

SACRIFICE AND VIOLENCE:
PAŚUBALI IN NEPAL

by

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ABSTRACT

LINDSAY CARROLL. *Violence and Sacrifice: Paśubali in Nepal*. (Under the direction of DR. WILLIAM SHERMAN)

Animal sacrifice in Nepal—known as *paśubali*—exemplifies the complexities of ritual animal sacrifice. It also complicates understandings of the relationships between sacrifice and violence. The word “violence” in sacrificial studies has been met with resistance in recent decades, and violence interpreted as “aggressive behavior,” “domination,” or “savagery” has been met with the most resistance. Interpretations of “violence,” however, are varied and should be considered when examining the role(s) of violence in sacrifice. When “aggressive violence” becomes the focus of sacrificial studies, other important aspects of sacrifice may be neglected. This can be demonstrated through an analysis of *paśubali* in Nepal. *Paśubali* in Nepal exemplifies a practice in which layers of both “violent” and “non-violent” components interconnect to form a web of inter-related constituents, none of which is independent of another.

DEDICATION

To Dr. J. Daniel White whose passion and enthusiasm inspired this work, but who was never able to see its completion. My deepest thanks to you, Dr. White, for the inspiration you roused and the lasting impression you made as my teacher.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It was mid-morning in Boudhanath, a suburb of Kathmandu. My interviewee and I sat under the weathered orange canopy of a café as the ever-threatening summer monsoon clouds gathered above. We were nearing the end of our formal interview—a discussion on the topic of animal sacrifice in Nepal. My interviewee had provided me with a wealth of rich information concerning his personal experiences with animal sacrifice, and he had given me some great resources concerning the literary origins of sacrifice in his culture. Up to this point, he was relaxed and open to speaking with me, but I knew the next question might change that. “Some scholars have called animal sacrifice violent,” I said. “What are your thoughts on this?” His light countenance changed. It was replaced by a look of concern, or perhaps even contempt. Clearly, the thought that scholars might label the practice as “violent” stirred my interviewee to the point of visible anger.

What was it about the word “violence” that created such a response? The answer may be found in the simple fact that my Nepalese interlocutors equated “violence” with “bad.” This is certainly understandable. For many, the word “violence” brings to mind thoughts of savagery, immoral action, and cruelty. Thus, hearing that scholars have called sacrifice “violent” caused many of my interlocutors to insist that sacrifice has been *unfairly* imparted with such characteristics. To them, sacrifice and violence simply cannot be equated. When violence is perceived in this way, it is easy to understand my interviewee’s visible irritation.

The word “violence” has received much attention in writings on sacrifice, and there are contested opinions concerning its degree of necessity in such writings. While

some scholars have developed theories—and subsequent writings—around a framework of violence, others feel, at the very least, uncomfortable with the use of the word.

Violence has become the most dominant emphasis of the study of sacrifice, and many of the most influential definitions and characterizations of sacrifice include violence-related vocabulary such as *destruction*, *immolation*, *killing*, *subjugation*, *victim*, *victimage*, *violent*, and *violence*.¹

The evolution of scholarly literature on sacrifice has been greatly influenced by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, Georges Bataille, Walter Burkert, and René Girard, whose writings include the abovementioned vocabulary, though to varying degrees. These theorists present a vivid example of the variety of ways that “violence” may be interpreted. Furthermore, their writings serve as a starting point from which to examine the ways that sacrifice and violence have been discussed in relation to one another. Thanks to these theorists, and others not mentioned in this essay, the study of sacrifice has become a generative site to understand and interpret violence. When compared to Nepalese animal sacrifice, we find that many aspects of these theorist’s models compliment the ritual’s complexity, but some fall short. Those that fall short are the ones in which violence is perceived as the manifestation of aggression—or a sort of violence that may be uncontrolled and dominating.

This essay will attempt to demonstrate *what happens* when “aggressive violence” becomes the focus of the scholarly lens. What might scholarship be compromising when

¹ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 43-61; Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith, *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); René Girard, *Sacrifice: Breakthroughs in Mimetic Theory*, ed. William A. Johnsen (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 27; Henry Hubert, and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions* (1964; repr., University of Chicago Press, 1981).

such foci take precedence? Could a violence-centric sacrifice simply be “a product of European modernity” and even “an obsession of modernity” as has been suggested by Julia Meszaros and Johannes Zachhuber?² In their fascination with violence, have modern and contemporary scholars overly-accentuated the significance of sacrifice as a basis for theories of ritual as proposed by Jonathan Z. Smith?³ Is it ever reasonable for scholarship to assume that victim and immolation, as well as aggressive subjugation and conquest, are the intrinsic and most prominent characteristics of sacrifice? Above all, *what is lost* with such foci, and what other relationships exist between sacrifice and violence beyond the tendency to equate the two?

In 2018 I spent my summer in Kathmandu—Nepal’s bustling capital and its most historically, economically, and politically significant metropolis. The purpose of the trip was two-fold; 1) to immerse myself in the study of the Sanskrit language, and, 2) to observe animal sacrifice (*paśubali*, pronounced *pashubali*) and speak to those who have participated in or observed *paśubali* as a part of their family or community tradition.⁴ The latter led me to conduct ten formal interviews, to partake in numerous informal

² Julia Meszaros and Johannes Zachhuber, eds., *Sacrifice and Modern Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-28; Johannes Zachhuber, “Modern Discourse on Sacrifice and its Theological Background,” in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*, ed. Julia Meszaros and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³ Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Domestication of Sacrifice,” in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). This essay is also found in *Violent Origins* (see footnote 1) and is followed by an analysis and discussion between prominent scholars and leading theorists in the fields of anthropology and religion.

⁴ The Sanskrit-English dictionary compiled by M. Monier Williams will serve as the chief reference for Sanskrit vocabulary superseded only by those vocabulary words defined by my interlocutors themselves. In the case of the word *paśubali*, Williams does not define the compounded Sanskrit word as “animal sacrifice,” but notes this definition for the word *pasubandha*. Nevertheless, the definitions for the separated compound components *pasu* and *bali* are defined by Williams as “animal” and “offering” respectively. Nepalese community members and scholars of ritual in Nepal freely use the word *paśubali* to refer to animal sacrifice. See: M. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary* (1899; Repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2011), 611-612, 723.

conversations, and to observe *paśubali* in context including the sacrifice of roughly two dozen animals at the Dakṣiṅkāli Temple on the southern fringe of the Kathmandu Valley. Driven by a curiosity to explore relationships of violence and sacrifice, I sought to understand how the Nepalese see violence as it relates—or not—to *paśubali*. Given the limited timeframe for in-field research and a relatively small collection sample when compared to the typical ethnography, my findings will also rely heavily upon the scholarly writings of those who have dedicated their lives to the study of ritual and sacrifice in South Asia—particularly in Nepal.⁵

The word *paśubali* is a Sanskrit compound which can be broken down into two parts: *paśuḥ* and *baliḥ*. Entries for *paśuḥ* in *A Sanskrit English Dictionary* include “animal,” “beast,” “brute,” “goat,” and “sacrificial animal,” among others.⁶ Entries for *baliḥ* include “tribute,” “offering,” “gift,” “oblation,” and others.⁷ As a dependent determinative compound (*tatpuruṣa*), *paśubali* literally translates to “offering of an animal,” or “oblation of a goat,” etc.... Nepalese and scholars alike have shortened it, and they simply say “animal sacrifice.” Today in Kathmandu, “*paśubali*,” and sometimes just “*bali*,” is used freely to refer to the practice.

To my Nepalese interlocutors, *paśubali* is interwoven with family and community. It involves layers of deep emotion, and it is more—*much* more—than the act of killing. It is one example of the complexities surrounding the practice of sacrificial ritual—a topic that has been widely theorized and discussed in recent centuries. These complexities, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, demonstrate how a

⁵ I certainly don’t classify this essay as an ethnography, but rather, a study with ethnographical components.

⁶ Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, 611.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 723.

focus on “aggressive” violence falls short in exposing the intricacies of sacrifice and the multiple roles that violence may play in the ritual. When aggressive violence becomes the foci, the stakes have been set, and shortfall is likely. At best, scholars and their readers miss other important aspects of sacrifice that may be markedly non-violent. At worst, they stigmatize a ritual practice in a negative light. Theorists such as Hubert and Mauss, Bataille, Burkert, and Girard have shown how varied the roles of violence can be, and how perceptions of violence are integral to understanding sacrifice. That being said, they’ve also shown how understandings of sacrifice are challenged by perceptions of violence, and how the notion of *truly* understanding sacrifice may simply be impossible.

