Indian courts have played an important role in recognising that animals are not merely property or resources for human use. Through several landmark judgments, courts have addressed animal cruelty, wildlife conservation, the treatment of performing animals and the responsibility of humans towards other living creatures.

The following cases are particularly significant for understanding how Indian law protects animals.

1. Protection from cruelty and unnecessary suffering

2. Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja (2014)

Landmark animal welfare judgment

Background: The case concerned Jallikattu in Tamil Nadu and bullock-cart races in Maharashtra. The Animal Welfare Board challenged these practices on the grounds that they caused unnecessary pain and suffering to bulls.

What the Supreme Court decided: On 7 May 2014, the Supreme Court prohibited these activities under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, holding that the practices, as they were then conducted, violated the law.

The Court also discussed the importance of recognising animals' intrinsic worth and protecting them from unnecessary suffering. It referred to the constitutional duty under Article 51A(g) to show compassion towards living creatures.

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Why this judgment matters: It was a major step in Indian animal welfare jurisprudence. It established that cultural practices cannot automatically justify cruelty towards animals.