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ARTICLE

The Case of Gnanathilaka Baddevithana: An Early Independent Investigation of One of Ian Stevenson's Reincarnation Cases

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INTRODUCTION

Critics frequently deride reincarnation case studies as anecdotal, implying that researchers have done no more than collect unsubstantiated stories or folk tales. Indeed, many accounts of past-life memory, especially those reported before 1961, when Ian Stevenson began his field research, are of this nature. However, there are exceptions. At the end of the 17th century, the Mughal Emper-

or Aurangzeb, then ruling India, heard about a child who claimed to recall having lived before and called him to his court to question him (Matlock, 2019, pp. 89–90). In the 19th century, the past-life memories of Katsugoro were documented by three different teams (Ohkado, 2021). In neither of these cases did investigators assess the validity of the memory claims by interviewing witnesses to the previous life, but this was done in India in the 1920s by R. B. S. Sunderlal (1924) and K. K. N. Sahay (1927) and

HIGHLIGHTS

Ian Stevenson's 1961 investigation of the Gnanathilaka Baddevithana reincarnation case missed key details, but his findings appear accurate despite prior criticisms of his methods.

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes one of the first reincarnation cases Ian Stevenson studied, in 1961, and reported in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. The case of Gnanathilaka Baddevithana had previously been investigated by H. S. S. Nissanka, who kept records of his interviews in writing or on tape, making this one of fewer than three dozen published cases with records produced before past-life memories were verified. Unfortunately, because the book Nissanka wrote about the case was published only in Sri Lanka, and not translated until 2001, his investigation is little known. Because Nissanka's and Stevenson's investigations were conducted independently, by comparing their reports, one can evaluate to what extent Stevenson's oft-criticized practices of spending only a few days in the field and working through interpreters impacted his presentation and conclusions. These practices are shown to have led Stevenson to miss considerable detail but to have had no effect on his evaluation of Gnanathilaka's case. This suggests that criticisms of Stevenson's methods are misguided and that, if anything, some of the cases he reported may be phenomenologically richer and evidentially stronger than he presented them as being, rather than the reverse.

KEYWORDS

Criticism of reincarnation research, reincarnation case studies, reincarnation research history, reincarnation research methodology.



in the 1930s by a government committee concerned with Shanti Devi (Gupta et al., 1936). Later, P. Pal (1961-1962) reported the Indian case of Sukla, reinvestigated by Stevenson in 1961 and included in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (Stevenson, 1966, 1974).

Cases that have been investigated to any extent cannot fairly be deemed anecdotal, although not all are equal in their quality. Especially valuable are cases with records made before the verifications of memory claims and cases that have been examined independently by two or more investigators. Very few cases meet both these standards. In his prize-winning essay for a contest sponsored by the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (BICS), Michael Nahm (2023) drew attention to one of them—the Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) case of Gnanathilaka Baddevithana, reported by Stevenson in *Twenty Cases*, but investigated before him by H. S. S. Nissanka.¹

Nissanka wrote about Gnanathilaka Baddevithana in the Sinhalese weekly periodical *Silumina* in 1960 and 1961 and then, in 1964, in a book whose title is transliterated as *Nāvata Upan Dāriya*. An English translation of the book was made by Nissanka's wife Rukmani in 1968 when the Nissankas were at the University of Pittsburgh, where H. S. S. Nissanka was undertaking graduate studies in international relations. The Nissankas were unable to find a publisher for their translation in the US, the UK, or Sri Lanka until 2001, when *The Girl Who was Reborn* was issued by S. Godage Brothers in Colombo. Although acquired by some libraries and reprinted in 2010, the book (Nissanka, 2001, 2010) is scarce and hence not well known, apart from its summary in a *Psi Encyclopedia* article (Wehrstein, 2017a).

The families of both Gnanathilaka and Gallege Turin Thilakarathne,² whose life Gnanathilaka recalled, were Sinhalese speakers, and H. S. S. Nissanka and his colleagues conducted interviews in their native language. Moreover, Nissanka was able to arrange for a controlled meeting between Gnanathilaka and members of Thilakarathne's family, permitting him to observe her recognition of these persons without the crowd influences involved on most such occasions.

After examining Nissanka's investigation, we compare it to Stevenson's. If there are problems with either investigation, they should be reflected in divergent findings and conclusions. Also, comparing the investigations allows us to assess how Stevenson's brief contact with witnesses impacted his report and evaluation (he spent only two days on the case during a week in Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was known until 1973, working through interpreters, practices which have been much maligned). Stevenson's reinvestigation supports Nissanka's findings, and we can discern no indications of unreliability in Stevenson's

report. Although Stevenson missed considerable details documented by Nissanka, he introduced some significant new facts that helped flesh out and clarify elements of Nissanka's narrative without contradicting them, and we conclude that a full appreciation of the case requires consideration of both reports together.

As an assist in our evaluation, we drew on Stevenson's unpublished field notes and correspondence preserved at the University of Virginia. Where Nissanka's and Stevenson's spelling of personal names differs, as it does for Gnanathilaka Baddevithana, we follow Nissanka's spelling. Table 1 provides a timeline of the development of the case, its investigation, and its reporting.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

At her birth in February 1956, Gnanathilaka's parents were living in Dihintalawa, a remote section of the village of Hedunuwewa, in central Ceylon. Gnanathilaka's mother told Nissanka that Gnanathilaka made her first references to a previous life shortly after she began to speak: "In the days when my little daughter learnt to say the words 'mother' and 'father', one day she suddenly said: 'Talawakelle mother'. After this she made frequent references to her 'Talawakelle mother'. In the mornings, after waking up from bed, she said, 'Mother, my Talawakelle mother fed me during the night'" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 84). Gnanathilaka's parents told Stevenson that, at first, she only spoke about having other parents. When she was about 12 months old, she said she had another mother and father. At about two years old, she added that she had two brothers and many sisters. Not long thereafter, residents of Hedunuwewa who had spent a few weeks in Talawakelle visited Gnanathilaka's house. Prior to their coming, Gnanathilaka had not mentioned the name Talawakelle, but afterward, she did so regularly and talked more about the previous life she recalled (Stevenson, 1961 field notes).³

Although discrepant in some details, the differences in these accounts do not seem problematic to us. In talking with Stevenson, Gnanathilaka's parents may have been more careful in recounting the case's development. In both versions, Gnanathilaka began to make references to a past life very early and began to refer to Talawakelle as the site of that life later. After this, she mentioned Talawakelle more often and recounted many other things about Thilakarathne's life, typically in response to things she saw or heard. Neither Nissanka or Stevenson report her ever having used Thilakarathne's name, which impeded his identification by Nissanka's team.

Upon seeing her mother carry firewood from the garden into the house, Gnanathilaka informed her that her

“Talawakelle mother” “bought” firewood. This was very possibly true, because Talawakelle was a town in the highlands, where firewood was scarce, whereas Dihintalawa lay in a lowland jungle valley, where it could be gathered freely. The term Gnanathilaka used for “bought,” *kuliyata gannawa*, was not employed in her family in the sense of “bought,” so her mother asked her what it meant. She replied, “It means you give money to get something” (Nissanka, 2001, p. 84).⁴

Gnanathilaka’s awareness of the contrasting environments between her home and the life she recalled was also shown one day when her brother Ariyapala⁵ climbed

a tree to pick a coconut, prompting her to tell her mother, “There are no coconut trees at Talawakelle – we used to buy our coconuts from the store!” (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 84–85). Similarly, because in Talawakelle there were no kitul (jaggery) palms from which to obtain treacle, they had to purchase the syrup, Gnanathilaka said. She recalled that one of her brothers ran a shop from which provisions were brought to her home (Nissanka, 2001, p. 88).

Gnanathilaka’s talk of Talawakelle increased over time and became more prominent after she was about two and a half years old. When her father hung a calendar that featured a full-face photograph of Queen Elizabeth II,

Table 1. Principal Events in the Case of Gnanathilaka Baddevithana

Date	Event
Jan. 20, 1941	Gallege Turin Thilakaradne born.
no dates given	Thilakaradne climbs Adam’s Peak twice.
Apr. 15, 1954	Thilakaradne sees Queen Elizabeth II when she passes through Talawakelle on train.
Nov. 9, 1954	Thilakaradne dies (aged 13 years, 9 months) at Aranayake District Hospital.
Feb. 14, 1956	Gnanathilaka Kumudini Baddevithana born in Ramboda Hospital.
Spring 1957	Soon after she starts to speak, Gnanathilaka begins to talk about other parents.
Summer 1958	From around 2 years, 6 months, Gnanathilaka’s reminiscences of Talawakelle become more frequent and intense.
Aug. 1959	Nissanka visits India, hears about Swarnlata Mishra and other cases of children claiming memories of past lives.
early Sep. 1960	Gnanathilaka’s brother Ariyapala Baddevithana takes her to Talawakelle on a bus; they visit a temple and return home.
Oct. 9, 16, 1960	Nissanka’s first articles on cases of children’s past-life memory appear in <i>Silumina</i> , prompting reader reports of similar cases in Ceylon.
Oct. 21, 1960	Reader sends Nissanka letter informing him about Gnanathilaka. Nissanka requests more information.
Oct. 27, 1960	Reader sends Nissanka follow-up letter on Gnanathilaka, with first detailed account of her memory claims.
Nov. 1, 1960	Nissanka’s first visit to Dihintalawa to see Gnanathilaka, when she is about 4 years, 8 months. He records his interview in writing.
Nov. 6, 1960	Nissanka’s first article about Gnanathilaka published in <i>Silumina</i> . Nissanka’s first visit to Talawakelle.
Nov. 8, 1960	Nissanka’s second visit to Talawakelle.
Nov. 10, 1960	Nissanka’s second visit to Gnanathilaka in Dihintalawa.
Nov. 12, 1960	Ariyapala writes to Nissanka relaying his father’s written consent for Nissanka’s investigation.
Nov. 13, 1960	Second article about Gnanathilaka published in <i>Silumina</i> .
Nov. 14, 1960	Headmaster of school at which Gnanathilaka’s elder sister taught sends Nissanka letter listing Gnanathilaka’s memory claims relayed to him in 1958 and 1959.
Nov. 19, 1960	Nissanka takes Gnanathilaka to Talawakelle. He encounters Thilakaradne’s father and identifies Thilakaradne as the referent of Gnanathilaka’s past-life memories, but she and her father leave Talawakelle without meeting Thilakaradne’s family. Nissanka tape-records interview with Thilakaradne’s family.
Nov. 27, 1960	Nissanka arranges for the families to meet at his home in Kandy, but Thilakaradne’s family fails to appear as promised. Nissanka tape-records interview with Gnanathilaka and her family.
Dec. 17, 1960	Teachers from Sri Pada College high school, Hatton, including D. V. Sumathipala, visit Gnanathilaka at her home in Dihintalawa. Gnanathilaka recognizes Sumathipala, who had taught Thilakaradne.
Dec. 18, 1960	Nissanka meets and interviews D. V. Sumathipala in Talawakelle. Gnanathilaka’s and Thilakaradne’s families meet for the first time, with tape-recorded controlled introductions to Gnanathilaka.
Jan. 22, 1961	Nissanka’s third and final article about Gnanathilaka in <i>Silumina</i> .
Feb. 2, 1961	Nissanka interviewed about the case by Radio Ceylon; compilation of tapes played.
Feb. 19, 1961	<i>Times of Ceylon</i> publishes three-paragraph summary of the case in English.
Feb. 19, 1961	<i>The Ceylon Observer, Sunday Edition</i> publishes longer English-language article by Nissanka. Francis Story sends this to Stevenson.
Early 1961	Gnanathilaka begins kindergarten at Hedunuwewa Central College.
Aug. 27–28, 1961	Stevenson’s investigation. Gnanathilaka is about 5 years, 6 months.
Sept. 10, 1961	First letter from Piyadassi Maha Thera to Stevenson.
July 13, 1962	Stevenson writes to Nissanka for first time.
Mar. 1964	Stevenson finalizes Ceylon section of <i>Twenty Cases</i> .
July 1966	Stevenson’s first follow-up visit to Gnanathilaka.
Sept. 1966	First edition of <i>Twenty Cases</i> published in ASPR <i>Proceedings</i> .
Nov. 1970	Stevenson’s second follow-up visit to Gnanathilaka.
1974	Second edition of <i>Twenty Cases</i> published by University Press of Virginia.

