



## The Role of Jallikattu in Promoting Cultural Identity, Traditional Sports, and Tourism in Tamil Nadu: A Study of Student Perspectives

Parveen Kumar Sharma<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. R. Sangeetha<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD (Part-Time) Research Scholar, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research (BIHER), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor & HOD, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research (BIHER), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

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\*Corresponding Author: Parveen Kumar Sharma<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. R. Sangeetha<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

The research titled "Jallikattu: Exploring Cultural Identity, Sports Participation, and Tourism Potential Among Tamil Nadu's Students" studies the perceptions of youth, particularly individuals aged 17 to 25, regarding Jallikattu in the context of cultural identity, sports participation, and tourism potential.

The study attempts to determine how students connect Jallikattu with Tamil heritage, their assessment of its significance as a traditional sport, and their views on its impact on Tamil Nadu's tourism sector. The research gathered responses from a diverse sample of Tamil Nadu students via an online survey using Google Forms to ascertain their perspectives on the opportunities, challenges, and cultural importance related to Jallikattu. The data collection process employed a blend of quantitative and qualitative questions to investigate various dimensions, including tourism opportunities, sporting elements, and emotional connections.

Preliminary research indicates that students perceive jallikattu as not merely a sport but a vital element of Tamil culture and a powerful means of presenting Tamil Nadu's history to a global audience. Nevertheless, concerns regarding safety protocols, ethical conduct, and evolving youth engagement emerged as significant factors influencing their perspectives. The findings suggest the promotion and preservation of Jallikattu demand increased youth engagement, improved event organisation, and heightened awareness.

This study shows how students can help bring Jallikattu into the modern world and act as cultural ambassadors for it ensure the sustainability of Jallikattu in the modern era, it offers valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and tourism officials to harmonise cultural preservation with sports development and tourism initiatives.

**Keywords**—Jallikattu, Ilikattu, likattu, entity, student perception, traditional sports

## Introduction

Jallikattu, also called Eruthazhuvuthal or Manjuvirattu, is an ancient Indian sport in which participants tame bulls. It originated in Tamil Nadu. It is typically conducted during the Pongal harvest festival, which occurs in the middle of January. The sport involves individuals attempting to grasp a bull's hump and maintain their grip while the bull fights to escape. The act signifies strength, courage, and bravery (Singh, 2017; Ravindran, 2020). This ancient custom is not merely a performance in a single location; it is a cultural expression that has endured over time.

Jallikattu has existed for more than 5,000 years, as documented in historical records. Tamil Sangam literature, including Kalithogai, as well as cave paintings and temple sculptures, evidences this (Priyadharsini et al., 2019). Some scholars assert that the event's origins can be traced to agriculture, where bulls were esteemed as agricultural partners rather than as profit-generating pets. Consequently, Jallikattu plays a crucial role in fortifying communal bonds, preserving the agricultural lifestyle, and demonstrating reverence towards nature and livestock (Jayanth et al., 2019).

Historically, Jallikattu has been a representation of Tamils' collective identity and traditional wisdom. Boyewa Fifty years ago, there was no discussion in Nigeria regarding the age of consent for young people. It has become a contentious political and legal matter in the past decades. In 2014, the Supreme Court of India banned it following accusations of animal cruelty by animal rights organisations, including People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). The ban had resulted in widespread protests in Tamil Nadu, in particular by student organisations that considered it an assault on Tamil culture and heritage (Jayashree et al., 2019; Shantharaju & Peter, 2017). The 2017 protest at Marina Beach in Chennai, primarily driven by youth, emerged as a symbol of cultural resistance and played a crucial role in the legislative amendments that reversed the ban (Shantharaju

& Peter, 2017).

In addition to its cultural and political aspects, Jallikattu plays a crucial role in ecological conservation and the sustenance of rural livelihoods. Indigenous bull breeds, including Pulikulam, Kangayam, Umblachery, and Bargur, are preserved and protected through the ongoing practice of Jallikattu (Priyadharsini et al., 2019). Without these events, the increasing prevalence of hybrid cattle in industrial agriculture puts these breeds at risk of extinction. Jallikattu contributes to rural employment and supports traditional agricultural communities. Events in areas such as Alanganallur, Palamedu, and Avaniapuram draw thousands of visitors, stimulating economic activity via transportation services, hospitality sectors, and local food vendors (Rose, 2025).

