

JALLIKATTU: WHY TAMILIAN BULLFIGHTING MATTERS NOW MORE
THAN EVER

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to explore the yearly traditional Tamilian bullfight known as Jallikattu and the controversy surrounding its banning by the Supreme Court of India in 2017. This tournament is held during *Pongal*, the Hindu harvest festival that celebrates the tools of agriculture as well as agrarian life in Tamilnadu. Jallikattu is celebrated on the third day of *Pongal*, the day for giving thanks for the cows and bulls used in everyday agricultural life to provide milk, transportation, and manual labor to plow the fields. In the past, the goal of Jallikattu was to wrestle the bull to the ground by having several men jump onto it and overpower the animal. However, the rules have changed since the ban on Jallikattu in 2017 and the resulting protests that reversed the decision. The Supreme Court of India and PETA India have battled with the state government of Tamilnadu for over a decade about whether Jallikattu should be legal or not. At the end of 2016, the Supreme Court instated a permanent ban and did not rescind their decision. This provoked an enormous protest that spanned across Tamilnadu and had supporters of all genders, castes, ages, and religions. A combination of Tamilian spirit and a turn away from Western influence created a sociopolitical atmosphere that led Tamil people around the world to steadfastly protest the ban until it was revoked right before *Pongal* started in 2017.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Jallikattu is a revered Tamilian tradition of bullfighting that has been practiced since agriculture became an important part of Indian life and is now a phenomenon synonymous with Tamil pride. The past decade has seen the development of a feud of sorts between the Supreme Court of India and the practitioners of Jallikattu. On one side is the Supreme Court, PETA, and the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI). The other consists of the DMK party in Tamilnadu and the Tamilian people. Starting in 2006, these various parties have been locked in a legal battle where petitions and acts are passed back and forth. The Supreme Court and its affiliated parties have banned Jallikattu in some measure or another but the local Tamilian state had made provisions for the event to still take place. In 2017, these tensions came to a head when the Supreme Court struck down a state law that had allowed for Jallikattu to continue and formally banned the sport (Armangue 2017). This sparked an immense and immediate backlash from Tamilian people all across Tamilnadu. The protest originated among college students but soon spread to all Tamil people regardless of age, caste, or religion. The ferociousness of the response and the unity it inspired is compelling; the “entire state was at a standstill and people took to the streets” to protest for a week (Armangue 2017). This thesis aims to explore why the banning of Jallikattu inspired such a unified and unrelenting response that crossed barriers that have held people at odds for hundreds of years. It is necessary to look at which factors of Tamilnadu’s development has led to the idealization of this sport. The relationship between *Pongal* and Jallikattu throughout time will give insight into the ideals that are celebrated by Jallikattu as well as people’s attitudes towards the spectacle. The final aspect of this analysis will focus on the modern-day discussion surrounding Jallikattu as well as a deeper look into the possibility of Jallikattu coexisting alongside legal regulations that will inevitably limit the practice. A firsthand

viewing of the 2019 Jallikattu that took place in Alanganallur, a town famous for its yearly Jallikattu outside of Madurai, will inform this analysis and will factor heavily into the modern conversation surrounding Jallikattu. Attending the event itself was an insightful way to hear the opinions of people who supported and disliked Jallikattu as well as an amazing opportunity to experience the rush and vigor of the sport.

Before addressing any of the other concerns surrounding this event, it is imperative to establish the context around Jallikattu and explain how the sport itself takes place. The name Jallikattu comes from the Tamilian words “*salli*” meaning “coins” and “*kattu*” meaning “package” because each bull that participates in Jallikattu has a small purse of coins attached to its horns (Akilon 1974). Participants of the sport aim to grab and hold on to the large hump on the bull’s back while the bull tries to buck them off. Their goal is to hold on to the hump for as long as possible, bring the bull to a stop, and to rip the bag of coins off the horns of the bull. Though there are several variations of Jallikattu that are practiced throughout Tamilnadu, there are two types that are considered the most common. The first variation has one bull released from a closed space into the midst of numerous contestants and each contestant must attempt to tackle and subdue the bull. In the second variation, the bull is directly released into an open ground. In all versions of Jallikattu, contestants are only allowed to attempt to tackle and subdue the bull one at a time. The goal of the sport may also vary depending on where a specific Jallikattu is taking place. For example, one city may require that a contestant must hold onto the hump of the bull for fifteen seconds while another city requires that contestants must remove the coin purse from the horns of the bull to be considered the victor (Akilon 1974).

An important part of the whole competition and the discussion surrounding Jallikattu is the bull itself. The bulls that are selected for Jallikattu are chosen carefully and are taken care of

by the local temples. Jallikattu bulls, especially the winners, are bred very carefully so they can go on to mate with the cows of local farmers. Due to this relationship between farmers and the local temples, a relationship based on the former's dependence on the latter is established and reinforced year after year. Villagers and farmers communally raise these bulls that are cared for by the temple by providing them with food, affection, and offerings throughout the year (Jayaraman 2019). The expensive costs associated with owning and raising a bull of such pedigree made such a relationship a necessity. Other times, rich or powerful households will own their own bull that resides in their private care that will also be entered into the tournament. Many people that are proponents of Jallikattu point to this process as a means of preservation of culture and of this specific breed of bulls. Without this rigorous system that prioritizes the bull's wellbeing, care, and attention, many breeds of high pedigree bulls may lose their status through crossbreeding. Several common breeds are the *Pulikulam* and *Kangayam* lines, both of which have aggressive tendencies and are solely used for Jallikattu. The breeding and upkeep of these bull breeds are a point of pride to the people who invest time, money, and love into these bulls. A Deputy Speaker who applied for an emergency ordinance to continue practicing Jallikattu considers "bulls [like family members]" and speaks to their necessity to preserve native breeds of bulls and to reduce dependence on foreign breeds (Jayaraman 2019). This urge for preservation of bulls and culture has been exacerbated by the steadily decreasing count of bulls across Tamilnadu. The discussion about the treatment of Jallikattu bulls is extremely relevant to this discussion because a big part of the argument against Jallikattu is on charges of animal cruelty. It may be hard to understand where this accusation comes from considering the comfortable and lavish lives these bulls live. Though their whole lives were lived extravagantly, Jallikattu bulls are exposed to a lot of trauma during the day of *Mattu Pongal* and Jallikattu.

The cow protection movement in India has set the precedent for all the legal battles and debates that are now enveloping the Jallikattu movement. This movement has been alive and flourishing since the 1800s and is as much a religiously influenced movement as it is a political one. Many religions throughout India have adopted the cow protection movement and the anti-Jallikattu movement has co-opted sentiments from them. The main point made by these activists is that the sanctity of the cow is not preserved when they are being abused and ill-treated. The cow protection movement is typically used to ban the sale of cattle for the purpose of slaughter and consumption (Mogul 2016). However, by equating Jallikattu with “barbaric treatment” of animals, PETA India and the AWB are able to use cow protection laws to their benefit.

The majority of the cruelty that Jallikattu bulls experience occurs at the very beginning of the sporting event. In 2011, an official report found that the bulls had their tails broken, had chili powder thrown into their anus, had their tails bitten, or were force fed liquor as part of an effort to incite these bulls to violence moments before they meet their human competitors. In addition to these abuses, bulls that become confused or disoriented during the tournament are prone to breaking through flimsy barriers and rushing into traffic and inadvertently severely injuring or killing themselves (Government of India 2011). These types of injuries and deaths had been recorded since the nineties, but it was only in recent years that official reports had been filed at the Supreme Court. The safety and wellbeing of the bulls is one of the central arguments against Jallikattu that was first proposed.

Though protecting and preserving a cultural artifact like Jallikattu is extremely important, the case against Jallikattu also raises issues that should be taken seriously. The first major concern is the massive public health risks that are present at every Jallikattu tournament. Government-run Jallikattu tournaments often have more safety features in place than the norm,

but even then, the protection is extremely minimal. The local government and PETA observed Jallikattu from 2008 to 2014 in order to gather evidence and determine if the sport was as harmless as people claimed. Jallikattu events over the period saw upwards of 40 preventable deaths, a fact that led to the 2016 reinstatement of the ban being put into effect (Staff 2019). Other public health concerns concern the behavior exhibited primarily by men at Jallikattu. Typically, men drink and celebrate raucously in the streets, usually exhibiting behavior that can lead to more rash decisions, injuries, and deaths (Irudayaraj 1990). Concerns about heavy drug and alcohol abuse at these events also work against the interests of families and family values. Upholding family values is a very important facet of life for Indian and Tamilian people. Events like Jallikattu, where there is heavy substance use and risky decisions being made, are the antithesis of the peaceful and idyllic family life. Many fathers, brothers, and sons are involved in Jallikattu and they all take risks by either participating or watching Jallikattu and partaking in substances.

In 2006, the first legal opposition against Jallikattu was filed with the Supreme Court of India by the “foreign” entity PETA after hearing reports of vicious animal cruelty against Jallikattu bulls. PETA India used the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960, which stated that animals should be protected “from unnecessary pain and suffering,” to put a temporary stop to Jallikattu (PETA India 2014). The reports found evidence of harm to animals in a few cases, leading the Supreme Court to immediately ban Jallikattu. Almost immediately, there was backlash from many rural people in Tamilnadu that the bulls live a very prosperous and happy life where they want for nothing. Although this was a significant point of contention between the two groups, the anti-Jallikattu parties submitted complaints that it was as dangerous for humans to be participating or watching this event as it was for the bulls. The barriers in arenas where

Jallikattu takes place are flimsy, wooden sticks that do not offer much protection against the violent thrashing and fighting that is going on within the ring. There have been numerous deaths of spectators of Jallikattu who are not well shielded by these barriers, which is a very preventable and unnecessary tragedy. After Jallikattu organizers learned of this specific complaint, they worked on making the arenas where Jallikattu is held significantly sturdier and safer. In 2009, organizers agreed to a set of terms put forth by the Supreme Court that ensured tougher regulation of safety standards in order to procure a license for Jallikattu to happen. By doing this, they were once again free to hold Jallikattu during *Mattu Pongal*. This type of back and forth legal argument has been ongoing for over the past decade. As the battle continues, different political parties have joined forces with either side of the debate. The DMK party in Tamilnadu incorporated the Pro-Jallikattu movement into their platform and gained much support from the populace as a result (Khan 2017).