Table 2. Gnanathilaka's Memory Claims and Application to Thilakaratne

Item	Memory Claim	Application to Thilakaratne
Letter from A. Jayasekara to Nissanka, Oct. 27, 1960		
S1	She had a house in Talawakelle.	Correct, although this could refer to either her mother's house or the house of an aunt, in which she slept.
S2	She had other parents in Talawakelle. §μ.	Correct. §β.
S3	She had a "sister" (<i>akka</i>) named Dora in Talawakelle.	Correct, with the minor confusion of Dora rather than Lora. The Sinhalese term <i>akka</i> refers to elder sister or elder girl cousin, but may be generalized to female friends to whom one is as close as a sister. Although T did not have a sister named Dora, he did have a close friend named Lora.
S4	She and a "sister" (<i>akka</i>) watched Queen Elizabeth II pass through Talawakelle on a train. *ρ §μρ,	Correct. T saw the Queen with a girl cousin, terminologically the same as sister.
S5	Her mother watched Queen Elizabeth from a window.	Correct. She watched it through the window of her brother-in-law's car, per tape-recorded testimony. Compare S42.
S6	She remembered the Talawakelle temple, in particular a large statue of the Buddha there.	Correct about the statue, although by this time, G had visited the temple with her brother AB.
S7	She remembered the Talawakelle post office.	Correct, or appropriate for T, who had gone there often because his father worked there.
Interview with Gnanathilaka, Nov. 1, 1960 (recorded in writing)		
S1	She used to live in Talawakelle. [In response to question of where she lived in the life she recalled.]	Correct.
S8	She had gone to (i.e., climbed) Adam's Peak. [In response to question of where she had gone when she lived there.] §μ.	Correct. T had visited Adam's Peak twice, per tape-recorded testimony. Compare S92.
S9	She had gone by car. [In response to question of how she had gone there.]	Correct. T had gone the first time by car.
S10	It was not possible to get there by train. [In response to question of whether she might have gone by train.]	Correct. Trains go no closer to Adam's Peak than Hatton, an hour away.
S11	There was a long flight of steps up the mountain. [spontaneous]	All correct. Ascending the steep sides of Adam's Peak requires a climb up a stairway.
S12	She used to go a school far away from her home. [In answer to Q of where else she went.]	Correct. T attended a high school in Hatton, 14 miles (23 km) from Talawakelle.
S13	She went to school with her <i>akka</i> (elder sister or girl cousin). [In response to Q about with whom she went.] §βφ.	Correct, although her sister attended a different school in Hatton, per tape-recorded testimony, §β.
S14	They went by train. [In response to Q about how they went.]	Correct, per tape-recorded testimony. Compare S93.
S15	They went in the morning and returned the evening, at around the time N's team had arrived, i.e., 5 pm. [In response to Q of what time of day she went.]	Correct, per tape-recorded testimony.
S16	There were many children at the school; how could she say how many? [In response to question of how many there were.]	Correct.
S17	She had 6 elder sisters in Talawakelle. [In response to follow-up Q on her <i>akka</i> .] §μ.	Correct. Compare S85. §β.
S18	Her sisters sometimes hit her, didn't give her enough rice to eat. However, her sisters in the other houses were good to her; they loved her. [In response to her question of whether her sister's loved her.]	Unverified, although plausible, and indicates awareness that some of T's 6 sisters were married and lived in different houses.
S3	One of her sisters was named Lora. [In response for request for her sister's names, when prompted by AB to say the name she sometimes mentioned.]	Correct. The term G used for "sister" was <i>akka</i> , which may be used in reference to close friends.
S19	Lora was good to her, unlike some of her other sisters. [spontaneous]	Unverified, but plausible. N confirmed that T's sisters sometimes mistreated him.
S2	Her mother and father lived in Talawakelle. [In response to Q of who else lived there.]	Correct.
S20	She loved her Talawakelle mother very much (<i>mage sudu amma</i>). [spontaneous]	Correct. T was close to his mother. The Sinhalese word <i>sudu</i> can mean "fair," but here the expression indicates affection.
S21	Her mother brought her dinner at night. [spontaneous]	Correct for one period of time, when T was in school in Nawalapitya.
S22	Her house in Talawakelle was near a factory that ground tea leaves. [In response to Q of where her house was located.]	Correct for T's aunt's house, in which he slept, but not for his mother's house
S23	Her house was situated between the railroad and the highway. [Continuation of S22, in response to Q of where her house was located.]	Correct for T's aunt's house, but not for his mother's house. Compare S93.
S24	There was a flight of steps going up to the house. [spontaneous]	Correct for T's aunt's house, although not for T's mother's house.
S25	There were many (tea) factories in Talawakelle, and many houses. [spontaneous]	Correct.
S26	That house might not be standing now; houses were being demolished and rebuilt. [In response to Q if she could find the house in Talawakelle.]	Correct in its cautionary language, as referring to T's aunt's house. T's mother's house was demolished shortly after T's death. However, his aunt's house was still standing in 1961.

S27	Talawakelle is much colder than Dihintalawa. [In response to Q about differences in climate.]	Correct. Talawakelle is at a much higher elevation than Dihintalawa.
S28	They used to get water from a little waterfall. [spontaneous]	Unverified for T's aunt's house. His mother's house had piped water, per tape-recorded testimony. Compare S43.
S29	They used to wash in the morning at "a kind of well" or "spring". [spontaneous] *μ.	Correct, per tape-recorded testimony.
S30	They used to bathe in a river. [spontaneous] *μ.	Correct, per tape-recorded testimony. Compare S78, S96.
S31	She had a till (piggy bank) in which she kept money. [In response to Q about what she did in Talawakelle.]	Correct.
S32	She purchased a blue cloth with that money. [spontaneous]	Correct, per tape-recorded testimony. T broke the till shortly before his death to purchase the cloth.
S33	It was in a wardrobe in her house. [spontaneous]	Correct for the aunt's house in which T slept and kept his belongings.
S34	It was blue because she liked blue. [In response to question of why it was blue.]	Correct. Blue and white were T's favorite colors, per tape-recorded testimony.
S35	She had two boxes of paint of many colors. [In response to Q of what other things she had.]	Correct.
S36	She and her sister used to paint their fingernails red. [In response to Q of what she painted.]	Correct.
S37	She drew and painted pictures in coloring books. [In response to Q of what else she had done.]	Correct.
S38	She kept the coloring books on top of the wardrobe. [spontaneous]	Correct, per tape-recorded testimony.
S39	She made flowers out of paper. [In response to Q about what else she did.]	Correct. When N first interviewed G, she asked him to make a paper flower.
S4	She saw Queen Elizabeth II when she was at Talawakelle. [In response to Q if she had seen anyone else while she was at Talawakelle.] §μ.	Correct. Note that she did not say here that she was with a sister, as in S4, but not coded as separate statement.
S4	She was in a train. [In response to question about the vehicle in which the Queen was travelling.] §μ.	Correct.
S40	She went to see the Queen with her akka. [In response to question of with whom she went to see the Queen.]	Correct. Akka may refer to an elder girl cousin as well as well as elder sister. T went to see the Queen with an elder girl cousin.
S41	She stood at the roadside and watched. [spontaneous]	Correct, per tape-recorded testimony.
S42	Her mother had stood at the window in the house and watched	Partially correct. Her mother watched from the window of her brother-in-law's car, per tape-recorded testimony from T's family. Compare S5.

Letter from headmaster of Wetalawa School, Hedunuwewa, Nov. 14, 1960

S43	On seeing her mother make lavariya (a sweet Sri Lankan pastry), she told her mother had made curry patties (unknown in Dihintalawa), which she closed with the aid of "something like a garden fork." *μ.	Correct. Curry patties, introduced by the British, are common in towns like Talawakelle, but largely unknown in rural villages. T had helped his mother prepare such patties. G had never had the opportunity to see a regular cutlery fork, used in the towns but not in rural areas of Ceylon. She was familiar with larger forks used in gardening, however.
S23	Her house was located between the highway and railroad, facing the former.	Correct for T's aunt's house.
S30	They used to bathe in a river that flowed below (at a lower altitude than) the highway.	Correct. Compare S79, S96.
S44	Drinking water came from a spring on the other side of the railroad. [In response to Q about where they got drinking water.]	Unverified. Compare S28, which omits the location detail.
S45	The houses of her sisters were close by her house.	Correct. T's married sisters lived in other houses close by their mother's house.
S46	She had had two grand-uncles or grand-fathers in Talawakelle.	Incorrect. It is not known to whom G was referring.
S47	One of her brothers had a store from which provisions were bought for her home.	Correct, although the brother's store was in Aranayake rather than Talawakelle.
S48	Her father lived in another house.	Correct. At the time of T's death, his parents were separated and his father lived in a different house.
S49	Her mother used to go along with the tea-plucking laborers to the tea estates, and used to hoe the estates, although she was not a laborer.	Correct. T's mother was not a regular laborer at the tea estates, but she did go there occasionally to help.
S50	Her family owned five or six small pieces of land for growing tea.	Incorrect. T's family owned no land and did not work in tea cultivation.
S51	A tamarind tree that was situated in their garden.	Partially correct. Correct for garden of T's brother in Aranayake, but not for members of the family in Talawakelle.
S52	Because they had no kitul palms, they had to buy their treacle syrup from the store.	Unverified, but plausible. There were no palm trees in Talawakelle, owing to its elevation.

Gnanathilaka stared at it for a while, then informed him: "Father, I have seen this person – she travelled through Talawakelle by train" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 85). Besides seeing the Queen, she said, she had climbed Adam's Peak. When Ariyapala asked her what Adam's Peak looked like,

she leaned two pillows against each other in the shape of a symmetrical steep-sided mountain—exactly the appearance of Adam's Peak, a well-known pilgrimage site in central Sri Lanka (Nissanka, 2001, p. 85).

In addition to her parents, she had six sisters in Tala-

S53	She went to school along the railroad track holding her sister's hand.	Correct, if metaphorically expressed. T went to school on the train with one of his sisters. Compare S13-S14.
S54	Her mother cried when she "came to her present home" (i.e., when she died).	Unverified, but plausible.
S55	She drank medicine before "coming here" (being reborn in Dihintalawa).	Correct. Compare S83.
S56	She just "came here" after she died. [In response to Q about why she "came here."]	Unverified.
S57	Her mother had been wearing a blue sari the day she died.	Unverified; apparently never queried by N.

