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**Compassion and Sanskara
in the Context of Neoliberalism:
Factors Shaping a Jain Socio-spiritual Organisation's
Development Activities in Gujarat, India**

Bindi Shah

School of Social Sciences, University of Southampton, UK
B.Shah@soton.ac.uk

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Asia Research Institute

National University of Singapore

469A Tower Block #10-01,

Bukit Timah Road,

Singapore 259770

Tel: (65) 6516 3810

Fax: (65) 6779 1428

Website: www.ari.nus.edu.sg

Email: arisec@nus.edu.sg

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Compassion and Sanskara in the Context of Neoliberalism: Factors Shaping a Jain Socio-spiritual Organisation's Development Activities in Gujarat, India

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School of Social Sciences, University of Southampton, UK

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ABSTRACT

Based on multi-sited fieldwork in India, Britain, USA and Singapore, I examine a Jain socio-spiritual organisation's (TripleS) involvement in development activities in Gujarat, India. I ask how religious links with the Jain tradition strengthen or weaken TripleS' ability to deliver 'secular' development activities. I examine the religious ideas and spiritual resources on which Jain nuns have built the organisation, and the wider socio-political environment in India, and particularly Gujarat, to understand TripleS' phenomenal growth in a short space of time and delivery of value-based education at multiple levels that it has undertaken in rural Gujarat. My findings suggest that the nun's adoption of reformist Jainism, emphasizing compassion, *sanskara* (values) and *seva* (selfless service) without regard to caste, creed, religion, or gender earned them initial spiritual capital that has attracted enormous economic and social capital from both diasporic and national Jains, which in turn has further strengthened TripleS' spiritual capital amongst these groups, as well as amongst politicians, civil society organisations, and media in the state of Gujarat. I argue that this spiritual capital, and the accompanying moral authority, has contributed to TripleS' ability to provide opportunity and help meet the aspirations of not only the most disadvantaged but also the 'autowalas' and the 'dudhwalas' who can now dream of their children becoming doctors, pharmacists and engineers. I also examine how the adoption of a neo-liberal project in India shapes the orientation and activities of a socio-spiritual organisation focused on selfless service to the most disadvantaged. Neoliberalism introduces not only market driven forces but also an emphasis on self-enterprising and educated subjects. Such pro-talent strategies are necessarily selective and target certain populations and places. TripleS' provision of value-based education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels does not challenge such exceptions generated by the neoliberal logic. However, the organisation's reformist Jain approach of education as *seva* perhaps softens the impact of the neoliberal logic. It fills a much needed gap created by neoliberal education policies and extends access to education to disadvantaged groups and aspiring members of the poor.

INTRODUCTION

From a time where religion was seen as antithetical to development and modernisation, contemporary policy and scholarship acknowledges the role of religion and faith based organisations in development (see Special Issue of *Development in Practice* 22, Nos.5-6). As Clarke and Jennings (2008:2) observe, this reflects a range of pragmatic and political developments since the late 1990s that has spurred active engagement between faith and development. But it also reflects a growing critique within the academy of conventional assumptions that modernisation leads to secularisation. There is acknowledgement of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 1999; Mahmood 2005), and Asad (1993:35) challenges the notion that in all societies something called 'religion' can be separated out from other parts of life, arguing that this view 'has a specific Christian history.' In other words, religion and the secular cannot be seen as separate, oppositional spheres in non-Christian settings such as Asia. As Asad suggests, the challenge is to explore how power is channelled in the connections and disjunctures between religious and non-religious images, talk, spaces, institutions and activities. I take up this challenge to examine a Jain socio-spiritual organisation's (TripleS)¹, involvement in development activities in Gujarat, India.²

Since the time of missionaries, religious organisations have long been involved in the provision of services such as health and education in India (Santosh 2015). In the contemporary period, there are numerous examples of non-state funded educational and health organisations associated with Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and (see also for example Clarke 2011; Rew and Bhatewara 2012; Levitt and Rajaram 2013; Santosh 2015). While lay Jains in India also operate numerous charitable educational and health organisations, this is the first time that Jain ascetics are running an incorporated organisational structure to deliver *Seva* (service), *Shiksha* (education) and *Sadhana* (inner development), according to TripleS' president. In this paper my key research question is: how do religious links with the Jain tradition strengthen or weaken TripleS' ability to deliver development activities? I focus the analysis on the organisation's work in Kutch, Gujarat to examine the religious ideas and spiritual resources on which the organisation is built, and the wider socio-political environment in India and particularly Gujarat in which it operates to understand TripleS' phenomenal growth in a short space of time and the range of development activities it has undertaken in rural Kutch.

¹ This is a pseudonym for the organisation.

² The label 'socio-spiritual' is not used by TripleS. In fact a range of other categorisations were found across various pamphlets and fundraising materials, and in interviews with some of the key lay Jains involved in the organisation. In the scholarly literature there is much debate about the appropriateness of the label 'faith-based organisation' for all religiously inspired development work, not least because of the implied Christianised and Westernised understandings of the relationship between religion and the secular (see Tomalin 2012 for a review of these debates). I have chosen to use the label 'socio-spiritual' to capture the ways in which key values in the Jain tradition inspires and permeates through the range of activities that TripleS is involved in.

METHOD

This paper is based on an exploratory pilot research project carried out over a period of 13 months in 2013-14. This included a two-week field trip to the organisation's centre in Kutch, accompanied by N. Rajaram, my co-investigator from Central University of Gujarat, and a research assistant. In addition to observations we conducted interviews with TripleS' spiritual leader, Acharyaji, a senior nun who provides leadership for activities in Kutch, teachers at TripleS' schools (4), key lay Jain informants within TripleS in India (3), and conversations with key non-Jain informants (6), including, leaders of local non-governmental organisations, a journalist and a retired teacher. I also conducted content analysis of a book on its organisational history, a video recounting the life TripleS' spiritual leader, fundraising materials and webpages produced between 1997 and 2014, review of local media articles, and interviews with TripleS' long-term supporters and donors (all Jain) in Britain (9), USA (9) and Singapore (3). These long-term supporters were identified from those in attendance at a TripleS event in USA in 2013, and through snow-ball sampling.