The support for Jallikattu stems from a variety of sources but the initial breakout of the Jallikattu protests is indicative of who is involved in this discussion as time progressed. The first mass protests began in Madurai and in the arena outside of Madurai where Jallikattu takes place on January 16th of 2017. The protests started with villagers and residents of Madurai and quickly spread to students (Bahrain 2018). As the mass protests gained attention on social media and support for the pro-Jallikattu movement grew, the fervor to support the local, Tamilian sport was echoed around Tamilnadu by individuals and organizations around the state. People organized a variety of peaceful protests such as sit-ins in popular public locations throughout Tamilnadu and the protests showed no signs of slowing down. By this time, protests had been occurring since January 4th and both the local and national governments were eager for an end to the confrontation. The central government suggested that the local government create an ordinance

to allow Jallikattu in Tamilnadu, and the local government did as recommended. By January 20th, an amendment was sent to the central government and Jallikattu was technically reinstated and a legal practice. This same day, however, the entire state of Tamilnadu experienced a shutdown as organizations chose to stand in solidarity with the pro-Jallikattu movement (Bahrain 2018). The amendment was originally ignored because of the Tamilnadu government's misstep a few years earlier.

It is important to remember that the major ban on Jallikattu that was erected and enforced in 2014 was not the first ban against Jallikattu ordered by the national Indian government. In 2009, the Tamilnadu government had passed an ordinance to regulate Jallikattu on the grounds of protecting the bulls' rights in order to keep being able to have Jallikattu during *Pongal*. However, this ordinance was quickly overturned by the national Indian government after an amendment diverted power to address cows under animal protection laws from the state to the central government. The struggle between the local and national governments eventually settled in 2011 in favor of not allowing Jallikattu to proceed regardless of any introduced regulations. The following years also saw more legal battle during which Jallikattu was allowed by the state and then knocked down by the central government (Mogul 2016). In the minds of many protesters, the Tamilnadu government's previous inability to pass and permanently enforce their ordinance was a sign that the weaker government would not be able to defend its position against the central government. Eight years later when the major protests for Jallikattu were at a peak and the Tamilnadu government supported Jallikattu by introducing a temporary ordinance in its favor, protesters were not convinced that the sport would have permanent protection. People remembered the central government's easy overturning of the 2009 ordinance and were convinced that this solution was not permanent.

On January 22nd, protesters held a Jallikattu that was not monitored by the government as a way to continue their protest, but this event led to injuries and deaths since it did not have the proper safety measures to protect viewers or participants. The following day held violent clashes between police and protesters as law enforcement tried to jumpstart a state that remained at a standstill. By the 24th, various factions of supporters had begun to call off their protests and had agreed to view the ordinance as a temporary victory. Their stipulations focused on ensuring that a permanent solution to the anti-Jallikattu law is found and on removing PETA from India (Kumar 2012). No permanent solution to this issue has been found and every few months, there are whispers of either reinstating the ban or of making Jallikattu a permanently protected cultural celebration.

Support for Jallikattu and the pro-Jallikattu movement became a pan-Tamilian marker of identity, pride, and nationalism. People from every walk of life in Tamilnadu became involved in these protests regardless of gender, class, religion, and caste. It is not often that people in India look past aspects of their identity that delineate them from others to unite for a common cause. However, the powerful association of Jallikattu with Tamil culture allowed people to connect and unite for a cause that previously did not have much attention or support. Only a very, very small fraction of the people who supported Jallikattu had ever seen or are ever going to see a Jallikattu in person. This reinforces the idea that Jallikattu had come to represent something greater than the sport in and of itself: Tamil pride (Kumar 2012). Tamilian pride has always been a significant part of people's identity in Tamilnadu and it is a valuable tool used specifically in this case. Suddenly, attempts to stop or restrict Jallikattu were seen as a suppression of Tamilian culture. Any attack on Jallikattu was equally as much an attack on Tamilian people as a whole. The branding of this protest as a state-wide issue of concern is one of the best strategies used in

this legal battle because the sheer number of people willing to put their lives on hold, made them impossible to ignore. Protecting Jallikattu was now an issue of “protecting Tamil culture from outside influences” such as PETA and foreign corporations that have long resided in India (Kumar 2012). Supporters of Jallikattu also maintain that this sport is the best way to select which are the best bulls to breed for the following year. The winning bulls from Jallikattu become the temple bulls that will breed the best and that will help farmers with their daily lives. It is yet another way in which Jallikattu is embedded in the lives of Tamilian people, though this group of people may no longer represent the majority.

One major influence on whether Jallikattu is legalized or banned is political alliances and connections between politicians and conglomerate companies. It is important to note the differences in opinion between the local and national governments, the roles of major players at both levels, and to examine where the loyalties of various political parties lie. The national government of India, also known as the Centre, was “approached by various animal rights organizations multiple times over the last decade” to ban Jallikattu (Mathew 2017). Among these organizations are PETA India and the Animal Welfare Board of India. The local Tamilnadu government has historically been in opposition to the complete banning of Jallikattu, typically because of the protests that break out every time the ban is instated. They have suggested ordinances and provisions that would somewhat counter the frequent animal abuse but government oversight of every local Jallikattu is not a practical nor a feasible solution. Despite the local government’s attempts to mediate a middle-ground between the protesters and the animal rights advocates, there has not been a permanent solution. This is because ordinances from the local government only last six months. The extent of their power is somewhat diminished because animal rights are protected by the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act

(PCAA) on a national level, and local courts do not have the ability to counter this law. Jallikattu was still being practiced only because of a 2009 Tamilnadu Regulation of Jallikattu Act that was immediately countered but took several years to be struck down. In 2016, the Centre unbanned Jallikattu but it was quickly re-banned within five days by the Supreme Court, which is what sparked the initial revolution of the pro-Jallikattu protest (Ramakrishnan, T. 2017). The Centre now supported Jallikattu since it was a tradition thousands of years old, but the Supreme Court once again did not allow it (Subramanian 2016). This headlock between the two entities led people to look to political parties as the main people unable to force a permanent decision.

The two political parties that the people of Tamilnadu held responsible for not ensuring the continuation of Jallikattu are the AIADMK and BJP parties. The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party currently holds power in Tamilnadu and was led by Jayalalitha at the time of the protests. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is one of the two major political parties in India and has significant representation in the political bodies of power of India. Since these two parties were in power when Jallikattu was banned, they became the Tamil nation's primary means of accessing the Centre and "were held responsible for every instating and recalling of the Jallikattu ban" (Bahrain 2018). The AIADMK conveyed the woes of protesters to the Centre and to the BJP in hopes that action in favor of Tamilnadu would be taken. Jayalalitha, the now-deceased leader of the AIADMK party, spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to demand that he and the central government "help facilitate a peaceful Jallikattu" and to "not ignore the pleas of Tamilians" (Bahrain 2018). This is an interesting clash of interests because Jayalalitha has framed herself as a champion for women's rights and for the preservation of family unity and values. Supporting Jallikattu is in direct opposition to the values that she has championed for decades. Her choices were either to stick to her broadcasted values

and reject Jallikattu or to prioritize Jallikattu over the principles for which she gained popularity. Jayalalitha decided to side with the protesters, who were the majority of Tamilians, in order to preserve her position at the head of the AIADMK party and as the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. In this case, working against Jallikattu would be more detrimental to her career and the popularity of the AIADMK party than indirectly countering her campaign's values.

CHAPTER 2: PONGAL AND THE BULL

In order to understand the importance of Jallikattu and why Tamilian people love the sport so much, it is necessary to explore the context around it. Jallikattu takes place during *Pongal*, the harvest festival celebrated by Tamil people. Also known as *Thai Pongal*, this festival is a celebration of the sun god, when prayers are made for a successful harvest in the upcoming Tamil calendar year (Arunachalam 1980). The defining characteristic of *Pongal* is an offering consisting of boiling the first rice of the season for the sun god. The whole celebration is four days long and each day has a specific celebratory event. The primary day, *Thai Pongal*, is the second day of *Pongal* and this is when the rice is boiled with jaggery, cashew nut, raisins, and lentils to overflowing and served to everyone with savory and sweet snacks. Tamilians will decorate their homes with colored rice flour, which is known as *kolam*, as well as go to temple, eat special foods, and give presents to younger family members. The third day of the festival is *Mattu Pongal* (meaning bull), when Jallikattu tournaments take place. This day celebrates cattle and is one of gratitude to them. Cattle are an “integral part of daily life for many Tamilian people, especially those involved in agricultural work” (Arunachalam 1980). Cattle are not only sources of milk, cheese, and natural fertilizer, they also serve as transportation and are a large part of the work force used in agriculture. In preparation for the day, cows are decorated by farmers who paint their horns and attach bells to them. Throughout the day, these cattle are given garlands of flowers and fruits, walked around about town, and allowed to graze and eat as they please. All of these gifts are ways of showing gratitude to cattle, livestock, and other farm animals. This immense level of adoration and respect is understandable given Tamilnadu’s long history of being an agricultural state. Given that *Pongal* is a celebration of the harvest and a time when offerings are made to the sun god to ensure a bountiful harvest in the upcoming year, it is

logical that cattle are a revered part of this process since they feature so prominently in agricultural practices. The motivation for *Pongal* is not only a cultural one – the Indian economy, and the Tamilian economy in particular, thrives on agriculture. The fourth and final day of the harvest celebration is *Kaanum* or *Kanya Pongal*, which is spent enjoying the day with friends and family. It is common to give and receive gifts, sweets, and trinkets from neighbors and loved ones. This final day is also the day for worship of birds, during which people will leave out balls of rice for birds to eat¹. The four days of *Pongal* occur at the beginning of the Tamil year, typically in the middle of January, and signify that the sun has reached its southernmost point and will now commence its northward journey. The passage of *Pongal* signifies the end of a month of inauspicious days and the start of a month of auspicious ones, making it an important day for Tamilians regardless of religious affiliation (Biswas 2016). This is one significant reason that the pro-Jallikattu protests had such a prolific reach: people across Tamilnadu are invested in *Pongal* every year and they associate the celebration to their Tamilian culture and heritage. Looking at the specific day of *Mattu Pongal* will shed more light on the importance of Jallikattu and the ideals surrounding it.

