UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

November 16, 2020
Shelly Leachman

‘A Major Contribution’

Adding an important layer to an already robust and well-regarded program, a trio of generous donors has teamed to support research and teaching in Jain studies within the UC Santa Barbara Department of Religious Studies.

The Bhagvan Vimalnath Endowed Chair in Jain Studies was established through a $1 million joint gift from Drs. Meera and Jasvant Modi via the Vardhamana Charitable Foundation; Mrs. Rita and Dr. Narendra Parson via the Narendra and Rita Parson Family Trust; and Mrs. Raksha and Mr. Harshad Shah via Shah Family Foundation.

“The most effective way of helping mankind, climate change and all forms of life is by spreading the principles of non-violence, giving and showing respect for all opinions. Support and creation of an endowed chair in Jain studies is the most effective way to achieve this goal,” the donors said in a joint statement. “UC Santa Barbara is a prestigious place and more important, it has an effective model to achieve our goals. This new position will make Ahimsa, Aparigraha and Anekantvad principles better known in the mainstream — and this will benefit us all.”

The new gift builds on prior philanthropy from the Modis and the Parsons, in partnership with the Jain Center of Southern California and the Jain Temple of Los Angeles, to establish UC Santa Barbara’s Bhagvan Vimalnath Lectureship in Jain Studies and South Asian religions. The study of South Asian religious traditions is a core strength of UCSB’s religious studies department, which focuses on comparative study of religions from a secular approach.

Noted Chancellor Henry T. Yang, “Our UC Santa Barbara Department of Religious Studies, founded more than half a century ago, is recognized as one of the best in the world. We are tremendously grateful for the generosity of Drs. Meera and Jasvant Modi, Mrs. Rita and Dr. Naredra Parson, and Mrs. Raksha and Mr. Harshad Shah to establish the Bhagvan Vimalnath Endowed Chair in Jain Studies, which will help us to advance Jain and South Asian studies, an exciting and increasingly important field, at UC Santa Barbara.”

The chair holder will support the graduate program and develop and teach undergraduate and graduate courses on Jainism, including exploration of Ahimsa (nonviolence), Aprigraha (non-attachment/non-possessiveness) and Anekantavaad (plurality of views and beliefs) — the principles of Jainism — and their import and implication for modern society. Students will be engaged to explore the practical significance of such principles for enduring peace, social harmony and ecological sustainability.

“We are so pleased that this generous gift will allow our faculty and our students to explore the history, beliefs and practices of Jain traditions within the context of South Asian religions,” said John Majewski, the Michael Douglas Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts. “The fundamental tenets of Jainism — including a commitment to peace, non-violence, education and enlightenment — are of increasing relevance to our students and the wider world. We are excited that these funds will support innovative new courses, path-breaking interdisciplinary research, significant national and international conferences, and important public programming.”

With a goal to create a visionary program that will be a national and international model, the new position also will enable academic investigation of the many ways in which Jainism has been integral to South Asian and transnational religious histories. The chair holder will support and train innovative scholars in the fields of Jain studies and South Asian religions, including language instruction in Sanskrit and Prakrit, while simultaneously making UCSB the programmatic center for an emerging network of scholars in the field.

“This new endowed chair will be a major contribution to the Department of Religious Studies,” said professor and department chair Fabio Rambelli. “Not only will it strengthen our South Asian component by adding Jain studies to our program — the richness of the Jain tradition, with its focus on radical nonviolence and pluralism, extends well beyond narrow definitions of religion to issues that are very important for us here today, such as environmental justice, business ethics and sustainable

lifestyles. As such, I expect that the future holder of the Bhagvan Vimalnath Endowed Chair in Jain Studies will bring a significant contribution to broader conversations on campus and in our community.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.