Removing any single component from *paśubali* as “definitive” risks ignoring its complexities and simplifying a phenomenon that can’t be reduced to separate parts. This holds especially true for “aggressive” violence. In lieu of these statements, the following chapters will attempt to demonstrate the following: 1) that prominent theorists writing about animal sacrifice have complicated understandings of sacrifice by revealing the diverse range of theories and interpretations concerning sacrificial violence; 2) that those who have focused on “aggressive” violence risk excluding other important components of sacrifice; 3) that Nepalese *paśubali* exemplifies the complexities of ritual animal sacrifice, some of which are markedly non-violent; 4) that Nepalese *paśubali*, and writings by recent scholars who recognize the flaw in the “sacrifice = violence” association, further complicate understandings of the relationships between violence and sacrifice.

CHAPTER 2: SACRIFICE AND VIOLENCE—THEORISTS, THEORIES, AND THOUGHTS

2.1 Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss

In 1899 Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss collaboratively wrote the essay “Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions.”⁸ Now largely considered a classic, the impact of this essay earned its authors the title “grandfathers of modern sacrificial studies.”⁹ Besides creating a general vocabulary around the study of sacrifice—a vocabulary which is still used in academia today—Hubert and Mauss superseded the leading sacrificial theory which revolved around gift-giving by devising a new theory centered upon consecration, communication between sacred and profane, transformation of the *sacrifier*,¹⁰ and the destruction of a victim.¹¹

Hubert and Mauss define sacrifice as “*a religious act, which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is consecrated.*”¹² As the necessary variable for transformation, the means by which the sacrificer is modified, the victim holds the key to increasing one’s religiosity—the outcome of the successful ritual. Hubert and Mauss state that the victim must be *destroyed* for sacrifice to occur. The two define the victim simply as “the object thus destroyed [in the act of consecration].”¹³ The authors set apart the

⁸ Nick Allen, “Using Hubert and Mauss to think about Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*, ed. Julia Meszaros and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147.

⁹ Kathryn McClymond, “Sacrifice and Violence,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, ed. Andrew R. Murphy (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 320.

¹⁰ Hubert and Mauss’s term *sacrifier* will be used throughout this essay to designate the individual or group who benefits from the sacrifice.

¹¹ Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*; Maurice Bloch, *Prey Into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 27-28.

¹² Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

victim as distinct from other oblations in that it is destroyed, and they explicitly reserve the word “sacrifice” solely for oblations involving destruction.¹⁴

Such a focus on “victim” and “destruction” may give the appearance of an emphasis on violence. However, to Hubert and Mauss, the sanctified setting for the ritual and its preliminary acts of consecration overturn any notion that the sacrifice demonstrates aggressive violence. “The place of the ceremony must itself be sacred: outside a holy place immolation is mere murder.”¹⁵ The duo sees violence as existing in a realm outside of the ritual sphere; whereas *inside* the ritual sphere, the immolation is driven not by aggression, but by the resolution to transform—to increase one’s religiosity.¹⁶

2.2 Georges Bataille

In the middle of the twentieth century, revolutionary thinker Georges Bataille, whose teacher Alfred Métraux attended lectures presented by Marcel Mauss, devised a complex theory of sacrifice which posited sacrifice as a form of consumption resulting from excess.¹⁷ Intrigued by surrealism, a movement contemporary to him, Bataille’s theory of religion—the premise for his theory of sacrifice—embraced surrealism’s principles of unity and interconnectedness.¹⁸ This theory connects a multitude of

¹⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, vol. 1, Consumption, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988); Bataille, *Theory of Religion*; “Biography of Marcel Mauss (1872-1950),” *The Biography*, accessed October 26, 2018, <https://thebiography.us/en/mauss-marcel>; Carl Olsen, “Eroticism, Violence, and Sacrifice,” in *The Allure of Decadent Thinking: Religious Studies and the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17, accessed September 18, 2018, Oxford Scholarship Online. Métraux attended Mauss’s lectures—recognized generically as instruction on ethnography—between 1926 and 1940 when Mauss was teaching at the University of Paris. It is generally considered that Bataille was influenced by the ideas of Mauss through Métraux.

¹⁸ Robert A. Campbell, “Georges Bataille’s Surrealistic Theory of Religion,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11, no. 2 (June 1999), accessed September 18, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/157006899X0022>.

ostensibly unrelated topics including evolution, solar energy, economy, war, eroticism, violence, luxury, and excess, and it establishes relationships between them to form the complex model that is Bataille's understanding of the human situation.¹⁹

Sacrifice, to Bataille, manifests as a result of the interplay between the phenomena listed above. When living entities receive more energy than is necessary for growth—such as a forest receives sunlight or a man receives wealth—the entity can either grow, or, in the case that there is no room for growth, expend the excess.²⁰ Ultimately, however, entities must expend.²¹ Man's excess energy is consumed without profit, either luxuriously or catastrophically, as in the cases of sacrifice or war.²² Despite this profitless squandering, there is still a sort of gain experienced for the sacrificer in the act of sacrifice.²³ Sacrifice is a means by which a sacrificer may return to a realm of lost intimacy with the sacred through the act of destruction.²⁴ Although Bataille does not explicitly offer this definition (or any, really) of sacrifice, handfuls of passages in *The Accursed Share* and *Theory of Religion* present close alternatives to a definition. The following is one example.

The principle of Sacrifice is destruction, but though it sometimes goes so far as to destroy completely (as in a holocaust), the destruction that sacrifice is intended to bring about is not annihilation. The thing—only the thing—is what sacrifice means to destroy in the victim. Sacrifice destroys an object's real ties of subordination; it draws the victim out of the world of utility and restores to it that of unintelligible caprice. When the offered animal enters the circle in which the priest will immolate it, it passes from the world of things which are closed to man and are nothing to

¹⁹ Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: First City Lights Books, 1986); Bataille, *The Accursed Share*; Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990); Bataille, *Theory of Religion*.

²⁰ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 21.

²¹ Kent Brintnall, email message to author, January 10, 2019.

²² *Ibid.*, 23-26, 45-61.

²³ Following the style of Bataille, the word “*sacrifier*” is replaced by “sacrificer” in this section.

²⁴ Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 43-44.

him, which he knows from the outside—to a world that is immanent to it, *intimate*, known as the wife is known in sexual consumption (*consummation charnelle*).²⁵

Bataille posits a tie between violence and intimacy as both involve passionate emotion and violation of the flesh.²⁶ Furthermore, he states that the one who sacrifices attains a level of intimacy with the sacred in that he frees himself by stepping outside of himself.²⁷ To Bataille, the act of destruction in sacrifice gives meaning to this newfound freedom and establishes a realm in which violence takes sovereignty.²⁸ In the words of Bataille, destruction as a principle “opens the way for passionate release; it liberates violence while marking off the domain in which violence reigns absolutely.”²⁹ Gavin Flood, in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought* interprets Bataille’s sacrifice as having the following definition: “For Bataille, sacrifice is an attempted reinvigoration of intimacy through the violent release of energy brought about by the transfer of the sacrificial victim from the realm of work or the real world, to the realm of intimacy, luxury, and subjectivity.”³⁰

Violence to Bataille is braided and entwined with its analogues: expenditure, eroticism, intimacy, and transgression.³¹ Violence is what sunders distinctions and allows one to experience the world through another.³² In sacrifice, the sacrificer feels and experiences through the victim—the two are one.³³ Thus, to Bataille, violence is

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Bataille, *Erotism*, 17-19, 93; *Theory of Religion* 50-51;

²⁷ Georges Bataille, “Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh,” in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, vol. 14, *Theory and History of Literature*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 70.

²⁸ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 58.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gavin Flood, “Sacrifice as Refusal,” in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*, ed. Julia Meszaros and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 122.

³¹ Kent Brintnall, email message to author, January 10, 2019.

³² Ibid.; Bataille, *Erotism*, 20-21.

³³ Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 60.

necessary, violence is *good*. We can see how “aggressive violence” doesn’t quite fit into Bataille’s thoughts concerning violence. Here, any “aggression” is overshadowed by a much stronger force—a force that leaves one in a state of utter vulnerability and open to the possibility of communication.³⁴

2.3 Walter Burkert and René Girard

In the mid to late twentieth century, Walter Burkert and René Girard both offered theories which approached the practice of sacrifice by searching for its origins.³⁵

Primarily interested in identifying the ways in which religion acts as a force for societal formation, their theories posit the emergence of ritual sacrifice as a way to channel the inherent violence of human biology.³⁶ This “channeling” of aggression spares the community by redirecting its catastrophic effects to a victim.³⁷

For Burkert, the channeling of aggression to a sacrificial victim began with Paleolithic man during the hunt.³⁸ Aggression concerning sexuality and pairing was redirected from society to the hunt—in which the hunters’ prey is considered the first sacrificial victim—a victim that would later become distinguished as the “stereotypical” sacrificial victim when the hunt began to take a ritualistic shape.³⁹ The classification of the hunt as a ritual is explained by Burkert’s interpretation of the dramatization of the hunt.⁴⁰ The hunt, centered around the act of killing, aroused human responses within the hunters such as shock, horror, and celebration; and it impelled them to creatively channel

³⁴ Kent Brintnall, email message to author, January 13, 2019.

