

Halma as Collective Action: Community-led Development among Bhil Tribes in India

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1309000019>

Received: 17 September 2026; Accepted: 22 September 2026; Published: 30 September 2026

ABSTRACT

The Bhil tribe, India's largest indigenous community, with an estimated 12 million members, is primarily concentrated in the mountainous regions of western and central India. Traditionally, the Bhils revere elements of their environment, including trees, water, and fire, as divine entities. Central to this community is the Halma tradition, meaning a "call for help" or "pukaar," which has served for generations as a foundational expression of collective responsibility and mutual assistance. Historically, when a Bhil individual or family faced an insurmountable crisis—such as rebuilding a damaged home, performing essential agricultural tasks like weeding, or even facilitating marriages—they would issue a Halma. In response, villagers would voluntarily unite, offering their labour and resources without expectation of monetary compensation, receiving only a modest meal as a gesture of gratitude.

In 2008, confronted with severe water scarcity and widespread deforestation in Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district, the local community identified "thirsty Mother Earth" as the distressed entity requiring collective action. This incident led to the revitalisation of Halma tradition, transforming it into a powerful environmental conservation movement. Since 2009, an annual "Shivji Ka Halma" has been organised, which embodies the essence of community-led development in the modern sense. The impact of this community-led initiative has been significant. Over 1,60,000 contour trenches and 65 water harvesting structures (including 10 earthen check dams and 55 water reservoirs) have been constructed, alongside the plantation of 1,10,000 saplings and the revival of 120 sacred groves (Matavans). The revitalised Halma practice clearly demonstrates how the wisdom of traditional indigenous communities can be effectively leveraged to advance environmental sustainability and social capital development.

In this context, the proposed paper aims to examine the nature and characteristics of community-led developmental initiatives among the Bhil tribes, particularly those associated with the Halma tradition. The study also seeks to explore how the Halma tradition has nurtured a culture of resilience among the Bhil tribe, not only for individual support but also for community-led collective action. The study also aims to document the processes of the community-led Halma tradition and its relevance in the current socio-economic milieu.

To achieve the objectives, the study adopts a qualitative approach to gain local insights into the processes, perspectives, and practices of the Halma tradition. An ethnographic approach, involving participant observation, enables the researcher to immerse themselves in the community during Halma in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, thereby facilitating the documentation of community-led development processes. Additionally, the data collection involves Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with community members who participated in Halma. Key Informant Interviews (KII) also help the researcher obtain in-depth context and historical information about Halma traditions among the Bhil tribes of India.

Keywords: Bhil, community, development, Halma and indigenous.

INTRODUCTION

The Bhil tribe, mainly residing in western and central India, has traditionally lived in a way that combines

nature, landscape, and communities. The tree, water, mountains and sacred groves are not a spectre of conservation, but are imbibed in the daily lives of the Bhil tribes. Within this ontology, the Halma tradition occupies a centrestage. The traditional Halma is a practice in which a household may call for help from the neighbouring community. The required tools, time and location are conveyed personally by the person seeking help from the community. The assistance to the concerned person is based on the spirit of reciprocity. The process is woven in such a way that no wages change hands, and a simple meal is offered to the person seeking help to acknowledge the shared labour. Thus, Halma is a social tradition for risk sharing, time-saving, knowledge transfer, and conflict mitigation in the Bhil community.

This paper is motivated by a resurgence of Halma in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, India, where a community mobilisation through Halma achieved a higher scale and visibility since 2009. The revival is not merely a continuation of tradition; rather, it is a deliberate rearticulation of an old practice to meet new problems. The rearticulation is based on the premise that community-led development is not a project-delivery model, in which community ownership is rarely found. Instead, it is a site of negotiation among individual relations, community norms, identities and social institutions. The paper dwells on the context in which Halma has been rearticulated, its changing norms, relations, and institutions within the community, and its relevance to resolving contemporary challenges.

METHODS AND APPROACH

The study adopts a qualitative, ethnographic approach to understand the philosophical bases, processes, meaning and manifestation of Halma. The participant observation during “Shivji ka Halma” and village-level Halma in Jhabua created opportunities to witness preparations, rituals, work sequences, conflict handling, and post-event evaluations. The focus group discussion (FGD), Participant Observation and Key Informant Interviews were conducted in September and October 2025.

