



Diverse Ethics Ltd., Consultants in Ethics and Diversity  
9 Redmill, Colchester, CO3 4RT  
Tel: 0780 4294903

Dr. Atul K. Shah, CEO Website: [www.diverseethics.com](http://www.diverseethics.com)

Email: [atul@diverseethics.com](mailto:atul@diverseethics.com)

*Diverse Ethics Ltd. is a company registered in England & Wales No. 5872648*

## **JAINS IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND – A SURVEY FOR EAST OF ENGLAND FAITHS COUNCIL**

**By Dr. Atul K. Shah, CEO, Diverse Ethics Ltd., June 2009**

Diverse Ethics were asked to survey the activities of Jains in the region and their willingness to engage in local and regional faith issues. We used a combination of questionnaires and interviews to targeted people living all across the region to obtain this information. We spoke to people as far north as Norwich and as far south as Hitchin. Telephone numbers were obtained through calling contacts and asking them for any friends or relatives from the Jain faith that they had in the region. The questionnaire that was designed is set out in Appendix A and was agreed with EEFC Director prior to mailing out. The most significant constraint experienced in this project was the small size of the population and the wide spread of the community. Most people cooperated, but it was difficult to get some people to return phone calls or complete questionnaires – but this is not uncommon in any survey activity. This report highlights the key findings from this research.

### **Geography and Demographics**

Throughout the region, there are no more than ten families in each major town or city, with the exception of Luton/Milton Keynes region, where we have 120 Jain families in a concentrated area. Most of the Jains in the area have migrated from East Africa, with some families coming directly from India. There are family clusters in some towns such as Norwich where relatives have chosen to live near one another. Mr. Rohit and Mrs. Doluben Shah are examples of one of the early pioneers in the area, having migrated there since the 1970's.

At Cambridge University, there is a Young Jains student society which has been active for a number of years, and some scholars having a particular interest in researching the Jains. The only global English language magazine on the Jain tradition was based in Colchester for many years, and edited personally by me. It had a glowing reputation and gave a new energy and vibrancy to this vast heritage. It

did not get any funding from public bodies, and survived as a charity for six years, but then ran out of financial support. Jains all over the world still remember it with pride.

In short, the Jains are a minority although their culture and wisdom tradition is very ancient and vast. They have not lost touch with their roots, and are connected to the larger Jain diaspora in Britain, but are definitely a mis-understood and unrepresented community in the region. Many people I spoke to did not even think that they could have a voice in the region or participate in wider policy issues or discussions. This survey has been a vitally important step in opening the engagement.

Jains living in the area are either professionals, such as Doctors, Accountants, Dentists, Pharmacists or Entrepreneurs running small-medium sized businesses. Education has always been giving strong emphasis in the community. The Jain student population at Cambridge has been growing steadily in the last decade, and the current estimate is about fifty students, which is completely disproportionate to their national population. Considering the prestige and selectivity of Cambridge, the Jain presence is no mean feat. They are by nature high achievers, although the culture has always been at an invisible fringe.

### **People, Organisations and Activities**

In Luton, the Oshwal Association of the UK, the largest Jain community organisation has a branch which has been active for a long time, with a membership which has reduced over the years due to London migration. They have regular activities, including a Saturday language school where vernacular language is taught, but also basic Jain prayers and principles are explained. This is the only significant community organisation in the region which is distinctly Jain. Key festivals such as Paryushan are also celebrated by this group of Jains. Nitaben Shah, one of the key leaders explained: 'We try to do our best to uphold the culture and values, but there is a general decline in commitment from parents and children alike. It is hard work and a strong personal sacrifice, but we still would like to keep the community activities going.' Mr. Kantilal Motichand Shah, a resident of Hitchin for nearly thirty-five years, explained that as a newsagent and shop-keeper, they have little time to get involved in organising activities, most of which are held in nearby Stevenage. For Jain festivals, they usually come to London as it is nearby and where there is a much larger community. In Stevenage, there are twenty Jain families who socialise fairly regularly, either at one another's homes or at the local Hindu community centre. Mr. & Mrs. Akhil Shah migrated eight years ago from Kenya and have settled very well in the area due to this support from friends and relatives.

In all other areas, towns like Cambridge, Ipswich, Peterborough, Colchester, Chelmsford, Norwich, the Jains are a minority and engage in community activities by working with the local Indian association or Hindu association. A senior NHS consultant who is a Jain and a member of staff at Addenbrooke's Hospital completed the survey. In Peterborough, Dr. Mansukh Shah has been a practicing GP for nearly fifteen years and he too explained that the Jains are a minority who have merged with the wider Hindu diaspora and do not celebrate any Jain festivals or events in a distinctive way. In Colchester for example, the President of the East Anglian Indian

Association is a Jain – Mr. Ramesh Shah. Also the leader of Sakhi Mandal, the Indian womens group, Mrs. Hasu Shah, is a Jain. Jains do not see any conflict in mingling with other groups and have no fear of losing their faith or identity by doing so. Historically, there is a close affinity with Hindus. Assimilation and working with different groups has been a core part of their faith and philosophy, and given Jains a natural instinct for diplomacy and compromise. As a result, they are often sought after leaders.

