



# HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF

## JAINA LA-JAIN CENTER LA-PATHSHALA

**July 4, 2009**

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## INTRODUCTION

Several historical articles are prepared; to depict the background, behind-the-scene deliberations, beginning and early days of : JAINA, LA-Jain Center JCSC, LA-Pathshala (Jain Center Youth Council, JCYC) and LA-Jain Social Group (JSG-LA).

Since the period under review was late '70s and early '80s, more than a quarter century ago, sincere and honest effort was made to do justice to the institutions of JAINA, JCSC, JCYC and JSG-LA. Considerable effort and time were spent to do it right.

Several documents were reviewed, historical data collected and dozens of relevant people at that time (in JAINA, JCSC, JCYC, JSG-LA) were contacted. Many people, including : C.N. Sanghavi, Girish C. Shah, Kalyanji Mota, Lalit Shah, Mihir Gandhi , Sailes Jain, Subodh Sheth, Sudhir Kothari and several others, who are knowledgeable on the subject or were actively involved in those historic days (1978-1985) were contacted, their input was secured and they reviewed for historical data, facts and authenticity. Chandrakant Parekh and Sailes Jain provided valuable help of reviewing. Vision and founding principles of Jain Center-LA and JAINA were also prepared.

Attached are five articles : (1) Birth of JAINA, (2) Vision of LA-Jain Center & JAINA, (3) Making of LA-Jain Center, (4) Making of LA-*Pathshala* and (5) History of Jain Social Group-LA.

Let us summarize the facts here:

(1) There were more than 150 families (250 members) who started LA-Jain Center on Sep 15, 1979, and not just 30 families.

(2) There were more than 15 Jain organizations involved in JAINA formation in 1981 and not just 3 Jain Centers/Societies.

(3) During the first and formative (constitutional) JAINA Convention in May 1981 in Los Angeles, JAINA was properly formed, its proposed constitution (developed, discussed and agreed by those 15 participating Jain organizations during the preceding 12 months) was presented, discussed, amended and adopted by the plenary session. The constituent assembly (plenary session) of the 1st JAINA Convention in

May 1981 in Los Angeles properly elected our JCYC founding V.P. Lalit C. Shah as JAINA's first/founding president.

(4) The Jain Social Group function is primarily socio-cultural with religious activities secondary, while that of Jain Center is primarily religious with social-cultural secondary. This way, both are complementary in the larger context of Jain community and society. JSG provides social networking, humanitarian aid and contributes toward unity in Jain community in accordance with tenets of Jainism.

It is a matter of great pride for all the members of JAINA as this Convention of 2009 is being held in Los Angeles area after 28 years of its birth in the same LA area. It is a great feeling to come back to where you came from.

In our journey through the following pages we will discover WHEN, WHY, WHERE and HOW our JAINA was born? The atmosphere, tempo, enthusiasm and excitement were unparalleled. This was the case when the First Jain Convention of North America organized by Jain Center of Southern California took place at the TRW Hall in Redondo Beach in metropolitan LA area. The time period was 1981. The architects of those times and molders of our thought processes were our beloved Pujya Gurudev Chitrabhanuji and Pujya Acharya Sushil Kumarji. Their inspiration was the driving force for all the centers and community members to achieve the great heights unimaginable in those times. Their vision, foresight, broadmindedness and inspiration will always remain as guiding light for Jain Center of Southern California, JAINA and all other centers of US & Canada.

*It is really a team work. Individuals alone could never have accomplished all these. The glory of achievements belongs to all of us together.*

May Mahavir Swami bless all. With His blessings and *Shasan Dev's Krupa*, may these organizations bloom and our Jainism spread for peace of all mankind.

Sincerely,

**Sudhir Kothari, Lalit Shah, Mahendra Khandhar.**

## **BIRTH OF JAINA** **(Mahendra Khandhar)**

Jain Center of Southern California (JCSC) was founded on 15 September, 1979. After JCSC was well established and stabilized, our visionary friend and Vice President of JCSC, Lalit Shah came up with a brilliant idea in mid-1980 - to establish an umbrella organization for all institutions - Jain Centers, Societies, *Sanghs*, Study Centers and others - representing Jain communities in US and Canada.

His idea was discussed in the JCSC Executive Committee and with the community members. Everyone was convinced that the idea and concept were worth pursuing. Lalit Shah and Mahendra Khandhar were requested to develop more information and discuss the concept with community and spiritual leaders of various centers.

At that time when we began to pursue the idea of having a central umbrella Jain organization, Jain Centers were already established in Los Angeles, New York, Boston, Chicago, Pujya Gurudev Chitrabhanuji's Center (JMJC) and Pujya Acharya Sushil Kumarji's Mission (IMJM). Jain organizations were in various stages of formation at several locations - San Francisco, Cleveland, Toronto, Washington DC, New Jersey, Florida, Texas, Phoenix, San Diego, Portland, Seattle and others. All of these centers were trying to develop their own organizational structure without the benefit of uniform and structured guidelines, while following their upbringing and *Sanskars*.

The concept of forming a CENTRAL Jain organization was pursued at four different levels:

**First:** We talked to the two Jain spiritual leaders in the USA - Pujya Acharya Shri Sushil Kumarji and Pujya Gurudev Shri Chitrabhanuji. Both were very happy with the concept and gave their heartfelt blessings. Discussions with them yielded many useful suggestions.

