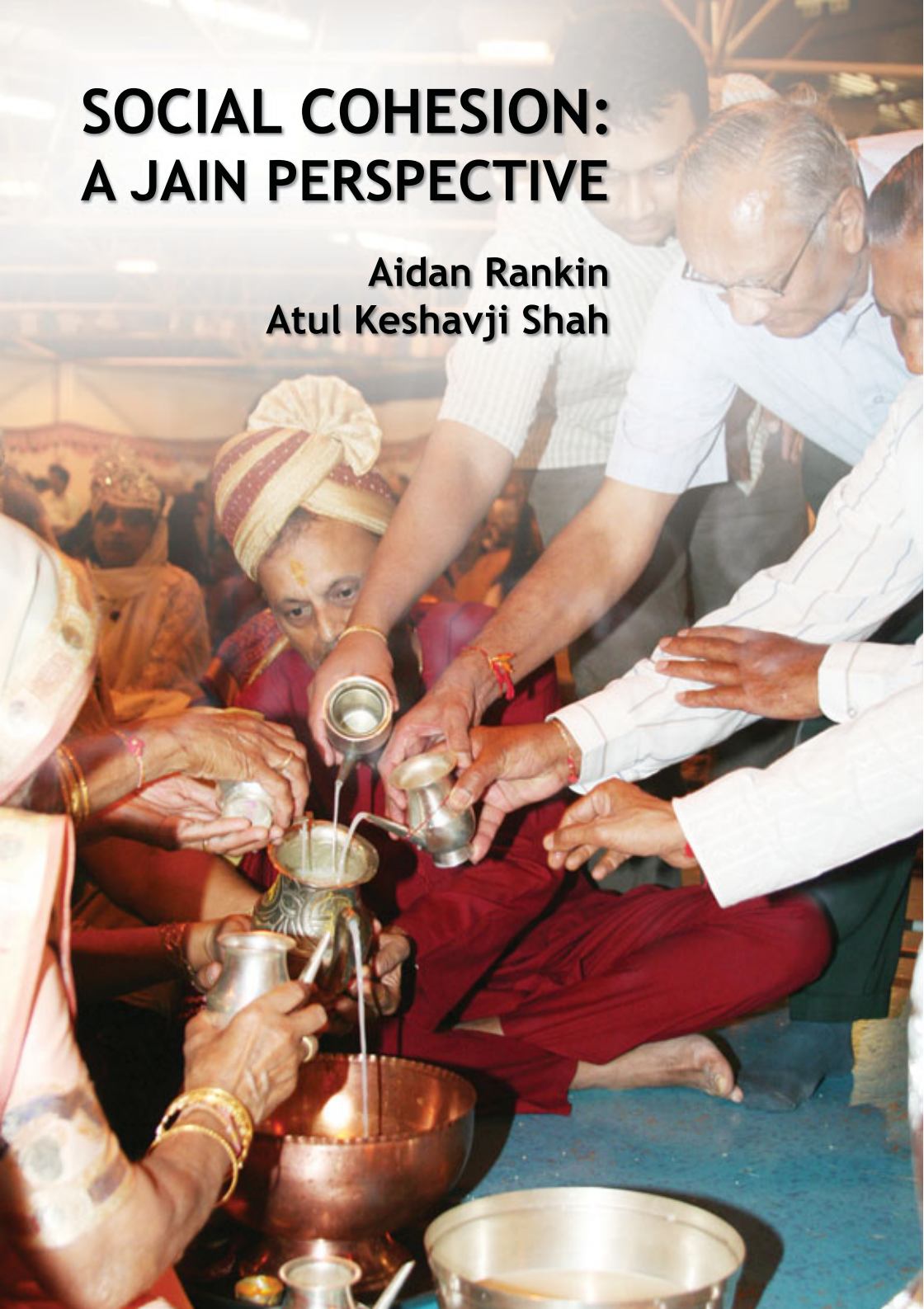


SOCIAL COHESION: A JAIN PERSPECTIVE

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Foreword

This paper provides a fascinating, sensitive and informed commentary on social cohesion from a Jain perspective – which is an inherently pluralist perspective, mindset and approach, respectful of others and committed to dialogue rather than conflict.

In these days when there are many forms of fundamentalism and extremist tendencies threaten to divide our communities, it is useful to hear the Jain voice of cohesion and unity. This is a voice and perspective heard less frequently than many others within Britain today, but soundly based on ancient wisdoms of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *aparigraha* (non-materialism), *dharma* (sustainability) and *anekant* (open-mindedness).

Each religion imparts important truths, or aspects of a larger truth, which it can share with and contribute to society. In the Jain tradition, I greatly value and respect the powerful concept of ‘many-pointedness’, or ‘many-sidedness’ that is an aspect of *anekant*. It offers a model to those of us who wish to work for reconciliation and find common ground between faiths, for the benefit of all. The quality of Jain philosophy far outweighs the number of Jains living in this country. I believe that Jainism contains many helpful insights that can assist us in working for a peaceful, pluralistic society based on the principle of unity-in-diversity.

Jains are quietly and positively helping to build a cohesive Britain based on tolerance and respect. They are living out principles that have stood the test of three millennia and have profound relevance for Britain – and the world – in the twenty-first century.

I hope that this paper will increase its readers’ awareness of and sensitivity to the Jain tradition, in all its beauty, intricacy and vitality. The authors have done us all a service in clarifying the distinctive and significant contribution Jainism can make to social cohesion, and to the major issues that face British society today.

LYNNE SEDGMORE CBE

Founder, Centre for Excellence in Leadership and Ordained Interfaith Minister
18th July 2008

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Introduction: The Relevance of Jainism

There was once a group of blind men who approached an elephant in the forest. One of them touched the animal's ears and perceived a flat, fan-like creature. Another man touched the leg and found a thick, round post and yet another finds the tail and thinks the elephant is like a long, hairy rope. Finally the owner of the elephant said to them: "All of you are correct, but you are also wrong because each of you has touched only one side of the elephant. Each of you is right from your individual standpoint, but the truth is something different altogether."

This is the Jain version of a well-known folk tale, of Indian origin, which is told in many ways by people of many faiths. Hindus, Sufi Muslims, Sikhs and Humanists all recite their own versions of 'the story of the blind men and the elephant'. For the Jains, the story itself – and the fact that there are many ways of telling it – illustrates the principle known as Anekant, which means Many-Sidedness or Multiple Viewpoints. For the idea that there are many paths towards the ultimate truth is central to the faith tradition of the Jains.

Over thousands of years, Jains have survived – and flourished – as a perpetual minority. Rather than forcing their ideas on others, they have preferred to exert a more subtle influence. They do not seek 'converts'. However they welcome anyone who seeks to live as non-violently as possible and to live in a sustainable way, reducing consumption in the interests of the planet as a whole. Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, was deeply influenced by Jainism although he remained a devout Hindu. The impact of Jain principles on his thinking shifted the emphasis of his Hindu philosophy. They helped him to place non-violence at the centre of his thinking, and to focus on social justice and the emancipation of women as integral parts of the anti-colonial movement rather than mere add-ons. Gandhi's non-violent Satyagraha or 'truth struggle' influenced Rev. Martin Luther King's civil rights movement among African-Americans, which has inspired many subsequent campaigns for peace and social justice.

For the Jains, non-violence is more than merely a form of outward behaviour. It is the principle that governs all mental processes, because violent thoughts lead logically to violent speech and deeds. Jain practice involves training the mind to avoid hateful thoughts. Being a Jain therefore means listening to other opinions and ideas, in order to enrich one's own.

One of the most important features of Jainism is its strong sense of commu-

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nity. Individual freedom, enterprise and initiative are all highly valued, and in the spiritual arena everyone is considered to be his or her own guru. Yet individuality and self-realisation are aided and enhanced by co-operation with others, rather than sterile competition as an end in itself. In India and everywhere they have settled, Jains are noted for their business success. They are equally drawn to the public and legal sectors, and to caring professions including medicine, teaching and social work.

In Jain thinking, there is no division between the two ‘worlds’ of commerce and public service. Their relationship is one of mutual support, for one cannot effectively exist without the other. Jains have a strong tradition of social entrepreneurship. Also, all Jains revere the ascetic who has renounced possessions, and this makes them put their wealth, power or good works in perspective, avoiding arrogance or self-righteousness. The ethics of Jainism stress the importance of the family, the equality of men and women, reverence and care for the old, love and nurturing of the young. Social solidarity is viewed in inclusive terms, encompassing the whole of society, not merely the Jain community. This is because Jainism is founded on a belief in cultural diversity the equally important search for shared values and truths beneath apparent differences.

Another aspect of Jainism has radical implications: the idea that social solidarity extends to the whole of the natural world. ‘Community’ is defined as the community of living beings, rather than humans alone. This reminds us that we are part of a much larger natural process, and that all the earth’s ecosystems are interconnected. Attempts to ‘conquer’ or ‘dominate’ the natural world are symptoms of misguided human arrogance – of which life-threatening pollution and climate change are logical outcomes. True knowledge means understanding that we are part of that natural world and so we must learn to co-operate with the rest of nature as well as our fellow men and women. Animal welfare has always been critically important to Jains, as has a larger ecological consciousness: the sense that humans must be constantly aware of the nature’s delicate balance and limit their activities accordingly. It could be argued that the idea of humankind’s ‘ecological footprint’ originated with the Jains.

