Three Endowed Chairs in Jain Studies, Sikh Studies and Modern India Studies Established at University of California, Irvine

BUENA PARK, Calif. — A historical celebration of the establishment of three endowed chairs—Shri Parshvanath Presidential Chair in Jain Studies, Dhan Kaur Sahota Presidential Chair in Sikh Studies and Swami Vivekananda-DCF (Dharma Civilization Foundation) Presidential Chair in Modern India Studies - in the School of Humanities at the University of California, Irvine was held at the Jain Center of Southern California (JCSC), Buena Park on August 12, 2015.

The agreements establishing two chairs (Jain and Sikh) were signed by UCI Dean of School of Humanities Dr. Georges Van Den Abbeele and the donors – Dr. Jasvant and Dr. Meera Modi and Mr. Rajesh (Raju) and Mrs. Neeta Shah for Jain Studies Chair and by Dr. Harvinder and Mrs. Asha Sahota for Sikh Studies Chair – in the presence of eight UCI officials including Associate Chancellor Michael Arias and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Herbert Killackey and about 100 invited guests.

An agreement to establish a third endowed chair – Swami Vivekananda-DCF Chair in Modern India Studies – is also confirmed. A total of four chairs - these three chairs plus the Thakkar Family-DCF Presidential Chair in Vedic and Indic Civilization Studies signed earlier this year - will anchor the religious studies program at UCI by permanently securing faculty-led research and instruction in influential Indian religions and culture and help establish a multidisciplinary campus for Indian studies at a prominent public university in United States of America.

The agreement signing event, hosted at the Jain Center of Southern California, commenced with the traditional lighting of the lamps and chanting of a Jain (A video blessings from 93 year old Reverend Gurudev Chitrabhanujji), a Sikh and a Hindu prayer followed by messages from the host officials, UCI officials and invited guests. Virendra Shah, JCSC
President, welcomed the guest. He made an observation that two recently published books on World Religions had mentioned Jainism and Sikhism only in the footnotes. “Today’s historical event will have a profound impact on developing academic opportunities for the study and research of these two religions which are not widely known or understood outside of India,” said Mr. Shah.

Mahesh Wadher West Coast Regional Vice President of Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA), an umbrella organization representing 71 Jain Centers in US and Canada, mentioned that the teaching of Jain philosophies and principles – Ahimsa (nonviolence), Aparigrah (non-possessiveness) and Anekantvad (Non-absolute, Pluralistic perspective) – will be of great benefit in resolving world conflicts. Nicole Balsamo, Senior Director of Development, UCI School of Humanities, was invited to introduce UCI Dean of School of Humanities Dr. Georges Van Den Abbeele. She recognized the tireless efforts of many individuals - in particular Dr. Nitin Shah, Dr. Harvinder Sahota, Dr. Jasvant Modi, Mr. Rajesh Shah, Mr. Yogesh Shah, Dr. Manohar Shinde, and others – which led to the successful fruition of the initiative to establish these chairs. Nicole outlined Dean Georges Van Den Abbeele’s progress and accomplishments, and his vision to develop a multidisciplinary center in South Asian studies at UCI School of Humanities.

UCI Dean of School of Humanities Dr. Georges Van Den Abbeele began his remarks by noting that the establishment of these four endowed chairs is an unprecedented event in the history of UCI - the first public university to establish a meaningful partnership with several Asian organizations to develop a Center of Excellence in South Asian studies. The endowed chairs will support UCI’s strength in the study of Indian and global South Asian diaspora. Dean Georges Van Den Abbeele expressed his gratitude to all the donors and thanked all the individuals including Dr. Nitin Shah for their tireless efforts and support for the successful outcome of this initiative.
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Dr. Manohar Shinde, founding chairman of DCF, spoke in support of establishing the Swami Vivekananda-DCF Chair in Modern India Studies. He explained the mission and academic vision of DCF and how UCI, as the first public university to establish a partnership with the organization, plays a special role. He also mentioned about Professorships at University of Southern California and $ 4.2 M pledge to Graduate Theological Union by DCF. The donors – Dr. Jasvant Modi, Mr. Rajesh Shah and Dr. Harvinder Sahota – offered their gratitude for the opportunity to support the faculty-led research and instructions for Jain and Sikh studies.

Each endowed chair is funded with $ 2 M of which the donors contribute $1.5 M and $0.5M is provided by UC President a matching donation. For Shri Parshvanath Presidential Chair in Jain Studies $ 1 M is pledged by (Dr. Jasvant and Dr. Meera Modi $ 750,000 and Mr. Rajesh (Raju) and Mrs. Neeta Shah $ 250,000), and for the balance of $ 500,000 community members have a very unique opportunity to help raise and be an active participant in this lifetime opportunity. Since UCI required commitment of $ 1.5 M, Modi and Shah family very graciously signed guarantee for $ 1.5 M also. For the Sikh Studies Chair, Dr. Harvinder and Mrs. Asha Sahota have pledged $ 1.5 M.

An endowed chair is a fund that provides resources to recruit, retain, and reward the finest scholars. The annual interest in the endowment provides resources in perpetuity for faculty salary, teaching, research and related activities.

Following the conclusion of the messages, UCI Dean of School of Humanities Dr. Georges Van Den Abbeelee and the donor families were invited to sign the agreements. The event concluded with recital of a prayer (Navkar mantra) by Mrs. Neeta Shah followed by a delicious Vegan lunch sponsored by Drs. Jasvant and Meera Modi and a tour of the JCSC facilities.

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