Unprompted statement by G on way to Talawakelle, Nov. 19, 1960 (not recorded)

S58	One can buy fish in Talawakelle. Boys fished in the river and sold their catch.	Unverified, but likely correct.
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Interview with G, Nov. 27, 1960 (tape-recorded)

S59	She was a boy before. [In response to Q if she was a boy or girl before.]	Correct.
S60	She used to go to the post office to send letters. [In response to Q if she went to the post office then.]	Correct.
S61	The post office was up a hill. There was a flight of steps which twisted like a snake. [In response to Q of where post office was and how she got there.]	Correct.
S62	She would go to the post office with her <i>nangi</i> (younger sister). [In response to Q of whom she went with]	Correct. T was accompanied to the post office by Gunalatha who, although not younger than T, was called <i>nangi</i> by him.
S63	Her sister Lora, not the sister who sewed, would stitch her clothes.	Unverified. Counted as partially true by N, without comment.
S64	At school, she loved her sister (<i>akka</i>) best. [In answer to Q of whom she loved most at school.]	Unverified. This appears to refer to LA, because Gunalatha attended a different school.
S65	At home, she most loved her "sister who lived at home" [In answer to Q of whom she loved most at home.]	Unverified, but T was close to his sister Gunalatha, who lived with his mother.
S66	A dog once bit Lora's hand, and her mother dressed the wound. [spontaneous]	Confused. LA's father's hand was bitten and T's brother's hand was bitten, but LA's hand was not.

Testimony about G's statements from adult witnesses, Nov. 27, 1960 (tape-recorded)

S67	Her Talawakelle mother used to purchase firewood. *μ §μ.	Correct, per tape-recorded testimony.
S68	When she saw a Buddhist statue in a local temple, said the one at Talawakelle was much larger. *σ. The nails were much larger.	Correct. The temple at Talawakelle had an unusually large statue of the Buddha, with sizeable nails.
S69	There are no coconut trees in Talawakelle. *μ §μ.	Correct. Because the higher altitude, coconut trees did not grow at Talawakelle.
S70	They used to buy their coconuts from the store.	Correct.
S71	When asked what Adam's Peak look like, leaned two pillows against each other to demonstrate its steep slopes.	Correct. Adam's Peak has a conical shape.

Visit of teachers to G's home, Dec. 17, 1960 (not recorded)

S72	The train to Hatton passed through a tunnel. [Said in response to DVS remarking that when she came on the train, it suddenly gets dark, then after a while, light again, doesn't it?] *μ §μ.	Correct. §σ.
S73	Sitting on DVS's lap, looking at him, G clinches her fist. When asked why, refers to <i>jataka</i> tale. [spontaneous] §σ.	Correct. T was in class when DVS taught tale shortly before T's death.

wakelle, Gnanathilaka affirmed. "Her" house was located between the highway and the railroad, facing the former. They used to bathe in the river that flowed by the highway. Drinking water came from a "little waterfall" (spring) and they would wash in the morning "at something like a well" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 38). Her sisters lived in houses close to hers, but her father lived in a different house (Nissanka, 2001, p. 88).

Upon seeing an unfamiliar man walk past her house in Dihintalawa one day, Gnanathilaka asked her father to invite him in, for "he lives near our house in Talawakelle." Although she repeated this entreaty three times, her father ignored her (Nissanka, 2001, p. 87). Sometime later,

news of a woman's body floating down the Kotmale River past Hedunuwewa and Dihintalawa reached Gnanathilaka's family. The dead woman was rumored to be from Talawakelle. Hearing this, Gnanathilaka became very upset, saying that it might be her "Talawakelle mother." She was in tears for days, until finally Ariyapala took her to Talawakelle, 22 miles away, on the bus. Although Gnanathilaka appeared to recognize the area around the bus depot, they went to a nearby temple, where she at last calmed down (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 85–86). In 1961, Ariyapala told Stevenson that Gnanathilaka had led the way to where she said Thilakarathne's mother's house had stood, but the house had been demolished and another was being

- S74 Scrawls map in chalk showing relation of school to train station, and explains, "you get there by this railroad. And then you go up this flight of steps." [In response to Qs about school in Hatton.] *σ §σ. The school was surrounded by many hills. [spontaneous] Correct, G's drawing depicted correct relationship of these structures, before G had visited the area. §σ. They were surrounded by many hills.

Statements made at December 18 meeting with T's family (tape-recorded)

- S34 She liked the color blue. [In response to Q about what color she liked.] Correct. Compare 32.
- S12-S14 She went to a school that was a long way off on a train with a sister. [In response to where she went with a certain sister, whom she had recognized.] Correct, per tape-recorded testimony from T's family.
- S75 She had won prizes in a Sunday school prize-giving. [In response to direct Q about whether she recalled it.] Correct.
- S76 She went to Aranayake with her elder brother. [In response to Q about with whom she had gone to Aranayake.] Correct. Aranayake is where her eldest brother lived.
- S77 Request for pears. [When "fair sister" asked if there is anything she would like her to bring.] †π §φ. Correct, appropriate response to question. When young, T had often asked "fair sister" to pick pears for him from a tree in their yard.
- S78 She liked girls rather than boys [In answer to Q about which she preferred.] Correct.

Additional statements noted by Nissanka (not recorded)

- S79 There was a small bridge near the house under which the children used to bathe. Correct for aunt's house, in which T slept. Compare S30, S96.
- S80 She made sketches and paintings. Correct.
- S81 There were two vases at home. Correct, per N. In tape-recorded testimony, GT says T used to make paper flowers and put them in vases.
- S82 Her mother hit her while she was eating a meal at home. [Said to have been reported frequently, but never in recorded testimony.] Unverified. Counted as correct by N, without substantiation. That T fell off his chair after his mother struck him may be based on a rumor of residents of Talawakelle, per IS. Compare S100. *
- S83 She was eating, sitting in a chair, then was in bed and drank medicine before she died. *σ. Unverified, although likely correct. Compare S54, S101.
- S84 Her Talawakelle mother sat crying by her bedside at this time. Unverified, although plausible.

Additional statements and variations reported by Stevenson (1966, 1974), recorded Aug. 1961

- S85 She had a mother and father, two brothers, and many sisters living in Talawakelle. §μ. Correct, per IS, although technically only partially correct, since one of T's brothers lived in Aranayake, not Talawakelle. Compare S2, S17. §β.
- S86 Her father was a postman. *μσ §μ. Correct. Noted by N, although he does not ascribe the statement to G. §φ.
- S87 Her brother was once bitten by a dog. *μ §μ. Correct, per tape-recorded testimony. Noted by N, although he does not ascribe the statement to G. Compare S66. §μ.
- S88 Her Talawakelle father did not have a knot on the back of his head. *μ §μ. Correct, according to G's parents. Likely, but not mentioned by N or observed by IS. §μ.
- S89 One of her sisters went to school at Nawalapitiya. Her "fair sister" went to school at Nawalapitiya. *μ §μ. Correct, per IS, but not independently verified by him. Not noted by N.
- S90 She had a brother named Dharmadasa. *μ §μ. Correct, per N. G's eldest brother also was named Dharmadasa. †π
- S91 Her Talawakelle mother was stout. *μ §μ. Correct, mentioned by N, but G's statement not recorded by him. §.
- S92 She had climbed Adam's Peak with some monks. *μ †π §μπ. Correct. Compare S8. The second time T climbed Adam's Peak, he went with monks, per N. †π §π.
- S93 Her house was located between the bus station and post office in Talawakelle. *μ §α. Correct for T's mother's house when he was living, but not recorded in this form by N. Compare S23. §α.

constructed in its place (1961 field notes). With no other leads to Thilakarathne's family, Ariyapala and Gnanathilaka returned home on the day's last bus (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 60–61).

NISSANKA'S INVESTIGATION

Although Nissanka went on to author ten books, principally about Buddhism and Sri Lankan foreign relations,⁶ in 1960, he was a feature writer for the Sinhalese-language *Silumina* weekly. In September of that year, the editor asked him for a series of articles on any subject of public interest. When he had been in India the previous year, Nissanka had read about Swarnlata Mish-

ra (another reincarnation case Stevenson was to include in *Twenty Cases*) and had written about her for *Silumina*. That article had been well received, and it occurred to him that more on the topic would serve the purpose. At the time, no children's past-life memories had been reported from Ceylon, so he wrote about reincarnation cases in other countries. As a result, he heard about six previously unknown cases from different parts of Ceylon. For investigation, he selected Gnanathilaka because she resided closest to his hometown of Kandy.

Nissanka had few models to guide him. The Indian case reports from the 1920s (Sahay, 1927; Sunderlal, 1924) had appeared in obscure places, and Sunderlal's

Additional statements reported by Stevenson (1974), recorded Nov. 1970

- S94** B had damaged one her Buddha shrines shortly before she died. §. Correct. B knocked over a shrine she had constructed of Vesak cards, per N (1961).
- S95** She had seen her present brother AB dancing in Talawakelle and "developed a fascination for him." §μ. Unverified, but possible. G's brother AB was in Talawakelle, dancing, on this day.

Additional statements and variations recorded by Stevenson in field notes, 1961, 1966, and 1970

- S96** Her Talawakelle mother would bathe in a river. *μ. Unverified. Compare S30, S79.
- S97** She took clothes for washing to a certain laundryman's house. *α Correct.
- S98** She was sometimes beaten by her mother. *μ Correct, according to N, likely based on rumors (compare S82). AN denied to IS that she had ever beaten T. *β.
- S99** She accidentally spilled a bowl of juice and her mother pulled the chair out from under her. She fell and hurt her back. *σ. Unverified. Compare N's version, S82-S83.
- S100** She spilled some food and her mother hit her, causing her to fall off the chair.*μ Unverified, but consistent with N was told. Compare S82-S83.
- S101** She was put in bed and the next day was taken to the hospital. *μσ Unverified.
- S102** She died in the hospital. *μσ Unverified.
- S103** Her Talawakelle mother was crying when she died. *μ Unverified.
- S104** Her Talawakelle mother said "Don't go away." *μ Unverified.

Key to Initials: **AB** = Ariyapala Baddevithana, G's brother. **AN** = B. L. Alice Nona, T's mother. **B** = Buddhadasa Thilakaratne, T's brother. **DVS** = D. V. Sumathipala, T's high school teacher. **G** = Gnanathilaka Baddevithana. **GT** = Gunalatha Thilakaratne, T's sister. **IS** = Ian Stevenson. **KB** = Karunawathie Baddevithana, G's sister. **LA** = Lora Almeida, T's friend. **N** = H. S. S. Nissanka. **T** = Turin Thilakaratne.

* Recorded by IS in field notes, per witnesses: **α** Ariyapala Baddevithana. **β** B. L. Alice Nona; **κ** Karunawathie Baddevithana. **μ** G's mother and father. **ρ** K. G. Ratnayaka, headmaster of G's school. **σ** D. V. Sumathipala.

† Communicated to IS in correspondence, by: **π** Piyadassi Maha Thera.

§ Reported by IS (1974), per witnesses: **α** Ariyapala Baddevithana. **β** B. L. Alice Nona. **μ** G's mother and father. **ρ** K. G. Ratnayaka. **σ** D. V. Sumathipala. **φ** T's "fair sister," Salinawathie.

was in French. Nissanka was skeptical about the number of accounts of children's past-life memory, if not about its possibility, but he wished to reserve judgment until he had put the claims to the test. Before proceeding, he asked his correspondent to collect more information about Gnanathilaka. The man reported back after he had gone to speak with her. Among other things, the girl told him about seeing Queen Elizabeth on the train. She and a "sister" had observed the Queen from the roadside, but her "Talawakelle mother" had watched from a window. Queen Elizabeth had passed through Talawakelle in April 1954, about two years before Gnanathilaka was born.