Jainism is a very ancient faith, but over millennia it has proved itself rational, scientific and adaptable. There are three main ways in which it is profoundly relevant to the problems, and possibilities, associated with social cohesion in modern Britain:

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1. Jain ecological awareness mirrors our green concerns. It can help us, individually and collectively, make changes in our lives and priorities. It also reminds us that the environment is not an 'issue' that can be compartmentalised and dealt with separately. Instead, it affects our whole approach to economics, politics, the way society is organised and the choices we make in our own lives. Until we broaden the concept of social, we shall not be able to cohere effectively.
2. Jainism's strong sense of community and emphasis on co-operation can help us heal the wounds and divisions that have ravaged our society, despite – or perhaps as a by-product of – our prosperity. There is a rising awareness that the cult of self-fulfilment through consumerism has failed us, creating fragmentation and discontent, contributing to family and community breakdown as well as environmental damage. There is also a growing sense that we have over-emphasised personal gain, instant gratification and competition. Inevitably, this has been at the expense of our relationships with each other, for example relationships between family members, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. The breakdown in social relationships runs parallel to our disconnectedness from the rest of nature. It has produced a culture of self-centredness, which finds ultimate expression in violence. Community breakdown also contributes to low-level anti-social behaviour, neglect of children, the old and the mentally ill, and a climate in which extreme inequality of income and poor quality of life is tolerated.

Politicians and policy-makers are increasingly concerned about these aspects of contemporary society. They are looking for practical solutions, a more coherent framework of values to hold families and communities together. Jainism can provide both – not in a strident, partisan or confrontational way, which exacerbates tension, but by showing that strong principle is compatible with tolerance, and that strong family and community ties are compatible with personal freedom. It is a question of both/and rather than either/or.

Jains in Britain are a small but thriving community. They have been able to preserve their own culture, traditions and beliefs, and at the same time fully participate and integrate in modern Britain. This success in both integration and conserving their culture is the product of many generations of experience. A perpetual minority in India, they escaped absorption into the larger Hindu community, whilst maintaining friendly relations and cultural exchanges with Hindus. Jains have also enjoyed positive relations with Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. One of India's

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Mughal rulers, Akbar, was persuaded by a Jain monk to renounce hunting and release captive birds. Jain communities have lived harmoniously with people of all faiths and none in all the countries to which they have emigrated. They have long experience of living in multi-cultural societies, and adapting to the challenges they present – experience which they can share with others, perhaps other minority communities in particular.

In today's multi-faith Britain, faith itself has become a potent political and social force. To a large extent, it has been a force for good, countering the trends towards fragmentation and selfishness, promoting community solidarity, encouraging co-operation and self-help. Yet there is also a powerful threat of religious extremism, which at its worst gives rise to violence and terrorism. The causes of religious extremism are many and complex. They include the isolation of communities from each other, continuing racism, unemployment and social exclusion, the conflict between conservative forms of religion and an apparently 'permissive' society.

Religious extremism is often fuelled by events and struggles abroad, which reinforce a sense of alienation from mainstream society. As well as directly threatening lives, it threatens community relations, playing into the hands of racists. Indeed religious extremists and racists represent two sides of the same coin. Both thrive amid social deprivation and both are equally opposed to integration and good relations between faiths. But we must remember that those who are influenced by extremist propaganda are themselves victims, even when they are inspired to plan and commit outrages.

Extremists – of whatever religion or ideology – thrive on ignorance and distrust between communities that have ceased to interact. With its doctrine and practice of Multiple Viewpoints, Jainism has an in-built inoculation against extremism. For a Jain, the more dogmatic the expression of certainty, the further it must be from the truth. Jain practice keeps in mind the idea that we are all travelling from different directions towards the same truth, which because of our human limitations we are unlikely to reach in one lifetime. Understanding of each other's journeys is viewed as a spiritual as well as a social good, and so Jains practised 'inter-faith dialogue' centuries before the phrase was invented.

3. Jain teachings of reconciliation and understanding between faiths can give a spiritual underpinning to the struggle against extremism – which is defined in Jain terms as *Ekant*, or One-Sidedness. Jain ideas, and the contributions of individual Jains, provide a positive alternative for policy makers to the cruder (yet sadly more conventional) approach of

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‘either you are with us or against us’. This is inherently limiting and has too often inspired repressive measures and reinforced the grievances of extremists, both imagined and real. The gentle but persuasive philosophy of the Jains cuts through the adversarial structures and ways of thinking that constrain us, personally and politically. Without having to ‘become’ Jains, we can learn to be more like the owner of the elephant in the folk tale. We can realise that the truth is not our narrow certainties, but ‘something different altogether’.

Such understanding points us towards forms of social cohesion appropriate to a multi-cultural, multi-faith society. With that in mind, we explore in this paper issues of cohesion from a Jain standpoint. The ideas we present are our own, but they derive from or are inspired by the Jain tradition. We believe that this tradition, and the way of thinking that goes with it, has much to offer to the wider society.

1. What is Jainism?

One of the world's oldest religions, Jainism, has as its primary philosophy 'Ahimsa' or 'reverence for all living beings'. Its latest prophet (*Tirthankara*), Mahavira, was born in 599 BC in North East India. He was the 24th in the line of prophets and thus Jainism is a *dharma* of unique antiquity. It has had a major influence on the spread of non-violent values and practices in the entire history of India. *Tirthankara* means 'ford-maker' or 'path-finder', one who points the way to enlightenment. *Dharma* signifies both the underlying law of the universe and the individual's path towards the truth. The idea of cosmic balance includes ecological sustainability.

Among the best known Jain scriptures are the *Acharanga Sutra* (Book of Good Conduct) and the *Tattvartha Sutra* (That Which Is). These works are presented in the crisp style of the Indian *sutra* tradition, as verses of philosophical import that act as points of reference for those who seek guidance in their journey towards truth. The *Acharanga* is one of eleven *angas* or 'limbs', which together form the 'body' of Jain ideas. The *Angas* were composed by learned followers of Mahavira in the centuries after his death. The *Acharanga* is the limb that refers to conduct (*achara*) and sets out explicitly the twin principles of non-violence and interconnectedness:

That which you consider worth destroying is (like) yourself.

That which you consider worth disciplining is (like) yourself.

That which you consider worth subjugating is (like) yourself.

That which you consider worth killing is (like) yourself.

The result of actions by you has to be borne by you, so do not destroy anything.

The *Acharanga* is regarded as the oldest written portion of the Jain canon, dated as far back as the fourth century BCE. The *Tattvartha* was composed somewhat later, in the second century CE, by the scholar and seer Umasvati. It presents in three hundred and fifty verses the Jain understanding of the nature of reality, and in particular the faith's unique approach to karma and liberation, which are referred to below.

Britain today has a population of 35,000 Jains who have been brought up in this timeless living tradition. They are a highly educated, resourceful, well assimilated and cohesive community who enrich national life through their ethics, conduct, wisdom and character. In India, the Jains have a huge track record of community cohesion and social uplift over thousands of years. They

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have always been a minority, but have assimilated and integrated very well throughout history. We may say that cohesion is a genetic trait of Jains. Unfortunately, very little is known about this community and its values. In writing this paper, we are drawing upon this vast ocean of wisdom and experience and translating the message to modern day Britain.

The core philosophy of Ahimsa, which literally means non-violence, or abstinence from harm, encourages respect for all living beings – irrespective of caste or creed, and more importantly, species. For them, human diversity is rooted in bio-diversity, and there is no difference between the two – one is an extension of the other. Thus difference is normal, difference is not to be feared, but instead loved and respected. Each soul (*atman*) is unique and equally worthy of dignity and respect. As a result, Jains have been practicing vegetarians for thousands of years and have a long track record of peaceful living and conduct. Women are accorded equal respect and status. Jain respect for humans has led them not only to assimilate with people from different backgrounds and beliefs, but also often to provide much needed leadership and vision to foster community cohesion.

Parasparopagraho Jivanam is a Jain maxim that means that all living beings are inter-dependent. Hence we are really not individuals but indivisibles, people who are inter-connected to one another and all life forms. All too often, this is forgotten and even in our practical actions, we act as if our actions have no impact on others. This leads to irresponsibility and recklessness. Instead, we need to encourage a culture of responsibility which recognises mutuality and enables people to see and understand the impact of their actions on others. Jains have always believed that endowed with superior intelligence and consciousness, the human being has the highest sense of responsibility and accountability to the planet. Arrogance and egoism should be replaced by humility and awe.

Other core values of Jain philosophy are *Aparigraha* (non-materialism), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Anekant* (respect for alternative viewpoints), *Brahmacharya* (restraint of the senses), *Satya* (truth and integrity), *Kshama* (forgiveness) and *Saiyam* (self-discipline). The focus is on the combination of the three jewels – right knowledge, right vision and right conduct – to enable the soul to attain liberation and enlightenment. These values empower them to attain this ultimate goal.

Aparigraha literally means ‘non-possessiveness’. Although we may need material objects to live, we need not become possessive about our wealth and

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objects. Instead, we should live simply and in a detached way, ensuring that our energies are focused on building our own inner purity and spirit and experiencing inner fulfilment rather than the temporary pleasures which come from material possessions. Society needs to understand the limits of materialism and a culture of consumerism and greed. Materialism has a tendency to lead to selfishness and a 'Me, I, Mine' culture - which has no space for others, let alone any respect for their beliefs and viewpoints. Greed is a type of violence which leads to exploitation and deprives others of their rights to self-fulfilment. This is one of the root causes of a lack of community cohesion today.

Anekant is a scientific analysis of the many-sidedness of truth and its multiple dimensions and perspectives. It demonstrates that truth is relative to the perspective of the seer and so has a subjective character and is difficult to articulate objectively. It rejects absolutism and fundamentalism. Thus we should respect alternative viewpoints even when we disagree with them. This mindset cultivates an attitude of tolerance, openness and co-operation, which helps to build bridges rather than walls – cohesion rather than conflict.

Brahmacharya explains that indulgence in sensual pleasures leads to a loss of self-control akin to permanent intoxication. Senses are there to allow us to experience and connect, but balance in everything is key. If humans learn to live with restraint and understand the nature and role of the senses, then we can attain true inner freedom. Otherwise, instead of becoming a master of one's senses, one remains a slave to them and will never experience lasting freedom.