³⁵ Burkert, Girard, and Smith, *Violent Origins*, 171.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4, 8, 31; Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, preface to *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, by Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), v.

³⁷ Flood, “Sacrifice as Refusal,” 119.

³⁸ Burkert, Girard, Smith, *Violent Origins*, 24-25.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

this anxiety—resulting in the hunt’s ritualization.⁴¹ This became the earliest form of ritual sacrifice.⁴²

To Burkert, sacrifice is “ritual slaughter followed by the communal meal.”⁴³ As is evident in his writings, he is more concerned with providing an elaborate definition of ritual than of sacrifice. Ritual, to Burkert, is “... a pattern, a sequence of actions that can be perceived, identified, and described as such, and that can be repeated in consequence.”⁴⁴ In that case, sacrifice is a recognizably sequenced or repeated slaughter followed by a communal meal. “Animal sacrifice,” says Burkert, “is a scandal, because it makes killing animals and eating them a sacred affair, a religious act, or even *the* religious act.”⁴⁵

Burkert’s attempt to explain the “anomaly,” as he calls it, shares a fundamental characteristic with the theory of René Girard.⁴⁶ Both posit an “original scene” of compulsory violence that “[becomes] the foundation of human society.”⁴⁷ For Girard, this “original scene” is a result of intraspecific rivalry caused by “mimetic desire”—a concept which explains the eruption of violence that occurs when man imitates the desires of another.⁴⁸ When rivalries mount as a result of ever-increasing mimeticism, reconciliation can only be reached when adversaries establish a common enemy onto whom each may redirect his aggression.⁴⁹ This “scapegoat”—a single and innocent individual—then

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 164.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 150.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 177. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Gabriel Andrade, “René Girard (1923-2015),” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource, accessed May 14, 2018. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/girard/>; Girard, *Breakthroughs*, 26-27.

⁴⁹ Girard, *Breakthroughs*, 26.

becomes the target of an entire community. He or she is lynched and utterly eliminated, and in the wake of the scapegoat's absence, peace is restored to the community.⁵⁰

Accordingly, in the words of Kathryn McClymond, Girard's sacrifice is "the internal aggression of a community displaced onto an innocent victim and circumscribed in a formal setting. Because sacrifice has its roots in violence, the two can never be completely separated from one another."⁵¹ In the words of Girard himself, "[h]umanity's first cultural initiative is the imitation of the founding murder, which is one with the invention of *ritual sacrifice*."⁵² Ritual sacrifice thus emerges from an "original" killing—a killing which displays the fullest degree of the human's inherent violence.

2.4 Discussion

The theorists discussed above have presented sacrifice as inseparable from violence, but each's interpretation of violence is quite different. Hubert and Mauss emphasize destruction and the role of the victim, but they also focus heavily upon transformation. They posit the ritual sphere as a realm in which aggressive violence is absent. Bataille emphasizes sacrifice as violent release, and posits violence as the necessary variable for intimacy, or that which allows communication with the divine. Burkert and Girard see sacrifice as the ritualized product of an original killing. To them, violence is associated with aggression. These heavily influential theorists helped establish the pattern of equating sacrifice to violence—a pattern that has become ingrained in

⁵⁰ Adrande, "René Girard"; Girard, *Breakthroughs*. 26.

⁵¹ McClymond, "Sacrifice and Violence," 321.

⁵² Girard, *Breakthroughs*, 27.

sacrificial studies, and continues to be seen in the prominent works succeeding Burkert and Girard.⁵³

Given such a variety of ways to approach violence and sacrifice, how then, might scholars approach the phenomena of sacrifice? In the following chapters, I will turn to Kathmandu as our “case study” to show how evidence gathered from one cultural setting supports those scholars who have presented *paśubali* with foci that are markedly non-violent. By placing such scholars alongside those discussed above, as well as those who are writing in the field of South Asian studies and approach the understanding of sacrifice through an analysis of violence, we start to see a score of rich material that may have been “hidden” under the vocabulary of the “violent.” We can begin to gain a sense of the multitudes of foci that present themselves when scholars look elsewhere than to aggressive violence. Furthermore, we can begin to explore other ways to approach a topic that has—all too excessively—reflected a “genuine product of European modernity.”⁵⁴

Johannas Zachhuber and Julia Meszaros ascribe the beginnings of the “turn toward the victim” in the study of sacrifice to early modern debates in which philosophers and members of religious communities singled out the death of Christ as the “perfect” and “last” sacrifice.⁵⁵ Sacrifice in Christian theology had come to an end at this point, but it still impacted Christian ways of thinking.⁵⁶ In the debates which followed the Reformation, all parties—influenced by representations of the suffering of Christ which emerged in the High Middle Ages—agreed on the necessity to make the suffering and

⁵³ An example of which is: *Maurice Bloch, Prey Into Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁵⁴ Zachhuber, “Modern Discourse,” 24. Julia Meszaros (see footnote 2) and Johannes Zachhuber both argue that eighteenth and nineteenth century writers “turned to the victim” as a result of Christianity’s influence on Western discourse.

⁵⁵ Meszaros and Zachhuber, *Modern Thought*, 3-4; Zachhuber, “Modern Discourse,” 13.

⁵⁶ Zachhuber, “Modern Discourse,” 15.

immolation of the victim the focus of sacrifice.⁵⁷ The death of Christ—an act of violence toward an innocent sentient being—became the exemplary sacrifice.⁵⁸

As has been shown in this chapter, what follows the initial associations of violence and sacrifice is a string of theorists who develop this line of thinking and who bind “violence” and “sacrifice” more tightly, though in different ways. Some, like Hubert, Mauss, and Bataille see violence as one of the many threads in the intricate web of sacrifice—a domain in which any single aspect of sacrifice cannot be independent of another. To Burkert and Girard, however, aggressive violence takes more of a central role, and it is set apart as one of the most, or even *the* most, distinguished aspect of sacrifice in its original form. But, can Euro-American academics have any claim to understandings of sacrifice in cultures that are not Euro-American? Jonathan Z. Smith argues that even the idea of ritual as an act of significance has been created by scholars.⁵⁹ If we shift our focus from subject matter to scholarly approach, we begin to recognize those actions that *we*—as Euro-American academics—have designated as ritual.⁶⁰ Moreover, if we carefully consider the heritage from which our reasoning has developed, we may reveal layers of influence that are relative only to the culture by which we have been shaped.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Domestication*, 146.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXT AND PRACTICE—PAŚUBALI IN KATHMANDU

3.1 Nepal—A cultural *Saṁsparśa*

Nepal is a country of blended identities—a “cultural *saṁsparśa*.”⁶¹ Its history tells the tale of a geographically isolated expanse of land caught between the Himalayas to the north and the marshy Tarai to the south. Thousands of years ago, as Indo-Aryans came up from the south, and Tibeto-Burmans came down from the north, they met in Nepal, where—according to one theory—the challenges inherent in crossing either of these northern or southern barriers prompted anyone who entered to abstain from exiting.⁶² The Tarai, Nepal’s southern strip of low, boggy terrain was ill-suited in climate for those coming from the north who favored colder temperatures, and the Himal, or Himalaya, in the north was ill-suited for those migrating from the south who favored a warmer climate. The region in the middle—Nepal’s “Middle Hills”—proved to be favorable to both groups. The fertile bowl that became known the Kathmandu Valley provided the resources needed for agriculture, and it grew into Nepal’s most significant cultural contact zone. As historian John Whelpton has written, “any history of Nepal has to be Kathmandu-centric to some degree...”⁶³

Over the past thousand years, different ethnic groups have penetrated the borders of Nepal and have shaped their identities within its borders.⁶⁴ Now home to dozens of ethnic groups, their subsections and castes, ninety different languages, and 225 dialects, Nepal displays a complex assortment of peoples and traditions that emerged alongside

⁶¹ “Conjunction,” “mixture,” “coming into contact with.” See: Williams, *A Sanskrit Dictionary*, 1122.

⁶² Gregory S. J. Sharkey, (untitled lecture, Rangjung Yeshe Institute, Kathmandu, Nepal, June 14, 2018); John Whelpton, *A History of Nepal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), x, 8, 10.

⁶³ Sharkey, untitled lecture; Whelpton, *A History of Nepal*, 2.