The increasing popularity of Jallikattu has established it as a prospective cultural tourism asset. The emergence of experiential tourism in India and globally is transforming festivals and local traditions into immersive attractions. Jallikattu offers tourists a chance to engage with genuine Tamil village culture, traditions, and hospitality. Tourism researchers recognise it as a distinctive, location-specific attraction capable of diversifying Tamil Nadu's tourism offerings and fostering sustainable rural development (Rose, 2025). Concerns about safety, ethical standards, and evolving youth values have undermined the sport's conventional practices and public perception (Singh, 2017).

This study investigates Tamil Nadu college students' views regarding the applicability of Jallikattu in modern society, with a focus on those between the ages of 17 and 25. The aim is to examine their perspectives on the cultural identity of Jallikattu, its value as a sport, and its potential as a tourism attraction. Comprehending student perceptions is particularly significant, given their role as future custodians of Tamil culture and their influence in shaping public discourse. Students played a crucial role in the 2017 protests and will continue to shape discussions regarding tradition, animal welfare,

and modernisation. Preliminary research found that many of the students consider Jallikattu not merely a sport but an identity of cultural heritage, which can tell a global story (Jayashree et al., 2019). At the same time, they recognise the safety issues and ethical debates surrounding the sport, suggesting a complex balance between cultural pride and critique. This paper aims to make a contribution to the literature by providing empirical examples of how youth feel connected and involved within customary activities. The purpose of this model is to inform policies, tourism plans, and cultural-education programs in accordance with heritage preservation and ethical modernisation.

### Research Problem

The traditional bull-taming sport, jallikattu, primarily practiced in Tamil Nadu, has been a persistent topic of discussion in politics, culture, ethics, and law. While deeply rooted in the agricultural and cultural traditions of Tamil society, the event is increasingly subjected to criticism concerning its modernisation and treatment of animals. Jallikattu has attracted national and international attention recently, particularly after the Marina protests in 2017, underscoring its controversial nature and cultural significance. However, there exists a limited understanding of how young individuals, especially students, consider Jallikattu's function in boosting tourism, safeguarding Tamil identity, and confronting modern ethical dilemmas. The absence of structured data on these perspectives impedes a fair assessment of the sport's changing role in modern society.

### Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are to:

1. Analyse the cultural importance of Jallikattu. Understand students' perceptions of Jallikattu's impact on Tamil Nadu's identity, rural traditions, and heritage.
2. To assess the relevance of Jallikattu today, examine its role as a traditional sport and its impact on youth engagement in physical

activity.

3. To evaluate Jallikattu's capacity for enhancing tourism, identify the aspects of the event that attract visitors, such as community participation and cultural festivities.
4. To evaluate moral dilemmas and modernisation prospects, examine student perspectives on participant safety and animal welfare, as well as the potential for improved event management techniques.
5. We aim to explore the ways in which youth can actively contribute to the preservation and promotion of Jallikattu. Highlight the ways in which students can advocate for Jallikattu through awareness, participation, and the utilisation of modern platforms.

### Research Questions

Based on the objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students think Jallikattu is important for Tamil culture and preserving rural heritage?
2. What do students believe is the continued importance of Jallikattu in today's society?
3. How can Jallikattu help Tamil Nadu's cultural tourism grow?
4. What moral issues do students have with Jallikattu, especially when it comes to the safety and well-being of animals?
5. What do students think their role will be in keeping Jallikattu alive and well in the future?

### The Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

1. It helps us understand how young people, especially students, feel about a traditional but controversial sport.
2. It presents policymakers, cultural advocates, and tourism authorities ideas on how to market Jallikattu as both a cultural heritage practice and a tourist attraction.
3. It looks at ethical and modernisation issues, which are important for making sure the

event lasts in today's world.

4. By focusing on student participation, it highlights the role of young people in preserving culture, which gives schools, NGOs, and government organisations new ways to encourage civic and cultural engagement.

