



# *PETA* INDIA Investigation Into Illegal Rekla (Bullock Cart) Races in Tamil Nadu

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2018





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## **I. Details of the Investigations**

### **Dates of the Investigations**

- 21 January 2018
- 4 February 2018

### **Rekla Races Covered**

- Kolumakondan in Dindigul district on 21 January 2018
- S Kumarapalayam near Pollachi in Coimbatore district on 4 February 2018

### **Objectives of the Investigation**

- To check whether bulls were subjected to cruelty
- To check for any other violation of animal-protection laws

## II. Executive Summary

The historic 2014 judgment of the Supreme Court banned jallikattu and rekla (bullock cart) races. Although an amendment was made by the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly to The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960, to allow jallikattu, which includes, “manjuviratu”, “vadamadu”, and “erudhuvidumvizha”, rekla races continue to be banned in the state. The aforesaid position stands confirmed by a recent Right To Information (RTI) response of Tamil Nadu’s Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries Department, wherein it’s stated that the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Conduct of Jallikattu) Rules, 2017, framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act, 2017, does not permit rekla races in the state. However, under the pretext of these state laws, illegal rekla races are rampant in various parts of Tamil Nadu.

The investigations conducted by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India revealed that banned rekla races were held at various places in Tamil Nadu and that various district administrations gave permission for them, violating the 7 May 2014 order of the Supreme Court of India and also ignoring the limitations of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act, 2017.

PETA India’s investigations into illegal rekla races held in January and February 2018 reveal that there is widespread cruelty in rekla races; bulls are brazenly given electric shocks; they’re beaten and jabbed with nail-studded sticks; their tails are savagely bitten and yanked; their nose ropes roughly handled; and they’re denied basic necessities, such as drinking water, feed, and shade.

In January 2018, the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) – the prescribed authority under the PCA Act, 1960, and the Performing Animals (Registration) Rules, 2001 – denied permission to shoot a rekla race for the Tamil movie *Kadaikutty Singam*, stating that such races are banned by the Supreme Court, as they’re against the provisions of the PCA Act, 1960. In February, the AWBI denied permission for the production company to use the footage of the rekla race, stating that the company already committed a violation despite the AWBI’s prior instruction that rekla races are illegal. The AWBI also stated that the rekla race was organised illegally and that footage shot of illegal races cannot be used. However, in March 2018, the AWBI overturned its own decision and approved the rekla race scenes, which were shot illegally without obtaining mandatory pre-shoot permission, by accepting the claim of the production company that animals were naturally shot to create village atmosphere scenes and the rekla race is a “stock shot”.

Bulls are abused during illegal rekla races, and they suffer mentally as well as physically. The ban imposed by the Supreme Court of India on rekla races must be enforced in Tamil Nadu in order to prevent cruelty to bulls. Moreover, disciplinary actions must be initiated against the erring government officials who allowed the conduct of rekla races in Tamil Nadu, and penal action must be taken against the organisers and participants of such illegal events. The AWBI may reconsider its March 2018 decision allowing the film *Kadaikutty Singam* to use scenes of illegal rekla races and may withdraw the permission granted to the production company.



### III. Observations and Findings

Illegal Rekla Race	General Observations	Interpretations in Reference to the 'Five Freedoms' <sup>1</sup> of Animal Welfare
<b>Before the race</b>	In order to agitate them, bulls were given electric shocks by owners and handlers right before they were taken to the starting line. Often, bulls were shocked at the place where they were tethered but after they were untied.	Compromised bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, fear, and distress
	Many bulls were dehydrated and/or exhausted in the absence of provisions of shade, drinking water, and food.	Compromised bulls' freedom from hunger and thirst
	Bulls were tethered for hours by short ropes that gave them very little room to move.	Compromised bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, fear, and distress
	Bulls were roughly handled and dragged using nose ropes, causing them much visible discomfort and distress.	Compromised bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, injury, fear, and distress
<b>At the starting line</b>	To hitch the carts to the reluctant bulls, men vigorously restrained the animals by their nose ropes and kept them in position by pushing and hitting them with bare hands.	Compromised bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, fear, and distress
	Bulls were hit with bare hands and poked with wooden sticks, and their tails were bitten and twisted at the starting line when the race began.	Compromised bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, fear, and distress
<b>On the racetrack</b>	Bulls were subjected to various forms of cruelty: they were hit with sticks and bare hands, jabbed with sticks in their anus, and poked with pointed wooden sticks, and their tails' were bitten, twisted, and yanked as men screamed to scare the animals into charging ahead. Most bulls were hit, poked, and bitten from starting line to the finish	Compromised bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, fear, and distress