Kshama encourages the active giving and seeking of forgiveness from all living beings. It accepts that none of us is infallible and giving and receiving forgiveness enables us to clear our conscience and free ourselves from anger and blame toward others. It builds a positive outlook which encourages us to seek pathways and solutions at all times to build peaceful co-existence on planet Earth.

Satya forges a path of living with integrity where our conduct is synonymous with our words and thoughts. Truth should not merely be in words but implemented in lived reality. Honesty and sincerity are the practical manifestations of Satya and crime or theft of any kind is abhorred and prohibited. Satya helps us build a just society and encourages its citizens to abide by the laws.

Saiyam teaches us that self-discipline is the key to lasting freedom and happiness. In contrast to many modern notions of 'freedom', where there is a

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tendency for schools and parents not to discipline children, discipline is central to the building of character. Freedom to do what one wants when one wants to leads to bondage rather than liberation. It makes one seek external pleasures which never fulfil completely, and make one bonded to such objects and escapism. Unfortunately the word ‘discipline’ is too often confused with authoritarianism and harshness. But true discipline is the opposite, because it is based on nurturing and respect. It provides the framework of stability and trust in which self-discipline can be cultivated from within. Discipline, and self-discipline above all, helps sustain a viable community and society. Alcohol, drugs and other intoxicants reduce discipline and control of human actions and are actively discouraged. If only pubs and bars lie at the heart of an urban community, for example, and alcohol is their only real social ingredient, then there will be weak cohesion at best. A wider range of social activities, clubs and sports facilities are therefore vital ingredients of social cohesion and social solidarity. Their importance should never be underestimated by policy-makers. Another important aspect of Jain teaching is the concept of *karma*. As in other traditions of Indian origin, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, karma is the cosmic law of cause and effect, by which every action has consequences, some obvious, others more subtle. This does not merely apply to human acts, but to every action in the universe, direct or indirect, conscious or otherwise. Karma reminds us of the continuity between generations, evolutionary levels and different forms of life. In short, it is the connecting principle of the universe, by which everyone – and everything – is bound together.

The word karma has become well-known in western culture, but it is widely misunderstood and viewed with fascination or fear. Karma is often wrongly conflated with fatalism and destiny. This is at best a simplification, and it is especially mistaken when applied to the Jain view of karma. Jainism’s starting point is the individual conscience and awareness of karma enables us to make rational decisions and ethical choices. In Jainism, there are two broad categories of karma affecting the individual – negative and positive. Negative karma is accumulated through selfish, avaricious or violent actions which harm others (human or non-human) and so do injury to life, including one’s own. When one accumulates negative karma, one’s soul is held to be weighed down or imprisoned. This is because it limits our consciousness. It comes between us and our true selves because it makes us confuse underlying reality with trivial ambitions and transient material concerns. Negative karma includes malign thoughts and emotions, such as greed, anger and prejudice, which are counted as forms of violence. It is a vicious cycle of unreason which takes us out of harmony with our fellow humans, with the rest of nature and with our inner selves.

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Positive karma, by contrast, is accumulated through benign, compassionate thoughts and actions, concern for others, by using one's ability and resources for the common good. It arises from awareness that all life is connected and that every decision we make has consequences, especially for future generations. Positive karma can counteract the effects of negative karma and, Jains believe, point the way towards spiritual liberation. This liberation (which few completely achieve but all are encouraged to work towards) is freedom from all karmic influences and the attainment of pure consciousness as karmic bonds fall away. Liberation is true independence, true self-realisation. This is because the true self and the soul are one and the same. Liberation, or *Moksha*, is achieved through recognising the interdependence of all life and acting accordingly. Materialism and egoism, by contrast, create an illusion of "personal autonomy" or "empowerment" but are really a form of slavery. They destroy the true self and they do injury to others.

This discussion of karma might seem to represent the purely philosophical and speculative aspects of Jainism. However karma translates directly into practical experience because of the framework for living it provides. It makes us aware of the importance of careful action, and equally careful examination of our motives, so that we avoid doing harm to others even when we think we are doing them good. Karma reminds us of the continuity between past, present and future, of our responsibility to conserve resources and live at peace with others, not just our fellow humans. It requires us to not only minimise harm, but to use our intelligence in creative and compassionate ways. Above all, karma expresses our sense that we are a social animal with obligations to others, rather than an isolated unit of production and consumption. This sense inspires and underpins all forms of social cohesion.

British society has never been monochrome or homogenous in character. But today it is unquestionably more varied than previously, as diverse customs, faiths and ways of life encounter each other, interact and jostle for influence. The benefits of this change have been immense, and the successes more than compensate for any problems that have arisen. However there is also a quest – within all communities – for the elusive "shared values" that bind us together, a search for new points of reference to make sense of our lives.

It is here, perhaps, that the Jain tradition has most to contribute. *Anekant*, the concept of many-sidedness, is well suited to the demands of a multicultural society, because it asks us to recognise and respond to other viewpoints, seeing them as part of a larger reality than our own. Jainism is primarily concerned with balance – between the individual and society, rights and duties, human

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intelligence and the rhythms of nature. The Jain community does not seek “converts”, for that would be cultural arrogance of the worst kind. Yet the principles of careful action and social responsibility can still be peacefully imparted. In a society seeking cohesion, they strike a powerful chord.

2. Jainism and Social Cohesion

The Jain expression *Parasparopagraho Jivanam* is most literally rendered in English as "all life is interconnected". Mahavira taught that "Non-violence to all living beings is kindness to oneself" and conversely "You are that which you intend to hit, injure, insult, torment, persecute, torture, enslave or kill". These teachings are generally cited, quite rightly, as proof of the Jains' respect for nature and ecological consciousness. All forms of life, even (to human eyes) the most primitive or basic, have intrinsic value. They depend on each other, both for their own survival and the ecological balance on which all of life depends. Each life form is unique and irreplaceable, but at the same time there is continuity between them. In Jainism, as in the science of ecology, there is a web of life.

These "green" principles at the heart of Jain thinking translate into relationships between human beings. Or, to put it better, they affect human relationships because humanity is part of the web of life, rather than above or outside it, as we sometimes arrogantly assume. Our attitudes and behaviour towards "the rest" of nature should govern our attitudes and behaviour towards fellow humans. Thus the Jain idea of social cohesion is really a form of human ecology.

In this context, Mahavira's words remind us of two important social concepts. One is the uniqueness and value of every human being. The other is the need for humans to co-operate with each other to survive and fulfil their potential. Today, these ideas are too often presented as if they are in opposition to each other. Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher for instance, famously asserted that "there is no such thing as society" but "only individuals and their families". At the other extreme, "society" can be equated with a bureaucratic and overbearing state which diminishes the individual's dignity.

Both these positions are wrong because they are one-sided. Extreme individualism in practice degrades the individual, reducing him or her to a mere economic unit or consumer. It promotes a mentality of selfishness, which is the opposite of genuine self-interest, and callousness towards fellow citizens – and, by extension, the environment and the planet. The ideology of individualism underpins the breakdown of families and communities, the rise of gross inequality and distrust between different sections of the community. At its worst, it creates a climate in which violence appears as a legitimate "option" and neglect or ill-treatment of children and the old becomes acceptable. This

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version of individual does not make us freer, but merely less secure, because it ignores the human impulse towards co-operation, which is both socially and spiritually inspired.

Equally, the bureaucratic view of society creates an attitude of passivity and dependence, without properly addressing the inequalities by which society is disfigured. If anything, the bureaucratic collectivist approach increases inequality, because it robs people of the capacity to control their own lives and take responsibility for those around them. Although well-meaning, this form of collectivism adopts a one-size-fits-all mentality rather than the more difficult task of accepting and working with human diversity. Usually, that mentality includes an inflexible, “target-driven” view of social or environmental problems, remote from real people and real communities. This is the mirror image of narrow individualism, undermining the sense of community and belonging on which social cohesion is based and the relationships of trust which enable it to work in practice.

It follows that these two approaches to society, individualist and collectivist, are not really opposed to each other but have much in common. Both take an imbalanced view of the relationship between the individual and the community. Both are based on mechanistic and materialistic conceptions of “progress”. The only things that “matter” are those which can be measured and quantified, ignoring the ties of friendship, affection and commitment that give life its meaning.

Social policy has veered uneasily between the two poles of narrowly defined individualism and bureaucratically enforced collectivism. For essentially the same reasons, both have failed. What is needed instead is a recognition that the individual and society matter equally and are continuous with each other rather than separate. The success of one is impossible without the stability of the other. Equally, there is more to individual fulfilment and social success than the purely material, including continuous economic growth as an end itself. For the emphasis on material progress, divorced from other areas of life, has proved to be socially harmful and divisive.

Material security, indeed prosperity, is important for our society’s survival, but only when balanced with what can be broadly interpreted as spiritual. This word is often associated with organised faith, but it encompasses far more and is by no means confined to those who have religious beliefs. The spiritual dimension includes a wide range of human activities that cannot be described in solely materialistic terms. Examples include: humanitarian activities and

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charitable giving, ethical enterprise, public service (paid and unpaid), neighbourliness and sense of community, the protection of the environment, wildlife and animal welfare, family life and networks of friendship. These connect all areas of human life together. They are parts of the human ecosystem on which social cohesion is based. Jainism is far from unique in its emphasis on the balance between individual and society, between the material and spiritual dimensions of life. Such ideas are, for example, staples of Jewish, Christian and Islamic thought and equally important to most forms of secular humanism. Yet the Jain dharma is founded on the idea of balance, with balance between humanity and the planet as its starting point. Jainism is a philosophy of both/and in place of either/or. It regards diversity, including diversity of opinions, as a strength and recognises that many of the “choices” we are currently asked to make – between individual and society, for example, or between human and environmental well-being – are illusory or false. Jainism promotes personal restraint, in the interests of compassion for all life (including one’s own) and an understanding that all life is intimately connected. The Jain idea of karma reminds us powerfully of our inheritance and our obligations to those not yet born.

