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A Case of the Possession Type in India With Evidence of Paranormal Knowledge

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Abstract—A young married woman, Sumitra, in a village of northern India, apparently died and then revived. After a period of confusion she stated that she was one Shiva who had been murdered in another village. She gave enough details to permit verification of her statements, which corresponded to facts in the life of another young married woman called Shiva. Shiva had lived in a place about 100 km away, and she had died violently there—either by suicide or murder—about two months before Sumitra's apparent death and revival. Subsequently, Sumitra recognized 23 persons (in person or in photographs) known to Shiva. She also showed in several respects new behavior that accorded with Shiva's personality and attainments. For example, Shiva's family were Brahmins (high caste), whereas Sumitra's were Thakurs (second caste); after the change in her personality Sumitra showed Brahmin habits that were strange in her family. Extensive interviews with 53 informants satisfied the investigators that the families concerned had been, as they claimed, completely unknown to each other before the case developed and that Sumitra had had no normal knowledge of the people and events in Shiva's life. The authors conclude that the subject demonstrated knowledge of another person's life obtained paranormally.

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The word *possession* designates a wide variety of conditions that psychiatrists, psychologists, and anthropologists describe. It indicates that a person has undergone such a marked change of behavior that other persons seem no longer to be in contact with the ordinary personality of the affected person.

Possession states occur widely in India (Carstairs & Kapur, 1976; Teja, Khanna, & Subrahmanyam, 1970).[1] Most psychiatrists, psychologists, and anthropologists have emphasized the similarities between cases of the possession type and diagnostic entities recognized in the West, such as multiple personality and hysteria. Accordingly, they tend to use phrases such as "possession syndrome" and "hysterical possession." They also, in varying degrees, offer motivational explanations of the condition that depict it as beneficial to the affected person in improving his status and perhaps resolving internal and external conflicts. However, Claus (1979) cautioned against psychological and sociological interpretations for *all* cases until we have more information. Along the same line, Lewis (1971, pp. 178–179) wrote: "Nothing after all is easier than leaping to conclusions and projecting our own psychological assumptions and interpretations onto exotic evidence which may correspond only in superficial detail with apparently similar data in our own culture."

The question arises of whether some ostensibly possessed persons show knowledge about the life of a deceased person that they could not have obtained normally. We think that in a small number of cases the subjects do show such knowledge. Cases of this kind are rare, and yet sufficiently well known in India so that the Hindi word *parakayapravesh* ("entering into another body") exists for designating them. One of us (I.S.) has studied several cases of the type with evidence of paranormal knowledge[2] and has published reports of two of them (Stevenson, 1966/1974a, 1983a). Their occurrence and that of occasional other cases of ostensible possession with evidence of paranormal processes, such as the case of Uttara Huddar (in which the subject spoke a language she had not learned and assumed the personality of a deceased woman completely unknown to her family) (Stevenson & Pasricha, 1979; Stevenson, 1984), have encouraged us to search for new cases of the possession type with evidence of paranormal processes.

Such evidence is not easily obtained. The ostensibly possessing personalities (when not gods or godlings) are usually persons known to the subject or about whom the subject may easily have learned normally. In cases of this type it is difficult to obtain satisfactory evidence of the subject's having knowledge paranormally acquired. We believe we have satisfied this criterion in the case we now report. It involves two completely unrelated and unacquainted persons. Their families lived in widely separated towns and villages, and the informants' testimony warrants believing that they had had no contact with each other before the case developed.

Case Report

Summary of the Case and its Investigation

When this case developed, the subject, Sumitra Singh, was a young married woman of about 17. She was living with her husband and their one child in her husband's family home (according to the custom in India) in the village of Sharifpura, in the Farrukhabad District of the State of Uttar Pradesh, India. Early in 1985 she began to develop episodes of loss of consciousness with eye-roll movements and clenching of the teeth. Sometimes she would speak during these trance-like states, and one day in July she predicted that she would die three days later. When the predicted day (July 19) came, she seemed to die. At least members of her family and other villagers considered her dead, because she was pulseless and apneic, and her face was drained of blood like that of a dead person. They had begun grieving and also preparing for Sumitra's funeral, when she unexpectedly revived.

Following a brief period of confusion Sumitra began to behave like a different person. She did not recognize the people around her and said that her name was Shiva and that she had been murdered by her in-laws at a place called Dibiyapur. She rejected Sumitra's husband and child and asked to be taken to Shiva's two children. She stated many details that were subsequently found to correspond with the life of another young married woman, Shiva Diwedi, who had died violently—whether from murder or suicide is still unclear—at Dibiyapur on the night of May 18–19, 1985, that is, two months before Sumitra's apparent death and revival. Shiva's parental family believed that her in-laws had murdered her and then attempted to simulate suicide by laying her body on railway tracks nearby. Her father, Ram Siya Tripathi, filed a complaint, and this instituted a judicial inquiry. Reports of Shiva's death and of the legal proceedings appeared in newspapers published in Etawah, the district town where Ram Siya Tripathi lived.

Sumitra's in-laws said that they knew nothing of a Shiva who had died at a place called Dibiyapur. At first they thought that Sumitra had gone mad and later that she had become possessed by a discarnate spirit; but they made no attempt to verify what she was saying. It was about a month before Ram Siya Tripathi learned about Sumitra's statements. This occurred, almost accidentally, when he heard a rumor, while he was visiting Dibiyapur, that his deceased daughter had taken possession of a girl in a distant village. Nearly two more months elapsed before he was able to verify this information by having someone from a village called Murra, which is close to Sharifpura, visit Sumitra and her family.

The information gathered corresponded to facts in the life of Ram Siya's deceased daughter, Shiva, and so on October 20, 1985 Ram Siya went

himself (accompanied by a relative) to Sharifpura, where Sumitra recognized him and said she was his daughter. Sumitra also recognized in Sharifpura and Etawah (where she visited Ram Siya during the following days) at least 13 members of Shiva's family and circle of friends.

