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Gendered contours of contemporary South Asian religious practices in the context of migration: Second-generation Jain women and men in Britain and USA.

**Abstract**

Viewing religion through the social constructionist lens and adopting a ‘lived religion’ methodological approach, this article draws attention to the gendered contours of contemporary Jain practice. Though it is a non-theistic, non-institutionalised religion, gender *differences* are embedded within lay practice in India. In contrast, analysis of qualitative interviews conducted with fifty second-generation, middle and upper-middle class Jain women and men in Britain and USA reveals a gender *convergence* in patterns of everyday religious practice and performance. I argue that the social turn in late modern societies, together with dominance of neo-orthodox Jain approach amongst diasporic Jains facilitates this convergence. Further, shifting patterns of religious practices suggest that religion is an important site for the negotiation of gender identities in the context of migration. The construction of Jain religious selves enables both young Jain women and men to navigate multiple and contradictory femininities and masculinities, and to display more affective, relational and compassionate selves in late modern societies.

Keywords: second-generation Jains, Jain *dharma*, everyday religious practice, gender, femininities, masculinities

**Introduction**

Existing scholarship on the relationship between gender and religion focuses on women: women within mainstream Christian institutions (Iadarola 1985; Wallace 1993), women’s participation in conservative religions (Brasher 1998; Griffith 1997), and on the dominance of women in New Age spiritualities (Vincett 2008; Woodhead 2008). In contrast, as Delap and Morgan (2013, 1) observe, the essentially Victorian assumption that masculinity and religion are incompatible prevailed in the twentieth century and led to a lack of scholarly attention on men. The recent emergence of literature on religion and masculinities is a corrective, but this has mainly focused on Christianity and Judaism (Boyd et al 1996; Bartkowski 2001; Krondorfer 2009), or on organisations such Promise Keepers (Heath 2003). Delap and Morgan’s edited collection expands the focus on religion and masculinities in twentieth century Britain to non-Christian religions, but only addresses Muslim and Hindu identities amongst first generation migrants.

Recent social science research examines non-Christian religious groups in advanced industrial societies, specifically young, second-generation South Asians (Berkeley 2006; Joshi 2006; Singh 2010; Werbner 2002). However, this scholarship addresses the role of religion in identity and belonging, meanings of specific religious practices, and mechanisms for transmission of religious knowledge to the second-generation, but neglects examination of relationship between gender and religion. The exception is literature on young Muslim women and men. Scholarship on young Muslim women has addressed generational differences in Muslim women’s identification with Islam, re-interpretations of Islam within late modern contexts, and the significance of the hijab (Afshar 2008; Bartkowski and Ghazal Read 2003; Dwyer 1998; Jacobsen 1998). Writing on young Muslim men has addressed how masculinities are shaped by racial and religious identities (Dwyer et al 2008; Hopkins 2007) but does not consider how the practice of Islam shapes masculinity.

This article examines everyday religious practices and performances among second-generation Jain women *and* men in the context of migration and socio-cultural transformations in late modern societies. The Jain tradition is a non-theistic, non-institutionalised religion, nevertheless has gender differences embedded within Jain ascetic practice (Balbir1994 ) and lay practice in India (Reynell 1991), as I discuss below. Attention to the religious practices of second-generation Jain women and men living in advanced industrialised countries allows consideration of whether these gender differences are also prevalent in the context of migration. My findings suggest a convergence in religious practices among young Jain women and men who self-identify as religious.1 I argue that the dominance of neo-orthodox approach to the Jain tradition (Banks 1991, 252-257) amongst the Jain diaspora facilitates this convergence. Further, while gender identities were not a central focus of this research, converging religious practices points to the ways in which these practices impact upon young Jain women’s and men’s sense of self. Shifts in religious practice and performance in the context of migration enables second-generation Jains to construct alternative femininities and masculinities compared to those among practicing Jain women and men in India, and in relation to hegemonic femininities and masculinities in advanced industrialised countries. Thus this article addresses Jain women *and* men as gendered beings, and furthers our understanding of the intersection of religious practice and gender among South Asian diasporic religious groups.

**Analytical framing**

I move beyond a ‘world religions’ paradigm, which identifies religion as a stable, cross-cultural and transhistorical phenomenon with specific institutions, literature and normative beliefs (Searle-Chatterjee 2000, 500). Viewing religion through a social constructionist lens urges us to focus on the social processes whereby certain “human ideas, symbols, feelings, practices and organisations” (Beckford 2003, 2) are counted as religious and become incorporated into one’s religious identity and practice. Methodologically, I draw on Hall’s (1997) concept of ‘lived religion’ to focus on young Jain women’s and men’s everyday religious expressions and practices rather than normative understandings of Jain *dharma*. The lived-religion approach enables us to focus on everyday behaviours and practices, and on illuminating which principles and values become incorporated into daily routines, interactions and decisions. Equally important, it directs attention to both visible – rituals, practice – and the invisible aspects of faith and spirituality (Joshi 2006, 8). Ammerman (2007, 12) has coined the related term of ‘everyday religion’ to draw attention to the ways in which religious ideas and practices are manifested “not only across cultural and religious traditions but also across the multiple settings in which modern people create life,” such as in formal organisations, education and so on.