There are, therefore, good reasons why Jain perspectives relate so well to and can enhance the present public debate about social cohesion. Jains do not evangelise, seek “converts” or attempt to impose their ideas, and so others can freely draw from Jain ideas and find their own faith or philosophy of life enriched by the process.

From a Jain standpoint, the causes of social breakdown are complex and intricate, and so must be addressed with delicacy and care. But at another level, they are straightforward and easily explicable. If we think of society as an ecosystem, we can also think of social problems as forms of ecological imbalance. And just as ecological imbalance – most of it human induced – threatens species and habitats, poisons the atmosphere or changes the climate, social imbalance disrupts the rhythms of human life. Violence, in its various forms, is a product of such disruption. It is a sign that the human ecosystem is out of balance, as a result of warped priorities and the breakdown of relationships of trust. Increasing violence has a profound influence on us all, even if it appears ‘only’ to affect certain areas, communities and age groups. The fear it generates is debilitating and makes society far less cohesive. But from the Jain perspective, it challenges us all, as individuals, to question our values and actions. It challenges the complacent assumptions many of us have about our own virtue and realise that too often we pay lip service to compassion, social justice and inclusion, but remain indifferent in practice.

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This does not imply that violence is a product of the social environment alone and so violent criminals can be absolved. On the contrary, it is central to Jain teachings that the individual is responsible for his or her actions, and that violence is never permissible. However we are also responsible for each other and so violent behaviour is not something “other” or separate from us, but is connected to many of the decisions we make and most of the problems we gloss over.

Violent behaviour – such as the knife and gun crime that blight some urban communities – is now widely perceived as part of a deeper social malaise. It is a symptom, perhaps the most visible symptom, of a much larger problem requiring many-sided solutions. The Jain definition of violence goes well beyond such acts. A violent society is one in which relationships of dominance take precedence over relationships of co-operation. Exploitation and poverty in the midst of plenty are forms of violence. The competitive spirit becomes violent when it ceases to be a vehicle for initiative and responsibility, and is instead an excuse for callousness. A society that neglects its children or allows its old people to die alone is also a violent society. Unsustainable consumption is a form of violence – against the rest of nature and against the other human beings, both globally and locally.

Violence, according to Jain ethics, means more than aggressive or merely callous behaviour. It includes indifference to others and neglect of one’s own mind and spirit. Violence is the void where compassion should exist. Its subtler politer guises are in many ways more dangerous than its overt forms.

We understand increasingly that different types of violent crime are linked. For example, many who are convicted of violent crimes as adults have histories that begin with bullying or cruelty to animals. Many were victims of abuse themselves or grew up in homes where domestic violence occurred. Similarly, we know that large numbers of people emerge from material poverty to become model citizens. Others who appear privileged become violent or exploitative. Of the former, many have come from loving and cohesive homes or supportive communities. Of the latter, many will have experienced emotional abuse or neglect, or other forms of psychological violence from which wealth offers no protection.

The sense that violence begets violence is an aspect of karma, the law of cause and effect. There is a continuum between petty crime and major offences. There is the same continuum between social injustice and more overt violence, ethical callousness and acts of cruelty. Yet because we are at once rational and

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sensitive beings, we have the capacity to break these patterns of violence, to be creative rather than destructive, inclusive rather than self-centred.

In our society at present, we have allowed the over-valuing of the material and the superficial, the cult of celebrity and being ‘famous for being famous’. These trends encourage indifference to the needs of others and a corresponding failure to understand one’s own needs. Over-valuing of independence and personal autonomy leads us to neglect interdependence – the essence of social cohesion. The result is not independence and autonomy at all, but an epidemic of loneliness, an increasingly atomised society in which the support networks offered by families and neighbourhoods have become fragmented. Phenomena such as binge drinking and drug abuse – forms of violence against the self – reflect a pervasive spiritual hunger, a sense of emptiness because instant gratification is not enough.

The Jain tradition is keenly aware that our treatment of the environment is reflected in our treatment of fellow human beings (and vice versa). From this it follows that the division between “environmental” and “social” issues is artificial. Ultimately, they are one and the same. There is an intimate link between the aspects of social breakdown that threaten us, collectively and individually, and our careless attitude towards the natural world, in which we place short-term “growth” before long-term stability and survival.

A sustainable social policy is impossible without a parallel commitment to ecological sustainability. Both require essentially the same change of consciousness and shift of priorities. In this, Jain philosophy can provide a useful point of reference. For it has always recognised that we achieve the most when we learn to live within limits, and gain the most control over our own lives when we exercise restraint.

Much of the debate about social cohesion is negative in nature. This is necessarily so, because the growing sense of dislocation is a matter of concern to policy makers – still more so to citizens coming to terms with the changes taking place around them. At the same time, there are many positive aspects of social change, which we should celebrate and build upon. Increasing equality and balance between women and men has the potential to open up new perspectives, changing the way we live, work and think. Racism remains a serious obstacle to cohesion, yet at the same time racial tolerance has become the norm as the prejudice of previous generations is dismantled.

We live in a society in which many cultures play a part, both distinctively and

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working together. Political discussion has focused on negative factors, such as racial tension, pressure on housing and schools and illegal immigration. These are serious issues, for social cohesion especially, but the cross-fertilisation of cultures has enriched many areas of our life, from food to music, the art gallery to the sports field. This is surely social cohesion in practice. Likewise, the encounter between faiths is leading to an exchange of ideas from which all faith communities are gaining new insight. This is matched by the growing dialogue between religion and science. Attitudes towards disability are undergoing a quiet revolution, unlocking the potential of millions of men, women and children, acknowledging their equal value and distinctive contribution.

Growing environmental consciousness is also challenging the conventionally held assumptions about progress and growth, replacing them with a more holistic view of humanity within nature and co-operation between human beings. We realise that animals have feelings and experiences as complex as our own and that there is no radical separation between “them” and “us”. This insight alone is revolutionary, for it takes the idea of inclusion beyond the human ghetto and impacts on diet, farming, scientific research and many of the staples of life.

In all these areas, much remains to be achieved, but such developments are a source of creativity and inspiration, as well as values around which society can cohere. They are also in keeping with the principles of equality, tolerance, diversity and careful action that Jains have thought about and practiced for millennia. Government can play a vital role in working for social cohesion, but it is more than a series of centrally-imposed programmes. It is the way we relate to our fellow men and women – at work, at school, in our communities, and in our friendships and family lives. Restoring balance is a process of reconnecting broken strands of the web that holds society’s disparate parts together. This offers a chance for the Jain community and its friends to play a lasting and transformative role.

3. Issues and Solutions

Jainism has often been portrayed as an other-worldly faith tradition, concerned with withdrawal from organised society. This is partly because of the highly visible asceticism of Jain monks and nuns – some of whom, famously, wear strips of cloth over their mouths and sweep the ground in front of them, to avoid injuring the tiniest forms of life. The Jain emphasis on the individual, and his or her personal spiritual development, is also sometimes equated with lack of social engagement. Both these interpretations of Jainism are, however, quite false. The men and women who have taken ascetic vows have withdrawn from all relationships of economic or physical power. But their lives also serve an educational purpose – to remind us all that there are values higher than material ambition, and that the highest of these values is respect for life. Jains also draw no distinction between spiritual endeavour, in the personal or private sphere, and activities which enrich or improve society.

Thus, although Jainism explicitly rejects material attachment as an end in itself, it is also a philosophy of social engagement. This explains in part why so many Jains have contributed to society as teachers, doctors and businesspeople, including social entrepreneurs. They tend to be modest about their faith and its tenets, preferring subtle or indirect to overt influence and realising that social issues cannot be reduced to simplistic formulae or political slogans. Yet the Jain philosophy is in many respects well-suited to the problems and complexities of a diverse modern society such as the United Kingdom today. In particular, it contains teachings and practices which relate closely to issues of social and community cohesion.

With this in mind, we have here attempted to address several key questions of social cohesion from a standpoint rooted in Jain principles. The list is by no means exhaustive, and aims to be accessible to all, regardless of faith, background or position on the political spectrum. It invites the reader to think, reflect and act with care.

i Home and Family Life

One of the distinctive features of Indian culture is the nature of family. The word used is '*kutumb*' which means the extended relatives such as uncles, aunties, cousins, nephews – all comprise part of one family and must be invited

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to all important occasions. This is why the guest list at Indian weddings often numbers in the hundreds – the number of close family members can easily be that large. The marriage ceremony and vows celebrate the importance of family and the role of parents in upholding its values and keeping its unity. At times of difficulty, the family rallies around to support one another. Sharing is the essence of family – in both pain and success. It is also true that ‘kutumb’ extends to nature and animals – in farming families, the animals are cared for as if they were a part of the family. This practical inclusiveness of nature promotes humility, reverence and respect for one and all.

Whilst the state cannot run people’s personal lives, it can promote good ways of living through art, education and media. In particular, tolerance and mutuality if taught and expressed as a key family value would help reduce the large number of family break-ups in this country. There is clear evidence that break-ups are very costly – emotionally, spiritually, physically and financially, for both families and the state. Worse is the long-term impact on children and their security, health and well-being. All too often, this larger span of life and long-term nature of families is not understood and the culture often allows intolerance and selfishness. Family cohesion is the bedrock of social cohesion. That is why a lot of resources need to be devoted to this area if we are to build cohesive communities. Stories about families, tolerance and mutuality can be discussed in the classroom from an early age. Theatre and drama could explore issues associated with family and relationships. For teenagers, an explanation of the significance of family break-up and the rationale of tolerance and understanding in times of disagreement can help towards developing a commitment to marriage and sound families.