THE JAIN TRADITION

The Jain tradition is one of several dharma-based religious traditions originating in South Asia, characterised by a distinctive ontology, which shapes religious action that is appropriate to an individual's circumstances at a particular time (Mittal and Thursby 2006: 1). Specifically, the Jain path is concerned with spiritual deliverance (*moksa*) from the endless cycle of birth-death-rebirth. Jains believe that the soul has always been impure or burdened by accumulated karma, and remains caught up in a cycle of transmigration and a worldly existence. Since all aspects of the physical world (trees, animals, microbes) are imbued with life and a soul, daily living has ethical implications for a Jain (Vallely 2002). Violence, in any form, to any one of these lives leads to the accumulation of negative *karma* and imprisons the soul, consequently decreasing the chance of *moksa* in this life and/or future lives. Positive *karma*, accumulated through benign or compassionate thoughts and actions, can counteract the effects of negative *karma*. However, all *karmic* influences, positive and negative, must be shed by cultivating detachment from one's passions (anger, pride, ego, deceit, greed).

Jain praxis for Jain ascetics involves a lifetime commitment to five 'Great Vows' that "govern their external, observable behaviour and [provide] a system of internal spiritual control" (Dundas 2002: 158). The first Great Vow relates to *ahimsā* or not causing intentional violence and harm and minimizing unintentional violence to any life-forms. The second Great Vow directs the ascetic to abstain from lying and the third relates to the rejection of theft, but also avoiding excessively prolonged occupation of any space or consumption of alms without the teacher's permission. The fourth Great Vow leads ascetics to renounce sexual activity, including eating and drinking anything that will stimulate sexual drive. The fifth Great Vow relates to renunciation of attachment, including to possessions. Once they renounce all worldly possessions their only mission is to work toward their own internal purification and help others attain the same by providing spiritual guidance.³

³ See Dundas (2002:157-160) for a more detailed discussion of the 'Great Vows' that Jain ascetics undertake.

REFORMIST JAIN TRADITION

The above brief discussion of the Jain tradition and injunctions undertaken by Jain ascetics provides the context from which to understand the ways in which TripleS' spiritual leader has re-interpreted these injunctions. During a decade spent in silence Acharyaji studied the Jain, Buddhists and Vedic traditions and developed three insights: there are multiple paths to spirituality, expressing the Jain ethic of *anekantvada* or the multi-faceted nature of reality; religion needs to be all encompassing; and the divisions between caste and sects has led to jealousy, hatred and violence. She was particularly inspired by Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Jain Tirthankara or spiritual victor, who continued to work for the welfare and betterment of society even after becoming a monk. Thus Acharyaji reinterpreted the ascetic path in the Jain tradition, arguing that working towards personal liberation is not the only path to spirituality. *Seva* or selfless service to the poor and needy is an equally valid path to liberation:

Life is not one-dimensional and all lives are interdependent. Religion must accept life in its entirety and work towards getting rid of physical and mental suffering, and that is true religious practice (Acharyaji in History of TripleS, 2014).

In arguing for *seva* as an alternative path, Acharyaji insists that service to the poor and needy is not a form of attachment that can lead to passions and therefore negative karma, as outlined above. In other words, proactively doing 'good' rather than withdrawing from society to avoid causing violence can also be a spiritual path for Jain ascetics.

TRIPLES IN KUTCH, GUJARAT

TripleS began its work in north-eastern India in the early 1970s, in a region where the Jain tradition, together with Buddhist and Vedic traditions had thrived, and where Mahavira had been born and achieved *moksa*, according to Jain texts. Over the past 40 years it has developed into a transnational organisation with four centres in India and a transnational network of diasporic Jain supporters in eight countries around the world.⁴ During this time TripleS has become incorporated into a charitable organisation in India with a Board of Trustees made up of lay Jains, who ensure proper governance of funds, legal matters and that TripleS abides by India's manifold regulations (Interview with TripleS President, 2nd December 2014). However, the overall visionary leadership is still provided by its spiritual leader, Acharyaji, and the Jain nuns who are part of her *sangha* or community of ascetics, are intimately involved in making operational decisions related to personnel, marketing, collaboration with state agencies in the delivery of education, as well as meeting with donors and liaising with local politicians. Involvement of the nuns in the everyday activities of Triples ensures that the three values of *seva*, *shiksa* and *sadhana* percolate throughout the organisation. Though they are supported by TripleS in their daily living, the nuns do not receive salaries and their ascetic vows prevent them from accumulating property of their own. Day to day activities and delivery of services is carried out by both Jain and non-Jains working as paid employees, and occasional groups of volunteers. Over time, TripleS has earned the highest charitable status accorded to about ten organisations throughout India (Interview with UK-based Jain supporter, 28th May 2015) reflecting its transparent and professional organisational structure. In the remainder of this section I focus on a detailed discussion of its activities in Kutch, Gujarat to chart its development from an organisation delivering disaster relief to an institutionalised, professionalised organisation involved in service delivery in the field of education.

⁴ I examine the development of these transnational diasporic networks and their philanthropic support for TripleS' activities in India in detail in another forthcoming paper.

On 26th January 2001, a devastating earthquake hit the Bhuj area of Kutch. On hearing the news, Acharyaji felt it was her moral duty to go and help the victims of this natural disaster. One of the senior nuns in TripleS, who often travelled to the USA, called on Jain supporters involved in the Local & Global Foundation in the USA to facilitate their arrival in Bhuj. The Foundation contacted NGOs, with whom they already had relationships, and made arrangements for the TripleS team of nuns to arrive in the region within a few days. Local & Global Foundation also provided the first container of goods, such as tents, clothing, food and milk powder, for TripleS to distribute to the earthquake victims.