## Review of the Literature

The literature on Jallikattu encompasses various disciplines, including cultural identity, traditional sport, animal ethics, and tourism. This section examines the existing literature concerning four significant trends relevant to the current study: cultural and historical significance, power and social resistance, traditional sports and youth, and tourism value. The present study seeks to address significant gaps by leveraging students' perspectives.

### Cultural and Historical Significance of Jallikattu

This sport is among the oldest cultural events in India, with a history that spans over 5000 years. Tamil Sangam literature also mentions bull-taming, and cave paintings and temple sculptures from ancient times onwards depict it (Jayanth et al., 2019). The Kalithogai, part of the Eight Anthologies (Ettuthogai), references bull-taming scenes that are reminiscent of the contemporary practice of Jallikattu, indicating that this traditional event has a long-standing history (Priyadharsini et al., 2019).

Jallikattu is a bull-taming sport that has been around for hundreds of years in Tamil Nadu. It is celebrated every year during the Pongal festival. It shows thanks to cows, which are essential to farming life. Jallikattu is one of the oldest traditional sports still played in South India. It is mentioned in texts from the Sangam period. It shows not only physical skill but also respect for nature and livestock (Priyadharsini, Balakrishnan, & Chandran, 2019).

Some scholars say that Jallikattu is more than just a rural festival; it is an important part of

Tamil culture and a story about the relationship between people and nature in farming societies (Ravindran, 2020). People in rural Tamil Nadu often treat bulls like family members and respect their strength and their connection to God. The sport is a way for people to show their respect for these animals. Because of this, Jallikattu is a way to strengthen traditional values, family ties, and community ties (Jayashree et al., 2019).

Traditional sports such as Jallikattu strengthen regional identities and safeguard intangible cultural heritage. Bjeljic, Marković, and Stamenković (2021) assert that events like Jallikattu are intricately interconnected in community life, embodying historical continuity and fostering cultural identity. Fenghu (2010) explains that festivals and traditional sports facilitate the intergenerational transmission of customs and values. Dai (2023) contends that intangible heritage practices are essential for preserving local cultural diversity, particularly amid rapid globalisation. Chaeroni, Wahyudi, and Suharto (2024) underscore that traditional games encapsulate national pride and socio-cultural values within various communities.

### Balancing Cultural Rights and Animal Welfare

The ethical conflict between cultural preservation and animal welfare has been extensively discussed regarding Jallikattu. Activists express concerns regarding animal treatment, whereas advocates highlight its cultural, agricultural, and socio-economic importance.

Based on Salim and Yasmeen (2023), who study cultural ethics, the Jallikattu debate is a complicated mix of cultural identity and animal welfare. They stress the importance of following tradition while also being aware of moral issues. Thakur (2018), a constitutional law expert, looks at this conflict through Article 29(1) of the Indian Constitution, which protects cultural rights. He says that regulations should be put in place to lessen animal suffering without interfering with cultural practices. Both scholars point out that



balanced legal and ethical frameworks can make it possible to keep traditions alive while also protecting animal welfare.

### Political Mobilisation and Cultural Resistance

Jallikattu came into the national spotlight after the Supreme Court banned it in 2014, citing concerns about animal welfare. Organisations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) voiced strong opposition to the sport, calling it cruel and inhumane. The prohibition triggered widespread protests across Tamil Nadu, led mostly by students and young people, and reached its peak with the massive 2017 Marina Beach demonstration (Shantharaju & Peter, 2017). What made the movement stand out was its grassroots nature—free from political influence—and it was widely considered a statement of cultural identity and a pushback against perceived outside interference (Jayashree et al., 2019).

Researchers examined the protest movement not only as a reaction to the ban but also as a cultural force that brought Tamil identity and unity back to life. According to Shantharaju and Peter (2017), the protests at Marina Beach were like a "cultural reawakening." Jallikattu became a sign of Tamil pride, resistance, and young people protesting. These events showed that traditional ways of doing things can be a great way for young people to share their political and social views, especially those who want to reconnect with their roots.