In addition to Sumitra's statements about the life of Shiva and her recognitions of persons Shiva had known, she showed a marked change in behavior. Sumitra's family belonged to the Thakur caste and they were villagers with almost no education; Sumitra herself had had no formal education, although she could read and write a little. The Tripathis, on the other hand, were Brahmins and middle-class urbanites. Ram Siya was a lecturer in a college, and Shiva had been educated up to the level of earning a B.A. degree. After her revival, Sumitra's behavior changed from that of a simple village girl to that of a moderately well-educated woman of higher caste and more urban manners, who could now read and write Hindi fluently.

The case came to our attention soon after the first exchanges of visits between the families concerned. The *Indian Express* published a report of the case on October 26, 1985. One of I.S.'s correspondents in India noticed this and sent a copy of the report to him. At about the same time a correspondent in northern India sent to S.P. a copy of a report of the case in a Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Jagran,* that had appeared on October 23, 1985.

Methods of Investigation

Our principal method of investigation was interviews with informants, particularly firsthand witnesses of the apparent death of Sumitra and the change in her personality that followed her revival; but we spent almost as much time interviewing the members of Shiva's family.

We were able to begin our interviews within three weeks of learning about the case. In November 1985, S.P. conducted a series of interviews with some of the principal informants for it. These included Sumitra and her mother-in-law, Shiva's parents, and one of Shiva's maternal uncles.

In February and March 1986, we worked together on the case for seven days. We interviewed again all but one of the persons S.P. had interviewed earlier. In addition, we interviewed numerous other informants for the case, especially in Sumitra's village of Sharifpura. We met her father in his village, Angad ka Nagla. We had to seek out other informants in four other towns and villages of the Farrukhabad District and the neighboring districts of Etawah, Mainpuri, and Hardoi.

In November 1986, February 1987, and October 1987 two of us (I.S. and S.P.) spent another 10 days on fieldwork for the case. During these three periods we interviewed (in Dibiyapur) Shiva's husband and father-in-law, whom we had not met earlier. We also interviewed informants who had connections through marriage or trade with more than one of the communities involved in the case; we intended these interviews to help us to assess the

likelihood that information about Shiva's life and death could have reached Sumitra's family along normal lines of communication. We also, during this later phase of the investigation, had new interviews with some previous informants, including Sumitra and her husband and Shiva's parents.

By the end of our investigation in October 1987 we had interviewed 24 members of Sumitra's and Shiva's families, and we had interviewed all the more important witnesses among these persons two or more times. In addition, we had interviewed another 29 persons who were able to furnish background information, especially that mentioned above concerning communications between the communities involved in the case.

During the interviews S.P. made notes, mostly in Hindi, and also acted as principal interpreter for I.S. and N.McC-R., both of whom made notes in English, as nearly verbatim as possible. During a few special interviews we made tape recordings only, or in addition to making notes.

In our interviews we gave particular attention to the following aspects of the case: the preceding illness, apparent death, and revival of Sumitra; the possibilities for normal communication of information about Shiva's life and death to Sumitra and her family; and the circumstances under which Sumitra, after her revival, identified Shiva's family in person and in photographs.

In addition to our interviews we obtained copies of newspaper reports (published in Etawah) of Shiva's death and of Ram Siya Tripathi's allegations that her in-laws had murdered her. We also obtained copies of the photographs of Shiva's family in which Sumitra had correctly identified persons normally unknown to her before the change in her personality.

One of us (I.S.) has published elsewhere further details of the methods followed (Stevenson, 1966/1974a, 1975).

Relevant Facts of Geography and Possibilities for Normal Communication Between the Families Concerned

This case occurred in the Farrukhabad and Etawah Districts of the State of Uttar Pradesh. Etawah is a small city of about 100,000 inhabitants located approximately 500 km southeast of Delhi. It is a district town on the main line of the railway that joins Delhi to Kanpur (about 250 km east of Etawah) and, ultimately, to Calcutta. Shiva's parents lived in Etawah from the time she was three years old until the case developed.

After her marriage Shiva moved to the home of her in-laws at Dibiyapur, which is about 55 km east of Etawah. Almost adjoining Dibiyapur is the railway station of Phaphoond, which is on the main railway line linking Etawah and Kanpur.

Sharifpura, the village where Sumitra was living when the case developed, is just outside the Etawah District in the Farrukhabad District, about 65 km north of Etawah and about 100 km (in a direct line) from Dibiyapur. Some

of Sumitra's in-laws lived in the town of Sikandarpur, which is about 30 km farther north and west from Sharifpura, in the Farrukhabad District.

Angad ka Nagla, where Sumitra's father lived, is about 15 km east of Sharifpura and perhaps slightly south.

Informants for Sumitra's side of the case said that they had no previous acquaintance with Shiva's family, and members of Shiva's family similarly said they were completely ignorant of Sumitra's family before the case developed. Apart from the long (for India) geographical distances between the families, they were further separated by significant differences of caste, education, and economic position.

Strong support for the informants' denial of prior acquaintance (or knowledge about each other) comes from the slow and roundabout manner in which Shiva's family learned about the personality change in Sumitra. Sumitra's father and her in-laws made no attempt to verify her statements about Shiva. Word about them first reached the neighboring village of Murra, which is 2 km from Sharifpura. From there it traveled to Dibiyapur apparently conveyed by women of Murra who had married and were living there. Ram Siya Tripathi, on a visit to Dibiyapur, heard a rumor that his dead daughter had taken possession of a girl in a distant village called Sharifpura. However, he had never been to Sharifpura and did not even know where it was located. After another two weeks he learned about a man called Ram Prakash Dube, a native of Murra who was living in Etawah, but whom he had not previously known. He asked Ram Prakash Dube to inquire in Murra about the truth of the account he had heard in Dibiyapur. The monsoon rains led to further delays. When Ram Prakash Dube next visited Murra, he looked into the story and confirmed its main outlines to Ram Siya Tripathi, who, as we have mentioned, then went to Sharifpura and had his first meeting with Sumitra on October 20, 1985. This was exactly three months after Sumitra's apparent death and revival. We believe that if the families concerned had been previously acquainted or had had any lines of communication through mutual acquaintances, they would have exchanged information about Sumitra's change of personality much sooner than they did.

