

Bishnoi community model: an Indian Ecological Feminist approach to environment protection

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Abstract

Purpose – As a solution to these crises, bringing back the feminine sensitivity can become a welcome change. The Bishnoi community, in particular, propagated Eco-feminism for the cause of the environment. Therefore, this paper aims to study the community in detail along with suggesting a Bishnoi Environment Protection Model as an Indian indigenous solution to the global environmental problems.

Design/methodology/approach – The method of obtaining information was a detailed questionnaire-based interview along with multiple focus group discussions. The interviews were conducted with the women who belong to the Bishnoi community and who are actively taking forward the ethos of their community. Interviews were conducted across a span of different villages to cover a different portion of the Bishnoi population. Adding to this, multiple focus group discussions took place in the temple, wild-life protection center, Self-help group women's households, community meetings.

Findings – Religion and science are complementary and supplementary to each other in the true sense. It would be good to recall what the greatest scientist had said "Science without religion is blind and religion without science is lame".

Research limitations/implications – The research limitation of this paper is that it is a field study-based research wherein the research findings are the outcomes of personal interviews with the village community people. The limitation, therefore, lies in the simplicity of the research arguments put forward in this paper. The

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implication of this research would be to challenge the dominant research paradigms in the field of Eco-feminism and Climate Change and bring grass root narratives to the forefront.

Practical implications – The practical implication of this research paper is that in Environment related policy solutions, rural women should be appointed as consultants of advisors in the high profile decision-making policy groups. It would make the process very democratic and rooted in ground-level solutions. If the Bishnoi community women of India are given their due regard they would eventually play significant roles in the decision-making groups at the national and international levels.

Social implications – Other than having a policy implication, this research paper has a social implication too. The community narratives which have been hidden for so long in the remote villages of India will come to the forefront and help as a guiding force.

Originality/value – This paper recommends that India should propagate its culturally-rooted principles such as the one in Jambhoji's commandments. India should strongly put these normative values in the international organizations and contribute to a new epistemology of knowledge in the counter effect of existing ones. This would make a paradigm shift at the level of the knowledge-power in which the developed nations manipulate the rest of the world. The new terminologies, concepts, agendas, goals should be formulated by deriving the knowledge from age-old communities in India. The people of these communities have even given their lives for the protection of the environment.

Keywords Bishnoi, Religion, Environment, Globalization, Ecological Feminism, Jambhoji

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Women in different time-periods have been made the object of desires either in the raj-durbar, in the market, or in the political setups. The secondary status of women has often been challenged by scholars at various time periods. There are many limitations of the widespread dominant literature of the women's movement which originated in the USA. The two important concepts that came out of these movements are Eco-feminism and Ecological Feminism. Eco-feminism is an activist and academic movement providing critical connections between the domination of nature and the exploitation of women. This particular movement grew during the New Social Movements wave in 1980 and 1990 in the USA. It had its worldwide implication in terms of raising awareness about the patriarchal dominating nature of capitalist societies across the western world. Hence, it also joined together the feminist and green movements together in order to save women and environment.

On the other hand, according to Cheney "the Ecological feminism refers to a sensibility, an intimation that feminist concerns run parallel to and are bound up with or perhaps are one with concern for a natural world which has been subjected to much the same abuse and ambivalent behavior as have women" (1987, p. 115). The take of Ecological Feminism is that there are substantial historical, symbolic and theoretical connections between the domination of women and the environment. In response to that the framework of Ecological Feminism provides a distinct feminist environmental ethic. It is within this framework that the next sections of this paper provide Indian environment ethics which are ingrained in the age-old religious philosophy of the Bishnoi Community.