Only in relatively recent years have other industries experienced technological innovations that transformed the state into a more industrialized economy. According to a report that was published in 2011, agriculture “is the principal source of livelihood for more than 40 percent of the population” of Tamilnadu (Government of Tamilnadu 2011). Despite recent industrialization, a significant proportion of Tamilians retain some sort of connection to agriculture and farming. Farmers and villagers throughout India still use cattle regularly in their day to day lives. Most farmers use cattle to pull their plow in order to till the fields before farming. Though technology has ushered in the one-man mechanical tiller as well as tractor

tillers, these pieces of equipment are considered very expensive to people who don't have the surplus cash to warrant this type of investment. Villagers will frequently use cattle for transportation by attaching a large cart to their backs, in a similar manner as horses being used to pull carriages. People can ride these carts around the village, to the nearby temple, or into the closest bigger town. These are a few ways in which cattle greatly improve and augment the lives of many Tamilians. Cows and cattle must also be looked at through the lens of Hinduism. Although *Pongal* is not celebrated as a purely religious holiday, Hinduism is the majority religion in Tamilnadu, and cows are revered in a similar manner during *Pongal* and within Hinduism. It is important to distinguish that Hindu people love and cherish cows, but they are not considered gods. However, they are considered "a sacred symbol of life that should be protected and revered" (Krishnaswamy 2019). This is because cows are seen as gentle, generous creatures that "give more to human beings than [they take] from them." Cows produce five things of interest to human beings in addition to their vital role in agriculture, farming, and village life: milk, cheese, *ghee* (clarified butter), urine, and dung. Milk, cheese, and *ghee* can be used for sustenance and for giving offerings to the gods while urine and dung can be used for fuel, fertilizer, or disinfectant. Cows are also associated with maternal figures because in Hinduism, cows are the animals of Aditi, the mother of all gods. Their gentle, docile nature also lends itself to this interpretation. *Mattu Pongal* is the only day that celebrates the bull and the cow in Tamilnadu, but cows and bulls are celebrated elsewhere in India (Krishnaswamy 2019). The annual Gopastami festival is dedicated to honoring cows and the god Krishna. It is a celebration of the day when Krishna's father gave him the responsibility of caring for the cows of Vrindavan and is seen as Krishna's coming-of-age ceremony. On this day cows are bathed and

cleaned, adorned with clothing and jewelry, and blessed during numerous poojas (Hindu rituals invoking blessings).

CHAPTER 3: BULLFIGHTING AROUND THE WORLD

Tamilnadu is by no means the first or last place in the world to have a rich and thriving bullfighting tradition marred by controversy. Many countries all over the world have some version of tauromachia, bullfighting, which can consist of cattle against cattle fights, cattle against men fights, or cattle versus other animal fights. These bullfighting traditions date back to 700 A.D. and many countries including Spain, Mexico, Colombia, France, Portugal, England, Italy, Venezuela, America, and India have some form of bullfighting. Modern-day bullfighting of all origins often faces backlash from people due to concerns about inhumane treatment of the animals or risk of injury and death to competitors. This section of the paper will examine what these traditions entail and will compare them to Jallikattu to find similarities in the values that are emphasized in bullfighting.

The first type of bullfighting that will be discussed is the French tradition of the race at Camargue, practiced in the southern regions of France. Though it is called bullfighting, many competitions use oxen instead. The goal of the sport is to remove “attributes” that are attached to the ox using a lancet while running away from the ox and avoiding injury from its upturned horns. Participants in the sport are called “*razeteurs*” and are not able to distract the ox because the only tool they are allowed is the lancet. Instead, they are assisted by “*tourneurs*” who distract the ox and divert its attention while the *razeteurs* focus on removing the attributes from the ox (Ramachandran 2017). There are three different attributes and they must be removed from the bull in this specific order: *coccarda*, *nappa*, and *ribbon*. The *coccarda* is a red bow pinned into place in the middle of the animal’s forehead, the *nappa* is a white wool fluff tied to each horn by a thread, and the *ribbon* is wrapped around the horns of the bull. The *ribbon* is an indication of the competitiveness, aggression, and value of the ox. Each round has between four and twenty

people in the arena as *razeteurs* and *tourneurs*. *Razeteurs* are awarded points for the attributes they are able to remove at the end of the round and are awarded prizes accordingly. The oxen often chase *razeteurs* right up to the wooden boundaries, so competitors must throw themselves over the barriers to escape the oxen.



Figure 1: A *razeteur* reaches behind him to snip one of the attributes on the ox's head as it chases him through the arena.

One interesting aspect of this competition is that the advertisements for this event focuses almost exclusively on the names of the oxen and where they come from before the *razeteurs* are even mentioned. The oxen are the focal point of this tournament and the “fame of the bull” is what makes a *razeteur* worthy of fame and glory. Though there are occasionally tournaments that result in deaths, this is not common and guarantees that the ox is disqualified. The values that seem to be prioritized in this fight are skill, agility, and mutual respect between man and ox (Colin 2018). While this is definitely an integral part of culture for those involved in the race, the whole event is perceived as an art that requires balance between two forces. Compared to Jallikattu, which emphasizes the bravery and valor of the bull-tamers, the races of Camargue appreciate the skillfulness and artistry required to tire out the ox, dodge its horns, and remove the extremely small trinkets affixed to its head and horns. The bull is highly valuable after the tournament is over, similar to the importance given to prize bulls after Jallikattu is over. In Tamilnadu, the bulls are taken to the temple where they are cared for by priests, temple-workers,

and visitors from the local community. They are also used to breed additional lines of Kangayam bulls, which are a specific breed of bovine that are known to be preserved in a purebred fashion (Ramakrishnan 2017). Additionally, there is a specific category for the bull breeders to win awards for the healthiest and strongest bulls. These races at Camargue have a similar prize for the breeder of the strongest and smartest bulls. The races at Camargue also have an interesting practice of training the bulls as intensively as the *razeteurs*. This makes sense given that the oxen are an integral, if not the most important, part of this competition. During the race, the younger bulls are run first because they are only at the beginning phases of training and the older bulls are saved for last. Since there is really no harm or injury of the bull nor significant injury to the *razeteur*, there is not much controversy surrounding this type of bullfighting.

Another type of bullfighting that will be discussed is English bull-baiting which was practiced up until the nineteenth century. This form of bullfighting was between a bull and a pack of bulldogs bred for the purpose of this event. Many towns and villages in England had a bull ring where commoners could watch the popular form of entertainment or place bets on the animals. This type of bullfighting ensured that the bull would be dead by the end of the event. Bulls would have a collar around their neck and be tethered to the ground or a stake. Trained bulldogs would “attack the bull around the nose and face area while the bull fought them off by stepping on them, throwing them with their horns,” and trying to pierce them (Mason 1997). This sport was brutal for both the bulls and bulldogs: the cows were always killed, and bulldogs suffered lacerations, broken bones, and death. As dogs were killed during the fight, organizers of the event would have dogs on hand as backup to introduce into the fight. This tradition did not have respect for the bull, nor the dogs involved. The breed of bulldogs was started as a result of bull-baiting because the fights favor short, stocky, muscular dogs that will not be caught in the

swing of the bull's horns. This form of bullfighting was outlawed in 1835 as a result of the Cruelty to Animals Act passed by the British parliament (Mason 1997). In comparison to Jallikattu, this practice is significantly crueler and more inhumane.

The third form of bullfighting to be examined is that of the rodeo which is common in the American south and southwest. The modern-day rodeo is based on the skills used by vaqueros and cowboys in the west. The first official rodeo was in 1869 and since then it has evolved into one of the biggest ranching events that occur yearly in several cities around America (PRCA 2017). The rodeo encompasses several different activities including roping events, steer wrestling, saddle bronc riding, bareback bronc riding, bull riding, and barrel racing. Rodeos that take place in America are under the legal jurisdiction of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) and the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA), which means they are tightly regulated. All participants in the rodeo, whether it be the competition portion, or the livestock showcase portion, are required to follow a strict set of rules that ensures the animals are humanely cared for.



Figure 2: Rider being bucked off bull during the 2018 Houston Rodeo.

The values prioritized by rodeo competitions are respect between man and animal, strength, skill, responsibility, and a celebration of the heritage of the west. This is very similar to Jallikattu in that the event is as much a celebration of culture and identity as it is an opportunity to bring honor to your name. Another significant similarity to Jallikattu is that the livestock showcase portion of the event is an opportunity to celebrate the animals that are a part of this competition. Breeders and contestants can win awards for raising the healthiest and biggest animal. Much like Jallikattu, the rodeo faces opposition from animal rights advocates. The American rodeo has now included provisions that ensure veterinary care for animals and other protections in order to safeguard livestock. Since these changes, they do not face as much opposition from organizations like PETA. This is a good sign for supporters of Jallikattu because this sets

precedent for a cultural practice that updated its rules and regulations to reflect a more humane atmosphere and is no longer banned.

