



## PRESS RELEASE

### **The Institute of Jainology and Jain All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Celebrates the Birthday of Lord Mahavir at the House of Commons**

**Westminster, UK, 24th April 2024:** The Institute of Jainology (IOJ) and the Jain All-Party Parliamentary Group celebrated the birth anniversary of Lord Mahavir at the House of Commons. Known as Mahavir Janma Kalyanak, this day celebrates the birth of the 24<sup>th</sup> Jain Tirthankara (enlightened teacher). This year's event was particularly significant, marking the 2,550th anniversary of Lord Mahavir attaining Nirvana.

The annual celebration at the Palace of Westminster gathered Jain community leaders as well as a diverse array of dignitaries from Parliament, various faith communities, and the academic world. The event commenced with Jain prayers led by Paarul Shah. Dr. Mehool H Sanghrajka, the Managing Trustee of the IOJ, warmly welcomed the attendees, emphasising the milestone anniversary and its importance to the Jain community.

The Deputy Chair of the Jain APPG, Hon. Bob Blackman, MP for Harrow East, presented the annual OneJAIN awards, the highlight of the evening, which honours individuals for their significant contributions to the Jain community. This year's awardees included Sonal Mehta, recognised with the *Excellence in the Community Award* for her dedicated community service in Manchester, and Suraj Bafna, who received the *Young Persons Award* for his impactful work on health initiatives within the Jain community. Chandrakant Shah received a high commendation for his extensive community involvement. A special Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Nemu Chandaria for his pivotal role in raising the profile of Jainism in the UK and his three decades of passionate service, earning him a standing ovation.

A special message from Baroness Scott of Bybrook, Minister of Faith, was read, reflecting the legacy of Lord Mahavir and her appreciation of the institute of Jainology's work in supporting Jain communities.

The evening also included an announcement by Samir Juthani, who is currently analysing the 2021 UK Census data to better advocate for the Jain community's needs in regions with significant Jain populations. Sonali Shah, a celebrity known for her role in the TV series "Pilgrimage" and as a presenter on "Escape to the Country," spoke about her personal spiritual journey within Jainism, highlighting how her understanding and acceptance of Jain values have deepened over time.

A pivotal moment of the event was the announcement and symbolic restitution of the Jain manuscripts held by the Wellcome Collection, represented by Dr Adrian Plau, to the IOJ.



Wellcome have confirmed their intention to restate their entire 2,000 plus Jain manuscripts to the IOJ. This gesture was described as an effort to "right a historical wrong", with Katherine Knowles discussing the care and preservation needs of these manuscripts. The IOJ announced a long-term loan of these manuscripts to the University of Birmingham, thereby enhancing its role as a premier Jain research institution outside of India.

University representatives, led by Professor Charlotte Hempel, provided insights into their ongoing research and innovative educational programs designed to engage the community with the Jain manuscripts. They assured the audience of their commitment to preserving and promoting these valuable cultural artifacts.

The evening concluded with remarks from the Mayor of Harrow, Ramji Chauhan, who spoke passionately about respect, unity, and diversity as foundational to fostering peace and harmony. Lastly, Niraj Sutaria of the Mahavir Foundation announced an upcoming OneJAIN large-scale celebration of the 2,550th anniversary of Mahavir's Nirvana, expected to attract around 2,000 participants, demonstrating the vibrant legacy of Lord Mahavir and the unity of the Jain community.

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### About OneJAIN

OneJAIN is an initiative of the Institute of Jainology (IOJ), which was established in 2014 with the unanimous consent of all Jain organisations in the UK. IOJ represents the Jain community in government and interfaith matters and provides the Jain community with a single coherent voice in promoting the values and cause of Jainism

For more information see [www.onejainuk.org](http://www.onejainuk.org)

### About the Institute of Jainology

The Institute of Jainology (IOJ) was founded in 1986 and is an international organisation promoting Jain philosophy and values through the disciplines of art, culture and education. It represents the 35 UK Jain organisations and the Jain faith under the OneJAIN banner in government and inter-faith matters in the UK and elsewhere.

Over its 25-year history, the IOJ has co-hosted the Peaceful Liberators exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum London, published the Catalogue of the Jain Collection at the British Library, and launched the Jainpedia.org encyclopaedia.

For more information, please email [press@jainology.org](mailto:press@jainology.org) or visit [www.ioj.org](http://www.ioj.org)