<sup>1</sup>**Freedom From Hunger and Thirst** ("by ready access to fresh water and diet to maintain health and vigor"); **Freedom From Discomfort** ("by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area"); **Freedom From Pain, Injury or Disease** ("by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment"); **Freedom to Express Normal Behavior** ("by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind"); and **Freedom From Fear and Distress** ("by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering")  
[http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/pro/files/aspca\\_asv\\_five\\_freedoms\\_final\\_0\\_0.pdf](http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/pro/files/aspca_asv_five_freedoms_final_0_0.pdf).

	line.	
	Some bulls crashed into the barricade and makeshift flag-off (starting) point. One bull was photographed falling on the tar road while being forced to race.	Compromised bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, fear, and distress
	Bulls were forced to race numerous times on tar roads under the blazing hot sun.	Compromised the bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, fear, and distress
<b>At the end of the race</b>	Many bulls were found to be dehydrated and/or exhausted in the absence of provisions of shade, drinking water, and food. There was absolutely no provision for feed, water, or shelter made by organisers or owners in the area after the finish line, before the same bulls were taken back to starting line for the next round of races.	Compromised bulls' freedom from hunger and thirst
	Bulls were tethered for hours by short ropes that gave them very little room to move.	Compromised bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, fear, and distress
	Bulls were crammed into small trucks and transported without feed, drinking water, or shade.	Compromised bulls' freedom from discomfort, pain, fear, distress, hunger, and thirst



## A. Electric Shocks

Before the bulls were taken to the starting line to race, many owners and support staff tortured them by giving them electric shocks using a device that was essentially a nail-studded wooden stick with an electric wire connected to an electric switch box. To agitate the bulls, men slyly approached them from behind and jabbed them with the sticks. One man was filmed giving his bull electric shocks near the anus, a sensitive part of the body. Even just by seeing the device, many bulls got scared and visibly disturbed and unsuccessfully tried to escape being shocked. Only a few owners had the devices, so they were shared among the owners and handlers.

In addition, bulls were also poked brazenly with non-electrified nail-studded wooden sticks.



**Photo 1:** Before a race in race in Kolumakondan, a bull owner is seen with a stick and a source of electric power.



**Photo 2:** A man shocks a bull in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 3:** A man hides an electric shock-inducing device from a bull, moments before he shocks the animal in S Kumarapalayam.





**Photo 4:** This electric shock-inducing stick was used on bulls in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 5:** A man shocks a bull in S Kumarapalayam.





**Photo 6:** A man can be seen holding a shock device in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 7:** Before the bulls are forced to race in Kolumakondan, an owner shocks his bull.





**Photo 8:** A man holds a shock device in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 9:** A bull owner holds a shock device moments before he shocks a bull in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 10:** A man can be seen with a shock device in S Kumarapalayam.



## B. Tail Biting and Twisting

Bulls' tails were rampantly and savagely bitten by the people manoeuvring the bullock carts in the majority of races held at both venues. The cart riders held and bit the tails for few seconds to induce pain and force the bulls to run faster. Tails were also twisted and yanked. In some cases, they were bitten and twisted from the starting line to the finish line.



**Photo 11:** A cart rider bites the tail of a bull in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 12:** A cart rider savagely bites the tail of a bull in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 13:** A man manoeuvring a cart in Kolumakondan bites a bull's tail.



