

Topic: The Limits to Popular Sentiment

The **bull-taming sport jallikattu** conducted on **the third day of Pongal festival** sparked a national debate. In the last few days, the nation witnessed an uprising in **Tamil Nadu against the ban on jallikattu**. On May 7, 2014, the **Supreme Court of India banned the traditional bull-taming sport** conducted in Tamil Nadu -- Jallikattu -- **after a 10-year-long battle** by animal activists and animal welfare organisations like Federation of India Animal Protection Agencies (FIAPO) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). The Supreme Court ruled that flouting of the ban will attract penalties and **upheld the ban on January 14, 2016** when the Government of India passed an order reversing the ban imposed. There was massive outrage across Tamil Nadu in 2016, but this year, the outrage has turned into nothing less than a revolt, something the Supreme Court, State and Central governments, and organisations like PETA didn't foresee. Before getting into why there is a revolution, mostly peaceful yet powerful, brewing in Tamil Nadu, let us understand what Jallikattu is and what it means to the people of Tamil Nadu.

About Jallikattu:

Jallikattu, in the simplest of terms, is a sport conducted as part of **Mattu Pongal**, the third day of the four-day-long harvest festival **Pongal**. The Tamil word 'mattu' means bull, and the third day of Pongal is dedicated to cattle, **a key partner in the process of farming**. Bulls get more importance over cows for bulls help farmers to plough their field, pull their cart loaded with goods, and inseminate cows, in turn resulting in production of milk, offspring and preserving indigenous species.

1. Temple bulls, usually considered the head of all cattle in a village, are readied for the sport. Temple bulls from different villages are brought to a common arena where the Jallikattu happens.
2. The bulls are then freed into a ground, one by one. Participants are to embrace the bull's hump, and try to tame it by bringing the raging bull to a stop, possibly by riding for as long as possible holding its hump.
3. The bulls that could be tamed are considered weaker, and are used for domestic purposes by the farmers and the untamable ones -- considered the strongest and most virile -- are used for breeding the cows in many villages.

History of Jallikattu:

Jallikattu is believed to be **a tradition practiced since at least last 2,500 years**. Cave paintings, as old as 2,500 years that depicts a man trying to tame a bull, have been found by archeologists. Jallikattu, in the present form, is believed to have played first between **400 to 100 BC**.

A seal, dated between **2,500 - 1,800 BC**, discovered at Mohenjo-Daro that shows bull-taming, is another reference to Jallikattu. There are references of people enjoying witnessing and participating in Jallikattu in Silappatikaaram, one of the five great epics of Tamil literature, and two other ancient literary works like Kalithogai and Malaipadukadaam.

Importance of Jallikattu:

Jallikattu is important to the farmers. It is a chance for them to flaunt their personal strength, the strength of their bulls, love for their cattle and how well they have looked after them and a chance to find out the most potent bull to breed with their cows. **Jallikattu is not a leisure sport** for Tamils, but a tradition that establishes the identity of **hard-working, self-sufficient, powerful Tamil**. Jallikattu also symbolizes a cordial **man-animal relationship**.

The controversy and Animal cruelty angle:

Jallikattu has been a **one-to-one sport**, a bull and a man inside the ring at a time. Recently, however, the way the sport has been conducted changed. What we see now is a one raging bull freed into an arena with many men, each person trying to embrace the hump of the bull and tame the beast. Since the bulls are not as wild and ferocious, people tend to provoke it and there have been reports of **ill-treating the animal**, for instance **getting it drunk, poking it with sharp objects and even smearing chilli powder in its eyes**. Another issue is **gambling**. Men, who put money at stake, betting to tame the bull, take the tradition of bull embracing to an objectionable level where the animal is hurt and left bloodied. But such instances are rare and the main argument Tamils raise, when it comes to the ban on Jallikattu imposed by the Supreme Court, is that a tradition that dates back to over 2,500 years cannot be banned citing rare occurrences mentioned above.

Comparison with Spain Bullfighting:

Interestingly, some have compared Jallikattu to Spanish bullfighting, but in reality, they are as different as chalk and cheese. Here are **five major differences between Jallikattu and Spanish bullfighting**:

1. Jallikattu is a bull-taming sport. It is also a way to identify the best breed for mating. Meanwhile, Spanish bullfighting is purely for entertainment.
2. Jallikattu contestants hold on to the bull's hump and try to get money or valuables tied to the horns of the bull. They are not allowed to hurt or cause injury to the bull, but Spanish bullfighters are free to inflict injuries and provoke the bulls.
3. Bulls used in Jallikattu are brought up with utmost care. They are not supposed to be hurt, but in Spanish bullfighting, a man on horseback armed with a lance inflicts injuries and tortures the bull.
4. Jallikattu contestants are not even allowed to catch the bull by the horns, forget using weapons. However, participants in Spanish bullfighting stab the bull with weapons, thus weakening the animal by blood-letting.
5. Bulls used in Jallikattu are not killed, though some do die in the melee. Bullfighting in Spain ends only after the bull is killed with a sword.

A step to control the outrage:

Bullfighting events recently given **temporary permission to go ahead by the Indian government** have taken place across the state of Tamil Nadu. The events attracted huge crowds, many demanding that the spectacle, known as jallikattu, must be **legalised permanently** and not just provisionally. Subduing angry bulls has long been practised in the state as a sport and is a key part of the harvest festival. The Indian Supreme Court banned it in 2014, ruling it was cruel to animals. But the central government **temporarily cleared the way for bullfighting** events to resume in Tamil Nadu, bypassing a Supreme Court ban. It did so by issuing a **six-month executive order that removed bulls from the purview of the law**. Animals' rights groups are imminently expected to appeal against the move. Various activities involving bulls have taken place, with two people reported to have been killed while holding on to a bucking bull. Events took place throughout the state including the state capital Chennai (Madras), where protesters on Marina beach demanded the **full scale legalization of jallikattu**.

Read further:

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/jallikattu-begins-in-parts-of-tamil-nadu-amid-continuing-protests/articleshow/56714264.cms>

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/jallikattu-live-police-begin-evicting-protesters-from-marina-beach/story-SmJo5OSBmFH0yIgNsntDOL.html>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-38711340>

<https://thewire.in/19157/banning-jallikattu-will-decimate-indias-indigenous-cattle-breeds/>