

# Gadhimai 2024

***The number of buffalo sacrifices plummeted from 22,500 in 2019 to fewer than 7,000 in 2024, says Kamlesh Shah***

**E**very five years, during November-December, hundreds of thousands of Hindus gather at the Gadhimai Temple in Nepal, near the Indian border, for a festival that has ignited both reverence and controversy. Known as “the world’s bloodiest festival” it involves the mass slaughter of animals offered as sacrifices.

This event holds significant importance for many in India, with millions crossing the border to appease Gadhimai. During this time, hundreds of thousands of animals are illegally transported and brutally sacrificed.

The origins of this practice date back to Bhagwan Chowdhary, the founder of the Gadhimai Temple in Bariyarpur, Bara District. In a dream, the goddess Gadhimai promised Chowdhary power and prosperity in exchange of a blood sacrifice. Initially seeking human blood, Chowdhary ultimately offered animal blood instead.

In 2016, the Supreme Court of Nepal ordered the government to phase out animal sacrifices, but this ruling was largely ignored. Despite legal challenges from opponents, the horrific practice continued in 2019 and in 2024. The Nepal Government was also not keen to stop this superstitious and brutal practice which is condemned worldwide.

This time, the Akhil Bharat Krishi Go Seva Sangh (ABKGSS) and Shree Vardhman Parivar (SVP) aimed to significantly reduce the number of animals sacrificed compared to the previous event in 2019. The ABKGSS team developed a strategic plan to enhance their impact. The aim was to stop hundreds of



**Photo courtesy: Sneha's Care**

thousands of animals from illegally crossing the Indo-Nepal border to be sacrificed at the Gadhimai Mela from December 7 to 9, 2024.

## Considerable Success

Prior to venturing to mitigate sacrifice in another country, an extremely onerous task, the ABKGSS team conducted thorough research about this brutal event, uncovering that the Gadhimai sacrifice is rooted in superstition and myth. The senseless killing of countless animals to fulfil personal desires is unacceptable to any rational individual. No goddess can be appeased with the blood of innocent lives. The Nepalese government appeared to be motivated by the substantial economic benefits derived from this festival, which attracts millions of attendees.

Our research also investigated past sacrifice events, the Supreme Court’s ruling, and the efforts of animal rights NGOs in Nepal. This groundwork empowered ABKGSS and SVP to confront this massive sacrificial event.

The Gadhimai sacrifice exemplifies humanity's insatiable greed, exploiting superstition to fulfil unquenchable desires. Millions of people attend the festival, bringing countless animals for slaughter from all over India and from Nepal itself.

On December 8, 2024 the slaughter began at 7 am. Nearly 6,500 male buffaloes were killed by 11:30 am. The beheading process was heartbreaking and cruel, conducted in a large area surrounded by 13 feet walls where CCTV and photography were banned.

Devotees were seen with knives in their hands chasing buffalo calves. Goat sacrifices were scheduled for the next day on December 9. Thousands of goats were killed in open fields. This gruesome spectacle seems more about profit than ritual or reverence, with the Nepalese government capitalizing on the event's economic potential.



**Photo courtesy:**

A glimmer of hope emerged thanks to the exemplary support from the Government of India, the vigilant efforts of the Sashastra Seema Bal, Bihar Police, animal activists and dedicated volunteers. Experienced teams were deployed along the entire Indo-Nepal border connected to Bihar's districts, including West Champaran, East Champaran (Motihari and Raxaul), Sitamarhi, Madhubani, Supaul and Kishanganj. Assertive volunteers maintained a presence at the borders for nearly 20 hours a day, creating a compelling environment that kept law enforcement agencies on high alert. The pressure from senior officials, fuelled by thousands of emails from around the world, further strengthened these efforts. Four NGOs actively worked at the border with the noble intention of saving animals from brutal killing — they intercepted vehicles attempting to smuggle animals for sacrifice — with the ABKGSS having the most significant presence.

The collective efforts of all involved produced remarkable results. The number of buffalo sacrifices plummeted from 22,500 in 2019 to fewer than 7,000 in 2024 — a marked decline that underscores our commitment to change. Although the exact number of goat sacrifices remains uncounted, it is clear that they too decreased substantially compared to previous events. This success is a testament to the unwavering support of generous donors, divinity forces, the divine blessings of heavenly Pujya Acharya Shri Muktidarshansuri ji, and the dedicated efforts of the ABKGSS and SVP teams. Together we made a profound impact.

## **Faces Behind the Success**

We must extend our heartfelt gratitude to the unsung heroes who worked tirelessly behind the scenes; our success would not have been possible without their

invaluable contributions. The remarkable achievements of our mission are largely due to the unwavering dedication of our young champions from the Shetrunjay Yuvak Mandal — Fenil, Keval and Harsh — along with their entire team. They ingeniously crafted an automated email campaign that targeted 16 key authorities responsible for preventing the illegal export of animals across Indian borders.