**Photo 14:** A man bites a bull's tail during a race in S Kumarapalayam.





**Photo 15:** A cart rider bites a bull's tail in Kolumakondan.



### C. Poking With Pointed Sticks

Bulls were brazenly hit, jabbed, and poked with sharp wooden sticks, some of which had one or two nails at one end. Running bulls' anuses were commonly poked to induce tremendous pain. Almost all pairs of bulls were poked and jabbed from the starting line to the finish line to try to win the top prizes.



**Photo 16:** A man pokes sticks into the anuses of two bulls as the cart rider bites one bull's tail in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 17:** A man pokes a stick into the anus of a bull in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 18:** A man pokes a stick into the anus of a bull in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 19:** A man pokes sticks into the anuses of two bulls in Kolumakondan.





**Photo 20:** A man pokes a stick into the anus of a bull as the cart rider bites the animal's tail in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 21:** A man pokes a stick near the anus of a bull as the cart rider bites the animal's tail in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 22:** A man pokes a stick into the anus of a bull at the race's starting point in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 23:** A man carries torture devices used in rekla races in Kolumakondan. Two were pointed wooden sticks, and the other wooden stick had two sharp nails on its tip.





**Photo 24:** Before a race, a bull was jabbed with this nail-studded stick in S Kumarapalayam.

#### **D. Beating and Hitting Bulls**

Bulls were brazenly hit with thick wooden sticks and whacked with bare hands by the duo on the carts. Each bullock cart had two men: one who beat the bulls with his bare hands and the other who poked and/or hit the animals with sticks. In addition, men hit bulls with their bare hands at the starting line in order to get them to stand in race position, and they were also hit when the races began.



**Photo 25:** Bulls leap as men whack them with bare hands at the starting point of the race in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 26:** A man hits a pair of bulls with a wooden stick while the other rider twists one's tail during a race in S Kumarapalayam.





**Photo 27:** A man whacks a bull on the back with his bare hand, while another pokes a stick into a bull's anus in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 28:** A pair of bulls is beaten by men on either side at the starting line in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 29:** A bullock rider hits bulls with his bare hands, while another person pokes a bull's anus with a stick during a race in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 30:** Two men beat bulls with sticks in Kolumakondan.





**Photo 31:** A rider hits bulls with a long, wooden stick in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 32:** A man hits bulls with a thick wooden stick in Kolumakondan.





**Photo 33:** A man hits bulls with a long, wooden stick in S Kumarapalayam.



**Photo 34:** A man hits bulls with a wooden stick during a race in Kolumakondan.





**Photo 35:** Beating marks are visible on the side of a bull who was walked from the finish line back to the starting point in S Kumarapalayam.

## E. Crashes and Collisions

Some bulls ended up crashing into barricades and into the starting line flag-off point. One bull pair in S Kumarapalayam crashed onto the tar road while being hit during a race but ended up escaping unhurt. Neither the organisers nor the people riding the bullock carts that caused bulls to crash and collide with barricades or fall onto the road were held accountable and penalised.



**Photo 36:** A bull is stuck to the parked vehicle that serves as the makeshift flag-off starting point in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 37:** A pair of bulls crashes into a barricade, moments after they emerge from the starting line in S Kumarapalayam.





**Photo 38:** A bull crashes onto the tar road moments after they run from the starting point in S Kumarapalayam.

## **F. Lack of Drinking Water, Feed, and Shade**

Bulls had no access to feed, drinking water, or overhead shelter from the sun at the waiting areas, starting lines, or finish lines at the two events investigated. The animals were tethered for hours by very short ropes that severely restricted their movement.



**Photo 39:** Bulls have no access to drinking water, feed, or shade in the waiting area in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 40:** Bulls have no access to drinking water or feed in the waiting area in S Kumarapalayam.



## G. Racing on Tar Roads

The racetracks at both illegal rekla races were tarred roads, and bulls were forced to race on them in the scorching heat. The roads had hoofmarks at the end of the races.



**Photo 41:** Bulls are forced to race and walk on a tar road in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 42:** Hoofmarks are visible after the race in S Kumarapalayam.



## H. Nose Ropes Roughly Handled

Bulls' nose ropes were roughly handled and yanked to drag reluctant, scared, and dehydrated bulls to the starting line and to keep them in position when the carts were loaded and hitched to the animals.



