

IDENTITY POLITICS AND RELIGIOUS MINORITY RESILIENCE AMONG JAIN COMMUNITIES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA AND THE GLOBAL DIASPORA

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Abstract

Jainism is one of the oldest religious traditions in India and represents a small minority within the country's demographic structure. Despite constituting less than one percent of the national population, the Jain community has maintained significant socio-political influence through economic strength, philanthropic engagement, and religious leadership. The increasing influence of Hindu nationalism and cultural assimilation pressures have generated new challenges for the preservation of Jain religious identity, both within India and among diaspora communities. Therefore, understanding the strategies employed by Jains to maintain their distinctiveness has become increasingly important in contemporary studies of religion and politics.

This study aims to analyse the relationship between Jainism and identity politics by examining how the Jain community negotiates minority status, preserves religious identity, and engages with socio-political structures in India and across its global diaspora. The research employs a qualitative approach using content analysis. Data were collected from academic literature, ethnographic studies, organizational reports, demographic statistics, policy documents, and contemporary media sources. The collected data were analysed through thematic interpretation focusing on minority religious resilience, cultural preservation, soft power strategies, and transnational networks.

The findings reveal that the Jain community maintains its socio-political relevance through strategic political engagement, economic influence, philanthropic activities, monastic leadership, and diaspora-based transnational networks. Furthermore, digital media, youth engagement, and interfaith collaborations have strengthened Jain identity preservation amid increasing pressures of assimilation and religious homogenization. The study recommends strengthening educational initiatives, digital religious literacy, and transnational cooperation to ensure the sustainability of Jain identity in contemporary society.

Keywords: Jainism, Identity Politics, Religious Minorities, Hindu Nationalism, Diaspora

A. INTRODUCTION

Jainism is one of the oldest surviving religious traditions originating from the Indian subcontinent. Rooted in the principles of ahimsa (non-violence), aparigraha (non-possessiveness), and ascetic discipline, Jainism has historically developed as an independent religious tradition distinct from both Hinduism and Buddhism. Although the Jain population constitutes only approximately 0.4 percent of India's total population, the community possesses significant socio-economic influence and occupies an important position within India's contemporary social and political structure (Indian Express, 2023). The persistence of Jainism over centuries demonstrates

the ability of a minority religious community to maintain its identity while adapting to changing political, economic, and cultural environments.

In recent decades, the socio-political landscape of India has undergone substantial transformation due to the rise of Hindu nationalism and the increasing prominence of majoritarian political narratives. These developments have created new challenges for minority religious communities, including Jains, who must continuously negotiate their cultural autonomy and religious distinctiveness within broader national identity discourses (Jaffrelot, 2007; Kumar, 2023). While Jainism has often been culturally associated with Hindu traditions because of shared historical and geographical contexts, Jain scholars consistently emphasize its independent theological foundations, ethical systems, and ritual practices (Jaini, 1998; Long, 2009). Consequently, contemporary debates concerning religious identity, minority rights, and cultural assimilation have become increasingly relevant for understanding the position of Jainism in modern India.

The challenges faced by Jain communities are not limited to domestic political developments. Globalization, migration, and transnational mobility have contributed to the emergence of significant Jain diaspora communities in North America, Europe, East Africa, and Australia. These diaspora communities have established religious institutions, educational programs, cultural organizations, and transnational networks that facilitate the preservation of Jain identity beyond India's borders (Young, 2024; Dundas, 2021). At the same time, younger generations of diaspora Jains encounter pressures of cultural assimilation, secularization, and identity negotiation within multicultural societies, creating additional complexities in the maintenance of religious distinctiveness (Kelting, 2009; Tambs-Lyche, 2021).

Previous studies have examined Jainism from various perspectives. Early works by Laidlaw (1995), Cort (2001), and Banks (1992) focused primarily on the social organization, religious practices, and economic structures of Jain communities. Other scholars, including Jaini (1998) and Long (2009), emphasized Jain philosophical traditions and doctrinal distinctiveness. More recent studies have explored the relationship between Jainism and contemporary social issues such as environmental ethics, sustainability, and animal welfare (Parekh, 2024; Chapple, 1993). Research on Jain diaspora communities has also expanded, particularly regarding identity preservation, youth engagement, and transnational religious networks (Smith, 2023; Young, 2024).