Block Tehsil	Panchayat	Village
Ranapur	Chhagola	Chhagola
Rama	Khadrubari	Limkhodra
Rama	Rotla	Golabari
Meghnagar	Naganwat Badi	Chhoti Naganwat
Petlawad	Salunia Bada	Semalpara

The key community members were contacted with the help of Shivganga, a non-profit organisation working in the area. The researchers briefed the key community member on the purpose of the study. Once they were satisfied with the research objectives, they called the other community members for the focus group discussion. The focus group discussions with mixed-age groups were held at five locations in the Jhabua district of the state of Madhya Pradesh, India, to extract the collective memory of Halma tradition. Based on the community members' participation in the focus group discussion, some key informants, such as traditional tadvi, patels, and kotwals, were identified for key informant interviews. In parallel, conversations with elected Panchayati Raj representatives helped understand how statutory bodies intersect with customary authorities. The analysis of the collected information integrates observational notes, oral histories, and contemporary experiences in organising Halma.

Bhil Community: Moral Traditions of Cooperation and Care

The Bhil homeland encompasses hills, plateaus and forested lands. The settlements are sparsely populated and hamlets are separated by fields, seasonal streams, and forests. Such topography creates impediments for state service delivery. It is not that the current government has limited reach in the Bhil community. Historically, the community has not acceded to the contemporary governance structure, whether under Mughal rule or the British era. The reason lies in the fact that the community, through cooperation, has been able to be resilient and self-sufficient. In this scenario, Halma tradition emerges as both a necessity of survival in the absence of strong state service delivery and a virtue of the community. The necessity is pragmatic: the prevalence of

terraced agriculture, the monsoon-bound sowing season, and labour-intensive house-building demand timely manpower intervention. Even before the emergence of the notion of demand and supply, the Halma tradition helped the Bhil tribe meet their labour requirements through cooperation. The virtue of cooperation in the community exists as a shared sentiment and mutual help honours that sharedness. In interviews with key informants, participants consistently described Halma as “dharma ka kaam”. Therefore, Halma signifies not just as an element of duty to fellow individuals but as a righteous act transcending the terms help and support. The work under Halma begins with the invocation of the local deities to express gratitude and respect for the process and labour.

Halma: Definition, Scope and Variants

The essence of Halma is a voluntary and time-bound mobilisation of the community in response to a call for help. The seeker of Halma specifies the task and the *fali* (work duration): a half-day from sunrise to noon, or a full day from sunrise to sunset. In return, the participants get a simple meal, and there are no monetary wages for the work. The beauty lies in the fact that the system works well as the community responds to the call for help, and there is no social hazard so far in operationalisation. Traditionally, Halma was called for house construction and repair (especially before the monsoon), agricultural operations such as ploughing, sowing, weeding, and harvesting, and assistance with marriage arrangements and funerary duties. There are three variants of Halma: (i) The *Padji* sits alongside allied forms of reciprocal labour and resource pooling. (*Padji* refers to a labour exchange ledger, like if two members of one household work a day for another, the receiving household reciprocates proportionally). (ii) *Phalni* denotes pooled contributions (often collected by the *kotwal*, a traditional position in the community) for communal rituals or repairs. (iii) *Dihari* is wage labour, increasingly prevalent as cash incomes rise. Halma differs from *dihari* in its explicit renunciation of wage relations, and from *padji* in its immediacy and moral framing as a community duty.

Invoking Halma and Community Participation

The process of invoking Halma is simple. A household may call Halma when the need exceeds their capacity, but calls are not purely individual decisions. In many cases, neighbours or elders advise the household to call a Halma to avoid damage or delay, especially before the monsoon rains. Often, these decisions are in the interest of the community at large, though they may be used for an individual in consultation with the elders of the community. The traditional village leader, like *tadvi* or *patel* plays a facilitator role rather than a top-down bureaucratic one. The *tadvi* confirms the need, helps fix the date and duration, and ensures that the call aligns with other village obligations. There is no misuse of the Halma system, as individuals are well-connected within the community and know individuals personally. The Households respond not as an external agent but as a partner in the work. A norm has long existed that at least one member per household attends, with gender and age composition varying by the nature of the task. Usually, women and men commonly work side by side. However, entire families, including children and elders, participate together in larger mobilisation when more hands are needed. As the community as a whole participates in the practice of Halma, there is great respect for the process and it works as a training ground for the next generation of the process and essence.