This analytical and methodological perspective on the study of religion has synergy with social analysis of late modern societies as post-traditional and characterised by structural individualization, which requires individuals to engage in a reflexive project of identity construction (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992). In contrast to his earlier scholarship, Beck (2010, 29) has acknowledged the contemporary influence of religion in the construction of one’s own biography; he recognizes the trend towards ‘a religiosity that is based increasingly on individualization’, and a decoupling of institutional religion and subjective faith. This process of subjectivization is part of a broader trend in advanced industrialized countries, which have witnessed a cultural shift away from theistic notions of God, and towards a sacralization of nature, the self and everyday life throughout the twentieth century (Heelas *et al.* 2005; Houtman and Aupers 2007). Inglehart (2008) also identifies a shift from material values to post-material values that emphasize self-expression, self-development and self-fulfilment. Recent scholarship has also documented how women draw on religion and spirituality to negotiate gender inequalities within their religious traditions, personal lives, and societies (Bartkowski and Ghazal Read 2003; Aune 2015). However both Vincett (2008) and Woodhead (2008) highlight the complex relationship between religion and femininities in late modern societies. With regard to men, Woodhead (150) argues that male projects of the self in late modernity may not represent a far reaching break with the past. However, the nascent literature on the relationship between religion and masculinities (Boyd et al 1996; Bartkowski 2001; Krondorfer 2009; Heath 2003) suggests that men also draw on religion to negotiate and construct selfhoods. In this article, I take an intersectional and post-colonial approach to understand how the everyday religious practices of young women and men from a minority religious community interact with class and race to shape their gender identities in late modern societies.

**The Jain tradition**

 Like other *dharma*-based religious traditions originating in South Asia, the Jain tradition has a distinctive ontology, which shapes religious action that is appropriate to an individual’s circumstances as a particular time (Mittal and Thursby 2006, 1). Jain texts identify five Lesser Vows (Dundas 2002, 189-190) for Jain laity, with non-violence or *ahimsā* as a central ethic in the Jain tradition and all the other vows of restraint follow from this. Since all aspects of the physical world are imbued with life, 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 enlightenment 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, cultivating detachment from one’s passions (anger, pride, ego, deceit, greed) allows a Jain to shed all *karmic* influences, positive and negative, in order to attain the highest perfection and achieve spiritual liberation (*moksa*) from the endless cycle of birth-death-rebirth. As a non-theistic religion, god cannot help a Jain in this spiritual journey.

Thus the doctrine of *karma* encourages a reflexive habitus in the construction of a religious biography (Shah 2014); moral authority lays with the individual who must choose how to act, speak and think and must live with the *karmic* consequences of his/her decisions.

Lesser Vows for lay Jains represent weaker versions of Greater Vows practiced by Jain ascetics, however very few lay Jains formally take the Lesser Vows under the guidance of ascetics (Jaini 1979, 60). For the majority these vows provide an ethical disposition in daily living, including the observance of dietary rules. The injunction of *ahimsā* governs the preparation and consumption of food and is therefore a religious act. Those committed to a strict Jain practice will also enact other rituals, austerities and restrictions as described in the next section. As previous ethnographic research (Cort 2001; Laidlaw 1995) as well as my own study suggests, the Jain tradition is not a cohesive religion and there is an extensive range of ways of being Jain in India and in the diaspora.

**Gender among ascetic and lay Jains in India**

Unlike in Hinduism or Buddhism, one of the major Jain sects, *Svetāmbara*, views women as independent soteriological agents and recognizes a woman’s ability to seek and achieve salvation through ascetism, while the *Digāmbara* sect views women as physically, intellectually, and morally incapable (Jaini 1991, 1-30). That is not to say that Svetāmbara Jain texts are devoid of misogynistic views on women and the female body (Balbir 1994, 129-131), as Goldman elaborates in his introduction to Jaini (1991, xvii):

Some arguments on the Digambara side derive from postulates that echo the generally misogynistic and patriarchal attitudes of the [South Asian] society as a whole . . . that women are not only physically weaker than men, and hence unable to endure the harsh asceticism regarded as necessary for liberation, but are intellectually, ethically, and morally inferior as well. . . . Although they (Svetāmbaras) may tend to soften these claims by, for example, pointing out famous women from literature and scripture who showed great spiritual or moral courage, or by asserting that men too may share some of the moral defects ascribed to women, they seem generally willing to accept the negative characterizations, contenting themselves merely with asserting that these do not in and of themselves preclude the possibility of moksa for all women.