Amidst all the national and international non-governmental organisations working on relief efforts, none were addressing the education of children according to a TripleS pamphlet from the early 2000s. The pamphlet cites a UNICEF report that 1400 schools were destroyed or seriously damaged in the earthquake. The Gujarat Government had decided to close all the damaged schools, leaving children to roam the streets. Acharyaji and her team also saw that many children had been orphaned or had lost one parent. Though the pamphlet does not explicitly mention dialogue with representatives of UNICEF and UNDP, Simpson (2014: 29-30) notes that the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GCDMA), formed in the aftermath of the disaster, took agencies such as Asian Development Bank, World Bank, USAID, and Dutch government representatives to survey the destruction and develop a plan for reconstruction. It is highly possible that TripleS had interactions with these representatives, or at least was aware of the position of these UN and aid agencies on the importance of re-activating delivery of education. TripleS' pamphlet on its Kutch activities, refers to UNICEF and UNDP as taking the following position on education: "for young children, the best and fastest way to recover from their trauma is to return to school as soon as possible." It is in this context that TripleS established free schools for children, including free computer classes, with priority given in the following order: orphans, child whose breadwinner family member had died or become severely disabled, child of a single parent family, and then all other needy children. Within three weeks after the earthquake TripleS established a stop-gap school and had 800 children enrolled.

Amongst other policy objectives, the development plan formulated by the UN and other aid agencies together with the GSMUDA also emphasised gender equality and livelihood generation as key development interventions. One teacher I interviewed, who had worked in the camps and now taught in one of TripleS' permanent schools, recalled that thirty-five vocational training centres were created in the Bhuj area. An advertisement in a local Kutch newspaper, promoting TripleS' free provision of vocational training in sewing, agarbati-making, screen printing and nursing, specifically states that this training was aimed at helping women who had lost family bread-winners to become self-sufficient (Kutchmitra, 3rd June 2001, p.1). TripleS also provided care for orphaned children. The nuns, orphan children and volunteers from the diaspora, all lived in these tents for three years. By day the nuns and volunteers were running schools in the tents and by night they were cleaning drains near the tents to avoid disease and infestations (Conversation with Acharyaji, 7th December 2014). These initial relief and rehabilitation projects were supported with generous donations from wealthy Jains in India (Mumbai, Calcutta, Delhi, Chennai, Pune, Hyderabad), as well as Jains in the diaspora (UK, USA, Canada, Kenya, and Belgium), but also by US based charitable foundations established by Jains and other South Asians living in the USA, such as the Local & Global Foundation and the South Asian American Foundation, and by economic sectors where large numbers of Jains and other South Asians are employed or have businesses, such as a multinational technology company based in California, and the Gems Association.

Upon hearing about the provision of free education, a community of artisans settled on government-owned scrubland north of Bhuj, came to TripleS asking for a school to be set up in their area. Originally from the border region with Pakistan, this community had lost everything in the

earthquake. They had also never had schooling in their villages when living near the border, and saw TripleS' provision of free school as finally providing educational opportunities for their children. However, interviews with the current Principal who had been at the school for ten years, and a teacher who had taught there since its inception, as well as an audio-visual on the Acharyaji's life story and history of TripleS, suggest that, initially there was a great deal of resistance amongst the Hindu and Muslim members of the community to have their children go to the same school.⁵ The Principal noted that caste divisions and related notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' were entrenched in Kutch at that time; Hindu parents were concerned about their children sitting next to or eating together with Muslim children. At the same time, Muslims parents were also fearful that since the school was run by Jain nuns, their children would be converted to Jainism. Acharyaji and the nuns sought to allay these fears through repeated visits and conversations with elders in local villages, but they were also resolute that TripleS will establish one school where there is no division or separation based on religion or caste.

The school began in 2003 and is set on 24 acres of land purchased by TripleS, amidst orchards of mangoes, Indian gooseberries, chikoo and limes. In 2014, during a field visit the Principal informed me that 400 students attend the school, with a 60:40 split between boys and girls, and 15% of the students are Muslim, the rest from various Hindu castes but mostly from Scheduled Castes or Other Backward Classes. It provides education for standards one to eight, with TripleS buses bringing the children to school in the morning and then dropping them back home in the early afternoon. This school, which used to provide snacks and since 2009 also provides lunch, is completely free to children, and thus reaches the most disadvantaged. It relies on philanthropic donations, and since its inception it has operated on donations from Jains in the UK largely, but also from the USA and Singapore. Since 2009, one Jain family based in UK and Kenya has undertaken all the running costs of the school.

The success of these schools, together with the widespread recognition gained from the local community, politicians and donors, prompted Acharyaji and a senior nun to consider plans for the long-term educational needs of people in Kutch. A local Kutchi Jain heard about these plans and offered to donate 25 acres of land outside of Bhuj where TripleS could set up a permanent educational institution. In 2003 a primary and secondary school teaching Gujarati medium opened with 450 children, together with a primary school teaching in English medium to around 200 children. In 2014, 960 children attended the schools, according to the Principal. This school, which also provides transportation, has a graduated fee structure so that orphans and children who have lost their father study for free. Other children living in villages within a radius of 30 kilometres receive a fee reduction if needed after their families' income levels are assessed by a team of TripleS representatives. Finally, TripleS offers a range of merit based scholarships especially to encourage girls' education (Interview with TripleS Trustee Two, 8th December 2014). Thus this school reaches students from disadvantaged backgrounds but also attracts students from lower-middle and middle-class families, attracted by fee-assistance and scholarships as well as good infrastructure when compared to other rural schools in the area. At the time of my fieldwork, this campus also included hostels for girls and boys providing boarding facilities for children from further afield, a kitchen and canteen, a guest house, a house for the nuns who live on site, and accommodation for the chief administrator and some of the teaching staff.

