

***Jallikattu* of Tamil Nadu Tradition Compared to the Theme of *Digging* by Seamus Heaney**

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Abstract

Jallikattu is a sports festival with one-to-one sport, a bull and a man inside the ring at a time. This paper investigates on “*Jallikattu*” the bull taming sports festival which was a part of old Tamil culture and tradition in association with agricultural farming in Tamil Nadu. *Digging* poem was one of Seamus Heaney's poem which reflects the poet's relationship to his family and appeared first in the *New Statesman* magazine in 1964. Through this poem “*Digging*”, the author explores the relationship between three generations: the speaker, his father, and the speaker's grandfather and also the rural history of his family. Seamus Heaney as a writer, he finds the same link with the nature like that of his forefathers who were farmers. Both writing and farming are a blend of culture and tradition. This paper describes the struggle to bring back the Tamil tradition of *Jallikattu* and also compared to theme of *Digging* poem to reflects its tradition.

Keywords: *Jallikattu*, bullfight, social media, ancient tradition, Tamil culture, Ireland. Seamus Heaney, *Digging*, culture, farming, tradition.

1. Introduction to *Jallikattu*

Tamil language, a major language the Dravidian family, had a presence even around 4,000 years ago ⁽¹⁻³⁾. Tamil language is spoken by the Tamil people of South India and it is an official language of the state of Tamil Nadu in India as well as two other sovereign nations, Singapore, and Sri Lanka ⁽¹⁻⁴⁾. At present, the number of speakers of Tamil language is around 7.7 crores. This language is spoken in India, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia ⁽⁵⁾. *Jallikattu* has been practised for thousands of years in Tamil Nadu and it had been referred to in Sangam literature. Historical references indicate that this sport was popular among warriors during the Tamil classical period. The term ‘*Jallikattu*’ comes from Tamil terms ‘*salli kaasu*’ (coins). The word ‘*kattu*’ referring to the tying of prize money to the horns of a bull which was tied. Later, in the colonial period, the name was changed to ‘*Jallikattu*.’ *Jallikattu* is believed to be a tradition

practiced since at least last 2,500 years. There were references of people enjoying witnessing and participating in Jallikattu in Silappatikaaram written by Ilango Adigal which was one of the five great epics of Tamil literature. There were references in two other ancient Tamil literary works like Kalithogai and Malaipadukadaam (6,7).

The harvest festival *Pongal* includes a number of social, cultural and traditional events and one of the traditional sport events was *Jallikattu*. In Tamil Nadu, the traditional Jallikattu sport festival involving young men competing against bulls is described as one of the ancient living sports in the modern era. The figure 1 shows the Jallikattu, and the bull is jumping from *vadivasal* before 2009 and olden days and the tamer tried to catch the horns to tame the bull. The casualties were more in this type of Jallikattu both for men and bulls.



**Fig.1. shows the Photograph of Jallikattu and the Bull is jumping from Vadivasal.
Courtesy: Medium.com**

2. Court Interference against Jallikattu:

Mr. N.Nagarajan, an elderly man appealed the court, whose son N. Marimuthu was gored to death by a bull in Alanganallur Jallikattu from the spectator gallery in 2004 and he insisted on banning the Jallikattu. A single-judge Bench of the Madras High Court on 29th March 2006 directed the Tamil Nadu government to ban Jallikattu which, according to the Bench, involved cruelty to animals, by implementing the provisions of Preventing Cruelty to Animals Act (PCA

Act), 1950. Also many cases were filed against as well as in favour of Jallikattu. In the year 2007 on March 9 Justice Banumathi issued the order to perform Jallikattu with certain restrictions and norms. On 12th January 2008, the Apex court refused permission to conduct Jallikattu but granted permission for Rekla race.

3. Tamil Nadu Regulation of Jallikattu Act, 2009 (Tamil Nadu Act 27 of 2009)

The court banned the Jallikattu in January 2008, therefore, the Tamil Nadu government under the Chief Minister M Karunanidhi passed the Tamil Nadu Regulation of Jallikattu Act in 2009. This ‘Tamil Nadu Regulation of Jallikattu Act, 2009’ regulated the conduct of Jallikattu with the introduction of restriction in holding such events to safeguard animals, participants and the spectators ⁽¹⁰⁾. This act also describes the procedures, venue, registration of bulls, and tamers and so on ⁽¹¹⁻¹²⁾.