Despite these misogynistic attitudes in Jain texts and in wider Indian society, Jain nuns have greatly outnumbered Jain monks historically (Balbir 1994, 122) and in the contemporary period. In the late 1980s Jain nuns numbered 6000 while monks numbered 2500 (Jaini 1991, 24). More recently, organisational innovations introduced by the reformist *Terāpanthī* sect has produced 500 fully ordained nuns, or more than three times the number of monks. Jaini (1991, 26) observes that almost all are unmarried, well-educated and come from affluent families. Radford (2013, 103) suggests that though the status of Jain nuns is less than that of Jain monks, it is still greater than that of lay Jain women and men, and therefore “becoming a nun places a woman at the very centre of the Jain spiritual community.” More generally in South Asia, Hausner and Khandelwal (2005) argue that with the overwhelming social pressure on women to marry, procreate and nurture families, or for widows to abide by social restraints, renunciation may provide an alternative model of womanhood that sidesteps rigid social hierarchies of gender and caste (see Vallely 2005).2 Though Jain nuns are subordinate to Jain monks in terms of temporal power (Balbir 1994, 122-123), given their much greater numbers, female ascetics have much greater authority and power over Jain laity through delivery of lectures and guidance daily, during organised religious celebrations and ceremonies, and through their role in teaching prayers and rituals to young girls (Reynell 1991). Thus, Jain nuns are influential in maintaining religious pride and fervour amongst both lay Jain women and men.

There is a dearth of scholarship on the relationship between religion and gender amongst lay Jains, the exception being Reynell’s research in Rajasthan, India in the 1980s. This study finds distinct gender differences in religious practice, which Reynell links to the construction of gender and the division of labour in the community she studied. While women are confined to the domestic sphere and economically dependent on men, they are involved in overt religious practices than men. All women visited the temple daily and performed *sāmāyika* or forty-eight minutes of contemplation in the morning as a means to cultivate detachment from the material world and disentanglement from karmic bonds. Some women performed the ritual of *pratikraman* at the end of the day to formally confess the inevitable violence enacted through the quotidian acts of eating, talking, sleeping, bathing, or walking. Other women performed *pratikraman* on their frequent fasting days and during *paryushan*, one of the most important religious festivals in the Jain calendar.3 Three-quarters of the women ate before sunset, and the rest followed this rule during the rainy season to avoid harm to insects and microscopic creatures. Additionally, while all the women were vegetarian, Reynell found that onions and garlic were strictly taboo and very few women cooked these vegetables. Other root vegetables, such as potatoes, carrots and radishes were more widely eaten, though most women abstained from consuming them during the rainy season and fifty percent of the women had taken a vow not to eat them at all. Some of the respondents observed further restrictions on the consumption of green vegetables and fruit on the auspicious eight and fourteenth days of the lunar calendar, supplemented these daily activities with other religious duties, of which fasting was one of the most important. Fasting is a form of austerity that can help cultivate self-control and the quality of worldly detachment. Reynell’s respondents fasted regularly for one to two days in a lunar month and for a minimum of three days during the festival of *paryushan* when Jains repent for any violence they may have caused during the year. Some women undertook longer, complex fasts, and during this time, they gathered as a group to perform the prayers, hymns and rituals associated with these fasts.

In contrast to women, the men in Reynell’s study were less involved in overt religious activities. The most regular activity consisted of brief daily temple visits. Most men reserved the performance of *pratikraman* and fastingfor the last day of paryushan only, and followed restrictions on consumption of food less strictly. Reynell (cited in Vallely 2005, 231) argues that these gendered differences in religious practice suggests that, in Rajasthan’s hierarchical gender relations, lay Jain women’s greater religious activity was important not only in the social reproduction of the community, but represents a vehicle through which women gained female honour and established their moral worth to the community. In contrast, men established their moral worth less through actual religious behaviour and more through using their wealth for donations to religious activities and celebrations at the temple. This was the only activity where male participation was greater than women’s religious activities.

In the following sections, I examine whether and how migration transforms these gendered patterns of Jain religious practice among second-generation Jain women and men.