⁵ Simpson (2014:71-72) notes that Kutch borders Sindh in Pakistan, and during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, Muslims from Kutch moved to Sindh in Pakistan and Hindus from Sindh resettled in Kutch and elsewhere. However, Kutch still continues to have a high percentage of Muslims, 25 percent compared to the national average of 12 percent.

TripleS recognises that not all children will go on to study at college and so believes that basic education and vocational training will allow young people in rural areas to develop livelihoods and thereby improve the standards of living and quality of life for their families (Interview with a key donor based in the UK). In 2012 TripleS partnered with Teach Skills, a non-profit started by Indian professionals in the diaspora, to launch a vocational training program in carpentry, electrician, plumbing, welding, and sewing to students aged 13-15. These classes are held once a week at both the rural school and the school on the main campus and are funded through philanthropic donations by Jain individuals in the UK.

In mid-2000s TripleS embarked on a programme of establishing technical training colleges, regulated by the All India Council of Technical Education, at its centre near Bhuj. Kutch, in the northern region of Gujarat and sharing a border with Pakistan, is relatively sparsely populated, historically less developed and experiences erratic rains as well as frequent natural disasters. Thus it has long been a region of out migration to Mumbai, other parts of India, and further afield to Africa, Persian Gulf, China, and now to UK and USA (Dhak and Shah 2011). The senior nun at TripleS' Kutch centre also suggested that the lack of development of further and higher education in rural Kutch had contributed to out-migration of aspiring young people and entrepreneurs (Interview, 19th December 2014).⁶ Thus, TripleS aimed to tap rural young people's talents so that they can be 'utilized for the development of the country' (History of TripleS, 2014). Initially TripleS had intended to establish a teacher training college as Acharyaji believed that good teachers were needed to induce an overall improvement in basic education in India. When they sought permission for such a college from the state of Gujarat, the then Gujarat Minister of Education suggested they consider establishing a pharmacy college as there are very few in Gujarat. Despite not having any previous experience in running higher education colleges, let alone a pharmacy college, TripleS agreed to establish a pharmacy college in Kutch. One of TripleS' Trustees, himself in the medical field, brought previous experience of starting a pharmacy college in another part of Gujarat. The organisation also benefitted from technical expertise from its wider social networks, particularly from a diasporic Jain entrepreneur and philanthropist with a long established pharmaceutical business in the Persian Gulf, and from the founder of a multinational pharmaceutical manufacturing company in India with manufacturing plants in Kutch (Interview TripleS Trustee One, 2nd December 2014).

In 2005 TripleS established a Pharmacy College and two years later it was officially inaugurated by then Chief Minister Modi. The college offers degrees at undergraduate, masters and doctoral levels. The building of this college was made possible through a substantial donation of over \$150,000 from a Jain with roots in Kutch but operating construction and steel companies based in Mumbai. This was seen as an exceptional donation from an Indian Jain at that time (Interview with TripleS Trustee Two 8th December 2014), and indicates the level of social and economic capital TripleS was able to mobilize from its Indian Jain supporters. Observations at the Pharmacy College and content analysis of TripleS materials also demonstrate support from a non-Jain Indian owned pharmaceutical company, the Association of Indian Pharmacists, and other Indian and diasporic Jain individuals. In 2008 TripleS established an Institute of Management and Computer Applications that is affiliated to Kutch University. This college is located on the same campus and funded by Jains in India and the diaspora as demonstrated by the plaques dotted around the college building.

In 2010, TripleS opened an Institute of Engineering affiliated with Gujarat Technological University and offering diplomas, undergraduate and masters level qualifications in six branches of engineering. The college is situated on a nearby 60-acre campus that also houses student hostels, a sports

⁶ A new university in Bhuj, Kutch and relatively close to the TripleS' campus, was founded after the earthquake (Simpson 2014:194).

complex and a state of the art kitchen and food storage facilities. The land, worth around \$300,000 at the time, was donated by a Kutchi Jain involved in the diamond industry but now living in the USA, the main buildings and infrastructure was funded at the level of almost \$2 million by another Kutchi Jain also with roots in the area but based in Mumbai, and the sports complex was funded by a USA-based Jain family involved in the medical field (Interview with TripleS Trustee Two 8th December 2014). These levels of individual philanthropy from Kutchi Jains in India attest to their economic successes under economic liberalisation policies in India, but also represent their strong on-going identities and links with Kutch (Interview TripleS Trustee One, 3rd December 2014; Sud and Tambs-Lyche 2011).

TripleS has introduced scholarship schemes to encourage disadvantaged students and girls to enrol in these colleges. A young man from a working-class urban family in Bhuj, whom I met during my fieldtrip, was studying for a Bachelor in Computer Applications after having graduated from TripleS' Gujarati-medium school, suggesting that TripleS encourages and facilitates students interested in pursuing further studies to enrol in one of its technical colleges. At the Institute of Management and Computer Applications forty percent of the students were from Other Backward Classes/Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe according to the 2014 figures provided by the principal of the college. However, an unrepresentative survey of final year students in the Pharmacy and Engineering Colleges that I conducted during my field trip suggests that the vast majority of students were Hindu from open –caste and middle-class background (87% of those surveyed), and approximately ten percent of students at the engineering college were girls, according to one of the lecturers.

VALUES EMBEDDED IN TRIPLES' DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

In this section I address how specific aspects of the Jain tradition shapes the development activities discussed above. I am particularly interested in how Jain spiritual values are embedded in the range of educational activities in which TripleS engages.