### Traditional Sports and Youth Engagement

When people talk about physical education and getting kids involved, they don't always talk about traditional sports. But Jallikattu is a unique example of how sport, ritual, and community come together. Singh (2017) says that what makes Jallikattu special is that it involves the village youth in both physical challenges and symbolic acts of masculinity and community belonging.

Scholars are worried that globalised sports culture is causing indigenous games to die out.

However, Jallikattu is still popular in Tamil Nadu because it is such a big part of the culture (Priyadharsini et al., 2019). At the same time, youth involvement is changing. Young people are still very involved in traditional ways, but they are also finding new ways to get involved, such as through activism, digital storytelling, and community organising. Ravindran (2020) says that young people are becoming "cultural intermediaries," balancing tradition and modernity while keeping the core values of Jallikattu alive.

Despite these positive trends, many people remain concerned about safety, the absence of standardised rules, and shifting moral standards. Injuries and deaths have happened in the sport, which is why researchers are calling for updates to training, event planning, and animal care (Singh, 2017). These concerns have a direct impact on how students see things and are now the focus of new research.

Shimray (2024) explains that traditional sports are essential manifestations of communal values, promoting unity and the preservation of cultural identity. They function as informal educational systems for the transmission of ethics, valour, and historical knowledge. Dai (2023) asserts that these practices hold particular importance in rural settings, where formal cultural education may be scarce. Jallikattu exemplifies a living tradition that imparts responsibility and courage while uniting community members in shared celebration.

Wang (2016) studies the integration of traditional games into formal education and public discourse as a means of ensuring their preservation. Bronikowska and Prabucki (2014), who observe that globalisation frequently sidelines local practices unless bolstered by proactive cultural preservation initiatives, support this perspective. Through media and educational discourse, Jallikattu continues to evolve in significance and relevance for the younger generations in Tamil Nadu.

## Jallikattu and Cultural Tourism

The convergence of traditional sports and tourism represents a developing focus in cultural studies and hospitality management. Jallikattu, a festival with significant local heritage, presents opportunities for place-based tourism. Rose (2025) indicates that Jallikattu events, especially those conducted at Alanganallur, Palamedu, and Avaniapuram, can attract visitors from both domestic and international locations. These events provide genuine cultural experiences through folk dances, traditional cuisine, and community festivals, thereby increasing tourist engagement.

Tourism literature categorises Jallikattu as a specialised offer within the expanding field of cultural and rural tourism. When effectively marketed and ethically administered, such events can enhance sustainable development (Rose, 2025). Existing studies, however, warn against the commodification of the event, as it may undermine its cultural significance. Jayashree et al. (2019) highlight the nuanced relationship between the celebration of heritage and its commercial exploitation. The study identifies inadequate infrastructure and inconsistent event planning as significant barriers to maximising the tourism potential of Jallikattu.

The role of youth, especially students, in promoting Jallikattu as a cultural and tourism product remains underexplored in current research. This study seeks to fill the gap by gathering student perspectives on the opportunities and challenges related to the preservation and promotion of the sport.

Cultural sports like Jallikattu can boost tourism by emphasising the destination's unique culture. Xu (2022) says that traditional festivals improve a region's look emotionally and intellectually, which makes it more attractive to tourists from both inside and outside the country. These cultural assets enhance the tourism experience, benefiting both tourists and the host community.

Cultural events like Jallikattu help rural communities make money. According to Herrero et al. (2006), festivals boost local economies by making people want to buy goods, services, and hospitality. Rivera and King (2008) say that the economic impact of tourism is more than just short-term benefits. It also leads to long-term jobs and community growth. These results indicate that traditional cultural events can boost the economy without losing their cultural significance.

Salem, Joseph, and Thomas (2024) look at how Tamil festivals like Jallikattu help Tamil people living outside of India connect with their cultural roots. They say that these events being witnessed all over the world not only strengthen identity in Tamil Nadu but also let people who live outside of Tamil Nadu keep a symbolic and emotional connection to their home country. Jurénienė and Kuizinaitė (2020) also say that showing off traditional practices helps people understand and appreciate different cultures in a world that is becoming more globalised.

