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Jallikkattu protests intensify in Kovai

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The clarion call for conducting jallikkattu, the traditional bull-taming sport of rural Tamil Nadu seems to be growing louder day by day. Traffic came to a standstill on Avinashi Road as youngsters, who had assembled in droves came together for a single cause- demanding the lifting of Supreme Court ban on the sport. As the youngsters took out a rally from Codissia Road to VOC Park, screaming slogans 'Ban PETA' and 'We do Jallikkattu', onlookers cheered them on. The protest spilled over to Thursday as well as students took out rallies on their customized bikes and cars that proudly flaunted posters of jallikkattu.

Protestor Divya Sathish Kumar, student at a private college in the city, tells us, "Jallikkattu has been played in the state from the days of yore, why

stop it now? It's a wrong perception that the bull-taming sport is a barbaric one. Just like you train a dog for a pet show, you train the bull to take part in jallikkattu or rekla. The act involves embracing the bull, rather than inflicting cruelty on them."

Businessman Vijay Krishnan has been part of the protest at VOC Grounds from Tuesday. "Until we get a clear answer for our demand, we are not going to budge. If PETA wants to stop animal cruelty, why is it not addressing the way in which temple elephants are treated or the way animals are sacrificed for religious festivals?"

Vijay, who has been protesting at the ground with a bunch of friends, has also been providing biscuits and water packets to other demonstrators. "Since majority of the protestors are students, we decided to fund few basic essentials like water and biscuits for them. We have split ourselves into small groups- while some are taking care of food, others are busy printing flexes and banners on jallikkattu," he adds. Isn't work affected? "Those at work are giving me live updates about the protests in other cities and the state and central government's move. But, it looks like we have to fight for our rights on our own as both the

governments are not giving us a promising answer," says businessman Anand.

Mathivanan N, employee at a private firm, adds, "There is a complete bonhomie among protestors. Families have also turned up at the venue. It's a pleasure to see everyone come together as a single family and fighting for Tamil pride." Ananda Theerthan, employee at the Tidel Park, beams, "It's such a mass gathering. But, there have been no incidents of violence or misbehavior with women. It's proof enough that Tamil Nadu is a peace-loving state."

In the meantime, NGOs like Coimbatore Food Bank has begun supplying food packets, biscuits and water to the protestors. "We have been on the ground for the last two days. All you have to do is pass the food packets to the food team at VOC Grounds and they will ensure that the packets are distributed evenly. Apart from our volunteers, the public has also come forward to donate food for the protestors," says Vyshnavee Harikrishnan from the food bank. As folk dances and demonstrations continued, there was only one sentiment among all. "Until the vaadi vaasal is opened, we will not go back to our houses."

...In the meantime

Even as the chorus in support of jallikkattu grows in the city, animal rights activists have stuck to their stand. "When the apex court in the country has made a decision, we cannot disregard the law. There is a lot of false propaganda and political gambits doing the rounds that the youngsters are falling prey to. As an animal activist, I am completely against any exploitation of animals. And, people should understand that the animal welfare organizations are also fighting for the protection of these animals," says Mini Vasudevan of Humane Animal Society.

Kalpana Vasudevan of People for Animals, Unit-II, adds, "Yes, Jallikkattu was being held in the state, and it was a medium to show a man's heroism. But, we have to change with times. Today, there are many other ways to show one's valour, for instance by joining the armed forces. Why don't the youngsters support the NGOs that are also working toward animal welfare? And, if you are fighting for the protection of native bulls, also fight for the conservation of other native breeds like a Kombai or

Rajapalayam dog. Why does everyone want a pedigree dog? Adopt a stray animal or just ensure an injured animal is attended to."