Nissanka realized that his next step was to interview Gnanathilaka himself, but he did not want to go alone. He recruited a well-known Buddhist monk, Piyadassi Maha Thera,⁷ and a local school teacher, K. H. M. Sumathipala, to accompany him. Guided by Nissanka's correspondent, the three investigators set out for Gnanathilaka's home on November 1, 1960. They discovered that it lay along a footpath half a mile from the center of Hedunuwewa. Gnanathilaka was happy to tell them some of what she remembered about the previous life, which they recorded in written notes. There appeared to be sufficient detail to identify the person the girl was talking about, but they were uncertain how to go about it. If that person had seen Queen Elizabeth as she passed through Talawakelle, he or she could not have died before April 15, 1954, but there

was little else to go on. Nissanka decided to write an article for *Silumina*, in the hope that readers would supply additional leads.

The piece that appeared in *Silumina* on November 6, 1960, aroused such interest that Nissanka felt that he must visit Talawakelle. He went there the same day, along with the Ven. Piyadassi, K. H. M. Sumathipala, and two other men. The only name besides Talawakelle, then mentioned by Gnanathilaka, was Dora or Lora (she used the former in speaking to Nissanka's correspondent, the latter in conversing with his team), whom she said was one of her former sisters. Nissanka's team located a family with a daughter named Lora that had lost a son, but on a date after Gnanathilaka's conception in the summer of 1955, which was enough for them to rule him out. Their other inquiries led nowhere, and they returned to Kandy.

Nissanka went back to Talawakelle two days later with K. H. M. Sumathipala and others but made no progress in tracing the person whose life Gnanathilaka recalled. The same day, he received a letter from Ariyapala, requesting he not write more about his sister without their father's permission. Nissanka at once enlisted the assistance of an intermediary. Besides promising to speak to the father, the intermediary addressed a letter to Ariyapala and, armed with this letter, Nissanka paid another visit to Gnanathilaka. The intermediary's missive proved insufficient; Ariyapala would not allow them to interview

Gnanathilaka again. By the end of the week, however, the father had given his consent, and Nissanka wrote a follow-up story about Gnanathilaka for *Silumina*. This was published on November 13, and in short order, Nissanka received a letter (dated November 14) from the headmaster of a school at which Gnanathilaka's sister Karunawathie taught. This letter listed more of Gnanathilaka's memory claims reported "during the third trimester of 1958 or the first trimester of 1959" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 86),⁸ no later than the beginning of Gnanathilaka's third year.

On November 19, 1960, Nissanka took Gnanathilaka and her father to Talawakelle, but left them at the town's rest house while he made inquiries. As it happened, he was finally able to track down Thilakaratne's father, who had read the *Silumina* stories and acknowledged they seemed to apply to his son. He agreed to go to the rest house to meet Gnanathilaka, but before he arrived with other members of his family, Gnanathilaka and her father had departed. Nissanka took advantage of the opportunity to tape-record an interview with Thilakaratne's family, confirming that Gnanathilaka's memories referred to him. Nissanka tried again to bring the families together in Kandy on November 27, but this time Thilakaratne's family failed to show. Nissanka tape-recorded another interview with Gnanathilaka, along with her parents and Ariyapala. Finally, on December 18, the two families met, in a room of the Talawakelle Rest House, in the presence of Nissanka, the Ven. Piyadassi, and a few others, with additional witnesses outside the door and in an adjacent room. The proceedings were tape-recorded and photographed.

GNANATHILAKA'S MEMORY CLAIMS

Gnanathilaka's recollections of the life of Thilakaratne are listed in Table 2.⁹ Our presentation differs at times from that of Nissanka (2001, pp. 172–176), mainly because we have grouped a few items differently and have included statements reported by Stevenson (1966, 1974) in *Twenty Cases* or mentioned in his unpublished field notes. We have subdivided the list by the occasion on which the statements were recorded. When Gnanathilaka replies to direct questions, we have indicated the questions in brackets. Some questions were designed to bring out details Gnanathilaka expressed previously and were intentionally leading. Often Gnanathilaka answered such questions with the expected responses, but then provided additional remarks. We have labeled these additional remarks "spontaneous." When essentially the same information is given on separate occasions, we have assigned it the same reference number, so that the final number (104) represents the total number of discrete statements

or significantly different information about the previous life attributed to Gnanathilaka.

In the righthand column of Table 2, we assess how Gnanathilaka's memory claims apply to Thilakaratne. Of the 74 statements made before the two families met on December 18, 1960, 11 (14.9%) could not be verified, 58 (78.4%) were correct, three (S42, S51, S66) (4%) were partially correct or confused, and two (S46 and S50) (2.7%) were incorrect.¹⁰

A critical issue in the evaluation of Gnanathilaka's statements is the meaning of the Sinhalese kinship terms *akka* and *nangi*. Both terms may be translated as "sister," but *akka* designates a sister or girl cousin older than the speaker, and is often generalized to include female friends with whom one has a sisterly relationship. Gnanathilaka referred to Lora Almeida as her *akka* (S3 and elsewhere). Lora was 13 when Thilakaratne died, the same age as he, although she was slightly older than he was. Although Lora was not Thilakaratne's sister or cousin, they were very close (Nissanka, 2001, p. 123), and it would have been appropriate for him to have thought of her as an *akka*. Similarly, *nangi* refers to a sister or girl cousin younger than the speaker. Gnanathilaka employed this term in relation to Thilakaratne's sister Gunalatha (S62). Gunalatha was actually slightly older than Thilakaratne, but as the youngest sister of the family, other siblings called her *nangi*. Thilakaratne adopted this usage when young and although he learned the correct term as he grew older, he continued to call Gunalatha affectionately his *nangi*, the term Gnanathilaka used in reference to her (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 119–120).

There is uncertainty about how Thilakaratne died, due in part to his family's apparent attempt to cover up the details. When asked how she "came here" (was reborn in Dihintalawa), Gnanathilaka would say she had "just come." She drank medicine, and "her mother" was crying at the time, the school headmaster related in his letter of November 14 (Nissanka, 2001, p. 77; S54–S56). Gnanathilaka's memories of drinking medicine appear to refer to Thilakaratne's stay in the hospital, where he spent a few hours before he passed (Nissanka, 2001, p. 69). Before that, he had been at home, where, apparently, he had fallen off a chair (S82–S83). His family maintained that he had been hit by a cricket ball at school, a story Nissanka was unable to confirm (Nissanka, 2001, p. 130). When Thilakaratne's mother declared this in Gnanathilaka's presence sometime in 1962, she retorted: "Mother, you are lying! That's not how I died; I fell off a chair – and now you're lying about it!" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 171).

Nissanka (2001, pp. 169, 176) states that Gnanathilaka said Thilakaratne fell off the chair after being hit by his mother (S82), but nowhere in recorded testimony does

Gnanathilaka say this. In his field notes, Stevenson reports Gnanathilaka saying that she was sometimes hit by her mother, but she does not say it happened on this occasion. Thilakaratne's favorite high school teacher, D. V. Sumathipala (no relation to K. H. M. Sumathipala, of Nissanka's team), who came to know Gnanathilaka

well after Thilakaratne was identified as the referent of her memories, relayed a different version to Stevenson. Gnanathilaka confided in Sumathipala her recollection that Thilakaratne had accidentally knocked over a bowl of juice, and his mother had then pulled his chair out from under him. He had fallen on his back and was in obvious

Table 3. Gnanathilaka's Recognitions of Places, Possessions, and People

Item	Stimulus	Comment
Places Known to Thilakaratne		
R1	Place "her" house had stood in Talawakelle (Oct. 1960). *μ ξα.	Successful recognition, per AB. Compare R6. ξα.
R2	Door of laundryman's house in Talawakelle. ξμ. Place laundryman lived (Oct. 1960). ξα.	Successful recognition, per AB. IS was told T used to take laundry there and states that this was confirmed by AN, but it is not mentioned by N. ξμ ξα.
R3	Talawakelle railway station (Nov. 19, 1960).	Suggestion of familiarity, but no conscious recall.
R4	Talawakelle temple (Nov. 19, 1960). *μ.	Suggestion of familiarity, but no conscious recall.
R5	Steps from road to river down which T went to bathe (Nov. 19, 1960).	Successful recognition, confirmed by N.
R6	Place her mother's house had stood, now the site where a new house was being constructed (Nov. 19, 1960). G pointed out the location again when being carried to the Talawakelle Rest House on Dec. 18.	Successful recognition, confirmed by N. Pointed out the house. Accuracy confirmed to IS by AN *β. Compare R1.
R7	Tall trees on road leading to Adam's Peak (Nov. 19, 1960).	Successful recognition. T would have driven this way at least twice, once in a car and once in a bus, and probably more often.
R8	Suspension bridge on road leading to Adam's Peak (Nov. 19, 1960).	Recognition failure? G did not respond to bridge, but it is not clear that this is the suspension bridge she claimed to recall.
R9	Post office on hill opposite temple (Nov. 19, 1960). *μ.	Successful recognition, but discounted by N because G could have seen the post office on her earlier visit to Talawakelle.
R10	Houses of T's married sisters (Nov. 19, 1960).	Suggestion of familiarity, but no conscious recall.
R11	House of T's aunt, in which he had slept and kept most of his belongings, in location correctly described by G (Nov. 19, 1960).	Suggestion of familiarity, but no conscious recall.
Thilakaratne's Possessions		
R12	Photograph of T, taken a few months before his death (Dec. 18, 1960).	Suggestion of familiarity, but no conscious recall.
R13	T's drawing books (Dec. 18, 1960).	Suggestion of familiarity, but no conscious recall.
R14	T's blue pair of shorts and a blue shirt, and some raw fabric which he had bought a few weeks before his death (Dec. 18, 1960).	Suggestion of familiarity, but no conscious recall.
People Known to Thilakaratne		
R15	Queen Elizabeth II in photograph on calendar (1958). *μ.	Successful recognition, recalling related memory.
R16	Man walking past house as from Talawakelle. *μ ξμ.	Successful recognition.
R17	Headmaster of T's high school in 1960 (but not when he attended in 1954) (Dec. 17, 1960). ξσ.	Successful non-recognition of man not known to T.
R18	Teacher at different Hatton school in 1960 (Dec. 17, 1960). ξσ.	Successful non-recognition of man not known to T.
R19	DVS, T's high school teacher (Dec. 17, 1960). *σ ξσ.	Successful recognition, stimulating additional comments
R20	T's mother, AN (Dec. 18, 1960). *βσ ξβσπ.	Successful recognition, emotional response, stimulating additional comments
R21	T's father (Dec. 18, 1960). *σ ξσπ.	Successful recognition, emotional reaction.
R22	T's sister Gunalatha, as the sister with whom he had gone to school (Dec. 18, 1960). *σ ξβφσ.	Successful recognition, emotional reaction.
R23	Man who had settled in Talawakelle after T's death (Dec. 18, 1960). *σ ξσ.	Successful non-recognition of man not known to T.
R24	T's "fair sister," Salinawathie (Dec. 18, 1960). *σ ξβφσ.	Successful recognition, emotional reaction, stimulating additional comments.
R25	T's sister Somawathie, "the sister who lives in the house below ours" (Dec. 18, 1960). *σ ξβφσ.	Successful recognition.
R26	T's sister Leelawathie, "to whose house we go to get our clothes stitched" (Dec. 18, 1960). *σ ξβφσ.	Successful recognition.
R27	Businessman of Talawakelle well known to T and family, "the father who lived in the lower house" (Dec. 18, 1960).	Successful recognition.
R28	T's Sunday school teacher (Dec. 18, 1960). ξσ.	Successful recognition.
R29	T's brother Buddhadasa (Dec. 18, 1960). ξβφσ.	Successful recognition with strong negative reaction.

