

ABSTRACT

While India is regarded as one of the most devout but tolerant cultures, the other side of the coin is still depressing due to issues like animal sacrifices performed to appease Gods and goddesses. People believed offering or sacrificing an animal to a deity would protect human life from different kinds of natural calamities, diseases, etc. People performed this superstitious practice considering it part of their religion. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960 protects animals from cruelty and prohibits the slaughter of animals except for consumption purposes. However, the Act itself placed a contradictory provision that is against the very purpose of the Act, i.e. sec. 28 of the Act, which stated that any animal killed in a manner prescribed by a particular religion could not be considered an offence. Though the section did not include the term “sacrifice”, people used this section to defend themselves, considering it as part of religious practises. Hence, the divergence arises. This socio-legal study aims to explore multifaceted aspects surrounding animal sacrifice within the context of religious practices in Tezpur, Assam. By examining the socio-cultural, religious and legal dimensions, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the intricate dynamics involved in this controversial issue. The study begins by delving into the historical and cultural roots of animal sacrifice in India, tracing its origins and evolution through various religious texts, traditions and cultures—the research narrative in nature with an extensive literature review. Different religious places of worship in Tezpur city, such as Mohabhorobi Temple, Durga Temple, and Mosques, were picked up to witness the ground reality of the practice. Interviews with key stake holders such as religious leaders, members of animal welfare organisations and academicians were conducted to analyse and understand the practice. The researcher also used the doctrinal method to analyse different judicial pronouncements and statutory acts dealing with animal sacrifice to understand the legal position and restrictions placed on the practice. After thoroughly analysing the study, the researcher has found that animal sacrifice in the name of religion should not be promoted and is not a fundamental component of religion. Even if animal sacrifice as an oblation is prohibited, the religion may continue.

The study suggested that the central government needs to develop a comprehensive policy to end the practice of animal sacrifice in the name of religion. The idea that no religion condones the killing of animals should be propagated by religious leaders, academicians and other experts.

Key Words: Animal sacrifice, Religion, Superstitious belief, Stakeholders, Assam