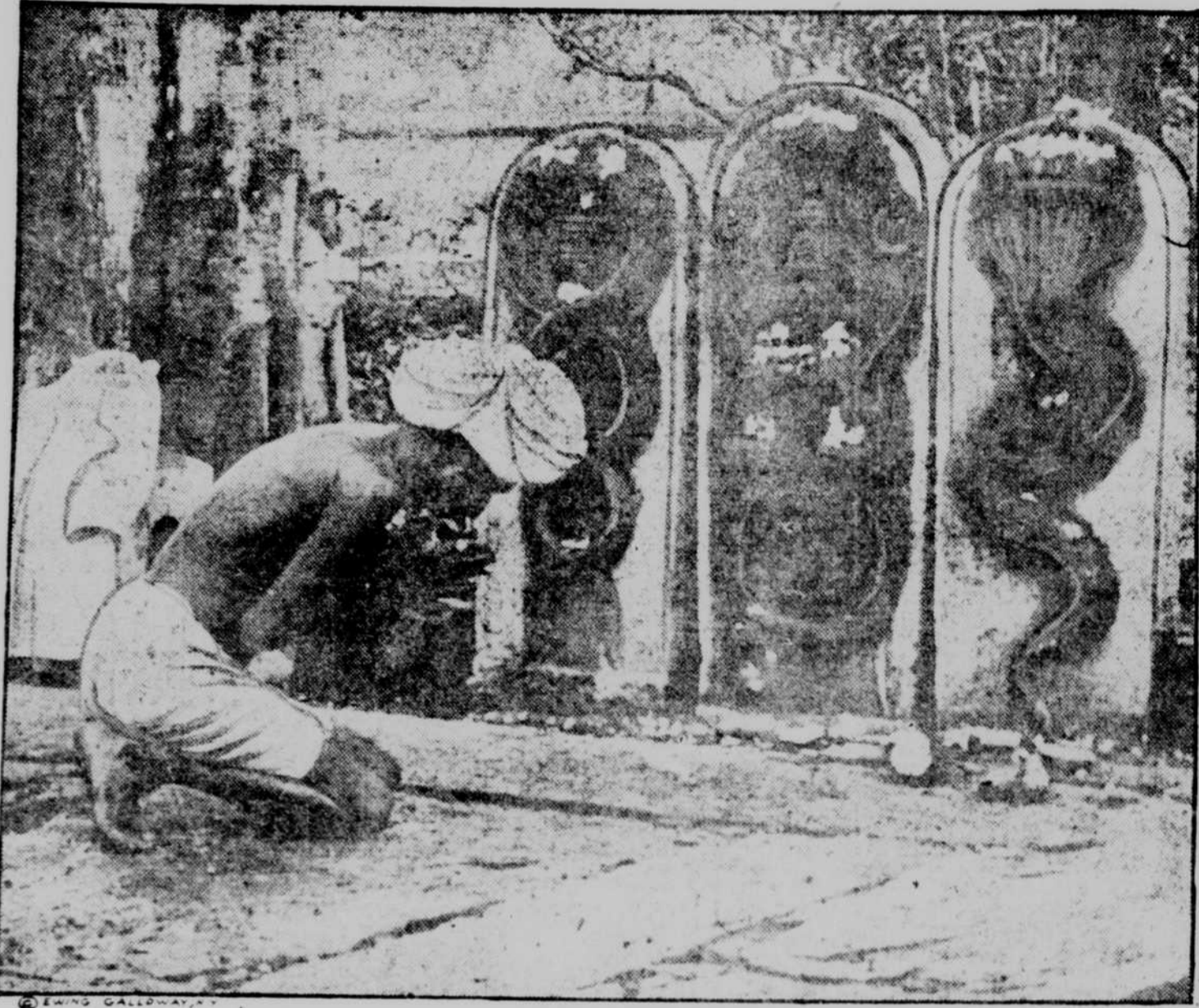


# Human Sacrifices Still Claimed by Burma's Strange Gods

Natives of India's Wild Hills Continue Chopping Off Their Neighbors' Heads and Even Flaying Them Alive to Appease the Evil Spirits and Win Favor From the Good Ones



