

Is there life after death? The question has both troubled and fascinated the human mind since the ancient times the world over. Life hereafter has been an important ingredient of religious folklore and has taken many forms. Religion has concerned itself with many things — origin of life in general and human life in particular; its aims and goals, indeed its very destination; the relationship not only between man and his Creator but also between human and non-human life and between man and Nature. Then, coming to the relationship between man and man, religion has played an overwhelmingly important role in structuring this relationship — multi-faceted in its manifestation — resulting in a human society.

All the ethical ideas about human activities, mode of conduct etc. have a strong mooring in religion, which has taken different forms for and in different sections of human society. And it is not surprising that these ideas should have influenced people's notions about ghosts and spirits which symbolize superhuman existence.

Another factor which has an important bearing on people's notions about ghosts, is imagination. Human understanding has not been circumscribed by the human sensory organs or even by the ingenuous mechanical aids made possible by an advancing technology. Imagination too, has been an important instrument in the service of man. It has invested human life with a richness far beyond the capabilities of man's senses — aided as well as unaided.

Imagination, we are told, is particularly strong in the earlier stages of life. How

does an adolescent who is approaching "the culmination of his physical and mental growth" view ghosts? The word 'ghost' is so surcharged with different ideas, beliefs and emotions that it is sufficient to spur the imaginative faculties of anybody — more so of youngsters in whom imagination and fantasy find their maximum and unfettered expression. And they are also at an age when they have already imbibed — directly as well as indirectly — the influence of their religion and are familiar with folktales about ghosts.

THE PROJECT

The students of the Department of Medical and Psychiatric Social Work of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay, decided to study adolescents' images of ghosts. Eleven students undertook to gather data on the topic. Since they wished to keep the religious overtones separate, each approached 40 adolescents between 11 and 14 years of age in different communities and each submitted a separate report. Data were collected in 1967-68, and all the respondents were school-going adolescents. Dr. G. R. Banerjee, Head of the Department of Medical and Psychiatric Social Work, guided all these eleven students right from the stage of formulation of the problem to the final stage of report writing. All the reports, written in part fulfilment of the requirements for the master's degree in social work, were submitted to the Academic Council of the Tata Institute. The following students had taken part in this group research project which had utilised one common schedule:

Student	Community Studied	Place
Miss Marie Lobo	Catholic Christian	Poona
Miss S. M. Misra	Brahma	Calcutta
Miss Panna K. Rege	Saraswat	Bombay
Miss Jayashree M. Jambekar	Chitpavan	Bombay
Miss Shobhana Vyavaharkar	Pathare Prabhu	Bombay
Miss Bhadra Shah	Gujarati Vaishnav	Bombay
Miss Jayshree Samant	Neo-Buddhist	Bombay
Miss Nalini Mehta	Jain	Bombay
Miss Renuka Sekhri	Sikh	Bombay
Miss Freny Bharucha	Parsee	Bombay
Miss Y. N. Shaikh	Muslim	Bombay

The main purpose of the present paper is to summarize the findings of these studies. What it seeks to provide is an idea about the adolescents' image of ghosts. As a good many communities were studied, the fare is rich. Although it is possible to draw a comparative picture bringing out similarities and differences, no conclusions have been drawn in terms of different religions and communities as the topic was not studied in depth. Nor was any effort made to look up existing documentary evidence about beliefs and ideas about ghosts.

One more point needs to be noted. Some of the studies have pointed out that the adolescents' images of ghosts not merely reflect the different religious-cultural ideas and influences imbibed by them but these images also give an insight into the psychological make-up of their personalities. The studies themselves have very little to say in this connection and this paper too does not cover this aspect.

The students had asked their respondents to draw pictures of ghosts according to the latter's ideas and imagination.

Obviously, the interpretation of these pictorial representations of ghosts has to be taken up independently and along altogether different lines.

As this was a group project, only one partly structured schedule was used. This had its own advantages, but as a large number of students had participated in the project, it was inevitable that the different aspects of ghosts should have received different treatment from different students. A great deal naturally depended on the degree of verbalization of ideas by the respondents themselves. However, it may be pointed out that the students' training in casework and interviewing techniques stood them in good stead.

This paper summarizes adolescents' ideas about the following aspects of ghosts: their origin, physical appearance, habitat, diet, locomotion and action. What does one do when confronted with a ghost? Adolescents' reactions in such a hypothetical contingency have also been recorded.

ORIGIN OF GHOSTS

What is the origin of ghosts? Where do they come from and why? Who becomes a

ghost? These were some of the questions asked to the respondents in connection with the origin of ghosts. All the adolescents were familiar with the idea of ghosts and of life after death. The notion that ghosts were human beings at one time, was common to all the groups representing different communities. It pointed to the concept of life hereafter; to "life being changed, not taken away"; to the "soul passing from one level of existence to another which is not basically different but is in a new spiritual form."

