

## Tales of inhuman cruelty dog world's largest killing fair

Tales of immense cruelty and imperviousness to suffering began to surface Thursday after the ritual slaughter of thousands of animals and birds at the world's largest killing fair ended in Nepal's Terai plains with animal rights activists condemning it as legitimisation of violence.

Hundreds of carcasses of butchered water buffaloes, goats and other animals lay strewn near the temple of Hindu goddess Gadhimai in Bara district with rivers of blood flowing since Tuesday, when the massacres started.

Dalits from India and Nepal -- a community that stands at the bottom of traditional Hindu hierarchy and is still regarded as untouchables -- flocked to the charnel house to collect the carcasses and clashed with the contractors who had paid the temple authorities to carry away the meat by the truckload.

At the end of the two-day massacre, the mounds of bodies proved too huge for both sides and bulldozers were called in to dig deep pits and bury the remaining carcasses.

The stench arising from the dead animals as well as from the human excreta left by the millions of pilgrims filled the area.

Nepali daily Naya Patrika said Thursday that about 150 visitors to the five-yearly fair had fainted at the sight of the blood and violence.

Manoj Gautam, member of a youth initiative Roots and Shoots, which had been campaigning for the prevention of the slaughter, painted a picture of unbearable cruelty and suffering.

'The animals were not provided with any water and food in the days before the sacrifice,' Gautam said. 'Many young animals had in fact already died from stress, exhaustion and dehydration before the killings started.'

The butchering was carried out randomly in a radius of 3 km around the temple.

'Anyone could kill anything, with whatever -- knife or sword,' he said. 'Many animals died an unbearable slow and violent death because the butcher was inexperienced and the knives were not sharpened properly.'

Thousands of buffaloes were standing in an enclosure when butchers holding swords started hacking randomly at them. While some heads could be severed in one cut, in other cases it took the butchers a long time to kill the buffalo.

Many tried to escape but were hunted down.

'Baby buffaloes were bleating and searching for their mothers,' a shocked Gautam said. 'Soon they were walking around in a pool of blood. Not a single animal survived the blood bath.'

Two Nepal organisations that spearheaded the campaign to stop the massacre -- Animal Welfare Network Nepal and Anti-Animal Sacrifice Alliance -- said while the Gadhimai Fair is being promoted

as a cultural event, it actually legitimises violence against the innocent.

'The priests make the devotees believe that their wish will come true only when offering an expensive buffalo, goat or other kind of animal,' the two organisations said in a joint statement. 'The Maoist-led organising committee, instead of abolishing these outdated beliefs, promotes them to collect more revenues and increase the vote bank.'

They also blamed the coalition government of Nepal for the wanton killings that have shocked the outside world with condemnations pouring in till Thursday.

'Not a single government leader has had the courage to speak out against the mass sacrifices,' the two organisations said. 'What kind of leader in this time and age wants to perpetuate rituals that perpetuate superstition, drain the resources of the poor and destroy the image of Nepal as an attractive destination?'

*Sudeshna Sarkar* ( © IANS / India eNews)