

# **Report on the Experience Gained by Dr. Hassan Kinyua Omari During a 5-Week Study of Jainism at the International Summer School of Jain Studies**

## **Introduction**

I, Dr. Hassan Kinyua Omari, a lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi, participated in a 5-week intensive study program on Jainism at the International Summer School of Jain Studies (ISSJS). This report outlines the experience gained, key learnings, and significant places visited during the program.

## **Program Overview**

The ISSJS program, guided by Dr Pandey and his colleagues, provided an immersive experience into the teachings, practices, and culture of Jainism. It involved a combination of lectures, field visits, and interactions with Jain scholars and practitioners. Dr. Omari's participation in this program enriched his understanding of Jain philosophy, ethics, and its practical applications in contemporary society.

## **Key Learnings and Experiences**

### **1. In-depth understanding of Jain Philosophy and Ethics**

we attended lectures and discussions led by eminent Jain scholars, covering various aspects of Jain philosophy, including:

- a) Ahimsa (Non-violence): The central tenet of Jainism, emphasizing non-violence in thought, word, and deed.
- b) Anekantavada (Multiplicity of Views): The doctrine that reality can be perceived from multiple perspectives.
- c) Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness): The principle of limiting possessions and desires to achieve spiritual growth.
- d) Vegetarian diet: This is my greatest experience. I never imagined that I could live a day without eating meat. I must admit that I nearly cancelled this trip, just thinking how I would live without meat. But I hereby state that this is the best way to go. I plan to continue being a vegetarian after seeing the benefits. No constipation, no stomach gas.

These sessions provided a comprehensive understanding of how these principles are integrated into the daily lives of Jains and their broader societal implications.

### **2. Field Visits to Significant Jain Institutions**

We visited several important Jain institutions, gaining practical insights into Jain practices and their historical contexts.

**Veerayatan:** A center dedicated to culture, leisure, conference facilities, and spirituality, embodying the Jain principle of selfless hospitality service. We observed how Veerayatan integrates modern hospitality with spiritual teachings, promoting holistic development.

**Abhay Prabhavana:** It is a great wonder in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Here we witnessed a great museum with Jain artifacts, and Jain history, connecting the past and future.

**Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute:** Known for its extensive collection of ancient Jain manuscripts and texts, the institute provided us with access to rare resources, deepening his research into Jain literature and history. Here we saw materials in several languages like Hindi, Arabic, English, Persian, and Brahmic among other languages.

**Kolhapur Temples:** Visiting these temples allowed us to experience ancient architectural grandeur and the spiritual ambiance of Jain worship places. He observed the rituals and interacted with devotees, gaining insights into the communal and religious life of Jains.

### **3. Interaction with Digambara Monks**

We had the opportunity to meet and interact with Digambara monks, who practice an austere form of Jainism. These interactions were profoundly enlightening, offering a firsthand look at the monks' ascetic lifestyle, commitment to non-attachment, and deep spiritual discipline. The monks shared their experiences and perspectives on spiritual practices, further enriching our understanding of the Jain monastic life.

### **Conclusion**

My participation in the International Summer School of Jain Studies was an invaluable experience that significantly enhanced his academic and personal understanding of Jainism. The program's comprehensive approach, combining theoretical knowledge with practical experiences, provided me with a deeper appreciation of Jain philosophy and its applications.

This enriched perspective will not only inform my future teaching and research at the University of Nairobi but also contribute to a broader intercultural and interfaith dialogue. The experiences and insights gained will serve as a foundation for further exploration and dissemination of Jain teachings in the academic and religious communities in Kenya and beyond.

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I realize that there are a lot of similarities between Islam and Jainism. In fact, I am planning to author a book on Jainism and Islam: a comparative analysis which will be launched in the next summer school.

This report summarizes the profound learning journey undertaken by Dr. Hassan Kinyua Omari and underscores the importance of such immersive programs in fostering a deeper understanding of world religions.