Further, almost all the respondent groups believed that either persons with unfulfilled desires or persons who had committed some sin or crime in their lives would become ghosts in order to fulfil their desires or to accomplish the things they could not do while living. A large number of Muslim respondents expressed the belief that persons who did not receive proper Muslim funeral rites became ghosts. Some Parsees also said as much about the Parsee rites. From among the Hindus, the Brahma adolescents mentioned that a ghost would visit his relatives or enemies to take revenge. The Catholics said that those who died in sin or had debt to pay became ghosts. Persons who had been murdered would also become ghosts. One Catholic respondent believed that he would become a ghost whom God wanted to be so. Gujarati Vaishnava, Jain and Parsee adolescents too referred to unnatural, sudden, premature, suicidal or accidental deaths. Persons who met with such deaths would tend to become ghost. "Being suddenly torn from the body, the soul became restless and resentful" and therefore wandered about unhappily. Some of the Parsee respondents held the belief that the same fate befell a person who ate

pig's flesh. Others believed that persons who were of aggressive spirit and disposition became ghosts even though their corporeal existence might come to an end. The Sikhs too generally shared the above beliefs. Some Chitpavans said that ghosts were those who had failed to attain *Moksha* or salvation. Some of the Neo-Buddhists had curious beliefs. Apart from the usual replies about unnatural death and unfulfilled desires, some said that only women would become ghosts though they could not say why.

The Muslim respondents manifested the influence of their religion when asked about the origin of ghosts. Twenty of the 40 respondents said that persons whose dead bodies did not receive the Muslim funeral rites and were burnt became ghosts. So too would those who committed suicide or disobeyed God or did not have faith in God.

Despite differences in the stress on the details in some cases, there seems to be general agreement in the respondents' ideas about the origin of ghosts. The answer are mainly of two types. One refers to a life of sin, crime and cruelty. The underlying belief is that God punishes those who lead such a life. Persons who indulge in these undesirable activities pay the price only after their death. Salvation is denied to them according to the theory of *Karma*.

The other causative factors i.e. unnatural death and unfulfilled desires are difficult to explain by any religious theory. These are things which happen to people. Perhaps these factors can be looked at from another point of view: happiness and contentment in life are highly prized values and their denial or lack in life on

earth appears to be the springboard for ideas about the origin of ghosts. Restlessness of soul goads the ghosts in their wanderings. These factors point to the influence of the negative factors in human life on ideas and beliefs concerning life after death.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Details about the typical physical appearance of the ghosts were sought by the students conducting the project. Questions were asked about the forms the ghosts took, their characteristic features, complexion, size, sex and the dress worn by them. Ideas about the origin are based more on certain values and concepts about life and death as such. But imagination can have a free rein when it comes to details about the physical appearance of the ghosts.

The descriptions of ghosts given by the different respondent groups depict a picture of a horrible, terrifying creature which is the embodiment of evil. According to the Catholic adolescents a ghost is a "bony, skinny skeleton looking figure moving on to something even more diabolical strange form with horns like a devil to an almost ethereal object."

All the Hindu respondent groups described a ghost as a horrifying, frightening, ugly looking creature with one or the other gross physical abnormality. Dark and black were the complexions mentioned. A Brahma respondent said that, in form, a ghost would be half human and half animal. Some of the Chitpavans thought that ghosts would have as ornaments, gold bangles, chains of bones or necklace of skulls. The common belief among the Pathare Prabhu was that ghosts would have the form of a skeleton characterized

by feet and hands turned backwards. The Jain respondents were not clear in their description but were of the opinion that whatever might be the form of the ghosts, they were gruesome and frightening creatures with fearful appearance. The answers of the Sikh adolescents were in no way different from those of the Jains. The Neo-Buddhists too could not give a clear picture of a ghost but believed that it was a white skeleton-like figure in both human and non-human forms. In contrast the picture depicted by the Parsee respondents was more vivid if horrifying. They had a general impression that a ghost would be "ubiquitous, oscillating between visibility and invisibility at will. It is a tall, hazy and nebulous figure with long limbs and with hawk-like tallons, a flowing robe cascading the entire figure." However, there is one instance of a girl (a Pathare Prabhu) who imagined that a ghost would be "more pleasant than frightening or ugly" and got its food from Heaven.