On the left, a remarkable photograph of a pious native kneeling in prayer at a wayside shrine, before the extraordinary graven images of three of the deities he worships. Note the flowers with which he adorned the images before beginning his devotions

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An Indian religious fanatic torturing himself by hanging suspended by the ankles for hours at a time in the burning heat of the tropical sun. This will, he believes, help win the forgiveness of heaven for his sins

**H**UMAN sacrifice, the ghastly religious practice that we are accustomed to consider as having completely died out long ago, is still going on in the hills of India, just north of romantic Burma, where the pretty native girl of Kipling's "Mandalay" lived amongst the pagodas and the sound of temple bells.

Very often travelers are horrified, upon approaching a village in the Naga Hills, above Burma, to see rows of skulls or dripping heads hanging from the trees. They are told that these are the remains of victims who have been surprised and deliberately murdered in the jungle because it was thought the gods demanded new sacrifices.

A recent government investigation brings to light the fact that there are at least a few persons sacrificed in this way every year, and that they are usually slaves brought from the neighboring territory of Assam for just this ghastly purpose.

The Governor of the frontier of Burma reports that when the Naga tribesmen are wealthy enough to buy more slaves the yearly sacrifice often reaches as many as twenty or thirty victims. Many of these are small boys and girls kidnaped from Assam. The government, he says, often steps in to save these unfortunates when it hears of the approaching sacrifice, but it has been noticed that in these cases the murders are merely postponed.

Sometimes the victim for the proposed propitiating of the "terhoma," or evil spirit, is earmarked and allowed to go about the village until they are ready for him. Government officials hasten to buy the freedom of these marked persons, although they realize that the redemption money is quite likely to be spent on a new set of slaves from Assam.

A pathetic story is told by an English civil service officer who was staying in the hills of the violent death meted out to a young slave boy in order to ward off the mysterious "terhoma," or haunting evil spirit.

The boy belonged to another tribe and was sold to an influential and prosperous savage in one of the villages of the Naga Hills. Unfortunately for the poor boy, this man died shortly after the purchase.

To the villagers this meant nothing else than that the dread "terhoma" was angry and must be appeased as usual with the sacrifice of a human being. The fact that the boy was purchased just before the death of his owner was considered a bad omen, and in their simple minds they decided that it was on account of the purchase that the evil spirit was enraged.

Immediately upon coming to this decision, they flayed the boy alive, cutting his flesh off bit by bit until he died—then divided the body, giving a piece of flesh to each man in the village to put into his "dolu," a large corn basket, to avert evil.

On another occasion one of these hill villages was attacked by smallpox and a number of villagers died. Therefore

it was decided that one of the strange spirits who are supposed to represent that particular scourge was angry and a village council was called.

It was decided that the only way to avert the evil spirit was to have four men go out and bring in a head as an offering to the "terhoma." And so four of those who had not been stricken with the terrible disease crept through the jungle, to lie in wait by the cultivation path of a neighboring village.

The murder, from the Naga point of view, was eminently successful. The four crept upon a woman, a small boy and a baby belonging to the other village and succeeded in securing for their angry deity the baby's head and the ears of the other two, which they carried off and buried in the vicinity of the village to be protected.

The natives firmly believed that the angry deity was appeased, for shortly after the murder of the baby the smallpox ceased to spread in the village.

The people of the Naga Hills are head-hunters, looking upon the decapitating of a human being as a praiseworthy exploit at any time, and the more praiseworthy if the victim is taken by surprise.

In one of the villages, among the Lhotas, any human flesh brought into the village on return from an expedition of this kind is examined by a sort of board of old men, who decide whether it is really what it is stated to be by the hunter. If it is, there is a ceremony celebrating the hunter's success.

Nor does the Naga tribesman make any very great distinction between human heads and the heads of game. Man is only the biggest and the most dangerous game.

Under certain circumstances, heads taken from women and children are more highly valued by the headhunter than those taken from men, provided, in the case of the children, that the teeth are cut.

