



Issue No. 1
February 2017

Sadhana Education Society's
L.S. Raheja College of Arts & Commerce

Inhouse Departmental Publication

SOCIAL ISSUES



Department Of Sociology

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L.S.RAHEJA COLLEGE OF ARTS AND COMMERCE

INHOUSE DEPARTMENT PUBLICATION

NAME: SOCIAL ISSUES

DEPARTMENT : SOCIOLOGY

ISSUE NO.: FEBRUARY 2017.

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Preservation of Cultural Tradition -

A Sociological perspective on the sport of 'Bull running'

Jallikattu



A youth trying to take control of a bull in Jallikattu

Jallikattu (or **sallikkattu**), also known as **eru thazhuvuthal** and **manju virattu**, is a traditional spectacle in which a *Bos indicus* bull, commonly of the Kangayam breed is released into a crowd of people and multiple human participants attempt to grab the large hump of the bull with both arms and hang on to it while the bull attempts to escape. Participants hold the hump for as long as possible, attempting to bring the bull to a stop. In some cases, participants must ride long enough to remove flags on the bull's horns. Jallikattu is typically practiced in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu as a part of Pongal celebrations on Mattu Pongal day.

Jallikattu has been known to be practiced during the Tamil classical period (400-100 BC). It was common among the ancient people Aayars who lived in the 'Mullai' geographical division of the ancient Tamil country. Later, it became a platform for display of bravery and prize money was introduced for participation encouragement. A seal from the Indus Valley Civilization depicting the practice is preserved in the National Museum, New Delhi. A cave painting in white kaolin discovered near Madurai depicting a lone man trying to control a bull is estimated to be about 2,500 years old.

This specific animal sport or cultural event is not practiced only in India. It is also a very popular Cultural event in Spain called 'Encierro' or 'The Running of the Bulls'

Running of the Bulls (Encierro)



The **Running of the Bulls** is a practice that involves running in front of a small group of cattle, typically six, of the *toro bravo* breed that have been let loose on the town's streets that have been sectioned off.

The most famous running of the bulls is held during the eight-day festival of Sanfermine in honour of Saint Fermin in Pamplona although they are also traditionally held in other places such as towns and villages across Spain, Portugal, in some cities in Mexico and southern France during the summer.

Spanish tradition says the true origin of the run began in northeastern Spain during the early 14th century. While transporting cattle in order to sell them at the market, men would try to speed the process by hurrying their cattle using tactics of fear and excitement. After years of this practice, the transportation and hurrying began to turn into a competition, as young adults would attempt to race in front of the bulls and make it safely to their pens without being overtaken. When the popularity of this practice increased and was noticed more and more by the expanding population of Spanish cities, a tradition was created and stands to this day.

However controversy has surrounded this sport that is rooted in culture.

Controversies

Animal welfare activists are concerned about matters related to the handling of the bulls before they are released and also during competitor's attempts to subdue the bulls.

Practices before the bull is released include prodding the bull with sharp sticks or scythes, extreme bending of the tail which can fracture the vertebrae, and biting of the bull's tail. There are also reports of the bulls being forced to drink alcohol to disorient them, or chilli being rubbed in their eyes to aggravate the bull.

During attempts to subdue the bull, they are stabbed by various implements such as knives or sticks, punched, jumped on and dragged to the ground. In variants in which the bull is not enclosed, they may run into traffic or other dangerous places, sometimes resulting in broken bones or death. Protestors claims that Jallikattu is promoted as bull taming, however, others suggest it exploits the bull's natural nervousness as prey animals by deliberately placing them in a terrifying situation in which they are forced to run away from the competitors which they perceive as predators and the practice effectively involves catching a terrified animal. Along with human injuries and fatalities, bulls themselves sometimes sustain injuries or die, which people may interpret as a bad omen for the village.

Animal welfare organizations, the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organizations (FIAPO) and PETA India have protested against the practice.

The sport as practiced in Spain also has its share of opposition and controversies. Many opponents argue that bulls are mentally injured by the harassment and shouting of both participants and spectators, and some of animals may also die because of the stress, especially if they are roped or bring flares in their horns.

Many animal rights activists oppose the event. PETA activists created the "running of the nudes", a demonstration done two days before the beginning of San Fermín in Pamplona. By marching naked, they protested the festival and the following bullfight, arguing the bulls are tortured for entertainment.

Despite all this, the festivities seem to have wide popular support in both countries.

A chronology of events and court directives regarding holding of the festival in India.

The Animal Welfare Board of India filed a case in the Supreme Court of India for an outright ban on Jallikattu because of the cruelty to animals and the threat to public safety involved.