## Economic and Ecological Contributions to Jallikattu

Jallikattu promotes the conservation of indigenous cattle breeds like Pulikulam and Kangayam, which are vital to Tamil Nadu's agricultural ecosystems. Vignesh (2018) finds that these breeds, while less commercially viable for milk production, are ideally suited for traditional agriculture. The practice of Jallikattu promotes the ongoing breeding and preservation of these cattle, contributing to biodiversity conservation. The event bolsters the rural economy via animal sales, tourism, and employment connected with the festival.

## Gaps in the Literature

There has been a lot of research on the cultural, political, and economic aspects of Jallikattu, but there is still a big gap in our understanding of how young people today see and interact with the tradition. Most of the studies that are out there right now look at community elders, event

planners, or policymakers. Very few people look at things from a youth-centred point of view, even though the 2017 Marina protest was led by young people. Furthermore, there isn't much empirical research that uses structured surveys to look at how students feel about Jallikattu's many roles in Tamil society. This study tries to fill that gap by looking at what students think about cultural identity, tourism, ethics, and getting young people involved.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design, utilising a survey approach to gather student perspectives.

### Participants and Sampling

The research focused on students from diverse districts of Tamil Nadu currently pursuing their undergraduate studies at various institutions in Chennai. The objective was to acquire diverse regional perspectives on the cultural significance of Jallikattu and the awareness of associated protests.

A random sampling method was employed to ensure that each student had an equal likelihood of being selected, thereby minimising the selection bias. The sample was collected via in-person visits to multiple educational institutions in Chennai, where students from various districts of Tamil Nadu are enrolled. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms, which enabled convenient, standardised responses.

A total of 400 valid responses were gathered and employed for the analysis. The sample size was considered sufficient to represent diverse perspectives from different regions of Tamil Nadu and to perform statistical analyses, including the chi-square test for hypothesis testing.

## Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data, incorporating items related to the objectives of the study. The questionnaire included questions on:

- Cultural Identity (Q7)
- Economic Impact (Q18)
- Breed Preservation (Q20)
- Protest Awareness (Q13)
- Tourism Appeal (Q21)
- Safety Concern (Q24)

## Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to summarise student responses. For hypothesis testing, chi-square tests were employed to examine the association between categorical variables. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS. A significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was set for all hypothesis tests.

## Results and Discussion

### Summary of Student Responses

The survey generated a range of viewpoints from the student participants, summarised as follows:

**Cultural Identity (Q7):** A significant majority of students understood the importance of Jallikattu in shaping cultural identity. 38.0% of respondents strongly agreed, while 32.0% agreed, resulting in a total endorsement of 70%. A minority (15%) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement, while 14% maintained a neutral stance. The degree of consensus reflects a robust belief among students that Jallikattu is essential to Tamil culture.

**Economic Impact (Q18):** In terms of economic impact, 77.0% of students affirmed that Jallikattu has an economic influence, whereas 23.0% disagreed. This finding is consistent with the literature (Rose, 2025), which emphasises the economic advantages of rural communities and

tourism.

**Breed Preservation (Q20):** A total of 66% of respondents, comprising 38.0% who strongly agreed and 28.0% who agreed, indicated that Jallikattu contributes to the preservation of native cattle breeds. This indicates that students acknowledge the sport's significance in the conservation of indigenous breeds essential for agriculture.

**Protest Awareness (Q13):** A significant majority of students, 79.0%, demonstrated awareness of the previous protests concerning the Jallikattu ban, while only 21.0% reported a lack of awareness. This reflects the significant socio-political impact of the protests and their widespread media coverage.

**Tourism Appeal (Q21):** In response to the question regarding tourism appeal, 69.0% of students affirmed that Jallikattu possesses tourism potential, whereas 31.0% disagreed. This aligns with the goal of analysing Jallikattu's viability as a cultural tourism asset and demonstrating its ability to attract visitors.

**Safety Concern (Q24):** In response to Safety Concern, 57.0% of students indicated safety

concerns, 28.0% did not express such concerns, and 15.0% remained uncertain. This highlights that, regardless of the cultural and economic advantages, safety continues to be a crucial concern for students, which is consistent with historical controversies and demands for modernisation.