For the conduct of Jallikattu, the following activities were done in preparation of the event ⁽¹⁰⁻¹²⁾:

1. A written permission is obtained from the District Collector 30 days before the sport is conducted.
2. The arena is to be covered by double-barricaded in order to avoid injuries to the spectators.
3. The gallery areas are to be built up specially for Jallikattu.
4. The tamers and bulls are to be registered with necessary permission.
5. Final preparation and testing are to be done by the authorities of the Animal Husbandry Department,
6. For enhancement drugs, liquor or other irritants are not used on the bulls.
7. The tamer holds the "hump" not the "horns" for taming. They shouldn't pull the tail.
- 8.

4. People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA):

In the year 2011, PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals) filed a petition against conducting Jallikattu in the Supreme Court of India challenging the Regulation of Jallikattu Act, 2009 to ban the Jallikattu, with report and evidence of photographs and video. The Supreme Court of India passed final judgment on 7th May 2014 banning the Jallikattu on the ground of animal cruelty. After this verdict, Jallikattu could not be conducted in 2015 and 2016. This verdict imposed a complete ban on Jallikattu, bullock-cart races and other such events, holding them to be in violation of several sections of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 (Sharma and Singh, 2015) ⁽¹³⁾ and so Jallikattu could not be conducted in 2015 and 2016. The court found there were 12 violations of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (PCA), 1960 of the Government of India under Section 11⁽¹³⁾. The argument put forth by the people of Tamilnadu was that the order was against the Article 13, the provision in the Constitution

granting protection to Tamil customs and culture, and they claimed that it was their fundamental rights to save their tradition.

5. Tamil Nadu Students and Youth Protest for Jallikattu

The Supreme Court of India banned the Jallikattu from 2014 onwards. The Centre issued special notification on 8th January 2016 to perform Jallikattu with certain conditions. But the Supreme Court of India stayed this notification on 12th January 2016. Therefore, the government of Tamil Nadu didn't permit the performance of Jallikattu in the consecutive years in 2015, 2016 and 2017. At the same time, the students and people of Tamil Nadu felt that it was an attack on Tamil culture and pride. This sentiment of the Tamil culture and tradition being under siege enabled the rural-urban divide into unite these binaries under the banner of this bull sport.

At the Marina beach, Chennai, thousands of students from various colleges in the city assembled to hold a massive, non-violence and spontaneous protest. It was clear that this protest was led by students and they demanded that the Supreme Court's ban on Jallikattu be lifted. The students from engineering colleges, law colleges, polytechnic colleges, arts and science colleges were adding to the numbers, and promising to stay until the ban on Jallikattu was lifted. "We are protesting against Jallikattu ban and for the people who were detained at Alanganallur in Madurai. We will be here till Jallikattu was allowed," said a student. The students from SRM and Valliammai engineering colleges were protesting outside their campus in Kattankullathur. The students from Theni, Dindigul, Madurai, Palayamkottai and all over Tamil Nadu gathered spontaneously pressing for the conduct of Jallikattu during the Pongal festival. The overwhelming voice of the protesters was that Jallikattu is Tamil tradition, and it should be respected as such and not be banned as cruelty to animals. In this protest the politicians were kept out, but there were students, software professionals, playback singers, filmmakers, doctors, lawyers, film stars, bank employees — all gathered to protest against the ban on Jallikattu, the traditional bull-taming sport.

Everyone became a volunteer, a protester, a leader, and everyone got a chance to address in the crowd to save their old tradition. Many people felt that it was a threat to their Tamil identity. When they impose nationalism, they felt that Tamils have a strong regional identity too. Not only rural people but also people from the urban regions were active participants in the protests for this traditional rural sports. Many employees in the government and private sectors too joined in this protest. Reports were put, there were an estimated 100,000 protestors gathered on the Marina Beach (Second largest beach in the world) alone. The matter also reached the High Court of Madras, but it refused to intervene, pointing out that neither the Supreme Court nor the State government had the powers to do intervene in a matter.

