

Chairman's Speech Dubai and Oman 2012

Jai Jinendra!

Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to be here with you today. I am delighted that so many of you have taken the time to be here, and I hope that you will be inspired by the presentations that we have for you.

The Institute of Jainology was founded 25 years ago with the support of the international Jain community following the first International Jain Conference held in London in 1983. From its foundation, the IOJ has had a global outlook and an aim to represent Jainism in national and international affairs.

An article in the 'HERALD TRIBUNE' Newspaper on 24 May 1989 announced launching of the 'International Sacred Literature Trust' at the United Nations by HRH Prince Philip to translate key scriptures of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Taoism into contemporary English. Jainism was not included in the proposed translation work. The two major Jain organisations in the UK – Oshwal & Navnat Vanik Associations approached jointly to HRH Prince Philip with a request to include translation of Jain Scriptures in the proposed programme.

The joint approach brought a favourable response and Jainism was included in the project. As a precursor to the translation work, it was decided that the IOJ should join the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) by submitting a 'Jain Declaration on Nature' Jains from all over were invited for participation in the programme.

30 Jain scholars worked on preparing the historical *Jain Declaration on Nature* and 21 Jains representing all sects of Jainism, presented this Declaration to Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace on 23rd October 1989 and the event gave national and international recognition to Jainism as the world's 8th faith. Today, the Institute of Jainology is recognised by all UK agencies of the Government, Interfaith, R E Council and the Palace.

Since then the IOJ has worked tirelessly on three major fronts to ensure that Jainism becomes a globally recognised religion. These are (i) interfaith relations, (ii) bringing awareness of the Jain philosophy and (iii) bringing access to Jainism.

I will address these individually, starting with our interfaith activities. The IOJ believes that for Jainism to have its proper place in the world's faiths, it is important to have

dialogue with other major faiths and to agree on common matters. This builds understanding, tolerance and mutual respect. The IOJ has held dialogue with the Vatican, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dalai Lama and the Heads of various Hindu sects. In 2011, we issued a joint communique with the Vatican on Ahimsa. We are now represented on many interfaith committees and host religious leaders at local *derasars*.

Virchand Raghavji Gandhi travelled to USA as a Jain delegate to participate in the parliament of the World's Religions held at Chicago in 1893. As a mark of respect and to commemorate VRG's visit, IOJ was instrumental in installing a bust of VRG at the Jain centre, Chicago in 1993 centennial celebrations. We are happy that after many years of work, this year the Gujarat Government has named a prominent *chowk* in Ahmedabad after Shri Virchand R Gandhi.,

Secondly, we bring awareness to the Jain faith by working in the fields of Art, Culture and Education . In 1995 the IOJ co-ordinated the first ever exhibition of JAIN ART FROM INDIA held at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A), London. The then President of India, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma and Her Majesty The Queen graciously agreed to become Joint Patrons-in-Chief of this Exhibition. Approximately 55,000 people visited the exhibition, making this a significant historical achievement for Jains.

Over the past 10 years, the IOJ has held an annual Ahimsa Day at the House of Commons. We recognise those that embody Ahimsa or compassion through the Ahimsa Award. Recipients of the award include personalities such as Dr. Nelson Mandela, HH the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Acharyashri Mahapragna, Professor Padmanabh Jaini, Professor Nalini Balbir, and Scott Neeson.

Today the IOJ maintains offices in London and Ahmedabad, ensuring that we are active in our purpose on a daily basis. Last year, IOJ organised manuscriptology seminars in Ahmedabad which were attended by more than 300 professors and students. It created tremendous interest in the subject and we are now discussing with a university in India to implement a diploma course in Manuscript studies. We are also discussing with Jain community to support the project and provide appropriate work to people who qualify in this field. We shall continue to deliver educational programs, free of cost, in Europe, Africa and Asia. We have an Educational team available to undertake this work.

Lastly our mission is to bring access to the Jain faith; we recognise that many of our young people are interested in Jainism, but are unable to access material. We also see

a need to build a strong body of Jain scholars and to make Jainism available to western scholars.

In 1995 the IOJ with Harper Collins and the International Sacred Literature Trust jointly published an English translation of the Jain classic - 'TATTVARTHA SUTRA'. Since then, we have published Text Books for teaching Jainism in schools: 'Discover Jainism' and 'Jain Tales' – now part of the UK National Curriculum for Religious Education (RE). We worked with the K J Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham, Mumbai to publish a multi-faith book: Indian Philosophical Terms ~ Glossary & Terms.

We have since published the Catalogue of the Jain Manuscripts of the British Library and the V&A and launched it with the PM of India and at Buckingham Palace. We continue to work on catalogues of other major collections.

In 2007, we undertook the mammoth task of building an online Jain encyclopaedia. This \$2m project will become a global resource for Jainism worldwide for generations to come and will drive interest in both Jains and non-Jains alike. You will shortly see a presentation on Jainpedia, and hear about our partners and goals.

Ladies and gentlemen, in these few brief minutes, I can only give you the briefest of views about our journey over the past 25 years. I am sure you will see that we have achieved a tremendous amount and that Jainism is now recognised as a major religion in the highest of places.

Our efforts have meant that Jain views are sought on issues and that Jains are respected for their faith and ethical values.

Through the generosity of our partners, donors, well-wishers, friends and patrons including the Indian and UK Governments, we continue to work on substantial international projects.

To continue to achieve our objectives and to create a legacy for the future generations we continually require support from Jain communities worldwide. National community associations can support us by becoming partners, such as the Oshwal Association UK. They can also promote the project locally within their own community. Individuals can also support the project by becoming Patrons and Friends of IOJ.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Institute, can I thank [name] for organising this event, your hospitality and generosity, and your time today. Thank you. Jai Jinendra