Halma: Procedural and Ritual Dimensions

Historically, the process has been deliberately personal and has been based on a one-to-one human connect. Though mobile phones and messaging are ubiquitous nowadays, with the advent of newer technology. However, the most effective calls for Halma are face-to-face family-based invitations, often symbolised by the delivery of *akshat* (unbroken rice grains) at the doorstep of the invitee as a symbol of purity, auspiciousness, and continuity. The receiving of grain in the form of *akshat* is both an acceptance to participate and a sacred token. It symbolises the seriousness of the activity undertaken through Halma and its communitarian essence. In Halma, the community's *kotwal* helps circulate announcements and track contributions. In the district-wide like “*Shivji ka Halma*”, the convenors first consult traditional leaders across villages to set the date, then rely on those leaders to mobilise their own hamlets. In the rearticulated version, the registration systems exist to manage logistics and to dignify participation, yet the moral energy comes from the older idiom of *pukaar*.

On the day of Halma, the tadvi from the Bhil community, or another respected elder, opens the work with a short address, invoking the local grove or deity as a gesture of gratitude and respect. Thereafter, the task teams formed around those with demonstrated skills. Where houses are to be repaired, masons and carpenters lead. Where trenches are to be dug, experienced watershed workers guide spacing, gradients and bund height. The community volunteer manages the meals according to the event's scale. A half-day work meal usually consists of a simple maize gruel and lentils for the gatherings. For a more extensive day-long work, sometimes including meat or mahua brew, is also served apart from simple food. The field conversations suggest that the meal served under the Halma is a sign of togetherness, not a substitute for wages.

Customary and Institutional Interface of Halma

The leadership and participation under Halma are distributed like a centrifugal force that radiates from the centre of the community. Meaning thereby leaders involved are not taking decisions, rather it is the community that is making decisions. Therefore, there is no question of disobedience of the call for Halma in the community. For example, tadvi in the Bhil community embodies inherited legitimacy, typically passing from father to eldest son. The tadvi receives no honorarium, no grain entitlement beyond esteem. The premise of authority is sustained by trust and fairness. The kotwal, a traditional position in the Bhil community, is responsible for transmitting information and collecting phalni when required. He also helps verify attendance and the needs of individuals. The elders of the community wield symbolic power to ensure that traditional norms and taboos associated with deities and groves are not violated.

Over time, elected Panchayati Raj representatives have assumed a statutory role alongside customary roles and practices. It has been found through participant observation that traditional institutions are not rigid but rather flexible enough to accommodate modern changes. The authority of local elected representatives is based on the electoral capacity and budgetary control. Though statutory and customary bodies intersect in varied ways. Sarpanches interviewed for this study consistently acknowledged that their mobilising power is limited because elections create factions within the community. In contrast to the elected representatives of local bodies, the tadvi, a customary position, attracts near-universal participation of the community. It signifies the power play between the community's customary and modern positions. However, it also offers an opportunity for panchayats to partner with tadvīs to convene Halma for public works such as de-silting tanks or repairing village paths. When both traditional and modern authorities work in tandem, it helps solve community-wide macro issues.

Halma as an Identity and Social Capital

As Putnam (2000) rightly put it, the concept of social capital as a network, norms of reciprocity and trust that enable people to work together for shared goals. Halma is a custom which completely fits into it. He argues that social connections have measurable value because they facilitate cooperation, reduce transaction costs, and strengthen democratic life. In a similar manner, Halma not only facilitates cooperation and reduces the transaction but also creates a resilient community. In the interview, participants repeatedly described Halma as constitutive of “who we are and how we operate as a community.” Thus, Halma cultivated resilience, solidarity and mutual support, facilitating the creation of social capital. During participant observation, it was observed that a person with a disability was digging trenches on hill slopes. It signifies the spirit of cooperation and mutual trust in the community. Each member of the community is contributing as per their capacity. Their involvement was neither staged nor celebrated; it was woven into the day's ordinary rhythm. Such participation forces community researchers to identify the real source of encouragement for developing traits of cooperation and trust. The spirit of the Bhil community in conducting Halma positioned it as a site of social capital, as imagined by Putnam (2000), which gives them a sense of identity and nurtures trust, ownership, and voluntary action.

Halma and Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a natural feature of community life, and Halma offers ways and substance to resolve the disputes. The adjudication is based on the premise of listening to both parties through an appointed batria or bhanjaria, a form of mediator who wields the trust of both aggrieved parties. The process of shared labour under Halma

works as a site of reconciliation. The presence of a large community, such as Halma, creates moral pressure on both parties to settle the dispute. The traditional form of settlement under Halma usually does not involve any transactional component. Whenever settlement of disputes involves compensation and damages, the community does it through Halma, and there is no individual burden to recover the damages. Throughout the observation and interview during the fieldwork, participants underscored that community members' non-participation is rare and has not been perceived as a problem at the community level so far. The personal connection with the community, reputation nudges, and the foreseeability of one's own vulnerability have sustained the community engagement spirit. In a true sense, Halma offers a genuine platform for resolving the dispute through spirited community participation and cooperation, though it may not be considered a traditional dispute settlement mechanism.

