Religious Sacrifice of Animals: some issues for discussion

An issue paper prepared for the round table discussion organised by Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities Forum Australia, 9th October 2010, Campsie, NSW, Australia.

Hom Moorti Pant
Canberra
Who would do this these days?
Bali
Indonesia
Ready to be killed
Bangladesh
Israel – Judaism: This is the calf that will be used to sanctify the Temple Mount for the Third Temple.

This is "Geula" from Texas
South America

According to the Aztecs, the flesh of the palm of humans was the choicest delicacy: it was a treat reserved only for the nobles. The rest of Aztec society had to quite literally make do with the bones.
South America

This original Aztec drawing shows the practice of human sacrifice which was central to their religion.
South America

The Aztec religion demanded daily human sacrifice and most of the victims for this sacrifice were seized from surrounding Amerind tribes by the Aztecs. This helped Spanish to conquer over the Aztecs.
WHAT is an Animal Sacrifice?

Animal sacrifice is the ritual killing of an animal as part of a religion.
Who gives animal sacrifices?

• It is practiced by many religions as a means of appeasing a god or gods or changing the course of nature. Animal sacrifice has turned up in almost all cultures, from the Hebrews to the Greeks and Romans and from the Aztecs to the Hindus and Bons (Tibet).

• Animal sacrifices were common throughout the Ancient Near East, (Middle East) and throughout Classical Antiquity. (ancient Greek-Romans)

• The Minoan culture of Phaistos on Crete reveals basins for animal sacrifice dating to the period 2000 to 1700 BC. (Greek Civilization)
Guess where?
Who? Why? When?

• This custom has been practiced in Nepal since time immemorial (500 years?).
• There is a general belief that these rituals will invoke a divine blessing, saving natural calamity-prone areas from disaster.
• The practice of animal sacrifice is in accordance with an age-old ritual followed by worshippers of the Shakhti cult.
• This practice is observed twice a year during Thulo Dasain and Chaite Dashain
Christianity

- References to animal sacrifice appear in the **New Testament**, such as the parents of **Jesus** sacrificing two doves (\(\)) and the Apostle Paul performing a **Nazirite** vow even after the death of Christ (\(\)). (includes 3 animal sacrifices at the end of the vow)
- Christ is referred to by his apostles as "the **Lamb of God**," within the Christian context, lacking understanding of such substitution as expressed in Judaism.
- Some villages in Greece also sacrifice animals to Orthodox saints in a practice known as **kourbànía**.
- Sacrifice of a lamb, or less commonly a rooster, is a common practice in **Armenian Church**. This tradition, called **matagh**, is believed to stem from pre-Christian pagan rituals.
- In Strangite sect of the Later Day Saints the head of every house, from the king to his lowest subject, was to offer "a heifer, or a lamb, or a dove. Every man a clean beast, or a clean fowl, according to his household."
Haiti – Voodoo practices
Animal Sacrifice in Islam

• **Islam** makes no general provision for animal sacrifice. However, it is considered to be incumbent upon sufficiently wealthy Muslims to sacrifice a large *mammal* during **Eid ul-Adha** (the Festival of Sacrifice), which falls during the period of **Hajj** (*pilgrimage* to **Mecca**).

• Typically, a *sheep* or *goat* is sacrificed, although some sacrifice *cattle* or a *camel* instead. Two-Thirds of the meat is usually given as charity to the poor, in commemoration of the **Sacrifice of Ismail**, in which **God** tested the faith of **Abraham** (Ibrahim) by ordering him to sacrifice his son **Ishmael** (Ismail).
Pakistan

An ox is readied for the slaughter during the Muslim high celebration of Eid al-Adha, also known as the Festival of Sacrifice. This day caps off the hajj, a traditional religious pilgrimage to Mecca that occurs on the 10th day of the last month of the Islamic calendar. This is usually during the months of November or December.
Cattle Market before Eid al-Adha

The hajj is a celebration of the tests and triumphs of the Prophet Abraham in Islam. One-third of the animal’s meat is consumed by direct family, while the other two-thirds are given away to friends and the poor Islamic residents of the community, respectively.
Hinduism

- Animal sacrifice was common in Vedic religion, the highest or "royal" such sacrifice being the Ashvamedha. The last known performance of the Ashvamedha was that by Jai Singh II of Amber in 1716.
- Classical (Puranic, Vedantic) Hinduism as it emerged in the medieval period de-emphasizes animal sacrifice, and indeed any meat processing, based on the doctrine of ahimsa which bars the killing or injuring of all living beings (Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism).
- Animal Sacrifices still current are mostly associated with either Shaktism school of Hinduism or with local tribal traditions.
- Possibly the largest animal sacrifice in the world occurs during Gadhimai festival in Nepal. In the 3 day long sacrifice in 2009 it was speculated that more than 250,000 animals were killed while 5 million devotees attended the festival.
Shamanism in Nepal