The Muslim adolescents' generalized image of the ghosts was that the ghosts could be either males or females. A male ghost would be dressed in a black gown and a female one in a green sari with a matching blouse. The female ghosts appear to be fond of green bangles and anklets with bells. The ghosts, whether male or female would mostly be dark-complexioned and have their feet turned backwards. The general belief was that though the ghosts could assume the human form, their feet betrayed them. The direction in which the toes of the feet pointed, could easily be taken to be the criterion for distinguishing a ghost from a human being. Generally the ghosts were thought to be frightening in appearance. Some adolescents imagined ghosts to be handsome but nonetheless

dangerous, because their good looks served as traps "to attract people and deceive them." Similarly it is also interesting to note that the three respondents who thought that ghosts had a very fair complexion also believed that this fair complexion "was used as a weapon to frighten people."

As regards the sex of the ghosts, the general opinion in most of the respondent groups was that ghosts could be of either sex. The Brahma and Gujarati Vaishnava respondents provided some notable exceptions. Nearly half the respondents among the Vaishnavas said that ghosts were sexless since they were spiritual and not human beings. A couple of respondents among the Catholics and the Pathare Prabhus too shared this view. On the other hand, a good many Brahma adolescents believed that ghosts were only males. A few respondents in other Hindu groups said the same thing. On the other hand not more than 3-4 respondents among all the groups said that there were only female ghosts.

In an inventory of the different characteristics of the physical appearance were to be made, it would read as follows:

Head: Horn on head; no head; head turned back; head with *Shendi* i.e. tuft of hair; hairless head.

Hair : Long; unkempt; matted and thick; plaited hair; long black hair; hairless.

Back : Hollow back (i.e. back with bones only) ; no back.

Ears: Long ears; no ears; big ears.

Eyes : Hollow sockets in place of eyes; no eyes; eyes at the back; very big eyes; eyes emitting fire; big black eyes; eyes big as a bullock's.

Nose: Holes in place of nose; flat nose; long nose; horn on nose.

Teeth: Two log and pointed white teeth; gumless teeth; no teeth; big teeth.

Hands: Long hands; hands like paws; hands with crooked fingers; hands turned backwards; hands with long and thin fingers; palms without dermal lines.

Nails: Long shining nails; sharp nails.

Legs and Feet : Feet turned backwards; long legs; thin legs, flatfooted.

Complexion : Black; dark; white; yellowish white; yellow; blue; wheatish; red.

Overall : Hairy; tall; skeletal; invisible; no colour; no weight; every organ crooked; stern face; covered with gown; disproportionate body; fleshless; casting a long shadow; shapeless; white figure; capable of holding a man in its palm.

It is clear that the image of the ghosts is characterized by a distortion of the human organs and features. This is in keeping with the general impression that ghosts are horrible and terrifying creatures.

What is the form of the ghosts? Three types' of answers were received: human form only; non-human form only and both human and non-human forms. The following table provides some statistical data for all the communities except the Chitpavans:

Nearly 65 per cent of the respondents had mentioned only human form. The non-human forms mentioned were as follows:

Catholics :

A black dog; a pig; a pair of shoes; a white cloud.

No. OF RESPONDENTS BY THE FORM OF GHOSTS MENTIONED.

Community	Human	Non-human	Both	Total
Catholics	23	6	11	40
Brahma	33	—	7	40
Pathare Prabhu	25	15	—	40
Gujarat	37	—	3	40
Saraswat	19	1	20	40
Jain	15	1	24	40
Neo-Buddhist	25	—	15	40
Parsee	33	1	6	40
Sikh	18	6	16	40
Muslim	34	6	—	40
Total	262	36	102	400

Sikhs :

Crows; cats; dogs; cows; lions; frogs; insects.

Pathare Prabhus :

Skeleton of any animal.

Gujarati Vaishnavas :

Any animal or bird.

Muslims :

Black cat; black dog; black goat.

However, most of the respondents were not able to give any description of a non-human ghost. The ability to assume non-human form is associated with the super-human faculties of the ghosts.

HABITAT

If ghosts have an existence, where do they live and where are they usually to be found? What are their favourite haunts? There seems to be a good deal of agreement on this point too. The adolescents from all the religions and communities tell us that ghosts are to be found in lonely places (lonely places where wicked deeds

have been done, say the Catholics), graveyards, dark and quiet places, haunted and deserted houses, tall trees ('Vad' and peepul trees were mentioned by the Chitpavans and Saraswats), small bushes, hilly areas, forests, deserts, etc. Some of the Brahma adolescents struck a different note when they said that some ghosts would live near Heaven but would not be able to enter it because of their sinful past life. Some of the other places indicated by the different respondent groups were as follows:

Saraswats: Tamarind trees, tunnels lonely villages, hiding places, caves, scenes of murder.

Pathare Prabhus: Hills, wells, corners, sea, caves.

Jains: Tree-tops, places in ruins, in the air.

Neo-Buddhists: Toilets, 'chawls'.

Parsees: Rivers, wells, holes, hill stations, Heaven and Hell.