**Researching second-generation Jains**

This article draws on qualitative data collated as part of a larger project on second-generation Jains in the UK and USA over a three year period (2008-2010).4 I primarily draw on interviews with 25 second-generation Jains in each country, between the ages of 17 and 30 years, and all of whom identified themselves as committed to some form of Jain religious practice. My respondents were all middle-class or upper middle-class, had attended or planned to attend university, or were working in professional occupations or self-employed. I used a combination of a purposive and snowball sampling strategy to recruit respondents. In the USA I contacted young Jains through *pathshalas* (Jain religious education) classes held at Jain temples in various cities, or through Young Jains of America (YJA), a national Jain youth organization under the umbrella of the Jain Federation of North America. In the UK, I recruited respondents through Young Jains of UK (YJUK), or through a Jain school in London, and contacts in Manchester. In each country, the sample included 13 females and 12 males. Given the small and selective sample, I treat the words of these Jain women and men as neither representative of second-generation Jains in Britain and USA or as representative of themselves; rather I use their words as representations of my own understanding and interpretation of the meaning and significance of these specific women’s and men’s religious practices and beliefs.

As in India, 5 Jains are a minority ethno-religious community in both countries. The 2011 UK census recorded a figure of 20,000 Jains6 living in the UK. In the USA Jains are estimated to number at 100,000 (Lee and Nadeau, 2011, 487). Migration histories of Jains in the two countries differ; in Britain, the majority of my respondents were the children of Gujarati Jain immigrants who had arrived from East Africa during the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, and a few respondents whose parents had arrived directly from India during the same time period. Vertovec (1995, 143) notes that surveys in the 1990s indicated higher levels of educational and occupational achievements among East African Asians than those arriving from the Indian sub-continent. In the USA, the majority of my respondents were the children of Jain immigrants who had arrived after the passage of the 1965 Hart-Cellar immigration reform law, which lifted racial quotas on immigration. A few respondents were members of families who had arrived in the 1990s as part of the family re-unification program or the Immigration Act of 1990, which gave preference to migrants possessing skills in demand in the USA, such as in medicine, scientific research, engineering and information technologies (Purkayastha 2005, 1 & 15-16). Though there are no official figures, like other Indian Americans (Kurien 2006, 725), Jains in my study are among the wealthiest and most educated foreign-born group.

**Living the dharma**

Overwhelmingly, second-generation Jain women and men did not care for or understand overt daily activities and regular rituals. Rather, it was more important to all of them to “practice it through my daily living” as Akhil described his practice. Young Jains attempted to integrate Jain religious philosophy into their everyday lives rather than maintaining separate social and religious lives. In particular, Jain ethics provided a ‘moral compass’ (Joshi 2006, 62), a navigational device that helped them negotiate and deal with competing and overlapping moral values prevalent in Britain and USA. For those living in the USA, Jain ethics helped them to manoeuvre through what they described as the prevalence of violence. For example, Chetan drew on the principle of *ahimsā* to help him decide on the ‘right’ response to violence at various levels, whether it was taking a position on the wars that the USA was fighting, picking up an insect flying around in his room and throwing it out of the window rather than killing it, or when trying to control his temper and frustrations with life. Similarly, Krupa highlighted compassion and non-violence as the key elements of the Jain tradition important to her:

…in the world today there’s so much violence that’s going on… especially in American society, I would say people are very independent that they sometimes lose sight of everything that’s around them. And so, if you have this compassionate attitude then you’ll have love for everyone around you…whether it’s a small ant or a living being or a plant… and you know be more willing to help others, and have care for each other. Because you can get sucked into this society of you know being selfish and just being independent.

For Krupa, acknowledging this interdependency with all life forms helps her resist the individualism in American society. She displays an understanding of the soul in all living beings in the Jain tradition and the need to treat each soul with respect and compassion to avoid accumulating negative *karma*.

Other respondents were more concerned about violence in their own social relationships. Dev described himself as having “a short temper” and sometimes getting angry towards “somebody for no particular reason.” Dev observed that he would later realise that this was wrong and was trying to improve himself by drawing on another key principle in the Jain tradition, that of *anekantvad* or the notion of multiple facets of reality. Together with *ahimsā,* the principle of *anekantvad* was important to Dev because:

there is something that gives you a lot more patience and lets you see other people’s views. I think it probably makes you a better person generally because you can actually see what other people are doing, and you might think actually, maybe that’s a better way of doing it.

Kareena asserted that ‘for me Jainism is not the rituals but its values.’ She contrasted the religious practices of her generation with that of her grandmother, for whom performing rituals and visiting the temple were important ways of being Jain. These young Jains are cognizant of the key ethic of non-violence in the Jain tradition and draw on the codes of conduct emanating from it to help them steer through what they saw as a world filled with violence in multiple arenas. In their desire to be a ‘good person’ they strive to apply these ethics in all aspects of their lives, in contrast to the perception of a Jain practice among parents and grandparents that is separate from every-day life.