• Some of the ethnic groups who have shamanistic religions and characteristics of ancient Bon are the Gurungs (Tamu), Tamangs, Thakalis, Yolmos, Sunuars, Lepches, Jirels, Surels, Limbus, Rais, Magars, Thams, Hayus, Chepangs, Sherpas, Lhomis, Monbas, Dolpos, Karens, and even the Matwali Khas. They are known by different names such as Dhami, Dhom (Don), Lambo, Tomba, Pawo, Nyengjomi, Ponbo, Bungthing, Mun, Bijuwa, Gyami, Gyabre, Pajyu, Nari, Phedangma, and Jhankari.

• They continue to follow the traditions of the ‘black bon’ (Nira Gurung). Bon Shamanistic religion were practiced in pre-Buddhist Tibet.
Shamanistic Bonpo Lamas

• Carry out rituals and sacrifices for redemption and to appease the demon, God or spirit when there is illness, bad luck, poverty, death, sterility, fire and accidents.

• They sacrifice animals such as sheep, goat and chicken while performing their rituals.

• They also predict good and bad luck by examining the liver of the slaughtered animals in different rituals.
Rationale for animal sacrifice: Redemption in Judaism

• Many Jewish sources discuss the deeper meaning behind KORBANOT.

• An individual bringing an animal sacrifice for a sin understands that he personally should have been sacrificed as punishment for the rebellion against God inherent in the sin, but God mercifully accepts the sacrifice in his or her place.

• Furthermore, it is considered fitting that an animal is used as a sacrifice because at the moment of sin, the individual in question disregarded his elevated human soul, effectively acting as an animal.

• What is the implied welfare /rights of the animal?
Animal sacrifice Israel
Rationale: blessings in Shakti School of Hinduism

• Everyone seems to think the animal sacrifices will please the gods and grant a boon to whoever makes such an offering.

• 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.

• So animal sacrifice is a win-win proposition to both man and the animal!
शक्ति पनि मुक्ति पनि!!
Free from this life form!
What Does Buddhism Say?

• As sentient beings are reborn according to their karmic propensities, all beings have transmigrated through the various animal realms.
• "it is not easy to find a being who has not at one time been our mother, father, brother, or sister.“
• So, by saving the life of another being, we are saving our fathers or mothers in the past. Do not, therefore, KILL!
• This school contends that all living beings feel pain, animals are lower forms of life, they deserve our compassion.
What is the difference?

• Both religions believe in rebirth - 84 lakh yonis
• Both consider animal life to be inferior to a human life
• Shakti sect of Hinduism argues that by killing an animal you help it to move faster to a higher life form
• Buddhism says we must show compassion to the weak, and warns that the animal could have been our relative in the past.
• You can not refute any of these because they are metaphysical arguments. There is no evidence against these statements.
Key premises behind animal sacrifices in all practicing religions/cultures

• A **profound belief** that there exist god/goddesses or devils that control our fortune and misfortunes

• By sacrificing animals (or even human) they can be pleased and
  – We will be blessed, protected from bad things such as natural disasters, disease, etc,
  – We can also acquire immense strength/power—shakti— which may allow us to conquer over our enemies.

• Many kings, including Nepali Kings, also had held this **belief Strongly**. They wanted Bhagawati to be on their side so that their control over the kingdom remains eternal and they are feared by their enemies (neighbors). The kings therefore had “institutionalised” animal sacrifices in Nepal. (e.g. Kot Puja etc)
What Does the Science Say?

- The Universe did not spontaneously begin to form but was set in motion by God - Sir Isaac Newton
- In A Brief History of Time (1988) Prof Hawking wrote, "If we discover a complete theory, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason — for then we should know the mind of God.” He did not dismiss God.
- However, in September 2010 (The Grand Design) Prof Hawking said, “Because there is a law such as gravity, the Universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the Universe exists, why we exist.”
- That is, no divine force was needed to explain why the universe was formed.
Prof Stephen Hawking’s view of God

"The question is: is the way the universe began chosen by God for reasons we can't understand, or was it determined by a law of science? I believe the second. If you like, you can call the laws of science 'God', but it wouldn't be a personal God that you could meet, and ask questions."
Issues for Discussion - 1

• If Prof Hawking is correct, then there is no basis for performing the rituals involving animal sacrifices. They are just the remains of a barbarian or tribal culture. They will disappear as the society becomes more civilised.
• Power comes from the correct use of science and technology. It is wiser to devote scarce resources to science, technology, education and health.
• History has shown that societies that have relied on animal sacrifices and devotion have lagged behind the societies that used science and technology carefully
• If Prof Hawking is wrong, then there is some ground for such sacrifices. The debate is on.
• Do we think Prof Hawking is correct?
Issues for Discussion -2

• Suppose, for discussion, that animal sacrifices were in fact made for the meat; the rituals are there simply to remove the guilt.