Despite these contributions, existing literature remains fragmented. Most studies concentrate either on doctrinal aspects of Jainism, socio-economic characteristics of Jain communities, or diaspora experiences separately. Limited attention has been devoted to examining Jainism as a case of minority religious resilience operating simultaneously across domestic political structures and transnational environments. Furthermore, there remains insufficient scholarly discussion concerning how Jain communities strategically employ political engagement, philanthropy, soft power, monastic leadership, media representation, and diaspora networks to preserve their identity amidst the dual pressures of cultural assimilation and majoritarian nationalism.

This study seeks to address these gaps by integrating perspectives from religion, politics, minority studies, and diaspora studies into a comprehensive analytical framework. Unlike previous studies that focus on a single dimension of Jain experience, this research examines the interconnected relationships between religious identity, political negotiation, cultural preservation, and transnational engagement. The study also highlights the role of soft power as a strategic mechanism through which Jain communities exercise influence disproportionate to their demographic size. Through this approach, the article contributes to a broader understanding of

how minority religious communities maintain relevance and agency within increasingly complex socio-political environments.

The urgency of this research lies in the growing global significance of identity politics and the increasing challenges faced by religious minorities in pluralistic societies. Across various regions, minority communities encounter pressures associated with cultural homogenization, religious nationalism, and globalization. Understanding the Jain experience provides valuable insights into how minority religious groups can preserve cultural integrity while simultaneously engaging constructively with broader social and political structures. As debates concerning religious freedom, minority rights, and multicultural coexistence continue to intensify worldwide, the Jain case offers an important example of adaptive resilience and peaceful negotiation.

Therefore, this study aims to analyse the relationship between Jainism and identity politics by examining how Jain communities navigate minority status within contemporary India and its global diaspora. Specifically, the research investigates the socio-political position of Jainism, the utilization of soft power and political engagement, the role of diaspora networks, and the strategies employed to preserve religious identity amidst assimilation pressures and Hindu nationalist influences. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and empirically to discussions concerning minority religious resilience, identity politics, and the evolving relationship between religion and politics in contemporary societies.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity politics provides an important framework for understanding how individuals and groups mobilize collective identities to gain recognition, representation, and protection of their interests within society. Castells (2010) argues that identity is socially constructed through interactions among culture, institutions, and power relations, meaning that identity is not merely an inherent characteristic but a product of ongoing social processes. In this context, religious identity extends beyond theological beliefs and functions as a social and political marker that shapes collective behaviour, community organization, and interactions with broader society. Hall (1996) further emphasizes that identity is not fixed but continuously negotiated and reconstructed through historical and social experiences. Consequently, religious communities often adapt their identities in response to changing political, cultural, and social environments while simultaneously preserving core values and traditions.

This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the Jain community in India. Despite representing a relatively small proportion of the population, Jains have maintained a distinct religious identity through educational institutions, community organizations, religious networks, and cultural practices. Their efforts to preserve religious autonomy and institutional recognition demonstrate how identity can function as a strategic resource for negotiating social and political positions within a larger national framework. The ability of Jain communities to sustain a strong sense of collective identity while adapting to contemporary realities illustrates the dynamic nature of identity politics and its significance in the study of minority religious groups.

The discussion of identity naturally intersects with the broader concept of religious minorities. Religious Minority Theory focuses on the position of minority groups within social and political structures and highlights the importance of recognition and institutional protection in preserving cultural and religious distinctiveness. Kymlicka (1995) argues that formal equality alone is often insufficient because dominant groups typically possess greater influence in shaping public norms, policies, and national narratives. As a result, minority communities frequently encounter challenges such as cultural assimilation, limited representation, and symbolic marginalization. To

address these challenges, they develop various strategies aimed at preserving traditions and ensuring continuity, including strengthening educational institutions, promoting cultural awareness, seeking legal recognition, and engaging with political and civil society actors.

In the case of Jainism, Religious Minority Theory helps explain how the community responds to its minority status within India and beyond. Efforts to secure minority rights, preserve religious practices, maintain educational autonomy, and protect sacred sites reflect broader attempts to safeguard cultural and religious identity. The experiences of Jain diaspora communities further demonstrate how minority groups continue to negotiate recognition, belonging, and representation across different national contexts. Viewing Jainism through the lens of minority theory therefore allows the community to be understood not only as a religious tradition but also as a social group actively navigating contemporary socio-political dynamics.