⁶⁴ Whelpton, *A History of Nepal*, 3.

one another in a shared cultural and religious environment.⁶⁵ The identities of Nepal’s inhabitants emerged in geographic isolation and during a long period of general xenophobia.⁶⁶ Europeans were not allowed to enter Nepal until the mid-twentieth century, and only a handful of scholars were given exception—one of which was Sylvain Lévi who first entered Nepal in 1898 and began one of the earliest Western accounts of the history of Nepal.⁶⁷ Among many other things, Lévi recorded the cause of Nepal’s unequal division in its religious demography between its two most prominent religions: Hinduism and Buddhism—the number of Hindus exceeding the number of Buddhists.⁶⁸ Lévi partially attributed the unequal division to the *brahmanic* spread throughout India and India’s influence over Nepal, but also—perhaps more significantly—to the rule of the Ghurkas whose late-eighteenth century conquests unified the states of Nepal and designated Kathmandu as the capital.⁶⁹ The Ghurkas, who were exclusively Hindu, declared religious allegiance to Hinduism and established their Indo-Aryan language, “Nepali,” as the official language of Nepal.⁷⁰

Today, the unequal religious dispersion still exists, and Hinduism may be the religion of seventy to eighty percent of Nepal’s inhabitants, while Buddhism may be followed by ten to twenty percent.⁷¹ There are some clear, and some unclear,

⁶⁵ Sharkey, untitled lecture.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*; Whelpton, 3.

⁶⁷ Sharkey, untitled lecture; Sylvain Lévi, *Nepal: Historical Study of a Hindu Kingdom*, (1905): 1:74, accessed December 20, 2017, Adobe PDF eBook. Lévi references another, and even earlier, traveler to penetrate Nepal’s borders and begin collecting data about the country. Colonel Kirkpatrick, envoy of an English company, spent two months in Nepal in the early nineteenth century and “brought back a magnificent collection of notes on the country’s geography, antiquities, religion, agriculture, commerce and institutions, which notes later on, written by a stranger’s hand, were published in 1811.” 1:66.

⁶⁸ Lévi, *Nepal: A Historical*, 70.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:69; Megan Adamson Sijapati, *Islamic Revival in Nepal: Religion and a New Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 17.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*; K. R. van Kooij, *Religion in Nepal*, vol. 15, *Iconography of Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 3.

⁷¹ Sharkey, untitled lecture; Sijapati, *Islamic Revival*, 17. The impossibility of obtaining actual census data has been noted by Sharkey who, in his 2018 lecture, stated that the Nepal census exceedingly undercounts

geographical distinctions between these two religions. The south is home to predominantly Vaiṣṇava Hindus who speak Indo-Aryan, Sanskritic languages, and the north largely contains Vajrayāna Buddhists who speak Tibeto-Burman languages.⁷² In the middle, however, there exists a mixture—of these two and others—and Kathmandu represents Nepal’s greatest density of blended religion and melded culture.

Buddhism and Hinduism in Nepal have lived peaceably side-by-side for over two thousand years, and their practices often overlap so greatly that those practicing them see no need to distinguish between the two.⁷³ When speaking with Nepali citizens about their religious identities, I would frequently ask my interlocutors if their families identified as Buddhist or Hindu, and it was not uncommon for them to respond, “Both!” Some practices, however, are predominantly performed by those who identify strongly as one or the other. A case in point is *paśubali*.⁷⁴

3.2 *Paśubali*—The Deities

As noted, Vaiṣṇava Hinduism is widespread in southern Nepal, and although it is also common in the Middle Hills, the numbers found in Śaiva Hinduism surpass those of Vaiṣṇava Hinduism in this region—a region which includes the Kathmandu Valley.⁷⁵ Śaiva Hinduism—the Hindu “sect” involving the concept of a female energy known as *śakti* which balances its male counterpart *śiva*—culminates in Kathmandu in the worship

its citizens. Furthermore, the problem of religious identification in a culture of heavily blended religions becomes apparent in Nepal where many of the practices of Buddhists and Hindus appear identical.

⁷² Sharkey, untitled lecture.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Though predominantly practiced by Hindus, there are accounts of Nepali Buddhists practicing animal sacrifice as well. For one particular account, see: Bruce MacCoy Owens, “Blood and Bodhisattvas: Sacrifice Among the Newar Buddhists of Nepal,” *Proceedings of the International Seminar on the Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya* (1993), accessed December 7, 2017, file:///C:/Users/Linds/Downloads/BLOOD_AND_BODHISATTVAS_SACRIFICE_AMONG_THE_NEWAR_B.pdf.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

of one or more of the many forms of Devī, or “the goddess”—particularly those forms associated with the male deity Śiva.⁷⁶ It is to Devī that most offer animal sacrifice in Kathmandu, and it is found almost exclusively within Śaivism. Indeed, my interlocutors who identified as Vaiṣṇava spoke of presenting only non-animal offerings to their deities.⁷⁷ Furthermore, only one of my interviewees spoke about his family sacrificing to a male deity, who in this case was Bhag Bhairava—a tiger-faced incarnation of Śiva.⁷⁸

Some of the forms of Devī to whom sacrifice is offered include the following: Bhagvatī (also spelled Bhagavatī), Bhavānī, Cāmuṇḍā, Durgā, Kālī, Pārvatī, Śakti, and Satī.⁷⁹ One of my interviewees, putting it simply, said, “All Śiva’s wives”—an amount which easily numbers in the hundreds.⁸⁰ And yet, even this is not entirely inclusive. Another interviewee spoke of offering *paśubali* to *ḍākinīs* and *yakṣiṇīs*.⁸¹ These semi-divine beings typically associated with Vajrayāna Buddhism—though not uncommon to Hinduism—receive sacrificial offerings in Nepal particularly among the Newar of Bhaktapur.⁸²

⁷⁶ Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Mother Goddess* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 218; Sharkey, untitled lecture. *Devī*, translated most simply as “Goddess” (see Williams, 496), may be considered an “umbrella term” used to refer to any of the many individual manifestations of a single “great goddess.” The concept of a “great goddess,” however, has been contested by scholars such as David Kinsley who suggests that Kālī—one individual manifestation of the goddess—exists in her own right exclusive of her “femaleness”—the defining characteristic which reduces all Hindu goddesses to manifestations of a single entity. See: David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa; Dark Visions of the Terrible and Sublime in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 84. For Devī as an “umbrella term” see: Jeffrey S. Lidke, *The Goddess within and Beyond the Three Cities: Śākta Tantra and the Paradox of Power in Nepāla Maṇḍala* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2017), 2.

⁷⁷ All interviews were confidential. The names of interviewees have been withheld due to mutual agreement and to comply with the UNCC board of research ethics.

⁷⁸ Interview no. 4, Kathmandu, June 27, 2018. Interview in English.

⁷⁹ Interview no. 2, Kathmandu, June 23, 2018. Translator used; Interview no. 5, Kathmandu, July 2, 2018. Interview in English; Interview no. 7, Kathmandu, July 11, 2018. Interview in English.

⁸⁰ Interview no. 5.

⁸¹ Interview no. 7.

⁸² *Ibid.*; Bhattacharyya, *Mother Goddess*, 112, 154. The Newar are a Nepali ethnic group that, like many other ethnic groups in Nepal, are divided into castes—some of which regard themselves as indigenous, and others of which have roots traceable to migration. See: Whelpton, *A History*, 14.

The multitude of forms that sacrifice takes in Kathmandu alone rivals the number of gods and goddesses to whom sacrifice is made. That being said, there are some general commonalities between them that, though in no way “standardizing” the practice, are common enough across Nepali ethnic groups in Kathmandu that scholars can examine them to gain a general understanding of the practice. The following account reflects these commonalities—particularly as they have been reported by my interlocutors and as they have been demonstrated at the Dakṣiṅkāli Temple situated on the southern fringe of Kathmandu where observational data for this essay was collected.⁸³ In the words of Alexander Von Rospatt—whose research examines Newar old age rituals—the summary “cannot do justice to the startling variety encountered on the ground.”⁸⁴ Where appropriate, I will note exceptions and deviations from the “common” practice.

3.3 *Paśubali*—The Practice

Paśubali in Kathmandu exists in both the realms of the private and public; it is practiced within close knit village-communities and in large public temples. Private sacrifices may be attended by immediate relatives, distant relatives, and other community members; and the ritual is practiced in the vicinity of the sacrificer’s home or that of a relative. In this way, “private” refers to the location of the ritual rather than the number of participants in attendance. A “private” sacrifice may have dozens in attendance, as

⁸³ The term Dakṣiṅkāli comes from the Sanskrit compound dakṣiṅākālī—*dakṣiṅā* meaning “south” or “south-facing” and Kālī being the name of the goddess worshipped at the temple. See: Williams, *A Sanskrit Dictionary*, 465. The name Dakṣiṅkāli has special significance for the Kathmandu temple. Situated on Kathmandu’s southern border, Kālī, here, acts as the protectress of the South. Furthermore, the name references a common image of Kālī called the “Dakṣiṅā Kālī” in which she is depicted as covered in blood, adorned with a girdle or garland of skulls, and standing with one foot upon her male counterpart Śiva. See: Suchitra Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal’ and Divine Digestion: Goat Sacrifice to the Goddess Kali in Bengal,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 3 (August 1994): 779-778, accessed December 10, 2017.

