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### **Scapegoats**

**It is morally wrong to torture fellow creatures, to do so in the name of religion is a sin**

**From Issue #371 (19 October 07 - 01 November 07) |**

### **Damber K Shrestha**

We celebrate Dasain by appeasing the goddess Kali so that she will chase away the demons and bring us health, wealth and victory. After all, this is a festival of the triumph of good over evil. This is also the festival of blood-letting as thousands upon thousands of goats, sheep, buffaloes, chickens and ducks are cruelly slaughtered on our streets and temples. Our idols are made of stone, but they drip with the blood of our fellow beings. It is now time to think about what this means in a festival that celebrates the victory of good. Why are we exhibiting such cruelty, and how does this reflect on our society? If we are indeed human beings, why can't we learn to be a little more humane during a national festival? A society that treats animals so brutally will also be brutal towards fellow humans.

It could be that our martial ancestors, while unifying the country and fighting invaders, had to harden their hearts. It may be a part of our tradition that the khukuri wielded in the battlefields first had to draw the blood of sacrificial animals. During the Malvinas war, the British Army used the Gurkhali reputation for fierceness with the khukuri to defeat the Argentinians. Our enemies today are not demons. It is superstition, fatalism, poverty and social inequity that plagues our society. We will defeat and overcome these ills by being more humane and caring ourselves, by showing civilized behaviour. Decapitating a bleating buffalo or goat should not be the symbol of the Nepali civilisation. Rage is a human trait. Rage leads to cruelty. But it is not a human attribute to enjoy brutality. Yet, in Mugu 32 years ago I witnessed the most cruel custom of rubbing chillies and salt on a goat's skin. The spectators cheered as the goats writhed and leapt in agony, and finally they bit the goat's skin until its entrails spilled out. There was a loud cheer as the goat was then dragged off to be killed at the temple. While watching this spectacle in horror, I asked myself are these human beings or are they hyenas? What kind of people take pleasure in such cruelty?

In Khokana of Lalitpur there is a similar sacrifice ritual in which a goat is thrown into a pond while participants jump in to tear the animal apart with their bare hands and teeth. In Bhaktapur pigs are skinned alive and their chests opened, and the living heart yanked out. The screaming mercifully dies, while its still-beating heart is offered to the temple amidst loud music. At Dasain, buffaloes are slaughtered by their hundreds in Nepal's momo capital of Kathmandu. The sidewalks and gutters of Kot run red with buffalo blood. Even Hindus from other countries are shocked by the bloodletting in Nepal. For the buffaloes, when the end comes, it is a relief. They have been tortured by the transportation from India and the tarai towns to Kathmandu packed in livestock trucks. They are tethered with ropes that go through their nostrils, they foam at the mouth, and I have seen them actually shed tears of pain from their deep blue eyes. Their skins is lacerated by friction against the sides of the truck. To eat meat we have to kill animals. But why do we have to inflict such pain before we do so? This is not just inhuman, it is also against the law in many

countries. Animals, be they beasts of burden, pets, dairy animals or livestock for meat have to be treated humanely. Nepal also now needs to enact such laws.

It is morally wrong to torture fellow creatures, but to do so in the name of religion is a sin. The government should set an example by stopping official sacrifices. Temples should follow by banning cruel slaughter on their premises. By sacrificing animals in front of cars, trucks, buses, even aircraft, we are promoting a culture of violence. Let us set a precedence for non-violence by stopping cruel animal sacrifices and slaughter in the New Nepal.

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<http://www.geocities.com/glossograph>

### **Animal Sacrifice in Nepal**

**Richard S. Ehrlich**

*DAKSHINKALI, Nepal — Hindus are sacrificing live animals by slitting the throats with shiny knives and aiming the thrashing beasts' spurting blood at this ancient, red-splattered shrine. Or they simply chop off the heads and hold decapitated torsos so a stream of ruby fluid pumps toward the deity. When a generous amount of life-bearing liquid is shaken out, the men drag the dead animals across the floor of the roofless, outdoor temple to a nearby chopping chamber. The shrine's washable, white-tile gutters and floor overflow with the massacre's blood.*

In 1780, Nepal outlawed human sacrifice. Animals, however, are allowed to be killed to satisfy the goddess Kali, and for other ceremonies. Devotees who cannot afford to sacrifice a goat, pig, lamb or waterbuffalo, offer a less expensive chicken or duck. The temple's executioners don't care, and slice the skinnier throats and splash the Hindu deity in much the same way.