Families naturally extend into communities. Involvement in the community is a part of growing up in Jain culture. Parents get involved in community activities and children automatically join in, thereby experiencing the community spirit directly and participating in its nurturing. Not all these events have a pure religious dimension – often they are social and cultural e.g. festival celebration, children’s variety shows, cooking classes and demonstrations, sports competitions, adventure trips and holidays, trips and outings. All these serve to bind families and the community, helping people to see the benefits of connectedness and sharing. For children and teenagers, the community helps create natural role models and support networks, providing priceless mentoring. There is no exclusion of people of any kind from these activities – whether they are single parents, rich or poor, disabled or different in any way. Participation is open to one and all.

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Encouraging families to get involved in local community activities is a good way of promoting cohesion. The benefits of involvement could be explained and the spirit of volunteering could be nurtured from an early age. Mutuality would then be directly experienced. If gatherings are along non-religious lines, then there would be no discrimination based on belief and people would see the benefits of one another and the non-exclusivity of any faith. A shared spirit of cohesiveness could be nurtured in this way.

We also recommend:

- Encourage employers to take a broader view of skills and experiences to include cultural diversity and homemaking – this would be of help to parents, particularly mothers, who wished to return to work, full-time or part-time, when their children are older.
- Joint or extended families provide care and respect for elderly, which can never be replicated by institutional care. Grandchildren learn a lot from grandparents living together or nearby and this provides support and stability to the young and growing family.
- Broadening of cultural understanding of ‘family’ to include friendship networks, neighbours, work colleagues, local community.
- Restoration of married couples’ tax allowance (this would apply to people in civil partnerships as well) Extension of ‘child care’ tax credits to couples where one parent (mother or father) chooses to stay at home.

ii Rights and Responsibilities

Rights and responsibilities tend to be contrasted with each other, or viewed as opposite poles. Instead, they should be viewed as complementary principles which support, or better still are part of, each other. The emergence of a rights-based culture marked a radical progression from a society based purely on obligation, in which some were over-privileged and others unable to rise to their potential. Yet the problems we face today – not least the ecological problems – require us to move towards a rights and responsibilities-based culture.

Our rights depend on, and reinforce, our responsibilities to be active citizens, rather than apathetic or self-absorbed, and to regain control over our lives so that, individually and collectively, we minimise harm to others.

The Jain tradition has always championed individual rights, as well as equality

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between men and women, majority and minority populations. But it sees the freedom and dignity of the human person as indistinguishable from his or her connection to all other humans, and all beings. There is also a strong duty of cosmic responsibility and accountability accorded to humans- - their intelligence has been endowed so that they act with the highest sense of care and compassion. Far from being mystical, as it might sound, this translates into the simple principles of social solidarity, respect for the rights of others and acknowledgement of responsibilities towards fellow men, women and children – and the environment that supports all life.

This means that we need to learn to think about rights in a new way, that is holistic rather than specific, in which we draw no distinctions between (for example) civil liberties for humans and cruelty-free farming methods, freedom from discrimination and the protection of ecosystems and habitats. A good starting point would be a Declaration of Human Responsibilities to balance, rather than counteract, our codified human rights.

Paper declarations are worth little without a cultural shift, a change in the way we think, so that we place rights in a broader context and cease to equate compromise with weakness or simple assertiveness with strength. Here the Jain concept of ‘Careful Action’ can help us. Instead of merely demanding the ‘right to choose’ an action, we need to ask questions of ourselves and each other about that action:

- What effect will it have on us?
- What effect will it have on others?
- What effect will it have on society?
- What effect will it have on the planet?
- What effect will it have a generation or more from now?

Such questions give us a broader view of ourselves and our society. Simultaneously they affirm our individual liberties and the connections with others that sustain us and give our lives meaning.

- A Declaration of Human Responsibilities, including responsibility for animal welfare and the environment. Here, Jain texts such as the *Acharanga Sutra* can provide valuable guidance.
- A cultural shift from narrow individualism to co-operation – including co-operation with the rest of nature.
- ‘Principle of Careful Action’ to be built into all policy-making.

iii Business and Workplace Ethics

Employment is a major part of the working life of every adult. At present, it appears as if it is separate from social and community life – a job as it were for the purpose of earning money to help pay the bills and go on holiday. All too often, meaning has been stripped off and passion is discouraged. Surveys have shown that employees are expected to switch values and identities when they go to work in order to ‘fit in’ and follow the bosses’ orders.

This is wrong. It will not lead to social cohesion. Purpose and passion have to be infused into work for people to experience real joy and fulfilment. This in turn binds the workforce helping to build a cohesive Britain. Citizens need to be encouraged to find their strengths and given advice that would help them align their careers to their skills and passions.

Jains have always believed that purpose in life should be beyond the material. Death puts paid to all material possessions, so why not live as if one is preparing for the after-life, taking good karma and deeds with them? Work is necessary but should not be divorced from one’s ethics and values and there are many values which are universal.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is aimed at businesses participating in their communities and encouraging employees to get involved. It is not a legal requirement, but a best-practice initiative among corporations. This is a good development which can also help employees discover a sense of purpose and civic responsibility in their work. However, all too often it is subsumed under the corporate drive for greater profits and growth.

Many small and medium-sized companies remain unaware of the opportunities and benefits that CSR can offer. As a result, it too often becomes a marginal and cosmetic exercise rather than a genuine approach to social cohesion. Jains are very strong in this sector and have been a very positive force in encouraging ethical enterprise and socially responsible ways of business. They could become a vital resource for demonstrating how such communities can be nurtured and social capital cultivated. Business co-operatives should be encouraged and models of co-operative working should be developed, promoted and supported.

Social entrepreneurship has always been an important part of Jain business life. One well-known example of a Jain social entrepreneur is the late Meghji Pethraj Shah. In 1919, aged 15, he arrived in Kenya (the under colonial rule) as

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part of a migration which continued until the middle of the twentieth century. Over the following thirty-five years, he created a business group involved in distribution, manufacturing and finance. From his retirement in 1954 until his death ten years later, Meghji Pethraj Shah devoted much of his time, money and energy to charitable activities, building schools, colleges and hospitals in India and Kenya. Meghraj is still a thriving financial services group operating in several countries including the UK. In Britain, Jains are also integrating their ecological and social concerns with their entrepreneurial skills. In London, for example, a young couple, Nishma and Mahersh Shah, have founded a catering service called Shambhu's, which provides and publicises healthy and tasty international vegan cooking that leaves a low ecological footprint. They, and other Jains, support animal sanctuaries in the UK, notably Hugletts Wood Farm in East Sussex, which operates on the principle of 'compassion for all life'. Jain temples are being encouraged to collect donations for Hugletts and similar causes under the principle of *Jiva Daya*. In India, there is a long-established tradition of Jain *panjrapura* (animal sanctuaries) funded by social entrepreneurs. It appears that this tradition is starting to take root in the UK.

Businesses need to unpick the notion of profit and unadulterated greed and temper it with balance and sufficiency. This is the only way that they can play a part in social integration and cohesion. They need to embrace non-material and non-monetary values as part of their core mission and to operate by these principles. Accounts need to incorporate the social, environmental and the financial performance of an enterprise – whether or not all aspects are quantifiable.

Interdependence and inter-connectedness of business with society and nature must be fully understood and appreciated by employees and directors. Education and training needs to include these dimensions and leaders should set an example by ensuring that they practice what they preach and act to preserve the planet and its societies.

The Jain complex at Oshwal Centre, Potters Bar, North London is multi-dimensional – not only is it a community and spiritual space, but it is also a major networking hub where social capital is nurtured and enhanced. Government policy should be targeted at supporting such community initiatives and should understand their multi-dimensional character. Such centres can help in business and employment initiatives, but also in areas such as health education, youth training, cultural understanding and social cohesion. We need to encourage business ethics and co-operative ways of working.

iv Education and Lifelong Learning

Jain society has always been characterised by its profound respect for education. It has produced generations of scientists, mathematicians, astronomers, law-makers and also artists and craftspeople, for the concept of education is inclusive rather than narrowly defined. Since the time of Mahavira, Jain education has been regarded as the birthright of people of all social and economic backgrounds. Each person also has the responsibility to acquire as much knowledge as possible and put it to good use. Jain culture has been exceptional in its equal emphasis on the education of women and men.

The pan-Indian goddess Saraswati is worshipped for knowledge, creativity and wisdom. She also has a sitar and is worshipped as a goddess of arts. The goddess personifies sacred wisdom, which unites reason with imagination and creativity. Faith is also intertwined with reason – something which many modern scientists completely deny. Jains have the highest respect for Saraswati and she has given them the wisdom to survive and prosper as a minority community. Her statue could be installed in the House of Commons to show the integration of faith, reason and the arts.

For education to be effective, it needs to awaken the spirit of curiosity and learning in each student. Its approach should be less about facts and memorisation and more about logic, creativity, experience and analysis. Reason and art should be part of teaching until adulthood rather than taught separately. Spiritual values should also be integrated into the curriculum and not separated as an optional subject. They form core components of personal development and help mould the students to a broader base of science and understanding than is presently taught.

Diversity and understanding of different religions, cultures and value systems can also help significantly in cultivating respect and tolerance among young people. All this does mean that schools need to be much smaller and more local in scale so that there is a real sense of personal identity and community in the moulding of our children and youth. The size of first and middle schools is still reasonable, but the size of secondary schools seems too large to encourage community building among the youth. This may explain why there are so many social problems at this level.

Travel and experience should be given greater emphasis in the curriculum such that knowledge is not just based on books and websites, but also on the use

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of the various senses to experience the truth. Wisdom should be articulated through stories, science and art such that students begin to see the various dimensions and facets of truth. In this way, there will be an understanding that truth is not absolute, but something which changes over time and depends on the perspective of the seer. The limitations of knowing and articulating truth through language, mathematics, images, sounds and smells also need to be explained for there to be an appreciation of the depth and variety of wisdom.