**Photo 43:** Bulls' nose ropes were roughly handled, as seen here in Kolumakondan.



**Photo 44:** Bulls are violently restrained and forced to stand in position at the starting point of the race in S Kumarapalayam.

## I. Cops Were Mute Spectators

In order to maintain law and order, police personnel were designated at the two venues. However, they were mute spectators to these illegal/banned events.



**Photo 45:** Police personnel play mute spectators at the banned race held in S Kumarapalayam.



#### IV. Illegal Rekla Races in Film

In January 2018, Tamil actor Suriya tweeted a photo and video of a rekla race from the set of his brother Karthi's (Karthik Sivakumar) film *Kadaikutty Singam*. It was reported that this illegal race was shot without obtaining mandatory pre-shoot permission from the AWBI, the prescribed authority under the PCA Act, 1960, and the Performing Animals (Registration) Rules, 2001.



**Photo 46:** Actor Suriya tweeted this from a rekla race on the set of *Kadaikutty Singam*.  
Source: *Twitter.com*



**Photo 47:** Suriya also tweeted a video of a rekla race from the set of *Kadaikutty Singam*. Source: *Twitter.com*

On 24 January 2018, the AWBI reportedly denied permission to shoot a rekla race for the movie, stating, “Not Approved. The applicant is informed that Rekla Race is banned by Supreme Court as it is against the provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.” (**Annexure 1**)

On 7 February 2018, the AWBI reportedly denied permission to the production company to use the footage of rekla races, stating, “The applicant . . . already committed violations in spite of the board’s prior instruction that Rekla race is illegal. The Rekla race was organized is illegally and stock shot of the illegal races cannot be accepted.” (**Annexure 2**)

However, in March 2018, the AWBI overturned its own decision and approved the rekla race scenes, which were shot illegally without obtaining mandatory pre-shoot permission, by accepting the claim of the production company that animals were naturally shot to create village atmosphere scenes and the rekla race is a “stock shot”. (**Annexure 3**)



## V. Apparent Legal Violations

- A. Rekla races are banned in India by the Supreme Court of India through the landmark judgment of 7 May 2014, in the matter of *Animal Welfare of Board of India v A Nagaraja & Ors*. The judgment made it clear that spectacles, such as rekla races, that harm bulls violate the provisions of the Constitution of India; Sections 3 and 11 of the PCA Act, 1960; and the 11 July 2011 notification of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), which prohibits the use of bulls as a performing animal.

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act, 2017, does not consider rekla races “jallikattu” under Section 2(dd), and since there aren’t any procedures for conducting rekla races under the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Conduct of Jallikattu) Rules, 2017, the organisers and participants of rekla races are liable for contempt-of-court proceedings.

The aforesaid position stands confirmed by a recent RTI response from Tamil Nadu’s Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries Department, wherein it’s stated that the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Conduct of Jallikattu) Rules, 2017, framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act, 2017, does not permit rekla races in the state. (**Annexure 4**)

Prior to the 2014 judgment of the Supreme Court of India, bullock cart races were banned in Maharashtra by the High Court of Bombay through its judgment dated 12 March 2012, by upholding the 11 July 2011 notification of the MoEF&CC.

On 11 October 2017, the High Court of Bombay in a Public Interest Litigation passed an order stating that it’s bound by the observations and views of the 2014 Supreme Court judgment that banned bullock cart races across the country. The High Court pointed out that the Supreme Court has categorically stated that bulls are not anatomically suited to racing.

- B. The findings of PETA India’s investigations highlight the rampant violation of the PCA Act, 1960. Giving electric shocks, hitting, beating, and poking bulls with sticks and biting and twisting their tails amount to cruelty to animals and violates Sections 3 and 11(1)(a) of the (PCA) Act, 1960.

Section 3 of the PCA Act, 1960, under “Duties of persons having charge of animals”, states, “It shall be the duty of every person having the care or charge of any animal to take all reasonable measures to ensure the well-being of such animal and to prevent the infliction upon such animal of unnecessary pain or suffering.”

