

## **Acharya Tulsi and the Making of Modern Jainism**

### **International Conference**

**Nov 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014**

**FIU, Miami, USA**

To commemorate the birth centenary of Acharya Shri Tulsi, The Florida International University organized an international conference with the theme: “Acharya Tulsi and the making of Modern Jainism” This conference was attended by many Jain scholars of international repute and was held at the Florida International University on Nov 1-2, 2014. The cosponsors of the conference were Jain Vishva Bharati University, Jain Education and Research Foundation.

As part of the celebration, Samani Shukla Pragya ji and Samani Unnata Pragya ji organized a student’s poster exposition on Nov 1.

### **Inauguration of Student’s Poster Session**



The student's poster session was held at the MARC building on Nov 1. Altogether 45 students presented 31 posters on the theme of "Self Discipline a key to life fulfilled". The proceedings started with the chanting of Namaskar Mantra by the Samani Ji's. This auspicious beginning was followed by the formal inauguration of the session by Prof John Stack, the director of FIU's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). In his inaugural address Prof Stack welcomed the FIU and non-FIU community. Prof Erik Larson, Chairman, Dept of Religious Studies and Prof Jainendra Navalakha, ex-Director School of Computer Science also graced the occasion and joined with Prof Stack in judging the poster entries. Analyzing the posters Prof. Stack congratulated the students on their creativity, hard work and thoughtfulness and on the impressive display of the posters. He remarked on what a huge impact the Samani Jis had and expressed his gratitude to JERF and JAINA on behalf of FIU and SIPA,



Three awards were declared and the winners are:

- Komal Ashok Kumar - **Ascetically artistic and Aesthetically ascetic**
- Patric Hand & Rachell Shuffler - Santhara: **The Peaceful Death**
- Christen Chacon and Gabriele Gocso- **Perspectives on Suicide: Modern Suicide vs. Peaceful Death**



The occasion was made memorable by the wide participation by the FIU's student community and the diversity and creativity of thoughts exhibited by the spread of topics of student's presentations. The event was a great success.

This event was partially supported by a gift from Sapan and Gitika Bafna. The local Jain community organized a complementary Jain vegetarian lunch for the guests.

The scholars, the Jain community and the guests were all impressed by the thoughtful and research oriented presentations made by the students.

The poster expo was followed by the afternoon session in which the Samani Jis recalled various aspects of Acharya Tulsi's life. The session was titled "Turning the wheel of dharma". In her presentation Samani Parimal Pragyaji recalled how the personality of Acharya Tulsi transcended the boundaries of sect, caste and creed. Although it was a time of sectarian strife, Acharya Tulsi's compassion towards fellow human beings made him embrace followers of other sect and religions without any hesitation.



Samani Shukla Pragyaji presented the struggle and survival of Acharya Tulsi during the Agni Pariksha book. Samani Vikas Pragyaji presented the historical story behind the song "Prabhu Parshva Dev Caranon Me" and then sang the song which enthralled the audience.

Samani Unnata Pragyaji presented a brief summary of various events that were organized during the whole year of centennial celebration of Acharya Tulsi's birth centenary. Prof Neptune Simal, President, JERF, outlined how from a simple beginning the Jain Studies at FIU has grown to be vibrant program encompassing a plethora of diverse and successful academic activities. He said that this would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Samani Jis and the whole hearted support of FIU and the Jain community. The session was followed by a tea break during which an animated movie on the life of Acharya Tulsi was showed. The event was very well attended and was a good start for the main conference. Apart from the local Miami community the event was attended by participants from Orlando, Tampa, New Jersey, California, Indianapolis, Texas and India.



## Inauguration of the Conference



The main conference was started with the Namaskar Mahamantra by Samani jis which was followed by welcoming speeches by Kamlesh Shah on behalf of JVBI, by Prem Jain on behalf of JAINA and by Neptune Srimal of JERF and by Dr Kirti Jain, Director, JERF .



While Acharya Tulsi Conference is a memorable event by itself, it should also lay foundation for future growth. With such an aim, the JERF Board of Directors announced the - Acharya Tulsi Unity Award which will recognize one of best recent research in Jainism.

The keynote speaker of the inaugural session, Prof. Peter Flugel of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) spoke on - Acharya Tulsī's middle path: Jaina modernism between orthodoxy and reform. Prof. Flugel talk discussed the historical timelines of the Jain Society and the characteristics of modern Jainism as contrasted with the traditional conservative Jainism. He elaborated on Acharya Tulsī's "middle path" and about reformatory initiatives and the struggles he had to face.



The program concluded with a cultural evening comprising dance performance choreographed with different songs composed by Acharya Tulsī. Students Madhumita Parmar and Jigna Shah performed Bharatnatyam dance on songs which were translated in English and set to the tune of western music. Nupur Surana presented a contemporary dance on Gurudev's Hindi songs. Students under the guidance of Samani ShuklaPragyaji also presented a small play on the theme of unity in diversity. The play dramatized the thinking of Acharya Tulsī, that humans fight among themselves to create the same God different in form only. The play was highly appreciated by the audience. The event came to a closing by performance of Madhumita Parmar, who danced to the theme of victory to mother ahimsa choreographed with a song set in english.