Muslims: Trees, deep dry wells, lanes, dustbins, latrines, river banks.

The common factor in almost all the places mentioned above is their relative remoteness from the ordinary places of human habitation. Toilets, dark corners, etc. are the additions made by timid and apprehensive minds to the already long list of the places supposed to be favoured and frequented by the ghosts. As ghosts, they obviously cannot mingle freely with the human beings nor have they completely discarded the scenes of normal human activities. Some of the places mentioned could be and are very near those where the human beings ordinarily live.

Do ghosts live alone or in groups? Depends on the ghosts themselves, say the Chitpavan boys and girls. Some live alone, others with friends. Some go further and said that if all the members of a family met with death at the same time, say in an accident, then, all of them would stay together as ghosts also. The Neo-Buddhists shared this view of the Chitpavans.

The majority among the Parsee and the Muslim respondents believed that ghosts lived alone but a few were of the opinion that they lived in groups and at times had well organized gangs.

As in the case of physical appearance, imagination has been an important factor in determining beliefs about places frequented by the ghosts. And fear too. Ghosts have been associated with places of which people, especially children, are usually afraid and scared — the dark lonely places so frequently associated with dark and mysterious things. A large number of the child respondents said that ghosts could be seen only at night. It will be re-

membered that the Parsee children had said that among the ghosts there were two varieties — the black and the white. It seems that the black ones appear at night and the white ones during daytime.

DIET

In keeping with the trend of answers so far, the diet of the ghosts is imagined to be horrifying. On what do the ghosts survive and subsist? Broadly speaking, there are three groups of respondents. One believed that since ghosts are spirits or were like skeletons, they did not need any food. Most of the Catholics and a few Chitpavans belonged to this group. The second, consisting of a few Chitpavans, most of the Brahmas, a few Jains and Parsees, said that the ghosts would eat whatever the humans ate — be it vegetarian or non-vegetarian food. It is interesting to note that some Chitpavans said that the ghosts liked rice and buttermilk — things that traditionally form part of their own diet. One Chitpavan also said that "the ghost asked the people who were influenced by *chetuk* or black magic to bring food to them."

Both the above groups are comparatively small and make for a variety in answers. The largest group comprising of adolescents of different communities was of those who believed that since ghosts were evil beings they ate foods abhorred by human beings. They are pictured as flesheaters and bloodsuckers. Most of the adolescents believed that the ghosts relished human flesh — the few Catholics who said that ghosts ate flesh said that they had a special liking for heart, liver and kidneys. Human blood was what quenched their thirst. And in order to get their eats, the ghosts would kill their victims. So the

ghosts killed human beings not only to take revenge but also to satisfy their hunger. That is another reason why ghosts are to be found in graveyards and cemeteries, say the Vaishnavas.

The ghosts' ways of getting food are varied and the ghosts seem to fall in two groups — vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The latter of course kill their victims. The former adopt many ways. The Vaishnavas said that the ghosts got their food from hostels and gardens. Some Neo-Budhists said that the ghosts would eat anything that human beings used in driving them away. The list of things used for the purpose of scaring or propitiating the ghosts is as follows: curds, rice, mutton, animals, chicken, *gur* (jaggery), eggs, coconuts and sour lime. Some Sikh adolescents said that ghosts would "get inside a person, eat his heart or liver, suck his blood and leave him sick and unconscious." Some said that ghosts would, when hungry, go to peoples' houses and demand food. "If the request was not paid heed to, it meant courting the wrath of the ghost."

A couple of Saraswat respondents said that ghosts ate the Pinda (a ball of rice offered at one of funeral rites), but could not say whether they ate anything else or ate at any other time. Similar, but a suitably modified — modified in line with the religious belief — opinion was expressed by a couple Muslim girls. They said that the ghosts ate the 'Sadka'. This calls for a little explanation. "There is a Muslim belief that if a man voluntarily gives back to *Allah* (God) a part of his possessions, by this act he purifies what he retains. What he gives to God is called 'Sadka.'" Sometimes this 'Sadka' consists of eggs, green chillies and lemons and then the ghosts, so

these Muslim girls thought, would eat this 'Sadka'.

Some respondents were of the opinion that the diet of the ghosts depend on their form. If the form was non-human then they ate non-vegetarian food. But if the form was human then they ate whatever the human beings ate. Similarly, there were ghosts who drank only water, some who drank only blood and of course others, who would satisfy their thirst with whatever they could get.

It seems that in most of the cases the answers regarding the diet of the ghosts were based on imagination of the adolescents rather than on beliefs current in any particular community. There are, of course, exceptions. For example, the belief among the Neo-Buddhists that a ghost would eat what is offered to it to either drive it away or to propitiate it. This is true not only of diets but of other aspects of ghosts as well. There is no pattern of replies concerning diet except in a few cases.

