



Le'go that Ego

Recently, I visited a large Jain temple in the USA. It was a beautiful temple, however I felt quite uncomfortable in that atmosphere. Underneath every large statue, an even larger plaque listing the donors over powered the statue. To make the matter worst, “puja” rights were being auctioned off! I just had to get out to avoid suffocation. More I study Jainism, more I see a disconnect between our philosophy and many of our traditional practices. I am sure, that for many of the donors, their contribution to temple is just an experiential aspect of renunciation and a practice in non-attachment. And yet, because of the overpowering need to satisfy the ego (an external stimulus) they end up denying themselves of a great internal pleasure that comes from anonymous donations.

Everyone likes to feel appreciated, and everyone should be. However when the recognition becomes a display of ego and competition, we should be concerned. Jain societies, like the one I come from, recognizes only money donations and not the time, skill or other efforts and dedication. In the temple example, there were no signs of recognition for many volunteers who may have put in countless hours in making the temple project successful! Many a youth, the back-bone of our centers and its educational activities, are hardly recognized. They have fresh ideas and lots of enthusiasm. Instead of building them and empowering them, we tend to brush them off as immature and unwise. Our society and leaders have shown a strong bias towards people with money and many of our monks encourage that. We have replaced cast system with class system.

“Some people claim that no institution or individual tells the donors to have greed or ego or any kind of desires. However, in actual practice, the names of donors and the amounts of donations are publicly announced and publicized in newspapers and magazines. They are prominently displayed on walls of temples and buildings” writes Hukamchand Bharilji. “These customs amount to enticing the unsuspecting masses to engage in such practices that violate the spirit of Jainism. Fund-raisers who are interested in satisfying their ulterior motives and donors who indulge in charity to satisfy their ego have vitiated the virtue of charity.” He further writes.

Jains, the followers of JINAs are certainly aware of the fundamental practice of Jainism - that calls for an active effort in minimizing our anger, ego, deceit and greed in our day to day activities. These, certainly are not very easy practices. However, we can at least stop cooking up new rituals and put an end to old traditions that fuel these weaknesses. Young Jains around the globe are turned off by these practices. Let us act on this before we are written off as hypocrites.