R30	At Talawakelle Rest House, woman who had quarreled with T's mother (Dec. 18, 1960). *σ §σ.	Successful recognition, per DVS, but not mentioned by N.
R31	En route from Talawakelle Rest House to temple, female devotee of temple known to T (Dec. 18, 1960). *σ §σ.	Successful recognition, spontaneously picked out of crowd. Not mentioned by N, but confirmed by DVS, who spoke to woman.
R32	T's sister, who had not been present in Talakawe with the others (Jan. 1961).	Successful recognition, spontaneously picked out of crowd, but in uncontrolled setting.
R33	T's sister, who had not been present in Talakawe with the others (Jan. 1961).	Successful recognition, spontaneously picked out of crowd, but in uncontrolled setting.
R34	Baggage handler on train to Hatton (1966).	Successful recognition, as reported to N.
R35	Girl from Talawakelle unknown to T (Nov. 1970). §.	Successful non-recognition, when introduced by IS.
R36	Lora Almeida (Nov. 1970). §.	Successful recognition, when introduced by IS; identifies her as Dora from Talakawe, but does not react further.

Key to Initials: **AB** = Ariyapala Baddevithana, G's brother. **AN** = B. L. Alice Nona, T's mother. **DVS** = D. V. Sumathipala, T's high school teacher. **G** = Gnanathilaka Baddevithana. **IS** = Ian Stevenson. **N** = H. S. S. Nissanka. **T** = Turin Thilakaradne.

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distress, so his mother put him in bed. The following day, he was taken to the hospital, where he died. Stevenson thought that Nissanka might have relied on rumors going around Talawakelle for the idea that the fall was due to his mother's having hit Thilakaradne (1966 field notes).

Of the 30 statements (S75–S104) reported on or after the two families met for the first time on December 18, 1960, 11 (36.7%) were unverified, and 19 (63.3%) were correct. None were partially correct, confused or incorrect.

GNANATHILAKA'S RECOGNITIONS

Gnanathilaka is reported to have made striking recognitions of places and people known to Thilakaradne (see Table 3). Most of the recognitions were immediate, but a few took time to surface in her conscious awareness. A delay occurred with her recognition of Queen Elizabeth and the memory of seeing the Queen travel through Talawakelle on the train (R15). A similar thing happened when she first met D. V. Sumathipala.

This meeting came about as a consequence of Nissanka's contacting the headmaster of Thilakaradne's high school in Hatton (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 90–91). The headmaster had not been at the school in 1954, and Thilakaradne had not known him, but he decided to visit Gnanathilaka to see what this was about firsthand. He took with him two other teachers, including D. V. Sumathipala. When the headmaster and the teacher Thilakaradne had not known asked Gnanathilaka whether she recognized them, she said she did not (R17, R19), but when Sumathipala asked her if she knew him, she gazed at him intently for a while before replying, "You have taught me. You have never caned me for punishment!" (R19). She walked to him and climbed into his lap. Soon thereafter, she referred to a tale from the Buddhist Jataka canon, ostensibly stories of the Buddha's past lives, that Sumathi-

pala had taught Thilakaradne's literature class not long before his death (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 91–93).

On a few occasions, Gnanathilaka stared intently at objects or places with which Thilakaradne was acquainted but related no memories in response to them. This occurred with the Talawakelle railway station from which Thilakaradne departed for school in Hatton each weekday (Nissanka, 2001, p. 60; R3). Similarly, she appeared comfortable in the Talawakelle temple and knelt before the Buddha statue she had talked about previously (Table 2, S6), but it stimulated no new memories (R4). When taken to the houses of Thilakaradne's married sisters, she "chatted happily and beamed contentedly," but did not say anything that might have a bearing on Thilakaradne's life (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 121–122; R10). Her reaction to Thilakaradne's aunt's house was different, and stronger (R11). This is a house in which Thilakaradne had slept and in which he had kept his personal belongings, his mother's house being too small to accommodate him. Gnanathilaka had speculated that Thilakaradne's aunt's house might no longer be standing, like his mother's house (Table 2, S26). As she approached her aunt's house, she "suddenly and inexplicably started crying. Her sobs became louder as she was carried up the steps and into the house. No offers of sweet or sweet drinks could console her," and the visit had to be curtailed (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 122–123).

On other occasions, Gnanathilaka not only recognized but remarked on places connected to Thilakaradne. After mid-morning tea on November 19, Nissanka, Gnanathilaka, and her father strolled down the main street of Talawakelle, in the direction of the temple and bus station she had seen on her visit with Ariyapala. When they reached a flight of steps leading down from the road, Gnanathilaka suddenly announced: "Down these steps we went to the river, to bathe" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 57; R5). At another place, closer to the bus station, she stopped to stare at a

house being constructed and was heard to mutter, almost to herself: "Those houses are not here now" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 57; R6).¹¹ Nissanka established that this was the site of Thilakaratne's mother's former home (Nissanka, 2001, p. 58). After the walk, Nissanka drove Gnanathilaka some way along the road from Talawakelle to Hatton, which leads onto Adam's Peak. As they passed a row of unusually tall trees, Gnanathilaka exclaimed, "Why, these trees are still here!" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 58; R7). Before returning to Dihintalawa, they went to the Talawakelle temple. Upon exiting the building, Gnanathilaka shouted excitedly, "There's the post office ... on that hill ... on that hill!" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 60; R9).

Gnanathilaka did less well with Thilakaratne's possessions. When Thilakaratne's mother Alice Nona¹² showed her his drawing books, she "regarded them fondly," but did not comment on them (Nissanka, 2001, p. 121; R13). When Alice Nona showed her some of Thilakaratne's clothing (a pair of blue shorts and a blue shirt) and a piece of blue fabric he had purchased a few weeks before his death, Gnanathilaka "turned shy and hid her face in her mother's sari, but did not say anything" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 121; R14). Alice Nona also showed Gnanathilaka a photo of Thilakaratne taken not long before his death. She examined it closely, but could not say who it was (Nissanka, 2001, p. 121; R12).

Gnanathilaka was at her best with people she met, making several successful recognitions of Thilakaratne's family and other persons known to him. The first to be introduced to her was Alice Nona. At the time, Gnanathilaka was tired and crying. Her mother was holding her in her arms. Alice Nona approached her, and the Ven. Piyadassi asked if she knew who she was. Gnanathilaka lifted her head, still sobbing, but her countenance quickly changed. Her eyes widened, her face brightened, and she stared at the newcomer in silence for a full minute. Asked again if she knew her, she said "yes," but refused to identify her.

Alice Nona fished a chocolate from her handbag, and Gnanathilaka accepted it eagerly, but still was reluctant to say who she was because, she said, her mother might hear. Her mother stepped back a few paces. Gnanathilaka looked around the room, saw Ariyapala, and said that he would hear. Ariyapala, too, moved further back. Gnanathilaka then bent to whisper in Alice Nona's ear. Nissanka moved swiftly with his microphone and picked up "Talawakelle mother..." Unable to contain herself, Alice Nona blurted out, "She says I am her Talawakelle mother!" Gnanathilaka's mother, by now, was crying audibly, covering her face with her sari. Alice Nona began to tear up as well. She handed Gnanathilaka back to her mother. "Go to your mother ... go to your mother," she told the girl. When she had composed herself, she added, "Her mother

too has her feelings ... my child was a son ... son, stay with your mother ... but come and see me too sometimes!" (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 100–101, 104–105; R20).

After this, Gnanathilaka made recognitions with less trepidation, although initially, she required assurance that her parents did not object to her acknowledging her previous family. Without hesitation, she identified Thilakaratne's father (R21), his four sisters who were present that day (R22, R24–R26), a businessman of Talawakelle known to Thilakaratne (R27), and one of Thilakaratne's Sunday school teachers (R28). She said she did not recognize the one person presented to her that Thilakaratne had not known (R23).

Gnanathilaka reacted with considerable emotion to Thilakaratne's family members. She identified his sisters appropriately as the sister with whom she went to school (R22), "the sister who lives in the house below ours" (R25), and "the sister to whose house we go to get our clothes stitched" (R26). She answered their questions correctly (see Table 2, S74–S77) and, at times, made appropriate remarks in association with them. She had often talked about her "fair sister," Salinawathie,¹³ whose complexion was unusually light. When Salinawathie asked if she knew who she was, Gnanathilaka responded, "Yes, you're my fair sister!" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 108; R24). When asked by Salinawathie if there was something she would like her to bring when they next met, Gnanathilaka said, "pears." This was significant because there had been a pear tree behind Thilakaratne's house in Talawakelle and, when young, Thilakaratne had asked Salinawathie, of all his sisters, to pick pears from this tree for him (Nissanka, 2001, p. 119).

In contrast to Thilakaratne's parents and sisters, Gnanathilaka had a strong negative reaction to Thilakaratne's brother Buddhadasa (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 114–117; R29). When she saw him, "the happy, bright look went out of her face, to be replaced by an angry stare." She insisted she did not know Buddhadasa, although it was obvious that she did. When Nissanka suggested she tell her mother who he was, she whispered in her ear, "Talawakelle ... my brother from Talawakelle..." Nissanka caught this on tape. Gently, he implored Gnanathilaka to tell the rest of them. She complied slowly, drawing out the identification, "My ... brother from ... Talawakelle," but would not let Buddhadasa hold her, despite her mother's intervention (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 114–115). Thilakaratne and Buddhadasa had a very strained relationship, and Nissanka judged Gnanathilaka's reaction to be appropriate for Thilakaratne (Nissanka, 2001, p. 116).¹⁴

Gnanathilaka is reported to have recognized a few people in later years, unusual for an older child. In 1966, when she was 10, she recognized a baggage handler on