Carcasses remain the property of the believers who brought them, and are carried home or taken to the chamber where the temple's butchers skin and debone the meat for a small fee according to devotees' requests. Amid the chaos of hundreds of people offering live animals, the crowd pushes and shoves as they near the sacrificial spot, walking barefoot in huge puddles of blood. Everyone seems to think the slaughters will please the gods and grant a boon to whoever makes such an offering.

Animal sacrifice is common in Nepal, the world's only Hindu kingdom. The act is part of various "pooja" ritual offerings performed when Hindus worship idols. Nepalis kill animals to sanctify weddings, new homes or religious festivals. Upon purchasing a new car or truck, the owner sometimes splashes its exterior with fresh animal blood, to ensure the vehicle doesn't crash whenever it is driven. Many times, pooja is merely symbolic -- an offering of butter, yogurt, money or flowers. When an animal is to be sacrificed, however, it should be an uncastrated male which is killed, apparently as a display of life's potency.

This death to please the gods is also interpreted as doing the animal a favor by releasing it from a life of suffering, amid hopes that it may be reborn as a much more fortunate human.

Sacrifices are also performed as a mass bloodletting, such as during the Durga Pooja festival when, once a year, soldiers in the center of Kathmandu hack off the heads of hundreds of waterbuffalos and goats -- trying to dispatch each with a single stroke. And during Nepal's most spectacular festival, the Dasain feast in early autumn, up to 10,000 goats and other animals are slaughtered. Nepal's Buddhists and animists also occasionally perform animal sacrifices, along with a bit of sorcery.

But here at Dakshinkali, on the outskirts of the capital Kathmandu, the Kali Temple arranges Nepal's biggest number of animal sacrifices -- hundreds every Saturday and Tuesday, totaling tens of thousands throughout the year. Other less fabled temples, shrines and courtyards elsewhere in Nepal usually allow the slitting of throats in sacrificial pits on Fridays and Saturdays.

At Dakshinkali's temple complex, set amid trees in a tiny valley between two mountains, swarms with men, women and children carrying their squirming prey. Hindu symbols, including brass tridents and snakes, adorn the shrine's walls and canopy. Many believe the animals' blood is an attempt to feed the goddess Kali's eternally insatiable stomach. Kali, often depicted with a long tongue dripping blood, and wearing a necklace of human skulls, traditionally devours demons, beasts and people -- which has prompted Kali worshippers to murder people to please her.

During the 1800s, British colonialists and others in neighboring India feared gangs of "Thugs," including some who worshipped Kali by murdering victims to gain her blessings. "It is by the command, and under the special protection of the most powerful goddesses that the Thugs join themselves to the unsuspecting traveler, make friends with him, slip the noose round his neck, plunge their knives in his eyes, hide him in the earth, and divide his money and baggage," wrote Thomas Macaulay, who served in India during the 1830s and drafted the basis of Indian criminal law.

Today, devotees of Kali are usually much more peaceful.

Sita Pathak, a Hindu banker in Kathmandu, said in an interview, "I didn't sacrifice any animals because I don't like to do all that, but my husband sacrificed a goat. "He sacrificed it because he wanted something to gain, physical power. He was sick before that, and after the sacrifice he was healthy and strong. "We bought the goat for 3,000 rupees (44 US dollars). It was just a small goat. Afterwards, they cut it up, and we took it home and ate it. "I cooked it. The goat tasted good. We are Brahmins, so we sacrifice goats, not chickens. The lower castes sacrifice chickens." She was referring to Hinduism's vicious caste system in which people born from Brahmin parents dominate all others, while lower castes are trapped for generations in often miserable jobs, lifestyles and other forms of public, private and religious behavior.

At Dakshinkali, meanwhile, some devotees don't wait to return home to dine on the dead meat. Instead, they picnic in the forest next to the shrine, roasting their meals on campfires while the slitting and hacking continues below amid clanging of bells and shouts of prayer.

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[www.animalpeoplenews.org](http://www.animalpeoplenews.org)

### **Progress toward abolishing animal sacrifice in Nepal and India** **Merritt Clifton**

KATHMANDU--"Though a ceasefire between the government and the Maoist guerrillas has held for over a year now," India News Service reporter Sudeshna Sarkar wrote from the Nepalese capital city of Kathmandu on October 19, 2007, "Nepal is passing through one of its goriest periods with thousands of animals being sacrificed daily on the occasion of Dashain, the biggest Hindu festival in the country.

