom was identified, apparently had nothing to do with each other and no clear reason has been discerned for why they were born together. It is also exceptional for the strength of the memories provided by one of the two.^[18]

Indika and Kakshappa Ishwara were Sri Lankan monozygotic twin boys born in 1972. When they were about three, they began speaking of past lives. Kakshappa's account of being shot to death as an insurgent was laughed at by his family, and he never again spoke of his past life. Indika, on the other hand, made many statements about a past life, to the extent that

the family were able to identify the deceased person he had been: Dharshana Samarasekera, a schoolboy who lived in a town some 40 miles distant from the Ishwara's home. He had died at the age of ten from a febrile illness, possibly viral meningitis.

Indika showed past-life-related behaviours such as affection for his former family and a phobia about vehicles likely related to an incident he had heard about early in his previous life. The twins' behaviours were very different, in ways that seemed to reflect their respective past lives. Indika was relatively religious, calm, gentle, intelligent, studious and aloof, while Kakshappa was relatively uninterested in religion, belligerent, violent, uninterested in studies and affectionate. These differences decreased, however, as they grew older. Physically, their faces did not look very alike; Indika was taller and had a nasal polyp that Stevenson connected with nasal intubation for feeding during Dharshana's terminal illness.

Ma Khin Ma Gyi and Ma Khin Ma Nge

Ma Khin Ma Gyi and Ma Khin Ma Nge were female dizygotic Burmese twins born in 1961. Their mother had a dream while she was pregnant that she would give birth to her reincarnated parents. When they were between the ages of four and five, the girls began recounting memories of life as the twins' maternal grandparents, U Maung, an Indian who had taken on a Burmese name, and Daw Aye Hla, a devout Buddhist.

Due to her religion, she had objected to her husband hunting animals with firearms for their meat and tying poultry to posts. Others in the family predicted some future punishment if he did not stop, and the dispute grew severe enough that couple separated. Shortly before his death, U Maung was reminded that, even though he had been raised Muslim, he had been born Buddhist, and his last utterances were Buddhist prayers using a rosary. Daw Aye Hla died four years later of a respiratory disease. Ma Khin Ma Gyi was born with two birth defects: her left hand was almost fingerless and there was a thick groove around her left calf. She said these were punishments for her mistreatment of animals in her past life. Stevenson suggests that the defects were more likely caused by U Maung Maung's belief that he would suffer punishment.

Throughout their childhood and youth, the twins showed behaviours similar to their respective grandparents. Ma Khin Ma Gyi preferred Indian food, drank coffee and tea, was right-handed and did well in school, like her educated grandfather, while Ma Khin Ma Nge had no interest in Indian food, drank tea only, was left-handed and did poorly in school, like her illiterate grandmother. As in their past lives, Ma Khin Ma Nge was the dominant and indeed bossy personality, and remained a devout Buddhist, while Ma Khin Ma Gyi was not religious and liked to kill insects. Ma Khin Ma Gyi behaved in masculine ways such as dressing and wearing her hair like a boy and playing with boys. Physically, the twins were similar to their grandparents in that Ma Khin Ma Gyi was taller, stockier and less sensitive to cold than Ma Khin Ma Nge, and had no susceptibility to respiratory infections, while Ma Khin Ma Nge did.^[19]

Ma San Nyunt and Ma Nyunt San

These Burmese dizygotic twin girls were born in 1964. At the age of two, when they were asked where they came from, one of them replied 'from the *kokka* (acacia) tree,' though there were no trees of that type in their village. They began speaking of their past lives as a pair of sisters, Daw Aye Phyu and Daw Sapai, who had lived in a nearby village and were distantly related to the twins' father. This village did have a *kokka* tree beside the sisters' former residence, and the child's words were interpreted to mean that their spirits had stayed in the tree between lives. When the twins were brought for a visit to the village they named as their former place of residence, they recognized and named people and places the sisters, who both lived to old age, had known.

The twins showed some behavioural differences that matched the differences of the sisters: for instance, Ma Nyunt San was more active and dominant than Ma San Myunt, just as Daw Aye Phyu had been in comparison to Daw Sapai. An important feature of this case is that the twins were unlike in facial appearance, but each resembled the sister they remembered having been.^[20]

Ma Khin San Tin and Ma Khin San Yin

A number of Burmese children remember past lives as Japanese soldiers who were killed during the country's occupation in World War II, including this pair of female twins born in 1959. At about the age of three they began speaking of their previous lives, in which they had been two brothers, soldiers in the Japanese army, and had been killed near the house in which they were born into their current lives.