Table 4. Gnanathilaka’s Implicit (Behavioral) Memories of Thilakaratne

Item	Implicit (Behavioral) Memory	Application to Thilakaratne
Behavioral Reenactments		
B1	When taken to the Talawakelle temple, G ran in and knelt before the big statue of the Buddha (Nov. 19, 1960).	Kneeling before the Buddha statue is a sign of reverence that was often performed by T.
B2	G placed flowers at feet of DVS, sign of devotion (Dec. 17, 1960). *σ.	T also would do this. Reported to IS by DVS, but not mentioned by N. *σ.
B3	G offered flowers at altar in Talawakelle temple (Dec. 18, 1960). *σ.	This is something T often did. Not reported by N, but witnessed by DVS. *σ.
B4	G would scribble on paper and ask her father to mail them to “her mother” in Talawakelle.	T’s father worked at the post office and T would have been familiar with letters and mailing.
B5	When young, G drew diagrams showing relation between buildings; as an older child, she enjoyed drawing and painting. *μ.	T enjoyed drawing and painting.
B6	G built her own Buddha devotional shrine.	T built his own Buddha devotional shrine.
B7	As she grew older, G cut and stitched her own clothes. *μ.	T would cut and stitch his clothes or have this done by Lora or one of his sisters.
Personality Traits		
B8	G’s parents judged her to be more mature than her peers, including her older sister at the same age. §μ.	Not credited to G’s parents by N, but noted by him.
B9	Hint of precocious sexuality in recitation of Jataka tale to DVS. *σ.	T was 13 when he died. Compare Table 2, S73.
B10	G was judged by her family to have some masculine traits, in contrast to her sister KB. *μ §μ.	T was male.
B11	G showed an unusually strong interest in Buddhism and religious observance, which persisted at least until 1966. *γ §γ.	Noted by N as well as IS. T was unusually religious for his age *β.
B12	G liked to use flowers in religious observance	T liked to use flowers in religious observance.
Language Use		
B13	Precocious use of language. G used much longer words than most children her age employ. §μ.	Reported by G’s parents and commented on by both N and IS. This is a common feature of reincarnation cases studied by IS.
B14	Employed <i>kuliyata gannawa</i> to mean “buy,” in relation to purchase of firewood.	Confirmed by N to be used in T’s family in this sense, specifically to purchase firewood.
B15	Referred to GT as <i>nangi</i> .	<i>Nangi</i> means “younger sister/female cousin.” GT was older than T, but he picked up this use from his family.
Philiias and Phobias		
B16	G favored the color blue, especially in her dress; this preference persisted at least until 1966. *γ §γ.	T’s favored blue, per N, or blue and white, per S in talking to IS. *βφ T liked to wear blue and white clothes and had broken his till to purchase blue fabric shortly before his death. *βσ
B17	On occasion of N’s first visit, G asked AB to make a paper flower (Nov. 1, 1960).	T had been fond of making paper flowers, but at her age at the time, G would not have been able to do this herself.
B18	G feared climbing on anything from which she might fall, despite her general fearlessness. *μ §μ.	Not noted by N. As above.

the train to Hatton, which Thilakaratne had ridden daily to school (Nissanka, 2001, p. 164; R34). In November 1970, when she was 14, Stevenson introduced her to Lora Almeida for the first time, along with another girl unknown to Thilakaratne. Gnanathilaka identified Lora as “Dora from Talawakelle”¹⁵ but said that she did not know the other girl (Stevenson, 1974, pp. 148–149; R35, R36).

On the whole, Gnanathilaka’s record with “recognitions” is good. Of the 36 items listed in Table 3, she successfully responded to 28 (78%), 3 of them (R18, R23, R35) successful non-recognitions of people not known to Thilakaratne. In another 7 instances (20%), her reactions suggested familiarity, but she expressed no conscious recall. She failed to react to the suspension bridge along the road to Hatton (R8), but it is not known that this was

the suspension bridge she claimed to remember, or that it held significance to Thilakaratne. Twelve (57%) of the 21 recognitions or non-recognitions of people were made in controlled settings.

GNANATHILAKA’S IMPLICIT MEMORIES

In addition to declarative memories, reincarnation cases typically include implicit memories that influence behavior, language, personality, and other unconscious dimensions of activity. Gnanathilaka’s case is no different in this regard (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 152–153; Stevenson, 1974, pp. 143–144). Examples are listed in Table 4.

Gnanathilaka struck her parents as unusually mature for her age (B8). She was advanced in her use of lan-

B19	G demonstrated a noticeable fear of doctors and hospitals. Fear of doctors. §μ.	Not noted by N. This expresses a phobia related to the death in the remembered life, a common feature of reincarnation cases studied by IS.
Emotional Memories		
B20	G expressed a strong attachment to AN as her "Talawakelle mother" that was evident in their first meeting and persisted thereafter. *σ †π §,	Compare Table 3, R19.
B21	G's often spoke of her "fair sister" and her attachment to S in particular was shown when they met on Dec. 18, 1960. *φ †π §,	Compare Table 3, R23.
B22	G's strong affection for her other sisters was evident when they first met on Dec. 18, 1960. §,	Compare Table 3, R21, R24, R25
B23	G had a strong and persisting negative reaction to B until at least 1970. *γ §γ,	T and B had had a very strained relationship, and this response was appropriate to T. Compare Table 3, R28.
B24	G developed an unusually strong bond with DVS. *σ,	DVS had been T's favorite high school teacher.
B25	G often expressed her affection for her "sister" Lora and recognized LA when introduced to her as late as Nov. 1970, when she was 14. *§.	T and LA were very close.

Key to Initials: **AB** = Ariyapala Baddevithana, G's brother. **AN** = B. L. Alice Nona, T's mother. **B** = Buddhadasa, T's brother. **DVS** = D. V. Sumathipala, T's high school teacher. **S** = Salinawathie, T's "fair sister." **G** = Gnanathilaka Baddevithana. **GT** = Gunalatha Thilakaradne, T's sister. **IS** = Ian Stevenson. **KB** = Karunawathie Baddevithana, G's sister. **LA** = Lora Almeida, T's friend. **N** = H. S. S. Nissanka. **P** = Piyadassi Maha Thera. **T** = Turin Thilakaradne.

* Recorded by IS in field notes, per witnesses: **β** B. L. Alice Nona. **γ** = Gnanathilaka Baddevithana. **μ** G's mother and father. **σ** D. V. Sumathipala. **φ** T's "fair sister," Salinawathie.

† Communicated to IS in correspondence, by: **π** Piyadassi Maha Thera.

§ Reported by IS (1966, 1974), per witnesses: **γ** = Gnanathilaka Baddevithana. **μ** G's mother and father. **σ** D. V. Sumathipala.

guage, using longer words than her peers and introducing terms such as *kuliyata gannawa* (B14; see Note 4). When young, Gnanathilaka would sometimes scribble on pieces of paper and give these to her father to mail to her "Talawakelle mother" (Nissanka, 2001, p. 85; B4). Nissanka (2001) interpreted this as a remembrance of interaction with Thilakaradne's father, a postman. Thilakaradne frequently went to the post office to see him and would have been well aware of how postal services worked. Nissanka remarks, "It must be very unusual for a little girl of three or four years, as Gnanathilaka was at the time, living in a remote jungle village where the nearest mailbox was two miles away (to be reached on foot), to indicate such knowledge of, and interest in, the mailing process" (2001, p. 162).

There was a hint of precocious sexuality in connection with the Jataka tale Gnanathilaka related to D. V. Sumathipala (Table 2, S73). Suddenly looking at him, she clenched her fist. Asked why she did this, she said that (in the tale), Pandit Mahaushada (the Boddhisatva) had clenched his fist, and Amara Devi had stretched out her fingers. Sumathipala asked why Pandit Mahaushada had clenched his fist, and Gnanathilaka, with "an adolescent type of embarrassment," explained, "in a small voice," "Pandit Mahaushada asked Amara Devi if she were married, and she replied that she was not" (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 92–93; B9).

Both Thilakaradne and Gnanathilaka were more religious than their peers (B10). Thilakaradne regularly went to the temple to worship. He attended Sunday school and

won a prize there, which Gnanathilaka recalled having received (Table 2, S75). Thilakaradne observed sil, a Buddhist practice of self-discipline and meditation (Nissanka, 2001, pp. 72, 73–74, 75–76). He made the pilgrimage to Adam's Peak twice. In addition to a Vesak-card shrine, Buddhadasa knocked over (see Note 14) Thilakaradne carved Buddha statues out of cardboard and wood for veneration. As an older child, Gnanathilaka constructed her own Buddha shrines (B6).

Gnanathilaka, when young, showed great delight in visiting the temple in Talawakelle. She ran in and knelt before its Buddha statue (Nissanka, 2001, p. 60), which she had previously described accurately as being immense and possessing large nails (Nissanka, 2001, p. 84; Table 2, S68). The Jataka tale she related to D. V. Sumathipala was not the only one she recalled. Her sister Karunawathie told Stevenson that upon seeing a Vesak card illustrating a Jataka tale, she had related the entire story.¹⁶ By 1970, Gnanathilaka had adopted vegetarianism for religious reasons and persuaded her mother to do the same (Stevenson, 1974, p. 147).

Thilakaradne was notably effeminate. He preferred the society of girls and would paint his fingernails red. Thilakaradne disliked being male and asked Sumathipala if it were possible to change sex from one life to the next. Gnanathilaka said she was happier as a girl, and although her parents judged her to have some masculine traits (B10), these lessened over time and were not apparent to the headmaster of the school with the kindergarten she began to attend at age 5 (Stevenson, 1974, p. 143).

Gnanathilaka's implicit memories are also reflected in her emotional reactions to Thilakaratne's family members (B20–B23). She behaved toward them very much as Thilakaratne had behaved. She also formed a special bond with D. V. Sumathipala (B24). When he first met Gnanathilaka on December 17, 1960, Sumathipala presented her with some sweets, which she accepted with alacrity—the first time her parents had known her to accept anything from an outsider. She allowed Sumathipala to use her cup, although she did not permit even her parents to do this. As Sumathipala was leaving that day, Gnanathilaka collected a flower from another room and placed it at his feet, a sign of utmost devotion. This was the first time her parents had seen her do this for anyone other than themselves. Sumathipala began to visit Gnanathilaka regularly, and she invited him to attend the opening ceremony of her kindergarten in 1961 (Stevenson, 1961 field notes).

Phobias are common carryovers in reincarnation cases and phobias related to the manner of death are common as well. Gnanathilaka, like Thilakaratne, was fond of the color blue (B16) and favored it in her dress. She feared climbing on things from which she might fall (B18). Stevenson (1974, p. 144) reports that she had a fear of doctors and hospitals also (B19).

STEVENSON'S INVESTIGATION

Stevenson began collecting accounts of reincarnation in the late 1950s and published a review of published reports in 1960 (Stevenson, 1960). By this time, he had become aware of a few promising new cases, mostly in Asia, which he resolved to investigate himself. Upon receipt of a grant from the Parapsychology Foundation, he made plans to do this in the summer of 1961 (Matlock, 2024b). Stevenson wanted to research past-life memory claims in India and Burma (now Myanmar), but when he could not obtain a visa for Burma, opted for Ceylon. His decision was influenced by a letter he received from Francis Story, a British expatriate living on the island, who sent him a clipping of Nissanka's article about Gnanathilaka in the *Ceylon Observer, Sunday Edition*, on February 19, 1961.¹⁷

When apprised of Stevenson's decision to come to Ceylon, Story arranged with Piyadassi Thera to work with him, and the Ven. Piyadassi freed five days from his schedule to do so. However, Stevenson extended his stay in India and arrived in Ceylon later than planned. The Ven. Piyadassi, meanwhile, had accepted other engagements, and he and Stevenson did not meet during the week Stevenson was there. Nissanka tried to call him at one point, but assuming that Nissanka was trying to reach him in his capacity as a journalist, Stevenson did not return the call, a decision he later regretted. The result of these missed

opportunities ended up being fortunate, because it meant that Stevenson's investigation was carried out independently of Nissanka's. Although Stevenson had seen Nissanka's one-page *Observer* story, this omitted much of what Nissanka had accomplished. Stevenson did not see translations of Nissanka's *Silumina* articles and was unaware of the extent of Nissanka's investigation until Nissanka sent him the English translation of his book in 1968, two years after the publication of the first edition of *Twenty Cases*.

On August 27, contrary to his usual practice of interviewing the case subject first, Stevenson interviewed Alice Nona and Thilakaratne's sister Salinawathie at their home in Talawakelle. Because this was his first direct acquaintance with the case, Stevenson did not know what questions to ask to confirm or disconfirm Gnanathilaka's memory claims and thus, in his write-up in *Twenty Cases*, only occasionally cites either Alice Nona or Salinawathie for verifications. In Tables 2–4, items recorded in Stevenson's field notes are indicated with an asterisk (*) and those in *Twenty Cases* with a section sign (§). These symbols are followed by lower-case Greek letters identifying the witness or witnesses providing testimony. Alice Nona is noted by beta (β) and Salinawathie ("fair sister") by phi (ϕ). Although it is not clear that Stevenson employed an interpreter for these interviews, he probably did.