**Second:** We talked to Jain leaders in academia, e.g., Prof. Padmanabh Jaini (Professor of Buddhism and Oriental Studies at UC Berkeley) and Prof. Jagdish Prasad Sharma (Professor of Ancient Indian History at the Univ. of Hawaii in Honolulu). Both were very

enthusiastic and supported the idea of a Jain Federation. Prof. Jaini was very encouraging and gave valuable suggestions. He had studied Jainism under Pragnachakshu Pandit Shri Sukhlalji.

**Third:** We contacted leaders of various Jain communities in the US and Canada - Dinesh Dalal and Vinay Jain in Boston, Mahendra Pandya, Kailash Chandra Jain and Naresh Shah in New York, Sanat Jhaveri in New Jersey, Manoj Dharamsi in Washinton DC, Ramnikbhai Kothari in Toronto, Nancy Shah in Rochester, Niranjan Shah and Prabodh Vaidya in Chicago, Tansukh Salgia and K.C. Bhajji in Cleveland, Prem Jain and Girish Shah in San Francisco Bay area and several others. Every one of them supported the idea of forming a Jain Federation and offered many useful suggestions.

**Fourth:** We discussed the concept with various local Jain community leaders and members. They all loved the idea and lent their support.

We reported back to the Executive Committee of our findings and feedback. There was a good deal of discussion on the topic in several Executive Committee meetings. In the end, the Executive Committee agreed to move forward with the idea and take the lead in the formation. Further deliberations in the Executive Committee encompassed pros and cons, work involved, how to proceed, finances, etc. It was then thought that the best way to start is to call a Founding Convention, invite all Jain organizations in US & Canada and proceed with the formation of Jain Federation if the attending delegates agree in the plenary session. The Executive Committee formed a *Convention Committee* that included Sudhir Kothari (Chairman), Lalit Shah (Co Chair), Mahendra Khandhar, Pallavi Sheth, Dhiren Shah and Dinesh Gala.

It was mid-1980. The Convention Committee needed some time to do work externally (with outside delegates) and internally (Convention venue, hosting, agenda, cost, etc.). The Executive Committee and Convention Committee agreed to tentatively propose the founding Convention place to be Los Angeles and during Memorial Day long weekend in 1981 (about 9 months away). The Convention Committee promptly started to function vigorously and methodically. We talked to our spiritual, academic and outside Jain community leaders. All tentatively agreed to hold the Founding Convention in Los Angeles in May 1981. All leaders (including our Jain Center) had to get back to their local members for their

approval.

The summary findings, Convention idea, Los Angeles venue, Memorial Day weekend in 1981, some idea of cost, hosting of the delegates and Convention Committee formation were presented to our Jain Center General Body meeting for their information, input, discussion and approval. The General Body wholeheartedly and very enthusiastically supported it along with many suggestions for Executive Committee and Convention Committee to consider.

We called all the spiritual, academic and community leaders and confirmed the Los Angeles location and dates (May 22-25, 1981) of the Convention. The umbrella institution will be of Federation type wherein all member organizations would operate autonomously locally and still be guided by the Federation for larger and external matters, e.g., representation at national and international level with one voice, uniform study matter in all *Pathshalas*, socio-religious meetings at regional and national level, guidelines for visitors-monks-scholars, future planning for new generations to come and the aging seniors, youth development-encouragement-participation, unified dealing with the governments, possible representation in United Nations etc. After that the Convention Committee drew up a draft constitution of Jain Federation based on JCSC model and prepared a tentative plan and agenda for the Convention. We then talked to Pujya Sushil Muniji and Pujya Chitrabhanuji for their suggestions & blessings and talked to Professor Jaini & Professor Sharma for their feedback and finally sent it to outside Jain leaders for review and tentative approval. We were lucky to get the TRW (now Northrop Grumman) Company's beautiful large capacity modern air conditioned hall for 3 days at no cost to us. That eased the potential burden on the young JCSC. Further, the local families were sought to host the delegates.

Communication was difficult during those days : no e-mails, no laptops, no desktops and scarce cell phones. All communication took a lot of personal time, energy and money. After hundreds of phone calls and constant dialog, a plan and the agenda were streamlined. Once things were settled with the tentative approval by the spiritual-academic-community leaders, the Convention Committee reported back to the Executive Committee and the Executive Committee in turn reported to the General Body.

**The Convention was held from May 22 to May 25, 1981 in Los**

**Angeles. The Convention was very successful**, graced by Pujya Acharya Sushil Kumarji, Pujya Gurudev Chitrabhanuji, Professor Padmanabh Jaini and Professor Jagdish Prasad Sharma. There were delegates from New York, New Jersey, Washinton DC, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Rochester, Toronto, Chicago, San Francisco and several other cities. In addition, many dignitaries were invited, including Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr., Congressman Mervyn Dymally, LA Mayor Tom Bradley, LA Cultural Commissioner Dr. Marwah, Indian Consulate General Mr. Aziz, Prof. Stephen Hay, Dr. Ann Norton, Ramesh Murarka of “*India West*” and more, but some of them could not attend. Hundreds of local JCSC members and others attended the Convention.

The Convention opened with invocation followed by welcome speeches from JCSC President and Vice President. There were addresses and blessings from Pujya Sushil Muniji and Pujya Chitrabhanuji. Professor Jaini, Professor Sharma, Sudhaben Sheth and invited dignitaries also addressed the Convention. Lively question-answer added flavor to the function. Convention proceeded very smoothly, colorfully and delightfully. Slide presentation of “*Samovasaran*” by Dr. Ann Norton and movie “*Jainism*” informed and entertained everybody. There was a cultural program presented by the local JCSC members.

