

**Animal Sacrifice in Nepal: Analyzing the Balance Between Cultural Practices and Laws on
Animal Welfare and Banning Cruelty**



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1. Abstract

Animal sacrifice has been practiced in Nepal for thousands of years. It is deeply rooted in Nepal's culture and religious practices that's why Nepal is facing criticism every year. It is a debatable topic because of its ethical implications and impact on animal welfare. This research paper tries to examine the historical, religious, and legal dimensions of animal sacrifice in Nepal. It will try to focus on the tension between cultural traditions and modern animal welfare laws. This paper highlights the negative consequences of animal sacrifice on public health, environmental pollution, and psychological well-being especially among children by analyzing various ethical and social implications. This study explores various legal frameworks that exist currently in Nepal that protect and restrict animal sacrifice traditions. This paper will also include a case study and supreme court verdict on the Gadhimai festival, which is one of the world's largest animal sacrifices in the name of god with the status of the enforcement of court orders with the perspective of people who give animal sacrifice as well as the mayor of the Mahagadhimai municipality. Comparisons with neighboring countries like India and Bhutan because of their similar religious compositions. By analyzing animal sacrifice status in those countries, animal welfare there and some decisions are also included. This paper also provides insights into potential alternatives adopted by various religions. The paper concludes by advocating for a balance between preserving cultural heritage and promoting animal welfare, suggesting that religious practices evolve to align with modern ethical standards. Recommendations include stricter enforcement of animal welfare laws, public awareness campaigns, and the promotion of non-violent alternatives to animal sacrifice.

2. Introduction

Nepal, the birthplace of light of Asia Gautam Buddha is a landlocked nation sandwiched between China and India. Despite its tiny size and population, Nepal is home to a wide variety of cultures, religions, and ethnic groups. As per the 2021 National Population and Housing Census, Nepal's total population of 2,91,64,578 is divided into 142 castes and ethnic groups. Of these, 17 castes were found in the census conducted in 2021, and 125 were recorded in the 2011 census.¹ Additionally, there is religious diversity; in Nepal, approximately ten different religions are practiced. Nepal's 2021 census shows that 81.2 percent of the population is Hindu, 8.21 percent is Buddhist, 5.09 percent is Muslim, 3.17 percent of the population is Kirat, 1.76 percent is Christian, 0.35 percent is Prakriti, 0.23 percent is Bon, 0.01 percent is Jain, 0.01 percent is Sikha and 0.00 percent (543 persons) are Bahai.² The majority of people in Nepal are Hindu and it is the world's most predominantly Hindu nation.

People from different cultures and religions have different traditions and customs that they have followed for decades. Such traditions might have been beneficial in the past, but as society evolves, they might no longer be accepted. Nepal is home to several such customs. The Sati system in Nepal, where a widow sacrificed her life on her husband's funeral pyre, began as a religious practice, became a social obligation in the medieval period, persisted after the unification of Nepal, and was officially abolished in 1920 following royal orders and legal codes starting in 1839.³ The Civil Code of Nepal 1854 reinforced caste discrimination, King Mahendra's 1963 amendment masked untouchability, the Maoist Movement (1996-2006) helped reduce it, and the Constitution of Nepal 2025 prohibits it under Article 24.⁴ One such custom that is still followed in Nepal, especially in Hindu society is animal sacrifice which is called *Bali Pratha* in Nepali language. Religions such as Buddhism and Jainism prohibit animal sacrifice. Muslims used to slaughter animals such as cows, camels, and sheep during festivals like Eid-al-Adha.⁵ Hindus used to sacrifice goats, buffaloes, pigeons, and pigs as *Panchabali* during various festivals and religious sites in the name of god.⁶ Gadhimai festival and animal sacrifice are synonyms in the context of Nepal. This festival, held every five years in Mahagadhimai Municipality of Bara district, is particularly known for the mass sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of animals, as Hindu devotees, including many from India, participate to honor Gadhimai, the goddess of power.⁷ In various

¹ National Population and Housing Census 2021: National Report on Caste/ethnicity, language and Religion 40 (2023), <https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/results/files/result->

² National Population and Housing Census 2021: National Report on Caste/ethnicity, language and Religion 38 (2023), <https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/results/files/result->

³ Tina Manandhar, *The Sati System in Nepal: Religious Conviction and Complications*, 15 Nepalese Cultures 57,65 (2022).

⁴ Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan, Tej B. Sunar & Yasso Kanti Bhattachan, *Caste-Based Discrimination in Nepal* 10 (Indian Inst. Of Dalit Stud. 2009), [Caste-based Discrimination in Nepal.pdf](#)

⁵ Nadda Osman, *Eid al-Adha 2023: What is Qurbani? Why Muslims Sacrifice Livestock, Explained*, Middle East Eye (June 20, 2023, 10:28 AM), [Eid al-Adha 2023: What is Qurbani? Why Muslims sacrifice livestock, explained | Middle East Eye](#)

⁶ Mission Summit Trek, *Gadhimai Mela*, (Sept. 30, 2023), [Gadhimai Mela Bara Nepal: Will again Animal will Sacrifice](#)

⁷ THT Online, *Gadhimai Festival: Mass Animal Sacrifice Every Five Years in Bara*, THE HIMALAYAN TIMES (Dec. 9, 2024), [Gadhimai Festival: Mass animal sacrifice every five years in Bara - The Himalayan Times - Nepal's No.1 English Daily Newspaper | Nepal News, Latest Politics, Business, World, Sports, Entertainment, Travel, Life Style News](#)

