

All gore: jallikattu in Tamil Nadu

With animal rights activists at the head of the campaign against jallikattu, more attention seems to have been paid to cruelty to the bulls than the inherently dangerous nature of the bull-taming event, that puts both spectators and participants at risk. Two onlookers have died in the space of two days in the jallikattu events in [Palamedu](#) and [Avaarangadu](#) in Tamil Nadu as the barricades separating the spectators from the arena were inadequate. Two others were killed in the *manjuvirattu* (a variant of jallikattu) at [Siravayal](#) when the bulls were unleashed outside the earmarked arena, a violation of due procedure. Clearly, the safety arrangements monitored by the district administration at these annual events in the Pongal season failed to prevent death and injury. With some of the events inducting more than 400 bulls and almost twice as many tamers, jallikattu has become a disorderly spectacle, making a mockery of even well-laid-out plans. The Animal Welfare Board of India, which was earlier in the forefront of documenting instances of mismanagement in the organising of jallikattu events, seems to have shifted its stance with a change of office-bearers. Other than spotting some “small mistakes” and “human errors”, the AWBI team’s convener, S.K. Mittal, found little amiss in the Palamedu event. The concern, instead, was on preserving “native breeds” of bulls. After last year’s protests against the Supreme Court ban on jallikattu, when thousands of people gathered in public places in Tamil Nadu demanding a revival of the sport, the authorities have been wary of condemning bull-taming during Pongal. They now speak the language of custom and tradition, one that is similar to that of the jallikattu enthusiasts.

When the Supreme Court banned jallikattu on the basis of submissions made by the AWBI, which recorded instances of cruelty to animals in regulated events, it did so on the ground that regulations were not working. Following public protests and political pressure, and on the strength of hurriedly drafted legislation, jallikattu is now back on the Pongal calendar. But nothing much has changed on the ground. Of course, participants and bulls are screened before being allowed into the arena. But the bulls do not heed the barricades that are meant to fence off spectators from the arena. Also, there is the risk of hyper-excited miscreants releasing the bulls outside the arena: this is what happened in Siravayal. District authorities have so far failed to find better ways to regulate the events, but more than the size of an event, the scale is the challenge. In short, there are too many events in too many places within a period of a few days, making regulation next to impossible. It is one thing to have well-regulated jallikattu. But we are far from staging it in a manner that leaves nothing to chance and that is insured against damage wreaked by a rampaging bull.

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