The driving force behind TripleS' focus on education is an oft quoted statement in fundraising materials and in a book charting its history and achievements: "Tirthankar Mahavir once said that the flame of one candle can light thousands of others." A distinctive element of education provision is the provision of what TripleS calls value-based education or *sanskara*. There is a strong belief that if children are taught the values of non-violence, compassion, friendship and mutual cooperation at a young age, they will grow up to live by these values:

We need to spread love among humans and need to teach them to love others (including tree, paper, animals, birds and humans). If we do not love the things we use in our day to day life then how we will love the other person. Though we are not hurting other beings, but still the attitude and behaviour is wrong (Conversation with Acharyaji 7th December 2014).

Acharyaji sees these *sanskaras* as representing universal moral values that can create a "global humanity" in an interdependent globalized world. Thus TripleS defines development as progress and change in material conditions as well as social norms and values, both achieved through education.

How is this value-based education implemented? Though not officially part of the curriculum, the incorporation of *sanskaras* was evident in several dimensions of TripleS' educational activities. On the first evening of our field trip, the 200 children boarding in the dormitories sat in neat rows in the veranda outside of the nuns' home, with the fourteen girls sitting in a row separate from the boys. Led by one of the nuns, the session started with a popular Jain prayer. We were then introduced as

visiting guests and the children were given an opportunity to ask us questions. This was followed by another Jain prayer and the narration of a story with a moral by the nun. Before the evening ended with more prayers, one of the girls was asked to sing a spiritual song. Observations conducted at subsequent evening prayer sessions indicate that they followed a similar pattern of prayers, moral stories often drawn from the daily news and opportunities for the children to sing or share jokes. Mornings for these children also began with a shorter 6.00 am prayer session. College students living in the dormitories are also encouraged to attend these prayers but none did during the time of the fieldwork. One of the nuns mentioned that they are planning to broadcast the prayers to the dormitories via loudspeakers so that the college students will have also an opportunity to imbibe the ethos and spirituality of TripleS.

The school day at the rural school north of Bhuj also began with recitation of a popular Jain prayer and a prayer that encompasses all religions, according to the Principal. Though religious education cannot be included in the school curriculum, the inner courtyard of the Gujarati and English mediums schools at TripleS' main campus exhibits several sculptures denoting Jain symbols but also Sarasvati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge, art, music and wisdom. Walls and pillars are adorned with photographs of Acharya Chandanaji showing compassion to an older woman, a small child or an animal. At the same time, the school celebrates key Jain, Hindu and Muslim festivals such as Navratri, Diwali and Eid, but also Christmas, and caters to Muslim children staying at the hostels during the month of Ramadan. In these ways TripleS works to symbolize its desire to create an inclusive global humanity "without any regard to caste, creed, race, religion or socio-economic status" (TripleS promotional material).

The spiritual values of 'selfless service', compassion and friendship with those in need are fostered among school and college students whenever an opportunity arises. The most recent example recounted to us by the senior nun at the Kutch centre was the involvement of students to help the victims of hurricane Nilofar that hit northern parts of Kutch in October 2014. The students became involved in creating food packages for the victims and college students went with the nuns to help distribute these packages in the affected areas.

Content analysis of its organisational materials, including the website at the time of the research and fundraising materials spanning back to the mid-1990s, reveal a lack of overt inclusion of the Jain tradition beyond noting the source of its inspiration in the life and teachings of Tirthankara Mahavira and vision from Acharyaji's guru. Moreover, visitors to TripleS' campus in Kutch encounter no Jain symbols. A huge hoarding erected above the main gate to the campus portrays a photo of Acharyaji surrounded by school children and TripleS' three goals in English and Gujarati. The logo of the organisation depicts three white doves, representing *seva*, *shiksa* and *sadhana*, flying across the globe. A fountain and garden at the entrance of the campus symbolises these transnational links and universalistic humanitarian ethic in 3-D form. Thus it has detached itself from an exclusive Jain focus to promote a cosmopolitan ethic of care that can appeal to audiences of different caste and religious backgrounds (see Huang, 2005, and Gajaweera, 2015, for similar development of a reformist Buddhist cosmopolitan ethic in different national contexts).⁷

⁷ More explicit evidence of specifically Jain traditions were evident in meals served in the canteens, which does not include onions or garlic but does include potatoes to partially accommodate the non-Jain students. Alcohol, smoking and tobacco chewing is also strictly prohibited from college hostels. But perhaps the most significant arena in which the Jain tradition is evident is in the prohibition of animal dissections at the Pharmacy College.

Another value that TripleS promotes is equality of opportunity for girls in education. The senior nun and teachers involved with TripleS' schools set up as part of post-disaster relief operations, recounted considerable resistance from local villagers to send girls to school. Parents were worried about the safety of their daughters especially in gender-mixed schools. Moreover, they did not see the need to educate girls who were needed to help with chores at home and would be eventually married away. Over fourteen years TripleS has witnessed a shift in attitudes and an increase in the numbers of girls attending school from local villages. Free schooling at the rural school north of Bhuj or fee reductions and scholarships available for girls in the fee paying schools at the main TripleS campus has probably facilitated this shift. Teachers I spoke to mentioned that most girls complete 8th standard at TripleS schools and then go on to nearby government schools to complete 10th or 12th standard.

TripleS has also made efforts to persuade villagers in the northern border regions of Kutch to send their daughters to TripleS schools. This is an area where child marriages are still prevalent, according to the senior nun. However, for those parents wishing to send their daughters the cost of such an education is unaffordable. TripleS has entered into an agreement with a Gujarat State company operating in the area to cover these costs under the company's corporate social responsibility programme initiative of empowering women in the community. I met two young women from this community during the field research. Both had been engaged to be married at a young age but are now resisting these commitments or insisting that they complete their education and wait until they are eighteen before getting married. This growing confidence amongst the girls, who are often the first in their families to receive an education, suggests that beyond the cost of education and lodging, TripleS also provides emotional shelter to these girls. In this way, TripleS seeks to transform cultural values and social norms related to child-marriage in Kutch. But it does not challenge prevailing ideas about femininity; it takes a pragmatic attitude and sees poverty among women and their subordinate position in the family as a result of lack of access to basic rights such as education, health and a livelihood.