Factors Behind the Decline of Halma

Despite its immense social value, the traditional practice of Halma has waned in the Bhil region in recent decades. There are multiple factors involved in the decline of the practice. The first and foremost reason is the spread of modern education in the Bhil-inhabited region. The contemporary school education, especially among the Bhil community, nurtured new aspirations and created an inferiority complex vis-à-vis traditional practices. The schooled young Bhil, mistook wage labour and urban life as a marker of success. It encouraged the migration of young Bhils to nearby towns in search of cash income. During the focus group discussion, community members shared that young Bhil was heavily influenced by market forces, saw Halma as “free work,” and showed no interest. Later, the introduction of the modern panchayati raj system divided the community into smaller factions due to elections. Moreover, elected representatives were mandated to take on various administrative tasks that had earlier been the domain of the traditional institutions within the Bhil community. Besides, newer laws and institutions failed to recognise the importance of collective agency and promoted individual interests over the community. Additionally, market influences encouraged youth to migrate to nearby towns, thereby reducing the social relevance of Halma for both community and individual needs. Also, the change in the housing, agricultural, and infrastructure patterns reduced the need for manual labour due to mechanisation. The decline of social institutions in the Bhil community reshaped household requirements, and the community became more cash-dependent in fulfilling them; the cooperative spirit of Halma declined gradually.

Debt, Migration and Social Fragmentation

Through focus group discussions and interviews, respondents constantly concurred that migration as a necessity to repay loans for medical bills, meet schooling costs, and the cost of various social ceremonies prevailing in the Bhil community. The data collection revealed seasonal migration to the industrial towns of Gujarat, where wages for unskilled labour are higher than in Madhya Pradesh. The cost of housing in the industrial towns is higher than the facilities available. Respondents shared that housing near work is cramped and unsanitary, and that illnesses are common, but mounting medical bills force youth to migrate. Despite cash earnings, participants reported no savings without financial literacy. The crumbling social institutions in the Bhil community declined sharply after liberalisation in India. The rise of a sense of capital in one of the relatively independent communities led to a loss of social capital, as Putnam (2000) rightly explained. It resulted in the weakening of community cohesion, reciprocity, cooperative traits and sense of collective action. It finally increased social vulnerability and reduced community resilience.

Cultural Revival and Rearticulation of Halma

In the changing socio-cultural milieu, traditional community cooperation in the Bhil community lost its charm. It has not only seen the decline of Halma traditions but also affected the daily lives of the Bhils, leading to the disappearance of numerous social institutions and customs. The changing weather patterns and climate have created a new set of problems that are at the core of the Bhil community's survival. The gradual decline of the water table in the region led to water scarcity. The community recognised it as a consequence of the loss of forest cover in the area. Thereafter, there was a challenge to revive the forest in the region, which is core to the survival of the Bhil community in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, India. The Bhil community elders in the district brainstormed and narrowed down the reason for the decline in the water table to a curse of ‘thirsty

mother earth'. The reverence for earth in the Bhil community is not a product of necessity; rather, it is part of their traditional knowledge that existed for thousands of years. Now, there was a turn to compensate for the damage done to revere mother earth, which led to the revival of the Halma tradition. The community did not seek help from the government and its functionaries to revive water sources in areas dominated by the Bhil community; instead, they felt an obligation to Mother Earth.

Consequently, the elders rearticulated Halma to address the crisis faced by the Bhil community. The annual event 'Shivji Halma' became the anchoring point since 2009. The mobilisation through Halma was channelled into measurable tasks to revive water sources. These tasks included digging contour trenches, building earthen check dams, de-silting tanks, planting saplings, and reviving sacred groves. These tasks were completed without any monetary payment, through voluntary community work with Halma. The mobilisation of the community for this purpose was achieved through the distribution of akshat and face-to-face invitation as practised in the Halma. The modern processes, like registration and allied logistical arrangements, added a professional outlook to the traditional Halma. Over the years, the movement consolidated various strategies and techniques into a repertoire leading to significant accomplishments. So far, 160,000 trenches interrupting runoff, 65 harvesting structures storing seasonal flows, 110,000 saplings bending toward the canopy, and 120 groves reclaimed as sacred space. In organising and rearticulating Halma, the role of the non-profit agency Shivganga was catalytic rather than proprietorial. However, Shivganga's role in training community youth in watershed management and nursery techniques was critical. It also helped rearticulate Halma in a new form and give it a modern outlook by creating committees based on individuals' expertise and documenting the processes and outcomes. Though Shivganga neither monetised participation nor created bureaucratic structures, it instead affirmed community ownership of Halma by treating others as guests and allies.