ACTIVITIES AND LOCOMOTION

The ghosts are supposed to be quite active creatures and they move from place to place. They have versatile faculties and are not hampered in their movements as are the human beings. They make light of the impediments which the humans find almost insurmountable. For example, the Catholics believe that ghosts can walk underground with as much ease as when they are overground. They can fly in the air or float around. Some adolescents say that ghosts can float because they have no weight. And of course, they can crawl. On top of all this, they can appear and disappear at will. These superhuman faculties have been attributed to them by the

Chitpavans, the Pathare Prabhus, the Saraswats, the Gujarati Vaislmavas and the Sikhs also. The Catholics made it clear, however, that although ghosts can *go* anywhere and can get over any difficulty in their way, they are afraid of two things — fire and holy places — and would not venture anywhere near them. The Muslims too said that ghosts were afraid of holy places.

Some of the Neo-Buddhists shared the above beliefs but said that "as ghosts possessed human beings and stayed in their bodies, naturally they moved with the human beings."

The majority among the Brahmas believed that the ghosts floated in the air rather than flew. Only a few amongst them said that the ghosts flew or walked. Only two Jain respondents confessed their ignorance and said that they did not know how the ghosts moved about. A large number of other Jain respondents could think of only walking but not flying or floating ghosts.

According to the Catholics, much of ghosts' wandering would be aimless but at times they would turn aggressive and vent up their feelings by choking, strangling or robbing people. Or they might harass people by eating up their food. Ghosts also appear to their friends or relatives to let them know about their own whereabouts and to instruct them to do the work they themselves had failed to do or to complete. Unaccomplished tasks and unfulfilled desires continue to goad them in their activities in their existence as ghosts after their death as human beings.

According to the Chitpavans, ghosts can move about anywhere and everywhere they desired. They revel in frightening

people by making sudden and loud noises and in troubling people without rhyme or reason. Some of the Chitpavans said that the ghosts were bent upon taking revenge on people, who had, according to them, harmed them in their human life. As they lived up in the trees, ghosts could easily harass the passers-by down below by throwing stones at them! The majority among the Christian and the Sikh adolescents believed that ghosts were malevolent creatures and would do no good. In contrast, the majority among the Neo-Buddhists thought that ghosts would be both good and bad.

According to the Muslim respondents ghosts' activities were wandering here and there and killing, misguiding and frightening people. The following table gives an idea about adolescents' evaluation of the ghosts' activities:

The respondents are thus lined up in two groups: one consisting of those who believe that ghosts are invariably malevolent. Most of the Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Saraswats, Jains, Vaishnavas and Parsees belong to this group. The others believe that ghosts are like human beings — kind to those whom they like and bad to those whom they dislike. Not all the ghosts are bad and malevolent in nature and character. Most of the Neo-Buddhists, Chitpavans and the Pathare Prabhus take this charitable viewpoint. They are also capable of performing kind and benevolent deeds though these may not be as numerous as the bad ones. They would, however, be kind to only those whom they had loved in their past life. The types of good deeds were specified in a few cases. The Saraswats, for example, mentioned that the ghosts would help their relatives in times of distress or would show them

NO. OF RESPONDENTS BY THE TYPE OF GHOST'S ACTIVITIES.

Group	Malevolent	Benevolent	Both	Don't know	Ghosts do not have any activities	Total
Chitpavan	12	1	27	—	—	40
Pathare Prabhu	7	1	32	—	—	40
Saraswat	37	—	—	1	2	40
Jain	30	1	9	—	—	40
Brahma	20	6	14	—	—	40
Gujarati Vaishnava	32	—	8	—	—	40
Parsec	24	—	16	—	—	40
Muslims	36	—	1	3	—	40
Total	198	9	107	4	2	320

hidden treasures. At the same time, it was also said that bad ghosts would poison and kill their enemies. A ghost would harass persons it disliked by sitting on their necks and troubling them. The Saraswats, like the Christians, believed that ghosts move about in places where God is not worshipped. The Jains think that bad ghosts are capable of harming the health of persons they disliked.

From the above, it is clear that the general belief is that ghosts appear to human beings. But who are these human beings? To whom does a ghost appear? A large number of answers were forthcoming to the above questions. The types of persons mentioned by the different groups are listed below:

1. To persons who have harmed others or committed crimes or sins (Chitpavans, Saraswats, Jains, Brahmas, Gujarati Vaishnavas, Parsees and Catholics).
2. To persons who have helped others (Chitpavans and Brahmas).