Beyond identity formation and minority status, the concept of soft power offers another important perspective for understanding the influence of Jain communities. Nye (2004) defines soft power as the ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction, legitimacy, and persuasion rather than coercion or force. Soft power originates from cultural values, ethical principles, institutions, and the capacity to shape preferences through credibility and moral authority. Although originally developed within the field of international relations, the concept has increasingly been applied to non-state actors, including religious communities that exercise influence through cultural, educational, and humanitarian activities.

Religious groups often generate soft power through philanthropy, educational initiatives, public advocacy, humanitarian programs, and the promotion of ethical values. These activities enable communities to gain legitimacy and shape public perceptions without relying on formal political authority. The Jain community provides a notable example of this phenomenon. Through charitable activities, educational institutions, business networks, environmental campaigns, and interfaith dialogue, Jain organizations have established influence that extends beyond their demographic size. Core Jain principles such as ahimsa (non-violence), ethical living, and environmental responsibility contribute to a positive public image and strengthen the community's social legitimacy. In diaspora settings, these values are further promoted through conferences, youth programs, digital platforms, and humanitarian initiatives that reinforce both community cohesion and public visibility.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the preservation of Jain identity and the socio-political relevance of Jain communities. Identity politics explains how Jain communities construct, negotiate, and maintain their collective religious identity, while Religious Minority Theory highlights the challenges and opportunities associated with minority status, particularly in relation to recognition, representation, and cultural preservation. Soft Power Theory complements these perspectives by explaining how Jain communities strengthen their position through ethical values, philanthropy, educational activities, and transnational networks.

The interaction among these concepts forms the conceptual foundation of this study. The preservation of Jain identity is understood not only as a matter of religious commitment but also as a process shaped by minority experiences and supported by soft power resources. Identity provides the basis for collective cohesion, minority status creates both constraints and opportunities that influence community strategies, and soft power serves as a mechanism through which Jain communities enhance their visibility, legitimacy, and influence within society. Through this integrated framework, the study examines how Jain communities in India and the diaspora

preserve their religious identity, secure recognition, and maintain cultural distinctiveness while adapting to contemporary social and political environments.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach using qualitative content analysis to examine the socio-political position of Jainism within contemporary India and its global diaspora. Qualitative content analysis was selected because it enables a systematic interpretation of texts, documents, reports, and social narratives related to religious identity, minority politics, and community strategies. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring how Jain communities construct, negotiate, and preserve their religious identity amid changing political, cultural, and social environments.

The study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational reports, demographic statistics, media publications, and policy-related documents. Academic sources were selected to provide historical, sociological, and political perspectives on Jainism, while contemporary reports and media publications were utilized to capture recent developments concerning religious identity, minority rights, Hindu nationalism, and diaspora activities. Key sources include scholarly works on Jainism, minority religious communities, identity politics, and soft power, as well as reports produced by Jain organizations and contemporary media outlets discussing current socio-political issues.

Data collection was conducted through document analysis. Relevant literature and documents were identified, reviewed, and categorized according to themes associated with the objectives of the study. The collected materials were subsequently organized into several analytical categories, including the socio-political position of Jain communities, religious identity preservation, soft power strategies, monastic leadership, diaspora networks, and challenges related to cultural assimilation and Hindu nationalism. This thematic categorization facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the various dimensions influencing Jain identity and socio-political engagement.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis procedures. Following the framework proposed by Schreier (2012), the analysis involved three stages. First, data reduction was conducted by selecting documents and information directly relevant to the research objectives. Second, thematic coding was applied to identify recurring patterns, narratives, and socio-political strategies found across different sources. Third, interpretation was undertaken by linking the empirical findings with the theoretical perspectives employed in this study, namely Identity Politics Theory, Religious Minority Theory, and Soft Power Theory. Through this process, the study sought to explain how Jain communities maintain cultural distinctiveness while simultaneously engaging with broader political and social structures.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information from academic publications, organizational reports, demographic statistics, and media sources. The use of multiple sources enabled the researcher to verify recurring themes and reduce potential bias arising from reliance on a single type of document. This strategy strengthens the validity of the analysis and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Jainism's contemporary socio-political dynamics.