The SVP team, along with the eloquent Shri Arpit Shah from Kolkata, Saket Shah from Ahmedabad, and the Jaianik Group, mobilized public support through compelling video messages. Their collective efforts culminated in an astounding 68,000 emails sent to these authorities from around the globe, generating powerful momentum that compelled government officials to take immediate action. Together, we have made a significant impact.

Our close associate and animal activist Advocate Raju Gupta played a pivotal role by visiting the SSB headquarters in New Delhi, where he met with the Director General and Inspector General of the SSB. He emphasized the importance of the Supreme Court's 2016 ruling in the case of Gauri Mulekhi vs. Union of India (WP 881/2014) and expressed his readiness to support the SSB in curbing the illegal flow of animals across the borders for sacrifice. The SSB responded positively, recognizing the urgency of the situation and committing to provide full support from both headquarters and local districts known for animal smuggling. This unwavering support from the SSB was instrumental in saving thousands of lives in 2024.

To combat the rampant illegal trafficking, the ABKGSS formed two specialized teams: One focused on Nepal and the other on the Indian border. Advocate Raju Gupta, and IPS aspirant Shri Ashish Barik travelled to Nepal



**Photo courtesy: Sneha's Care**

on November 30, 2024, as part of Team A. They conducted extensive groundwork in Kathmandu, meeting with Supreme Court Advocate Shri Arjun Kumar Aryal, representatives from the Indian Embassy, and the Director General of the Armed Police Force (Nepal's border security agency). They conveyed the urgent need to end the sacrificial practices rooted in superstition and condemned worldwide.

Team A also visited the Gadhimai site, spending two additional days to observe the sacrificial rituals and identify opportunities for intervention. They collaborated with prominent animal welfare NGOs to devise a comprehensive plan to rescue and save animals destined for sacrifice. Their relentless efforts extended from Gadhimai to Patna (Bihar), where they engaged with volunteers stationed at the most vulnerable borders to prevent illegal smuggling.



The presence of Team B was a game changer. This dedicated team operated around the clock from November 28 to December 10, 2024, prioritizing the rescue of innocent lives over their own comfort. Under the guidance of experienced leaders like Advocate Shri Shashank, the spirited Ms Latha, zestful ground leader Ms Neha and her committed volunteers, they worked tirelessly in extreme challenging conditions, determined to save as many lives as possible.

Senior figures, including Sant Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Shri Shantilal Jain and Dr Kalyan Gangwal, played crucial roles in achieving success. The invaluable guidance of Ms Sneha Shrestha, founder of Sneha's Care Animal Welfare Organization, provided critical insights that proved to be a game changer for our successful operation.

Through the collective efforts of these passionate individuals and teams, we made significant strides in protecting innocent lives and challenging the status quo of animal sacrifice. Their commitment and resilience serve as an inspiring testament to the power of collective action in the face of cruelty.

We have learned a lot from this experience and we are confident of stopping this cruellest of cruel practice by creating mass awareness amongst devotees who are misled and therefore innocent lives are brutally beheaded. To end this age-old mythical practice, we need support of Sant Samuday, community, opinion makers, NGOs and Governments of Nepal and India.

Animals rescued by ABKGSS volunteers from the borders are rehabilitating safely in Gaushalas and were seen under armed police protection on December 12, 2024. Of the 336 animals rescued, custody of 305 was given and they were shifted to Bodhgaya Gaushala run by Rushabh Foundation and Vandevi Gaushala near Motihari, both in Bihar. The rest of the animals were rehabilitated by the SSB/ Police in other Gaushalas. Actually the team convinced many not to take animals across the border to Gadhimai since slaughtering was not real Bali.



*Kamlesh Shah is a Trustee of Akhil Bharat Krishi Go Seva Sangh and Head of Research Team at Shree Vardhman Parivar. He is also a BWC life member*

## BWC's contribution

**O**ur BWC Trustee, Rajeev Sethi contacted Shri Bikesh Shrestha, Founder of the Federation of Animal Welfare Nepal, only to be told that this time the court had done nothing to prevent animal sacrifices. But, the Gadhimai temple authorities had requested people to donate money instead of sacrificing animals so that they could build a bigger and better temple, therefore hopefully the number of animals sacrificed would be reduced.

The solution and hope was to stop animals from crossing over. BWC had already written to India's Prime Minister, Home Minister, Sashstra Seema Bal, Chief Ministers and Director Generals of Police of Bihar, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, asking them to ensure that no animals cross the Indo-Nepal border.

And that's exactly what Shri Kamlesh Shah organised. BWC congratulates him and all others who helped in stopping the illegal movement of animals from India into Nepal. Although thousands of animals were beheaded, those that were saved were lucky – each and every life is an individual and matters.