**Being Vegetarian, Being Jain**

In India, vegetarianism is only one of many practices that define a Jain. However, in the West, where few young Jains participate in regular ritual practice and austerities, observing a vegetarian diet takes on much greater significance as an expression of what makes a person Jain. In both countries all respondents were vegetarian or vegan,nevertheless actual habits varied greatly among young Jains in both countries. 8 Only one woman and two men in Britain and four women in the USA had made an active decision to refrain from root vegetables in the home, though they were flexible when eating at restaurants or when visiting friends as they did not want to impose their dietary preferences on others. With regard to dietary injunctions on the auspicious days in the lunar calendar, only two women and one man in Britain, and one woman and two men in the USA observed additional restrictions to consumption of particular foods, and only did so if it was practical. These patterns of observing dietary restrictions are very different to that found by Reynell in India.

A development in the religious injunctions related to diet has been the steadily growing interest in veganism. As I discuss elsewhere (Shah 2011) young Jains in the USA have been exposed to debates on the importance of vegan practices at the biennial conventions held by Young Jains of America since the early 1990s. For a small number of my respondent’s knowledge of commercial milk production techniques meant that simply being vegetarian was no longer adequate to minimise violence when consuming food; they believed that such awareness brings responsibility to act ethically and maintain compassion for other living beings. This reconstruction of what it means to be a Jain in the diaspora, which equates vegan lifestyles rather omission of root vegetables with being a good Jain, was evident among one woman and two men in the USA, and two women and two men in Britain.

**Regular Study of Jain religious texts**

For some young Jain women and men in both countries, it was important to engage in continuous reading and reflection of Jain religious texts, prayers and stories. For Jiminy, immersion in Jain texts involved listening to a sacred text on her iPod while traveling to work because “certain lines or tunes get stuck in my head, and it kind of resonates throughout my whole day, and that means that instead of thinking about silly things, my mind is kind of full of that.” Listening to sacred texts first thing in the morning helped Jaimini focus her mind on spiritual rather than material things.

Jaimini, like several other respondents in Britain also participated in peer-led discussion groups. Unlike in India, my respondents only had access to visiting Jain ascetics or Jain scholars perhaps once a year.7 Instead they relied on their own efforts or lay Jain teachers to extend their understanding of Jain philosophy and further their spiritual development. Adarsh had maintained a rigorous self-study and taught at a Jain school in London. Through these activities he had come to understand that the spiritual goal of a practicing Jain must go beyond a focus on *ahimsā* and being a good person; rather it must focus on “the mechanics of how *karma* works” and its role in achieving spiritual liberation. Apurva too devoted time to self-study and discussion groups, but also took time away from his professional commitments as a medial practitioner to visit his guru in India annually.

Respondents in the USA often combined self-study with attending Jain study classes led by lay Jains at the local Jain centres. Sonia, who had a very active social and professional life in marketing, often struggled to get to these classes on Sunday mornings. However, she continued to make the effort because “it kind of gives me a break. I think that’s the best way to put it. It’s just a break from life, a break from reality, whatever else is going on, just like quiet time for you.” Nayam was not attending Jain study classes at the time of the interview but had done so in previous years “because [he] wanted to learn stuff.” When I asked him to elaborate, he added:

…how does Jainism think about dogma? So, if you strictly read scripture things like the moon landing are impossible. So then, do you take that as face value? How do you reconcile that? …the key takeaway message was that in the Jain tradition, your engagement with scripture is supposed to be an active engagement where you are in a dialogue with the scripture, not just passively absorbing it.

The above narratives demonstrate that for some respondents, both women and men, devoting considerable time and effort to the study of the Jain tradition, and discovering the subtleties and nuances in Jain philosophy was an important aspect of their religious practice. In doing so, both young Jain women and men were able to develop a spiritual practice that went beyond a focus on the moral codes of conduct.

**Overt Religious practices and involvement in Jain organisations**

Only a small minority of my respondents carried out regular overt religious activities and duties as the women in Reynell’s study. Among my UK respondents, only two women and two men performed *sāmāyika* or forty-eight minutes of contemplation on a regular basis, five women and three men acknowledged performing regular prayers, while 2 other men prayed irregularly, and two women and two men had carried out eight days of silence, another form of austerity designed to cultivate worldly detachment. Amongst respondents in the USA, while two women and one man performed *sāmāyika* regularly*,* and one woman had carried out eight days of silence, more visited the temple at their local Jain centre regularly and performed prayers while there (eight women and seven men). More frequent visits to the temple among my USA participants serves as a reminder that in the context of the USA, religious institutions also serve as “community spaces” for South Asian Americans (Purkayastha 2005, 96).