From Micro to Macro: The Scaled Functioning of Halma

The scaling of Halma did not entail forsaking its foundational ethos. The same foundational principles of trust and cooperation which formed the core of the tradition were used to evoke the communitarian sense in the new flavour. Where it was traditionally used for micro works like house repair, it is now used to anchor bigger tasks like trenching, the construction of small check dams, and afforestation. The whole process of decision-making remained participatory and genuinely in the hands of the community. The choices, such as constructing a check dam, were determined jointly by technicians and land users. The villagers collaboratively mapped anticipated impacts, identified contributors of soil and stone, and agreed on shared maintenance responsibilities of common assets created through Halma. By embedding technical questions of the construction within social processes, the movement ensured genuine community participation.

The mainstay of the community in Halma is the participation of the young population. The newer approach of using various social media platforms for Halma's work and initiatives has attracted the interest of youth. The short videos of the initiatives have become an expression of the Bhil identity. While social media engagement risks superficial participation, it has expanded Halma's reach beyond its region and community. The visibility on social media is a product of substantive community and labour work. Therefore, it does not appear to be a staged engagement when outsiders visit to witness Halma. For the new generation of Bhil youth, this visibility fosters a syncretic identity rooted in traditions and future aspirations, enabling them to embrace identity without compromise.

Impact of Halma on Social Relations

During the participant observation, it was found that Halma alters social relations in the community and has reduced the minor conflicts that prevailed. Due to the prevalence of Halma, there is a very thin line between donor and receiver. The receiver today may turn donor tomorrow. It also bridges social differences within the community, as there are no dominant individuals. The presence of women and elders alongside the work creates community bonding. It alters social relations, as individuals interact directly with youth and women and earn respect and dignity from fellow community members. Consensus-building around any work is core to the Bhil community's life. It symbolises respect for participatory democratic life. The practice of Halma has woven community solidarity by reducing the social cost of asking for help and increasing the social reward of offering it. In essence, Halma is based on the principle: every inflow implies an outflow. It means that if you

are receiving labour, you must reciprocate by giving it in return. In essence, the Halma traditions work like a credit institution, striving to maintain balance and continuity. If there is no system for attaining balance, no one will appear to help others, and tradition and community solidarity will collapse automatically.

Policy and Praxis Perspective

The administrative recognition of Halma as a practice has seen a mixed response. While some officials occasionally expressed admiration, others saw it as just a traditional institution parallel to the Gram Sabha under the Panchayati Raj System. Some officers assumed that the modern Panchayati Raj system in India could replicate the same processes. By drawing a parallel between traditional and contemporary institutions, officers unnecessarily created confusion and rivalry in the community. However, the community recognised that a subtle acknowledgement of the conventional system, along with the modern institutions, fosters greater positivity and community spirit. Publicly acknowledging Tadvi's role in bringing the community together, including in implementing government schemes, has led to greater participation. An elder of the Bhil community highlighted during the key informant interview that state systems serve a larger purpose when they cede some space to traditional institutions.

There are several takeaways of the Halma traditions among the Bhil community in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, India. Traditional institutions should be treated as partners in progress, not just as channels for target delivery. The state perspective looks at 'how Halma as a tradition serves our purpose', but the community asks 'how state schemes can serve Halma's priorities'. The technical training for the community in executing local development works through Halma may help solve numerous local problems. These trainings can create practitioners within the community, thereby enabling gradual knowledge transfer and the creation of young leaders. The subtle recognition of traditional institutions by local authorities creates a deep sense of self-respect and pride in the young Bhils, thereby facilitating the intergenerational transmission of the tradition. In this process, the social legitimacy of Halma within the community is further strengthened through the administrative legitimacy. The debt-migration nexus, prevalent in the Jhabua region among the Bhil community, requires a wholehearted approach to improve health services and financial literacy. If this nexus is not broken, a significant migration of youth to nearby cities may undermine the culture of cooperation and trust within the community, further eroding social customs and institutions in the long run. The school education for the Bhil children must offer some insights into local customs and traditions rather than catering only to book-specific knowledge. It will not only help the children catch up with the changing world but also help them know their own culture and traditions with a sense of deep respect.