The fourth and final form of bullfighting that will be examined is Spanish bullfighting, or *corrida de toros*. This is the most famous type of bullfighting in the world and is practiced in Spain, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Portugal. The entire tournament is divided into three distinct phases, also called “*tercios*.” First is the *tercio de varas*, meaning the third with lances, during which the *matador* studies the bull and notices its habits and weaknesses while they parry back and forth. The *matador* goads the bull to attack and performs a variety of maneuvers with his red cape. Next, several *picadores* enter the arena on horses with lances that are jabbed into the “muscle on the bull’s neck when the bull is goaded into attacking the horses” (Thyberg 2019). This makes the bull lose blood and weakens it for the second *tercio*, which is the *tercio de banderillas*. In this stage, the *matador* plants two *banderillas*, little flags on barbed sticks, into the shoulders of the bull. This weakens the bull even more since it is still losing blood. Finally, the *tercio de muerte* is the portion of the event where the *matador* faces the bull with a small red cape and a sword. There are a series of passes with the small red cape, the *muleta*, and then the *estocada* is performed. The *estocada* is the act of killing the bull with the sword and if it is not done cleanly, the entire event can be ruined. An incomplete *estocada* means the *matador* must sever the bull’s spinal cord to spare the animal pain and kill it instantly. This is dishonorable for the *matador* and reflects poorly on his skills.



Figure 3: Bull with several banderillas in its shoulder and neck. This is still in the *tercio de varas* because the red cape is still the full cape and not the *muleta*.

On the other hand, a successful *faena*, which is the performance with the *muleta* and the *estocada*, means that the matador receives a trophy which could be the ears or tail of the bull (Thyberg 2019). Occasionally, bulls will be allowed to live at the end of the tournament. This occurs only when the president, who watches the tournament and occasionally gives directions, deems the bull can live which means the bull is retired from competition and raised as a stud. Compared to some of the other versions of bullfighting mentioned in this chapter, Spanish bullfighting does not emphasize the bull as much as the *matador*. The successes of the *matador* are seen as indications of his level of skill and experience. That is not to say the bull is not an important and valued part of the event. Bulls are chosen, bred, and cared for very specifically with the purpose of participating in a tournament. Bulls that are massive, strong, and agile are reserved for matadors of a higher skill level while younger, smaller bulls are used for practice or

in tournaments with *matadors* that are not as experienced. This type of bullfighting is similar to Jallikattu in the values that are embodied during the fight. Machismo, strength, bravery, and dedication are all very important in both types of bullfighting and the competitors are eager to earn their designations as matadors or bull-tamers. However, one significant difference that many Tamilians that support Jallikattu point to is the fact that bulls are often killed as part of the ritual of Spanish bullfighting (Thyberg 2019). Compared to this violent and inhumane treatment, legal practice of Jallikattu is tame and beneficial to the agricultural industry of India. Additionally, Jallikattu is a way of honoring the bulls rather than an opportunity to show dominance over them.

CHAPTER 4: JALLIKATTU LIVE

This year, I had the opportunity to travel to India for *Pongal* towards the end of January and celebrate in Madurai with my family for the first time. Given that Madurai is close to Alanganallur, one of the three authorized locations of Jallikattu for 2019, I knew this was a rare opportunity to attend the festival of Jallikattu, experience the fervor and passion surrounding the event, and get a chance to talk to people who also came to watch or participate in Jallikattu. The day started at 6 AM and we made the short drive to the outskirts of Madurai where Alanganallur is. On the trip were my uncle, Allan, and I in order to make sure everyone stayed safe and stayed together during the event. One big concern about Jallikattu is the safety of people watching the bullfight from right outside the fence enclosing the arena. We decided to watch from farther back on a set of raised bleachers that were behind the crowds surrounding the fence in order to minimize the risks we were taking.



Figure 4: People observe Jallikattu from a set of bleachers

By the time we sat for breakfast at a small restaurant, parked, and walked to the seats we wanted, it was 8 AM and officially time for the daylong tournament to start. Prior to the event, officials had stated that the event at the Alanganallur Jallikattu would last from 8 AM to 4 PM. The day started out with the recitation of some prayers and blessings for the bulls participating in the tournament, the tamers that are competing to win the tournament, the owners of the bulls, the people in attendance to watch the competition, and farmers across all of Tamilnadu since this event is a celebration of *Pongal* at the end of the day. Following the prayers were a few speeches from local religious and political leaders, which focused on thanking the organizers of the tournament. One important local leader even thanked the nation of Tamilnadu and the Tamil people as a whole for having pride in their culture and for fighting for the right to practice and celebrate their culture. Despite the bulk of the protests occurring about two years ago, their effects are still relevant, and their impact is felt to this day.



Figure 5: This picture shows my cousin and his friends protesting outside of their college in Tiruchirappalli in 2017. It was only after seeing this picture that I learned the protests were happening.

This is especially true because the legal decision about Jallikattu is still in flux according to the Supreme Court of India and its legality is allowed on a yearly basis by the local Tamilnadu government. Many scholars and activists still continue to raise money and awareness about Jallikattu to aid their efforts to convince the Indian Supreme Court to fully support the practice of Jallikattu.

Due to the dense population in India, any event or competition has a large number of competitors and Jallikattu is no exception. The official recordkeeping of the Jallikattu event at Alanganallur shows that 697 competitors entered the arena to tame a total of 729 bulls that were cleared to participate in the Alanganallur tournament by the Animal Husbandry Department of Tamilnadu. Not all of the 729 bulls had the opportunity to actually enter and compete in the Jallikattu arena. At the Palamedu Jallikattu, which also happens in the outskirts of Madurai, the counts came out to 500 bulls and 450 tamers that competed in the tournament. The tally of how many people and bulls participated in the Jallikattu tournament that took place in Avaniyapuram were not available at the tournament or in online records.

Next, the presenter at the arena announced the rules. They are listed below:

Rules of the Game²

1. Competing bulls will be released into the arena through the “*vadivasal*” (entry gate).
2. Bull tamers/competitors should aim to catch the bull by holding on only to its hump.
3. Bull tamers should hold onto the bull until it crosses the finish line in order to be considered a winner. The finish line is usually 50 feet away and designated by overhead marker flags strung along the finish line.
4. The bull will be declared victorious if the bull manages to throw off the bull tamer before it reaches the finish line or if no one manages to hold on to the bull.

5. The bull tamer is declared the winner if the bull tamer manages to hold on to the bull's hump till it crosses the finish line.

6. If more than one bull tamer holds on to the bull until the finish line, there is no winner.

Therefore, only one bull tamer should hold on to any one bull at a time.

7. The bull tamer can be disqualified if they hold on to the horns, tail, or neck of the bull during the competition.

8. Bull tamers cannot hit or hurt the bull in any way.

9. Tamers cannot grab or bite the bull's tail or ears.

Qualifications and Regulations

10. The blood alcohol level of all bull tamers will be tested before the competition. Competitors with alcohol in their system will not be allowed to compete and not be allowed in the arena. This rule is enforced very seriously for competitors.

11. Competitors should have an official medical fitness certificate that is signed by a licensed medical doctor.

12. Tamers are not allowed to carry weapons of any sort into the arena, especially with the intention of hurting a bull.

13. The owner of the bull must carry a document of medical fitness for the bull. The bull will also be medically examined by a government-sanctioned veterinary doctor. After the bull has been examined, it will only be given food that is predetermined by the veterinary specialists at each Jallikattu location.

14. The owner of the bull is not allowed to carry any weapons to the *vadivasal* area and should not bite the tail of the bull or hurt it in any way.

15. Once the bull exits the arena or crosses the 50-foot finish line, it becomes the responsibility of the bull owner.
16. CCTV cameras will monitor the entire tournament in order to make sure everyone competes fairly.
17. The presence of volunteers that are medically trained to take care of the wounded bull and bull tamers is required at every tournament.

It's Jallikattu time again
Additional safety measures to be provided to prevent bulls from returning to play arena

Conditions for bulls to enter the arena:

At least four feet tall	Minimum three years of age	At least with two teeth	No broken or sharp horns	Ears should not be mutilated	Tail should not be cut	Normal health condition
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Schedule

- January 16 Alanganallur
- January 15 Palamedu
- January 14 Avaniyapuram

• Around 500 bulls likely to take part in each jallikattu

• Event would be held between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Tamers should be:

- Without any health problems
- Between 20 and 45 years of age
- Should not be under influence of alcohol

Play arena

- Should be 50 square feet
- Coconut coir bed should be laid on the ground
- Double barricades should be erected till bulls collection point
- CCTV to monitor screening area, play arena and collection point
- Fodder and water to be provided at screening spot, collection point

Dos and don'ts in play arena

- Qualified tamers would be given unique jerseys
- Would be sent in a batch of 75 persons in each hour
- Excelling tamers would be allowed for next rounds
- Tamers should not catch the bulls by horns, ears and tails
- Violators would be identified and pulled out of arena
- No sort of cruelty like hurting or biting tails allowed
- Should catch hold of humps only
- Observers from Animal Welfare Board would be present

Support teams

- Special teams to screen bulls and tamers
- Mobile units to attend to injured tamers, bulls
- Commandos of Fire and Rescue Department to be deployed
- Ambulances to be kept ready
- Over 500 police personnel to be deployed

Figure 6: This is a pro-Jallikattu image being circulated on WhatsApp. This diagram shows some of the new rules and restrictions placed on the sport.

One significant and integral part of Jallikattu that is noticeably missing in this modern rendition of the ages old tournament is the bag of coins tied to the horns of the bull. Traditionally, the coin purse, also known as the “salli”, is pronounced as “jalli” and gives Jallikattu its name. As the tradition grew and changed throughout the years, Jallikattu was modernized and the prizes were

no longer limited to a small coin purse. I hypothesize that a multitude of factors led to a gradual changing of the rules of Jallikattu: the value and types of prizes available, modernization of the tournament, and stricter regulations imposed on the tournament. The prizes awarded to the winners of the bull-taming competition and the bull-owning competition are now in the range of large sums of money, motorbikes, or cars. This year, Chief Minister Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister Panneerselvam sponsored two cars as the prizes for the Alanganallur Jallikattu, one for the winner of the bull-taming part of the competition and one for the owner of the best bull (Ananth 2019). In the past and, to a certain extent, currently, cars are seen as symbols of wealth and status that are earned by people of high status or power. It may seem odd to foreigners that the prizes offered at this highly-valued and government-officiated event are cars. This is because India was subjected to decades of “socialist deprivation” where many consumer goods were rare and only attainable for the extremely wealthy class. Given that India was under British rule until 1947, cars were not available for the average Indian until 1950s and 1960s. Over the past few decades, the tide has shifted and inspired a “domestic hunger for goods” such as refrigerators, cellphones, air-conditioning units, washing machines, branded clothing, imported foreign food, and cars. Consumer goods such as these are now much more available to purchase for the middle-class consumer (Waldman 2005).