Skills such as non-violent communication, empathetic listening, non-verbal communication, humour and effective dialogue can also help in developing a broad range of life skills for the children. Planning, careers, work-life balance, management, financial budgeting and control are also very important in preparing a student for life. Money will be an important part of their future and its effective understanding and management, a key secret to success and stability in life. Within local communities, parents could be educated in methods of raising children and enabling them to have positive values and a peaceful and creative life. Community service should be encouraged at every level as a core part of the education process. The value of community can be taught and experienced throughout the curriculum, not just as a series of add-ons. Change and adaptability are important for people to understand if we wish to stop narrow stereotypes, intolerance and extremism (religious or political) from taking root.

Learning should be understood as an activity not just for school, but also for home, family and community. The state can facilitate it, but individuals should be encouraged to see its value and take the initiative to learn and adapt to new ways of thinking and doing. The status of vocational training needs to be raised to the same level as academic qualifications. Over the past two decades, we have tended at every educational level to over-emphasise quantitative testing over more rounded social and educational development. Policy makers have adopted what seems to be a double-faced attitude towards university education. At one level, it is present as the most desirable, indeed the only positive outcome of the school experience, thus devaluing other skills, experiences and aspirations. At another level, pure science and other core areas of academic study have been downgraded. Many Physics, Chemistry and Modern Language departments have been closed or are under threat, in marked contrast to most other European countries – as well as the United States, Canada and the emerging economic powers of India and China. Certainly, universities should aim to be socially inclusive and have a broad curriculum, but at the same time their academic status and research interests must be encouraged and strengthened. Meanwhile, we need to adopt a more inclusive

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approach to education as a whole. This means learning to value all forms of knowledge – practical as well as theoretical, manual as much as intellectual. It means promoting and valuing diverse educational institutions as equally valid routes to the fulfilment of potential.

The Further Education (FE) sector can play a crucial role in making education more inclusive, reaching across barriers of age and social or economic background, breaching the divide between academic and vocational qualifications and reaching out to under-represented groups: mature students, minority ethnic communities, people with disabilities and students whose first language is not English. FE Colleges should be strongly rooted in their local communities and offer flexible courses, tailored to local needs and individual needs. One of their primary roles should be that of springboard to opportunity for those who are returning to education and work, those who wish to update their skills and acquire new ones, and those who have remedial needs (such as literacy and numeracy) or learning difficulties that have previously held them back.

For the FE sector, the spirit of collective and shared learning, and the possibility that wisdom can come from all cultures, big or small, black or white, is critical to building a community of respect and understanding. Nature can be included in our search for wisdom, not as a separate subject or box but as something which pervades all that we seek and learn. ‘We are nature, nature is us’, could become a lamplight for student cohesion and holistic learning on FE campuses. There are students of Jain origin in the UK Further Education sector, and also lecturers from the Jain faith. It is important for community cohesion, that the presence of this faith and its modern-day relevance is understood by lecturers and students alike. Students need to understand that for many ancient cultures, spirituality was critical to their ways of life and in learning from them, we cannot exclude their faith and beliefs. Progress is not always linear – there may be ancient wisdoms which held timeless solutions which we have now forgotten or ignored to our own peril. The Jains made an enormous contribution to sustainable science and lifestyle which we can draw from even today.

In Further Education colleges, a module on ethics could be made compulsory for all students, enabling them to see the connection between values and science and enhance their own character and conduct. The variety of ethical systems that are available on the planet can help show the students the diversity of knowledge systems that exist on the planet. Education should be a holistic, life-long process, not circumscribed by age or defined either in narrowly academic

or exclusively vocational terms. FE colleges at their best give us a glimpse of what an inclusive yet rigorous, equitable yet excellent system of education could be like. There is therefore a case for putting the FE sector at the centre of educational strategy for the coming decades, and raising it from the Cinderella status to which it is all too often relegated.

v Health

Individual and public health is one of the most important keys to social cohesion. Diet and nutrition have always been central to health in the Jain tradition. The right diet not only influences the physical health, but also the mental health of individuals and society. It is now widely accepted that alcohol and drugs are destroying public health, physically and mentally. The Jains have always cautioned against them and emphasised discipline in food. Fasting is also given the highest importance and is encouraged during festivals like Paryushan and Ayambil. Not only does it act as a detoxification of the body, but it also strengthens individual resolve and self-discipline. More importantly, health care has developed too much along the lines of an industry, with a two-dimensional attitude to disease and cure that takes little account of the individual as a whole person, or of the social and ecological factors affecting illness and health. Thus doctors are trained more to address the effects of ill-health than to understand its underlying causes and try to prevent them. They ‘cure’ sickness more than promoting good health. The patient can appear to be less an individual and more a part on a production line, passed from one ‘expert’ or ‘carer’ to another. There is too little one to one emotional support for a patient overcome by illness.

We recommend that health become less of a system and more of a way to happy living. The promotion of a vegetarian diet is critical to this – in fact, it has been shown by a large number of animal health crises in the last two decades that the public cost of the meat industry is colossal and ceases to abate. Evidence is also coming out of the huge adverse health effects of a meat-based diet. Jains have a rich, nutritious and diverse vegetarian cuisine which would help the nation’s health significantly. It would save on the environment bill, the health bill, the food bill and the alcohol and drugs bill. Resources should be spent on health education and training such as Yoga, meditation and Ayurveda should be made widely available in schools and sports and leisure facilities, and promoted through the media.

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The practice of spirituality should be encouraged and not suppressed or prohibited as it has a huge contribution to mental and emotional health.

- Prevention is better than cure, but the NHS seems to have too few resources and expertise for preventative health care. This situation is unsustainable - the NHS should be reformed such that it is patient centred and not doctor or drug centred. Alternative systems of health care should be supported and promoted, especially where they have no side-effects and proven benefits.
- Health should be seen holistically and not just biologically as it is practiced today. The causes of poor health should be understood, and stress alleviated through the encouragement of diversity and family and community cohesion.

vi The Environment

One of the chief problems of our society in its present phase is that we compartmentalise areas of policy. We assume that they can be ‘dealt with’ or ‘tackled’ separately and as distinctive ‘issues’, because there is little connection between them. We assume, for instance, that there is no connection between aggression on the international stage and anti-social behaviour closer to home. We pretend that we develop ‘green’ consciousness and conserve the environment, without questioning basic assumptions about our patterns of consumption, our priorities and our goals.

Recent developments in the physical and biological sciences point towards connections, hidden and overt, between all aspects of life on earth. For millennia, Jainism has emphasised that no man or woman is an island, and nor is there – as we have for too long imagined in the west – a radical separation between humanity and other forms of life. Thus the most ancient and the most modern insights converge in spirituality and science, but economics and politics lag far behind. We therefore need to look at policy formation in a different way – to make connections between issues rather than separating them out.

Nowhere is the need for joined-up policy making more apparent than in the areas of environment and social cohesion. Every aspect of these two ‘issues’ overlaps, intersects or shades into each other. Social and environmental breakdown have the same underlying cause, a human arrogance that assumes a ‘right’ to limitless consumption of the earth’s resources.

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As a species, the delusion of entitlement to more and more is threatening to destroy the planetary equilibrium: the climate, the global ecosystem and everything that makes life on earth worthwhile or even possible. As a society, meanwhile, we are becoming dislocated by the illusion of limitless consumption. This leads to the idea that each of us has the 'right' to a greater share of the earth's resources, regardless of the ecological and social cost, and that by extension other people are commodities to be thrown away or traded in as obsolete.

The Jain principle of *Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness and non-attachment) emphasises material restraint and respect for nature – a society that meets the needs of all, rather than a scramble to satisfy the demands of some. *Aparigraha* also extends the idea of social conscience to our relationship with the planet and all its inhabitants. A secular version of this Jain approach needs to be translated into all areas of public policy, if we are to address environmental concerns that threaten all of life, including human survival.

At present, campaigns against climate change are mere fiddling while Rome burns because they do not question our uncritical attachment to economic growth, as an end in itself and often at the expense of the real quality of human life, along with the species and ecosystems that are needlessly invaded or destroyed. For ecological healing to take place, we need to accept the connection between untrammelled economic expansion, environmental degradation and social injustice, as humans and other species are exploited to satisfy irrational demand. This is one of the reasons why Jains have been pioneers of animal welfare, both in the West and India, where the Jain animal sanctuaries of Ahmedabad, Gujarat are world-renowned. As well as being a social good in itself, this commitment reminds us to respect and value the natural world, rather than exploiting it, and to identify with something larger than ourselves.

Environmental activities can also help promote diversity and inclusion. The work of the Black Environment Network, for example, has shown that gardening and allotments in inner city areas enables people to reach across ethnic and cultural divisions and overcome prejudice. These activities also alleviate the stress created by social iniquity and the unnatural conditions of much of urban life. Being surrounded by life rather than inanimate objects has a calming effect on individuals and communities. It promotes a more positive outlook and reduces violence and self-harm. Provision of green spaces and the protection of trees and woodlands are as important for community cohesion as tackling poverty or reducing benefit dependency. Environmental education is a crucial ingredient of social education

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Ecological consciousness and reconnection with nature should therefore be built into all aspects of economic and social policy, including architecture and planning, health care and education. A new Department for the Environment and Community Cohesion should be created, a pioneering step which recognises that social and ecological cohesion are one and the same.

- Creation of new Department for the Environment and Community Cohesion;
- Phase out factory farming and animal experiments;
- Encourage environmental volunteering and outdoor pursuits;
- Integrate ecological considerations into all aspects of economic and social policy;
- Shift of priorities from economic growth to quality of life;

vii Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

It has become fashionable of late to agonise about the rising tide of delinquency. Politicians of all parties vie with each other for votes by demanding tough measures. News media report, at times with seeming glee, the latest outrage. The hoodie, the feral youth, the neighbour from hell, have become modern folk devils. And with good reason, for there is much evidence, both anecdotal and statistical, that crime is spiralling out of control, that many neighbourhoods, especially the poorest, are living in fear. The growth of unrestrained violence is taking place within a culture of low-level anti-social behaviour, symptoms of which include litter, graffiti, noise and the pervasive, seemingly inescapable presence of the ‘f’ word.

