

Two-day National Seminar

on

‘Halma and other Community-driven Traditions of the Indian Tribes’

Concept Note

The traditional communities of India have a rich socio-cultural life which provides a deep insight into the cultural heritage of the country. Community living and collectiveness form an inseparable part of this cultural heritage. The local knowledge systems and traditions practiced within these communities have a potential to provide solutions to the myriad problems faced by our society today. One such age-old tradition is ‘Halma’ which is practiced by the Bhil and Bhilala tribal communities of the Jhabua district, Madhya Pradesh. ‘Halma’ is a way of life for the people living in Jhabua. It is a medium that brings together the villagers to discuss the problems faced by them. The problems can either be of an individual or of an entire community. Once the problem has been identified, the community works together for a solution. ‘Halma’, thus, becomes one of the best examples of the role of community participation and social solidarity in the management of ecological and cultural resources. It also paves the way for the promotion of sustainable growth and development.

Culture plays an integral role in shaping a community’s worldview. The tradition of ‘Halma’ began with the purpose of helping the needy and its foundation was based on the belief of ‘finding solution for everyone with everyone’. Over the years, the practice of ‘Halma’ has evolved to social solidarity and its motto of ‘community for individual’ is gradually moving towards ‘community for the community’. Traditionally, ‘Halma’ was called by several villagers for their domestic and agricultural needs. But, with the change in time, new meanings have been associated with ‘Halma’ as it is now being used for environment protection, water conservation, planting of trees, and promotion of forests. At present, the whole world is facing severe climatic and environmental issues and its effects are also visible in the rural and remote areas. ‘Halma’ tradition is paving the way to combat these issues and it is now being used to preserve the natural heritage of the village. In Jhabua, through ‘Halma’ the lakes and wells are being revived which has resulted in the recharge of the groundwater level of the area. The increase in soil moisture has reduced soil erosion and promoted the growth of new plants, which has led to an overall positive impact on the green cover of the region. It is crucial that traditions like ‘Halma’ should exist which provide plausible solutions that resonate with the local ethos.

In this context, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts is organizing a two-day national seminar in collaboration with the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. One of the important objectives of this seminar is to identify and document ‘Halma’-like traditions from different tribal communities of our country and to bring these traditional local knowledge systems to the forefront. Such traditional practices and rituals that promote community participation should be highlighted so that they can play an instrumental role in the holistic

development of the country. The traditional wisdom and patterns of livelihood of the tribals must come into the public eye so that the whole country can be benefitted from their knowledge bank.

This seminar aims to provide an academic platform for the researchers/academicians/organizations to present their research work, share and discuss the following themes of research:

- 1) The worldview of tribes with specific reference to concepts of 'development', 'progress', and 'modernity'.
- 2) Individual rights vs. cultural rights/community rights
- 3) Social capital of tribes in India.
- 4) Traditional economic exchange practices
- 5) Natural resource management practices
- 6) Traditional dispute resolution mechanisms/practices
- 7) Local traditional knowledge systems with special reference to environment and ecology
- 8) Inter and intra-tribal relations
- 9) Role and Contributions of NGOs/civil society in the Development of traditional communities of India
- 10) Impact of ecological changes on tribal cultures
- 11) Government interventions (development/welfare programs) and their impact
- 12) Any other community-driven practices

The identification and documentation of the community-driven practices from the tribal world need to be highlighted and promoted to make a positive impact on the lives and livelihoods of the tribal people on one hand and to learn the way of sustainable living on the other hand. It will be an opportunity to highlight the local knowledge systems and self-sufficiency of the tribal communities along with the significance of social solidarity in tribal development. It will also enable us to study the history, ecology, environment, and patterns of livelihood of the tribal communities. These knowledge systems can be a perfect example of how Intangible Cultural Wisdom can be turned into powerful instruments of growth and sustainability.