Through this methodological approach, the study provides an in-depth examination of the ways in which Jain communities navigate minority status, preserve religious identity, and exercise socio-political influence within both national and transnational contexts.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Socio-Political Position of Jainism in Contemporary India

The findings demonstrate that Jainism occupies a distinctive socio-political position within contemporary India. Although the Jain population represents only a small fraction of the country's total population, estimated at approximately 0.4 percent, the community has maintained a level of visibility and influence that exceeds its demographic size. This phenomenon can be explained through a combination of historical legacy, economic strength, educational attainment, and strong institutional organization. Unlike many minority communities that rely heavily on electoral representation to secure political influence, Jains have historically developed alternative mechanisms of participation through economic networks, philanthropy, religious institutions, and social engagement.

Historically, Jain communities have played an important role in trade and commerce across different regions of India. Their involvement in mercantile activities dates back centuries and has contributed to the accumulation of economic resources that continue to shape their contemporary position. In modern India, Jain entrepreneurs and business leaders are active in sectors such as finance, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, information technology, jewelry, and diamond trading. These sectors provide not only economic prosperity but also opportunities to establish relationships with policymakers, government institutions, and civil society organizations. As a result, the Jain community has been able to maintain a meaningful presence in public affairs despite its relatively small population.

Another important factor contributing to the socio-political position of Jainism is the community's emphasis on education. Jain families traditionally prioritize literacy, professional achievement, and higher education. Consequently, Jains consistently record some of the highest literacy rates among religious communities in India. Educational attainment has enabled members of the community to occupy influential positions in academia, business, law, medicine, and public administration. These achievements strengthen the community's social capital and enhance its ability to advocate for its interests within broader political and social structures.

Table 1 presents a general overview of the demographic and socio-economic profile of the Jain community in India.

Table 1. Demographic and socio-economic profile of the Jain community in India

<i>No</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	Population	Approximately 0.4% of India's population
2	Literacy Rate	Among the highest among religious communities
3	Economic Presence	Strong involvement in business, finance, and trade
4	Political Influence	Indirect influence through economic and social networks
5	Religious Status	Officially recognized religious minority

Source: : Indian Express (2023); Forbes India (2024); Shah (2024).

The findings further indicate that the Jain community has successfully balanced integration with identity preservation. While actively participating in national economic and political life, Jains continue to maintain distinct religious traditions, rituals, and ethical principles. Religious institutions, temples, educational foundations, and charitable organizations serve as important mechanisms for preserving collective identity. These institutions provide spaces where religious

teachings can be transmitted across generations while simultaneously strengthening community cohesion.

From the perspective of Religious Minority Theory, the Jain experience illustrates how minority groups can preserve their distinct identity despite demographic limitations. Rather than relying primarily on electoral power, Jains utilize institutional resources, educational organizations, and community networks to maintain visibility and secure recognition within the national political framework. This finding supports Kymlicka's (1995) argument that minority communities often depend on institutional protection and cultural autonomy to sustain their identity within larger societies.

Furthermore, the official recognition of Jainism as a minority religion by the Indian government has provided additional legal and institutional protections. Such recognition enables Jain organizations to establish educational institutions, preserve cultural heritage, and advocate for community interests more effectively. However, the findings also suggest that minority recognition alone does not guarantee cultural survival. Continuous community engagement and organizational capacity remain essential for maintaining religious distinctiveness in an increasingly complex social environment.

Overall, the socio-political position of Jainism demonstrates that demographic size is not the sole determinant of influence. Economic resources, educational achievement, institutional strength, and social legitimacy collectively contribute to the community's ability to maintain relevance within contemporary India. The Jain case therefore provides an important example of how minority religious communities can exercise influence through non-electoral and non-coercive means while preserving their cultural and religious identity.

2. Soft Power and Strategic Political Engagement

The analysis reveals that soft power constitutes one of the most significant mechanisms through which Jain communities exercise influence in contemporary society. Unlike conventional political actors that rely on electoral competition, mass mobilization, or coercive authority, Jain communities primarily utilize attraction, moral legitimacy, and social contributions to strengthen their public position. This strategy reflects the ethical foundations of Jainism, particularly the principles of ahimsa (non-violence), compassion, self-discipline, and respect for all living beings.