Hindu temples also animal sacrifice is practiced in Nepal. Devoted Hindus offer sacrifices to Goddess Kali, a terrifying figure associated with Shiva, believing her worship grants wishes, while she is also seen as a powerful demon and guardian. Animals are killed in her honor to gain her favor. Temples of Goddess Kali such as Dakshinkali are famous for animal sacrifice.⁸ At the Taleju Temple of Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur, a unique mass sacrificial rite is held to offer the goddess on *Maha Asthami* and *Maha Nawami* during the Dashain festival in Nepal.⁹ In the Rajdevi temple of Janakpur, people sacrifice around 15000 goats on the 8th day of Dashain every year to appease the God and Goddess, especially Durga and Brahma, for peace, property, and prosperity.¹⁰ The festival known as ‘*Depukhu*’ or ‘*Deopokhari*’ festival is celebrated by people from the Newar community of Khokana village in August every year. As a part of the tradition, a man jumps into the pond carrying a young female goat and later others join to kill it underneath the water by biting and reaping it apart with bare hands.¹¹ In Khandadevi temple Ramechhap, buffaloes and other animals and birds and animals like pigeons and hens are sacrificed to God each day to achieve her blessings.¹² Animal sacrifice is practiced in *kul puja*, a collective form of ancestor worship by *Bahun*s (Brahmans) and *Chhetri*s (Kshatriyas) in Nepal. People believe that the ancestors (*pitris*) and clan deities (*Kul devata*) require blood sacrifice to remain satisfied.¹³

Since the majority of people in Nepal are Hindu, there is a division in belief within Hinduism that animal sacrifice is good or bad. Some people argue since animal sacrifice is mentioned in Vedas and tradition practiced for thousands of years, it should be continued. However, the light of modern ethical sensitivities and concerns about animal welfare, the morality of animal killing has been called into question.¹⁴ Animal welfare has a long, rich history that reflects our evolving relationship with animals. From ancient philosophers advocating for compassion to modern-day laws protecting animal rights, our understanding of animal welfare has changed dramatically.¹⁵ Nepal has implemented several animal welfare laws in addition to the significant advancement of animal care legislation worldwide.

This research paper focuses on the practice of animal sacrifice as described in religious scriptures and how its interpretation has evolved from prehistoric times to the contemporary era. It examines the ethical implications of animal sacrifice and analyzes the legal framework governing this

⁸ Günther Jontes, *Bloody Sacrifices for Goddess Kali in Dakshinkali Near Kathmandu*, GLOBAL GEOGRAPHY, https://global-geography.org/af/Geography/Asia/Nepal/Special_Information/Sacrifices_for_goddess_Kali

⁹ Binu Shrestha, *Animal Sacrifice Rituals During Dashain Festival*, THE RISING NEPAL (Oct. 8, 2024), [Animal sacrifice rituals during Dashain festival](#)

¹⁰ Jivesh Jha, *Stop This Cruelty*, MYREPUBLICA (Oct. 5, 2019, 1:30 AM), [Stop this cruelty - myRepublica - The New York Times Partner, Latest news of Nepal in English, Latest News Articles | Republica](#)

¹¹ Hemanta Shrestha, *Depukhu Jatra: People Hurl a Live Goat into Pond and Rip It Apart*, THE KATHMANDU POST (Aug. 31, 2015), [Depukhu Jatra: People hurl a live goat into pond and rip it apart \(photo feature\)](#)

¹² Khirlal Moktan, *Khandadevi Temple*, NEPAL EVEREST HIMALAYA HIKING COMPANY (Mar. 5, 2023), [Footnotes vs Endnotes](#)

¹³ Krishna P. Adhikari & David N. Gellner, *Ancestor Worship and Sacrifice: Debates Over Bahun-Chhetri Clan Rituals (Kul Puja) in Nepal*, in RELIGION, SECULARISM, AND ETHNICITY IN CONTEMPORARY NEPAL 226, 226-61 (David N. Gellner et al. eds., 2016).

¹⁴ Shyamal Kumar Palit, *Ritual Versus Morality: A Critical Ruminantion of Animal Slaughtering Practice*, 10(2) Int'l J. Sanskrit Res. 227, 227-229 (2024), [Ritual versus morality: A critical ruminantion of animal slaughtering practice](#)

¹⁵ The Woof, *A Timeline of Animal Welfare: How Our Relationship with Animals Has Evolved Over Time*, (Oct. 30), [A Timeline of Animal Welfare: How Our Relationship with Animals Has Evolved Over Time — The Woof](#)

practice in Nepal, including current legislation and Supreme Court rulings that both support and prohibit it. By comparing Nepal's legal and cultural context with that of neighboring countries, this paper aims to identify viable alternatives to animal sacrifice. The ultimate objective is to strike a balance between preserving cultural traditions and addressing modern animal welfare concerns, ensuring that both ethical and legal considerations are adequately addressed.

3. Historical and Religious Perspective on Animal Sacrifice

There is no actual date from when sacrificing animals in the name of god has been started. Socrates one of the greatest Greek philosophers last words were: *don't forget to sacrifice a rooster to Asklepios*.¹⁶ But it was contradictory that either he said to sacrifice the actual rooster or it was symbolic. Some say Socrates's last words symbolically remind healers and patients alike to participate in and give thanks for the wondrous gift of true healing.¹⁷ In religions also it is contradictory that it is a symbolic or actual sacrifice of the animal.

Numerous animal sacrifices, such as *Ashvamedha*, *Go-medha*, and *Agnyadheya*, were used in ancient Hinduism and are detailed in the Vedas. Trained Brahmins perform these sacrifices by chanting Vedic hymns. The same Hindu faith, on the other hand, worships nature and promotes *Ahimsa Paramo Dharma* (Non-violence is the highest duty) which respects the existence and welfare of all living things. It appears to be contradictory. The *Ashvamedha Yajna* (Horse Sacrifice), an ancient Vedic rite carried out by kings to demonstrate their sovereignty, divine favor, and wealth, is described in length in the Rigveda (1.162.2-22).¹⁸ The Ashwamedha Yagya begins with hymns invoking deities like Varuna, Aryaman, Mitra, Indra, and Pusan for blessings. Before the main horse sacrifice, a dappled goat is offered as a sacred tribute. Every part of the sacrificed horse is carefully processed, with its meat cooked and dedicated to the gods, ensuring nothing is wasted. The horse's food, ropes, and trappings are also offered. The ceremony concludes with prayers for prosperity, healthy children, and divine legitimacy. *Rigveda* (10.86.14) describes Indra consuming the fat-rich meat of 35 bulls until fully satisfied.¹⁹ Another verse from the Rigveda (6.017.11) describes a special offering made to Indra. It says that 100 buffaloes are cooked as a sacrifice for him, and the *Maruts* (storm god) support him in his strength.²⁰ The horse of Ashvamedha symbolizes universal force or energy. It says Ashva i.e. horse is a symbol of the energy that runs the universal activities, while *medha* is a synonym of Yagya. The Ashwamedha yagya was performed to uplift human consciousness and refine mass consciousness. Whenever a king achieved unity in their Kingdom, the next step was to elevate society culturally, spiritually, and ethically through Ashwamedha Yagya. This ritual, fostering social harmony and ecological