3. To kith and kin: (Chitpavans, Saraswats, Brahmas, Parsees and Catholics).
4. To *Mantrik*: (Chitpavans, Saraswats and Neo-Buddhists).
5. To persons who all ghosts: (Catholics).
6. To those who do not wear the sacred '*Kada*' and/or perform *Paat*: (Sikhs).
7. To those who don't pray: (Muslims).
8. To blue-eyed persons: (Muslims).
9. To persons with a black dot in the eye: (Muslims).
10. To those who urinated under a '*pepal*' tree (Sikhs).
11. To persons belonging to *Manava Gana* (Chitpavans, Pathare Prabhus and Saraswats).
12. To persons belonging to *Rakshasa Gana* (Chitpavans, Pathare Prabhus and Saraswats).
13. To persons belonging to *Dev Gana* (Pathare Prabhus and Saraswats).

14. To villagers (Chitpavans).
15. To wealthy persons (Parsees).
16. To persons passing through lonely places (Vaishnavas).
17. To anybody (Jains, Brahmas, Neo-Buddhists, Parsees and Sikhs).
18. To nobody (Neo-Buddhists, Muslims).
19. To adults (Pathare Prabhus and Sikhs).
20. To weak-minded persons (Chitpavans, Saraswats, Jains, Brahmas and Parsees).
21. To those who are scared of them (Pathare Prabhus, Neo-Buddhists, Sikhs and Catholics).
22. To persons who believe in ghosts (Saraswats and Brahmas).
23. To sick children (Pathare Prabhus and Jains).
24. To small children (Chitpavans, Vaishnavas and Sikhs).
25. To those who are possessed (Neo-Buddhists).
26. To the mentally ill persons (Parsees and Catholics).

It is interesting to read the answers. Some of them follow the pattern of answers given to other questions. Not so the others. Answers numbers 20 to 26 indicate that the respondents believed that certain personality factors are also involved and that at times it's all a question of faith and belief. For example, ghosts would appear to small children because the latter possess excessive imagination. A few answers call for a little explanation. According to Hindu astrology, human beings are divided into three categories—the *Manava Gana* or the human category,

the *Rakshasha Gana* or the superhuman but evil category and finally, the *Dev Gana* or the superhuman but good category. We need not go into the details about the criteria on the bases of which this classification is made or about the characteristics of persons falling under the three categories. It seems that ghosts appear to the first two categories of persons in order to bother them. But as persons belonging to the *Deva Gana* are on good terms with all their fellow human beings, the ghosts too are kind to them and appear to them only to do them good.

Similarly, the Chitpavans, Saraswats and the Neo-Buddhists believed that a *Mantrik* i.e. a person who can summon up different spirits by reciting certain secret but magical *Mantra* or words, can call upon a ghost to appear and that the latter would obey the call. The Neo-Buddhists styled these *Mantriks* as *Bhagats* or *Bhaktas* i.e. the devoted ones. But on their own, the ghosts would appear to their friends and relatives or to their enemies and others who had committed sins.

COMMUNICATION

Although the ghosts lead a separate life from the human beings, they are in touch with the human beings. How? What means of communication do they employ to convey their feelings and intentions to those whom they contact? There are a number of beliefs in this respect also.

Some of the Catholics believed that the ghosts could use all the human means of communications such as words and language, signs and gestures. Their dances were quite expressive and conveyed their intentions. The Chitpavans too shared these beliefs though they stressed gestures and dances. Some of the Chitpavans said

that although ghosts could communicate with human beings, they could not share their feelings and thoughts among themselves. Obviously, these would be the ghosts who live alone and do not belong to any group or family. The Gujarati Vaishnava, the Pathare Prabhus, the Sikhs, the Neo-Buddhists and the Muslims said that the ghosts used code language to communicate among themselves. They always talked in whispers. Nevertheless, they employ gestures of eyes and hands to make themselves understood by others. The Pathare Prabhu respondents also indicated dances as one of the means of communications.

To the above, the Parsee respondents have added shouts, screams and whistling. Some also mentioned communication through dreams and telepathy. Telepathy was also mentioned by the Christians and Sikhs. Some of the Saraswat respondents

said that ghosts communicated with one another in an invisible manner. And others said that they shout at one other and that they also fight amongst themselves.

To some of the Neo-Buddhists, ghosts were versatile in their proficiency in languages. "Thus, if they took the form of a Gujarati gentleman, they would speak Gujarati. If they took the form of a Christian gentleman, they would speak English, and so on."

Some of the Jain respondents too gave similar answers. And of course, there were respondents who could not imagine ghosts speaking anything except their own (i.e. the respondents') mother-tongue! Such respondents belonged to the following groups: Parsee, Neo-Buddhists, Chitpavans.

On the question of language we get the following distribution for seven groups.