The study identifies several soft power strategies employed by Jain organizations, including philanthropy, educational initiatives, environmental campaigns, animal welfare advocacy, healthcare services, and interfaith dialogue programs. These activities project Jain ethical values into broader society while simultaneously strengthening the community's social legitimacy. Through these initiatives, Jain organizations contribute to public welfare and create positive perceptions among both governmental institutions and the wider population.

One of the most visible expressions of Jain soft power is philanthropy. Wealthy Jain individuals and organizations have established hospitals, schools, universities, scholarship programs, and charitable foundations across India. These institutions often serve people regardless of religious affiliation, thereby extending the community's influence beyond its own membership. Philanthropic engagement not only reflects religious values but also enhances public trust and social credibility.

Environmental activism represents another important dimension of Jain soft power. Jain teachings emphasize respect for all forms of life and encourage environmentally responsible behaviour. Consequently, many Jain organizations actively participate in sustainability campaigns, tree-planting initiatives, waste reduction programs, and environmental education projects. These

activities resonate strongly with contemporary global concerns regarding climate change and ecological degradation, allowing Jain values to gain relevance in broader public discourse.

Table 2 summarizes the major forms of Jain soft power engagement.

Table 2. Major forms of Jain soft power engagement

<i>No</i>	<i>Area of Engagement</i>	<i>Examples</i>
1	Philanthropy	Hospitals, schools, scholarships
2	Environmental Initiatives	Tree planting, sustainability campaigns
3	Animal Welfare	Advocacy for vegetarianism and animal protection
4	Education	Religious schools, youth development programs
5	Interfaith Relations	Dialogue and cooperation with other religious groups

Source: : Jain Digest (2020); Parekh (2024); Shah (2024).

Animal welfare advocacy also occupies a central place within Jain public engagement. The principle of non-violence extends beyond human relationships to include animals and the natural environment. Jain organizations frequently support campaigns promoting vegetarianism, veganism, animal shelters, and ethical treatment of animals. These initiatives have attracted attention from international environmental and animal rights movements, further expanding the reach of Jain ethical teachings.

The findings strongly support Nye's (2004) Soft Power Theory. Jain influence is not derived from demographic size or political dominance but from the ability to generate public trust and moral credibility. The community's consistent association with non-violence, ethical business practices, philanthropy, and environmental responsibility has enhanced its attractiveness within both governmental and civil society circles. This form of influence is particularly effective because it relies on voluntary acceptance rather than coercion.

Another significant finding concerns the role of religious leaders in political engagement. Jain monks and spiritual authorities continue to play an important role in community mobilization and public advocacy. Although they generally avoid direct participation in partisan politics, their moral authority enables them to influence public opinion and facilitate dialogue with political actors. Their involvement often helps maintain a non-confrontational approach to political engagement, consistent with Jain ethical principles.

Moreover, soft power contributes directly to identity preservation. By promoting Jain values through public service and social engagement, community organizations reinforce collective identity while simultaneously increasing public recognition. This dual function allows Jain communities to remain socially relevant without compromising their religious principles. Consequently, Jain soft power functions as both a mechanism of identity preservation and a strategy for socio-political participation.

3. Jain Diaspora and Transnational Identity Networks

The findings indicate that transnational networks have become increasingly important for the preservation and globalization of Jain identity. Migration has transformed Jainism from a predominantly Indian religious tradition into a global religious community with significant populations in North America, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. These diaspora communities have established religious institutions, educational centers, cultural associations, and digital platforms that facilitate the transmission of religious values across generations.

Jain diaspora communities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and East Africa have developed extensive organizational structures designed to preserve religious

traditions while adapting to local social environments. Temples, community centers, youth organizations, and educational programs serve as important spaces for religious learning and cultural continuity. These institutions function not only as places of worship but also as centers for community building, leadership development, and intercultural engagement.

Organizations such as the Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA) have played a particularly significant role in connecting geographically dispersed Jain communities. Through conferences, educational programs, publications, and youth initiatives, these organizations facilitate communication among Jains living in different countries. Such activities strengthen collective identity and encourage cooperation across national boundaries.