⁸⁴ Alexander von Rospatt, “Negotiating the Passage beyond a Full Span of Life: Old Age Rituals among the Newars,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 2014): 111, accessed September 24, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2014.858659>.

Nepalese families tend to be large, or they may be attended by only a few people. None of my interlocutors discussed the performance of a sacrifice in which only a single individual was present, but I did not encounter any evidence which demonstrated this as impermissible. The frequency of private sacrifices increases during the fall which is “festival season” for many of Nepal’s citizens, particularly those who identify as Hindu. The frequency of public sacrifices, or those that occur at public temples and auspicious sites, also increases during festival season; but public sacrifices are generally more recurrent and steady throughout the year, as in the case of sacrifice at the Dakṣiṅkāli Temple which occurs every Tuesday and Saturday.

In either realm, the reasons for performing *paśubali* may vary depending upon the person offering sacrifice, the time of year, and the sacrificer’s individual, familial, or communal circumstance. Those offering *paśubali* may do so for spiritual, practical, or material gain such as the advancement toward salvation, protection from evil spirits, or the opening of a new business.⁸⁵ Almost all of my interlocutors made certain to emphasize the importance of tradition. In addition to receiving spiritual and pragmatic gains, the performance of *paśubali* is favorable because it honors the ancestors by maintaining longstanding family traditions and, by consequence, evoking remembrance of the deceased—an act of great importance.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Interview no. 1, Kathmandu, June 22, 2018, interview in English; Interview no. 2; Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal,’” 778.

⁸⁶ John N. Gray, “Bayu Utarnu: Ghost Exorcism and Sacrifice in Nepal,” *Ethnology* 26, no. 3 (July 1987): 184, accessed September 21, 2018, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/36920420/>; Interview no. 1; Interview no. 2; Interview no. 4; Interview no. 7; Interview no. 8, Kathmandu, July 19, 2018. Translator used; Interview no. 9, Kathmandu, July 24, 2018. Translator used; Interview no. 10, Kathmandu, July 25, 2018. Interview in English; Michael Witzel, “Macrocosm, Mesocosm, and Microcosm: The Persistent Nature of ‘Hindu’ Beliefs and Symbolic Forms,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 1, no. 3 (December 1997): 512, accessed December 30, 2017, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11407-997-0021-x>.

Chickens and goats comprise the large majority of sacrifices in Nepal, but deities accepting sacrifice will also take buffalo, ducks, and pigeons.⁸⁷ Of course, exceptions do exist, and scholars have observed the sacrifice of sheep and serpents in Kathmandu as well.⁸⁸ The offering of a more valuable animal over a less precious one—such as a goat over a chicken—may more potently appeal to the deity, and may help to secure the sacrificer a place of greater favor. That being said, those who do not have the resources to offer valuable animals may offer less costly animals and even vegetables with no disadvantage.⁸⁹ Sacrificial animals must also be of a certain gender and quality. Females are generally not accepted, and male goats must have first have been castrated—as this will “make him strong to be sacrificed.”⁹⁰ Black goats are favored, but those with brown or mixed-colored coats are not rejected.⁹¹

The ritual is typically performed by a male priest or by the male elders of a family or community, but women often play the role of the sacrificer—the participant who, in the words of Hubert and Mauss, benefits from the sacrifice or undergoes its effects.⁹² For some, preparations for the ritual—and the ritual itself—may involve a number steps, and for others, there is little to no preparation and very few steps.⁹³ Some of my interlocutors spoke of the necessity to apply the *tilaka* mark and to offer smoke and vegetal material to

⁸⁷ Interview no. 1; Interview no. 2; Interview no. 7;

⁸⁸ Bert van den Hoek, and Balgopal Shrestha, “The Sacrifice of Serpents. Exchange and Non-Exchange in the Sarpabali of Indrāyanī, Kathmandu,” *Bulletin De L'Ecole Française D'Extrême-Orient* 79, no.1 (1992), accessed December 20, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3406/BEFEO.1992.1812>; Owens, “Blood and Bodhisattvas,” 262.

⁸⁹ Interview no. 4; Interview no. 5; Interview no. 6, Kathmandu, July 4, 2018. Interview in English; Interview no. 7.

⁹⁰ Interview no. 2. Direct quote; Interview no. 5.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Cult of the Goddess Kujjika: A Preliminary Comparative Textual and Anthropological Survey of a Secret Newar Goddess* (Nepal Research Centre Publications, 2001), 9; Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 10; Interview no. 9; Interview no. 10.

⁹³ Interview no. 2; Interview no. 8; Interview no. 9.

the deity before the sacrifice, and scholars have noted preparatory rites including the blessing of knives and sacrificial posts.⁹⁴ One component, however, was cited by almost all of my interviewees and has been noted extensively in the literature of scholars writing about animal sacrifice in South Asia: the “acceptance” of the sacrifice by the sacrificial animal.

If an animal does not freely accept its sacrifice, then it is not offered.⁹⁵ Those who practice sacrifice in Nepal identify an agency and selfhood within the sacrificial animal. The animal has the capacity to pray and to offer himself to the deity on behalf of his family or community.⁹⁶ He can communicate directly with the deity—an act which proves to be especially powerful during a *paśubali* ritual as he becomes a mediator and exists in the realm of the “mesocosm,” as some have said.⁹⁷ Indeed, one of my interviewees spoke of the caution he and his community must exercise while performing *paśubali*. “[When performing the ritual] we will narrate the sacrifice out loud. We don’t say everything out loud. If we say something out loud then we are obligated to fulfill it. The goat is the messenger.”⁹⁸ As a messenger, the goat receives a glorified status before his sacrifice; he is fed abundantly and may be painted with red or yellow paste to signify

⁹⁴ Interview no. 7; Interview no. 8; Owens, “Blood and Bodhisattvas,” 262; Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal,’” 783, 788. The *tilaka* mark is a mark that is stamped or painted on the forehead and is made of colored paste. The shape and color of the mark may indicate a Hindu’s “sect.” For example, a large red circle—roughly the size of a nickel and made by mixing red herb paste with dry rice—is applied to the forehead for those worshipping Devī.

⁹⁵ Radhika Govindrajan, “‘The Goat That Died for Family’: Animal Sacrifice and Interspecies Kinship in India’s Central Himalayas,” *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 3 (August 2015): 505, 510, accessed December 7, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/amet.12144>; John N. Gray, “Keep the Hom Fires Burning: Sacrifice in Nepal,” *Social Analysis* 1 (February 1979): 89, accessed December 7, 2017, <https://search-proquest-com.librarylink.uncc.edu/docview/1300723874/fulltextPDF/83F815F3F82D405FPQ/7?accountid=14605>; Interview no. 1; Interview no. 2; Interview no. 7, Interview no. 8, Interview no. 9; Owens, “Blood and Bodhisattvas,” 262; Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal,’” 788.

⁹⁶ Dyczkowski, *The Cult*, 2; Govindrajan, “The Goat that Died,” 510.

⁹⁷ Michael Witzel, “Macrocosm, Mesocosm.”

⁹⁸ Interview no. 2.

his exaltation. This is reserved only for goats that have taken the vow to be sacrificed. The vow is complete when water sprinkled on the goat causes him to shake.⁹⁹ The shaking is the signal that he has accepted and is ready for his sacrifice.

The procedure for the beheading of the sacrificial animal may vary from one community to another. The following account describes the procedure taken at the Dakṣiṅkāli Temple, an open air temple dedicated to the goddess Kālī and situated on the outskirts of Kathmandu within the sacred town of Pharping.

3.4 *Paśubali*—The Procedure: Observations at the Dakṣiṅkāli Temple

On Tuesdays and Saturdays throngs of people come to the Dakṣiṅkāli Temple to offer oblations and receive blessings from the goddess Kālī. After waiting for hours with flowers and vegetables in hand or with animals on strings or tucked under their arms, Kālī devotees find themselves at the front of the quarter-mile line which ends at the borders of the main temple. There, a spigot of flowing water is used to wash and purify animal offerings before the sacrifice. Once purified, the animal is taken past the main altar to the sacrificial priest who begins the process of beheading. Chickens are killed without any need of assistance. Holding back the chicken's wings and head in his left hand, the priest uses his right hand to sever the head of the chicken with multiple sawing strokes. Goats require the use of an assistant priest who holds the back legs of the animal to prevent it from moving excessively and hindering the fluidity of the sacrifice; a smooth sacrifice ensures the deity's satisfaction and the sacrificer's receipt of blessing.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Govindrajan, "The Goat that Died," 510; Gray, "Hom Fires," 89; Interview no. 1 ; Interview no. 2; Interview no. 7, Interview no. 8, Interview no. 9; Owens, "Blood and Bodhisattvas," 262; Samanta, "The 'Self-Animal,'" 788.

¹⁰⁰ Interview no. 2.