Halma as Climate Action

The rearticulation of Halma in the Jhabua region evoked a deep and loud message. The problem of the commons and water scarcity has been successfully tackled through community action. As far as the community is concerned, their experiences have explicitly highlighted the issue of climate change. For them, climate change manifests as erratic rainfall, soil erosion, a declining water table, and declining forest cover. Works such as trenching, the construction of earthen check dams, and the protection of sacred groves under the Halma proved meaningful and yielded positive results. The community's traditional scientific knowledge base has helped people in battling the challenge of climate change. For the community, it is do or die. They have a fundamental understanding that, without water and forests, their survival is directly in question. The essence of climate action within the Bhil community lies in the fact that they do not look to the government for help but instead take the initiative to tackle issues locally. The cumulative impact of their small initiatives has borne fruit, preventing water runoff, increasing buffer crop cycles, and stabilising the microclimate. Because Halma is labour-intensive, it can be scaled across slopes and watersheds without heavy machinery or large budgets. When work is undertaken through Halma, it seeks to incorporate local belief systems. For example, if a trench is framed as care for 'thirsty mother earth', it receives better maintenance; if groves are declared sacred, encroachment is minimal. In other words, Halma should not be seen as mitigation and adaptation activities under the climate action framework; it repurposes the essence through local belief and traditions. Like reciprocity in Halma is essential, as the community believes 'help given will be help received' in some way or other. Another notable essence of labour under Halma: labour is associated with dignity in the community and with righteous conduct rather than a wage alone. The theory of 'wantlessness', as conceptualised by J K

Mehta, perfectly explains the tradition of Halma, as meals and shared tools in the absence of a monetary wage serve as an anchoring point for change. Therefore, the endurance of the resurgence of Halma depends on the community's ethical values, with trust at the core. (Tiwari, 2023)

LIMITATIONS

As a qualitative study, the paper tries for a deeper understanding of the meaning and essence of Halma. The data collection for this study was done in the district of Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, India. However, customs and traditions are similar across the Bhil communities, with few divergences. Quantitative outcome data beyond aggregated counts of trenches, structures, saplings, and groves were not systematically collected in this study. However, scientific measurement and assessment of assets built through Halma may provide a more scientific understanding of the real ecological impact. The presence of researchers and outside visitors may also influence how Halma days are conducted and narrated, although researchers made multiple visits on different occasions to mitigate these biases. Despite these limitations, the findings have been widely validated through oral readings of the significant conclusions before knowledgeable elders in the community.

The future researcher can take up long-term ecological footprints of the works undertaken through Halma. The multidisciplinary team of researchers can leverage multiple lenses to examine the outcomes. A purely social study, based on the traditions and customs, mapping the role of social institutions in developing a sense of trust, leadership, and reciprocity, can be planned to probe further. Lastly, a comparative study with other traditions involving trust and reciprocity may be planned to understand how the traditional community functioned and operated historically.

CONCLUSION

Halma is not just a tradition; it is a living tradition. In the recent calibrated form, Halma in Bhil heartland of Jhabua has become synonymous with community work for commons like trenching, construction of earthen check dams and sacred groves. It has arrested deforestation and the decline of the water table in the region. The tangible achievement of shared community labour has created many common assets in the region and given the young Bhils identity and self-respect. It also altered social relations by reviving traditional social institutions and fostering trust and cooperation. The recalibrated Halma tradition demonstrates that traditions endure not by resisting change but by adapting to it while keeping its moral values intact and widening its scope to address the community's contemporary issues. By articulating its broader vision, the practice of Halma in Jhabua offers a template for community-led development rooted in traditions with a broader vision of environmental protection. The policy-makers, practitioners, and academicians seeking pathways to develop community resilience must revisit existing models and seek local solutions that are community-driven and productive. However, caution must be observed when employing Halma in various regions and communities. The fundamental principle of trust and cooperation remains core to Halma. If the community lacks trust and cooperation, it may become a moral hazard. Therefore, instrumentalising it may turn it into a negative force. In sum, the Jhabua model, rooted in Bhil tradition is more than just a shared labour by the community. A deep respect for process, trust among individuals and the capacity to associate it with local deities like sacred groves make it more than just a work and differentiate it from other developmental works.

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