The one overt religious activity that has come to have much significance for almost all of my respondents in each country is the eight or ten day religious festival of *paryushan* or *das lakshana parva*, when Jains repent for any violence they may have caused during the year. Divya had fasted and taken a vow of silence for eight days during *paryushan* for three years in a row. When asked why she had decided to combine two practices of extreme austerity, she said:

I just think that to quieten the body and the mind together, that adds more benefit, because even if you are not eating and you are speaking, then harsh things could come out, and I wanted to be totally, as much as I could be away from that….to get to that state of mind, and body and that feeling, to that depth, is absolutely amazing, that you couldn’t experience in any other way…

Divya emphasizes the spiritual quality of exercising non-violence through detachment, while Pranav, who had fasted for all eight days during the previous eight *paryushan* festivals, focused on the personal benefits. He believed that it was a test of “your own limits”, and each time he accomplished the fasts, he felt “quite empowered.”

Overall, similar numbers of women and men observed this religious festival in some way. Respondents listened to religious talks delivered by visiting ascetics or religious scholars at local Jain centres, and many performed or observed other religious duties at this time. Amongst the UK respondents, three women and two men performed *pratikraman* for all eight or ten days of the festival, and four women and two men performed the confession on the last day of the festival. Five women and four men had fasted between one to eight days during the festival, and seven women and four men had maintained further restrictions on diet by abstaining from green and root vegetables. Amongst the USA respondents, slightly higher numbers had performed *pratikraman* and fasted. Five women and four men had performed *pratikraman* for all eight or ten days of the festival, and two women and two men had performed it on the last day of the festival. Six women and six men had undertaken fasts of between one to eight days, and three women and six men had abstained from green and root vegetables. For all these respondents, engaging in the observation of *paryushan* or *das lakshana parva* allowed them time away from professional and educational commitments for self-reflection and introspection on whether and how they had been able to practice non-violence in thoughts, speech, and actions over the year that had passed.

The above discussion demonstrates young Jain women’s and men’s everyday, visible and invisible, religious expressions and practices, and which “ideas, symbols, feelings, [and] practices” (Beckford 2003, 2) are counted as being Jain in the context of migration. Many respondents also expressed their commitment to the Jain tradition through active involvement in Jain organisations, suggesting the importance of ‘everyday religion’ (Ammerman 2007), or the ways in which religious ideas and practices encompass multiple settings in modern life. Unlike in Reynell’s (1991) study, I found that both young men and women believed it was important to be involved in efforts aimed at socialising the younger generations into the Jain tradition and community, and in the promotion of the Jain tradition in public arenas and inter-faith networks. My interviews, and participant observations for the wider project, indicate that both women and men complemented their personal practice with active involvement in Jain institutions. Table 1 illustrates the range of leadership and organisational roles in Young Jains UK or Young Jains of America, in the youth committees at local Jain centres in the USA, and as teachers at Jain schools that many of my respondents undertook.

<Table 1 here>

The lived religion approach to the study of Jain practice suggests a convergence in religious practices in the context of migration, with both young Jain women and men primarily interested in pursuing a Jain practice based on spirituality rather than performance of regular, overt religious rituals or observance of regular austerities. Further, both men and women in the study are involved in public roles within Jain institutions in the diaspora.

**Discussion**

These findings suggests that the religious practices of young Jain women and men in Britain and USA are markedly different to that found among lay Jains in India (Reynell 1991l) or among the parents’ generation, as Banks found and as my respondents had commented upon in interviews. I argue that the convergence of religious practices among second-generation Jain women and men in the context of migration can be explained by the dominance of what Banks (1991, 252-257) calls the neo-orthodox tendency amongst Jains in Britain. Neo-orthodoxy rejects the authority of ascetics and rituals and instead elevates one’s own knowledge, discipline and insights as key elements of being a Jain in modern times (252-254). Anyone with sufficient knowledge and discipline can be a Jain; thus being Jain becomes an ascriptive status rather than achieved. Neo-orthodoxy emphasizes a more experiential, experimental and flexible approach to the practice of the Jain tradition rather than one that emphasizes faith in an authoritative text or guide. It is not as much a belief in achieving salvation but a “science for the individual in his or her present situation” (252). In the context of late modern societies, the neo-orthodox Jain tradition is also viewed as “a science for society” (252), which promotes Jain Dharma as a “modern and progressive” religion, and therefore can be accommodated to and encompass ‘western’ modes of thought” (Dundas 2002, 273; single quotation marks added).9 The neo-orthodox tendency, while not unknown in India, is more prominent outside of India (Long2009, 76). My participant observations at conventions and events organised by Young Jains of America and Young Jains UK indicated that young Jains are predominantly socialised into the neo-orthodox tendency; one that de-emphasizes rituals and focuses on the capacity of each person to gain wisdom and insights through their own efforts (see Shah 2017). The interview data presented above demonstrates socialization into neo-orthodox interpretations and practices among young Jains in the diaspora. But second-generation Jain women and men, embedded in late modern societies, also exhibit a reflexive habitus (Shah 2014): they actively incorporate particular practices, whether it is an emphasis on Jain ethical values, devoting time to study and self-reflection, committing to being vegetarian or even vegan in the context of predominantly meat-eating cultures, or performing rituals and austerities during the most important annual Jain religious festival. In other words, the neo-orthodox tendency is compatible with late modern societies characterised by detraditionalization, structural individualization, and predominance of post-material values. Neo-orthodox Jain *dharma* enables both Jain women and men to exercise choice in constructing a religious self in the context of migration and my data is evidence that these choices are similar amongst my respondents.