The delegates discussed and adopted the name “The Federation of Jain Organizations in North America” with the short mnemonic name of “JAINA”. The draft constitution was proposed, discussed, amended and approved by the delegates and general attendance. The **First Executive Committee** was elected and included - Lalit Shah as President; Manoj Dharamsi, Tansukh Salgia and Dinesh Dalal as three Vice Presidents; and Girish Shah of San Jose as Secretary/Treasurer.

By grace of *Shasan Dev* and blessings of Bhagvan Mahavir Swami, everything worked out great as planned. In addition to hard working Convention Committee and Executive Committee, many JCSC members and volunteers spent hundreds of hours to form JAINA and help it take off. To list all their names would be space prohibitive and make others uncomfortable whose names might be inadvertently left out. The JAINA, JCSC and entire North American Jain community are grateful to all the early pioneers. *It is really a team work. Individuals alone could never have accomplished all these. The glory of achievements belongs to all of us together.*



The seed of JAINA sown in May 1981 in Los Angeles and nurtured by JCSC and North American Jain communities has grown into a huge internationally recognized organization. United Nations, US Congress and Government of India have recognized JAINA. It is financially stable, and functions with over fifty committees and subcommittees, seventy five member organizations, hundreds of volunteers, quarterly JAINA magazine communicating news-views-development-progress with the Jain community at large (in US, Canada, India and worldwide), several auxiliaries (e.g., YJA, YJP, Seniors, etc.) and matrimonial listings-forum-get together. It developed wonderful series of uniform Jain textbooks for *Pathshalas* and held 14 successful biennial conventions across US and Canada with attendance ranging from 3000 to 10,000.

The 15th JAINA Convention will be held July 2-5, 2009 in the founding city of Los Angeles, hosted by the founding member organization - Jain Center of Southern California. **It is our hope, prayer and confidence that JAINA will carry the torch of Jain unity in the world and it will be a beacon of youth leadership. It will continue to become a better and stronger organization, and it will inspire the youths and future generations.**

*(P.S.: The inadvertent errors of omission and commission, if any, are sincerely regretted with Michchhami Dukkadam.)*

## Vision of Jain Center of Southern California and JAINA (Sudhir Kothari)

Chitrabhanuji visited Los Angeles in 1971 and since that time, there was a natural desire among Jain families to get together and build our own *Derasar*. *Samvatsari Pratikraman* was hosted by Lalit & Madhu Shah in 1970s where many families and single young people came. At times several families would get together at the home of one of the families to do Swadhyay. Lalit & Mahendra Khandhar were the pioneers in getting Jain families together with a vision for the larger cause of Jain unity and propagating Jain values. Lalit conceived the idea of organizing Jain Center at local and national level. Mahendra and others picked up on that vision and it soon became the dream of the whole community. The formulation of local Jain Center began to take place in 1978.

There were many obstacles: no money, no contacts, no facility, no one to go to, a new project in foreign country etc. **Only thing we had was a dream and the desire to achieve it.** Working hard, several informal community meetings ensued to discuss the establishment of Jain Center in LA area, over a period of next twelve months. Particular attention was paid to goals, principles, constitution, organization, activities and finance.

Finally, the **Jain Center of Southern California (JCSC) was born on September 15, 1979 with a grand vision.** There was an elected Executive Committee to achieve vision and conduct daily routines.

Some of the highlights of this vision are:

1. Jain Center will conduct its activities without any consideration of Jain sects.
2. Develop and implement the idea of organizing the national federation of all Jain Societies/Centers in US & Canada.
3. Help establish other Jain Centers throughout US & Canada.
4. Save our children from Western culture by imparting Jain values in them.
5. Promote the ideals of Jainism among fellow Indians and Americans.

The founding principles are briefly discussed below :

1. **Promote Jainism:** We were finding ourselves being lost in the Western culture prevailing around us at work, in the neighborhood, at school etc. We felt a keen need to preserve our rich heritage, promote it among like-

minded people and pass it on to our younger generation.

**2. Explain true meaning of “Jain”:** Any person who is interested in Jain philosophy-literature-principles (vegetarianism, non violence, purifying soul etc.) would be called “*Jain*”. Jain is not defined strictly by being born in a traditional Jain family. This definition also applies to people born in a traditional Jain family.

**3. Promote Jain Atmosphere:** It was recognized that in light of the above definition of the word “Jain”, we assimilated the atmosphere prevailing at the time of Mahavir Swami *desna* (mass preaching) period. At that time every person listening to *desna* was equal. There was no king, no low cast, no Shwetamber, no Digamber, no Sthanakwasi, no Terapanthi etc. Everyone was just **Jain**.

This theme became a common ground for promoting ideals of Jainism. We embarked upon conveying the meaning of Jain to our children and friends who were Vaishnavs, Swaminarayans, other Indians and Americans. We recognized that our children may marry into any of the above groups and could have spouses who may get interested in Jainism by virtue of being married to one. It would be difficult to identify a newly interested person as Shwetamber or Digamber etc. Living in this country, we needed to have an expanded view of Jainism rather than restricting it to small sects that would confuse our children into ultimately rejecting the whole religion. The above theme was the basis for holding the Jain convention of North America in Los Angeles.

**4. Promote Jain Unity:** There were not many Jain Centers/Societies in US/Canada at the time of Jain convention in 1981. We did not want to create India-like divisive situation based on birth as Shwetamber or Digamber or Sthanakwasi etc. We received spiritual guidance, blessings and valuable suggestions from Pujya Acharya Sushil Kumarji and Pujya Gurudev Chitrabhanuji for promoting these ideals.