What is needed instead is a holistic approach to the problems of crime and anti-social behaviour, in which we neither blame nor absolve, and in which we ask critical questions of ourselves. For there is a sense in which those who are anti-social or criminal hold up a critical mirror to the wider society, taking its values to their logical conclusion. We see this phenomenon at its most dramatic and horrible in attacks on old people and people with disabilities. These two groups are neglected by a society obsessed with illusions of ‘perfection’ and which treats people as marketable commodities. Most young men and women are good citizens and a credit to their families and their country. Those who commit crimes, however, are at once offenders and victims who have been dehumanised by false values.

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Our society in its present phase sends out the message that acquiring wealth and spending it quickly are desirable ends in themselves. It chooses to reward footballers, pop stars and supermodels rather than teachers, nurses and social workers. It views relationships exclusively in terms of ‘choices’ and ‘rights’, without balancing them with responsibilities and obligations, still less affection and commitment. It favours continuous change over stability and continuity. In domestic and foreign policy alike, power is equated with aggression and strength with assertiveness. Our economic policies are aggressive and expansionist, as is our attitude towards nature, which is seen as a force to be ‘conquered’ and subdued. Against this background, it is small wonder that anti-social behaviour is spiralling out of control. It is a side-effect of our mania for growth, which is in itself anti-social.

Jain philosophy connects intention with action, small personal acts with collective, even global actions, violent thoughts and speech with violent deeds. From a Jain perspective, spiralling violence overlaps with other forces in our society which are spiralling out of control. As a society, we are engaged in collective self-harm, through being in thrall to false values, of which violent crime, like pollution, is a symptom that affects us all.

It follows that we cannot treat crime and anti-social behaviour as something ‘other’, an external threat. Instead, it is linked to a system of values into which we have slipped unintentionally, and which we must re-examine, as individuals and collectively. Those who advocate ‘more prisons’ or worse still ‘super-prisons’ are badly missing the point. Such policies merely create crime factories and perpetuate the cycle of violence – as shown the appalling example of the American penal system, which we seem for some reason to be imitating in Britain. We would be better to follow the example of the Netherlands, and Denmark, for instance, where prisons are small and rehabilitation takes precedence over punishment. Young offenders’ institutions should be based on therapeutic rather than punitive principles, and introduce nurturing and care rather than further abuse to fractured young lives.

One of the chief causes of prison over-crowding is that prisoners – for example most young men and women, mothers and the mentally ill – are given custodial sentences that harm rather than help them. Alternatives to prison should be fully explored, including restorative justice, through which offenders are forced to confront and make good the consequences of their actions. Access to drug rehabilitation and treatment should be upgraded and extended, with drug policy transferred as far as possible from the criminal to the therapeutic sphere.

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Within the custodial setting, the emphasis should move towards the development of the whole person. Education – including basic skills – is a tool to unlock the mind and release potential and should take precedence over punishment. Imprisonment should not just be about confinement, but reconnection with the environment – through gardening, conservation and outdoor activities. It should also be about the cultivation of the inner life, through meditation and reflection.

Far from being ‘soft’, such policies are a radical challenge to the individuals affected and to the wider community. A materialistic and punitive society creates disaffected, violent citizens, ill at ease with themselves and each other. Addressing crime and anti-social behaviour means starting with ourselves, and learning to lead more compassionate, sustainable lives. It also requires a shift of social priorities away from narrow concepts of competition and autonomy towards co-operation and common purpose.

- Promotion of restorative justice;
- Alternatives to prison, where possible, for non-violent offenders;
- Encouraging acts of forgiveness between murderers/ criminals and victim families so that resentment does not turn into anger but creates possibilities of growth – Jains have done this successfully in India;
- Smaller prisons;
- Shift of emphasis from punishment to rehabilitation – every soul has potential to improve;
- Transfer of drug policy from penal to medical sphere and policy centred on the root causes of drug abuse, including social and family breakdowns;
- Encouragement of meditation, yoga and environmental activities in prison;
- Stronger and sensitive community policing;

viii Diversity and Inclusion

Genuine inclusiveness requires a belief in equality and non-superiority over others. It also means that difference is not only allowed, not only tolerated, but positively supported and nurtured. Difference is the mosaic which weaves society together and enriches its wisdom. Investment in awareness and understanding about different cultures and belief systems does help, but what is most prohibitive is a closed mind, or one which feels it is exclusive and superior to other thought systems and beliefs.

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Jains have embraced bio-diversity as a starting point for respect. Most modern thinking ignores the connection between human diversity and bio-diversity and focuses far too much on humanity and its tensions. If the problem is decontextualised, and nature seen as the basis of all creation and the source of beauty and diversity, we can bring about a change in mindset and attitudes. Nature should not be seen as something to be used and exploited at will. Only then will we be able to build a genuine inclusiveness in society. What this also does is to promote the wider inclusiveness of nature and animals in promoting respect in society.

History and Geography are good subjects for teaching diversity, and so is Religious Education. However, the content of these subjects need to be sensitive to different belief systems and their stories and experiences, and not written from a mono-cultural perspective. The histories of the diverse communities, including minorities, who live in Britain, should be part of the core education curriculum in schools. Such subjects should not be compartmentalised, and instead inter-connections explained. Whole stories of migration and settlement will help the process of inclusiveness.

Ghettos and mono-cultural neighbourhoods are a problem. However, they have often arisen as a defensive mechanism to help minorities retain their dignity and cultural identity. As inclusiveness spreads and is genuinely felt, people will migrate to different neighbourhoods and we will see more and more mixed communities. However, it is difficult to force these changes: instead, we must create the conditions for social evolution, through an ethos of flexibility, tolerance and mutual understanding as the basis of every social policy. In this way extremism, whether racist or fundamentalist in character, will be deprived of its breeding grounds of social division and cultural misunderstanding.

Economic inequality can lead to social deprivation and a lack of social cohesion. It is important then to alleviate economic problems for there to be a respectful society. However, this should not be blamed as a reason for intolerance. Economic deprivation is a collective problem which requires a sensitive approach and a long-term solution and commitment by all concerned, especially the rich. Government and social services have a uniquely challenging role to remove such deprivation. There should be a dedicated long-term effort to resolve such problems and a culture of long-termism encouraged in this arena.

The media have a special role to play in building community cohesion. The government could support quality media which provide information about cultures, positive examples of cooperation, techniques of parenting, benefits of

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continuous education, methods of dialogue and direct engagement, creative ideas about raising children with an open mind, and showing ways of discovering common values. Satish Kumar, a Jain, publishes Resurgence magazine which provides a holistic approach to ethical living, integrating art, science and spirituality.

Diversity means more than simply celebrating difference. It also means looking beneath these differences for shared values and common interests. The legal principles of equality and unity-in-diversity are a good expression of Jain values and ethics.

ix The Political System

‘War is merely the continuation of politics by other means,’ wrote the Prussian officer and historian Carl von Clausewitz in his treatise on the phenomenon of war. In this age of ‘homeland security’ and ‘war on terror’, his words resonate. They also capture the essence of modern British politics, which has evolved into a pattern of continuous, low-level conflict. Politicians of all parliamentary parties speak in terms of ‘victory’ and ‘defeat’, of ‘trouncing’ or ‘routing’ their opponents, of ‘campaigning tactics’ and ‘political battles’ and claiming the ‘scalps’ of their opponents.

These phrases are highly significant, because they express the underlying adversarial character of our politics, which constrains the participants in both thought and action. The language also perpetuates conflict, creating a vicious circle. Jain ethics draw no real distinction between thought, speech and action. In a chain reaction, violent thoughts and violent speech lead to violent acts. Thoughts and speech are forms of action in themselves, and violence means far more than crude physical force.

Looked at from this perspective, we are living in quite a violent political culture. This is reflected in the cult of ‘strong government’, where strength is equated with stubbornness and punitive campaigns ‘targeting’ groups such as single mothers, refugees or benefit claimants, and a more aggressive relationship with the rest of the world.

Even the architecture of our parliamentary system appears to be based on conflict. Government and Opposition benches face each other like serried ranks. The parliamentary process revolves around point scoring, trivialised debates,

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bullying tactics, ridicule and ‘ambush’ of opponents. Prime Minister’s Question Time has been compared, with good reason, to a Punch and Judy show.

These antics are reinforced by a ‘winner-take-all’ electoral system in which a monopoly of power is enjoyed by a party with a minority (sometimes quite a small minority) of the vote – the so-called ‘electoral spoils’. It is significant that the most visible symbols of our parliamentary system are a portcullis and chains, hardly emblems of liberty and inclusion, but indicators of exclusion and defensiveness.

Despite – or rather because of – the manic adversarialism of Westminster, politics is increasingly dominated by a narrow class whose members, of whatever party, have more in common with each other than the wider electorate. The adversarial system entraps those who seek to bring greater openness to the political process. It appeals to the wrong human qualities: petty ambition, at the expense of concern for the public good, adherence to one-sided certainty, at the expense of the quest for truth, which in the context of Punch and Judy politics is dismissed as ‘naïve’.

Adversarial politics entraps those who wish to make the political system more transparent, open and inclusive, because it confuses reconciliation with ‘weakness’ and elevates point-scoring above any meaningful discourse. Most seriously, it is proving ill-equipped to address the concerns of an increasingly diverse and complex British society, within an interconnected world.

This is why disillusionment with ‘conventional’ politics – and with it hard-won democratic rights – is at its highest. This does not mean that interest in politics has disappeared. On the contrary, single-issue campaigns, such as the anti-war movement, animal rights and environmental issues (specific or general) are appealing to large sections of the population, especially the young. This is a positive form of political engagement, but it is also inherently self-limiting and can lead to positions of fanaticism and one-sidedness that undermine the original purpose of the campaign.