"On the eighth day of the nearly fortnight-long celebrations," Sarkar explained, "animal killings reach a crescendo, with buffaloes, goats, and chickens being slaughtered." But since the recent dissolution of the Nepalese theocracy, Sarkar noted, dissent against the sacrifices--formerly personally led by the king--has emerged." Amid growing protest by animal rights activists, hundreds of red-robed lamas stopped speaking in monasteries across 22 districts," Sarkar said, "to issue silent prayers for the welfare of all creatures of god. The prayers started from Lumbini in southern Nepal, where the Buddha was born."

Sarkar cited an "opinion poll by a private television station," which "showed over 60% of the respondents said the festival would remain incomplete without animal sacrifices." But Damodar Neupane of the Kathmandu Post approvingly profiled the villages of Chumchet and Chhekampar, in Gorkha, "eight days' walk" from the seat of regional government, where the Bhutan-born guru Dukpa Ringpoche Serab Dorje abolished animal sacrifice in 1917. "Five years after his arrival all the villagers had gone vegetarian," Neupane wrote. "Nobody breached the rule," recalled 91-year-old villager Chhewang Laharke. "Everyone follows the teachings of the guru, which have become an integral part of our precious culture." Added local guru Dawang Khenrab, "We have taken the decision to discourage other people from animal sacrifice."

Kathmandu-based BBC reporter Charles Haviland observed that "New dissenters are questioning both the scale and the methods of the killing. An article in the Nepali Times weekly says most buffaloes, like smaller animals, are decapitated but the bigger ones are battered to death with a heavy hammer on the forehead. "Respected botanist Tirtha Shrestha, writing in the same paper, says that in Bhaktapur, near Kathmandu, pigs are skinned alive and their beating hearts offered to the temple, while in a nearby village people tear apart a live goat. 'Decapitating a bleating buffalo or goat should not be the symbol of the Nepali civilisation,' he says. 'Why are we exhibiting such cruelty, and how does this reflect on our society?'

"The suffering of the people of Nepal [in the recent civil war] and the slaughter of [nine members of] the family of the King" in a June 2000 rage massacre attributed to a prince who later shot himself "is due to such stupid practices," opined Blue Cross of India chief executive Chinny Krishna, who has made personal efforts to encourage Nepalese opposition to sacrifice. "I am convinced that all the troubles for the kings of Nepal is due to their cruel participation and perpetuation of this barbaric practice," Krishna continued. "If the kings believe in the Hindu philosophy, they must surely know that there is an inexorable law of action and reaction under which cruelty begets more cruelty and suffering."

But similar sacrifices continue in parts of India, exempted from prosecution by Section 28 of the federal Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960, which says, "Nothing contained in this Act shall render it an offence to kill any animal in a manner required by the religion of any community." Reported The Statesman, of Kolkata, "Reports of slaughtering of nearly 200 animals poured in from three prominent shakti shrines during the midnight hours on 19 October. "Tradition was allowed to prevail. Animal sacrifice is practised by the local politicians, the police and the revenue officials," explained animal advocate Bijoy Kabi. "The first goat butchered at the Satabhaya shrine was offered by a police station," Kabi alleged.

"Eid followed by Durga Puja, and you have blood and more blood flowing country-wide," lamented Assamese activist Azam Siddique, referring to the Feast of Atonement slaughters practiced by Muslims and the more common Indian term for the occasion called Dasain in Nepal and Dasara in southern India. Siddique described several sacrifices he had heard about in Assam, and recalled that "in a place called Belsor," where 100 buffalos were sacrificed this year, "the superintendent of police last year sacrificed and danced with a buffalo head on his shoulders. This year it is alleged that a senior minister in the state government was also party to the slaughter," Siddique added.

But Bano Haralu of New Delhi Television profiled the Haatkholia Dutta Bari family of north Kolkata, who gave up animal sacrifice in 1794, and have now shunned sacrifice for 28 generations. State and city governments have some leeway to ban or restrict sacrifice in public places. "Animal sacrifice as part of Dasara festivities has been banned under the Karnataka Prevention of Animal and Bird Sacrifice Act since 1959," The Hindu reminded Bangalore residents on October 19. The Hindu mentioned the next day that, "Animal sacrifice for Dasara has been banned in the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation limits," and that "Violators would be prosecuted under the Andhra Pradesh Animals and Birds Sacrifice Prohibition Act of 1950, according to city veterinary officer N. Karunakara Rao."

In Cuttack, The Hindu noted on October 22, "In the absence of any specific law banning animal sacrifice in the country, the district administration was able to sensitize the people against this age-old practice." Said district deputy collector [deputy chief administrator] Aditya Mohapatra "No report of any animal sacrifice was received from any part of Cuttack district."

*The four major temples in the district reportedly ended animal sacrifice in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006, respectively.*