

Saathmari (साठमारी): A Unique Game of Elephant fighting

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ABSTRACT

Saathmari was a game of elephant fighting and was played during early 20th Century only in 2 princely states of India. These states were Baroda (Gujarat) and Kolhapur (Maharashtra). Origin of this game is obscure. As per records this game was very popular in Baroda state. Maharaja of Kolhapur, Chhatrapati Shahu, experienced the thrill of this game during his visit to Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda and after experiencing thrill of it he started this game in his state as well.

This game was usually played when adult males come in heat, and when the animal becomes aggressive and violent. If the male elephant is not aroused enough, he is fed alcohol.

Players as well as the elephants were often severely injured in this sport. However this sport, 'Saathmari' was very popular among royalty as well as the masses.

Saathmari was a sport introduced in Kolhapur in the year 1915. His Highness Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj built a separate stadium for this sport. Special tools required for the sport were also made by his artisans.

Today no witnesses of this sport are alive. The stadium is still there and few tools can still be seen at the museum.

The description of "Saathmari" can be read in biographies of H.H.Shahu Maharaj and H.H. Sayajirao Gaikwad, these records give us glimpse of this thrilling sport.

We shall be trying to collect few paintings or photographs from local museums depicting "Saathmari" and references from the available official papers of erstwhile states of Kolhapur and Baroda.

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