¹⁶ Gregory Nagy, *The Last Words of Socrates at the Place Where He Died* (Mar.27, 2015), [The Last Words of Socrates at the Place where he Died - Classical Inquiries](#)

¹⁷ James E. Bailey, *Socrates's Last Words to the Physician God Asklepios: An Ancient Call for a Healing Ethos in Civic Life*, Cureus (2018), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6402746/>

¹⁸ Rigveda 1(Mandala 1: The Mandala of Invocation among 10 mandala of Rigveda), 163 Sukta(Hymn) which is dedicated to the Ashvamedha Yanjna (Horse Sacrifice), 2-22 Verses(Riks)

¹⁹ Ralph T. H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rigveda* (2d ed. 1896), [griffith.pdf](#)

²⁰ Ralph T. H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rigveda* (2d ed. 1896), [griffith.pdf](#)

balance, was performed by Lord Rama in *Ramayana* and by Yudhisthira in the *Mahabharata* under Lord Krishna's guidance.²¹

The *Bhagavad Gita*, known as the "Song of God," is a summary of the essence of Hindu teaching and wisdom.²² Chapter 9 Verse 26 of *Bhagavad Gita* highlights that simple, pure, and non-violent offerings with devotion such as a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water are most pleasing to the Divine, rather than blood sacrifices.²³ Chapter 16 verses 1-3 explains that *Ahimsa* (non-violence) is listed as a divine quality and violence and cruelty as *Asuric* (demonic) quality.²⁴ The *Bhagavad Gita* promotes *Ahimsa* (non-violence) rather than blood sacrifices.

According to Surah As-Saffat, Chapter 37, Verses 102-107 of the Quran, Prophet Ibrahim was given the order to sacrifice his son Ismail by Allah in a dream. Ismail voluntarily accepted their directives as well, demonstrating total obedience to Allah's will. Allah stepped in just as Ibrahim was ready to make the sacrifice, indicating that it was a test of obedience devotion, and surrender to Allah. Muslims worldwide perform animal sacrifices on Eid al-Adha to demonstrate submission to Allah, commemorating Prophet Ibrahim's devotion and symbolizing faith, gratitude, and obedience.²⁵ The spiritual significance of animal sacrifice in Islam is emphasized in Surah Al-Hajj (22:36–37). The slaughter of sacrificial animals in Allah's name is a Divine practice, emphasizing the believer's piety and devotion rather than the meat or blood. The meat is distributed to the poor and needy, promoting charity, gratitude, and obedience to Allah.²⁶ During Bakrid (Eid-al-Adha), Muslims perform special morning prayers and conduct the ritual sacrifice of an animal, symbolizing Ibrahim's devotion. The meat is shared among family, friends, and the needy, fostering community and charity.²⁷

It is commonly thought that Buddhism is a religious tradition that advocates strict nonviolence. Buddhism, along with its rival, Jainism, maintains the view that sentient beings should not be killed, and Jainism also extends this protection to plants. The Buddha rejected animal sacrifice for two reasons: (1) because it was cruel and (2) because it failed to "bring the objectives the Brahmins

²¹ Manisha Bhardwaj, *Ashwamedha Yagya in Puran*, 23 DEV SANSKRITI INTERDISC. INT'L J. 49 (2024)

²² Natesan Chinna, Michael J. Keefe & John R. Darling, *Enhancement of Global Business Practices: Lessons from the Hindu Bhagavad Gita*, 21 Eur. Bus. Rev. 128, 128–43 (2009).

²³ Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is* 404–05 (A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda ed. & trans., Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 8th prtg. 2015).

²⁴ Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is* 613–19 (A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda ed. & trans., Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 8th prtg. 2015).

²⁵ Al-Qur'an, Nepali Bhāṣā Anubādīt Kur'ān Majīd 738 (Maulana Alaudhin Ansari Falahani trans., Maulana Baruj Hasan Falahani ed., Islami Sangh Nepal, n.d.).

²⁶ Al-Qur'an, Nepali Bhāṣā Anubādīt Kur'ān Majīd 544,545 (Maulana Alaudhin Ansari Falahani trans., Maulana Baruj Hasan Falahani ed., Islami Sangh Nepal, n.d.).