The idea of having a permanent place for our Jain Center for practice and advancement of Jainism for us and our children took hold in the minds of community and Executive Committee members. It was also recognized that the **feeling of unity was more important** than the building that we were going to create. We can have a building that could be a state of the art building, but if there is no unity then that building is equivalent to a useless *khander*.

Scholars and speakers were invited to give lectures at our Jain Center. Each speaker was requested not to make any derogatory comments regarding other religions. We also requested them, not to make any divisive remarks about other sects within Jainism, no matter what sect they came from and however strongly they felt about their particular sect. The reason was that many people from other religions and other Jain sects attended our lectures with the view of learning something from the lectures. We did not wish to hurt their feelings directly or indirectly. In addition, we wanted our children to experience the richness of our religion and carry Jainism forward in the future without confusing them with different sects and losing interest in religion altogether.

**5. Promote Children's Awareness Towards Jainism:** It was recognized that children growing up in American society have a questioning mind so they needed to be appealed in a logical manner in order to get them interested in Jainism. Children's committee was formed for this purpose. Niru Kothari & Dr. Dinesh Shah took the initiative for the activities. It was a tall order. It had to cultivate tomorrow's leaders who would carry the torch of Jainism forward and for them to have an identity as Jain.

**6. Worship:** It was recognized that in order to have a building for the Jain Center there would have to be a focal point such as Lord Mahavir's idol and a couple of other idols. It was decided that we would not place emphasis on how the idols are worshipped. We would let our members carry on different ways of worshipping. The Committee would step in only for cleanliness, order and administrative functions. We would not call idols as Shwetamber or Digamber. The open eye-idol is called *desna mudra* where Lord Mahavir is communicating with audience with open eyes. The closed eye (or half closed, *nasagra*)-idol is called *dhyanasth mudra*. To call open eye-mudra as Shwetamber and to call closed eye-mudra as Digamber is the same as improperly saying that Lord Mahavir's message is only for certain Jains in certain position or to say that Gandhiji belongs to only Gujaratis.

The purpose of worship is to progressively attain higher level for the soul, not to be mired in the divisive thinking. Committee would step in and correct any situation if it felt that divisive tendencies were beginning to surface. Committee is to resist and reverse divisive situation that can very easily sneak under the cloak of worshipping. This can destroy the founding principles of our Jain Center. All the monies received from worship activities would go into common fund unless specified by the donor.

**7. Promote and Preserve Jain Teaching and Literature:** It was

recognized that to promote Jain teaching, we needed books and literature, in addition to frequent visits by scholars and monks. We needed to have library in our building plans. We could then pass on this information to interested parties such as members, students, scholars, universities etc. We planned to have classes for our children to learn the meaning of our religion. We considered adult classes and *satsangs* to have deeper understanding of our rich heritage.

**JAINA:** Now that JCSC was established, the Executive Committee started to discuss and implement the idea of organizing the National Federation of all Jains in North America. JCSC decided to hold a convention for that purpose. JCSC invited community leaders from various states, other Jain associations and interested community members throughout US and Canada. A Convention Committee was formed with Sudhir Kothari as Chairman, Lalit Shah as co-chair, and Dhiren Shah, Dinesh Gala, Pallavi Sheth and Mahendra Khandhar as members, to carry out all the Convention related tasks.

About 15 Jain organizations participated in the pre-Convention discussion for Jain federation. The meeting for the formation of North American Jain Federation for all Jains was held at the Convention chaired by JCSC. Puja Gurudev Chitrabhanuji and Puja Acharya Sushil Kumarji graced the Convention with their presence and blessings. Prof. Padmanabh Jaini, Prof. Jagdish Prasad Sharam, Sudhaben Sheth, and many scholars, dignitaries and VIPs gave inspiring speeches. The constitution was hammered out and the name JAINA was adopted at the meeting. The **First Executive Committee of JAINA** was elected and included - Lalit Shah as President; Manoj Dharamsi, Tansukh Salgia and Dinesh Dalal as three Vice Presidents and Girish Shah of San Jose as Secretary/Treasurer. Thus JAINA was born at the first ever Jain Convention held by JCSC at TRW Hall in Los Angeles in 1981. At the end of Convention, the JCSC Committee took Acharya Sushil Kumarji and Gurudev Chitrabhanuji to Las Vegas to look at the wooden temple (Palitana replica, now adorning the foyer area of LA Jain Center cultural complex). The Committee had already started a dialog to acquire it for JCSC. The Convention was a great success in every respect.

The guiding vision was now turning into reality step by step. JAINA embarked upon helping to establish Jain Centers/Societies in other parts of US and Canada. The members would visit those places and help the communities to start a Jain Center or Society of their own. They would also give them ongoing support as needed.

JAINA efforts included organizing activities for children. The Young Jains Auxiliary (YJA), Young Jains Professionals (YJP) were started. Children fun activities and *Pathshala* activities (uniform texts, teachers' conferences etc) also got started.

The promotion of Jainism among Jains was easier and natural. The fellow Indians also had some concept of Jainism. We encouraged them to visit our functions and lectures. To impart understanding of Jainism to Americans various interviews were given to Los Angeles Times, media and magazines.

JAINA's goal is to become a beacon of light & knowledge, and spread the message of oneness among the Jain community throughout US, Canada, India and the world. It has achieved the goal beyond the expectations of the founding fathers.