If Ram Siya Tripathi had not complained to the police about the unseemly haste with which his daughter's body had been cremated (as we shall describe below), few persons outside those immediately concerned would have heard about her death. However, when the police began to investigate the matter, the newspapers of Etawah took notice and published accounts of Shiva's death and of the judicial inquiry. Some of the newspapers carrying these reports reached Sikandarpur, where persons who might have come in contact with the family of Sumitra's mother-in-law read them. At least one newspaper with a report also reached a reader of Sharifpura. The brother of the headman of Sharifpura said that he had read about Shiva's death in a newspaper before the change in Sumitra; but he gave the matter little attention at the time. The headman himself, a schoolteacher, said that he learned

about Shiva's death only after Sumitra's changeover. In addition, we learned of two traders who went regularly between Sharifpura and Etawah on business. After the case developed one of them became acquainted with Ram Siya Tripathi, but had not known him earlier.

Members of Sumitra's family said that they had heard nothing about Shiva's death before Sumitra's death, revival, and personality change. However, in view of the circulation of some newspapers in their area, and of some trading between Sharifpura and Etawah, it is best to assume that they might have learned of Shiva's death and perhaps also learned about some of the allegations of suicide and homicide that figured in the newspaper reports. (There was no radio station in the area. Some television had been introduced at Etawah only [Sharifpura had no electricity], but it only relayed programs from Delhi and broadcast no local news.) The newspaper reports included some of the names of Shiva's parental family and in-laws. The important question remaining is, therefore, whether Sumitra, after the change in her personality, demonstrated knowledge and behavior corresponding to Shiva's life that went beyond the information available in the newspapers reporting the death of Shiva and the related judicial inquiry.

The Life, Last Illness, Apparent Death, and Revival of Sumitra

Sumitra was born in (probably) 1968[3] in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, where her father, Chotte Singh, had gone for employment in one of the many textile mills there. He was a native of Angad ka Nagla, a village of the Etawah District. He and other members of his family belonged to the Thakur caste.

Sumitra's early life was unusual in the degree to which she lived separated from one or both of her parents. The separations reflected her father's efforts to break out of the life of a village cultivator and become a steady wage-earner.

Because of her parents' movements Sumitra lived for about eight years with an older cousin, Phool Mala, in the village of Birpur, in the neighboring district of Mainpuri. Sumitra never attended school, but Phool Mala taught her the elements of reading and writing. Phool Mala herself had gone to a primary school only for a year or two, and she had mainly learned to read and write at home. She taught Sumitra as much as she knew. She said that Sumitra could read the *Ramayana* and was able to write a letter. Sumitra's father told us (incorrectly) that she could not write at all, and her husband said that she could write "a very little like a child in kindergarten." He thought that she was (when he knew her) unable to write a letter, but we learned that she had occasionally done this.

Sumitra's mother, Ganga Devi, died in 1979, when Sumitra was about 11.

In childhood Sumitra enjoyed good physical health. When she was about 13 (in 1981), she was married (in the Indian style of arranged marriages) to Jagdish Singh and moved to her husband's village of Sharifpura, which is about 15 km from Angad ka Nagla, where her father was then living. Sumi-

tra's marriage to a considerable extent repeated the pattern of separations that she had experienced in childhood, because her husband, like her father, went to a city (in his case, Delhi) trying to obtain regular employment, and he was often away from Sharifpura for months at a time. After three years of marriage, Sumitra gave birth to a baby boy in December, 1984. A month or two later, early in 1985, she began to suffer from periods of loss of consciousness or trance in which her eyes would roll upwards and she would clench her teeth. She seemed not to have fallen suddenly in any of these episodes. The spells lasted varying times—from a few minutes to a whole day. Sometimes Sumitra would say afterward that Santoshi Ma[4] had possessed her. On two occasions she was seemingly possessed briefly by discarnate personalities. One of these communicating personalities said that she had been a woman of Sharifpura who had drowned herself in a well; the other (a male) said that he had been a man of another state in India. She gave some particulars about this latter life that have not been verified and are probably unverifiable.

During these episodes of apparent possession, Sumitra's condition sufficiently troubled her family so that they consulted local healers. Of these the most prominent was a man called Vishwa Nath. He was a distant relative of the family, a cultivator regularly, and without experience in other cases like Sumitra's. Nevertheless. he seemed to have a pacifying influence on her. He himself at times went into trances when he would be possessed, as he would say afterward, by the Hindu god Hanuman.

Vishwa Nath's intervention did not arrest Sumitra's episodes of trance; and, as we described earlier, she predicted her death, and three days later (on July 19, 1985) she lost consciousness and seemed to die. We questioned several eyewitnesses of this event. Her respiration and pulse stopped and her face became drained of blood like that of a dead person. A considerable group of persons surrounding Sumitra were convinced that she had died, and some began to cry. It was proposed to put her body on the ground (a Hindu ritual performed for persons who are thought about to die or who have died). Sumitra seemed to be dead for a period estimated by her father-in-law and brother-in-law as about five minutes. Some other informants thought that she had been dead for much longer than five minutes before she revived, but we think they may have estimated the onset of death from a time when her breathing became shallow and barely perceptible. No doctor was in or near the village, so Sumitra's heart was not auscultated, and we have reported the villagers' judgment that Sumitra was dead without asserting ourselves that she was.

When Sumitra revived she did not recognize her surroundings including the people of her husband's family. She said little or nothing for a day after her revival. Then she began to say that she was Shiva and to describe details of the life and death of Shiva. We shall summarize her statements about Shiva's life in a later section of this report, after we describe what we could learn about Shiva's death.

