

Jalli Kattu – Primitivity Amidst Modernity?

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Jalli Kattu however glorified is a brutal sport for both the players and sometimes even to the sadistic crowd. It is one of the cultural markers of manliness and to express Bravery during civil times in the olden era. Moustache, steel frame and muscles, honour deaths, Jalli Kattu, Mal Utham (wrestling), potency and big family, family violence are some of the social and cultural markers of manliness in Tamizh world as it is probably elsewhere also which are natural in a world where men were active in economic and military activities and women were confined to domestic chores and if lucky in golden cages in rich and royal families.

Jalli Kattu or bull taming has been banned by the Supreme Court of India in 2014 which decision is being questioned legally, culturally and politically in Tamizh Nadu. Powerful voices such as the Chief Minister himself, the newly anointed General Secretary of AIADMK party, Ms. Sasikala, actors like Kamala Hasan, Dhanush, Satyaraj and others, DMK (not to lose out on political ends) and others are lending support to the revival of this sport under several pretexts. The sport has been linked to the Tradition and Glory of Tamizhilian civilization. Participation in this sport is a part of the cultural makeover of Manliness exhibited often in the presence of royalty and eligible young women. Kamal Hasan has questioned the logic of cruelty to animals by asking for ban on Biryani also. Several others including BJP has lent a religious colour to it by asking the judiciary to ban animal sacrifices which are a part of Islamic festivals and so on. Apart from the obvious and uncalled for cruelty inflicted on the bulls in the name of sport hundreds of unwary men have been hurt in their grappling with bulls and scores have died as well. The response to Kamal Hasan is that cruelty to animals has been curbed when it is a part of a human sport. While vegetarian societies will pat Kamal Hasan for his call on Biryani he is too shrewd to be advised of the illogicality of his comment. Logic has its limits and one cannot compare cruelty caused to animals in sport (for human joy) with that done for human consumption. PETA's reflective remark whether the human beings sought the consent of the bulls for grappling by men has been attacked using Kamal Hasan's expansive logic – did other animals whose skins or tusks or any other part of the animals which are used for varieties of human consumption such as decorative items or a purse, etc. give their permission for these extracts and uses? This is again is a logical fallacy of undue and facile extension of a logic that is limited to a certain matter.

In fact, as we have moved in awareness we no longer have circuses which use animals with cruelty as in the past. Having witnessed both types of circuses I know how much the civilized generation of the present has lost in terms of human enjoyment though at the expense of animals. But we don't murmur, do we? Cinema world has awakened to the cause of animals' welfare and thus we have suitable assurances on animal safety in the beginning of a movie.

Animal sacrifices are common amongst Hindu communities also. Well, the joke is that religious groups do not care for animal safety as they are for settling scores with other religious communities.

While all societies had invented some forms of sports for human enjoyment and it is a mark of civilization to not to continue such acts and sports which cause cruelty to animals and cause human misery as well. Tradition can be celebrated in numerous other ways.

In fact I would go a step further and say that maintaining pets by humans is a form of cruelty, as animals are chosen by “humans” to be their pets and not vice versa. Further they are utterly domesticated in consonance with human comfort levels. It does not shock us that the stray dogs are shot down with social endorsement. If only humans could understand the language of animals we would be much shocked to learn of “their” perception of humans, I guess.

There is another view point that any sport is prone to injuries as bull taming is and what is required is regulation. The cardinal error in this argument is that regulation of a sport between humans is fine and despite that aggression has its own casualties, but here we are speaking of a sport involving an animal and men. Typically in this sport the bull’s instinctive aggression is sought to be excited to test the man’s tackling prowess. In the process, the cheering crowd intoxicates the man and the temptative signals excite the animal and no regulator can control the outcome of it, though skill will come to the rescue of the tackler and umpires might save the animal from destruction.

There is also another argument that Jalli Kattu symbolizes coexistence of animal and people and this has helped to protect the breed of native cattle. But there must be other ways to sustain the animal breeds. Again, the critics observe the disconnect with the rural economy such that moderate and sunny urbanites do not understand the rough functioning of rural life. True, we have lost touch with nature. That is precisely the point. Let us not play with animals. All the justifications for cattle breeding and being a part of the rural economy and society and culture do not justify this singular act of unsolicited sportive action from the animals. Yes, they respond to the “manning” by people and enacts to please the crowd. But it does not carry the flag of the pro-jalli kattu any higher.

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While these notions and cultural norms are fast losing relevance it is downright silly for these people to ask for revival of a reprehensible sport which brings sadistic joy to thousands who enjoy the murderous sport from the so-called safe zone of “non-manliness”.

But the more worrisome aspect is that it is highly likely that the Supreme Court’s order will be ignored with utter joy and contempt now that this sport has achieved not only support but a sense of social legitimacy. Tamizh Nadu can no longer enjoy the credibility even legitimacy to question Karnataka’s non-observance of Supreme Court’s order on sharing of Cauvery water with it. Atleast that non-observance, to wit, was for a more productive cause, i.e. to retain more water for the farmers in Karnataka as compared to this non-observance for an utterly unproductive even destructive cause.

It is a supreme case of violation in a Constitutional sense when the federal State which is supposed to implement the highest judicial body’s order is itself a party to violation. These are not comforting signs where political ir[rationalities] supersede judicial wisdom. It is a threat to Constitutional Order in a pluralistic democracy.