²⁷ ShareSansar, *Muslim Community Commemorates Bakrid (Eid-al-Adha) in Nepal*, (June 29, 2023), <https://www.sharesansar.com/newsdetail/gallery-muslim-community-commemorates-bakrid-eid-al-adha-in-nepal-2023-06-29>

hoped for”.²⁸ Dhammapadha, Chapter 10 verse 129 highlights all living beings' fear of harm and death so putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill.²⁹

4. Ethical and Social Implications of Animal Sacrifice

Animal sacrifice is done for the sake of people's well-being. However, numerous studies have demonstrated that animal sacrifice has several negative consequences on the general well-being of society. Animal sacrifice in large numbers increases the chance of spreading various health and pandemics near the sacrifice area such as *Gadhaimai* and the *Dashain* festival, at *Hanuman Dhoka* in Durbar Square. The unsanitary slaughter methods during such festivals put butchers, temple staff, and the general public at risk for zoonotic diseases such as HPAI, anthrax, and tuberculosis. Residents, particularly those from marginalized groups who eat the meat of sacrificed animals, face threats from pathogens that flourish in unsanitary environments. For instance, members of the *Chamar* community, a lower caste within the Hindu caste system, have experienced outbreaks of cholera and other illnesses after eating meat from these sacrificed animals.³⁰ However, a section of *Chamars* has planned to boycott the festival. “Firstly, carcasses are not good for health. They have made many of us sick previously,” said Raj Narayan Mahara Chamar, secretary of the boycott committee. “It’s also a subject associated with the prestige of our community. Many look down upon us because we trade the sacrificed meat. The Festival Committee can manage the carcass.” According to *Chamar*, they will only be accepting vegetables, coconut, sweets, and tika as the festival’s prasad this year, not the meat.³¹ In Hindu society, vegetarianism is linked with purity. The upper caste people, who can purchase vegetables and dairy goods consider themselves superior, and lower caste people, who had no option but to sustain their lives with meat consumption are considered untouchables.³²

Posting content that shows various sacrifices are also seen on social media. Watching violent pictures and videos harms the mental well-being of a child. Animal cruelty in children is associated with factors such as lack of empathy, poor socioemotional development, or child abuse. If children are introduced to animal abuse and such environment in childhood such children will grow up to be violent criminals.³³ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989 under Article 17 (e) Encourages the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection

²⁸ James Stewart, *Violence and Nonviolence in Buddhist Animal Ethics*, J. Buddhist Ethics, Jan. 2014.

²⁹ Dhammapada: Dhamma Verses, verse 129 (Ānandajoti Bhikkhu ed. & trans., 2nd ed., 2017), [Dhammapada, Dhamma Verses](#)

³⁰ Acharya, K. P., & Wilson, R. T. (2020). *Animal Sacrifice-Public Health Nexus in Nepal*. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, [The animal sacrifice–public health nexus in Nepal](#)

³¹ Laxmi Sah, *Despite Protests from Animal Rights Activists, Tens of Thousands of Animals Are Being Slaughtered in Gadhimai*, The Kathmandu Post (Dec. 2, 2019, 8:20 PM), [Despite protests from animal rights activists, tens of thousands of animals are being slaughtered in Gadhimai](#)

³² Karamala Areesh Kumar, *Caste in Plates: Politics of Food in India*, (Feb. 9, 2025, 1:06 PM), [Caste in Plates: Politics of Food in India](#)

³³ Daniel Mota-Rojas et al., *Animal Abuse as an Indicator of Domestic Violence: One Health, One Welfare Approach*, 12 *Animals* 977 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12080977>.

of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being.³⁴ The main goals of those who sacrifice animals are to have successful lives and to be protected from evil or negative energy. However, improper physical management can result in several health hazards and poor virtual control can have an impact on children's mental health.

5. Legal Framework on Animal Sacrifice in Nepal

Despite mounting pressure exerted by animal rights activists, Nepal has yet to introduce a separate legal framework to ensure animal rights and welfare.³⁵ Wild and endangered animals have received more attention from our legal system than working animals. Cows, dogs, and oxen are examples of working animals that are valued in Hinduism and have the right to life, but they are abandoned on the streets after they are no longer helpful to humans because it is forbidden to kill these animals in Hindu culture and the Nepalese legal system. So, people used to sacrifice animals such as goats, sheep, and buffalo in the context of Nepal's religious site.

The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 has provisioned about Right to religious freedom in Article 26 where (1) Each person shall be free to profess, practice, and preserve his/her religion according to his/her faith. (3) While exercising the right as provided by this Article, no person shall act or make others act in a manner which is contrary to public health, decency, and morality, or behave or act or make others act to disturb public law and order. Such an act shall be punishable by law.³⁶ Article 30 has provisioned rights regarding a clean environment where 1) Each person shall have the right to live in a healthy and clean environment. (2) The victim of environmental pollution and degradation shall have the right to be compensated by the pollutant as provided for by law.³⁷ Article 35 of the Nepalese Constitution provides the right to health care where (1) Every citizen shall have the right to seek basic health care services from the state and no citizen shall be deprived of emergency health care. (4) Each citizen shall have the right to access to clean water and hygiene.³⁸ The constitution has provisioned the Right to religion, the Right to a clean environment, and the Right to health and hygiene.

The National Penal (Code) Act, 2017 under Article 291 has prohibited killing animals or birds in public places (1) Except as otherwise provided in this Act, no person shall kill any animal or bird in any public place other than a religious place where there is a tradition to offer the sacrifice of an animal or bird. Provided that nothing shall bar the killing of any animal or bird in a fair, feast, exhibition event, or place where there is a tradition of slaughtering animals or birds being practiced from time immemorial. Explanation: For this Section, the term "public place" means a way, road, bridge, meadow, or place for movement of human beings. (2) In making the sacrifice of an animal or bird under sub-section (1), no sacrifice of such animal or bird shall be executed in any public place or religious place other than a religious place where the sacrifice of animals or birds has been

³⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 17, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

³⁵ Kamal Subedi, *Animals Are Killed Brutally Time and Again, but Perpetrators Are Hardly Booked*, (Apr. 13, 2021, 7:55 AM), [Animals are killed brutally time and again, but perpetrators are hardly booked - myRepublica - The New York Times Partner, Latest news of Nepal in English, Latest News Articles | Republica](#)

³⁶ Constitution of Nepal, 2072 (2015)

³⁷ Constitution of Nepal, 2072 (2015)

³⁸ Constitution of Nepal, 2072 (2015)

in practice from time immemorial. (3) In making the sacrifice of an animal or bird under sub-section (1), any alternative measure, if any available, to such sacrificing shall be adopted. (4) Where it is necessary to make the sacrifice of an animal or bird being it not possible to adopt the measure under sub-section (3), such sacrifice shall be made at such place and in accordance with such method as determined by the manager of the concerned religious place. (5) A person who commits, or causes to be committed, the offense referred to in this Section shall be liable to a sentence of imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month or a fine not exceeding five thousand rupees or both the sentences. ³⁹According to the penal code, people can sacrifice animals in religious sites if it has been practiced for a long time.