Upon hearing Sumitra's statements about Shiva's life and death, her in-laws thought first that she had gone mad and then that she had become possessed by a wandering discarnate personality who could be exorcised away or might leave spontaneously as had the ones previously manifesting in Sumitra.

In the autumn of 1986 Sumitra became confused for a few hours and seemed to resume her ordinary personality. Then the Shiva personality resumed control and was still dominant at the time of our last interviews in October 1987. By this time the Shiva personality had been dominant—with the single brief exception just noted—for more than two years.

The Life and Death of Shiva

Shiva Tripathi was born in Sevpur in the Etawah District on October 24, 1962. Her parents were members of the Brahmin caste and her father, Ram Siya Tripathi, was a lecturer in a college. After 1965 the family lived in Etawah, and Shiva grew up there along with five brothers and sisters. She attended school and then college from which she graduated with a B.A. in Home Economics.

At the age of 18 and a half she was married to a man called Chhedi Lal, who lived in the village or small town of Dibiyapur.

Shiva gave birth to two children who became known by the nicknames of Tinku and Rinku. (Tinku was about 18 months old and Rinku less than 6 months old when Shiva died.) Shiva was living (according to the custom of joint households in India) in her in-laws' house. Friction developed between Shiva and her in-laws. It is possible that Shiva's superior education and more urban manners irritated her in-laws. They grumbled when Shiva returned to Etawah in order to write final examinations for her college degree. Shiva complained that her mother-in-law had told her to go and hang herself. At one stage her father-in-law wrote to Shiva's father and suggested that he take her back, but nothing came of this.

A more serious quarrel developed in the second half of May 1985. Shiva was invited to attend the wedding of a member of her family, and her in-laws, after at first agreeing to her absence for this function, changed their minds and forbade her to leave the house. On the evening of May 18, 1985 Shiva's maternal uncle by marriage, Brijesh Pathak, who lived in a village (Kainjari) about a kilometer from Dibiyapur, called on the family and learned from Shiva about the quarrel she had had with her in-laws. Shiva was crying and told him that her mother-in-law and one of her sisters-in-law had beaten her. She did not seem depressed, and she did not talk of suicide. Her uncle tried to calm the family members and advised them to ask Shiva's father to come and arrange a more durable peace.

The next morning Brijesh Pathak and his brothers learned that Shiva had died in an "accident." Her dead body had been found on the railway tracks, and her in-laws said that she had thrown herself in front of a train. We

interviewed five persons who saw Shiva's body on the morning of May 19 before it was cremated. When discovered, it lay between two rails of a track at the railway station of Phaphoond (which adjoins Dibiyapur). The body was intact and therefore had not been run over by the wheels of a train; several trains had passed the station during the night.

Brijesh Pathak, remembering the quarrel between Shiva and her in-laws of the night before, asked them to delay cremation of the body until he could go to Etawah and bring Shiva's father (which would take only four hours, because the railway stations of Dibiyapur and Etawah are both on the main railway line). However, Shiva's in-laws ignored his pleas, obtained permission from local authorities to cremate her body,[5] and lit the fire at about 11:00 a.m. To make it burn more quickly they had poured fuel oil on the wood.

Shiva's in-laws said that they had noticed her unexpected absence from the house and had gone in search of her. Her body had been found on the railway tracks at the railway station, and they concluded that she had thrown herself in front of a train. They presented this account of Shiva's death during judicial inquiries and also in our interviews with them.

Although it is not uncommon for young married women in India who are harassed by their in-laws to commit suicide, several circumstances in the death of Shiva pointed away from suicide and raised a suspicion of murder. First, there was the history of the quarrel on the evening of May 18, when Shiva had told her uncle that her in-laws had been beating her. Second, rumors began to circulate in Dibiyapur about persons having seen Shiva's in-laws carrying her during the night to the railway station at Phaphoond (just a few hundred meters from their home). They were said to have explained that they were taking her to the hospital. Although there were people around the railway station, it was night, and at one point the lights in the station failed; it would then have been dark, so that a dead body might have been placed on the tracks unobserved. (Firsthand confirmation of this report would have been of critical importance, but we were unable to learn even the name of a firsthand informant.) Third, Brijesh Pathak, who saw his niece's body lying on the platform of the railway station before it was taken away by her in-laws, remarked that only the head was injured; he thought it suspicious that a body knocked down by a train was not more extensively damaged.[6] Fourth, although it is customary to have an inquest and autopsy after any accidental death, the *panchnama* was signed with suspicious haste, the expressed wishes of Shiva's uncle to delay the cremation until her father could arrive were ignored, and the cremation proceeded with hurriedly.

Ram Siya Tripathi arrived at Dibiyapur around 2:00 in the afternoon of May 19. By that time the cremation fire had reduced his daughter's body to ashes. After considering all that he could learn about the circumstances of her death, he complained to the police, and they began a belated inquiry. Later, he filed a formal charge of murder against Shiva's in-laws. Shiva's husband and father-in-law were arrested and then released for lack of evidence. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law absconded and remained in

hiding for some months. In 1986 they returned to their home, were arrested, and then released pending an expected trial. In October 1987 the judicial inquiry was continuing with the usual delays of such proceedings.

On the facts available to us, we must suspend judgment about how Shiva died. That she died violently and after a quarrel with her in-laws on the night of May 18–19, 1985 is established. Her in-laws may have killed her and put her body on the railway tracks to simulate a suicide; or she may have thrown herself in front of a train during a trough of depression following the quarrel with her in-laws.

Sumitra's Statements About the Life and Death of Shiva

Sumitra's statements made after her revival may be divided into three groups. The first group consists of names of persons and places that the newspaper accounts of Shiva's death and her father's lawsuit had published. We think it extremely unlikely that anyone communicated even the fact of Shiva's death, to say nothing of its details, to Sumitra or her family. However, as we have mentioned, some newspapers were circulated in the general area of Sharifpura, and so we must assume that Sumitra's family might have learned about Shiva's death normally. This means we cannot count as paranormally derived any of the names Sumitra stated that had appeared in newspaper accounts.