Their mother, Daw Khin Kyi, remembered that when her village had been bombed and strafed by Allied planes, her father-in-law had seen two Japanese soldiers running for cover, heading towards tamarind trees near the family's house. When

the attack was over, the two soldiers were found dead. This mostly matched what the twins recalled, including the detail of the tamarind trees. They provided many details of their earlier lives: they had been born three years apart, and when the elder enlisted in the Japanese army at age eighteen, the younger insisted on joining him. They had been 25 and 22 when deployed in Burma, serving in the same unit, and had been inseparable. Since the twins provided no past-life names, however, the brothers have not been identified.

In early childhood, Ma Khin San Tin and Ma Khin San Yin spoke to each other in a language that no one else understood, and had some difficulty learning Burmese. They asked to be taken back to Japan, showed animosity toward the allied countries, preferred Japanese-style dishes and beverages, and would slap people across the face when angry – as Japanese soldiers had done during the occupation. They displayed masculine behaviours such as dressing as boys until their family insisted they stop.^[21]

Maung Aung Ko Thein and Maung Aung Cho Thein

This case is unusual in that these Burmese twin boys, born in 1970, said almost nothing about their previous lives. Rather, these were inferred from three indications: two announcing dreams; Maung Aung Ko Thein's birthmarks; and behaviours that were considered similar to the previous persons. Maung Aung Ko Thein had previously been a male Indian rice farmer, Sunder Ram, and Maung Aung Cho Thein had been a female mill owner, Daw Hla May. Their association had been one of business: she had routinely bought rice from him.

Daw Hla May was related to the twins' mother, though the informants were uncertain how; she was possibly an aunt. She was of Chinese extraction, never married, and was described as 'quiet, pious and businesslike'. While dying, she expressed the wish to reincarnate as a man. Sunder Ram was known as 'quiet, pious and hardworking'. While pregnant, the twins' mother had two invasively-themed announcing dreams: in the first, Sunder Ram walked into her house, and in the second, Daw Hla May came forcibly into bed with her and her husband. This was the first clue in identifying the twins' past lives.

The twins showed both behavioural and physical similarities to the people of whom their mother had dreamed, which was the second clue. Maung Aung Cho Thein was more Chinese-looking, fairer-skinned and less hirsute. He dressed as a girl when young, tended to spend money freely, was dominant and fussy about food, and preferred pork over curries. Maung Aung Ko Thein was more Indian-looking, darker-skinned and more hirsute, frugal with money, quiet and submissive and fond of curries.

Maung Aung Ko Thein had birthmarks on the helices of his ears where Sunder Ram may have worn earrings, as is typical for men from northern India. This third clue was enough, in combination with the others, to make the identification certain in the minds of the families; these clues were also persuasive to Stevenson.^[22]

Gillian and Jennifer Pollock

John and Florence Pollock, a British couple who ran small grocery stores, had two daughters, Joanna, born in 1946, and Jacqueline, born in 1951. Jacqueline had an accident with a bucket at the age of three that left her with a distinctive scar above her right eye. Joanna had a premonition that she would never grow up. While walking to school on May 5, 1957, both girls were run over by a drug-addled, suicidal driver and killed instantly.

When Florence became pregnant in 1958, John felt sure that she would give birth to the girls reincarnated as twins. She felt equally sure this would not happen and that she was carrying a single foetus; her doctor agreed. Nevertheless, she gave birth to monozygotic twins: Gillian and Jennifer.

In early childhood, the girls made statements about past lives. They recognized toys and clothing, remembered that they had had lunch at school (unlike in their current lives), and recalled where the swings were in their former schoolyard. Jennifer had a birthmark similar to the former's Jacqueline scar, and Gillian identified it as such. The twins were close, as Joanne and Jacqueline had been; they were also close to their grandmother, who had done much to raise Joanna and Jacqueline. Like Joanna, Gillian was more mature and liked to mother her sister, which her sister accepted. Jennifer had a birthmark on the left side of her waist, corresponding to a mark that Jacqueline had had.^[23] For more detail on the Pollock twins' case, see [here](#).

Stevenson's Discussion

In Stevenson's view, expressed in *Reincarnation and Biology*, discordant physical phenomena in monozygotic twins such as some of those described above cannot be explained by environmental factors. The genetic origins of cleft lip seem

well-established, he points out, but in 62% of monozygotic twins, only one twin has it. Citing a study that attributes the fact that only one of a pair of monozygotic twins had a giant pigmented naevus to 'incomplete penetrance' and 'somatic mutation', Stevenson remarks on the similarity of this birthmark to one found on a child, Ma Khin Hsann Oo, who remembered having burned to death in her previous life; from this he concludes that reincarnation could be the cause when, as in the cited study, one twin has a birthmark and the other does not.

