

Why Tamil Nadu is on streets over Jallikattu

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New Delhi: The row over traditional Tamil sport Jallikattu has transformed into a large scale rebellion in the southern state. While the debate over holding a sport should not ideally hold weight when pitted against animal rights, the cultural significance it holds for many in the state has led to the current protests that we are seeing intensify every passing day.

Jallikattu protest

The protests have left the country divided with one side feeling that culture should no longer be a reason for animal cruelty in the 21st century. Jallikattu, they believe, is a terrible spectacle of animal abuse for sake of a few minutes of entertainment which is unacceptable.

For the other side though, the ban on Jallikattu is a case of their cultural heritage being trampled upon by insensitive lawmakers. As the verdict is still out on which side gets better over the other, we bring you a primer on the heritage that protesters and sympathisers in the state see as uncalled interference.

What is Jallikattu?

Jallikattu is an ancient Tamil sport which is celebrated on the third day of the Pongal festival in Tamil Nadu. The word Jallikattu refers to as 'Jalli' which mean gold or silver coins and 'Kattu' which means tied. Therefore, Jallikattu means gold or silver coins tied to the bull's horns. Whoever manages to tame the bull, win the coins in prize and the bull that wins is used for breeding numerous cows. This ancient sport has been practiced for more than 2000 years, but has now turned controversial since the sport often leads to injuries and even fatal accidents such as deaths to the players as well as the bulls.

According to PETA's research, the bulls were often disoriented. Sometimes their tails were twisted, cut off, jabbed, smashed and towed on the ground.

B-town celebrities like Hema Malini and John Abraham have also voiced their protest against this cruelty and called for putting an end to this practice.

The tension is still on whether or not to ban Jallikattu since the Tamilians consider it as their ancient sport which has been celebrated for more than 2000 years and why should it be banned now?

Tamilians and Jallikattu

Tamilians consider Jallikattu as a symbolic event and their pride, since its roots come from their fore-fathers. They

consider Jallikattu as their cultural identity and believe it should continue since it represents their community. They strongly reject cruelty against animals during the festival and demanded that PETA be banished from the state.

However, the controversy on Jallikattu doesn't seem to come to a conclusion. But PETA and other Animal Safety groups continue to fight against what they believe to be a cruel practice done against the bulls.

Controversy

Under the UPA regime in 2011, the Animal Welfare division of Environment Ministry added bulls to the list of animals which are banned from training and exhibition citing cruelty towards animals.

Other animals already in the list were bears, monkeys, tigers, panthers and dogs. The notification was challenged in the Supreme Court and was upheld in 2014.

The Apex court observed that between 2010 and 2014, an estimated 17 people were killed and 1000-odd were injured during Jallikattu events.

The Court said, "Use of bulls in such events severely harmed the animals and constituted an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to the Animals Act."

Under the NDA government, the ministry in 2016 modified its earlier notification and declared that the sport could continue despite the existing ban.

This was in direct conflict with the SC order and was duly challenged by animal welfare organisation such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Subsequently, a stay order was issued by the court.

The issue has once again snowballed into a major controversy and a headache for the AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu which is already facing problems after Sasikala's appointment as party general secretary.

What next

On Thursday, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister O. Paneerselvam met Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting him to overturn the existing ban on the bull-taming sport through an ordinance.

The Prime Minister, however, declined to do so saying the matter is sub-judice in the apex court even as he appreciated the cultural significance of the bull-taming sport.

PM also said the centre will support the state's actions on what he described as a matter of great cultural significance.

He added a central team would be deputed to Tamil Nadu shortly and "all possible assistance" will be extended to address the drought situation in the state.

The union government today urged the apex court to delay its verdict on the bull taming sport saying the centre is working with the Tamil Nadu government to find a solution to the conflict. The Court, meanwhile, has agreed to defer its verdict for a week.

Meanwhile, the Tamil Nadu government has sent a draft ordinance for the Centre's approval.

“An ordinance will be promulgated for conducting Jallikattu in Tamil Nadu,” the chief minister has said.

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