**Thus our Jain Center should be proud in helping create JAINA. Jain Center and JAINA have grand vision and glorious history. Let all of us from every Center, every Society offer our best wishes, support and participation for JAINA's march towards a bright and wonderful future.**

## MAKING OF JAIN CENTER OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (Mahendra Khandhar)

Jain Center of Southern California (JCSC) became a reality on **15 September, 1979**. Since then the successive Presidents and able JCSC Administrations have made the seed sown that day to the great Banyan tree that Jain Center of Southern California is today. A chronological history of JCSC was outlined by successive past Presidents in JCSC's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir published in 1998. Periods of accomplishments included:

Executive Committees (1979-98)  
 Formatting Years (1979-81)  
 Planning Years (1982-83)  
 Continued Planning Years (1984-85)  
 Realization of Dream-First Jain Bhavan (1986-89)  
 Growth Years (1990-91)  
 Phenomenal Growth (1992-93)  
 Community Outreach Years (1994-95)  
 Community Empowerment Years (1996-97)  
 Expansion Years (1998-99)

The purpose of this article is to highlight behind-the-scenes community meetings and deliberations that culminated in the formation of JCSC.

In the early seventies there were several hundred Jain families in a hundred mile radius of California, from San Diego to Santa Barbara and from Santa Monica to San Bernardino. Most followed their family traditions and mainly did some penance and *Samvatsari Pratikraman* during *Paryushana* in localized small groups of family and close friends. There was no organized effort, no organization and no visiting Jain dignitaries. This continued for several years.

In 1977, Vina and I met our old friend (from Limbdi and Stanford) Lalit and his wife Madhu Shah. Lalit is very creative, proactive, visionary and selflessly socio-religious service oriented. He initiated informal Jain community dinner meetings at his home as a sounding board for ideas, discussions and formation of a Jain organization. Several meetings ensued over a period of about 2 years. Many friends, relatives, community members, activists, well wishers, sideliners, bystanders and fun loving-

socialites attended. The attendance ranged from twenty-five to hundred. The highlights and issues are briefly noted below.

Everybody felt and agreed on the need to organize the Jain community, to help our generation to perform our Jain rituals as well as to pass the heritage to the next generation. It was general consensus to broad base the organization, hence “Southern California” instead of “Los Angeles” in the name. Also, it was thought that “Center” would connote the community breadth, avoid any hint of sectarianism, imply an invitation to local non-Jain community (Indians and otherwise) to visit & participate and possibly lend a soft touch of academics. So, the name of “Jain Center of Southern California” was evolved.

Although Gujarati Jains were in a majority, it was decided after some discussion, to make special effort to seek, invite and assimilate the non-Gujarati Jains. In the following years, many were in our Executive Committees. The language will be English in all written, formal, constitutional and financial matters. However, public lectures could be in English, Gujarati or Hindi depending on the speaker, audience and topic. There was a lengthy discussion of sects and rituals. Although the majority of the Jains in LA area are Murtipujak Shvetamber (Derawasi), it was felt that the sectarian views and differences prevailing in India should not be imported here. To follow the sectarian rituals strictly (based on one's family traditions and *Sanskar*) in the family is one thing, but in public and in our organizational affairs it will be corrosive and divisive. A reasonable balance will be kept in public events to respect all sects. Minority will be heard, respected and accommodated where practical, while majority will prevail.

The governing body will be simple: five officers and four members at large, each for a two year term, with the election of both groups in turn in alternate years. The service and work will be strictly voluntary and qualifications will be JCSC life member and willing-able-available to serve the Jain community. There will be one and two year membership for newcomers and life membership for the rest. **The constitution will be simple, embodying the above ideas with the purpose of performing Jain rituals, continuity of Jain religio-cultural heritage, assimilation in American mainstream by local community service, academic awareness and in consonance with Jain scriptural guidelines.**

Although everybody desired to have a place of our own for the Jain



center, it was not practical due to finance and infancy of JCSC. Initially meetings were held in other community halls that included Gujarati Society, Gujarati Cultural Society, Patidar Hall, Swaminarayana Temple Hall etc. until we would have our own building. It is heartening to see that we built our first Jain Bhavan from ground-up in 1988 costing about \$1 million with the full community support of donations and interest-free loans. Within few years, that facility was too small for our growing community and exponentially growing *Pathshala* attendance. We embarked on a three-phase expansion plan to develop a new facility.

In the mid seventies a small scaled replica of Palitana Temple, hand carved in teakwood in India in 1904, was observed by many members of Jain community including Lalit Shah and Shirish Seth, in the courtyard of Castaways Hotel Casino in Las Vegas. *India West* covered the story with a photo on front page in August 1980. After the first Founding Convention of JAINA in Los Angeles in 1981, we took Pujya Acharya Sushil Kumarji and Pujya Gurudev Chitrabhanuji, accompanied by Lalit Shah, Lal Momaya and others, to Las Vegas for their spiritual guidance. They saw the temple and agreed that the sacred Jain temple should belong to a Jain organization (e.g. JCSC). Himanshu Shroff who lived in Las Vegas was a gracious host and helped us. Dialog began with the hotel management for donation or purchase of the temple. The perseverance of the JCSC and its successive leaders resulted in the donation of that temple to JCSC in 1995, and it currently adorns the main foyer of our beautiful new cultural complex.

Executive Committee resolved to publish a monthly newsletter to communicate with the members. To avoid any bias and conflict of interest (real or apparent), it was decided unanimously that no paid or unpaid advertisements would be included in the JCSC newsletter. The newsletter will include short religious articles, *stavans*, *stotra*, *sutra*, a summary of last meeting or lecture, and information about the upcoming meetings or events. There will be broad grass root participation by the general membership in any large-scale event or undertaking or donations to avoid vested interest, alienation of general members, to eliminate oligarchy and to stay away from undue outside influence or interference.