These Jain religious practices and performances impacts the gender identities of both young Jain women and men in late modern societies. Second-generation Jain women, born and brought up in advanced industrialised countries, have benefitted from extensive shifts in women’s roles and expectations, and opportunities in education and paid employment since the 1960s. In stark contrast to the opportunities and expectations for Jain women in Reynell’s (1991) study in India, many of my respondents in both countries had attended highly ranked universities and, of those in employment at the time of the interview, many were pursuing competitive and demanding professions such as accountancy, engineering, law, pharmacy, teaching, investment banking and management consultancy, human resource management, marketing, and television media or were engaged in entrepreneurship. This suggests that young Jain women are not subject to the same gender expectations and hierarchies in the context of migration. The lives of young Jain women in the Britain and USA did not only revolve around home, family and children; nor did my respondents rely on religion to provide an environment in which to articulate their identities, desires and demonstrate female honour, or to provide opportunities to circumvent rigid gender hierarchies by becoming renunciates. These middle- and upper class second-generation Jain women availed themselves of the opportunities to create late modern femininities (Woodhead 2008, 149) that reflected independent self-hoods centred on public spheres of education and employment. While the few respondents who had children did take responsibility to pass on Jain traditions within the family, many of my respondents were involved in the social reproduction of the community through their volunteer activities in local and national Jain organizations. At the same time, they all exhibited a reflexive commitment to incorporating a practice of Jain *dharma* (Shah 2014) that “is both a noun and a verb” (Aune 2015, 138). In the context of migration, the neo-orthodox approach enables young Jain women to maintain entitled, independent selfhoods that integrate Jain religiosity, as well as allows them to remain embedded in their religious community and acknowledge familial femininities (Woodhead 2008, 155).

For second-generation Jain men, the neo-orthodox tendency in the Jain tradition also provided resources to construct a regular, personal religious practice that went far beyond occasional rituals and austerities, and donations to the temple or for religious activities as Reynell (1991) found among men in her study. This committed Jain religious practice helps my respondents navigate contradictory expectations and obligations in the context of migration. Recent scholarship on Asian American masculinities (Shek 2006; Lu and Wong 2013) highlights the emotional stress they experience as a result of being a privileged group by gender and a subordinated group by race. Values such as humility and communalism, often attributed to Asian cultures, are seen as feminised and in opposition to regional hegemonic masculinities (Connell and Messerschimdt 2005, 846)) that emphasize individualism, economic success, competitiveness, technical expertise, power, aggression, and virility (Connell and Wood 2005, 205). At the same time, Asian American men are also subject to the ‘model minority’ stereotype that characterizes Asian Americans as highly intelligent, hardworking, successful, compliant and asexual (Lu and Wong 2013, 347-348). Research on British South Asians also documents the representation of Indian origin young South Asian men as a ‘model minority’ (Wong 2015), who are held up in contrast to Asian Muslims as the new ‘folk devil’ (Alexander 2000). Additionally, migrant parents often expect their children to pursue occupations with high status and potential earnings so that they could become a ‘provider’ (Lu and Wong 2013, 361) or the ‘breadwinner’ (Dwyer et al. 2008, 123 & 127-128). All my respondents had a university education, with many attending highly ranked institutions. Those in employment, were involved in demanding professions in the medical field, as dentists, engineers, investment banking, and optometry or as relatively successful entrepreneurs. These educational and economic achievements suggest they have tried to live up to these dual sets of expectations from the wider society and from family. However, they struggle with the violence entailed in being competitive or showing dominance and aggression in the wider society, or experiences of frustrations and anger as they attempt to meet family expectations, evident in some of the quotes above. The neo-orthodox Jain approach provides resources for second-generation Jain men to integrate Jain religiosity, remain embedded in their religious community, as well as exhibit responsibility for the social reproduction of the community in the context of migration through volunteer activities in Jain organizations at local and national levels. These practices and performances enable them to negotiate contradictory expectations and values.