HIGH MORAL AUTHORITY CONTRIBUTES TO TRIPLES' RAPID EXPANSION

Though there is no consensus on whether improved access to education for disadvantaged groups can, on its own, reduce poverty given the multi-dimensional nature of social inequality in India (Rew and Bhatewara (2012: 852), TripleS has had some impact with reference to the development goals of promoting gender equality and providing access to basic education to the most disadvantaged. I argue that Jain spiritual values, together with the nun's ethos of selfless services and professional organisational structure enables TripleS to make a distinctive contribution to development and delivery of educational activities. This distinctiveness has earned TripleS high trust and moral authority from a number of groups and enabled the organisation to expand the range and scale of educational activities it delivers in Kutch in a short time span.

At the entrance to TripleS' main campus outside of Bhuj is a beautiful circular garden, with a fountain, a black granite plinth, and lawns bordered by bougainvillea. Carved into the plinth are the names of individuals, foundations and corporations that had supported the building of the main infrastructure minus the colleges. Additional plaques in the colleges and conversations with three trustees of TripleS India, revealed that the TripleS centre in Kutch has been the beneficiary of generous individual philanthropic support from Jains in Mumbai, Chennai, Calcutta, diasporic Jains in Britain, USA, Kenya, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and the Gulf States, as well as funding from industry associations and USA-based private foundations with which diasporic Jains are associated, and two non-Jain high profile companies operating in Kutch. These findings suggest that the donor base for TripleS Kutch primarily consists of members of Jain communities in India and the diaspora

though the proportion of donations from Indian Jains versus that from diasporic Jains is not possible to discern as TripleS as does not publish annual reports. This capacity to mobilise high levels of economic and social capital from Jains in India and the diaspora is a mark of TripleS' distinctiveness and moral authority attached to selfless service as well as recognition for its 'good work'. Like other faith-based organisations (Berger 2003), TripleS is highly networked nationally and internationally and can draw on these networks for social and economic capital. The trust and moral authority that the nuns have engendered amongst Indian Jains is particularly significant as until the 2000s TripleS was not well known outside of north-eastern India and had attracted controversy from 'traditional' Jain ascetics and lay Jains (Interview Trustee One, 2nd December 2012; Interview UK Jain Donor 21st November 2014). At the same time, the extensive and sustained support for TripleS education projects also speaks to narratives of success amongst the Indian Jain community. Kutchi Jains, who have long been part of the merchant class in Gujarat (Tambs-Lyche 2011) and beyond, have benefitted substantially from India's adoption of a neo-liberal project and are, therefore, able to wield substantial economic and social capital to further TripleS' projects in Kutch.⁸ For diasporic Jains, particularly those in the USA, Britain and Kenya who have known of and supported Triple since the early 1990s, the focus on primary, secondary and tertiary education resonates with the foundations on which their own successes were built as professionals or as entrepreneurs.

In contrast to the implementation of development policy in Gujarat in the 1990s through local village level vehicles (Sud 2007), TripleS has challenged traditional caste and religious divisions in Kutch through the provision of inclusive education. This cosmopolitan ethic has also earned TripleS recognition and legitimacy amongst a range of local civil society actors. In an informal conversation with a retired school teacher in Bhuj who writes articles on the history of Kutch (8th December 2014), he noted that when compared to other Hindu communities in Kutch, Jains tended to spend their wealth on building temples. Thus, he approved of TripleS' focus on education as it benefitted the wider community, and had been involved with TripleS when the organisation was providing education in temporary facilities in Bhuj. *Kutchmitra*, described as the bestselling and most influential local newspaper by Simpson (2014:24), regularly reports on TripleS' activities and student achievements. A *Kutchmitra* journalist, who has covered stories on TripleS in recent years, was very keen for me to understand that what is unique (he used the word '*khubi*') about TripleS is that "they are solely focused on education and do not force any student to become Jain or follow the tradition" unlike other religious organisations that also run schools in the area (Conversation with author 5th February 2015).

Non-governmental organisations with a long history in Kutch also viewed TripleS in a generally positive light. The director of a non-governmental organisation involved in integrated rural development at the village level in Kutch, noted the TripleS has very good infrastructure and was offering degree programmes that were not available in Kutch before. However, he noted that, at the TripleS primary and secondary schools, the quality of education could be improved if teachers were paid as well as teachers in government schools and sent for regular training (Conversation with author 15th December 2014). The director and a staff member working at another non-governmental organisation, operating in Kutch since 2001 as a facilitator of local level development plans and policies, were also enthusiastic about TripleS colleges filling a gap in Kutch, and perceived TripleS as having created a good reputation in the field of education in Kutch (Conversation with author 16th December 2014). Another social activist, who had held a position as director of the network coordinating the work of non-governmental organisations providing disaster relief in Kutch, believed that TripleS had developed a positive reputation among a range of actors, including

⁸ Sud and Tambs-Lyche (2011:322) have noted that there is a strong feeling of regional identity in Kutch, which I argue facilitates the philanthropic support from successful Kutchi Jains now living in Mumbai.

politicians as I discuss below, because it was “using all its forces in the most acceptable sector – education”. Moreover, she viewed TripleS’ growth and scale of activities as “timely”. The activist observed that large sections of the population in Kutch are not well-off but they have become aspirational over the last ten years both as a result of the neo-liberal project under the Modi government and increased access to digital communication. If these groups can access education they can help their children achieve social mobility (Conversation with author 17th December 2014).

The mobilisation of economic and social capital from Indian and diasporic Jains has enabled TripleS’ rapid growth as a well-endowed, professional educational institution and the development of a reputation for doing ‘good work’ (Simpson 2014) in Kutch. But what is also clear is that TripleS’ growth and widespread positive recognition is also shaped by the state’s conception of development. I discuss the co-constitution of TripleS and the state’s neoliberal project in the next section.