Nepal, Animal Health and Livestock Act, 2055(1999) has provisioned for the Establishment of a Quarantine Check Post under which the Nepal Government shall establish a temporary or permanent Animal Quarantine Check Post in any area within the country of Nepal by notification published in the Nepal Gazette. "Quarantine" means the process of confirming any animal, animal products, or animal production inputs whether diseased or not, and putting such animal, animal products or animal production or inputs in isolation in a specific place, together with or separately for a period of time as prescribed for their inspection. ⁴⁰

Under Animal Slaughter and Meat Inspection Act, 2055(1999) there is no Objection: Notwithstanding anything contained in other parts of this Act, there shall be no objection to slaughtering an animal in places other than a slaughterhouse or to consuming meat with skin on the occasion of traditional festivals, religious rituals, feasts or spiritual ceremonies. ⁴¹

Animals such as Buffalo, sheep, goats, and mountain goats also fall under "Working Animals" that are used for transporting goods or people in agriculture, industry, or other business purpose with commercial motives under Chapter 1, Article 3 of Animal Welfare Directives, 2073(2016). These working animals are sacrificed in the temple. Animal Welfare Directives, 2073(2016), Chapter 2 Article 4 has mentioned various provisions related to Animal welfare such as; a. Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition, b. Freedom from fear and distress, c. Freedom from physical and thermal discomfort, d. Freedom from pain, injury, and disease, and e. Freedom to express normal patterns of behavior. Article 7 of the same directives mentions that working animals need a proper working climate and conditions. Working animals shall not be made to work under the following conditions: a. immense heat, scorching sun, heavy wind, heavy rainfall, thunderstorm, hailstorm, snowfall, or during the occurrence of other natural disasters. b. in the dark or on terrain where the risk of losing the life of the animal is a higher possibility, c. more than 8 hours per day. 2. There shall be, at least, one complete rest day per week. Under Article 10 it is provisioned that while keeping in rest, sufficient food and water must be within the reach of the working animals. Similarly, Article 14 mentions the End of Working Life: 1. Animals incapable of working and old animals must be provided with necessary care by the animal owner. Chapter 3

³⁹ Nepal Penal Code, 2074 (2017).

⁴⁰ Nepal, Animal Health and Livestock Services Act, 2055(1999), N0.2055, Nepal Gazette, Sawan 2055 (July 22, 1998), available at www.lawcommission.gov.np.

⁴¹ Animal Slaughterhouse and Meat Inspection Act, 2055 (1999), No. 26, 2055 B.S. (1999) available at www.lawcommission.gov.np.

Article 15 mentions Acts construing Cruelty towards working Animals such as causing pain, discomfort, or wounds, by hobbling, tying, or handing on the nose or legs.⁴²

6. Supreme Court Verdict on Gadhimai case

On November 20, 2014, advocate Arjun Kumar Aryal filed a writ petition demanding an end to the practice of animal sacrifice at Gadhimai. He had made the office of the Prime Minister, the Council of Ministers, and the Gadhimai Temple Management Committee the defendants.⁴³ Along with him, two PILs were also filed challenging the practice. The petitioners argued that the Nepalese government failed to enforce existing animal welfare laws regarding the importation, transportation, quarantine, and slaughter of animals during the Gadhimai festival, leading to environmental pollution, public health hazards, and unchecked cruelty. They also contended that the uncontrolled bloodshed and violence had psychological effects on children and promoted criminal thoughts. The petitions also argued that the melā was giving Nepal a bad global reputation, as it was now infamously known as the place of the largest sacrifice in the world. All the parties agreed on the importance of preventing cruelty to animals and protecting public health and the environment, but they disagreed on the adequacy and implementation of laws, and on whether there was a real safety concern.⁴⁴ The Gadhimai temple committee submitted a rejoinder stating that the Gadhimai temple holds an important place and is not only famous in Nepal but also recognized at the international level and is a religious site that is revered by all. This temple is considered to be a Devi (God of Power) and since devi holds certain powers, offering animals to the temple is paramount. Animal sacrifices, being deeply rooted in religious beliefs, are granted legal concessions to avoid religious disturbances, as Section 1 under the Chapter of Adal in the Muluki Ain prescribes imprisonment for anyone attempting to undermine a religious place or function.⁴⁵ A joint bench of justices Ishwor Prasad Khatiwada and Anil Kumar Sinha issued the order directing the government to form a committee to address the issue.⁴⁶ The ruling states that there's a need to make people aware that this practice is wrong. The government should create an environment in which people can enforce a code of conduct against this practice. The government has also issued a directive to stop animal sacrifice, pointing out that the practice is also against environmental well-being.⁴⁷ Despite the Supreme Court decision Gadhimai festival was recently celebrated in December of 2024 and at least 4,200 buffaloes and thousands of goats and pigeons were killed during a mass sacrifice, according to Humane Society International India (HSI).

⁴² Animal Welfare Directive, 2073 (2016 A.D.), Ministry of Livestock Development, Singha durbar (Nepal), endorsed on 2073/12/24 available at www.lawcommission.gov.np.

⁴³ Onlinekhabar, *Gadhimai: Nepal Supreme Court Orders Government to Stop Animal Slaughter*, ONLINEKHABAR, Aug. 5, 2016.

⁴⁴ Letizia, C. & Ripert, B., *Not in the Name of Dharma: A Judgment of the Supreme Court of Nepal on Mass Sacrifices at the Gadhi Māi Melā*, in *Animal Sacrifice, Religion and Law in South Asia* (Taylor & Francis, 2024).