**Conclusion**

A focus on everyday lived religion among *both* young Jain women and men demonstrates the gendered contours of contemporary Jain practice in the context of migration. The social turn to ‘individualization’ and ‘reflexivity’ in late modern societies, together with the dominance of the neo-orthodox Jain approach in Britain and USA has enabled second-generation, middle and upper-middle class Jain women and men to negotiate secular and religious worlds, and integrate Jain religiosity in ways that reveal a gender convergence in patterns of religious practice. Compared to Jains in India, or the parents’ generation in the diaspora, both young Jain women and men in this study had little time or inclination for performing regular rituals, austerities and observing additional dietary injunctions beyond vegetarianism on a daily basis. They are far more concerned with being a ‘good’ Jain through the application of Jain ethics in all aspects of their lives, observing vegetarian or vegan diets, regular study of Jain texts, and contributing to the reproduction of Jain communities in the diaspora. For some, being a ‘good’ Jain also includes participation in one overt collective religious activity, the annual festival of *paryushan* or *das lakshan*. Respondents drew attention to the ways in which the practices and rituals associated with this festival contribute to a healthy and peaceful minds, but in non-Jain, Western environments, participation in this festival also facilitates a sense of belonging to Jain communities. These religious practices and priorities reflect the neo-orthodox tendency in the Jain tradition, which emphasises a shift away from a hierarchical order and authority of Jain ascetics to self-experience and personal development. Neo-orthodox Jain *dharma* provides resources for both young Jain women and men to develop a committed everyday Jain religious practice in the context of migration.

Converging religious practices among young Jain women and men suggests shifting relationships between Jain dharma and gender, highlights Jain men as well as women as gendered beings, and the Jain tradition as an important site for the negotiation of gender identities in late modern societies. Given the neoliberal logic that pervades many aspects of everyday life in Britain and USA, regional hegemonic masculinities as well as late modern femininities in both countries underscore autonomy, independence, competitiveness, success and rationality. The construction of Jain religious selves based on the neo-orthodox Jain approach enables young, middle-class Jain women *and* men to navigate dominant femininities and masculinities in late modern societies and display more affective, relational and compassionate selves. These gender identities do not hark back to that of practicing lay Jain women and men in India but represent shifting Jain femininities and masculinities in the context of migration.

Though this study is not representative, given the paucity of scholarship in India or in the diaspora on the relationship between Jain *dharma*, a South Asian religious tradition with a distinctive ontology, and gender amongst lay Jains, it draws attention to the gendered contours of contemporary Jain practice.

**Notes**

1. I am not arguing that similar numbers of young Jain men and women are religious but am referring to gender patterns of religious practice.
2. Together with the changes brought about by the adoption of a neoliberal model of development, there are regional, rural-urban, caste and class differences in gender norms and expectations experienced by women in contemporary India.
3. Depending on the Jain sect, the festival lasts eight or ten days, and is called *paryushan* or *dash lakshana* *parva.*
4. This article is based on a research project funded by the Economic and Social Science Research Council, ‘Ethnicity, Religion & Citizenship among the children of immigrants in the UK and USA’ (RES-063-27-0131).
5. <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/religion.aspx> [Accessed 18 August 2012)
6. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioninenglandandwales2011/2012-12-11#more-census-analysish> [Accessed 27 February 2018]
7. Several nuns from the *Terāpanthī* sect are resident in London and in Houston but only two respondents in the UK mentioned that they had sought spiritual guidance from them.
8. Despite the importance of observing vegetarian diets amongst all participants the place that diet holds in the construction of a Jain identity and practice among young Jains in the UK and USA differs (Shah 2011, 111-112).
9. In addition to neo-orthodoxy, Banks (1991, 244-257) identified two other ‘tendencies’ or categories of beliefs and practices among first-generation Jain immigrants in the UK, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, but argued that neo-orthodoxy was dominant.

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**Table I: Involvement in Jain organisations in the UK and USA**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Britain** | **USA** |
| Women:Committee member of Young Jains UK (YJUK), including executive roles,Editor of YJUK quarterly magazine,Organising and facilitating workshop sessions at YJUK conventions,Organising YJUK university student nodes,Teacher at Jain school in London,Jain representative on UK Interfaith Network,Fundraising activities for Indian Jain NGO. | Women:Board members of Young Jains of America (YJA),Members of organising committee for YJA conventions,Members of youth committee organising religious and social activities at local Jain centres,Teacher at Jain school at local Jain centre. |
| Men:Committee member of YJUK, including executive roles,Organising and facilitating workshop sessions at YJUK conventions,Contributing to YJUK web presence and magazine,Organising YJUK university student nodes,Teacher at Jain school in London. | Men:Board members of YJA,Members of organising committee for YJA conventions,YJA trustee,Members of youth committee organising religious and social activities at local Jain centres. |