Section 11(1)(a) of the PCA Act states that it’s considered cruelty to animals if any person “beats, kicks, over-rides, over-drives, over-loads, tortures or otherwise treats any animal so as to subject it to unnecessary pain or suffering or causes, or being the owner permits, any animals to be so treated.”

- C. In addition, the findings of the investigations conclusively prove that the rekla races violated other provisions of the PCA Act, 1960. Section 11(1)(f) states that it’s considered cruelty to animals if any person “keeps for an unreasonable time any

animal chained or tethered upon an unreasonably short or unreasonable heavy chain or cord”. And Section 11(1)(h) states that it’s a punishable offence if “the owner of (any animal) fails to provide such animal with sufficient food, drink or shelter.”

The provisions of the PCA Act, 1960, were violated in every race, and the physical and mental abuse of bulls were inherent in these illegal races.

- D.** The district administrations in Tamil Nadu which gave permission to conduct illegal rekla races are liable to be subjected to disciplinary action for violating the PCA Act and the directions of the Supreme Court of India. Through the 7 May 2014 judgment, in paragraph 77 on page 99, the Supreme Court of India directed, “The Governments would see that if the provisions of the PCA Act and the declarations and the directions issued by this Court are not properly and effectively complied with, disciplinary action be taken against the erring officials so that the purpose and object of PCA Act could be achieved.”
- E.** The company 2D Entertainment Pvt Ltd – Valliammai Illam, No 10/6, Seethamma Colony, 2nd Cross Street, Alwarpet, Chennai 600 018 – involved in the production of the Tamil film *Kadaikutty Singam* apparently violated Section 26 of the PCA Act, 1960, by not obtaining mandatory pre-shoot permission from the AWBI and for using the animals before registering them with the AWBI. As per Section 26 of PCA Act, 1960, an offender under this section “shall be punishable on conviction with fine which may extend to five hundred rupees or with imprisonment which may extend to three months, or with both”.
- F.** In light of the RTI response from Tamil Nadu’s Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries Department, wherein it’s clearly stated that the government order dated 21 January 2017 – the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Conduct of Jallikattu) Rules, 2017 – does not permit rekla races in the state, the AWBI officials erred in approving *Kadaikutty Singam* with scenes of illegal rekla races.



## **VI. Conclusion and Recommendations**

PETA India's investigations prove that illegal rekla races are organised in Tamil Nadu. Cruelty is inherent in rekla races, and the bulls are subjected to immense physical and mental trauma. Through its 2014 judgment, the Honourable Supreme Court banned rekla races and jallikattu and stated that when culture and tradition are at variance with the law enacted by Parliament, the law will take precedence. The District Collectors, rekla race organisers, police, bull owners, bullock cart riders, and spectators failed terribly to ensure that the Supreme Court's order and the PCA Act, 1960, were implemented and not violated.

There is so much more to the Pongal festivities than hitting, poking, and giving electric shocks to bulls in order to force them to race. The celebration also includes praying, singing, garlanding bulls, eating sweets, providing God with offerings, doing charitable deeds, and more. The purpose of the festival is to give thanks to nature and celebrate life, and that's not something that can be achieved by tormenting bulls and causing humans and bulls to get injured and die.

Animal torture cannot be regulated, and regulations cannot negate the fundamental cruelty of deliberately tormenting bulls. Many peer-reviewed papers demonstrate a link between the actions of humans and the fear, distress, and pain experienced by other species. Research has shown that handling animals roughly or abusively compromises their welfare and increases their fear of humans. Bulls who are given electric shocks, hit, poked, tormented, and otherwise abused during rekla races suffer mentally as well as physically. The ban imposed by the Supreme Court of India on rekla races must be enforced in Tamil Nadu in order to prevent cruelty to bulls. Moreover, disciplinary actions must be initiated against the erring government officials who allowed the conduct of rekla races in Tamil Nadu, and penal action must be taken against the organisers and participants of such illegal events. Furthermore, the AWBI may reconsider its March 2018 decision approving the film *Kadaikutty Singam* with scenes of illegal rekla races and may withdraw the permission granted to the production company.