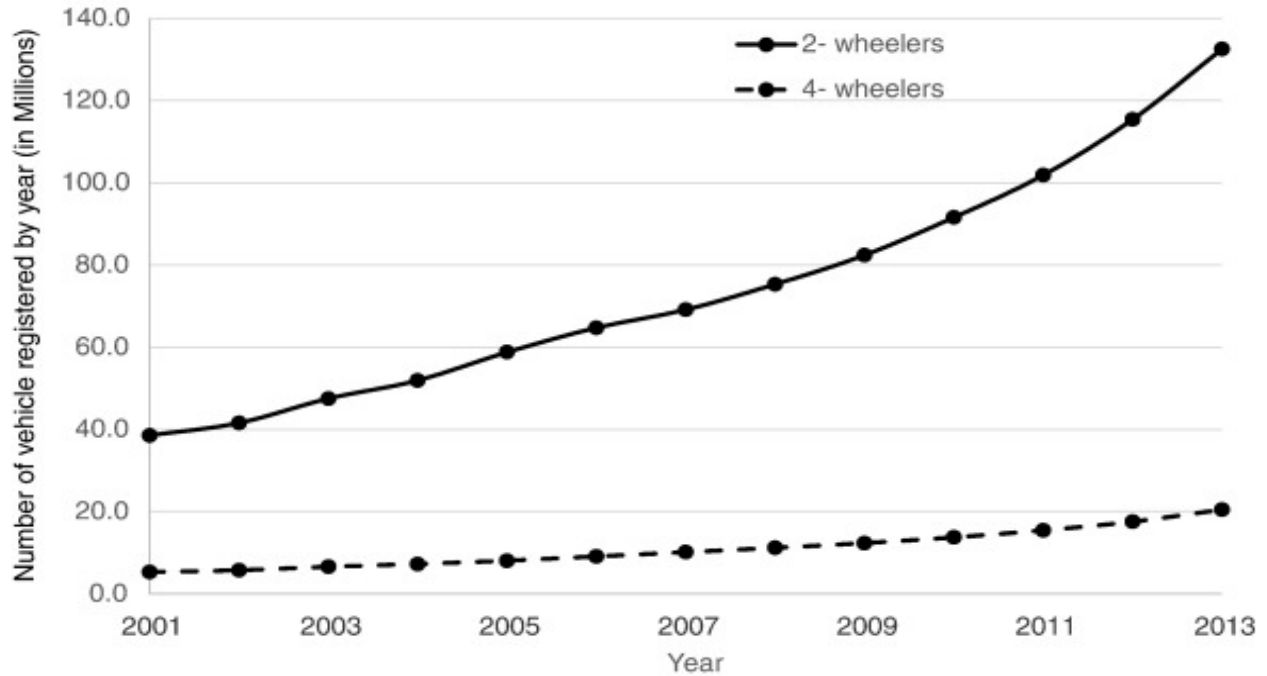


Figure 7: Data from a "Study of vehicle ownership for urban and rural households in India"

The diagram shows the dramatic uptick in the number of car registrations from 2001 to 2013 in India. The fanaticism over cars has significantly diminished when compared to the fervor of the mid 1900s since they are more commonplace. However, cars still remain a symbol of privilege, status, and affluence and the desire to own one is still pervasive throughout Tamilnadu. Both the middle and upper classes relish the ability to show they are not above spending a large sum of money on "upgradation," the phenomenon where as soon as people obtain one material good, they want the next, fancier, upgraded version (Waldman 2005). The fixation on cars has existed for many years, which is apparent in older Tamil films that show young, poor children running after the car of the richest person in the town. My own parents spoke of running after these cars with their friends, straining to reach out and touch the bumper of the car, and thinking they would never be able to purchase or drive a car³. In current times, this intense fascination and obsession with cars has significantly decreased but the idea of what cars stand for is still present in the minds of Tamilians in India (Choudhary 2016).

Modernization of the tournament is a result of the natural progression of time. Jallikattu tournaments that occurred when the “*salli*” was still being used were more dangerous because standards of safety were not of major concern. Everyone knew the tournament was inherently dangerous, both to participate in and to watch, so there were not as many safeguards for the competitors. As technology improved and increasingly more people travelled to see the tournament, safety measures such as a sturdy fence and rafters were enforced. Switching from the coin purse method of competing in Jallikattu was another one of these measures. Grabbing for the purse tied to the horns of the bull requires that people directly engage with the most dangerous part of the bull. By changing the rules of the tournament, officials were able to retain the spirit of Jallikattu as well as minimize the risks that are part of the tournament. In addition to the modernization of Jallikattu and the change in types of prizes offered to winners, the stricter regulations imposed on Jallikattu by both the national Indian government and the local Tamilian government played a role in changing the rules of the game. Before the protests took place in 2016 and 2017, Jallikattu tournaments often resulted in at least one or two deaths at every location. At this point in time, there were many more official Jallikattu tournaments and even more unofficial, smaller tournaments in Tamilnadu. Since the tournament has become much more regulated in the past two years, it follows that officials now require that all government-sponsored Jallikattu venues be outfitted with certain amenities and tournaments held there must follow the official rules. The modern rules without the use of the coin purse are much easier to monitor, standardize, and they ensure that the bull will not be hit in the face or eyes.

By this point, the prizes and donors had been announced, the rules had been recited, and the tamers and bulls had been vetted and gathered. The day consisted of nine total rounds of the competition that were spread out throughout the day. Each contestant is only allowed to compete

during one round of the initial eight rounds. The total number of bulls was divided by nine which came out to around 70 bulls released in each round. The final round was reserved for players who had held onto at least one bull in previous rounds. As the first round started, the atmosphere around the arena become more energetic and frenetic since everyone had been anticipating this event for so long. The tensions and protests surrounding Jallikattu seem to have made people more appreciative of the event since there is a strong chance that there will not be a Jallikattu the following year. From where I was sitting, the crowd immediately surrounding the arena was predominantly males from ages 15 to 50.



Figure 8: I didn't take a picture of this year's Jallikattu at Alanganallur. This was taken in 2018 by a photographer from my cousin's university. Photo is credited in annotations and is used with permission.

As can be seen in the photo above, most viewers at the level of the arena are male. Though women can technically also join these crowds and watch the tournament from up close, this is not the reality of the situation. The rowdy nature and ferocity of the crowds make it inhospitable

and wildly unsafe for women to watch or participate in any capacity. Violence and harassment against women are of major concern in India and Tamilnadu is no exception (Thirumurthy 2017). In 2007, a total of 6,612 cases of crimes against women were reported to the police with over half the cases being cases of cruelty by husbands and relatives. There have been numerous acts and provisions passed by the Tamilnadu government to protect and support women. These include the Indecent Representation of Women Act, the Tamilnadu Prohibition of Sexual Harassment of Women Act of 2000, and the Dowry Prohibition Act (Sigal 2013). These laws, though well-meaning and steps in the right direction, have not made any significant decrease in the instances of violence against women. This violence, lewd behavior, aggression, and molestation of and against women is very much present at the tournament as well. It is the reason why there were almost no women on the ground around the arena. It is also the reason why bleachers and rafts are built to keep primarily women and children separated from the rowdyism of the crowds below. The role that women play in the Jallikattu tournament and the relationship between the two groups is very interesting because women's support or lack of support of Jallikattu usually relies on a variety of factors, as is evident in the interviews with women.



Figure 9: Jallikattu fans and observers crowd around the winner of the previous round. This photo was taken by my cousin Allan D'Souza and is being used with his permission.

It was extremely invigorating to see the crowd respond in such a dramatic fashion to the start of the tournament. Even the people in the stands were shouting and cheering at an intensity to match the excitement of the crowd on the ground for the first ten or so bulls that were released from the gate. Standing among the crowd and feeling the euphoria wash over me, I finally understood how people can lose themselves in the emotions of a crowd and get carried away. I felt frenzied but freed at the same time: the anonymity of being just another person in a giant mob of people allowed me to enjoy the tournament without being concerned with any of the ethical or moral issues surrounding the Jallikattu tournament. The riotousness of the crowd was at times uplifting and mesmerizing and at other times was overwhelming. The other side of the coin of the positive feelings of being caught up in the crowd is that there is no one to truly control the mood of the crowd. There were a few policemen stationed throughout the arena, but they were not concerned with crowd control. This meant that the crowd's cheering and shouting could get out of control if any serious argument broke out. Though the section of bleachers we were sitting in never got overzealous enough to the point that police needed to be involved, a fight broke out in a set of rafters a few sections away. This fight seemed to be because two men had gotten into an argument after bumping into each other. In the past, however, there have been many fights due to arguments between two different castes, arguments between owners, and arguments between sponsors and the supporters of local leaders. The energy and unbridled enthusiasm of our section of the rafters lost most of their steam by the time the third round had ended. The crowds around the fenced arena, however, seemed to gain momentum, strength, and ferocity from the competitors and the bulls as they competed. They cheered for every bull that was released as if it were the first, even as the day approached lunchtime. My uncle and I decided that this would be the most opportune time to start talking to people. Many people had

started to filter out of the stands and away from the fence area to get food for lunch, so my cousin and I had a quick bite and got started. Armed with paper and pencils, we started talking to nearby vendors. We had planned ahead of time whom exactly we wanted to talk to and in which order. First were the vendors: they had most likely seen multiple Jallikattu events if they set up shop for the event every year and could offer insight that others may not be able to. Second, we would interview women that had attended the event. I wanted to know how they see themselves within the framework of Jallikattu as well as their thoughts and actions during the pro-Jallikattu protests. The protests were revolutionary in Tamilnadu because of their ability to unite people despite a variety of divisive classifications, one of which is gender. I also wanted to hear about how they navigate the Jallikattu arena and the different things they have to be concerned with to enjoy a simple day out. Third, we decided to interview middle-aged or older men to hear about their passion for Jallikattu and their reasons for supporting it. I also wanted to hear about the protests if they participated in them. Finally, I was hoping to speak to any bull tamer that had competed previously in the day. Ideally, I would interview them right after they had finished competing in their round but any interview at any time would be fine. The questions I would ask to people varied for each group I was interviewing at the tournament. All questions were asked in Tamil and most responses were also in Tamil. I have translated them into English for the purposes of this thesis. They are listed below:

Vendors

1. How long have you been selling food around the Jallikattu venue?
2. Do you get an opportunity to watch any rounds?
3. How many Jallikattu tournaments have you seen in your life?
4. Have you noticed any significant changes over the years?