Initial JCSC membership was about 250 with 100 life membership. The history of JCSC will be bland, unauthenticated and non-historical if the several initial committees are not mentioned with their names:

**The Initiating Families** included (alphabetically) Sailes and Sachi Jain, Mahendra and Vina Khandhar, Ramesh and Chandrika Khandhar, Manibhai and Savita Mehta, Rasik and Kavita Parekh, Gordhan and Saroj Patel, Lalit and Madhu Shah, Mansukh and Mrudula Shah, Ashwin and Divya Sheth.

**The Ad Hoc Working Committee** included (alphabetically) Dinesh Gala, Navin Ganger, K.C. Jain, Mahendra Khandhar, Ramesh Khandhar, Manibhai Mehta, Kalyanji Mota, Gordhan Patel, Mohan Patel, Surendra C. Patel, Amrut Shah, Lalit Shah, Ashwin Sheth, Pallavi Sheth and Vina Sheth.

**The First Nominating Committee** included Gordhan Patel (Chairman), Manibhai Mehta, Shirish Seth and Amrut Shah.

**The First Executive Committee** included Mahendra Khandhar (President), Lalit Shah (Vice President), Kalyanji Mota (Secretary), Surendra C. Patel (Treasurer), Rajul Mehta (Public Relations). Savita Mehta, Mohan Patel, Manda Shah and Yogesh R. Shah served for the first one year term and Niru Kothari, Shirish Seth, Dinesh Shah (Dr.) and Mahesh Shah joined the Committee for the second one year term.

**Initial Kitchen Volunteers** included Savita Mehta, Vina Khandhar, Saroj Patel, Madhu Shah and Pallavi Sheth.

Many Jain community members were involved in attending those planning meetings and they participated actively & enthusiastically in the discussion with their views and ideas. All had good spirit of compromise with give and take attitude. To list all their names would be space prohibitive and make others uncomfortable whose names might be inadvertently left out. JCSC and the entire Jain community are grateful for the contributions and leadership of those early pioneers and well-wishers. *It is really a team work. Individuals alone could never have accomplished all these. The glory of achievements belongs to all of us together.*

With Mahavir Swami's blessings, *Shasan Dev's Krupa*, hard work & dedication of successive leaders and heartfelt support of the Jain Community, our Jain Center and *Pathshala* have flourished beyond anybody's

imagination - about 400 students in Pathshala, 850 life member strong Jain community, almost daily Swadhyays, weekly *Pujas*, a beautiful temple with a wonderful cultural complex and *Aradhna* Hall. Our Jain Center is admired by Jain communities in US, Canada, India and the rest of the world. **I am sure that it will grow even more in next decade and continue to set an example for others to follow.**

*(P.S.: The inadvertent errors of omission and commission, if any, are sincerely regretted with Michchhami Dukkadam.)*

## **MAKING OF LA - JAIN CENTER *PATHSHALA*** (Mahendra Khandhar)

Jain Center of Southern California (JCSC) was established in **September 1979** and Federation of Jain Organizations in North America (**JAINA**) was inaugurated in **May 1981** in Los Angeles. Ever since the Jain Center organization was started, there was always some talk of starting *Pathshala* or *Jainshala* for our children. Many pros and cons were discussed. Not having our own building was a major obstacle. Number of parents who would be motivated to send their children to *Pathshala* was another concern since JCSC was in its infancy. Los Angeles being a wide area, traveling long distance was a major factor. The other topics that were discussed were frequency of classes, language, syllabus and religion teachers.

We sought guidance and blessings of our spiritual leaders, Pujya Acharya Sushil Kumarji and Pujya Gurudev Chitrabhanuji. Both supported the concept and encouraged the idea of children's activities and *Pathshala*. They even suggested to organize winter camps for children during Christmas holidays and recommended holding joint camps with students from other centers. Camps will provide fun, excitement, change and inspiration to the children and their parents. The **first** children's winter camp was held jointly with the Northern California group in December 1981 in San Luis Obispo with Gurudev Chitrabhanuji. There were about 50 children, 25 each from Southern and Northern California. It was a great success. Everybody enjoyed the camp.

Based on the success of the winter camp, in a meeting at Dr. Chunibhai's residence, JCSC president Kalyanji Mota took the initiative. He was very keen on starting *Pathshala*. In 1982 the Executive Committee approved and established a children's auxiliary of the Jain Center and named it Jain Center Youth Council (JCYC). The charter of *Pathshala* included growth, comradeship, service to community, future leadership development and torchbearer of our religious-social-cultural heritage. Girish C. Shah and Mahendra Khandhar were nominated to lead JCYC and the annual winter camps during Christmas holidays.

The first *Pathshala* class was held at the residence of Rajen and Rajul Mehta, with about 20 children. Dr. Niranjana Shah, Girish C. Shah and Mahendra Khandhar were the religion teachers. The class was held weekly,

every Sunday morning from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. “Basic Jainism” book, cyclostyled with some hand written sections, developed by Dr. Ratibhai Dodhia and published by the Boston Jain Center, was used.

Later, the JCYC class was tried out at various places including residence of Divyakant and Sarala Sheth, Inder and Nirmal Jain office, Pujya Sushil Muniji's Ashram in Long Beach and some parks. The JCYC class eventually settled at Rajen-Rajul Mehta's residence in Cerritos, for several years. The attendance increased from 20 (1982) to about 70 in 1988, when it finally moved to our newly erected Jain Bhavan.