### Hypothesis Testing Results

This study tested two hypotheses using the Chi-square test to determine if perceptions and awareness of Jallikattu vary according to students' geographical location within Tamil Nadu. The initial hypothesis evaluated whether perceptions of Jallikattu's significance in cultural identity differed by geographic location. The second assessed whether awareness of the Jallikattu protests varied among students from diverse regions. The table below demonstrates that both hypotheses produced non-significant results ( $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting that cultural identity perception and protest awareness did not significantly differ by location. The findings indicate that Jallikattu possesses a uniformly robust cultural significance throughout the state, and the extensive nature of the protests guaranteed uniform awareness among the student demographic, irrespective of their particular location.

Hypothesis	Test Used	p-value	Result	Interpretation
<b>H1:</b> Cultural identity perception varies by location.	Chi-square test	0.5423	Not Significant	Student perception of Jallikattu's cultural identity is consistent across locations, indicating a uniformly shared cultural view within Tamil Nadu.



<b>H2:</b> Protest awareness differs by location.	Chi-square test	0.8362	Not Significant	Awareness of Jallikattu protests is consistent across different areas, likely due to widespread coverage and state-level relevance.
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Discussion

The results show that Tamil Nadu students have a strong cultural connection to Jallikattu. It's clear that it's more than just a sport because so many people know how important it is for cultural identity and breed preservation. This goes along with what was said in the introduction about the historical context, which talks about Jallikattu as a key symbol of Tamil culture and the bond between people and animals. Knowing about protests that happened in the past makes it a stronger symbol of cultural identity and resistance.

Students' positive opinions about Jallikattu's economic and tourism effects align with its growing reputation as a unique cultural tourism experience that can boost rural economies (Rose, 2025). This implies that the tourism industry in Tamil Nadu could benefit from Jallikattu events, provided they manage the associated problems effectively.

Many students are worried about their safety, which is something to keep in mind. This shows that we need to do more to keep people and animals safe, both for cultural and economic reasons. This goes along with what people are talking about these days when it comes to animal rights and possible changes to the sport. The fact that people in different places have the same views on cultural identity and protest awareness, as shown by non-significant p-values, suggests that the student population has a shared cultural understanding and experience. This supports the idea of Jallikattu as a collective symbol.

Conclusion

This study effectively examined student viewpoints regarding Jallikattu's contribution to cultural identity, traditional sports, and tourism in Tamil Nadu. The results clearly indicate that students view Jallikattu as a fundamental aspect of Tamil cultural identity, acknowledging its vital role in conserving indigenous cattle breeds and its substantial economic impact on rural communities. The extensive recognition of the historical protests underscores the sport's significant symbolic importance and its association with Tamil cultural perseverance.

Moreover, students predominantly perceive Jallikattu as having significant potential for the promotion of cultural tourism, suggesting a pathway for sustainable development. The recognised safety concerns emphasise the necessity for ongoing advancements in event management practices to safeguard the welfare of both humans and animals. The uniformity of perceptions across various geographical regions indicates a profound and cohesive comprehension of Jallikattu's cultural importance among the youth.

Recommendations

- **For Cultural Preservation:** Educational initiatives can further reinforce the historical and agricultural significance of Jallikattu among younger generations.
- **For Tourism Promotion:** Develop structured cultural tourism packages around Jallikattu events, focusing on authentic experiences and community engagement, while transparently addressing safety protocols.

- **For Ethical Practices:** Continue dialogue and implement robust measures for animal welfare and participant safety, potentially integrating technology for monitoring and regulation to enhance the sport's reputation.
- **For Youth Engagement:** Foster platforms for students to actively participate in the safe and ethical promotion and preservation of Jallikattu, leveraging social media and academic research.

### Limitations and Future Research

This study relied on student perspectives and a specific set of survey questions. Future research could expand by including perspectives from other stakeholders (e.g., bull owners, organisers, animal rights activists, and tourists), employing qualitative methodologies to gain more profound insights into motivations and experiences, and conducting longitudinal studies to track evolving perceptions and the long-term impact of policies. Additionally, exploring the direct correlation between Jallikattu events and specific tourism revenue generation would be beneficial.

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