NO. OF RESPONDENTS BY THEIR IDEA ABOUT GHOST'S LANGUAGE

Group	Ghosts have some lanugage	They do not have any language	Don't know	Total
Parsee	14	26	—	40
Vaishnava	33	7	—	40
Brahma	38	2	—	40
Sarswat	17	16	7	40
Pathare Pradhu	13	27	—	40
Chitpavan	28	9	3	40
Jain	19	20	1	40
Total	162	107	11	280

REACTIONS ON SEEING A GHOST

Our account was, so far, concerned with the adolescents' beliefs about the different aspects of ghosts' existence. Towards the end of the interviews, they were asked to tell the interviewers about their reactions

if they happened to have an encounter with a ghost. The hypothetical question posed was: "What would you do on seeing a ghost?" The following Table will give an idea of the type of answers received even though all the communities have not been included.

NO. OF RESPONDENTS AMONG

Reaction on seeing a ghost	Jains	Chitpavans	Vaishnavas	Neo-Buddhists	Catholics	Parsees	Muslims
Run away	12	13	7	28	27	14	10
Shout, scream	5	1	5	6	9	10	5
Pray	17	12	—	—	14	7	18
Get frightened	2	6	—	23	—	—	1
Shut eyes	3	—	—	—	6	—	—
Wait and see	—	5	8	1	6	4	—
Beat it or fight with it	—	2	8	5	—	—	2
Put on light	—	—	3	—	—	1	—

Although the reactions of the respondents belonging to the other communities have not been given in the above table, these would be more or less similar in nature. Similarly, a good many respondents belonging to different communities gave a variety of answers, each valid in only a few cases. These are given below:

Throw things at the ghost: For the Jains anything of iron would do, while the Chitpavans would rely on *chappals* i.e. a kind of footwear.

Show sacred things to the ghost: Chitpavans mentioned *Brahmagath*, i.e. the knot of the sacred thread. The Christians would wear religious articles. *Kada* i.e. an iron bangle would serve the same purpose for the Sikhs.

Show other things disliked by ghosts: The Chitpavans believed that the ghosts did not like things such as match box, a leather belt and a red cloth. Hence, they would show these things to a ghost, should they meet one.

Sleep with someone: Some of the Catholic children said that they would

sleep with someone so that they could feel secure after seeing a ghost.

Talk to the ghost: The Chitpavans think that if a conversation on God is started then the ghost would get scared and run away. The Gujarati Vaishnavas too favoured talking to the ghost in order to drive it away.

Take another path: A Chitpavan and Parsee said that they would quietly take another path in order to avoid a ghost. *Run to parents:* The reaction of a couple of Parsee children would be to run to their parents.

Show big eyes or fist: On the other hand, a couple of Parsee children were bold enough to say that they would try to scare away the ghosts by showing them fists or big eyes.

Faint: Some Neo-Buddhists and Muslims said that in all likelihood they would faint, were they so unlucky as to have an encounter with a ghost.

No reaction: A Brahma adolescent said that as he did not believe in ghosts the question of his having any reaction in

such a hypothetical contingency, did not arise at all.

The children were also asked to give their impressions about the likely reactions of other children about their own ages. This question was an indirect attempt at gaining an insight into the reactions of the respondents to a hypothetical encounter with a ghost. An overall summary by the student studying the Jain adolescents was: "Though only 13 adolescents had revealed that they would run away, 24 adolescents thought that boys and girls of their age would run away on seeing a ghost, whereas 19 respondents said that they would pray, only one adolescent girl had expressed (the opinion) that the girls or boys of her age would pray. Ten adolescents had stated that they would scream while 21 adolescents had expressed (the opinion) that boys and girls of their

age would scream. This shows that they were considering themselves better than their peer group." Similar conclusion has been drawn by the students who had taken their samples from the Sikh and the Parsee communities. The students who had studied the other seven communities observed very little, if any, variation between the reactions of their respondents and what the latter thought would be the reactions of boys and girls of their own age.

Another question closely linked with the earlier one concerns the ways and means of driving away the ghosts. It is also here that the religious beliefs of each community are reflected in the respondents' answers. It is possible here to give a distribution of respondents belonging to seven communities, by their answers to this question.