The **second** children's winter camp was held in December 1982 at Lake Arrowhead with Pujya Sushil Muniji. The attendance was about 50, including 10 students from Phoenix and San Diego. The **third** winter camp was held in December 1983 at Lake Arrowhead with Balbhadraji (Bruce Costain of Toronto, a disciple of Pujya Chitrabhanuji). There were about 60 children. The **fourth** camp was held jointly with Phoenix group in December 1984 in Parker (AZ). There were 30 children from Los Angeles and 20 from Phoenix. After that, the Winter Camp for JCYC children was an annual event. Students (and parent volunteers) eagerly and excitedly looked forward to Winter Camps. It was first-come-first-serve and we were limited to about 60 students due to constraints of facility and management. The Camps were held at various places including San Bernardino mountain retreats, Big Bear, Idyllwild, Hemet etc. Girish C. Shah, Mahendra Khandhar, Dr. Kirit Gosalia and Kishor Parekh (last two from Phoenix) taught Jainism at these camps. Every year, we prepared a make-shift 100-page religious text for use at the Camp, consisting of that year's theme. Examples include Nine Reals (*Nav Tattva*), Six Substances (*Chha Dravya*), *Samayik*, *Pratikraman*, *Sutras*, *Stavans*, Prayers and short stories. There were other activities at the Camps including cultural shows, skits, singing, music, hiking, snow play and fun games. Food was prepared by volunteers (mostly parents).

### **In the early years, the following volunteers helped with Camps:**

Girish and Pravina Shah  
Kishor and Jaysri Parekh  
Ajit and Surabhi Shah  
Lalit and Madhu Shah  
Narendra and Sonal Sheth

Mahendra and Vina Khandhar  
Kirit and Vibhuti Gosalia  
Chunilal and Ila Shah  
Prakash and Kalpana Shah  
Shirish and Padma Seth

**In the later years following volunteers joined:**

Yogesh and Saurabh Shah  
 Kalyanji and Jyoti Mota  
 Navnit and Niru Shah  
 Vikram and Smita Doshi  
 Mahesh and Malti Maheta  
 Anand and Yogi Shah

Sailes and Sachi Jain  
 Kishor and Kavita Sanghvi  
 Hasendra and Bina Shah  
 Kirit and Pallavi Gala  
 Chandrakant and Hasmita Parekh  
 Divyakant & Sarala Sheth

Many other JCSC members helped enthusiastically with their views and ideas. To list their names would be space prohibitive and make others uncomfortable whose names might be inadvertently left out. The JCYC, JCSC and entire Jain community thank all of them. *It is really a team work. Individuals alone could never have accomplished all these. The glory of achievements belongs to all of us together.*

After moving JCYC to Jain Bhavan, the attendance increased from 70 (1988) to about 150. More classes were added. Others joined in teaching, e.g., Dilip M. Shah (religion), Ramesh & Chandrika Khandhar (religion), Rashmi Shroff (religion), Sailes Jain (Gujarati), Bakulbhai Shah 'Bapuji' (Gujarati), Surendra Jain (Hindi) et al.

Around 1993, there were several meetings between Mahendra Khandhar, Kalyanji Mota, Sailes Jain, Pallavi Gala and Executive Committee to make JCYC grow further. Classes were expanded, many new classes were added, several volunteers joined as teachers and assistant teachers. Several teachers were recruited from Girishbhai B. Shah's Sunday class. Many JCSC members came forward for miscellaneous volunteer work and children's snack program. Girish C. Shah and Mahendra Khandhar retired in 1995, after 14 years of teaching and having a management role in JCYC. Sailes Jain then took a major role, and since then he is working very hard and diligently.

In 1982, nobody imagined or dreamed that the small beginning of one class of 20 with three teachers will become a huge institution of about 400 students, 29 classes, and 86 teachers and volunteers. JCYC shines as a role model for other centers in US, Canada, India and the rest of the world. It is all

*Shasan Dev's Krupa*, Mahavir Swami's blessings, JCSC Management's full support and hard work of all teachers, administrators and volunteers.

**I am sure it will grow even more and the religious *Sanskars* imbibed in these children at an early age will benefit them, in this life and thereafter.**

*(P.S.: The inadvertent errors of omission and commission, if any, are sincerely regretted with Michchhami Dukkadam.)*

## History of Jain Social Group - Los Angeles (Mahendra Khandhar)

My elder brother Kishorbhai in Borivli-Bombay was very active in Jain Social Group (JSG) movement. So, C.N.Sanghavi, the founder president of JSG Federation; Pratapbhai Gandhi, JSG Fed President and others suggested starting overseas group in Los Angeles (LA). While visiting Bombay in 1983, we had several meetings with Sanghavi *Saheb*, Pratapbhai Gandhi, Labhubhai Mehta, Mahasukhbhai Kamdar, Rasikbhai Shah, Chimanbhai, Naginbhai and others. We discussed various aspects of purpose, religious, social, humanitarian activities, JSG Federation, finances and contribution to Jain unity. We were convinced of Jain Social Group's need, noble purpose and practicality.

Primary purpose of Jain Social Group movement is social interaction and *Sadharmik* brotherhood, in consonance with Jainism. This is what Mahavir Swami said as *Paraspar Upgraho Jivanam* (mutual interdependence). On the other hand, the Jain Center has primary purpose as Jain religion *Sanskar* spread. Thus Jain Center activities are primarily religious with social-cultural secondary, while the JSG is primarily socio-cultural with religious activities secondary. This way, both are complementary in the larger context of Jain community and society.