⁴⁵ *Advocate Arjun Kumar Aryal & Others v. Nepal Government, Office of the Prime Minister & Council of Ministers*, Nos. 071-WO-0371, 071-WO-0372, 071-WO-0373 (Sup. Ct. Nepal) (Khatiwada & Sinha, JJ.).

⁴⁶ "SC Orders Govt to Discourage Animal Sacrifice During Gadhimai Festival," REPUBLICA (Kathmandu), Aug. 4, 2016, [SC orders govt to discourage animal sacrifice during Gadhimai festival - myRepublica - The New York Times Partner. Latest news of Nepal in English, Latest News Articles | Republica](https://www.republica.com.np/news/sc-orders-govt-to-discourage-animal-sacrifice-during-gadhimai-festival)

⁴⁷ Onlinekhabar, *Gadhimai: Nepal Supreme Court Orders Government to Stop Animal Slaughter*, ONLINEKHABAR, Aug. 5, 2016.

Despite challenges in its effectiveness and implementation, it remains a landmark case on animal sacrifice in Nepal.

7. Animal Sacrifice in Neighboring Countries of Nepal

Due to cross-border trade and familial relationships, Nepal and India enjoy an excellent relationship known as "Roti-Beti" and an open border. In addition to family ties, Indians and Nepalese have a common religion, primarily Buddhism and Hinduism.⁴⁸ Indian constitution provisioned Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice, and propagation of religion under Article 25 and Freedom to manage religious affairs under Article 26.⁴⁹ Article 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act, 1960 has various provisions that prohibit cruelty to animals such as if any person beats, kicks, over-rides, over-drives, over-loads, tortures, or otherwise treats any animal to subject it to unnecessary pain or suffering or causes or, being the owner permits, any animal to be so treated but Article 28 of the same act have provisioned Saving as respects manner of killing prescribed by religion.—Nothing contained in this Act shall render it an offense to kill any animal in a manner required by the religion of any community.⁵⁰ In many parts of Himachal Pradesh, it is a common tradition to sacrifice animals in full public view during religious festivity and celebrations. In September 2014, the Himachal Pradesh High Court banned animal sacrifice.⁵¹ After an extensive review of mostly Indian Supreme Court judgments, the Court held that “discontinuing” the religious practice of animal sacrifice would not violate articles 25 and 26 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantee to all persons the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate their religion and for denominations to manage their affairs in matters related to religion.⁵² The Kerala Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prohibition Act, 1968 under Article 3 provisioned Sacrifice of animals and birds in temples or their precincts prohibited.- No person shall sacrifice any animal or bird in any temple or its precincts and under Article 4 Temple or its precincts are not to be allowed to be used for sacrifice -No person shall knowingly allow any sacrifice to be performed at any place which- (a) is situated within any temple or its precincts, and (b) is in his possession or under his control.⁵³

One of India's most significant and historic cases, *Gauri Maulekhi v. Union of India*, addressed the illegal transfer of cattle and buffaloes from India to Nepal during the *Gadhimai* festival. In this case, in 2014, the Supreme Court of India before the *Gadhimai* festival in Nepal, vide its order dated 17th October 2014, directed that the Central Government of India shall ensure that no cattle and buffaloes are transported to Nepal illegally. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960

⁴⁸ Shivangi Sharma & Nagalaxmi Raman, *Analysis on Cultural Ties Between India and Nepal from Ancient to Contemporary Times*, (Amity Inst. of Int'l Stud., Amity Univ. Uttar Pradesh, Research Paper).

⁴⁹ *The Constitution of India* (Ministry of Law & Just., Gov't of India, May 2022).

⁵⁰ *The Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act*, 1960, No. 59, Acts of Parliament, 1960 (India).

⁵¹ HT Correspondent, *Himachal: Goat Sacrifice Video Goes Viral, Case Registered*, Hindustan Times (Dec. 14, 2024, 9:18 AM IST), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/himachal-goat-sacrifice-video-goes-viral-case-registered-101734118889824.html>.

⁵² Tariq Ahmad, *India: High Court of Himachal Pradesh Bans All Religious Forms of Animal Sacrifice in the State*, Global Legal Monitor (Law Library of Congress, Oct. 6, 2014), <https://www.loc.gov/law>.

⁵³ *The Kerala Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prohibition Act*, 1968, No. 20, Acts of Kerala State Legislature, 1968 (India).

Section 11(3)(e) was also emphasized by the Supreme Court. The court was of the view that “because of Section 11(3)(e) of the Act, commission or omission of any act in course of destruction of any animal in question cruelly, unless, of course, such destruction or preparation was accompanied by the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering.” The Court was of the view that unnecessary pain or suffering cannot be inflicted upon any non-human living beings simply to satisfy the desires of humans. The court also ruled that offering an animal as a sacrifice is in no way considered a way to please the gods.⁵⁴

Bhutan is primarily a Buddhist nation, following the Drukpa Kagyu tradition, with 80% of the population adhering to Buddhism. However, Hinduism also holds a significant presence, mainly among the *Lhotshampa* (Nepali-speaking) community.⁵⁵ Animal sacrifice was a historical part of Bhutanese religious traditions, especially in Bön and shamanic rituals, but has been increasingly discouraging due to Buddhist influence. Buddhist highest leader Edict Je Khenpo issued a ban on animal blood sacrifice in these rituals. Instead of sacrifice, Buddhist leaders promoted saving animals (*tsethar*) as a way to gain merit.⁵⁶ Article 22.3 of The Livestock Act of Bhutan, 2001 has provisioned that Livestock shall not be subjected to any unnecessary suffering or injury.⁵⁷