Table 3. Major Jain diaspora networks and activities

<i>Country</i>	<i>Major Institution</i>	<i>Main Activities</i>
United States	JAINA	Conferences, youth programs, interfaith dialogue
United Kingdom	Institute of Jainology	Research, advocacy, environmental campaigns
Canada	Jain Society Organizations	Education and cultural preservation
Australia	Jain Community Associations	Youth engagement and religious education

Source: : Young (2024); Jain Youth Federation (2023); Smith (2023).

The findings reveal that digital technology has significantly enhanced the effectiveness of transnational Jain networks. Online lectures, virtual religious classes, social media platforms, and digital archives allow community members to access religious teachings regardless of geographic location. During periods of restricted mobility, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms became particularly important for maintaining religious participation and community interaction.

Viewed through Identity Politics Theory, these transnational networks serve as mechanisms for the reconstruction and reinforcement of collective identity. Identity is not simply inherited but continuously reproduced through social interaction, cultural practices, and institutional participation. Diaspora organizations provide opportunities for younger generations to engage with Jain traditions while simultaneously navigating multicultural environments.

The findings also suggest that diaspora communities contribute to the international visibility of Jainism. Through participation in interfaith dialogues, environmental conferences, academic research, and human rights discussions, diaspora organizations introduce Jain ethical principles to global audiences. Concepts such as non-violence, ecological responsibility, and religious tolerance have gained increasing relevance in international debates, enabling Jainism to contribute to broader discussions concerning global ethics and sustainability.

At the same time, diaspora communities face challenges related to cultural adaptation and generational change. Younger Jains often grow up in multicultural societies where religious identity competes with numerous alternative sources of belonging. Consequently, community organizations have developed innovative strategies such as youth camps, leadership programs, mentorship initiatives, and digital engagement projects to maintain participation among younger generations.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that transnational networks play a crucial role in preserving Jain identity while simultaneously expanding its global influence. Through institutional cooperation, digital communication, and international advocacy, Jain communities have transformed geographic dispersion into an opportunity for cultural resilience and global engagement.

4. Identity Preservation, Cultural Assimilation, and Hindu Nationalism

The findings further reveal that identity preservation remains one of the most significant challenges facing Jain communities in both India and the diaspora. Although Jainism has demonstrated remarkable resilience throughout history, contemporary social and political developments have created new pressures that require continuous adaptation. These pressures emerge from multiple sources, including religious homogenization, globalization, migration, secularization, and changing political dynamics.

Within India, the rise of Hindu nationalism has intensified debates concerning religious identity and cultural belonging. Several narratives associated with Hindu majoritarian discourse tend to portray Jainism as part of a broader Hindu civilizational framework. While some individuals view this interpretation as a reflection of shared historical and cultural connections, others express concern that such narratives may undermine the distinctiveness of Jain religious identity. The findings indicate that many Jain organizations actively emphasize the independent philosophical foundations, scriptures, and practices of Jainism in response to these concerns.

At the same time, globalization and migration have produced new assimilation pressures, particularly among younger generations of diaspora Jains. Exposure to secular lifestyles, multicultural environments, and digital culture has transformed traditional patterns of religious transmission and community participation. In many cases, younger individuals possess weaker connections to religious institutions than previous generations, creating concerns regarding long-term identity preservation.

Table 4 summarizes the major factors influencing Jain identity preservation and the strategies employed to address them.

Table 4. Factors influencing Jain identity preservation

No	Assimilation Pressure	Preservation Strategy
1	Religious homogenization	Religious education programs
2	Globalization	Digital learning platforms
3	Youth secularization	Youth camps and leadership programs
4	Cultural integration	Community festivals and transnational networks
5	Political pressures	Advocacy and cultural diplomacy

Source: : Smith (2023); Kelting (2009); Young (2024).

The findings demonstrate that Jain identity preservation is neither passive nor automatic. Rather, it involves continuous negotiation between adaptation and resistance. Community leaders, women’s organizations, youth groups, educational institutions, and diaspora associations collectively contribute to maintaining religious distinctiveness while adapting to changing social realities. Religious education programs remain particularly important because they provide younger generations with knowledge of Jain philosophy, ethics, and history.

Digital technology has emerged as a valuable tool for identity preservation. Online learning platforms, virtual religious classes, podcasts, and social media campaigns enable Jain organizations to reach audiences that may not regularly participate in traditional religious institutions. These technologies facilitate the transmission of religious knowledge while accommodating contemporary lifestyles and communication preferences.