At the same time, the climate of disillusionment has a shadow side. This is expressed in the rise of racist parties and a growing climate of xenophobia, to which ‘mainstream’ politicians pander for short-term gain. It is expressed equally in the emergence of fundamentalisms based on exclusion, dogmatism and the assumption of absolute truth, in other words adversarialism *par excellence*. For politicians and concerned citizens alike, the challenge is to engage with these new political forces, addressing grievances without surrendering to

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the shadow politics of fanaticism or bigotry.

What is needed is a radical extension and renewal of the democratic process – radical in the literal sense of addressing a problem from the roots upwards. This means an electoral system in which every vote counts and all shades of opinion are articulated. It means the greater use of the referendum, nationally and locally – as in Switzerland, for example – because electors are treated as mature adults with the right and duty to participate and understand. At national and local levels, power would be devolved from unrepresentative quangos to elected representatives.

Such reforms would have two main effects, which seem to be opposites but are in fact complementary principles. At one level, it would ensure diversity of representation, including greater participation by women and minority groups. At another, it would end the perpetual two-party conflict and replace it with a search for consensus and compromise. The architecture of adversarialism needs to be replaced by the semi-circular structures characteristic of other European parliaments, including the devolved assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This change would be more than symbolic, as it would mark a departure from point-scoring, conflict-based partisanship.

Constitutional reform of this type is closely connected to questions of social cohesion, for two reasons. First, it addresses the democratic deficit, by which many individuals, communities and shades of opinion are marginalised or suppressed, increasing polarisation and mutual distrust. Secondly, it affects the way politicians and opinion-formers behave towards each other and the example they set to society as a whole. The move beyond adversarialism lifts a terrible burden from the shoulders of the political classes, increasing their range of possibilities and scope for independent thought.

A political system reformed on these lines reflects the Jain principle of Anekant, which acknowledges that there are many paths to the truth, and pursues that truth with humility and respect for others. It is a principle that has meaning and relevance outside Jainism, especially in a diverse society where there is a need for constant mediation and questioning.

The details of economic policy remain outside the scope of this paper. It is not the task of Jainism to dictate such terms, or to choose between approaches associated with ‘left’ or ‘right’. But the implementation of such choices can be informed by concern for social and environmental well-being, and recognition of spiritual as much as material needs. This approach would restore to economics

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its true meaning, ‘the law of the house’, the households in question being society and the planet.

- A fair electoral system in which every vote counts and political diversity is reflected;
- An encouragement of diversity at every level in the political system to ensure representation of minorities;
- A recognition that people from minority cultures can have timeless solutions to modern-day problems – their numbers should not conceal their wisdom, whose quality needs to be appreciated and celebrated;
- Replacement of adversarial architecture of the House of Commons with a semi-circular structure;
- Greater use of referenda at national and local levels;
- An end to ‘Punch and Judy’ politics;

4. Interconnectedness and Interdependence

We have seen that the twin ideas of *interconnectedness* and *interdependence* lie at the heart of Jain philosophy, and inform every aspect of the Jain way of life. Even the principle of Ahimsa (non-violence, non-injury) arises from these two concepts. If we are connected to each other, directly or indirectly, if we depend on the ability to co-operate with each other for our physical and spiritual well-being, then it follows that we must minimise harmful activities and maximise creative, positive and compassionate acts. Therefore, we must act carefully at all times, aware of the impact of each of our actions (including thoughts), whether short-term and long-term, obvious or subtle.

The injunction to act carefully applies equally to the individual and the human community of whatever size – family, locality, nation or international networks such as the United Nations, European Union or Commonwealth. It applies equally to the private and public spheres, the world of work and the voluntary activities we choose to pursue.

Interconnectedness takes us beyond the idea of a purely human community towards a ‘community of beings’ of which humans are an integral part. Interdependence means a shift of emphasis away from competition with and control over fellow humans towards co-operation and finding common ground. At the same time, it requires us to work with ‘the rest’ of nature, rather than regarding it as something other than ourselves, a hostile force to be ‘conquered’ or a mere collection of resources to be exploited.

In other words, there is a connection between aggressive policies towards other countries or peoples and the invasions of other species’ habitats in the name of human expansionism. There is a connection between the torture of animals in laboratories and ill-treatment of the disabled, the mentally ill or the vulnerable old and young. A society that tolerates factory farming also accepts dehumanising social conditions, production-line education and gross disparities of income and life chances. Callous indifference to the natural world is linked intimately to callous indifference towards fellow-humans, which leads to family and community breakdown. Restoring social cohesion means breaking a series of negative patterns arising from an artificial sense of separation – of humanity from the rest nature and of human beings from each other.

This approach rejects any distinction between our social and ecological activities. Or, to put it more positively, it reintegrates social and environmental

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concerns. Social cohesion and ecological balance are intimately linked, rather than separate, compartmentalised 'issues'. The social-ecological continuum recognised by Jains makes their thinking especially relevant to a society trying to rethink its attitude to the environment and aware that materialism does not satisfy us ultimately, but does social and psychic harm.

More than that, Jain values provide a useful template for living in a pluralist society, and in a 'borderless' world where economic, political and cultural boundaries are blurring increasingly. The experience of Jains as a perpetual minority has enabled them to integrate and participate fully while simultaneously maintaining and developing a distinctive cultural identity. Jains have been able to combine adaptability with the retention of first principles. The philosophy of non-violence, intellectual as much as physical, allows for tolerance and accommodation without the need for compromise. Globalisation, and the fact of a culturally diverse society, means that we can no longer assume the superiority of 'our' values, or their inevitable 'triumph' over others, and so from the ancient and peaceful wisdom of Jain dharma we can take the gift of humility. That principle reinforces (rather than opposing or challenging) the majority Judaeo-Christian and humanist traditions of British society. It creates an ethical framework of respect and inclusion in place of division and difference.

Jainism's contribution to social cohesion is to offer an alternative new way of thinking based on interconnectedness and interdependence. It is a holistic approach that aims to reach beyond boundaries and make common cause, rather than focus on division and difference. It is a philosophy of both/and rather than either/or.

Individual and social interests are identical, because each of us is a social being and society is the sum total of its individual parts. From this it follows that each human life, each individual contribution, matters equally. Each individual success is a social success and each failure to achieve full potential is a failure for society as a whole. Likewise, human welfare and the welfare of the planet wholly coincide. Environmental problems *are* social problems and social cohesion is an ecological issue as much as it is specifically human.

Jainism is an ancient faith that values accumulated wisdom, tradition and continuity, and is based on the unalterable law of non-violence. At the same time, it is a highly 'modern' philosophy that values reason, welcomes change and actively promotes gender and racial equality. Social cohesion involves recognising the continuous, creative tension between continuity and change,

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accepting that social evolution can only take place successfully when it is built on enduring ethical foundations.

As a society, we failed to recognise this when, in the name of modernity, we destroyed thriving urban communities and replaced them with soulless housing estates. We made the same mistake when, in the name of greater freedom and choice, we eroded the familial and communal ties that gave stability and purpose to our lives. Today, we are reaping the consequences of this one-sided view of progress. It has made us in many ways less free, less safe and less fulfilled, despite apparent prosperity and the blandishments of consumerism. Addiction and compulsive behaviour, gang culture and the retreat into fundamentalism as a quest for certainty are all symptoms of a malaise created by one-sided thinking.

Yet there is a rising awareness of the need to reconnect, with ourselves and with the planet. There is a sense that economic growth does not necessarily correspond with quality of life, that 'freedom' and 'choice' mean little without security and mutual trust. In this change of consciousness, political and – in the broadest sense – spiritual concerns come together. This is where Jainism, based on reconciliation and the healing of wounds, can play a positive role where twentieth century political ideologies have retreated. And unlike those ideologies, it will not seek to impose itself as a universal truth, for social cohesion is about unity-in-diversity, rather than the creation of a monoculture. Jains themselves can play a role, as educators, peacemakers and community organisers, for there is no distinction in Jainism between actions and ideas, philosophy and lived experience.

Two and a half millennia ago, Mahavira recognised that 'non-violence and kindness to living beings is kindness to oneself'. This ancient insight is a message for our time.

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Glossary

Achara conduct.

Ahimsa principle of non-violent living, respect for all living beings.

Anekant pluralism, respect for diverse viewpoints, ‘many-sidedness’.

Aparigraha non-possessiveness, non-materialism.

Asteya non-stealing, non-exploitative living.

Atman soul.

Brahmacharya restraint of the senses.

Dharma underlying principle of cohesion and truth.

Ekant one-sided viewpoint, prejudice.

Jiva Daya identification with all living beings.

Karma cosmic law of cause and effect, accumulated experience that binds the soul.

Kshama active giving, seeking of forgiveness.

Kutumb extended family.

Moksha liberation from karma through understanding.

Parasparopagraho Jivanam principle that ‘all life is interconnected’.

Panjarapura Jain animal sanctuary.

Saiyam self-discipline.

Satya integrity and truthful living.

Tirthankara prophet, ‘ford-maker’ or ‘path-finder’, one who points the way to enlightenment.



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Social cohesion is an issue at the top of the political agenda in Britain today, but there is a shortage of new ideas and thinking. This paper provides a fresh approach, drawing from the Jain tradition - an ancient but continuously evolving culture founded on the idea of co-operation through Ahimsa (reverence for all living beings). For the Jains, all life is interconnected. The principles of anekant (pluralism), aparigraha (non-materialism) and satya (integrity and truthful living) provide a unique framework for social cohesion, highly relevant to the twenty-first century. Jains do not seek to impose their ideas on others, but offer their philosophy for policy-makers to draw upon freely.

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“This monograph provides a fascinating, sensitive and informed commentary on social cohesion which policy makers would do well to heed.”

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