

Dharti ka Halma

How a tribal community in Jhabua utilized their age old practice of Halma to revitalize water sources and reinvigorate agricultural practices.

<Insert image of the pamphlet>

***Gaon gaon mein jayenge, Shankar jhata banayenge
Ek nahi lakhon hai bhageerath, gaon gaon mein hoga teerath***

These slogans are clarion calls by a community to revive their land by conserving water and reclaiming missed opportunities. This is a Halma by Dharti mata (mother earth) and everyone in Jhabua comes together to play their part.

The concept of Halma

Halma is a tribal tradition of coming together as a community to help a community member address their struggle. If a community member is unable to finish constructing his home in time before monsoons, he calls a halma. His community steps forward to assist in completing the construction before monsoons in return for a hearty meal. Such is the power of community.

How about bringing them together to collectively address their environment's distress call?

This is an approach Shivganga Samagra Vikas Parishad, a NGO based in Jhabua, facilitated to address the area's depleting water reserves.

In 1998 Shri Mahesh Sharma along with Harsh Chauhan met at Jhabua to understand the resident tribal community's challenges, needs and aspirations. One of the founding principles of Shivganga, the non-profit they founded, is that the community is the front runner of the solution while Shivaganga is the facilitator.

They chose young school dropouts as change agents they would nurture and develop into community leaders. They identified these youth by observing those who were at the forefront of solving community challenges, be it supporting a bereaving family upon their family member's demise or organising a local event.

Over a span of 5 years, they trained these youth and cultivated a group of proactive change makers. By build their self- belief, the organisation was able to instil a resolve to solve their community's problems.

The organisation facilitated spaces where these youth would collectively brainstorm solutions for their community's struggles. Depleting water reserves reduced opportunities for agriculture which in turn led to distress migration as seasonal labour. Water conservation emerged as one of the vital solutions to the community's problem.

One of the community's wise elder shared the approach of ***Halma***, a traditional practice to organise collective action. This sparked the idea for organising ***Dharti Mata ka Halma. This Halma called for its community members to come together to build water conservation structures to revive their land.***

Designing the campaign

Shivganga developed a campaign that was rooted in the spiritual and cultural beliefs of its people, who worship Lord Bholenath (Shiva). They painted the backdrop with the story of Raja Bhageerat who undertook penance to bring River Ganga to Earth. Witnessing his faith and dedication, Lord Shiva helped him bring River Ganga to Earth by channelising the river through his hair. This motivated the community to also build "Shankar Jhataye" when monsoons hit Jhabua.

The coined a clarion call for the community to unite them in their mission:

"Gaon gaon mein jayenge, shankar jhata banayenge"

"Ek nahi lakhon hai bhageerath, gaon gaon mein hoga teerath"

Shivganga volunteers visited each family in the village to invite all their family members to the Halma. They would highlight how the various gods are upset with the lack of inaction and disregard shown towards nature and invite them to take part in the right form of worship : collective action. The volunteers collect 20 rupees per family and give them a slip to come to the Jhabua Halma.

They invite the smallest child of the family and the oldest member of the family. As a child, this experience becomes a foundational memory that nurtures the seed of community development in them. Many of the young children who attended the first Halma, have fond memories of participating in it and are now volunteers with Shivganga.

These volunteers invited over 2 lakh members to the Halma.

Partnership with SG ITES Indore

Shivganga developed a partnership with SG ITES Indore to develop technical modules on building water structures for rejuvenation such as contour mapping, groundwater recharging, engineering for pond construction, etc.

<Insert links to technical modules>

Shivganga fundraised for all the goods and materials required to organise a Halma of this scale, right from tractors, to event logistics for the Halma.

Organising Dharti ka Halma

The process of planning and organising a Halma in February starts by October the previous year. The members of Shivganga brief the cluster coordinators, each of whom are mapped to 4 to 5 villages) on the plan to mobilise the community. Each cluster coordinator ropes in people from their respective villages, resulting in onboarding 1500 volunteers.

These volunteers are trained for a day and provided with a pamphlet shaped like an invitation for their conversations with the villagers. The key is to make these people feel like custodians of their own community and not beneficiaries. Each volunteer commits to taking this to at least 200 people within a week.

<insert image of invitation>

<insert of images of volunteers inviting a family>

The Halma sees an annual turnout of close to 50,000 people turnout at the venue and results in construction of <Insert number> contour trenches in one day.

<Insert image of people at the Halma venue>

Reference Links:

<https://youtu.be/-LfWXwQgCPE?feature=shared>

<https://youtu.be/1ivxtMevNdk?feature=shared>