On 27 November 2010, the Supreme Court permitted the Government of Tamil Nadu to allow Jallikattu for five months in a year.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests issued a notification in 2011 that banned the use of bulls as performing animals,

On 7 May 2014, the Supreme Court of India struck down the state law and banned Jallikattu altogether, citing animal welfare concerns.

On 8 January 2016, the Government of India passed an order exempting Jallikattu from all performances where bulls cannot be used, effectively reversing the ban.

However, on 14 January 2016, the Supreme Court of India upheld its ban on the event, leading to protests all over Tamil Nadu.

On 8 January 2016, the Ministry of Environment and Forests permitted the continuation of the tradition under certain conditions, effectively ending the ban; however, this was overturned by the Supreme Court on 26 July.

On 16 January 2016, the World Youth Organization (WYO) protested at Chennai against the stay on ban on conducting Jallikattu in Tamil Nadu. The WYO also demanded a ban on PETA in India.

After hearing the petitions which were led by the Animal Welfare Board of India challenging central government's notification, the Supreme Court of India on 12 January ordered a stay, issued notices to the central government and the government of Tamil Nadu and later refused to lift the stay. Numerous Jallikattu events were held across Tamil Nadu in protest of the ban, and hundreds of participants were detained by police in response. The Supreme Court has agreed to delay its verdict on Jallikattu for a week following the Centre's request that doing so would avoid unrest. The Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi informed the Supreme Court bench that the people of Tamil Nadu were "passionate" about Jallikattu and that the issue was being resolved between the Centre and the State government.

Due to these protests, on 21 January 2017, the Governor of Tamil Nadu issued a new ordinance that authorized the continuation of jallikattu events. On 23 January 2017 the Tamil Nadu legislature passed a bi-partisan bill, with the accession of the Prime Minister, exempting jallikattu from the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1960). The first legal jallikattu under this exemption is scheduled on 1 February in Alanganallur, Madurai district

Portrayal in popular culture and Media

Jallikattu is often shown in Tamil cinema where the hero tames the bull to prove his gallantry.

Popular cinema, an integral part of the modern social and political life of Tamil Nadu, has often portrayed jallikattu as a symbol of masculinity, and social status. And there are instances of the portrayal running as a counter-narrative, wherein a subaltern hero tames an overlord's bull and turns it into a challenge to power and authority. In films such as *Cheran Pandian*, *Rajakumaran* and *Murattukaalai*, the conflict between the hero and the villain is portrayed through Jallikattu, during which the owner whose bull loses, shoots the bull.

The encierro of Pamplona has been depicted many times in literature, television or advertising, but became known worldwide partly because of the descriptions of Ernest Hemingway in books *The Sun Also Rises* and *Death in the Afternoon*. The cinema pioneer Louis Lumière filmed the run in 1899.^[21]

The run is depicted in the 1991 Billy Crystal film *City Slickers*, where the character "Mitch" (Crystal) is gored (non-fatally) from behind by a bull during a vacation with the other main characters.

The run appears in the 2011 Bollywood movie *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, directed by Zoya Akhtar, as the final dare in the bucket list of the three bachelors who have to overcome their ultimate fear; death.

Functional Perspective

Culture is a way of Life. B.Malinowski, considered as one of the founding fathers of British Social Anthropology, is of the opinion that every culture is a working whole – and integrated unity – in which every element makes a functional contribution. Any institution functions as an integrated whole in fulfilling purposes or needs.

‘Jallikattu’ in Tamil Nadu, India, or **‘Encierro’** in Pamplona, Spain, being age old cultural traditions that dates back to centuries, have wide popular support in the villages of their origin and cannot be discontinued, as this performs a function to meet the needs of those who practice it and would also hurt the sentiments of many who consider it an important ritual.

The ritual of Jallikattu has a direct impact on the rural economy in Tamilnadu. It is extremely important as it is linked to agriculture and livestock and the livelihood of small farmers and is a symbol of pride and strength. It also helps to test the value of the bulls and allows a large number of native cow species to remain in the market.

Adequate safeguards and precautions can be undertaken and instituted to minimize the impact of injuries, and rules must be laid down and adhered to, like in any other sport. This includes setting up of medical posts with physicians and nurses, veterinary services, and ambulances on call to attend to any emergencies caused to humans or animals.

Traditions and rituals which are an important component of one’s Cultural heritage cannot be sidelined and dismissed as this would have negative repercussions as has been witnessed in the recent attempts to ban the sport in Tamilnadu.