A second group of Sumitra's statements remains unverified. We refer to her account of Shiva's final quarrel with her in-laws and of how her sister-in-law had hit her on the head with a brick, after which her body was laid on the tracks at the railway station to simulate suicide. Nothing refutes these statements, but they remain unverified and may be wrong.

A third group of statements, those concerned with nicknames and private affairs not published in the newspapers, includes statements that we think contain information Sumitra could not have obtained normally. We learned of 19 items that we felt justified in placing in this, the most important group. These showed that Sumitra had knowledge of: a particular yellow sari that Shiva had owned, a watch that had belonged to Shiva and the box (in the Tripathi home) in which it was kept, the respective order of birth of Shiva's maternal uncles (although one who was younger actually looked older than one of the older uncles), one of Shiva's nicknames familiarly used in the home (Shiv Shanker), the names of two educational institutions where Shiva had studied (Sarvodya College and Sorawal Intermediate College), the pet names of Shiva's two children (Rinku and Tinku), the names of two friends of Shiva who happened to have the same name, and the names of Shiva's two brothers, two of her sisters, two of her maternal uncles, a maternal aunt (by marriage), and a nephew.

Sumitra's .Recognitionsof Shiva's Family Members and Friends

Observers of recognitions in cases suggestive of reincarnation — of which the present case may be considered a variant — frequently vitiate them by

asking leading questions or by cueing the subject with glances directed toward the person to be recognized (Stevenson, 1975, pp. 39–40). Nevertheless, there remain several circumstances in which recognitions may occur that deserve credit as showing paranormal knowledge on the part of the subject. These are: recognitions that the subject makes spontaneously without anyone's having asked him or her to identify another person; recognitions that occur when the subject is confronted with a person and asked a question like: "Do you know who this person is?" or "Tell me who I am"; and recognitions in which the subject immediately afterward adds a statement about some intimate detail, perhaps a nickname, not known outside a small circle of family and friends. We learned of 12 members of Shiva's family and circle of friends whom Sumitra recognized under conditions that we believe excluded cueing. We shall describe the circumstances of seven of Sumitra's recognitions, including one in which cueing might have played a part and six in which we think it did not.

1. Ram Siya Tripathi, Shiva's father. When he first went to Sharifpura, he introduced himself outside the house and someone told Sumitra, who was then inside, that "her father" (that is, Shiva's) had come to the house. We therefore attach no significance to Sumitra's telling Ram Siya Tripathi what his name was. However, she called him "Papa" (as Shiva had) and wept. Also, when Ram Siya Tripathi asked her, Sumitra immediately stated two pet names by which Shiva was sometimes called in her family: Aruna and Shiv Shanker. The first of these names, Aruna, had been published in a newspaper report of Shiva's death, but the second had not.
2. Baleshwar Prasad Chaturvedi, Shiva's maternal uncle by marriage. Sumitra recognized him at the time he accompanied Ram Siya Tripathi to Sharifpura. Asked who he was, Sumitra at first said he was Arvind's father. (Arvind was one of Shiva's maternal uncles.) Asked to try again, Sumitra then said that Baleshwar Prasad Chaturvedi was the father of Arvind's wife. This was correct.
3. Ram Rani, Shiva's mother. This recognition occurred at the time of Sumitra's first visit to Etawah. Ram Siya tried to mislead Sumitra by telling her that her (Shiva's) mother was standing in a group of other women at the Tripathi house. In fact, Ram Rani had gone inside the house and was not in this group of women. Sumitra insisted that her (that is, Shiva's) mother was not among the group of other women; she then went into the house and searched for Shiva's mother whom she found and embraced tearfully. (Attempts were also made in another instance to mislead Sumitra deliberately, but failed.) In connection with this recognition we should note that Ram Siya Tripathi had already shown Sumitra a photograph of Ram Rani (see below).
4. Ram Naresh, another of Shiva's maternal uncles. This recognition occurred at the time of Sumitra's first visit to Etawah. Ram Naresh pre-

sented himself to Sumitra and said: "Who am I?" Sumitra said: "You are my mother's brother." He said: "Which one?" She replied: "Ram Naresh of Kanpur." He had formerly lived in Kanpur, and had moved to Etawah after Shiva's death.

5. Ram Prakash Dixit, another of Shiva's maternal uncles. He went to Sharifpura (at the end of October, less than 10 days after Ram Siya Tripathi had first met Sumitra). He had grown a beard, which Shiva had never seen. When Sumitra first saw him, he was sitting in front of her and remained silent. She recognized him as Shiva's mother's brother, but was at first unable to give his name. He then spoke a few words, and she immediately recognized his voice and stated his name.
6. Manish, Shiva's nephew (the son of her sister Uma). This recognition occurred in Etawah on November 22, 1985. Sumitra was at the Tripathi house on an upstairs terrace. One of Shiva's brothers, noticing Uma and Manish approaching, drew Sumitra's attention to them. Sumitra looked down and said "Manish has come." Sumitra went down from the terrace, hugged Uma, and called her "sister." However, this cannot count as a flawless recognition, because Ram Siya Tripathi had already shown Sumitra a photograph of Uma (see below).
7. Krishna Devi Dube, a friend of Shiva's youth. This recognition occurred at Sikandarpur when Sumitra visited her mother-in-law's family, in February 1986. More than eight years earlier, Krishna Devi and Shiva had known each other when Shiva used to visit one of her maternal uncles (Brijesh Pathak) in the village of Kainjari, Krishna Devi's native place. When Krishna Devi married, she moved to Sikandarpur and had not met Shiva for more than eight years prior to Shiva's death. When Sumitra saw Krishna Devi, she said: "Jiji! How come you are here? I died and have come into a Thakur's family and am helpless." Shiva would have known normally that Krishna Devi had married and moved to Sikandarpur; nevertheless, the Shiva personality of Sumitra —if we may use that expression here— seemed surprised to meet Krishna Devi in Sikandarpur. Shiva, when alive, had called Krishna Devi "Jiji." This word means "sister," and although Shiva and Krishna Devi were not real sisters, close female friends in India may use this form of address with each other.

