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## Gheeboli in Jainism

During a recent social occasion at Siddhachalam, I observed an event that compelled me to write this article. In the temple, there was “ghee-boli (auctioning)” for arati and devo. When it was time to do arati, a group of children that usually participate enthusiastically in arati/devo were just sitting around. One of the younger child innocently said “let’s go for arati”. To that an older child in the group replied “we can’t go because our parents did not bid for the arati”. Realizing that I was listening, the child looked at me, and I looked down in shame. I was ashamed that I kept quiet and tolerated this shameful tradition. A tradition carried out in the name of religion, in a temple, that in fact opposes everything Jainism stands for!

It promotes ego, greed, jealousy; in some cases even anger! There is a competition for exhibition. The tendency for the show dominates kindness and compassion. Through this tradition, we have allowed hypocrisies, charades and exhibitionism to permeate into Jainism.

We teach our children to control their passions and yet we invent events like “ghee-boli” to satisfy our ego, our passion for fame, praise and social position. Even monks encourage these events!!!

Sure funds are needed to run the organization (‘sangh’), but proper ways of fund raising and giving is clearly prescribed in our scriptures. ‘Acharang Sutra’, the oldest of our Agams clarifies the need to separate ‘dharma’ (religious activity) from ‘vyavahar’ (social activity). We all have learned from childhood that ‘when a right hand gives, even the left hand should not know about it’ and yet, we refrain from giving unless our name is recognized, our statues are erected, and our photos are put up. It is shameful to see in our temples, photos of the donors hung up on the walls, the names of the donors carved in stone, instead of spiritual verses from agams or the reminders to help us control our inner weaknesses.

The purpose of ‘Bhandar’ (donation box) in the temple is to promote anonymous donations within each individual’s capacity with no selfish motive. There is something really special; an ultimate joy that comes from within when one gives without anyone knowing about it. Let us not deprive ourselves of that internal bliss just for the sake of satisfying our ego.

I have talked to many young Jains, at our Center as well as many others at the conventions and workshops, and almost without exception all Jain youths are turned off by ‘ghee-boli’. Not only they do not participate in this event, they simply leave the room in boycott.

At a recent teachers and educators’ convention, youth groups had raised this issue. There was a lengthy discussion on this subject. One adult passionately spoke in favor, arguing that without ‘ghee-boli’ we would not be able to raise the kind of money needed to build big temples in this country. To this, youth representatives made their choice very clear. If we can not raise funds in line with Jain philosophy, they would rather not have temples built for their future. They would much rather have smaller and simpler temples or community centers that can be managed without tainted money from ‘ghee-boli’.

There is a group of people who think that ‘ghee-boli’ is a wrong way of fund raising, and yet support

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this tradition saying; “Let’s be practical, we need funds and this method works.” Here is the question for them: For this tradition, are we willing to sacrifice our principles? Are we willing to alienate the young generation, the future of Jainism? Is this really being practical? Has our creativity dried up completely or has our society fallen so low that we can not come up with an alternative in line with our philosophy?

Let us determine to abolish ‘Ghee-boli’ from Jain tradition starting with our Center and enthusiastically embrace the true Jain tradition of anonymous donations. We, most definitely, won’t regret it.