• If meat consumption is acceptable, then, ignoring the hygienic issues, what is wrong with the animal sacrifice system as a provider of meat?

• If animals are going to be killed any way and we can accept that, then what is the problem in killing some animals in the designated temples?

• Logical consistency requires that either we reject eating meat altogether or we can not reject animal sacrifice.
Issues for Discussion - 3

• Modern science suggests that there is no divine power that can be pleased by sacrificing animals. Therefore any money spent by government in making provisions of sacrificial animals is a waste. Why do not we oppose it?

• Despite the fact that the point may be valid, as the amount involved could be small, would it not be more wiser to use that energy to identify and plug other bigger wastes?

• As the protest seen in Maoist times shows there will also be resistance from people who actually believe in the divine power, the practical question is: is the benefit worth the conflict?

• Would not this be more wiser to educate the population on how the earth began and let them decide what they chose to believe on?

• There is a logical problem in opposing the government funding for animal sacrifices in government owned Kots, when we accept animal sacrifices done privately. Kings and high officers in the government do fear from the goddesses as well. Who can make such a bold decision??
Issues for Discussion - 4

• It appears that the only consistent approach is to follow that path of non-violence, ahimsa. It will renounce all kinds of killings and hurts and promotes vegetarianism.
• Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism all argue for non-violence, ahimsa.
• The extent to which the principle of non-violence can or should be applied to different life forms is controversial between various authorities of Hinduism, that leaves space for the Shakti sect.
• Ahimsa + No God = Buddhism. This appears the only religion consistent with science.
• Ahimsa + God = Jainism or [Hinduism –Shaktism]. They are not consistent with modern science in the creation of life.
• In a pluralistic society, however, we need to respect the right of other religious groups. While doing so we can also persuade them to practice a life style that supports non-violence or ahimsa.
### Consistent Logical Steps

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<tr>
<th>Step</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If Committed to Non-violence (Ahimsa)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Then no killings of any Animal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Then no animal sacrifices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then no animal sacrifices in govt. institutions (no waste of taxpayer’s money)</td>
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Consistent Logical Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If there is no commitment to AHIMSA</th>
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<tr>
<td>Then Killings of Animals -OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then Shakti Puja with animal sacrifices - OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then Kot/Devi Puja in govt. institutions must be OK. Taxpayer funded animal sacrifices must be OK.</td>
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Inconsistent Logical Steps – need consultation between conflicting groups

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Then Killings of Animals - OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then private Shakti Puja with animal sacrifices - OK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then if taxpayer funded Kot/Devi Puja with animal sacrifices in govt. institutions is NOT OK, we have <strong>conflicts</strong>!</td>
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### Why do we want to stop taxpayer funded animal sacrifices?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>reason</th>
<th>action</th>
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<td>To stop unproductive use of public funds?</td>
<td>First stop bigger misuses of public funds, plug bigger holes! Money spent on animal sacrifices would be a tiny fraction of the total budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>To maintain fairness because they fund Shakti sectarian Hindu practices only</td>
<td>Ask funding for animal sacrifices or for other activities as needed by other religious groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>For ethical reasons, principle of non-violence - AHIMSA? (can’t be animal rights)</td>
<td>Stop killing animals everywhere (be vegetarian and encourage others to be vegetarian)</td>
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Where are animal rights violated?

- Factory farming— for example too many chickens being cramped in one cage
- Animals in sport—particularly in horse racing, and duck and quail shooting
- Animal shelters—where overcrowding and a lack of food supplies can cause health problems
- Animal testing—tests can result in pain and sometimes death of the animal
- When owners abuse or abandon their pets (i.e., humane slaughtering are allowed)
Under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, prohibited offences include:

- Abandoning animals
- Giving poisons to animals
- Using certain electrical devices on animals
- Animal baiting and fighting
- Bull-fighting
- Trap-shooting
- The keeping of game parks
- Tail nicking/docking (the removal of the tail of an animal)
- The sale of severely injured animals

(i.e., Animal rightists are not required to be vegetarian)
The way forward – the middle way

- Subscribe to non-violence
- Be vegetarian!
- Encourage others to be vegetarian

Respect the choices of others. Faith/beliefs take time to change. However, keep educating the community the principles of non-violence.
Conclusion

As of today, I will be vegetarian.

Thank You!
Internet resources used

• http://www.gurungs.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=52&Itemid=62
• (http://kenraggio.com/KRPN-TheThirdTemple.htm)
• (http://www.white-history.com/hwr48.htm)
• (http://reference.findtarget.com/search/Religion%20in%20ancient%20Rome/)
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