6. Jallikattu Bill, 2017 Passed Unanimously

With the view of the protest by students in the Tamil Nadu for Jallikattu in the state, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly was conducted a special meeting for bill amendment. The Bill was introduced by the Chief Minister O. Paneerselvam and was whole heartedly welcomed by M. K. Stalin, the leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, and Jallikattu amendment bill, 2017 was passed unanimously on 23rd January 2017 ⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁷⁾ by saving the culture and tradition of Tamil Nadu.

7. Digging Poem by Seamus Heaney

Irish poet Seamus Heaney wrote a wonderful English poem on “Digging” and got a Nobel prize in 1995. “Digging” looks into the relationship between the speaker’s generations: the speaker, his father, grandfather and the forefathers. The speaker lives a very different life as he is a writer, whereas his ancestors were farmers. The speaker’s father worked the digging on the land, just like his father before him. Both his father and grandfather used a shovel (spade) skillfully and were engaged in farming. The speaker isn’t a digger of the earth, but he realizes that he can still honor his tradition.

8. Comparison of Jallikattu of Tamil Nadu tradition with the Theme of Tradition “Digging” by Seamus Heaney

First Comparison: The speaker Seamus Heaney writes, Father, Grandfather and Forefathers held Shovel (Spade) between their Fingers and Thumb for Digging their agricultural land for farming Potatoes ^(18, 19). This is compared to the 4000 years old tradition of Tamil culture and here the tamers, Father, their Grandfathers, and forefathers hold the horns of the Bull (Figure. 2) between their Fingers and Thumb for taming the bull ⁽⁶⁾. The bull was associated with agricultural farming.



Fig.2. shows the Photograph of Jallikattu, here the Tamer hold the horns of the Bull between their Finger's and Thumb for taming the bull before 2009.

Second Comparison: The speaker writes the following:

**“Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down.”**

The speaker suddenly diverted by the sound “Dung” from spade while his father digging the land for the potatoes while he is on work with pen and paper. The sound is similar to that of metals and stones. The speaker writes, “Under my window, a clean rasping sound “Dung” when the spade sinks into gravelly ground”.

The tamer holds the "hump/horns" of the bull between his fingers and Thumb to tame the bull in the Jallikattu sports festival. The tamer hears a clear rasping sound "Hai" from the spectators when he caught the bull's horns/hump.

Third Comparison: The speaker writes the following:

**“Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.**

I'll dig with it".

The author Seamus says between his Fingers and Thumb, the Squat Pen rests to write about their tradition of farming. He says tradition is much more Value. Through this poem he remembers his tradition and traditional value. He says, his ancestors used spade (manual force) to dig, now he is using his pen (intellectual force) to dig. This represents their hardwork.

As per the guidelines of **Tamil Nadu Regulation of Jallikattu Act, 2009**, the tamer holds the "hump" of the bull between his fingers and thumb to tame the bull in the Jallikattu sports festival (**Figure.3**). Tamilian ancestors (Tamer) used to hold bull horns for taming which created a lot of casualties. Now as per the guidelines of the Regulation Act, 2009, the tamer used to hold bull "hump" for taming the bull which is a safer side for the tamers. This represents the struggle of the students to save their tradition.



Fig.3. The tamer holds the "hump" of the bull between his fingers and Thumb to tame the bull. Courtesy: Blogs. Pjstar.com

The bull taming sports festival “Jallikattu” was a part of Tamil culture and it was an age old tradition, and it was saved and practiced/played for everyone to remember their tradition and traditional value ⁽²⁰⁻²²⁾.

9. Conclusion

The Ireland tradition is agricultural farming. Potato farming is inevitable in Irish tradition. The survival of Irish people is based on potato farming. Heaney decides to give up the concept of writing as aggression and focuses on the spade as his analogue for his pen. The pen will serve as an instrument. By writing poems, Seamus Heaney got Nobel Prize in 1995 for literature.

Today, the ancient tradition of Jallikattu has been saved. Thanks to all the students of Tamil Nadu who took part in the agitation against the Supreme Court order to save the Jallikattu sports festival in Marina and other places. Tamil identity has been recognized by the entire world by enjoying the Tamilian sports festival Jallikattu through YouTube, etc. Reading the poem "Digging" brings out the focus on relevance of positive and hardworking people's tradition and how even when the tradition takes a different form.

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