5. Are tournaments safer and less violent than they were in the past?
6. What is your perception of Jallikattu? Is it a violent sport, art form, or expression of culture?
7. Would you compete in a Jallikattu (given the right circumstances and if you were younger)?
8. What do you think of the young men who win the tournament?
9. Are you for or against Jallikattu? What is your reasoning for your stance?
10. Did you participate in any form of protest? If so, what was it?

Women

1. Is this the first Jallikattu you've attended? If not, how many have you seen?
2. Have you noticed any significant changes over the years?
3. What is your perception of Jallikattu? Is it a violent sport, art form, or expression of culture?
4. What is your impression of the young men who win the tournament?
5. Are you for or against Jallikattu? What is your reasoning for your stance?
6. Did you participate in any form of protest? If so, what was it?
7. Where do you stand or sit when you come to the tournament?
8. What are your concerns about safety for women at this tournament? Do you think it is adequately safe?
9. Are you accompanied by any family members? If yes, would you have come to see this tournament alone?
10. Do you have any family members or friends who are involved in Jallikattu in any way? What are your thoughts on their involvement?

Middle-aged and older Men

1. How many Jallikattu tournaments have you been to?

2. Have you noticed any significant changes over the years?
3. What is your perception of Jallikattu? Is it a violent sport, art form, or expression of culture?
4. What is your impression of the young men who win the tournament?
5. Are you for or against Jallikattu? What is your reasoning for your stance?
6. Did you participate in any form of protest? If so, what was it?
7. Where do you stand during the tournament?
8. Would you compete in Jallikattu given the opportunity?

Competitor

1. Is this your first time competing in a Jallikattu tournament?
2. How long did you prepare to be ready for today?
3. Did you tame any bulls today?
4. What is your perception of Jallikattu? Is it a violent sport, art form, or expression of culture?
5. What is your impression of the people who win the tournament?
6. Why did you want to compete today?
7. Did you participate in any form of protest? If so, what was it?
8. Would you compete again if you were given the chance?

The interviewing portion of this day was very interesting because I felt that I finally had access to real people's thoughts and concerns. Reading articles online and conducting research on the topic is very interesting but meeting people face to face is an experience that cannot be reproduced. Before I started the process, I thought people would be more polarized: either they would blindly support Jallikattu without acknowledging the issues that turn people away from it or they would be steadfastly against it without recognizing it for the important cultural practice that it is. This was not the case at all. Almost everyone I talked to at the event had some level of

nuance to their responses. Their reasonings were logical and thought out: it was clear that most people knew both sides of the story and fell somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of being for or against Jallikattu. This level of nuance is not reflected online, mostly because the majority of articles about Jallikattu are not testimonials and do not directly embed the thoughts of individuals within the story. This is another reason this experience was so valuable. When I look back at the research I did, I realized that I really had not heard the thoughts and opinions of individual laypeople. Any mention of how people view Jallikattu and the different sides of the debate were only concerned with the overall result.

At the end of the day I had interviewed four vendors, ten women, three middle aged or older men, and two competitors. The interviews took a lot longer than I was expecting and I decided to take my time with each person instead of rushing the interviews. I will only use the first name of interviewees in order to retain anonymity. There were six questions I asked to all four groups in order to find some trends that might shine light on the attitudes of different people. These questions, or some variation of them, are listed below:

1. How many Jallikattu tournaments have you seen in your life?
2. Have you noticed any significant changes over the years?
3. What is your perception of Jallikattu? Is it a violent sport, art form, or expression of culture?
4. What do you think of the young men who win the tournament?
5. Are you for or against Jallikattu? What is your reasoning for your stance?
6. Did you participate in any form of protest? If so, what was it?

Among the vendors, all of them had seen multiple Jallikattu tournaments over the past five years and had noticed a trend of increasing safety measures, larger police presences, and a significant reduction in deaths as a direct result of competing in the tournament. Though there

weren't a high number of deaths before the stricter government regulations, one vendor named Gopal appreciated the changes that were being made because "every life is valuable. If these changes mean that less young men will be gored, trampled, or killed, then I am okay with more regulations." Gopal had attended Jallikattu tournaments in the late 90s as an observer, rather than a vendor, and seen two men die due to injuries from the competition. He returned as a vendor several years ago and appreciates the protection in the form of stricter regulations. Two other vendors, Raju and Mani, expressed similar beliefs. This is most likely because the three were in their late 50s and had children and grandchildren that "softened their rowdy nature" (Raju). All three men viewed Jallikattu as a sport that embodies what it means to be a Tamilian and a man: it requires a combination of skill, strength, and valor to successfully tame the bull. Given the values they assign to the sport, it was no surprise that they are in favor of the tradition carrying on.



Figure 10: Picture of Mani making tea in his tea stall. This photo was taken by me during the interview at the request of Mani.

Vasanth, the last vendor I spoke to, was slightly different than the other three men. He was in his early 30s and had taken over the stall for his father. He too had seen multiple Jallikattu tournaments but felt that the regulations were taking away from the spirit of the tournament. He was a staunch supporter of Jallikattu and had protested at Marina beach in 2017 with his friends and then classmates. All three of the elder men stated that they did not protest in person because “that is for the young people to do” (Mani) but had spread pro-Jallikattu messages and chain texts over Facebook and WhatsApp. All four men had the same perception of the young men who win these tournaments. They saw them as heroic figures that had to be brave and extremely accomplished in order to win a tournament of this caliber.

Compared to the mostly unified opinions of the vendors, the thoughts of the ten women were a lot more diversified. For six of the women I spoke to, this was the first official Jallikattu tournament they had seen. Two of these six women had attended Jallikattu tournaments near their villages outside Coimbatore when they were young so they could not remember much about those experiences. The other four women had seen three or more tournaments in Alanganallur and Palamedu before and could speak to the trends they saw over this time. Rani, a mother in her 30s, said that the safety features and rules of the tournament did reduce contact between bull and tamer, but she thought the competitors these days “are not as strong as they used to be. These boys used to be taller and stronger and would be able to tackle more bulls.” However, she did not think this was a bad trend because she said sensitivity and brains are more valuable in the modern day than brawn. The other three women noticed similar trends as the vendors did, namely, increased regulation and a decreased threat of danger. When asked the question about how they perceive Jallikattu, eight of the women said they considered it an expression and celebration of culture. Of these eight, three said the sport was still too violent despite the stricter rules and regulations. Meenakshi, a woman in her forties who attended the tournament with her husband and brother-in-law, said that though she was pro-Jallikattu, she was uncomfortable with using animals for sport in this way. She was struggling with an ethical dilemma that was forcing her to choose between uplifting and supporting a cultural phenomenon that is highly valued among Tamilians and the needless suffering of an animal that otherwise would have been left in peace. Many of the other eight women reflected similar worries about forcing a bull to be enraged enough to charge people. The other two women believed Jallikattu was just a sport that had grown to mean a lot to Tamilians and is therefore culturally significant. The women’s thoughts on the young men who win the competition varied but there were similarities in the

responses depending on age. The six younger women, who were in their twenties or thirties, stated that the men who won these competitions were strong, courageous, and upholders of Tamilian tradition. The four older women, who were in their forties to fifties, saw the men as brave and bold but ultimately silly for risking their lives in such a drastic manner. They understood why these young men might feel compelled to compete in this tournament, especially in post-pro-Jallikattu Tamilnadu, but did not personally feel that these reasons were powerful enough to participate in this event.

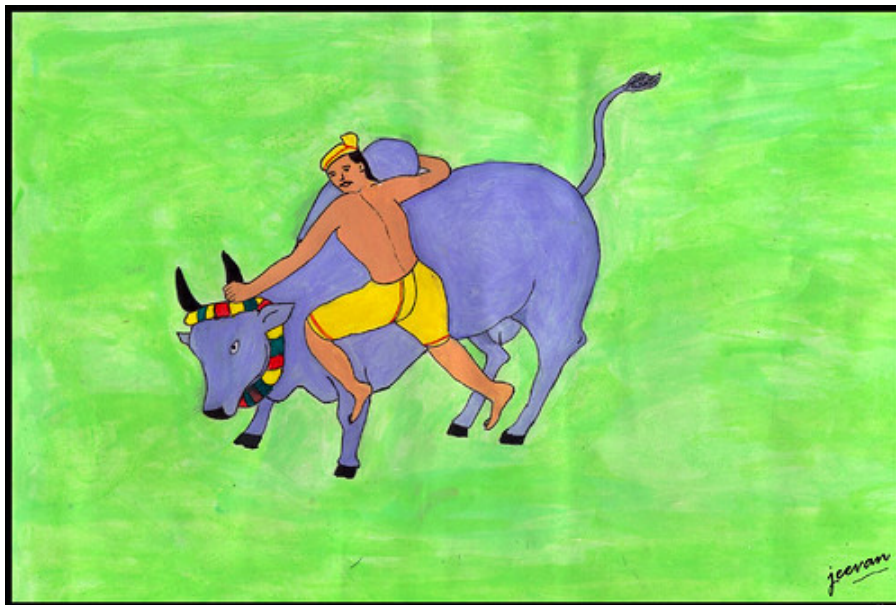


Figure 11: This image was provided to me by Jansi. Her son, Jeevan, runs a blog with updates about Jallikattu and he drew this image. Image is used with permission from both Jeevan and Jansi.