In addition to the above mentioned and other recognitions of living persons, Sumitra was able to recognize 15 members of Shiva's family in photographs. When Ram Siya Tripathi first met Sumitra in Sharifpura, he showed her eight photographs in an album that he had brought. One was of his wife and children that was taken in 1967, that is, about 18 years earlier. Sumitra correctly identified all six persons in the photograph: Ram Siya Tripathi, his wife, his mother, his daughter Uma, his son Raman, and his daughter Shiva. Of the last, Sumitra said: "This is me."

Shown another photograph, this one of five of the Tripathi children,

Sumitra correctly identified and named all the persons in the photograph. (Some of these persons figured in the previous photograph and in others shown to Sumitra.)

Another photograph showed three adult women, two of them holding infants. Sumitra identified Shiva's mother in it and said the child on her lap was Shiva's brother Raman. She then said that one of the other women was a maternal aunt. She said the third woman was possibly another aunt, but she was unsure of this, and she could not recognize the child on this woman's lap.

Upon seeing a photograph of Shiva's young son Tinku, Sumitra began to cry, said the photograph was of Tinku, and asked where Tinku and Rinku then were.

When a photograph of Shiva's sister-in-law Rama Kanti was shown to Sumitra, she said: "This is Rama Kanti who hit me with a brick." (Ram Siya Tripathi said Sumitra's recognition of this photograph dispelled his remaining doubts about whether his daughter Shiva was possessing her.)

In showing the photographs to Sumitra, Ram Siya Tripathi's attitude appears to have been one of keen interest mixed with skepticism. He said that as he showed Sumitra the photographs in the album, he asked her to identify the persons in them and gave her no cues. She gave the name of each person and usually the relationship of the person to Shiva. The villager, Lal Man Dube, who escorted Ram Siya Tripathi and his relative Baleshwar Prasad Chaturvedi to the house of Sumitra's in-laws in Sharifpura, witnessed Sumitra's recognitions of the photographs as Ram Siya Tripathi showed them to her. He confirmed that her recognizing statements about them were entirely spontaneous and not cued by any remarks the visitors made. We have described only a portion of the photographs she recognized, and we have examined the photographs ourselves. Excluding repetitions—of the same person appearing in more than one of the photographs—Sumitra was asked to identify 17 persons in the photographs. She unhesitatingly identified 12 of them, identified another three after some hesitation, and failed to recognize two persons.

Ram Siya Tripathi showed the album of photographs to Sumitra when he first met her on October 20, 1985. Although he did not give her cues before she recognized each photograph, he did tell her after she had finished that she had recognized all the people in them correctly. We think it likely also that he communicated to her, if only nonverbally, that she was correct after her statements about each photograph, if not about each person in a photograph. Under these circumstances, Sumitra had some advantage in recognizing persons she met later in Etawah whose faces she had already seen in the photographs. (We have referred to two of these persons above, Shiva's mother and sister.) However, Sumitra was credited with recognizing and identifying (usually by name) eight members of the family or their circle of friends whose photographs she had not seen.

Some of the newspaper accounts of the death of Shiva and of the subsequent judicial inquiry included photographs of Shiva, but these were taken in 1979. The photographs of her as a child (which Sumitra recognized) and the photographs of other members of the Tripathi family had not been published.

In sum, Sumitra recognized 23 members of Shiva's family and acquaintances either in person or in photographs, some of them in both ways.

Sumitra's Failure to Recognize People and Places Familiar to Her

After her revival from apparent death Sumitra could not recognize the people around her in Sharifpura, such as her husband and her in-laws; they all seemed complete strangers to her. Similarly, when her father came from Angad ka Nagla to see her, she did not recognize him. Ordinarily, she would have greeted him and called him "Father," but instead she said of him: "I do not know him." She was persuaded to go to Angad ka Nagla, and somewhat reluctantly agreed to do so. She said that she had no connections there and no interest in the place. In the village she recognized no one and seemed not to recognize any of the places with which Sumitra would have been familiar.

Similarly, when Phool Mala, Sumitra's older cousin who had in effect raised her from the age of five, went to see her in Sharifpura, she did not recognize her; nor did she recognize Phool Mala's husband, Risal Singh.

Sumitra, after her revival, showed no interest in her husband and child. She refused her husband's amatory advances for some time and did not acknowledge that her child was hers. Instead, she asked about Shiva's two children. Over a period of some days and weeks, she gradually came to accept her husband and son and to respond appropriately to them. Of her child she said (while still insisting that she was Shiva, not Sumitra): "If I look after this child [meaning Sumitra's son] God will take care of them [meaning Shiva's children]. If I neglect this child, would God not punish me?"

Under this heading we may mention also Sumitra's disorientation for place. For example, when her mother-in-law took her out to the fields for natural functions—the usual site for these in Indian villages—she seemed nonplussed and asked what they were doing in the fields. When her mother-in-law explained, she said: "We have a latrine inside the house [meaning in Etawah and Dibiyapur]." This was correct for both the house of Shiva's parents and that of her in-laws.

Sumitra's Changed Behavior After Reviving

We have already described Sumitra's initial failure (after her revival) to recognize the people around her in Sharifpura, and how, after neglecting her husband and child, she gradually resumed more or less normal relations with them. However, she said that her son was Jagdish Singh's child from his first marriage. Her attitude toward members of the family of her in-laws was

that they were good people and, as she was thrust among them, she would be as gracious about the necessary adjustment as she could be. Nevertheless, there remained important differences in her behavior compared with that before her apparent death and revival. We shall now describe some of these changed behaviors.