Community festivals and cultural events also play a significant role in strengthening collective identity. Celebrations, conferences, and religious gatherings provide opportunities for social

interaction and reinforce a sense of belonging. Such events are especially important in diaspora contexts where community members may be geographically dispersed.

The findings further suggest that women and youth increasingly occupy central roles in identity preservation efforts. Women often serve as primary transmitters of religious values within families, while youth organizations create spaces for leadership development and community engagement. Their participation ensures that identity preservation remains a dynamic and evolving process rather than a purely traditional one.

Overall, the findings indicate that Jainism's resilience is shaped by the interaction of three key dimensions: identity politics, minority status, and soft power. Identity provides the foundation for collective cohesion, minority status creates both challenges and opportunities, and soft power serves as the primary mechanism through which Jain communities sustain influence and legitimacy. Together, these dimensions explain how Jain communities continue to preserve their religious identity while actively engaging with contemporary socio-political structures in India and beyond. The Jain experience demonstrates that minority religious communities can remain culturally distinct, socially influential, and globally connected through strategic adaptation, institutional strength, and the effective use of moral and cultural resources.

E. CONCLUSION

This study examined how Jain communities negotiate minority status, preserve religious identity, and maintain socio-political relevance within contemporary India and its global diaspora. The findings demonstrate that the resilience of Jainism cannot be explained solely by theological continuity or historical endurance. Rather, the community's ability to sustain its distinct identity is closely associated with its strategic engagement in political, social, economic, and cultural spheres. Despite representing a small demographic minority, Jain communities have successfully maintained visibility and influence through strong institutional networks, educational achievement, economic participation, philanthropic initiatives, and community-based religious organizations.

The study further reveals that soft power constitutes a central mechanism through which Jain communities strengthen their social legitimacy and public influence. Through philanthropy, environmental activism, educational programs, animal welfare advocacy, and interfaith engagement, Jain organizations project ethical values that resonate beyond their own religious boundaries. These activities not only reinforce internal community cohesion but also enhance public recognition and acceptance. In addition, the findings indicate that monastic leadership, community institutions, and transnational diaspora networks play important roles in preserving religious identity and facilitating adaptation to changing socio-political environments.

At the transnational level, Jain diaspora communities have transformed migration and globalization into opportunities for cultural preservation and global engagement. Through religious institutions, youth programs, digital platforms, and international networks, diaspora organizations contribute to the reproduction of Jain identity across generations while simultaneously promoting Jain ethical principles in global discussions concerning environmental sustainability, non-violence, and religious pluralism. These developments demonstrate that Jain identity is no longer confined to territorial boundaries but increasingly operates through interconnected global networks.

The study also highlights the challenges posed by cultural assimilation, globalization, secularization, and the growing influence of Hindu nationalist narratives. These developments

create pressures that may weaken religious distinctiveness, particularly among younger generations. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that Jain communities have responded proactively through educational initiatives, digital engagement, cultural diplomacy, and institutional strengthening. Such strategies enable them to balance adaptation with the preservation of core religious values and traditions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on identity politics, religious minorities, and soft power by demonstrating how these three dimensions interact in shaping the experiences of minority religious communities. The Jain case illustrates that minority status does not necessarily imply political marginalization or social vulnerability. Instead, when supported by strong institutions, collective identity, and effective soft power resources, minority communities can maintain cultural distinctiveness while exercising meaningful influence within broader socio-political structures.

This study is limited by its reliance on qualitative content analysis and secondary sources. The findings therefore reflect interpretations derived from existing literature, organizational reports, and publicly available documents rather than direct observations or interviews with members of Jain communities. Future research may strengthen the empirical understanding of Jain identity politics through fieldwork, ethnographic approaches, comparative studies of minority religious communities, or investigations focusing on the experiences of Jain youth and women in both India and diaspora contexts.

Overall, the experience of Jainism demonstrates that minority religious communities can successfully navigate contemporary political and cultural challenges through a combination of identity preservation, institutional adaptation, and strategic soft power engagement. The Jain case provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of religious pluralism, minority resilience, and the evolving relationship between religion and politics in an increasingly interconnected world.

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