



## Jallikattu Sport

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**Context :** Jallikattu from cultural turned to legal episode.



**Background :** The Assembly polls round the corner in Tamil Nadu, the Pongal festival and Jallikattu, the traditional bull-taming sport, have caught the attention of the national parties. It is often termed as a controversial sport as has faced long legal battles over cruelty to animals, and which at the same time is a symbol of Tamil culture. In their present efforts to celebrate these cultural symbols ahead of elections, the two national parties have attacked each other over their past stands.

Recently, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has appealed to the Tamil Nadu government to withdraw the order to conduct jallikattu (bull taming sport) citing a letter written by 52 doctors. The letter calls the sport a non-essential activity which will lead to Covid-19 spread.

### In Detail

It is the bull-taming sport is popular in Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Theni, Pudukkottai and Dindigul districts and is popularly known as the Jallikattu belt. It is celebrated in the second week of January, during the Tamil harvest festival, Pongal.

A tradition over 2,000 years old, Jallikattu is a competitive sport as well as an event to honour bull owners who rear them for mating. It is a violent sport in which contestants try to tame a bull for a prize; if they fail, the bull owner wins the prize.

In an age when the farm sector is largely mechanised, there are no major monetary benefits for bull owners in breeding Jallikattu bulls other than the prizes they get during the Jallikattu events. Traditionally, these used to be a dhoti, a towel, betel leaves, bananas and a cash prize of Rs 101. Over the last two decades, the prizes have included grinders, a fridge and small furniture.

### **Cultural Importance**

Jallikattu is considered a traditional way for the peasant community to preserve their pure-breed native bulls. At a time when cattle breeding is often an artificial process, conservationists and peasants argue that Jallikattu is a way to protect these male animals which are otherwise used only for meat if not for ploughing.

Kangayam, Pulikulam, Umbalachery, Barugur and Malai Maadu are among the popular native cattle breeds used for Jallikattu. The owners of these premium breeds command respect locally.

### **Legal Episode**

In India, several laws have been formed to prohibit the unfair treatment with the animals, thus the legal battles surrounding animal rights issues emerged in the early 1990s. A notification from the Environment Ministry in 1991 banned the training and exhibition of bears, monkeys, tigers, panthers and dogs, which was challenged by the Indian Circus Organisation in the Delhi High Court. In 1998, dogs were excluded from the notification.

Jallikattu first came under legal scrutiny in 2007 when the Animal Welfare Board of India and the animal rights group PETA moved petitions in the Supreme Court against Jallikattu as well as bullock cart races.

The Tamil Nadu government, however, worked its way out of the ban by passing a law in 2009, which was signed by the Governor.

In 2011, the UPA regime at the Centre added bulls to the list of animals whose training and exhibition is prohibited. In May 2014, days before the BJP was elected to power, the Supreme Court banned the bull-taming sport, ruling on a petition that cited the 2011 notification.

## **Present Legal Status**

That is the subject of a case pending in the Supreme Court. The state government has legalised these events, which has been challenged in the court.

In January 2017, months after the death of Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, massive protests erupted across Tamil Nadu against the ban, with Chennai city witnessing a 15-day-long Jallikattu uprising.

The same year, the Tamil Nadu government released an ordinance amending the central Act and allowing Jallikattu in the state; this was later ratified by the President.

Although, Several Non Governmental Organizations including, PETA challenged the state move, arguing it was unconstitutional.

In 2018, the Supreme Court referred the Jallikattu case to a Constitution Bench, where it is pending now. The main question to be resolved is whether the Jallikattu tradition can be protected as a cultural right of the people of Tamil Nadu which is a fundamental right. Article 29 (1) mandates that “any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same”.

Like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka too passed a law to save a similar sport, called Kambala. A similar attempt by Maharashtra, too, was challenged in court, before it was passed as a law.

At present, except in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, where bull-taming and racing continue to be organised, these sports remain banned in all other states including Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Maharashtra due to the 2014 ban order from the Supreme Court.

## **Connecting the Article**

**Question for Prelims :** In which of the following state, the Kambala sport is played

- (a) Andhra Pradesh
- (b) Kerala
- (c) Karnataka
- (d) Tamil Nadu

**Question for Mains :** There are good reasons to criticize the Jallikattu sport but animal cruelty is the flimsiest. Comment.

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