Sumitra's Different Identification of Herself and Modes of Addressing Other Persons. Sumitra obstinately insisted that she was Shiva and sometimes would not respond or carry out a request unless she was called Shiva. She addressed her husband, Jagdish Singh, as "Thakur Sahib," showing respect, but distance. Previously she had called him (with the indirection Indian wives commonly use) "Guddi's brother." (Guddi was Jagdish's sister.) Formerly Sumitra had called her father-in-law by a Hindi word "chacha," meaning an uncle; now she called him "Father." Formerly she had called her mother-in-law by a word, "Amma," for mother; now she addressed her by another, more respectful word for mother, "Mataji."

In the month following Sumitra's apparent death and revival, a particularly poignant episode occurred. At that season (August) it is customary in northern India for women to show their loyalty to their brothers by tying a short length of string around a brother's wrist. This is known as the *rakhi* ceremony, and Hindus attach great importance to it. When Sumitra's brother came to Sharifpura and asked her to return with him to Angad ka Nagla for the rakhi ceremony, she refused saying she knew no one at Angad ka Nagla. The brother began weeping and begged her to tie the rakhi string on him. She still refused and began to weep herself saying that she had no brothers near her to whom she could tie the rakhi string. (We have our account of this episode only from Sumitra and have not learned about it from Sumitra's family.)

Different Style of Dress. Sumitra changed her style of dress. She wore her sari in a different manner and put on sandals, which Sumitra, like most village women, had rarely worn. Her new habits of dressing accorded with Shiva's style.

Caste Snobbery. After her revival Sumitra showed, for a time, a definite hauteur toward her in-laws, the Singhs. Thinking of herself as Shiva, a Brahmin, she regarded them, Thakurs, as inferior.

On the occasion of Sumitra's first journey to Etawah with Shiva's father, Ram Siya Tripathi, and her husband, Jagdish Singh, the group stopped at the home of Baleshwar Prasad Chaturvedi in the village of Umrain. After they had eaten a meal, Sumitra told Jagdish Singh: "Please wash the plates and utensils you used. You are a Thakur and they are Brahmins. It does not matter for me [meaning about her plates and utensils], because I am one of them."

Sumitra's Increased Literacy. Sumitra could read a little, and she was able to write letters and occasionally did so. However, the testimony of infor-

mants was concordant that she had never attended school and had attained only a very limited knowledge of reading and writing. After her revival she showed a marked improvement in her ability to read and write. We observed her in both of these activities and found her able to read and write Hindi with great facility. However, we wish to emphasize that the significant change in Sumitra's literacy was not in her basic ability to read and write but in her fluency in these activities and in her interest in writing. Whereas formerly she only wrote a letter occasionally, after the change in her personality she wrote letters and postcards often to Shiva's family in Etawah.

Other Unusual Behavior. Ram Siya Tripathi said that he noticed in Sumitra some behavior that he regarded as characteristic of Shiva, such as a certain boldness and a tendency to joke. Her husband said that Sumitra, before her apparent death and revival, would usually get up at about 6:00 a.m.; after her death and revival she got up much earlier, at about 4:00 a.m. Shiva had been an early riser; her father said that she used to get up at 5:00 to 5:30 a.m. and even earlier in the summers. One of her uncles commented to us that Shiva used to go to bed earlier and get up earlier than other members of the family. However, we recognize that traits such as we have mentioned in this section are difficult to appraise, and we think they are less important than the others we have mentioned.

Discussion

We propose to discuss what we believe are the four principal interpretations of the case: fraud; cryptomnesia (source amnesia) with secondary personality; secondary personality having paranormal knowledge; and possession of Sumitra's body by the deceased Shiva.

Fraud

We think we can exclude a hoax perpetrated by Sumitra alone. A barely literate village woman in India could not have obtained detailed accurate information about another woman who lived 100 km away without assistance. If there was a hoaxing team, who composed it? Sumitra's husband, as a man, could move around more easily than Sumitra, but he was not in a position to go to places like Dibiyapur and Etawah in order to search out unpublished details about the life of Shiva. It has been suggested that the exorcist Vishwa Nath, who had access to Sumitra (although probably never alone) before and after her apparent death and recovery, might have obtained information about Shiva and coached Sumitra with the details of which he had knowledge. However, this suggestion also, in our view, fails to take account of the information Sumitra had of the private life of the Tripathi family, and it fails to explain her ability to recognize 23 strange persons in person or in photographs.

Shiva's in-laws at Dibiyapur had all the information included in Sumitra's statements about Shiva's life and death, but they were already incriminated in Shiva's death and had an interest, therefore, in Sumitra's silence. Sumitra's "Shiva personality" was saying publicly that Shiva's in-laws had murdered her, and the in-laws could not be suspected of promoting this view of Shiva's death.

Shiva's parental family also had the information included in Sumitra's statements. Ram Siya Tripathi might have collaborated in a hoax. In talking with us, he himself mentioned this possibility. When we asked him whether he thought Sumitra might have learned normally about Shiva he said: "No. If she had done that how could she recognize me and members of my family?" Then he spontaneously added: "People say I have made this case up, but why would I do that? I am gaining nothing, and my [legal] case [against Shiva's in-laws] will not be improved. Sumitra cannot be a witness. I am not getting my daughter back." We think he is correct on these points.

Sumitra and her in-laws might have gained a little status from the change in her behavior and from the social elevation of a "new" family member from the Thakur caste to the Brahmin one. In addition, her husband, who had been away a lot prior to the change, was staying at home more than he had before and presumably giving her more attention. However, all these possible gains seem to us minuscule.