On the morning of August 28, Stevenson interviewed D. V. Sumathipala in Hatton and K. G. Ratnayaka, the headmaster of Gnanathilaka's school, in Hedunuwewa. Both men spoke English, so these interviews did not require interpreters. Sumathipala as an informant for Stevenson is noted by sigma (σ) and Ratnayaka by rho (ρ) in Tables 2–4. Sumathipala accompanied Stevenson to meet Gnanathilaka and her family and acted as an interpreter for them. Gnanathilaka's father and likely her brother Ariyapala also spoke English, so these interviews may have had a bilingual character, but this is not indicated in the field notes or the case report. When informants for Stevenson, Ariyapala is indicated by alpha (α) and Gnanathilaka by gamma (γ). Their parents are collectively designated mu (μ), because their testimony is invariably shown by Stevenson (1966, 1974) to be coinciding.

After his return to Charlottesville at the beginning of September 1960, Stevenson replied to a note the Ven. Piyadassi had left for him with a German monk in Kandy. He asked follow-up questions, principally regarding Gnanathilaka's "recognitions" of Thilakaratne's family members, at which Piyadassi Thera had been present. Piyadassi Thera consequently is listed as a witness for some items in *Twenty Cases*, although Stevenson had no contact with him during his fieldwork, only in correspondence later in 1961 and in 1962. Information Stevenson received

in correspondence is marked with a dagger (†). Piyadassi Thera's testimony is indicated by pi (π). Stevenson also confirmed some items of testimony with Sumathipala in correspondence in 1962 and asked additional questions in 1968. Gnanathilaka's father wrote to Stevenson (in English) in 1962 and 1966, but he contributed no new information about statements Gnanathilaka had made.

Stevenson met with Gnanathilaka and her family again in 1966 and 1970, although he did not return to Alice Nona. In 1970, he also interviewed Gnanathilaka's sister Karunawathie (κ) and Lora Almeida (λ) and introduced Gnanathilaka to Lora. These developments are reported in the second edition of *Twenty Cases* (Stevenson, 1974), although they are not entered in the table of Gnanathilaka's statements and recognitions, which is unchanged from the 1966 edition of the monograph. Gnanathilaka wrote to Stevenson (in English) in 1974 and 1978, giving news about herself and her family (her mother died of cancer in 1974; she was studying Ayurvedic medicine in 1978) but contributing no new memories of Thilakaratne. Stevenson then lost track of Gnanathilaka, and nothing is known about her after 1978.

Stevenson's table of Gnanathilaka's statements and recognitions in *Twenty Cases* (1974, pp. 136–141) includes 17 statements. Two other statements drawn from interviews in 1966 and 1970 are mentioned in the Later Development section of the second edition (Stevenson, 1974, pp. 146–149), for a total of 19 statements documented in *Twenty Cases*. Table 2 indicates more items than this because Stevenson's organization of testimony does not always match ours. Stevenson learned of some memory claims not reported by Nissanka (Table 2, S85–S94), although in three instances (S87–S89), he was unable to verify them independently of the witnesses who reported them. Stevenson collected several other items in interviews and recorded them in his field notes (S97–S105), but did not include them in *Twenty Cases*. We have, however, listed these in Table 2.

Altogether, in his unpublished field notes and correspondence, along with his published report in *Twenty Cases*, Stevenson mentions 27 of Gnanathilaka's memory claims. In addition, with *Twenty Cases*, Stevenson listed 17 of her recognitions (of people known to Thilakaratne) or non-recognitions (of people not known to Thilakaratne). In the second edition of the monograph, he added the recognition of Lora, which he had witnessed (Stevenson, 1974, pp. 148–149). These recognitions are noted in Table 3. Stevenson spent more time than Nissanka on Gnanathilaka's implicit memories, as reflected in Table 4.

Overall, there is good agreement between what Stevenson and Nissanka learned, sometimes from different witnesses. We have mentioned two places where the in-

formation they were given diverged—on the question of how Gnanathilaka's memories of Thilakaratne developed and what she said about Thilakaratne's death—but these are the only instances of the kind. The many things Stevenson missed are much more striking. Nissanka (2001, Chap. 17) lists 61 statements, compared to Stevenson's 27 (counting items from his unpublished fieldnotes).¹⁸ The two investigators agree that Gnanathilaka's statements, recognitions, and implicit memories apply unambiguously to Thilakaratne. There is no significant difference in their evaluations of the case, despite the reliance on different witnesses and the varying emphases of the presentations. However, because each investigator presents some details the other does not, their reports must be considered together for a full appreciation of the case.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Stevenson (1974, p. 371) considered Gnanathilaka's case one of the richest he had studied, due to its strong behavioral features along with its veridical memory claims. Although not all of Gnanathilaka's statements and behaviors are specific to Thilakaratne, taken together, they clearly point to him and to no one else.

Gnanathilaka's case was immediately controversial in Sri Lanka, where it was interpreted as confirming Buddhist doctrine. Christian and secularist critics were quick to take issue with it and stepped up their attacks when the Sinhalese edition of Nissanka's book came out in 1964. Novelist Martin Wickramasinghe (1965) implied that Gnanathilaka's parents had influenced her, but how he thought they could have fed her information when they knew nothing about Thilakaratne themselves, he did not explain. Christian advocate Lynn de Silva (1966) was of the opinion that Gnanathilaka's memory claims could be accounted for by "social and cultural dynamics," if not "conscious or unconscious fraud" (p. 19). Secularist H. S. D. Senaratne (1970) insinuated fraud as well. Abraham Kovoov (1980) later reproduced Senaratne's treatise verbatim, without properly attributing it, plagiarism that added nothing to the debate.¹⁹

Although Euro-American skeptics have said nothing about Gnanathilaka's case specifically, they have criticized Stevenson's methods in general, making charges similar to those of the Sri Lankan skeptics. Keith Augustine (2015) provided a comprehensive overview of critiques of Stevenson's methodology (see Nahm, 2023, p. 162, for a summary). To allegations of social construction and parental guidance, Augustine added questions about issues such as memory reliability, selective recall, leading questions, Stevenson's brief periods in the field, and his use of interpreters. These concerns are rendered moot when

there are reliable records of a case subject's statements made before verifications, but not many cases have them. As of 2005, there were 33 cases with prior written records in the University of Virginia files (Keil & Tucker, 2005), 21 of which had been reported in print. Other "before" cases have been reported by other investigators, bringing the total number of published reports to 33. In 31 of these 33 cases, the creators of the "before" records were speakers of the subject's native language (Matlock, 2021a).

So important is the documentation of a subject's memory claims before verifications that several critics have tried to find flaws in "before" cases (Matlock, 2021a). "Could the absence of credible conventional explanations of CORT [cases of the reincarnation type] be an artifact of the fact that they were not investigated deeply enough?" Augustine asks, adding, "This is not some mere possibility; Sudduth (2021) has already *demonstrated* an example of it" in his analysis of the James Leininger case (2022b, p. 379, italics in original). The Leininger case (Tucker, 2013, 2016; Wehrstein, 2017b) is unique among "before" cases in its dated internet downloads and other documentation compiled *after* the case was solved, making it unusually vulnerable to criticism. But unfortunately for Augustine (and Sudduth), Tucker (2022) exposed many of Sudduth's distortions, and Matlock (2022a) showed that he employed a faulty timeline in trying to dispose of the case. Matlock (2022a) presented a different, secure timeline backed by documents sent to the Psi Open Data repository for public inspection, negating Sudduth's arguments.

Sudduth (2021) believed he had uncovered evidence of fraud on the Leiningers' part, a position apparently embraced by Augustine (2022b) in his critique of the BICS contest essays.²⁰ In a reply to Augustine, Nahm (2022, p. 788) observed that "Sweeping generalizations without foundation do not qualify as scientific arguments," and asked, "Where exactly did the parental coaching, misinterpretation, misreporting, or cheating enter the reports about Ryan's²¹ and Gnanatilleka's cases? What is the flaw that renders them untenable?" Augustine's (2022a) response was to assert that Nahm was asking the wrong question. "The scientific community (not me) asks a different question," Augustine insisted.

Where exactly did Nahm (or anyone else) rule out all non-reincarnationist conventional explanations, including those where dark data are potential factors?

In order for Nahm to meet his burden and show (by the standards of the scientific community) that paranormal information or influence was responsible for certain features of a CORT, he would have to provide (good) positive evi-

dence that reincarnation caused the presence of those features. (Augustine, 2022a, p. 798)

Now, it seems to us that Nissanka's investigation successfully ruled out all possibilities other than "paranormal information or influence" by applying standard practices of scientific inquiry. Nissanka presented written records of Gnanathilaka's statements from his initial correspondent and from K. G. Ratnayaka, the headmaster of Gnanathilaka's school in Hedunuwewa, then recorded in writing or on tape statements about Thilakarathne by Gnanathilaka, before identifying Thilakarathne as the referent of her memories. Nissanka assembled the most comprehensive set of "before" statements in any reincarnation case yet reported.²² Nissanka also described the development of his investigation in sufficient detail to exclude the realistic possibility that inadvertent leakage of information might explain the case's core features, recruited co-researchers of social standing to his team, and arranged for the meeting of the families to be photographed as well as tape-recorded.²³ Stevenson's reinvestigation of the case confirmed Nissanka's essential findings and reached similar conclusions, providing additional support for it.

The counter-proposals of Augustine and other critics are vague and speculative in comparison to the investigations of Nissanka and Stevenson. As Matlock put it in his review of "before" cases for the *Psi Encyclopedia* (Matlock, 2021a), "Sceptics frequently throw out charges (including investigator fraud) without substantiating them – in striking contrast to the works they are critiquing." Nonetheless, fraud is often the only alternative left for critics, unless they wish to appeal to living-agent psi (Sudduth, 2016). In the absence of any indication of fraud, the onus, we repeat, falls on Augustine and other critics to show that the details of a case have not been recorded correctly or are otherwise deficient. However, something more than this appears to be involved with Augustine's response to Nahm, as quoted above.

Drawing on an inappropriate analogy concerning a physical event, namely the shooting down of an airplane with a surface-to-air missile, Augustine (2022a, p. 798) insists that in order to show that "paranormal information or influence" is responsible for certain features of a reincarnation case, one must not only rule out "all non-reincarnationist conventional explanations," but also provide "(good) positive evidence that reincarnation caused the presence of those features." In other words, researchers need to supply a convincing theory of the reincarnation process in order to render reincarnation a scientifically plausible explanation for putative past-life memory. Although efforts are being made in this direction (Matlock,

2019), we are far from having a widely accepted theory, as Augustine must know. Nahm (2023) stressed that

it is presently difficult to obtain a deeper understanding of what the afterlife realm might actually be like, or to determine which aspects of personalities might survive in what form, and for how long. ... There might be different variants of survival that coexist, and reincarnation might also only be facultative. It might even be that aspects of personalities split into parts with different degrees of activity or passivity, merge with aspects of other personalities, or even enter non-personal forms of awareness that may recondense into centers of individual awareness.²⁴ (Nahm, 2023, p. 195)

At present, we do not have a satisfactory explanation for the function of consciousness in living organisms or an account of how exactly consciousness relates to brain activities. In fact, more than 2,500 investigated reincarnation cases, diverse related survival phenomena, other parapsychological phenomena, and other mind-brain-anomalies—on top of philosophical considerations—make it seem likely that consciousness is a complex phenomenon, precluding any simple characterization (Nahm, 2012, 2023).