8. Alternatives to Animal Sacrifice

The alternative of animal sacrifice is explained in the Bhagwat Gita chapter 9 verse 26 that the most pleasing to god is simple, pure, and non-violent offerings such as a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water with devotion, rather than blood sacrifices.⁵⁸ During the Gadhimai festival also we observed thousands of people offer vegetarian products such as coconut, flowers, and fruits. People who wanted to offer meat in the temple used to sacrifice small portions of animal parts such as ears. In some Buddhist countries, such as Thailand and Sri Lanka, vegetarianism has become integral to Buddhist practice, with vegetarian food offered in monasteries and temples.⁵⁹ The 56 Bhog, also called *Chappan Bhog*, consists of 56 distinct food items offered daily to Lord Jagannath at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha. This intricate food offering ritual is a central aspect of the temple’s traditions, showcasing the region’s rich culinary heritage and profound devotion. Once the food is presented to the deities, it is shared with devotees as *Mahaprasad*, a sacred offering. Partaking in *Mahaprasad* is regarded as highly auspicious, and believed to bring blessings and prosperity to those who consume it.⁶⁰ The *langur* (community kitchen) at the Golden Temple serves 50,000 free meals a day to everyone, regardless of religion or class. More than 5,000 happy

⁵⁴ Dev Tejnani, 15 Landmark Judgments of Indian Judiciary on Animal Rights, *Legal Desire Media and Insights* (Feb. 13, 2025), [15 Landmark Judgement of Indian Judiciary on Animal Rights - Legal Desire Media and Insights](#)

⁵⁵ Daniel Schäppi, *Cultural Plurality, National Identity and Consensus in Bhutan*, CIS Working Paper No. 6 (2005).

⁵⁶ Mari Miyamoto, Jan Magnusson & Frank J. Korom, *Animal Slaughter and Religious Nationalism in Bhutan*, 80 *Asian Ethnology* 121 (2021).

⁵⁷ Royal Government of Bhutan. *The Livestock Act of Bhutan 2001*. Ministry of Agriculture, 2001.

⁵⁸ Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is* 404–05 (A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda ed. & trans., Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 8th prtg. 2015).

⁵⁹ Buddhism, Zen Buddhism: Are All Buddhists Vegetarians? by Fuyu Zen Buddhism, *Zen Buddhism: Simple Wisdom for Happy Living*, [Are Buddhists Vegetarians? | Zen-Buddhism.net](#)

⁶⁰ 56 Bhog: The Divine Offerings of Jagannath Temple, by Shri Jagannath Mandir & OACC, [56 Bhog: The Divine Offerings of Jagannath Temple | Shree Jagannath Mandir Delhi](#)

volunteers work round the clock, cooking up a full meal of tea, rice, vegetables, daal, chapati, and *kheer* (pudding).⁶¹

9. Methodology

With an emphasis on finding a balance between cultural traditions and animal welfare regulations, this study uses a qualitative research approach to examine the practice of animal sacrifice in Nepal. By comparing behaviors in neighboring countries and looking at historical, religious, ethical, and legal aspects of the problem, the technique aims to give an in-depth understanding of the issue.

1. Research Design

Both an analytical and a descriptive research design are used in this study. This study's primary goal is to investigate the ethical and social implications of animal sacrifice while additionally looking at its cultural, religious, and legal aspects. The main objective of this research paper is also to identify better alternatives after examining all of the existing laws in Nepal and the neighboring countries. We attempt to achieve the best outcome by doing qualitative research on cultural, religious, and cultural perspectives through literature reviews, interviews, and field observations.

2. Data Collection Methods

Both primary and secondary sources of data collection are used in this research.

a. Primary data Collection

Interviews and field observations are part of our primary data collection process. Local government representatives from several locations where animal sacrifice was taking place were interviewed to get information about how they enforced animal welfare laws, handled large-scale animal sacrifice rituals, and planned future changes and rituals. To better understand the real situation and viewpoint of the locals regarding animal sacrifice, a field tour was undertaken during Nepal's largest animal sacrifice festival, *Gadhimai*.

b. Secondary Data Collection

This research is mainly based on secondary data collection sources through various online websites such as Google Scholar and SAVE Nepal. A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted on the religious and legal fields. Religious texts such as Vedas, Quran, Ramayana, Mahabharat, and Bhagat Geeta are reviewed. Legal documents such as the Constitution of Nepal (2015), National Penal Code (2017), and Animal Welfare Directives (2016) were reviewed to analyze the legal framework governing animal sacrifice in Nepal. The Constitution of India and The Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act, 1960 are reviewed with various state laws to analyze various legal provisions that protect and restrict animal sacrifice in India. Various articles, reports and case studies on animal sacrifice in Nepal and neighboring countries are reviewed. Various cases such as

⁶¹ Inside the World's Largest Community Kitchen, India Lunch (May 20, 2019), [Inside the world's largest community kitchen – People I Meet and Food They Eat](#)

the Supreme court verdict on the Gadhimai festival of Nepal and *Gauri Maulekhi v. Union of India*, a landmark case that restricts the illegal transfer of animal sacrifice in Nepal from India during the Gadhimai festival are the major sources of this paper.

10. Findings

Animal sacrifice is deeply rooted in both Hindu and Muslim cultures. Some ancient religious scriptures, such as the Quran, describe animal sacrifice. In Hinduism, certain scriptures also mention animal sacrifice, though it often appears to be symbolic. Interestingly, both Hinduism and Islam also emphasize peace, love, and compassion, which seems contradictory to the practice of animal sacrifice. Religions like Buddhism and Jainism, on the other hand, strictly prohibit animal sacrifice. Most religions, in general, teach love, affection, and kindness toward all living beings. We also find that rituals such as Ashvamedha have been misinterpreted over time.

In Nepal, various animal sacrifice rituals are practiced, such as the Gadhimai festival, sacrifices in temples during the Dashain festival, and *kul puja*. There is no doubt that these rituals, where animal sacrifice is practiced, have been followed for centuries and are deeply connected to people's religious sentiments. However, we also observe that traditions like Sati Pratha (widow burning) and Jati Pratha (caste discrimination), which were once legal in Nepal, have been reformed over time. Similarly, animal sacrifice and cruelty in the name of God are increasingly seen as irrelevant, especially since large-scale animal sacrifices lead to various health hazards, environmental pollution, caste discrimination, and psychological harm to children.