During the beheading, the sacrificer watches and may experience a physical response—as in the case of a women I observed who thrashed violently, apparently overcome with the force of Kālī. Once the head of the animal has been severed, its carcass is given back to the sacrificer who may take it to an on-site processing location where half a dozen men skin hides and pluck feathers to prepare carcasses for consumption. Once prepared, carcasses are taken home where they are cooked and eaten as *prasād*.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Samanta “The ‘Self-Animal,’” 787; Interview no. 1; Interview no. 2; Interview no. 4; Interview no. 5. *Prasād* was defined by one of my interviewees as “blessed food.” The entry for *prasāda* in *A Sanskrit Dictionary* reads: “the food presented to an idol , or the remnants of food left by a spiritual teacher (which any one may freely appropriate to his own use).” See: Williams, *A Sanskrit Dictionary*, 697.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LAYERS UNDER “VIOLENCE”

This chapter will present the variety of emphases concerning sacrifice that emerges when one looks beyond the “culmination” of the ritual—the “violent” beheading of the animal—to the components and characteristics that precede and lie beneath the moment of beheading. A 2015 article by Radhika Govindrajan, whose research centers upon sacrifice in Northern India, will serve as a starting point from which to move forward and from which to compare preceding theories and definitions of sacrifice. Evidence from Nepal will then be used to expand upon the ideas of Govindrajan and to illuminate the layers of depth in sacrifice.

4.1 Radhika Govindrajan—Counterparts to Violence

Radhika Govindrajan’s article, “‘The Goat That Died for Family’: Animal Sacrifice and Interspecies Kinship in India’s Central Himalayas,” presents *paśubali* as characterized primarily by love rather than violence. Although recognizing violence as a component of sacrifice, Govindrajan demonstrates how violence, and the sense of immorality often associated with it, is offset in *paśubali* by revealing a deep layer of love and compassion that exists between sacrificer and sacrificial animal. Indeed, Govindrajan does not attempt to obscure violence, and she even argues that it is vital to the formation of interspecies kin relations. She is, however, careful not to portray violence and its attributed characteristics “aggression” or “immorality” as the defining aspects of sacrifice. Heavily significant and often overlooked, “interspecies kinship”—a constituent of sacrifice which stands as a counterpart to violence—is fostered not only through the act of killing but also through bonds between human and animal which are the result of a

relationship characterized by nurturing, care-taking, and attention.¹⁰² These bonds, she argues, counteract aggressive violence by shaping the act of sacrifice with a markedly non-violent component.¹⁰³ Govindrajan describes violence as a vital element to sacrifice, but one whose “immoral” or “aggressive” attributions may be offset by its counterparts—compassion, guilt, kinship, and love.

Like Bataille, Govindrajan presents intimacy as intertwined with violence. The intimacy described by Govindrajan reflects the affection that a mother may feel for a child. Bataille’s intimacy is often linked to eroticism, but it also represents a sacred world lost to humans.¹⁰⁴ He argues that the desire to regain this lost intimacy is the chief cause of sacrificial violence. Govindrajan, too, recognizes a strengthened sense of intimacy resulting from the act of sacrifice. Both posit a deeply-felt connection between sacrificer and victim. Govindrajan discusses how the death of the animal causes the sacrificer to mourn like a grieving parent, and Bataille discusses the union of the sacrificer and victim and how one is able to feel and experience through the other.¹⁰⁵ For both authors, sacrifice causes two separate entities to fuse with one another in an intimate way—as a parent to a child, or a lover to a beloved. Violence is the means by which this is achieved.

Govindrajan argues that sacrificial goats—commonly raised by the families that sacrifice them—are viewed in the eyes of their families as children.¹⁰⁶ In this way, the animals display a need for nurturing, and those who offer care begin to experience emotional attachments to the animals. The profound affection for the animal makes its

¹⁰² Govindrajan, “The Goat that Died,” 505.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 506.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 510-515; Bataille, *Erotism*, 85; *Theory of Religion*, 35, 37.

¹⁰⁵ Bataille, *Erotism*, 21; *The Accursed Share*, 56.

¹⁰⁶ Govindrajan, “The Goat that Died,” 510-515.

sacrifice especially sorrowful, and this deep love, repaid by the goat in his willingness to be sacrificed on behalf of his family, offsets the violence apparent in his killing.¹⁰⁷

Govindrajan states, “I close with a reminder that isolating the violence of sacrifice from its companion constituents—love, guilt, grief, and devotion—would be to do a fundamental injustice to the complexity of the interspecies encounter it entails.”¹⁰⁸

Indeed, as will be shown in the following passages, *paśubali* in Nepal supports the notion that love, guilt, grief, and devotion form the “companion constituents” of sacrificial violence.

4.2 Evidence from Nepal

“Families raise the goats from the time they are born,” said one of my interlocutors.¹⁰⁹ “Many families fall in love with their goats, so it is very hard to sacrifice them. The goat is like family. Sometimes people will even bring the goat to the temple and just leave it because they are too sad to see it killed.”¹¹⁰ Another interlocutor reiterated this, similarly noting the occasional abandonment of the animal and the reason for doing so.¹¹¹ This tells us a lot. Because of such deep affection for the family goats, some—by abandoning active participation and the direct witnessing of the ritual—risk losing the guarantee of the ritual’s occurrence or the ritual’s success. Govindrajan, after quoting an interviewee who was consoled by her faith in her sacrificial goat’s rebirth, noted that this need for consolation points toward the distress and difficulties that must be faced when one is forced to come to terms with the death of a cherished animal.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 515.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 516.

¹⁰⁹ Interview no. 1.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Interview no. 6.

¹¹² Govindrajan, “The Goat the Died,” 507.

But what about animals that are purchased rather than raised? Perhaps due to the variance in the practice from Uttarakhand to Kathmandu, Govindrajan’s article—though quite thorough—lacks any reference to this. My interlocutors in Nepal, however, have noted that it is common to purchase sacrificial animals.¹¹³ Especially in Kathmandu where space for livestock is minimal, people will purchase their sacrificial animals.¹¹⁴ At the Dakṣiṅkāli Temple, the booths that line the main walkway to the temple sell goats and chickens as well as other ritual items. The compassion that one would feel for a purchased animal is presumably much less than what one would feel for a raised animal. Nevertheless, one interviewee spoke of the remorse she felt at having to sacrifice goats that her family had bought. “I don’t like to see the animal killed, and I don’t even want to eat it. Sometimes I feel guilty, but this is my tradition, so I am bound to it.”¹¹⁵ This statement shows that for some, the compassion—and perhaps even affection—felt for the sacrificial animal is not dependent upon its status as “purchased” or “family-raised.” The fact that the goat is a sentient and self-aware being is enough to evoke the same empathy found in “interspecies kinship”—a bond which results from everyday proximity. Thus, even where bonds formed through proximity are absent, the feelings of love that offset sacrificial violence often still endure.

¹¹³ Interview no. 2; Interview no. 4; Interview no. 5; Interview no. 9.

¹¹⁴ Interview no. 5.

¹¹⁵ Interview no. 9.

4.3 Tradition

The previous quote raises another important topic: tradition. The word “tradition” may have been the single most used word by my interviewees. The emphasis on tradition points toward yet another aspect of Nepalese sacrifice that holds immense significance. Some—battling the feelings of love which compel them to spare the animals—turn to tradition as a way to make peace with the practice. “It is a tradition, so we have to follow the community rules,” said one of my interlocutors.¹¹⁶ “It’s not that we don’t love the animals, but it is something we must do.”¹¹⁷ To turn away from the long ancestral lines which saw to the continuance of the time-honored custom was—by almost all of my interviewees—unthinkable. One interviewee—the only one I spoke to who successfully broke the tradition of sacrifice in his family after becoming Buddhist—voiced the difficulties he experienced in persuading his family to stop the practice. “My grandfather kept it [sacrifice] because he had a huge throng of family members, maybe 150 people, who followed the tradition.”¹¹⁸ It took him years of persuasion, but he managed to convert some of his family members. Others, he said, still practice.

Like “interspecies kinship,” tradition in sacrifice offsets violence. We may even go so far as to say that sacrifice in Nepal—woven as it is with tradition—justifies violence. “Violence performed under the name of sacrifice has been tolerated when it would not be tolerated under regular conditions,” says scholar Kathryn McClymond.¹¹⁹ “Thus, violence that has been framed as sacrifice can be reinterpreted so that it is not

¹¹⁶ Interview no. 2. Translator used. Direct quote from translator.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Interview no. 10.

¹¹⁹ McClymond, “Sacrifice and Violence,” 326.

immoral or illegal and not viewed as murder.”¹²⁰ Mixed feelings concerning the ethics and morality of *paśubali* never completely disappear, however.¹²¹ This was evident in Nepal when feelings of skepticism arose as I sought out people to interview. I was typically only permitted an interview after ensuring that I was not advocating for animal rights and that I took a neutral stance on the matter. Only after the initial caution did people speak openly about the practice.