TRIPLES WITHIN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF GUJARAT

In the early 1990s India adopted policies of economic liberalisation and reduced state intervention to boost growth and development.⁹ Gujarat declared itself a “poster boy” for the country and the Bharatiya Janata Party, which has been in power since 1998, and its economic leaders claimed to be leading the way in India in the adoption of market driven policies (Sud 2010:120). After the 2001 earthquake, market-led growth has also reached the previously less developed region of Kutch. In fact, the retired school teacher and local historian mentioned earlier, gave blessings to the earthquake because Bhuj had metamorphosized since 2001. This sentiment expresses the widespread and growing sense in Gujarat that intensive infrastructural and industrial development is a good thing. Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat, described reconstruction in Kutch as the ‘backward region demolished by the disaster now resembles Singapore’ cited in Simpson (2014:6). Simpson (2014:6) observes that after the earthquake “the entire language of public politics in Gujarat has altered... from the watchword ‘Muslim’ to those of ‘development’ and ‘growth’.”

The state government announced a series of tax concessions for industry locating in Kutch, and facilitated a great land giveaway to boost large-scale industrial growth (Simpson 2014: 27-37).¹⁰ Kutch now boasts a large port privately owned by the Adani Group, one of India’s largest enterprises and closely connected to Narendra Modi. The adjacent special economic zone is the location of numerous pharmaceutical companies, Jindal Steel, and there are several power plants owned by Tata and Adani Groups. This large scale industrial growth was billed as creating jobs for local communities and the Government of Gujarat had stipulated that corporations benefitting from tax incentives will have to recruit local persons for a minimum of 85% of the total posts and for a minimum of 60% of the managerial and supervisory posts. However, a local citizens group that conducted a survey when factories first began to open in 2003, found that most industries employed high percentages of ‘outside’, i.e. non-Kutch labour (Simpson 2014:39). Informal conversations with

⁹ In conjunction with neo-liberal economic policies, the government of India has also promoted a policy discourse of ‘inclusive growth’ aimed at increasing access to health, education and skill development of scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribes (ST) and other backward classes (OBC) (Motiram and Naraparaju 2014). However, Motiram and Naraparaju argue that not only does this goal remain vaguely defined, but their analysis of data for the period 2004-2005 to 2011-2012 found no evidence for pro-poor growth for any disadvantaged caste group or for lower classes (labourers, marginal farmers and small farmers in rural areas, and casual labourers and the self-employed in urban areas) in relative or absolute terms.

¹⁰ With this focus on heavy industrial development in Kutch since 2001, local activists have also worked to ensure that traditional industries, such as husbandry, also acquire the status of an industry and contribute to reviving the livelihoods of local people (Interview with Social Activist, 17th December 2014).

lecturers at TripleS' Engineering College and an electrician working at an Adani power plant nearby provides anecdotal evidence for these labour trends continuing in 2014 and bolsters TripleS' rationale for establishing technical colleges in Kutch.

Accompanying the adoption of neo-liberal industrial development policies, have been wider conversations about the role of education in the development of knowledge and human capital. Indeed, Ong (2006) observes that 'knowledge society' has become the buzzword throughout Asia, but particularly in China and India. Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, there have been numerous World Bank reports assessing education provision and human capital development in India (Jagganathan 2001; Dahlman and Utz 2005; World Bank 2008). Dahlman and Utz (2005:xvii) urge India to embrace the knowledge economy in order to spur productivity in agriculture, industry and services. The development of a highly skilled workforce will require a strong basic education system, yet, as Dahlman and Utz (2005: xx) note, almost 26 million children in India are out of school and the participation of girls aged 6-14 in elementary education is very low. Another World Bank Discussion Paper (World Bank 2008:v-), produced at the behest of the Indian Government, echoes similar themes about the need to transition to a knowledge economy but also highlights that 90% of employment in India is in the informal sector. The report advocates high quality secondary education, tertiary education and vocational education and training to improve employment prospects and lifetime earnings for this workforce. Finally, a more recent World Bank working paper (Blom and Saeki 2011) highlights a shortage of skilled workforce as severely constraining a range of industries in India. This is despite an 800% increase in students enrolled in engineering in the ten year period 1998-2008. In line with these national level policy directions, five-year plans for Gujarat also indicate a policy focus on addressing the mismatch between shortage of skilled labour and underemployment/unemployment. In the third year assessment of Government of Gujarat's 12th five-year plan 2012-2017, there is an emphasis on focusing on "sectors that can generate higher employment, women empowerment through economic and social participation, expanding access to education and health services, particularly to deprived sections..." (Government of Gujarat Development Programme 2014-15:19), as well as "to continue the efforts of expansion and quality improvement programmes of Higher and Technical Education ..." (Government of Gujarat Development Programme 2014-15:25).

In order to meet these policy objectives, the government of India had made a constitutional commitment to education for all children. However, in a state like Gujarat, despite improvements in literacy rates between 2001 and 2011, the rural literacy rate is much lower than urban literacy rates, 71.7% as compared to 86.3%, and female literacy rate was 69.7% in 2011. (Government of Gujarat Development Programme 2014-15:2). In fact research suggests that public provision of many basic services such as health and education, is inadequate and of poor quality throughout India (Dreze and Sen, 2002; Motiram and Osberg 2012, Dreze and Sen 2013, all cited in Motiram and Naraparaju 2014:146), and so even the poor are forced to access these services privately and at considerable cost. Acknowledging the inadequate public sector investment in education, the World Bank reports urge the Indian government to collaborate with non-governmental organisations in the delivery of basic education, vocational training and technical education to develop a skilled workforce.