All ten of the women considered themselves pro-Jallikattu despite any of the concerns they voiced throughout the initial part of the interview. When I asked why this was the case, the almost universal response I received was because “supporting Jallikattu is equivalent to supporting a Tamilian way of life.” The protests from two years ago were wildly successful, and this was evident to me in the responses I was getting. Neither concerns about the sanctity of human life or concerns about the treatment of bulls really changed the outlook of the group of

women. Half of the women actively protested in their respective hometowns against the ban and nine of the women protested by sharing messages and information that were pro-Jallikattu.

The three middle-aged or older men I interviewed were very direct and straightforward with their views. Vijay, Krishna, and Kiran had seen multiple Jallikattu tournaments before and understood why the government was making drastic and strict changes to the tournament. Vijay saw the change as just another iteration of the government making “everything very, very safe. Even if it was not dangerous in the first place, the government will find a way to make it safer.” Though there was a tone of bitterness about this trend, the three men ultimately believed that being able to celebrate Jallikattu at all was a big victory that they would not take for granted. Krishna’s son had participated in a tournament a few years ago, which informed Krishna’s view that changes that are made with the safety of the competitor or observer in mind is all for the best. Krishna and Kiran agreed that they saw Jallikattu as an expression of culture that happens to be violent. Vijay saw the sport as a test to prove that you are strong enough, manly enough, and Tamilian enough. When asked what he thought of the winners of the tournament, his answers were the same. The other two men agreed in that they saw these young men as brave men who are risking their lives to prove to themselves and the world that they are Tamilian men who do not fear danger. All three men considered themselves pro-Jallikattu and had participated in some extent in the protests in 2017. Kiran and Vijay marched in their respective hometowns along with their family and friends. Meanwhile, Krishna made and distributed small meals for protestors in his hometown because he owns a restaurant and health conditions made it dangerous for him to protest in the crowd.

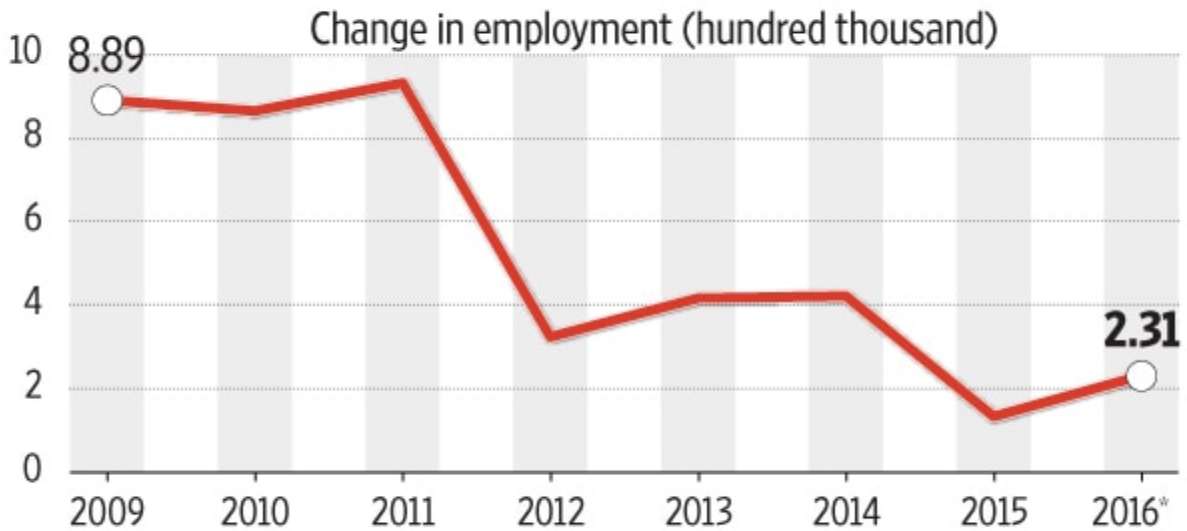
My conversation with two of the competitors was very illuminating because they spoke about the sport with passion and insight. Jay and Srikanth, who were in their mid-20s, competed

in the second and fourth rounds respectively and I spoke to them at the end of the entire competition. Both these young men had never competed in Jallikattu competitions before and thought of their opportunity to compete as a result of the blessings from the gods and many hours of training over the past year. Jay had grown up hearing about Jallikattu and had always wanted “to compete and make my family proud of my abilities.” Though Srikanth became involved in the Jallikattu scene more recently, he too expressed a great appreciation and passion for the sport. Their perception of and experience in Jallikattu was that it is a way of celebrating Tamilian heritage through a sport that requires relentless training and dedication to succeed. It was also seen as an opportunity to show their community and family their bravery and valor in addition to adding to their family’s prestige and status. Though neither Jay nor Srikanth won at this official Jallikattu, they were some of the best talents in their hometowns and regions. Srikanth was somewhat envious of the winners and looked up to them since they had achieved such a prestigious goal. He had tackled one bull when he competed in the fourth round and was therefore qualified to compete in the ninth round of the day. By this point, he knew it was impossible for him to win the competition as a whole, so he was able to enjoy “playing Jallikattu with the best tamers. There was a level of bravery and strength in the arena that you feel. It makes you feel braver than you are.” Jay also reiterated this point when he spoke of his time competing in the second round. He asked how it was possible “to get into the ring and throw yourself at a dangerous bull unless there are braver people around you.” Obviously both young men supported Jallikattu and both protested with their friends in Madurai and Madras, but they understood why people would be angered if the bulls were treated inhumanely. Ultimately, they could live with additional rules and regulations if it meant Jallikattu could be practiced somewhere legally.

Apart from the standardized questions asked of people in every group, there were questions that looked into the specific experience of each different demographic. The vendors were asked if they would compete if given the chance during the right time in their lives. All four vendors declined actually participating in Jallikattu, choosing to be participants and encouragers rather than bull-tamers. The women were asked what types of things they need to consider if going to watch an event such as Jallikattu. All ten women mentioned safety and fear of being harassed as their primary concern, which is understandable given the high statistics of crime against women throughout the country. Of the ten women, six had children and mentioned that they felt uncomfortable bringing their younger children to an event that can turn wild and violent at the drop of a hat. The women had no hope of standing anywhere close to the fence because the crowd consisted of only men. All but one of the women came in groups of people that included multiple women and other male family members. Eight of the women did not know anyone personally involved or invested in Jallikattu but replied that they would not want any of their relatives joining the competition. Finally, the competitors themselves were asked how long their training lasted and if they would compete in Jallikattu again if they had the chance. Both men stated that their official training had started one year ago but they had to get and stay in good physical shape before then to ensure their training proceeded as expected. Jay said that he would love to compete again because he had grown up hearing about Jallikattu and he was not able to catch any bulls during his round. On the other hand, Srikanth was done with the excitement and risk involved in competing in Jallikattu. He was satisfied that he had played, managed to subdue one bull, and made his parents proud. Srikanth planned to start applying for work as a software developer given that he has a degree in computer science. I found this very interesting because Srikanth had essentially taken time off between schooling and working to pursue his dream of

competing in Jallikattu because the opportunity was available to his caste. I am unsure of which kind of story is more common between Jay and Srikanth. Despite the modernization of many aspects of life in India, there is a large, overbearing technically trained workforce that does not have enough jobs available. This is a chronic problem in India given its population size and density.

LABOUR BUREAU STATISTICS SHOW A COLLAPSE IN JOB-CREATION SINCE 2014



*January to March 2016 numbers are not available

Source: Labour Bureau, Government of India

Figure 12: Despite the rapidly growing population increase, jobs are not being created. This will lead to an inevitable rise in unemployment as the years go by and the discrepancy widens.

The graphic above paints a bleak picture. As job creation grows stagnant, the population is skyrocketing which means the gap between those who need jobs and available jobs will widen until it becomes unsustainable (Sinha 2005). However, at this point it just means that workers have to compete very hard for the same positions and technically qualified people have to fill in jobs that they are overqualified for. Many previously “rural” competitions would see their competitors trained in technical working skills. After all, once Jallikattu is over and these young

men have competed as many times as possible, they have to go out into the workforce and make money to provide for themselves and often their family. This is Srikanth's path, and I'm sure many of the other competitors feel this way as well.

My first thought after completing my interviews at the tournament was that I never expected to hear so many nuanced opinions. Meeting this group of people was extremely insightful because I was able to see what motivated their opinions and how certain aspects of their life influence their thoughts and principles. People's priorities are often not what you expect, and I found that for the people who came to watch Jallikattu, pride in their identity and culture as a Tamilian was of utmost importance. This was especially true of many of the men I spoke to: in addition to the cultural identity attached to Jallikattu, they also associated winning Jallikattu with traits like bravery, heroics, machismo, valor, and masculinity. Who they identified with as people and the qualities they valued both in themselves and others were reflected in Jallikattu. Even with these factors working in favor of Jallikattu, almost all of the men interviewed expressed concerns for the other side of the debate and were willing to accept additional rules in order to keep practicing Jallikattu. In comparison, the women were a lot more nuanced in the discussion of Jallikattu. Many of them were concerned about the welfare of the bull and agreed that safety measures, in many different ways, were not at the standard at which they needed to be. A higher percentage of the women than the men also did not want their family members to participate in the tournament itself because there is still a risk of death. However, they did not have any qualms about their family members and loved ones protesting or standing up for Jallikattu because they were doing the same. I found that after a while, I could predict what people would say their final stance on Jallikattu is based on their answers about their family, lives, and the other questions I had prepared. Another common justification for Jallikattu