JSG movement was initiated in 1960s, almost half a century ago. Currently, there are 305 groups, including 15 overseas, with the membership of 51,000. (Our JSG-LA, group number 51, is one of the early one and a pioneer in overseas groups.) The JSG Federation contributed millions of rupees and thousands of man-hours, directly and through Red Cross, during Morbi floods in Gujarat, Latur earthquake in Maharashtra, coastal floods in Orissa, Gujarat-Kutchha earthquake, tsunami of Tamilnadu and many other natural calamities. It also arranges *Paryushan* lecture series by eminent Jain scholars.

We came back to LA, and started meeting with the friends and community members. We explained the purpose and function of JSG activities. Met with the Jain Center of Southern California (JCSC) officers before the Group formation to explain the purpose of JSG as socio-cultural-religious, while that of JCSC as religio-socio-cultural. Both are



complementing sister Jain organizations, expanding and reinforcing the *Sadharmik Vatsalya* among our Jain community. There was very favorable response. This dialog continued for almost a year.

Finally, we had the first formative, founding dinner meeting in May 1984. There were 60 members and 10 invited guests from Jain Center Committee and community leaders. There was open discussion, constitution was proposed and adopted, and the first Executive Committee was elected with Mahendra Khandhar as president, Kalpana Shah as vice president, Jitu Shah as secretary, Harshad Mody as treasurer, Harsha Patadia as public relations and Malti Maheta, Pallavi Sheth, Suryakant Belani & Vinod Mehta as members at large. With almost 50 % ladies in the Executive Committee, including VP and PR officers, it was first in JSG history.

JSG-LA was formally inaugurated in Sep 1984. More than 150 JSG members, officers from several groups, Federation officers and friends came from India. There were many invited VIPs and dignitaries, e.g., well known philanthropist Dipchandbhai Gardi, Prof. Padmanabh Jaini, JAINA founder president Lalit C. Shah, Jain Center Presidents Shirish Seth (current) & Kalyanjibhai Mota (former), Vice President Dr. Manibhai Mehta, Chicago JSG founder president Dr. Arvind Shah, Dr. Rashmikant Gardi and others. It was a grand successful function.

The founding period of 1984-86, saw stabilization of our group with moderate growth. Being in both the executive committees, the Jain Center and Jain Social Group, I was able to develop good rapport with our larger sister organization LA Jain Center. Succeeding Administrations have done wonderful job of growth, variety of programs and brotherhood (JSG motto of work and walk together). The next administration of Anil Shah was on explosive growth path, almost doubling the group size. Then, chronological administrations of Sudhir Sheth, Rajendra Vora, Subodh Sheth, Dr. Mahipal Shah, Dhiren Mehta, Pradip Dalal, Raj Dhami and Mahesh Sanghvi provided growth and leadership. Pradip Dalal contributed the special leadership of unity and stability by multiple terms.

Over the years JSG-LA has donated money to charities. Four membership directories have been published. JSG always supports Jain Center fully in all its endeavors. Our JSG group contributed \$15,000 to JCSC for all kitchen equipment and utensils to first Jain Bhavan in 1988 (the

present value would be more than \$50,000 now). Under president Rajendra Vora, JSG started free medical expo and after sometime, Jain Center joined us. With that spirit of cooperation, the annual medical expo (in March/April), has become very successful with hundreds taking advantage of free consulting, diagnostics and lab work in many medical disciplines. In March of this year, almost 400 people took advantage, regardless of caste, creed, color, religion or national origin. It has a major positive impact on the local community. Thanks to our good friend and former president of Jain Center Dr. Nitin Shah.

JSG-LA contributed money and services to Red Cross and others during earth quake, wild fires, floods and other natural calamities in US and India. Our group name is NOT only social group, but it is JAIN social group. All JSG activities and food menus are strictly in accordance with the tenets of Jainism and scriptures. JSG often arranges meetings and dialog with Jain dignitaries. In the past, we had meetings with Dr. Kumarpal Desai, Dr. Hukumchand Bharrill et al.

With the humble beginning of 60 members in 1984, the JSG-LA has outgrown to more than 250 members with a waiting list. Our growth continued unchecked, to the point that another JSG group was started in LA area under the dynamic leadership of Rajendra Vora, who also served as International VP in the JSG Federation. I am indeed very proud of JSG-LA progress and very happy with the growth of JSG activities and excited with its bright future. The JSG-LA group has completed 25 years of wonderful programs. Just recently, it celebrated its grand function of Silver Jubilee. The members and Executive Committees of the past 25 years deserve many congratulations.

JSG-LA has served our Jain community very well and contributed toward unity and brotherhood in Jain *Sangh*. Various committees and their members, and others helped to make it successful. It is all team spirit and genuine effort. Following humble beginning in 1984, the organization blossomed into one of the best in the area. JSG-LA helps bring its members together (social networking) and promotes unity and love. May this endeavor of bringing closeness amongst our community and fostering deeper bonds between members continue for decades to come.

**Last thing I want to say is that by our past good deeds and *Punya Karmas*, we all got this human birth and good life here. Let us continue that tradition of helping others and community service. *Bhagwan Mahavir* says that the way to be happy is to make others happy and service before self.**

Our very best wishes to JSG-LA for continued success, growth and achievements. May Mahavir Swami and *Shasan Dev* bless all. *Jai Jinendra* and *Jai Prabhu*.

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