This wider political and policy context highlights the ways in which TripleS' focus on primary, secondary and tertiary education in Kutch is co-constituted with the state's neo-liberal model of development. Close alignment with political processes and agendas in Gujarat has allowed TripleS to mobilize political capital at multiple levels of government. Field research revealed that Narendra Modi had inaugurated TripleS' Pharmacy College. The symbolic significance of this event was clearly important to TripleS; a photo of Narendra Modi at the inauguration is displayed on a board in the entrance hall of the main administration building, a plaque commemorating the event graces the entrance of the Pharmacy College, and a photograph from the event prominently formed the

background screen on the computer of one the TripleS Trustees whom we interviewed. The current Chief Minister, Anandiben Patel, always visits TripleS when she is in Kutch (Interview with TripleS Trustee One, 8th December 2014) and recently hosted a science fair organised by TripleS. Interviews with the senior nun at TripleS also revealed that the local Member of the Legislative Assembly, a Jain and member of the BJP, has been instrumental in swiftly addressing any obstacles to its activities, especially those related to infrastructure such as repairs to a road leading to its rural school north of Bhuj, and securing water supply from a branch canal of the main Narmada canal for the exclusive use of this school, or ensuring the government bus service runs frequently enough to provide adequate transportation for students commuting to the colleges from nearby towns.

From one perspective TripleS, a socio-spiritual organisation embodying Jain values of compassion and non-violence, can be perceived as complicit with a right-wing anti-Muslim state government. Conversations with Acharyaji suggest that TripleS has maintained a resolutely apolitical public position and does not overtly challenge or endorse the political reality in Gujarat. Privately, she disavows nationalism and questions why Pakistan is seen as the enemy and not a friend though she did not mention Muslims in Gujarat. Her perspectives suggest that she is focused on her mission of selfless service to the people of India and has thus adopted a pragmatic attitude to the political landscape in Gujarat as illustrated in this quote:

There are many thorns in the world. Now you will think that we will remove all the thorns but yesterday these thorns were there, also today they are there, and also tomorrow they will remain there in the world. But at the same time we also have flowers along with the thorns. Now our duty is to pick those flowers and use them to decorate our world. We have limited amount of time and it is not possible to take responsibility for others. But what we can do is save ourselves from those thorns (Conversation with Acharyaji 18th December 2014).

The flowers include “whoever has done good work” from whichever political party. She went on to emphasise that she “never relates [herself] with any individual person or any political party” and “cannot understand what is the need to organise rallies, strikes, burning buses and vehicles.” She resolutely believes that these “negative thoughts” create more problems and the only path forward is to have the courage to incorporate compassion, love and friendship “in our actions, words and country,” as these are the values that will survive over selfishness and hunger for political status.

CONCLUSION

As Tomalin (2012:698) has argued, it is impossible to disentangle faith from social, economic or political influences. TripleS draws on the Jain tradition to provide the spiritual and ethical basis for ‘secular’ development activities. The execution of selfless service by Jain nuns across caste, religion and gender, together with a professional governance structure has earned the nuns and TripleS high levels of trust and moral authority from both national and diasporic donors, but also influential actors in society including state politicians, leaders of non-governmental organisations and local media. As I have demonstrated, the initial spiritual capital, to borrow a term from Fogel (2002), that TripleS’ spiritual leader and her *sangha* enjoyed, has attracted enormous economic and social capital from national and diasporic Jains, which in turn has further strengthened TripleS’ spiritual capital amongst these groups, as well as amongst politicians and media in the state of Gujarat. The spirituality embodied in TripleS is compatible with the dominance of what Tambis-Lyche (2011) has called a merchant religion in Gujarat that emphasises purity, non-violence, vegetarianism and respect for renunciators, rather than a concern for the absence of violence in the political arena. This spirituality resonates with the Gujarati Jain supporters who have become successful in business or in

professional occupations in Mumbai or in the diaspora. It is this spiritual capital, and the accompanying moral authority, that has strengthened TripleS' ability to help meet the aspirations of not only the most disadvantaged but also the 'autowalas' and the 'dudhwalas' who can now dream of their children becoming doctors, pharmacists and engineers.

In this case study focusing on TripleS' activities in Kutch, Gujarat, I have also addressed how the adoption of a neo-liberal project in India, and in Gujarat in particular, shapes the orientation and activities of a socio-spiritual organisation focused on selfless service to the most disadvantaged. Sud (2010:130) observes that in the current climate of land liberalisation, investor friendliness and industrial expansion in Gujarat, "there is little room for the articulation of alternative developmental ideas or for debate on a more socially and environmentally just distribution of land." In fact, as Davies (2013) has noted, one of the most prominent global trend of the twenty-first century has been the co-optation of transnational civil society actors by corporate and government agents to promote neo-liberal globalisation, and Levitt and Rajaram (2013) have found a similar trend of a neoliberal health assemblage among private organisations and NGOs delivering health services in Gujarat. As Ong (2006:6) has argued, pro-talent strategies, and the accompanying ethos of self-improving and self-enterprising individual', selectively target certain population within a national territory. In this wider political and policy context, TripleS' educational activities represent a privatisation of the Indian government's goal of creating 'inclusive growth'. In its pursuit of a neo-liberal agenda, the Indian government has prioritised economic growth rather than 'pro-poor' policies and public investment in social sectors such as education and health (Motiram and Naraparaju 2014). Thus, TripleS' approach of education as *seva* fills a much needed gap and extends access to education to disadvantaged groups and aspiring members of the poor.

Politically, perhaps we can think of TripleS as trying to re-imagine another Gujarat. One where the politicisation of religion is halted and space made for the universal values of compassion, love and friendship that TripleS' spiritual leader believes exist in all religions. Through these universal values, TripleS has the potential to counter, or at the very least disrupt the exclusionary and potentially violent politics of sections within the BJP. In the end, I hope to have painted a complex and nuanced picture of the contribution of a Jain socio-spiritual organisation to development in Kutch.

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