In Ipswich, Mr. Vaibhav Fadia & Mrs. Purvi Fadia are an example of the new immigrants from India who have come here as professionals. He works for British Telecom which is a major hub there and has two children. He has to go all the way to London or Leicester for Jain festivals, and does make a point to go at least a few times every year to ensure that the children take pride in their faith. In Felixstowe, I discovered Mr. Pankaj Jain, who has virtually no relatives in this country and is quite cut off from the Jain faith and community.

The social enterprise Diverse Ethics, founded by Dr. Atul Keshavji Shah, has distinctly Jain roots. It was Dr. Atul who was the founding editor of Jain Spirit international magazine, and is a writer and broadcaster on matters of faith and diversity, consulting with national organisations. His family took a group of 50 local residents on a culture tour of London which included the beautiful Jain temple in Potters Bar. He has also run a course entitled 'The Spirit of India' for local residents. His book 'Celebrating Diversity' is widely regarded as a very timely and prescient work on cultural harmony.

### **Minority Issues**

Jains living in this area have not had any experience of public engagement by and large. Neither have they hitherto been encouraged to participate – usually, others have asked them to spell the word Jain, showing how much ignorance there is about this faith. This is a huge paradox. The Diverse Ethics publication, 'Social Cohesion – A Jain Perspective' demonstrates very clearly and positively the huge wisdom for cohesion that is inherent in this culture, one which the region and the whole country could benefit from.

EEFC's attempt to engage with the Jains is truly laudable. The act of this survey has encouraged people to come out of their 'shells' and take pride that someone is interested in their faith and wants to do something about it. This is a vital start to community engagement. Mrs. Sarita Jain, Executive Director of the Luton All Women's Centre commented that such efforts were vital to raising awareness about the Jains in the region. Her role and status is an example of what Jains are capable of, and the different ways in which they are contributing to the region.

### **Survey Results**

In all, we have thirteen respondents to the survey – see full report attached. The results can be analysed as follows:

1. Most Jains (over 90%) are unaware of the work of the East of England Faiths Council. However, 33% showed an interest in finding out more about its work and events.
2. Most are very proud of their faith and its underlying values (90%). Most people do participate in some kind of faith activity on a regular basis (85%), even though this may not be distinctively Jain.

3. Meetings between Jains living in the region are generally rare and infrequent (30% never meet other Jains living locally). London is the main hub for gatherings.
4. Although not very involved, a number of Jains surveyed did express interest in participating in inter-faith activities. 23% were interested in the national inter-faith week that is coming up in November.
5. Although not actively engaged in local politics or governance, a number of Jains showed an interest in finding out more and getting their views heard. Of these, non-violence, health and education were the key concerns. The high levels of education among the Jain population suggest that if they did engage in civic affairs, they would make very important contribution through their knowledge, faith and experience.

### **Recommendations**

There is definitely a living Jain community in the region which is thinly spread out all across. We estimate that there are in total about 800-1000 Jains living in the region. Unfortunately, the numbers in each town or city are relatively very small, so there is never a significant core for them to meet and congregate on a regular basis. The East of England Faiths Council can get lay Jain members to participate, and can give a useful voice to their faith and contribution to the region. For example, I know that there is no Jain member in any SACRE in the region, nor has one been sought. This is a very important step in their recognition as a faith community. Local inter-faith groups in each town should be encouraged to put one Jain event in their calendar every year, and should be connected to Jains living in the locality who can come to talk about their faith on that important day. Mahavir Jayanti, the birthdate of Lord Mahavir, could be one day which can be celebrated across the region by inter-faith groups as a recognition of the presence of Jains in the area.

Civic engagement is a slow process, and effort needs to be made to educate Jains about the importance and value of such participation. This could perhaps be done as part of a general initiative for minority faith groups in each town or city. What's in it for them should be clearly spelled out. One obvious way of doing so is to create a media database and publicise faith related work of people living in the region, thereby getting them interested in the work of EEFC. This can also be achieved through active engagement with local inter-faith groups and Councils.

Time and money are correlated, and in general, the good work of faith peoples and communities in the region rarely gets supported or appreciated. Government needs to appreciate the huge cost saving that is achieved and compensate for this by encouraging their sustenance. This is especially important for small minority communities, who are often totally marginalised by local authorities through their ignorance or discrimination. It is now a legal duty for public bodies to seek out and support such faith communities – although I rarely see this law being obeyed by local Councils in the region. I recently met a Cabinet Councillor in Colchester who was not even the least bit aware of this legal duty and what it meant. If there was a fund allocated to different faith groups, it may be possible to spearhead proactively a regular engagement process. Diverse Ethics can facilitate such work.