

## "The Sacred Rac of the Asu Tribe"

- (1) An Indian anthropologist decided to study foreign cultures which had customs similar to those of India. One culture fascinated him because it considers one animal sacred, much as the people in India love the cow.
- (2) The tribe he studied is called the Asu and is found in North America north of Mexico. This society has a great interest in caring for and feeding of the rac--an animal much like a bull in size, strength and behavior. In the Asu tribe, it is almost a requirement to own at least one rac. Anyone not owning at least one is held in low esteem by the community because he/she is too poor to maintain one of the beasts properly. Some members of the tribe, to display their wealth, even own herds of racs.
- (3) Unfortunately, the rac breed is not very healthy and usually does not live more than five to seven years. Each family invests large sums of money each year to keep its rac healthy and shod, for it needs new shoes often. There are many rac specialists in each community, and they demand a large payment whenever a tribesman must treat his ailing rac.
- (4) At the age of sixteen, many Asu youths undergo a puberty rite in which the rac is important. The youth must petition a community council and then go through the ceremonies that surround the care of the rac. If proven worthy, the youth can keep a rac of his/her own.
- (5) Although the rac may be used as a beast of burden similar to an ox, mule, or horse, they have many habits that are considered by other cultures as harmful to the life of the Asu people. For example, the rac breed is increasing at a very rapid rate and the Asu tribesmen have given no thought to limiting the rac population. As a consequence, the Asu must build more and more paths for the rac to travel on since their love of racing other rac at high speeds require special areas to be created to prevent them from hurting themselves. The cost of smoothing the ground is too expensive for any one Asu tribesman to afford, so it has become a community project and each tribesman must pay an annual tax to build new paths and maintain the old ones.
- (6) In addition, unlike the sacred Indian cow, the excrement of the rac cannot be used as either fuel or fertilizer. On the contrary, its excrement is totally useless and harmful to the natural environment. Worst of all, the rac is prone to rampages in which it runs down anything in its path, much like stampeding cattle. Estimates are that the rac kill thousands of Asu tribesmen in a year.
- (7) Despite the rac's high cost of its upkeep, the damage it does to the land, and its habit of destructive rampages, the Asu still regard it as being essential to the survival of their culture.

**Adapted from "The Sacred Rac," by Patricia Hughes, Focusing on Global Poverty and Development, by Jayne C. Millar (Washington D.C. Overseas Development Council, 1974), p. 357-8.**

Sacred: adjective. dedicated to a religious purpose and so deserving great respect.

Esteem: noun. respect and admiration

Shod: adjective. Wearing footgear/ shoes

Petition: verb. to make or present a formal request to (an authority) with respect to a particular cause.

Beast of burden: noun. an animal such as a mule or donkey that is used for carrying loads.

Annual: adjective. occurring once every year.

Excrement: noun. waste matter discharged from the bowels; feces; poop

Essential: adjective. absolutely necessary; extremely important.