By remaining silent on these fundamental issues and likening the process of reincarnation to a physical plane crash, Augustine leaves the appropriate level of argumentation and appears intentionally to be calling for something he knows cannot be delivered. He is deliberately asking the impossible. Science is not, nor has it ever been an all-or-nothing enterprise. Scientific understanding proceeds step by step, and what is considered convincing “positive evidence” at any given juncture may be tainted by subjective opinions and agendas within the cultural zeitgeist (just ask Ukrainian and Russian officials about the reasons for the crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July 2014). Augustine’s portrayal of science comes across as hugely facile. In order to develop a theory of reincarnation, one must first accept the possibility that young children can gain knowledge about previous lives in one way or another, as epitomized by the case of Gnanathilaka. By denying this possibility, Augustine forecloses the developments he demands.

In any event, we can use Nissanka’s extensive case study to gauge the force of criticisms of Stevenson’s research methodology. Granted that Stevenson was able to interview witnesses soon after Thilakaratne was identified, the close agreement between his informants and Nissanka does not suggest problems with the interview-

ing style or with the memories of witnesses. A comparison of the percentage of accurate recollections related before and after Gnanathilaka’s and Thilakaratne’s families met goes against the idea that witnesses are selective in what they relate after they are familiar with the life recalled: The percentage of Gnanathilaka’s verifiably correct statements is marginally higher (79% vs. 78.4%) when only those recorded in writing before the identification of Thilakaratne are considered (see Note 10). At least in Gnanathilaka’s case, then, the idea that apparent past-life memory may be attributed to human error receives no support. Nor does Stevenson’s short time in the field and working through interpreters appear to have impacted his appreciation of the case. The only discernable consequence of Stevenson’s methods is that he missed a great deal of detail, but the overlooked material would have strengthened, not weakened his conclusions.

From today’s perspective, the pioneering work of Stevenson and his first-generation colleagues (e.g., Mills, Haraldsson, & Keil, 1994) was extremely important in legitimizing research on reincarnation, and a few other early cases are as strong as Gnanathilaka’s (Stevenson, 1975). This does not mean that there are no improvements to be made in research methodology or the presentation of findings (Matlock, 2022b). We can help counter a “will to disbelieve” in the evidence by enlisting more local investigators conversant with the languages and cultures of the cases they study and by reaching cases early enough in their development for the subject’s memory claims to be recorded (either in writing or with readily available modern means of documentation) before efforts at verification begin. Both are features of recent investigations (Matlock, 2024a; Ohkado, 2023; Rawat & Rivas, 2021, pp. 88–91). At the same time, it would be wrong to dismiss the work of Stevenson and his colleagues as inherently unreliable. The more cases that are studied, the more their basic patterns are confirmed (Matlock, 2017, 2019). Numerous cases have been reported from Sri Lanka alone since Gnanathilaka Baddevithana and two others included by Stevenson (1966, 1974) in *Twenty Cases* (e.g., Haraldsson, 1991, 2000a, 2000b; Stevenson, 1977; Stevenson & Samararatne, 1988; see Nahm, 2023, p. 143, for a list of six Sri Lankan “before” cases), and as demonstrated by one of us (Weerasekera & de Silva, 2023), fine cases continue to be reported from there.

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

We appear to be well on the way to establishing that human consciousness is not an effluence of the brain, or even necessarily dependent on and confined to the brain (e.g., Kelly & Marshall, 2021; Matlock, 2016, 2019; Nahm,

2012). This is a finding of enormous consequence, especially for biology and philosophy (Nahm, 2019; Nahm & Hassler, 2011). Two of us have argued elsewhere (Matlock, 2019; Nahm, 2023) that reincarnation has an advantage in explaining cases of veridical past-life memory over other possibilities, including living-agent psi (Sudduth, 2016). Although many details of a presumed reincarnation process and past-life memory remain obscure and continue to be subject to speculation, future research very well may provide improved insights into these matters, illuminating the role of reincarnation in the human condition. As more investigators enter this research domain, we can expect faster progress to be made in developing theory and testing hypotheses that address critics' concerns.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

James Matlock (ORCID: 0000-0003-1280-2476): Project conceptualization, writing – first and final drafts. Akila Weerasekera (ORCID: 0000-0003-0446-7604): Comments on paper draft and substantive contributions to revision. Michael Nahm (ORCID: 0000-0003-1930-9692): Comments on paper draft and substantive contributions to revision.

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ENDNOTES

1. Both Gnanathilaka and Baddevithana appear in the literature with variant spellings. Stevenson used "Gnanatilleka Baddewithana" in *Twenty Cases* (1966, 1974), and this consequently is the spelling by which the case is best known (Nahm, 2023; Wehrstein, 2017a), but we have chosen to employ Nissanka's "Gnanathilaka Baddevithana" in the present article. Other examples of "before" cases studied by two investigators are those Stevenson (1975) called Jagdish Chandra and Bishen Chand Kapoor, which were studied and reported initially by K. K. N. Sahay (1927) under the names Jagdish Candra and Vishwa Nath.
2. Sinhalese names generally are composed of three parts: a paternal ancestral name; a given name or names; and a modern surname. Here, Gallege is the ancestral name, and Turin Thilakaratne is the given name. Both Nissanka (2001) and Stevenson (1966, 1974) refer to him as Thilakaratne, and we follow their

practice. Gnanathilaka, whose full name is Gnanathilaka Kumudini Baddevithana, went by the first part of her name. Although it serves as a surname, Baddevithana is actually her ancestral name, and Gnanathilaka Kumudini is her given name.

3. The visitors from Hedunuwewa had not known or heard about Thilakaratne's family when they lived in Talawakelle.
4. The term *kuliyata gannawa* actually means "hiring," but was used to refer to purchasing firewood in Thilakaratne's family, his mother told Nissanka in a recorded interview (Nissanka, 2001, p. 78).
5. More formally, D. Ariyapala Baddevithana. Nissanka (2001) calls Ariyapala by his ancestral name Baddevithana, but in order to avoid confusion with his father, also D. A. Baddevithana, one of Stevenson's informants and correspondents, we use his given name here.
6. See <https://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n84103072>.
7. This name does not follow the format of other Sinhalese names (see Note 2). Piyadassi was a name bestowed when he became a monk. Maha and Thera are not names, but honorifics, meaning "esteemed elder." Alternatively, monks may be addressed as "Ven.," for "Venerable," and we employ "Piyadassi Thera" and "the Ven. Piyadassi" interchangeably.
8. Because the headmaster heard these statements from Gnanathilaka's sister, they are, at best, second-hand, and unless Gnanathilaka's sister was a witness to them, they are third-hand. Nonetheless, this letter was written before the case was solved and thus represents important documentation of Gnanathilaka's memory claims before that point. As it turned out, all the details related proved correct for Thilakaratne, so even if third-hand, the statements were not distorted.
9. With exception of those credited to Stevenson, the statements are abstracted from the transcriptions of interviews presented by Nissanka (2001).
10. A more conservative evaluation would take into account only the 57 statements recorded in writing before Thilakaratne was identified and his family interviewed on November 19, 1960. Of these, 8 (14%) could not be verified, 45 (79%) were correct, 2 (S42 and S51) (3.5%) were partially correct or confused, and 2 (S46 and S50) (3.5%) were incorrect.
11. Gnanathilaka had observed on her earlier visit with Ariyapala to Talawakelle that "her" mother's house was no longer standing (Stevenson, 1961 field notes).
12. Alice Nona's full name is Beliatte Liyanage Alice Nona. Beliatte and Liyanage are ancestral names; Alice and Nona are given names.
13. Nissanka avoids using the name of "fair sister" at her

- request, but it is supplied by Stevenson (1966, 1974). Stevenson interviewed Salinawathie along with her mother in 1961, and Salinawathie apparently raised no objection to his use of her name.
14. Buddhadasa, who was two or three years older than Thilakaratne, teased him mercilessly about his devout religious observance. He once knocked over a shrine that Thilakaratne had constructed of Vesak cards (featuring religious images and texts) and used to venerate the Buddha. Stevenson (1966, 1974) credits Gnanathilaka with recalling this episode (Table 2, S94), which is described in detail by Nissanka (1961).
 15. Oddly, in *Twenty Cases*, Stevenson (1974, pp. 148–149), expresses puzzlement about this recognition because, he says, Thilakaratne did not know Lora well, but from his 1970 field notes, it is clear that he realized that they had been very close. Nissanka's (2001) account makes it clear how close they were.
 16. It is not clear whether or not this is the story of Pandit Mahaushada and Amara Devi; most likely it is a different Jataka tale from the series of over 500.
 17. All correspondence referenced is included in the "Gnanatilleka Baddewithana" case file in the Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS), Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, University of Virginia School of Medicine.
 18. Our total of 104 statements is due to our breaking some of Nissanka's (2001) list of statements into two or more elements, as well those and Stevenson (1974) recorded, in his table from 1966 or in later interviews described in his fieldnotes.
 19. These early critiques were made in response to the original Sinhalese edition of the book (Nissanka, 1964) rather than the later English translation (Nissanka, 2001), prompting the question of the difference between the versions. Weerasekera read the Sinhalese edition and compared it to the English. The body of the text is complete and unchanged, but the Sinhalese edition includes an introduction from a religion scholar that emphasizes an interpretation of the case within the Buddhist framework. In the English edition, that introduction is replaced by a presentation Nissanka gave to an international seminar on rebirth research held University of Peradeniya (Sri Lanka) in 1999 (Senanayake, 2001), shifting the emphasis toward a research perspective.
 20. The BICS contest winners were announced in 2021 and posted online, where they are still available (<https://www.bigelowinstitute.org/>), although in 2023, they were published in a series of five volumes. The exchange between Augustine (2022a, 2022b) and Nahm (2022) refers to Nahm (2023).
 21. Ryan refers to Ryan Hammons (Matlock, 2021b; Tucker, 2013).
 22. A close runner-up is the Ryan Hammons case (first reported by Tucker, 2013 and summarized by Matlock, 2021b), in which Ryan's mother recorded 230 statements, although it has not been possible to verify the majority as applying to the previous life recalled.
 23. Nahm (2023, p. 142) included two of these photographs in his BICS essay. They are taken from the 2001 edition of Nissanka's book in English translation.
 24. This is not the place to go deeply into these issues, but we deem it probable that reincarnation began when life began, which would mean that reincarnation is a feature of all life. Consistent with this view, Reber (2019) traces the origins of consciousness back to the primordial ooze from which unicellular organisms sprang. A major implication is that the postmortem survival and reincarnation of consciousness may be as varied as are the species of life consciousness animates. The "Lamarckian" dimension of reincarnation cases (in the sense of a non-physical form of "inheritance of acquired characteristics" in the course of evolution) has been highlighted by Nahm (2019; Nahm & Hassler, 2011). Clearly, we are thinking of consciousness much more broadly than conscious awareness, including subconscious processing, and it is at the subconscious level that we imagine there may be some division or blending of consciousness streams. Nonetheless, as Matlock has observed (2019, pp. 264–270; Matlock, 2021c, in reply to Schwenke, 2021; and Matlock, 2023, in reply to Greyson, 2021), it is noteworthy that there are no reported cases of divided or multiple reincarnation with carryovers of past-life memory, suggesting that personal identity has a more complex relationship to consciousness than is currently appreciated.

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