In 1911 an Englishman, Captain Porter, of the 17th Infantry, then quartered at Kohima, went on a shooting trip into the Lhota country. Accompanied by some men of Phiro, he was obliged to stop for shelter at night in one of the villages, but was received with reluctance, because it was found that there was enmity between his savage attendant and his host.

The reason for the feud between these two savages from different villages was

that in the days of their youth they had quarreled over a very pretty girl in the village where Captain Porter's attendant lived.

The story was that the girl's mother had said that she should marry whichever of her suitors would bring her the ears of some girl belonging to a neighboring tribe.

It turned out that Captain Porter's attendant was the successful ear taker and suitor; the wife of the host had no ears, and hence must have been the victim!

The heads of women and children are taken more often under less romantic circumstances, however. The favorite method is to hide at dawn by a neighbor's well and to take the head of the first woman or child coming to draw water.

The idea of the necessity of human sacrifices to the unseen spirits is prevalent all over India, although in the Hindu religions of the more civilized parts of the country it is more usually in the form of self-punishment and self-torture.

A favorite mode of mortifying the flesh among the strange fakirs and sadhus at the bazaars along the sacred River Ganges is to sit under the blazing Indian sun all day, with five small fires lighted close to the body.

Other Eastern mystics who devote



Entrance to the Shive Dagon Pagoda, in Rangoon, one of India's most magnificent places of worship

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All these tortures, including burial alive for five or six weeks, are self-inflicted. They cannot be compared with the deeds of the northern hill districts, where the superstitious kill their fellow men.

Human sacrifice has always been more or less connected with the religious ceremonies of primitive peoples, and numerous instances of it are mentioned in the Bible. Abraham, it will be remembered, came near slaying his son Jacob on the mountain, and we know that in Ur of the

Chaldees in Abraham's time the temple of the strange Moon God was the scene of countless terrible sacrifices. The blood of human victims is believed to have run so freely on the altars that gutters and drains had to be constructed to carry it away.

The problem of putting an end to these cruel human sacrifices is being wrestled with to-day by the ruling authorities in the Fiji Islands, the African jungles and other parts of the world, as well as in the hill regions of India.

In Africa the purpose of human sacrifice is the same as it is in India—to strengthen alliance with the supernatural world. A typical sacrifice in the Congo region is described by a missionary:

"The savages allowed themselves the luxury of two or three human sacrifices a week. This ceremony was the occasion of public rejoicing.

"The condemned person, firmly secured, is permitted to witness the height of joy which his death is to bring. At

length they untie him, make him sit on a log slightly raised from the ground, his arms hanging beside his body, his hands fastened to the ground by means of forked sticks whose extremities are securely fastened in the soil.

"Suddenly the crowd is silent; the village sorcerer has appeared. In his woolly hair more than two hundred feathers of different colors are arranged artistically to form an enormous headdress; two white circular marks surround the eyes, which thereby acquire extraordinary brightness.

"The sorcerer advances with short steps, swinging his feathery mane, holding in his nervous hand the terrible execution knife that must sever the head with a single blow; and he stops and greets the wretch whom he has to execute.

"Then, as though seized with madness, he goes through contortions that no pen could describe; he tosses himself about like one possessed, leaps, doubles up, advances so gently, so much like a reptile, that you cannot perceive any movement of his feet. The crowds applaud.

"But silence is restored the moment the fatal knife is raised. The sorcerer then begins a rhythmic chant; it is the chant of death. Thus singing and gesticulating, he approaches his victim, who is a helpless witness of these preparations. With white chalk he marks a line around the victim's neck—it is there he will strike when the time arrives.

"Twice brandishing the knife, he touches the condemned man's neck with it. The chant is ended; with a leap the sorcerer approaches the victim and again steps back; twice more his arm strikes the air by way of trial.

"Then the knife is lowered and a single stroke cuts off the head, which the bent pole sends rolling far away.

"With a shout the crowd leaps on the body. All is over; soon the savages will joyfully return to their homes to discuss with interest all the horrid details of the sight they have witnessed."