4.4 Suchitra Samanta—Intent

It became evident that in addition to tradition, the violent act was pardoned also by intent. The fact that *paśubali* is performed for the good of the individual, family, or community justifies it further. “The sacrifice is a gift. This is not a senseless or purposeless killing,” said one interviewee.¹²² Scholar Suchitra Samanta, writing on *paśubali* in Bengal, verifies this idea by presenting evidence which shows intent as the central component of sacrifice.¹²³ Samanta recognizes a homology between deity, sacrificer, and sacrificial animal; this homology, she argues, is the basis for understanding intent.¹²⁴ When one offers an animal for sacrifice, the sacrificer is offering the part of himself that is animal-like, she contends.¹²⁵ The killing of the animal represents the cessation of the sacrificer’s animal-like qualities, and the deity’s consumption of the sacrificial offering signifies the transformation from “animal-like” to “refined.”¹²⁶ “Divine digestion”—as Samanta calls it—is characterized by a transformation fueled by

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Interview no. 2. Translator used. Direct quote from translator.

¹²³ Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal.’”

¹²⁴ Ibid., 799.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 787.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 800.

the intent to attain salvation.¹²⁷ The intent is the driving force which grants the sacrificer—through the process of transformation via “divine digestion”—realization of his own divine nature; his homogeneity with the divine.¹²⁸ Rather than bringing one from the realm of profane to sacred, sacrifice—driven by an intent whose consequential actions lead to transformation—reveals sameness.

Like Hubert and Mauss, Samanta highlights transformation as a key component of sacrifice. Hubert and Mauss’s transformation is the moral modification of the sacrificer by means of a victim, whereas Samanta’s transformation is the cessation of the animal-like self or “self-animal” by “divine digestion.” Unlike Hubert and Mauss who posit the victim and the divine recipient as external, Samanta recognizes their homogeneity.¹²⁹ Thus, to Hubert and Mauss, the victim—who “represents” the deity and who “signifies” the sacrificer by playing the role of the external substitute—communicates with the deity—an entity who is also external to the sacrificer and exhibits a “sacred vs. profane” binary.¹³⁰

According to Samanta, the notion that the deity is external often shifts the focus of sacrifice to the desires of the deity and his or her desire for appeasement, glorification, or placation.¹³¹ When god, man, and sacrificial animal are homogenous, however, the focus shifts to the intentions of the sacrificer.¹³² Accordingly, the sacrificer’s intent, rather than the desires of the god, form the foundation of *paśubali*. In a passage discussing the concept of the deity Śakti, Samanta notes that Śakti’s divine essence exists in the form of

¹²⁷ Ibid. The intent to attain salvation is an inclusive objective in which can be found other, more physical and material aims such as health and success for individual, family, or community.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 798.

¹²⁹ Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 32.

¹³⁰ Ibid., Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal,’” 785.

¹³¹ Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal,’” 785.

¹³² Ibid., 785, 797-798.

potential within Śakti's devotees who creations formed from her very self.¹³³ She

continues:

The act of offering the sacrificial animal to Kālī is, thus, less of a “transaction” or “communion” between human and superhuman powers (or between the profane and sacred, in Hubert and Mauss's terms). It is, rather, symbolic of a progression leading to union or identification *between sacrificer and deity*. The true *concept* of the deity as Śakti lies, then, in the possibilities of transformation *between sākti-Śakti*. It lies in the self-impetus, or intent, of the sacrificer—in the *process* of transformation itself. The severance, rather than the immolation of the sacrificial animal, may be understood within such a scheme.¹³⁴

For those who follow this line of thinking, it makes sense to emphasize the intent of sacrifice over the physical act of killing. It may be that scholarship is indeed moving in this direction—a direction in which both the violent and non-violent forces which fuel the act of sacrifice are considered. Nevertheless, an emphasis on physical violence is still prominent in literature on sacrifice from the late twentieth century onward. Janet Hoskins, for example—writing on animal sacrifice in Eastern Indonesia—argues that anthropological studies of sacrifice are in need of a greater emphasis upon violence.¹³⁵ Sacrifice, she argues, “involves the violent subjugation and conquest of an animal, but also the ambivalent feelings which follow from that conquest.”¹³⁶ Shortly after Hoskins' article was written, there emerged *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*.¹³⁷ This journal—dedicated to the publication of scholarly writings inspired by René Girard—contains many articles that critique Girard, but it also includes just as

¹³³ Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal,’” 785.

¹³⁴ Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal,’” 798.

¹³⁵ Janet Hoskins, “Violence, Sacrifice, and Divination: Giving and Taking Life in Eastern Indonesia,” *American Ethnologist* 20, no. 1 (February 1993): 159, accessed May 16, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645417>.

¹³⁶ Hoskins, “Giving and Taking Life,” 160.

¹³⁷ Project Muse, “Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture,” Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries, last modified 2018, accessed December 2, 2018. <https://muse-jhu-edu.librarylink.uncc.edu/issue/19940>. The journal's inaugural issue was published in 1994.

many that develop and expound upon his ideas of mimesis, scapegoating, and the role of aggressive violence in sacrifice.¹³⁸ Indeed, one does not have to search hard to find the influence of Girard and other theorists who see aggressive violence as playing a key role in the origins of sacrifice. As the fields of religion, anthropology, and social sciences become increasingly influenced by affect theory and the study of feelings as subjectively experienced, however, it is conceivable that such developments of Girardian theories may dissolve. For now, they remain irrepressible.

4.5 Nepal—Reactions to the Term “*Violence*”

In Nepal, the word “violent” was met with a similar reaction by almost all of my interlocutors. “Some scholars have called sacrifice violent,” I would say. An immediate tension would ensue as my interviewees considered this perspective. Some showed visible signs of agitation, like the man I interviewed in the Boudhanath café. It was clear that to them, this adjective was plainly negative, and it was not the word of choice for describing sacrifice. Even those who confessed to having given up *paśubali* for various reasons—including religious conversion or changes in one’s personal code of ethics—were resistant to the word “violence.”

My interviewee from the café said that scholars calling sacrifice “violent” cannot be scholars from within the tradition. “These are not scholars of the Tantra,” he said. “If I

¹³⁸ “Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture,” Michigan State University Press, last modified 2018, accessed December 2, 2018, <http://msupress.org/books/series/?id=Studies+in+Violence%2C+Mimesis%2C+%26+Culture>.

say ‘violent,’ this is not my subject. What is important is whether the scholar is from the tradition or not. Is the scholar a *siddha*?¹³⁹ It is our tradition. Others cannot say.”¹⁴⁰

The significance of Tantra in the practice of *paśubali* was noted by more than one of my interlocutors. The Tantras are a body of texts and a system of beliefs and practices which include psycho-experimentation.¹⁴¹ *Siddhas*, in South Asian traditions, are masters and teachers of Tantric practices and are often considered perfected beings who have gained voluntary control of their bodily systems and mental activities. Tantrism, according to scholar Agehananda Bharati, has its roots in Indian ideology, and “all tantrics flout traditional exoteric orthodoxy...”¹⁴² The *siddha*, as the master and teacher of the Tantra, would supposedly reflect such ideologies and the roots of the practice in his teachings. The irritation shown by my interlocutor leads me to believe that Tantric teachings concerning *paśubali* would not display a practice fueled by any trace of aggressive violence.

The push-back to the word “violence” among those who actively practiced *paśubali* was expected. What was surprising, however, was the resistance shown by Buddhists and Vaiṣṇavas, most of whom I spoke to conversationally and less formally than my interviewees, but who, nevertheless, expressed the same unease with the term. “Violence” was, in short, a charged word that prompted my interlocutors to correct false impressions of *paśubali* and to become wary of my intentions for our interviews.

¹³⁹ According to my interviewee, a *siddha* is a master of the Tantras. M. Monier Williams defines “*siddha*” as: “one who has attained the highest object,” “thoroughly skilled or versed in,” “sacred,” “illustrious,”... For the complete entry see: Williams, *A Sanskrit Dictionary*, 1215.

¹⁴⁰ Interview no. 7. Direct quote.

¹⁴¹ Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (London: Rider Books, 1992), 20.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 21, 30-31.

