



Hindus in ritual tongue-piercing in east India

印度東部祭典 金屬棒穿信徒舌

Low-caste Hindus thronged temples in eastern India to take part in a festival that sees believers drive metal rods through their tongues to purify their souls.

In one temple in Beinon village, 80km from Kolkata in the state of West Bengal, 1,000 spectators were **champing at the bit** to catch a glimpse of the ritual despite opposition from the authorities to the **gory** practice.

"There has been attempts to stop this festival but we will not be deterred," said Shashti Bhushan Chakraborty, head priest of a temple to Hindu god Shiva, where an AFP reporter saw 60 people have spikes driven through their tongues.

The iron rod is removed once the believer makes a round of the village collecting **alms**, which usually takes about an hour.

"This is an ancient practice and we have been conducting it every year," Chakraborty said in Beinon, one of the many West Bengal villages where the popular ritual, called Shiber Gajan, took place.

Only low castes volunteer for the practice — which starts on the eve of the Bengali New Year — in the hope the searing pain will cleanse their soul and grant them higher status.

Low-caste Hindus still face severe discrimination despite efforts to reduce the grip of the hierarchical system on Indian society.

They have restricted access to education, employment and housing and are often reduced to performing **menial** tasks such as cleaning sewers and collecting garbage.

Organizers rejected official fears that the tongue-piercings could cause serious injuries or life-threatening infections.

"We have attained this knowledge from our forefathers and so far there has been no infections among these people," said Kalipada Bhattacharya, one of those responsible for the piercings.

低種性印度人擠滿印度東部寺廟參加傳統節慶。慶典中信徒將金屬棒子穿過舌頭，以疼痛淨化靈魂。

儘管印度官方反對這種血淋淋的活動，位於西孟加拉省，離加爾各答八十公里的貝農村，依然聚集約一千名觀眾，大家擠破頭，迫不及待想看一眼難得一見的習俗。

就在法新社記者眼見六十多人將尖棒刺穿舌頭的慶典上，印度教濕婆神寺廟主祭司夏希提·卜山·查克拉波爾提說：「這慶典受到多次干預，但我們不會低頭的。」

信徒就這樣舌插棒子繞行村子一圈，收集各方施捨物之後才可

將棒子取下。整個過程大約一小時。

正在貝農村的查克拉波爾提說：「這是個古老的習俗，我們每年都舉辦一次。」如西孟加拉省許多村子一樣，貝農村也照慣例舉行這種名為西貝爾·嘎容的儀式。

只有低種性的人自願參加。參與者以極度的疼痛淨化心靈，祈求在種性階級中晉升。該慶典於孟加拉新年除夕展開。

印度當局致力化解社會階級。即便如此，低種性人依然受到嚴重歧視。

低種性人無論受教育、就業與住房都遭限制，而且只能做瑣碎低階的工作，如掃水溝跟撿垃圾等。

主辦單位反駁官方阻止祭典的理由，表示穿刺舌頭並不會造成嚴重傷害或威脅生命的感染。

負責穿刺他人舌頭的卡立巴達·巴塔查亞說：「我們從祖先那兒傳承這項古老的習俗，至今無人因此受到感染。」

(法新社/翻譯：吳岱環)

An Indian Hindu devotee adjusts a metal rod pierced through his tongue during the ritual of Shiva Gajan at a village in Bainan, some 80km south of Kolkata, on April 14, 2010.

PHOTO: AFP

四月十四日，距離加爾各答南方八十公里處的貝農村，一位印度教徒參加濕婆神祭典時，舌頭以金屬棒穿刺。圖中信徒正以手調整金屬棒位置。 照片：法新社

TODAY'S WORDS

今日單字

1. **gory** /'ɡɔ:ri/ adj.

血淋淋的 (xie3 lin2 lin2 de5)

例：Audience members complained about some of the gory scenes in the movie. (觀眾抱怨電影中部分血淋淋的畫面。)

2. **alms** /amz/ n.

施捨物 (shi1 she3 wu4)

例：The foundation distributes alms to the poor before New Year. (基金會新年前發送物品救濟窮人。)

3. **menial** /'mi:niəl/ adj.

不需技巧的 (bu4 xu1 ji4 qiao3 de5)

例：Many students take on menial jobs to get through college. (為了繼續念書，許多大學生便做起不需技巧的工作。)

LANGUAGE POINT

重要片語

champing at the bit
迫不及待

Somebody is **champing at the bit** if they are extremely keen to do something. According to the article, the villagers were **champing at the bit** to see people undergo the tongue piercing ritual. The idiom comes from the metal bar — the bit — that race horses bite before a race.

如果有人「champ at the bit」，就代表他非常想做某件事。上文中提到，村民迫不及待地想看舌頭穿刺祭典。這個片語來自「bit」（馬勒）這個字——賽馬比賽前所咬的金屬棒。