

*Arun Gupto writes a beautiful essay about the sacrificed airline goats. Traditionally the sacrifice of animals was indeed carried out in a much more respectful manner. Nowadays countless people drive goats up to temples on the back of their motorbikes; buying fat goats for sacrifice (on the market or through internet) to many seems to have become a status symbol. Sacrifice raises many questions but we would like to remind people that in the past, human sacrifice was carried out in Nepal. Culture and traditions adapt with time.*

## **FACT & FICTION: Sacrificial Semiotics**

By ARUN GUPTO

The scene of a dead black goat under a huge white plane and a man approaching towards a white goat with an open khukuri is politically incorrect and aesthetically shocking. The scene hurts the sentiments of those who are vegetarians and animal lovers. Even to those eyes who are non-vegetarians, who relish meat and momos, the reconciliation of bestiality and benediction mars the aesthetic sensibility of our times.

Whose culture Shekhar Basnet (September 6, Letters to the Editor) is talking about? Do all Nepalis follow the culture of animal sacrifice? Aren't there millions of Nepalis who take other sacred paths for grace and blessings? I know sacrificial ceremonies have holy nuances of primordial kinds and those who followed it in the past bore the spirit of innocence too. But now in a public place, for a public well being if you are axing a goat you are making ethnocentric claim of a parochial kind by announcing that it is "our" tradition. Who is that "our"?

Furthermore, there are rituals which bear thousands of years of tradition, and which are beautiful as well as ugly, sacred as well as profane. Modern sensibilities sometimes need to preserve all of them but some in the permanence of museums and arts, instead of in the practicing rituals. People sacrifice animals during Dashain, but that is the family and community affair. Dashain sacrifices offend many Nepalis of the hills and the Tarai, but a humble Nepali cannot object because they are private rituals despite the fact that the animal rights activists have all the logics and sentiments to question the modes of killing animals.

And again, the idea of sacrifice is more than behaving an animal. Offering sacrifice is also erasing your ills, offering yourself for the cause of good: Buddhist, Christ-like and Gandhian self sacrifice for great causes. Sacrifice is taken literally too and more in the past with the spirit of innocence. Here is a story which may tell us about the sublimity of sacrifice.

A renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell narrates about a central African tribe's manners of killing. After chasing the boar and killing it with their weapons, the hunters would lovingly look at the prey. The chief of the hunting tribe would stand with his warriors surrounding the dead animal. Then he would bend down and caress the dying body and talk to him. O wanderer of the woods, we pay respect to you because your body is sacred to us for you provide us the means to survive. Your body is our necessity. Then all of them would wail and dance around the sacred dead. The consecrated purpose of the killer and the killed is reconciled, the prey and the predator are united in a sacred bond of survival. I think we have lost that innocence today. It is difficult for us now to preserve that sacredness of mind. Do we think that we and those university educated NAC engineers approached that goat with sprit of the ancientness? For the mere purpose of cooking meal and enjoying the evening, I do not blame those enthusiasts because killings and food are inseparable natural and cultural behavior.

What do we do then? At least we can behave aesthetically and not expose all our traditions as superstitions, ugliness, and male gratifications. Some cultural images do not look good all the time and at all places. The amputated animal on the ground, blood soaked circle around Karmali (the beautiful name of the carrier), another animal ready to be beheaded by a severe blow by the artist, the engineer (probably), do not look beautiful to our eyes. Tradition! It has its sophistications too.

Public buses injure and kill people almost everyday. How many goats and doves do you need for the benedictory purpose of avoiding killing humans by killing animals?

The concerns showed by Sameer, Ganesh, Chirendra, Krishna, Sheela, Niranjana, and Vinaya, the letter writers, also speak about how we identify ourselves to the world. Even if such rituals are good and helpful, when they send ugly messages to the outsiders, we need to rethink about such mores. Even for the Nepalis who do not like animal sacrifices, we should at least be politically correct by avoid hurting other's sentiments.

Let us argue then on the sheer purpose of killing an animal to avoid troubles and accidents. Let us assume that those engineers firmly believe that the sacrifice of this kind avoids troubles. Let us accept for a while that blood expiates sin and avoids future accidents. Why not use your body to do the act of public safety? Why that silent animal?

The matter is plain enough. The management of goat is the management of eating and drinking in the evening, not about caring public culture. It is not even superstition (superstitious people are pitiable), it is cultural poverty in organizational thinking.

The very fact that lensman Bikas Karki was obstructed by the airport authorities speaks about the guilt of the performers. The photograph represents the pathologies of our modes of thinking. Bikas's software helped him expose the semiotics of decadence.