CHAPTER FIVE: COMPLICATING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SACRIFICE AND VIOLENCE

Over 700 years ago people [were] playing in the forest with their goats. They went to make a tiger [statue], and went far away to look for a *lalupate*¹⁴³ leaf for the tongue. They [made] the whole tiger, but not the tongue, and while they [were] gone, [an actual] tiger took the goats. So, they [made] *puja* to the tiger. They never put the tongue in the tiger because it might consume everything.¹⁴⁴

This story, told by one of my interviewees, relates the beginnings of sacrifice in his community. “This is why we worship Bhag Bhairav,” he said, “and the community never kills the tiger.”¹⁴⁵ He informed me that the tiger *puja* initiated the tradition of sacrifice that was to follow. Like others in Nepal, he wanted to stress the significance of tradition and ancestry. “When we die we become the history. Even I will become the history. We follow the tradition. It brings good fortune,” he said.¹⁴⁶ “I don’t think [sacrifice] is called violence. No one has a right to judge. It helps to gather the family and to bring peace.”¹⁴⁷

The comments that my interviewee made in addition to his story reiterate some formerly-made assertions with regards to *paśubali* in Nepal, specifically: 1) tradition is an immensely significant aspect of *paśubali* in Nepal; 2) many Nepalese remain guarded with the use of the word “violence” in sacrifice; 3) intent plays an important role as a force that drives sacrifice. Each of these three points—and others presented in chapter

¹⁴³ Nepali word for “poinsettia.”

¹⁴⁴ Interview no. 4. Paraphrased.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. Direct quote. Bhag Bhairav is a tiger-faced incarnation of Śiva. This deity was one of the very few male deities to be mentioned by any of my interlocutors as a recipient of *paśubali*. The tiger’s association to Bhag Bhairav necessitated the tiger’s preservation in my interviewee’s community despite the animal’s reputation for wreaking havoc on small Nepalese villages. Tigers—widely feared and respected throughout Nepal—were abundant before the widespread habitat loss of modern decades that heavily decreased the numbers of wild tigers in Nepal.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Paraphrased quote.

four—illuminates something about sacrifice that departs from the “sacrifice = violence” association. When we look closely at these points, we not only depart from this association, but we begin to complicate it. We start to see where this association obscures, where it misses the mark, and where it is challenged. We reveal its tendency to limit and to restrict; and consequently, we may be roused to uncover what it conceals. What we find underneath are strata of inter-related forces and components—woven together and building an intricate web of history, tradition, belief, intent, kinship, community, and practice—to name a few.

5.1 Other Possible Relationships between Sacrifice and Violence

A close examination of various sacrificial practices and substances reveals that sacrifice is far more complex than the single act of destroying an animal to benefit an individual or community. Sacrifice often involves multiple activities, and frequently the victim’s death carries less significance than other procedures.¹⁴⁸

Here, Kathryn McClymond reaffirms the argument made by Radhika Govindrajan who—as shown in chapter four—presents violence as a component of sacrifice which stands on equal footing with its counterparts. “Violence may be only one of many elements in sacrificial ritual,” says McClymond, “yet it may have richer significance precisely because of its relationship to those other elements.”¹⁴⁹ Govindrajan’s article provides a paradigmatic example of this in the way that she displays violence as helping to shape “interspecies kinship.”¹⁵⁰ “Violence-as-equal-component” complicates understandings of sacrifice and violence in that violence is examined on the same grounds as the other components that characterize it. Like the

¹⁴⁸ McClymond, “Sacrifice and Violence,” 324.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Govindrajan, “The Goat that Died.” See chapter four.

theories of Hubert, Mauss, and Bataille violence—in this sense—is not set apart as central. The relationship we can conceive here is that *sacrifice absorbs violence* or *sacrifice assimilates violence* into a fusion of inter-related components—none of which are independent of the others. In this way, violence becomes integrated and incorporated into a larger picture of sacrifice that is enormously multifaceted.

Another conceivable relationship between sacrifice and violence is that *sacrifice offsets violence*. Again, Govindrajan’s article provides exemplary evidence of this in her discussions on love in “inter-species kinship” as a principal element of sacrifice.¹⁵¹ Samanta, too, in her examinations of intent, recognizes violence as counterbalanced by other elements.¹⁵² Further still, evidence from Nepal—particularly that which revolves around tradition—shows how violent and non-violent aspects of sacrifice blend together to create an equilibrium. To summarize this point made in chapter four: familial and communal bonds—made through the continuance and maintenance of ritual practices set in motion by the ancestors—are of such import that they nullify the physical violence of the animal’s beheading.

To take this point one step further, some may argue that *sacrifice justifies violence*. Indeed, Kathryn McClymond argues in favor of this possibility. Discussing self-sacrifice she states, “By invoking the language of sacrifice, the violence that one experiences takes on meaning, and the victim displays an element of agency in his or her own death and suffering.”¹⁵³ “The language of sacrifice” and the “agency of the victim” are reflected in Nepal in ways that point toward *paśubali*’s power to excuse violence.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Samanta, “The ‘Self-Animal.’” See chapter four.

¹⁵³ McClymond, “Sacrifice and Violence,” 326.

First, the act of “invoking the language of sacrifice” can clearly be seen in Nepal as a justification of violence. Two of my interlocutors—dismayed at witnessing an increase of “improper practice” of *paśubali* in their community—said that some have begun to abuse *paśubali*’s capacity for the justification of violence. “It is all about taste,” said one. “Nowadays in this new culture, when people want to eat meat, they sacrifice,” said the other.¹⁵⁴ The exploitation of *paśubali* in this manner shows how some in Nepal have recognized—and have used to their advantage—the pardoning of violence that sacrifice offers.

Second—in regards to McClymond’s reference to the “agency of the victim”—we can see how Nepalese *paśubali* brings this concept into play as yet another justifying component of sacrifice. In Nepal it is recognized that both agency and willingness are at play in the goat’s acceptance of his death. He readily assents to his beheading, and his selfless death gains his family the favor of the deity. One of my interlocutors told me how the sacrificial animal began to rely on human assistance for his death.

Many years ago, the sacrifice occurred through Tantra Yoga, and now people use weapons and knives. The old tradition was just through *mantra*.¹⁵⁵ In the old tradition people would talk with God. The Tantric *siddha*¹⁵⁶ could speak with the animal and knew how to tell if the animal accepted the sacrifice. The animal would have a *kuṇḍalinī* awakening,¹⁵⁷ and it would will itself to die. It could will the *prāṇa*¹⁵⁸ to leave from its body and sacrifice itself without assistance.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Interview no. 5; Interview no. 6. Direct quotes.

¹⁵⁵ “Speech,” “sacred text or speech,” “a prayer or song of praise,” “a Vedic hymn or sacrificial formula.” See: Williams, *A Sanskrit Dictionary*, 785.

¹⁵⁶ See footnote 125.

¹⁵⁷ In Tantrism, *kuṇḍalinī* is the “coiled” energy that exists at the base of the spine. Through yogic techniques, one can open a vertical channel up the spine that *kuṇḍalinī* energy can ascend until it reaches its highest point centered in the brain or at the crown of the head. This rising or “awakening” results in a heightened sense of religious and spiritual experience. See: Bharati, *Tantric Tradition*, 291-292.

¹⁵⁸ *Prāṇa*, often correlated with breath, is said to be the “life-force energy.” The relinquishment of one’s *prāṇa* is analogous to one’s death.

¹⁵⁹ Interview no. 7. Paraphrased quote.

According to my interlocutor, in Nepal's history of sacrifice there occurred a switch from the sacrificial animal's unassisted self-immolation to an assisted beheading.¹⁶⁰ Humans thus became the instrument required to perform the ritual—a ritual that at one point needed no physical human assistance. Presumably then, had this switch not occurred, unassisted self-immolation would still be occurring. One could certainly argue that this further serves to justify the violence of sacrifice—a violence that in this case would simply be the result of the necessary utilization of physical force required to behead the animal. The story above reaffirms the belief in the animal's complete agency, but it also touches on the human's desire for the animal to be sacrificed. The animal does not sacrifice on behalf of itself, but on behalf of its family.

That being said, the sacrificial animal in *paśubali* gains favor for himself as well. The altruistic self-offering secures the animal a better rebirth, or, according to some, frees the animal from the cycles of birth and death altogether.¹⁶¹ This becomes a cause for celebration. The animal has not been killed—at least not in the traditional sense of the word—but it has been released from the inevitable suffering that characterizes the cycles of birth and death. Any trace of aggressive violence in the animal's beheading becomes invalid or pardoned.

Clearly, “violence” in *paśubali* cannot be measured on the same grounds as aggressive behavior—the direction that some theorists and scholars have taken the study of sacrifice. If there's anything to be said about the evidence that has been presented in this essay, it's that the relationship between violence and sacrifice is complicated.

Another way to look at it is that *sacrifice complicates violence*. Violence—as it is

¹⁶⁰ My interlocutor did not explain the reason for this switch.

¹⁶¹ Govindrajan, “The Goat that Died,” 506-507; Interview no. 10; Owens, “Blood and Bodhisattvas,” 262.

experienced and perceived differently across cultures—becomes even more muddled when it enters into the realm of sacrifice. Remarks which declare any sacrificial act to be “violent” would *ideally* be accompanied by a consideration of one’s own perception of violence as a product of one’s collective experience—an experience rooted in a specific time and place. Only by explicitly disclosing such considerations, can a scholar move away from the tendencies that have—and have continued to—limit the study of sacrifice.

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