The Sunday session started with Manju Nahata's presentation on her art work. She explained the symbolism used in the giant scroll on the life of Acharya Tulsī and concluded with a picture containing the message of Acharya Tulsī: “my eternal autograph is live my message”. Prof. Chris Chapple of Loyola Marymount University shared his experience when a Jain sadhvi had embraced “santhara” and how he was exposed to the death and how this experience helped him to deal with death more profoundly. He was able to carry his experience to his professional realm and was able to assist others in dealing with the dead. Hampa Nagarajaiya presented Acharya Tulsī's journey to south and his charismatic identity. Hampa declared that if Gurudev Tulsī would have been here he would have said- let FIU be second Jain Vishva Bharati.



In the second session of the day, Anne Vallely elaborated the devotion in Terapanth sangha towards the Guru. This devotion here is devotion towards the living which is different from Temple devotion. Prof. Steven Vose, Bhagwan Mahavira Assistant Professor and the Director of Jain Studies at FIU made a presentation on the friendship of Srimad Rajchandra and Gandhi. Srimad is considered as 25th Tirthankar by his devotees and Gandhi is considered as an incarnation of God. Shivani Bothra spoke on the Anuvrat movement. Kamini Gogiri of University of Mumbai discussed the life history of Chandana Ji, who was the first female Acharya among the Jains and was also a human rights activist.



In the last panel of the day Prof. Whitney Bauman of FIU presented Planetary Technology which was an idea of how the natural resources give innovative ideas for technology which also goes with eco-friendly nature. Prof Manual Gomez of the FIU School of Law presented his study of conflict resolution mechanisms of Jain diamond merchants. Final presentation was by Samani Unnata Pragyajji who presented the Preksha meditation research undertaken at FIU. The presentation explored the philosophical background of mahaprana dhvani and the methodology used in her research. Prof. Ranu Jung of FIU presented the EEG analysis of a subset of the group, followed by this Dr. Dev Mehta presented statistical analysis of different psychological and physiological tests. Their preliminary findings show significant improvement in student subjects with simple meditation techniques.

### **The JVB Published Agam Literature Donated to FIU.**



The JERF executive committee and Samani ji's, on behalf of JVB, made a gift of the entire set of the Jain Agams to the FIU library. Prof Vose commented that this gift will immensely help the students and scholars of Jain studies at FIU for many years to come.

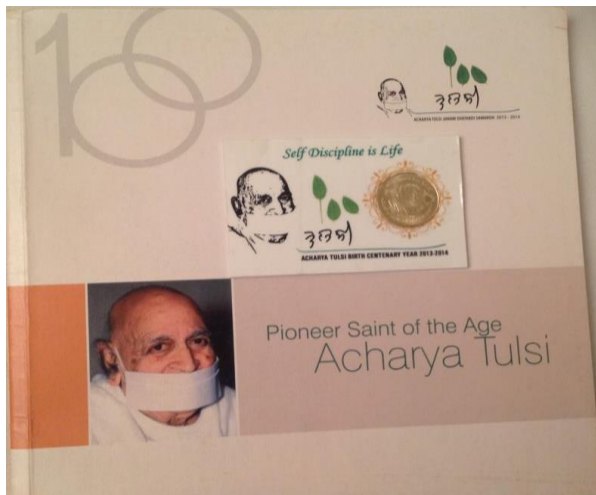
The conference closing was at the Jain Center of South Florida. All the delegates were accorded a traditional Jain welcome by the members of the Jain community. Rupal Shah, President of the Jain Center welcomed the delegates. Nirmal Baid presented a pictorial journey through the life of Acharya

Tulsi. Prem Jain, President, JAINA spoke about the World Vision of Acharya Tulsi. He said, "Acharya Tulsi choose to harmonize with sects even when there were conflicts in traditions. He also said, Acharya Tulsi had the vision to bring revolutionary change by not breaking the traditional ascetic practice. He chose to create a new category of saman order which all Jains should follow."

## USA launch of Acharya Tulsi Smriti Granth, Memorial Volumes



At the end of the session, Acharya Tulsi Smriti Granth was formally launched in USA in a simple ceremony. Sashi Jain and Sapan Bafna ceremoniously carried the two volumes in a wooden casket and then Prem Jain, President, JAINA and Prof Nathan Katz, the first Bhagwan Mahavira Professor of FIU officially launched the volumes. The volumes were then gifted to the Jain Studies program of FIU. Ramesh Parmar, Director and Secretary, JERF and Rupal Shah, President, Jain Center of South Florida made a formal gift of the two volumes to FIU library and Prof Whitney Bauman, Director, Center of Spirituality at FIU and Prof Steven Vose, Director of Jain Studies at FIU received the gift on behalf of FIU.



The blessings received by His Holiness Acharya Mahashraman Ji that "**Everything should go good**" came true. The two day event was a successful venture with the blessings of Gurudev by the team work of one and all. The audience, scholars and community took home memories of a memorable event. A book on Acharya Tulsi, Pioneer Saint of the Age, Acharya Tulsi, and the historical coin of Acharya Tulsi Centennial produced by Government of India was gifted to all attendees. The event concluded with Samaniji's spiritual mangal path.



# Manju Nahata's Art Display

Manju Nahata brought her art display to the conference, which had Quotes of Achary Tulsi in an Aesthetic way. She donated her art work to JERF. JERF appreciate's her aesthetic and philanthropic contribution.





**A dedicated JERF Team of Accomplishers**



**A Scholars Team of Presenters**