that was mentioned to me at least once in every demographic was bullfighting in Spain. People often compared how bulls in India are treated after the competition to how bulls in Spain are treated after the tournament. In Tamilnadu, the bulls become the responsibility of the temple and people who visit the temple will feed and care for the bull. The winning bulls are used to continue their bloodline and preserve that line of cattle which means they are very cherished among the community. As mentioned in a previous chapter, bulls that participate in Spanish bullfighting are killed after the tournament. Tamilians often point to this fact as an explanation for why Jallikattu should not be attacked. One final, yet noticeable trend I noticed was how proliferated the use of technologies such as Facebook and WhatsApp were used to communicate protest details and general opinions about Jallikattu. This was further evidence that supported my hypothesis that a significant portion of the reason why people were galvanized to act in 2017 was due to social media communication.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The thesis up to this point has discussed what Jallikattu is, its role in *Pongal*, and the Tamilian people's relationship to *Pongal*. In order to understand why Jallikattu became a rallying point for Tamilians, it is imperative to have parsed out the context surrounding the sporting event and celebration. This section will be an overview of the current issues surrounding the legality and presence of Jallikattu in Tamilnadu. The stage is first set by discussing the protests themselves and the effect they had on the outlook of Jallikattu. The Tamilian perspective of Jallikattu is that it is a cultural experience that they are entitled to celebrate given that animals are not abused. The opinions of people are varied across Jallikattu depending on their, and their families', experiences with Jallikattu. Despite this variance, there was an overwhelmingly pro-Jallikattu wave throughout Tamilnadu and it is part of the reason this issue is relevant (T. Ramakrishnan, 2017). The discussion of the arguments against Jallikattu and the concerns of anti-Jallikattu activists are valid as well since the reports of animal abuse were technically correct. The concerns range from numerous public health concerns, upholding the integrity of Indian family life, and animal cruelty. The final but equally as important aspect of Jallikattu in a modern-day context is the role of politics in this debate. The differences between the Tamil and national Indian governments, the influence of PETA, and other political factions' influence all played significant roles in events that gave Jallikattu both national and international attention. In many ways, the survival of Jallikattu within Tamilian culture is unique and contradictory. There are many valid and evidence-backed reasons to reject Jallikattu and enforce its ban throughout India. As Jallikattu enters modern times, these reasons seem to accumulate more rapidly than in previous centuries. However, support for Jallikattu among Tamilian people has grown in the past several years in an unprecedented manner (Shrikumar 2016).

An important factor that both powered and was affected by the Jallikattu protests is a movement away from foreign influences and brands combined with a return to local, Tamilian brands and products. For many years, India has emulated aspects of Western culture because of the cultural wave of modernization. Western culture became synonymous with progress and evolution, which led to the Indian market being flooded with Western marketing and products. However, because of the association of Jallikattu with Tamil nationalism, there was pushback against the Western market along with the pro-Jallikattu protests in 2017 (Sharma 2017). The resistance to avoid Western products had two primary motivations behind it. The first motivation was a rejection of the foreign influence of organizations like PETA that had been heavily vilified over the years. This meant people were being encouraged by marketing campaigns in Tamilnadu and over messaging apps like WhatsApp to switch to eating and drinking food produced and prepared locally rather than packaged, unhealthy foods from American and British markets (Sharma 2017). A shift away from foreign influences was another way in which people were able to reclaim Indian and Tamilian culture as well as support the Jallikattu movement. The second motivation was a state-wide boycott of companies like Pepsi and Coca-Cola because they were siphoning water from major rivers near agricultural towns where farmers relied on this water for irrigating their crops. This direct attack on the Tamil people was met with swift outrage because of the injustice of Tamil people suffering for the benefit of foreign conglomerates that do not respect the land they are taking from. Many restaurants, grocery stores, and corner stores in Tamilnadu have either reduced or stopped selling major soda brands or multinational companies. Instead, they choose to serve Indian brands of juices and drinks that are healthier than sugary beverages. Public health officials from all over India used this “anti-corporate sentiment to further their own agenda of promoting healthy eating” and drinking habits (Sharma 2017). The

pro-Jallikattu movement had the unexpected benefit of promoting a healthier lifestyle and eating habits but ultimately highlighted the importance of identity and cultural preservation.

Though Jallikattu is a culturally significant tournament, there are numerous valid reasons for people to work against Jallikattu. Participants run the obvious risk of being gored to death in the process of trying to grab the coin purse tied to the bull's horns. This risk is intrinsic to the nature of this sport, but the people who are watching on the floor of the arena are also very vulnerable because they are protected by little more than wooden posts that form a gate (Ramakrishnan, T. 2017). Additionally, there are many reports of drug and alcohol use at this event. This was evident even on the day I observed the tournament at Alanganallur: as the day wore on, there were more men partaking in both marijuana and liquor. One particularly poignant story is about a woman who found herself at the intersection of a very difficult problem involving Jallikattu (Venkatachalapathy 2016). She felt that Jallikattu should be preserved since it is an important aspect of Tamilian history and culture but decided to oppose it after her brother was killed during a Jallikattu. Her son now wanted to participate, and the woman knew he would drink heavily and put his life at risk for very little reward (Venkatachalapathy 2016). This dichotomy was repeated in many people's stories but there is no clear answer regarding whether people whose lives had been directly impacted by Jallikattu tended to support or not support the sport. The idea of Jallikattu as an event that is destroying the sanctity of family values is a powerful counter to the idea of Jallikattu as a staple of being Tamilian. Focusing on the wellbeing, health, and prosperity of the family and its members is just as much of a cultural staple. In many ways, Tamilian family values are more widely experienced and upheld compared to Jallikattu. This apparent contradiction has not diminished the fervor of the pro-Jallikattu movement.

One particularly influential aspect of the ban against Jallikattu from the beginning of the debate is the Indian branch of PETA's claim that animal rights are being violated during Jallikattu. Counterparts to the numerous human deaths and injuries that occur every year during Jallikattu are the deaths and injuries of the bulls themselves. During that same observation period from 2008 to 2011, officials saw four bull deaths and countless injuries to the bulls who were supposedly revered and going to take up residence at the temple (Government of India 2011). According to the government and eyewitness reports, bulls participating in Jallikattu are subjected to a multitude of cruel and inhuman treatments in order to incite them into aggressive behavior (Joshipura 2017). The majority of injuries to bulls happen before they are released into the arena. Since bulls are generally animals that do not attack people or become enraged easily, handlers subject them to various treatments to aggravate them. This includes jabbing the bulls with scythes, fracturing the vertebrae of the bull by bending the tail, and biting the bull's tail. Additional abuse involves forcing the bulls to imbibe alcohol to severely disorient them and rubbing chili in their eyes (Peregrine 2016). All these treatments are inherently cruel because they serve to frighten and terrify the animal so that it reaches a state of mind where it can react with aggression. Studies have suggested that this abusive treatment leads bulls to lash out with aggression because they see humans as predators and threats. PETA India suggests that bulls' natural sense of preservation is capitalized on by competitors and participants (PETA India 2014). Another hazard to the safety of the bulls and people is that the bulls can easily run into traffic or other hazardous areas. This can happen in areas that have Jallikattu not monitored or regulated by the government, which usually means safety measures are overlooked (Mogul 2016). Tensions between protesters and PETA were reignited in July of 2017 when PETA released a video showing their investigation of Jallikattu events from earlier that year that

showed the previously mentioned abuse. PETA India found an ally in the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWB) and the two organizations filed for the banning of Jallikattu with the Supreme Court in 2009 (Venkatesan 2016). Their partnership remains to this day and attempts to undermine Jallikattu have often included both organizations working together. In 2009, the provisions the government secured in order for the continuation of Jallikattu were that animals needed to be registered with the AWB and veterinarians were required at every celebration of Jallikattu to ensure animals were treated properly and so injuries could be addressed immediately. However, this demands a high level of regulation from the government and that has not been the case since these provisions were passed in 2009. Given that the government manages to set in place a rigid system of regulations and monitoring of the tournament, it is quite possible to both celebrate Jallikattu and not harm the animals involved.

It is apparent that the discussion surrounding Jallikattu is nuanced and influenced by a variety of different factors, parties, and people. There are many public health and animal cruelty related reasons that lead people to support the ban of Jallikattu. There are negative impacts Jallikattu has on the health of the competitors, the bulls, or the spectators, and the abuse of alcohol and marijuana during the tournament. However, protestors in favor of continuing Jallikattu defend their right to practice Jallikattu because of what Jallikattu has come to represent in the face of outside influences: manliness, strength, valor, bravery, and most importantly, Tamilian-ness (Ponnu 1984). This is both a push back to the Western influences in India that take the form of corporations that abuse the land without care for the people that reside there as well a result of people being able to share their opinions and galvanize others through social media and technology. Despite all the back and forth on the validity of either side, Jallikattu will always remain a cultural gem that is important for the history of India. To move forward in a

constructive way, there needs to be a compromise that involves both the freedom to celebrate the tradition as well as regulations during the tournaments.

NOTES

1. I compiled these rules by hand as the presenter was speaking. Though the rules were presented more as a general speech about how to participate in Jallikattu, I parsed through my notes and created a set of seventeen rules that I feel accurately and succinctly describe the game-playing aspects, limitations, and requirements of Jallikattu tournaments.
2. The practice of feeding birds small balls of rice that are left as a blessing to honor the elders was mentioned in one article that detailed the practices of all days of *Pongal*. While in India and speaking to people about how they celebrate *Pongal*, there were a handful of people who included this in the ritual of the third or fourth day of *Pongal*. However, most research made no mention of feeding birds in this way and it was a rare occurrence that led me to discovering this practice in the first place.
3. I include this short interlude about my parents, Kamatchi and Antony DSouza, who both grew up in different, small villages close to Madurai. This short story was obtained during interviews I conducted with my immediate family about their experiences with Jallikattu.

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BIOGRAPHY

Jana DSouza was born in Tiruchirappalli, India on December 2, 1996 and moved with her family to Katy, Texas in 2000. She enrolled in the Plan II Honors program at the University of Texas at Austin in 2015 and studied the pre-med track during that time. In college, she was a mentor for the Plan II KIPP program and officer of Delta Epsilon Mu, a pre-health fraternity. She will graduate in 2019 and is applying to medical school programs this summer. Ms. DSouza will work as a Medical Assistant for a Dr. Amy McClung in Austin, Texas for the following year.