Stevenson criticizes the tendency of other commentators to consider disease, birth-defect and brain-surface-anatomy discrepancies in monozygotic twins as 'chance' or 'sporadic', which he interprets as actually meaning 'unexplained'. Citing Lenz's 1935 observation that in some female monozygotic twins one twin is distinctly more masculine than the other, Stevenson remarks that this allows for an explanation beyond genetics or environment.

Stevenson cites a study that shows twin infants often exhibit clear behavioural differences within the first few months of life, with concordance rates rarely above 60% and usually lower. A second study shows that parents respond to such differences rather than causing them. Conjoined or 'Siamese' twins show great differences in personality, Stevenson notes, despite invariably being monozygotic and living in the same environment by necessity. As an example he cites the case of Chang and Eng, the first conjoined twins to be extensively studied, who had very different personalities, likes and dislikes.^[24]

In *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*, Stevenson suggests that when twins display similar behaviours, it may not only be due to genetics, but similar circumstances or life-courses in previous lives. Using Indika and Kakshappa Ishwara as an example, he suggests that reincarnation might explain otherwise inexplicable behavioural differences in monozygotic twins. Being treated differently by their parents because of their different personalities might explain an increase in the divergence as twins grow up; but, as Stevenson points out, Indika and Kakshappa became more similar rather than more different as they aged and the past-life influences faded. He cites a study in which the author attributes discordant sex-role behaviour in a pair of monozygotic twins to parental influences, despite important differences being observed in their young infancy, such as the more feminine baby being easier to cuddle and having a more feminine appearance. Stevenson gives the example of Ma Khin Ma Gyi and Ma Khin Ma Nge as exemplifying how a similar case would be interpreted in a culture that accepts reincarnation.^[25]

How Do Two Spirits Become Twins?

In both works cited above, Stevenson hypothesizes on methods used by two spirits who want to be reborn together. He writes:

For dizygotic twins the problem would consist in maneuvering two ova into positions where they could be fertilized at about the same time. For monozygotic twins there would need to be some cleaving force that would divide a fertilized ovum soon after it had been fertilized.

In his opinion, it would not be a conscious effort, but outside conscious control, similar to circulation and digestion. He observes that it is no more implausible than a discarnate personality influencing the form of an embryo, which the evidence from cases throughout *Reincarnation and Biology* suggests does indeed happen.^[26]

In *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*, Stevenson adds that, as a third strategy for being born together, the two spirits might just wait until twin embryos become available. He also modifies his 'cleaving force' wording:

In considering the division of a zygote into two parts, it is unhelpful to imagine two discarnate personalities cleaving it in two as one might halve a round cheese with a kitchen knife. A better analogy would be that of two overlapping magnetic fields (in which iron filings have become aligned), which then separate and form two new magnetic fields, each taking with it a portion of the iron filings.^[27]

Karen Wehrstein

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References

Footnotes

- 1.^ Fielding [Hall], H. (1898).
- 2.^ Summarized in Haraldsson and Matlock (2017), p. 177.
- 3.^ Fielding [Hall] (1898), p. 339.
- 4.^ Haraldsson and Matlock (2017), p. 178.
- 5.^ Haraldsson and Matlock (2017), p. 178.
- 6.^ Fielding [Hall] (1898), p. 340.
- 7.^ Fielding [Hall] (1898), p. 340.
- 8.^ Fielding [Hall] (1898), pp. 340-41.
- 9.^ See Galton, F. (1875).
- 10.^ Stevenson (1997), p. 1933.
- 11.^ Stevenson (1997), Table 25-4, p. 1937.
- 12.^ Stevenson (1997), Table 25-5, p. 1938.
- 13.^ See Haraldsson and Matlock (2017), pp. 221-2.
- 14.^ Stevenson (1997), p. 1939.
- 15.^ Stevenson (1997), Table 25-7, p. 1940.
- 16.^ In full: Akmeemana Palliyaguruge Robert.
- 17.^ Full case study: Stevenson (1997), pp. 1940-70.
- 18.^ Full case study: Stevenson (1997), pp. 1970-2000.
- 19.^ Full case study: Stevenson (1997), pp. 2000-17.
- 20.^ Full case study: Stevenson (1997), pp. 2017-25.
- 21.^ Full case study: Stevenson (1997), pp. 2025-34.
- 22.^ Full case study: Stevenson (1997), pp. 2034-41.
- 23.^ Full case study: Stevenson (1997), pp. 2041-58.
- 24.^ Stevenson (1997), pp. 2058-62.
- 25.^ See Stevenson (2001), pp. 189-194.
- 26.^ Stevenson (1997), p. 2062.
- 27.^ Stevenson (2001), p. 247, fn 22.