The Nepalese legal system, on the one hand, talks about animal welfare, while on the other hand, it does not restrict animal sacrifice traditions that have been practiced for centuries in the name of religion. We analyzed the Supreme Court verdict on the Gadhimai festival, which is the world's largest animal sacrifice held every five years in Nepal. The ruling states that there is a need to make people aware that this practice is wrong. The government should create an environment where people can enforce a code of conduct against this practice. The government has also issued a directive to stop animal sacrifice, pointing out that the practice is harmful to environmental well-being. Despite the Supreme Court's order, the Gadhimai festival still occurred in 2024. During field observations, we noticed significant pollution on both land and water. Local people were reluctant to be interviewed, as the topic is considered controversial.

A resident, Aditya Prasad Shah, said, "Those who are against *Bali Pratha* will face a situation where they will have to come here in the next five years with a sacrifice." Another local, Arvind Yadav, shared, "I have begged for blessings this time from God. If I am blessed, I will offer a goat in the temple." Gurusaran Runiyar, a local of Gadhimai Temple and a law student at Kathmandu University, offered vegetarian products such as coconuts, flowers, and fruits. He is against animal sacrifice and encourages everyone to offer vegetarian items. During an interview with the Mayor of Gadhimai, Mr. Upendra Yadav, he expressed happiness about the successful conduct of the festival and viewed it as economically profitable. He compared the Gadhimai Mela to the Kumbh Mela and stated that he does not want to eradicate *Bali Pratha* but rather promote it. He claimed that NGOs and INGOs opposing the festival are funded by foreign countries and organizations.

Animal sacrifice has been banned in various Indian states, such as Himachal Pradesh and Kerala, through court decisions and legislative acts. In the case of *Gauri Maulekhi v. Union of India*, the Indian government addressed the illegal transfer of cattle and buffaloes from India to Nepal during the Gadhimai festival, indicating that the Indian government does not support animal sacrifice at Gadhimai. In Bhutan, animal sacrifice in the name of God is also prohibited.

We also analyzed various alternatives to animal sacrifice adopted in different religious sites, such as offering vegetarian items to God and spreading the correct interpretation of Dharma through charity. Additionally, helping those in need by serving tons of vegetarian food daily is another meaningful alternative various religious sites are adopting.

11. Recommendations

In my point of view, people used to sacrifice animals with the belief that God would be pleased and grant them prosperity and material well-being. However, in Chapter 2, Verse 47 of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says:

“Karmanye Vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana, Ma Karmaphalahetur Bhurma Te Sangostvakarmani.”

This means: *"You have the right to perform your duty, but never to the fruits of your work."*

Throughout the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna to become a *Karmayogi*—one who performs righteous actions without attachment to the results. This suggests that without discipline and hard work, God will not provide us with anything. Instead of sacrificing animals, we should sacrifice our greed, attachments, and bad behaviors.

Another observation is that animal sacrifice is more common in regions of Nepal with higher poverty and lower literacy rates, such as Karnali Province and Madhesh Province. During field research, I noticed that outside temples, there were hundreds of beggars. If sacrifice truly brought prosperity, why are these people still poor? This indicates that many people do not study their religious texts themselves, leading to misinterpretations that introduce harmful traditions. Therefore, I strongly believe that everyone should study their religion properly and adapt religious practices to meet the needs of modern society while preserving their essence.

We must also consider the well-being of all living beings. Earth does not belong to humans alone; it is home to countless other creatures. It is unreasonable for conscious beings like humans to kill innocent animals in the name of religion, hoping for prosperity through such cruel acts.

I also urge the government to implement strict policies to eradicate harmful customs like *Bali Pratha* (animal sacrifice). This practice tarnishes the reputation of the entire Hindu community and Nepal as a whole. Nepal, known as the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, is being criticized for such practices, just as it was for Sati Pratha and caste-based discrimination in the past. It is time for the government to take bold steps by amending the criminal code to prohibit such acts. These practices also hurt the sentiments of Hindus who follow non-violence, as well as followers of Buddhism and other major religions in Nepal.

Furthermore, NGOs and INGOs must play a crucial role in controlling and spreading awareness among the people. However, despite all these efforts, no solution will work unless there is a change in people's mindset—especially among those who have been practicing animal sacrifice for generations.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of religious leaders, scholars, teachers, students, media, government and non-government organizations, NGOs, INGOs, and animal rights activists to guide society in the right direction. Only through collective effort can we establish peace in this land of Buddha.

12. Conclusion

This research paper has explored various cultural traditions and religious practices as well as existing animal welfare laws in Nepal. Animal Practice is majorly found in Hindu and Muslim communities. We cannot say nothing is explained about animal sacrifice in the religious scriptures but symbolically these scriptures try to convey various messages. It is not easy for the government and courts to stop it because this has been practiced for thousands of years. However, the ethical implications of such practices, including public health risks, environmental degradation, and psychological harm to children cannot be overlooked. The legal framework of Nepal also fails to address such practices because of religious contexts. Supreme Court has also ordered to stop mass animal sacrifice on the Gadhimai festival, but its implementation remains challenging.

The result highlights the various alternatives to respect both cultural and religious traditions while addressing modern ethical concerns. The paper highlights the importance of public awareness and education in shifting societal attitudes toward animal welfare. Reinterpreting religious scriptures in a way that is consistent with modern principles of compassion and non-violence requires collaboration between religious leaders, academics, and legislators.

Future research should explore the socio-economic factors driving animal sacrifice, particularly in impoverished and low-literacy regions. Advocacy should promote non-violent alternatives like offering vegetarian items or engaging in community service while ensuring stricter enforcement of animal welfare laws. Collaborative efforts between the government, NGOs, and religious institutions are essential to balancing cultural traditions with the ethical treatment of animals.

“Why should a man be humane only to his fellow men? Why not extend the same humane consideration to all living beings?”

- Swami Vivekananda