Cryptomnesia

The interpretation of cryptomnesia with secondary personality suggests that Sumitra somehow obtained information about Shiva's life normally without being aware that she had done so and also without her family being aware of this. She would then have used the information in the construction of a secondary personality (Stevenson, 1983b). As mentioned, information published in the newspapers about Shiva's death may have reached persons in Sharifpura, even though we found no evidence that it had. The next steps are, however, difficult to imagine. How could the published information—and much else besides—have been passed on to Sumitra without others being aware that this had happened? Moreover, how could information in a verbal form have enabled Sumitra to recognize many members of Shiva's family in person and in old photographs? Such recognitions depend on tacit knowing that cannot be conveyed in words (Polanyi, 1966).[7]

Apart from the newspapers there were the traders who went between Sharifpura and Etawah and the women of the neighboring village of Murra who were married in Dibiyapur or nearby. The latter group particularly drew our attention. If one or two of them had brought the news of Sumitra's death, revival, and changed personality to Dibiyapur, could they not also have been conduits for information from Dibiyapur about Shiva's death and other details of her life? We spent considerable time both at Dibiyapur and Murra in probing for ways in which this might have happened, and we

cannot see any way in which it could. Although Murra and Sharifpura are only 2 km apart by road (and closer across the fields), there is little intercourse between the villages except on special occasions. Because they are so close, they are considered twin villages and each is inside the other's boundaries for acceptable exogamy; therefore, there are no marriages between the two villages. At the same time, the villages are far enough apart so that the inhabitants of one do not meet those of the other when they are at work in their fields. One informant of Sharifpura, who lived less than 60 m from Sumitra's house (and was distantly related to her), assured us that it would have been "impossible" for women of Murra to have told or taught Sumitra what she knew about Shiva's family. Again, even supposing that the women of Murra had brought back and somehow conveyed to Sharifpura some news of Shiva's death, such knowledge as they may have had would not have accounted for all of Sumitra's knowledge of Shiva's private life and for her ability to recognize so many persons known to Shiva, but whom Sumitra had never seen before.

Secondary Personality With Paranormal Knowledge

Most secondary personalities do not demonstrate paranormal knowledge;* but a few exceptions have occurred, and the case of Doris Fischer (Prince, 1915–1916, 1926) belongs in this small group. There is no evidence that Sumitra had any powers of extrasensory perception before her apparent death and revival. However, if she somehow acquired such powers she might conceivably have obtained information paranormally about the life and death of Shiva and then developed a secondary personality with that information. The sudden enhancement of Sumitra's ability to read and write makes the case parallel to that of Pearl Curran; she was a person of extremely modest education whose secondary personality, "Patience Worth," wrote a series of remarkable historical novels that seemed far beyond the normal capacities of Mrs. Curran (Litvag, 1972; Prince, 1927). However, "Patience Worth" showed little evidence of telepathy and certainly nothing like what Sumitra demonstrated, if we attribute her knowledge of details of Shiva's life to that process.

Possession

The evidence that Sumitra's case provides of paranormally acquired information invites comparison between it and the cases of Lurancy Vennum (Hodgson, 1901; Stevens, 1887) and Maria Talarico (Giovetti, 1985; Scambio, 1939). However, these were cases in which the change of personality was so marked that the term *possession* seemed applicable to them. And this is the fourth interpretation we wish considered for the present case.

If the other interpretations we have mentioned should be set aside as inadequately accounting for all the facts of the case, we are led to consider that a drastic change of personality occurred. When personality becomes

altered unrecognizably, taking on the attributes and the knowledge a deceased personality was known to have, it may be best to speak of the change as a type of possession or reincarnation. Although we do not dogmatically assert that this is the correct interpretation of this case, we believe much of the evidence makes it the most plausible one.

Endnotes

[1] Possession states occur in many other countries, one might almost say in all of them. However, we think it unnecessary to review the unmanageably extensive literature on this subject, all the more so since adequate reviews with further references have been published elsewhere (Bourguignon, 1976: Lewis, 1971; Pattison, Kahan, & Hurd, 1986). We should like to record our agreement with Lewis (1971, pp. 29–30), who warned against the futility of trying to find a single interpretation that will fit all cases of ostensible possession. The word possession labels many conditions of various types and different origins and processes.

Although we shall refer to knowledge ostensibly obtained without the known sensory organs as paranormal *knowledge*, we do not mean thereby to beg the question of how such knowledge is communicated. However, the important question in any specific case, including the one of this paper, is *whether* such knowledge has been obtained, not how it was obtained.

[3] The absence of adequate written records in the villages makes some of the dates and ages that we give in this report approximate only. However, we know precisely the dates of Shiva's death and of Sumitra's later apparent death and revival.

[4] Santoshi Ma is a Hindu goddess regarded as the special protector of pious and faithful women. She was little known until this century and is not even mentioned in some standard works of reference for Hinduism, such as Walker (196811983). An immensely successful moving picture film about her in the 1970s both expressed and promoted the cult of Santoshi Ma in regions of northern India. Villagers of Uttar Pradesh would regard apparent communications from Santoshi Ma and seeming possession by her as unusual, but not pathological.

[5] The legal formalities for cremation of a body in a village of India require that five notables of the village sign a document (called a panchnama, which means "five names") authorizing cremation. Although some of the persons forming such committees are honest and incorruptible, many of them, at least in small villages, are likely to be friendly with the family of a deceased person and will do the family's bidding with and without bribery. Not surprisingly, observers give no credence to a panchnama if other evidence points to suspicious circumstances.

[6] However, if a train strikes a living person the head alone may be damaged either by impact with the train itself or if the body is lifted, thrown away from the train, and falls so that the head strikes the ground first. A more suspicious circumstance to us in this case is the location of the dead body within the rails of a single line. We find it difficultto believe that a person intending to commit suicide could have thrown herself so neatly in front of a train as to remain, after the train had passed, within the two rails of a track. We should have expected the train either to have thrown the body away from the line or to have run over it and severed it in two or more parts.

[7] Readers interested in a fuller discussion of this point—here asserted axiomatically—can find it in Stevenson (1974b, 1984).

[8] It would be more accurate to say that secondary personalities are not observed or not reported often to demonstrate paranormal knowledge. This may be partly due to the failure of observers to examine open-mindedly the evidence that some cases, such as the present one in our view, provide.

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