WAYS OF DRIVING AWAY A GHOST
No. of respondents in Different Communities

Ways of driving away a ghost	Catholics	Neo-Buddhists	Vaishnavas	Chit-pavans	Saraswats	Jains	Brahmas	Muslims
Religious remedy	25	5	6	13	9	34	3	36
Do as the ghost says	2	2	2	4	3	—	—	—
Make big noise, collect people	2	—	4	—	—	—	3	—
Call <i>Mantriks</i>	—	20	—	18	14	—	—	—
Put on light, fire	—	—	15	—	—	3	19	—
Beat the ghost	—	1	11	—	—	—	—	—
Do nothing	12	—	6	—	—	1	19	—
Other ways	2	23	1	13	—	2	1	4
Don't know	—	—	—	2	—	—	3	—

Non-inclusion of Sikhs, Pathare Prabhus and Parsees in the above table does not mean that the respondents belonging to these communities have not indicated the ways and means of driving away the ghosts. Their answers have been summarized differently and are mostly religious in nature. The religious remedies indicated in the above table differ from religion to religion and usually take the form of reciting prayers. The Muslims also believed that a holy thread tied to the arm can dispel the ghosts. A good many Christians and Brahmas were of the opinion that it is best to leave a ghost alone and that nothing need be done because a ghost would go away on its own. On the other hand, a large number of the Neo-Buddhists, Chitpavans and the Saraswats pin their hopes on a *Mantrikas* to drive away a ghost. Some Muslims would call in their priests who are similar to *Mantriks*. The Neo-Buddhists and the Chitpavans come out with a large number of sundry superstitious beliefs about the best means of driving away a ghost. All these remedies need not be recounted—the list would be too long—but a specimen could be given. One Neo-Buddhist remedy reads as follows: "Take a black cloth and put four pieces of sour lime, black and red *kumkum* and a coconut in it and place it where the ghost was supposed to have possessed the person." The other remedies are mostly variations of the same theme. Such rituals are known among the Muslims as well and four of the Muslims respondents have indicated them.

A large number of Brahmas and the Gujarati Vaishnavas would take recourse to fire and light because the ghosts like dark places and are afraid of fire. Fire has special significance for the Brahmas and

is considered to be an agent of purification. The Parsees too hold the same belief and a good many Parsee adolescents have indicated the same remedy.

Showing sacred things to a ghost is another possible way of scaring it away. For the Christians it would be a cross or a rosary; for the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, it would be the knot of their sacred thread; for a Parsee his '*Kasti* and *Sadra*' (i.e. his sacred garments) or a piece of iron for some Parsees and Jains. The '*Kada*' (i.e. an iron bangle) would serve the same purpose in the case of a Sikh.

Incidentally, it may be observed that this listing of the adolescents' beliefs in this respect is obviously not meant to be a description of the various beliefs prevalent in their respective communities. Such was not the intention of the present exercise, although the students did set out to "see how much common religious influence was reflected in responses and how much personal imagination was added."

We will give two instances of such individualized answers. There are a few revealing answers which appear to have a religious tinge but are, in fact, the results of some logical thinking. Here we could be grateful to the young researchers for some skilful probing. One Neo-Buddhist respondent said that only Muslims and Christians would become ghosts. The student-researcher wondered if any political or religious issues were involved. Her probing, however, revealed a simple process of reasoning instead: the respondent held the view that the ghosts were skeletal in appearance. "Now, only people who were buried left back skeletons. And burials are practised among the Muslims and the Christians and not among the

Hindus." Ergo, only Muslims and Christians can become ghosts!

The other example is that of a Parsee respondent who associated ghosts with the sea. This is explained as an individualized extension of the central theme that ghosts arise out of the dead. But instead of thinking of the Parsee funeral well, this respondent had the Hindu burning '*ghats*' near the sea in mind.

In the end, it would not be out of place to record the students' impressions about the respondents' reactions to an investigation of this type. 'Ghosts' certainly is an unusual subject on which to question children. Fortunately, most of the students have noted their impressions which provide some interesting information. There was a reason why children between 11-14 years (but mostly between 12-14 years) were chosen. They would, it was hoped, be capable of giving expression to their ideas, images, impressions, beliefs etc., concerning ghosts and yet retain their spontaneity in giving responses. They would not feel the necessity of showing a spirit of bravado or "feel ashamed to express their genuine feelings (such as fear) about ghosts." In fact the student studying the Saraswat adolescents noticed that the 13-year-olds had a stronger interest in the subject of ghosts, while the

older children were a little condescending in their attitude.

On the whole, the respondents were very co-operative. The students themselves were somewhat apprehensive about the responsiveness of the children. But as one student put it, "her own experience was happily very different. The youngsters, on the whole, were lively, open and accessible." Similarly, the reactions of the children can best be summarized in the words of another student: "Various types of reactions were observed when the respondents were told what the topic was. Some were amused, some were surprised and a few were scared to talk about the ghosts and said that their parents won't like them to talk about ghosts. But quite a few showed their interest to talk about ghosts and a few were eager to know more about ghosts from the writer."

The questions which generally evoked ready response were about the appearance and description of ghosts. An exception was in the case of the Chitpavan children who were somewhat confused in describing a ghost. But questions on the habitat, diet, occupations and communication required a good bit of patience and probing. Most of the students have recorded that collecting data on the subject of the adolescents' image of ghosts was an interesting task.