Only a few great human beings have been able to accept women in their completeness as human beings. One among them is the philosophy of Jambhoji which is practiced even today by the Bishnoi community. In Jambhoji's philosophy, women are not self-pitying human beings. Rather, they are impartial, just, courageous and full of zest. These characteristics are usually associated with men in society. Disrespect toward them is not acceptable. He strongly opposed the old rudimentary ways of living which were very unkind toward women. The one who is not affected by the time and space during his existence can only bring change in that time. Because transcending the limitations imposed by the dimension of time brings new and innovative solutions to the existing problems. This is why in the time when Jambhoji lived, many kings, landlords, Thakur, don and even criminals who were disturbed by their worldly existence used to come to Jambhoji to listen to his philosophy. Therefore, it has been noted by scholars that the one who is strong in dedication and devotion wins this world.

In the above context, this paper discusses that the Ecological Feminism established in the Indian psyche is slightly different from the dominant western narratives of climate change. The research paper's problem, therefore, is "if the inculcation of religious sentiments into environmental causes can turn into an impactful, effective solution for many environment related problems". The profound basis for this is the preaching that man is a microcosm of the universe, therefore, everything done by an individual is reflected in the macrocosm and the higher reality is affected by his acts. Thus man's evil infects nature. His degeneration precedes the degradation of the ecosystem. If the equilibrium in nature is to be restored then man, the fulcrum of the world, must be reformed.

Method

This paper is solely premised upon the field observations and discussions in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. The historical and socio-cultural details are derived from the interviews conducted with Bishnoi women, community leaders and spiritual heads. The method of obtaining information was a detailed questionnaire-based interview along with multiple focus group discussions. The interviews were conducted with the women who belong to the Bishnoi community and who are actively taking forward the ethos of their community. Interviews were conducted across a span of different villages to cover a different portion of the Bishnoi population. Adding to this, multiple focus group discussions took place in the temple, wild-life protection center, Self-help group women's households and community meetings.

The process of conducting interviews was face-to-face discussions with the women and other community people. These were mainly unstructured interviews which are described as conversations held with a purpose in mind to gather data about a particular research study. The main objective in these kinds of interviews is mainly to build a bond with the respondents due to which there are high chances that the respondents remain 100% truthful with their answers. There are no specific guidelines as such to follow hence the researcher can ethically approach the participants to gain as much information as they can gain in their research. Since there is no particular guideline to be followed; the researcher is expected to keep the approach in check so that it does not sway away from the main research motive. To derive the necessary outcomes, the researcher keeps certain things in mind such as the main intent of the interview, taking into consideration the participant's interest and skills, and conversations within the permissible limits of research. There are many advantages of unstructured interviews in terms of flexibility for the researcher to develop a friendly rapport with the participants. This helps in gaining insights in extreme detail without much conscious effort. In the process, the participants can clarify all their doubts about the questions and the researcher can take the opportunity to explain better answers. There is no well-defined question by which the researcher has to abide which in turn enhances the flexibility of research.

Literature review

The leading proponent of the Eco-feminist movement in India is the renowned activist Vandana Shiva. She holds that, "capitalism is responsible for the destruction of nature and women's work underlining the fact that development does not benefit women and nature in the way that it perpetuates domination and centralization through patriarchal control" [1]. Adding to this, Shiva claims that modern science marginalizes the women's subsistence practices, knowledge of and dependency on nature for survival leading to physical and cultural uprooting of indigenous peoples from their ancestors' soil. As a result, this has caused an onslaught on local culture, which has fragmented and commodified into salable entities on the global supermarket.

Similar to the above Indian Scholars, the Ecological Feminists have propagated an alternative formulation of the relationship of oppression between human and non-human groups. They proposed a different view of the social relationships which have been the systems of dominance. Their main agenda is to expose as well as denounce the binaries separating men and women, culture and nature while simultaneously equating women with nature. Certain kinds of domination have been justified through established hierarchies. The whole objective of the framework of Ecological Feminism is to deconstruct the traditional dichotomies that have operated in favor of the perpetuation of hierarchies for the establishment of values and for the separation of realms such as human and non-human.

In the above context, Freya Matthews explains that “Eco-feminists have sought to overcome the dualist mind/matter system by proposing an alternative principle of individuation, one that defines entities in terms of their relations with one another” [2]. This is the new emerging paradigm of Relationality that defines new entities and attributes in terms of their constitutive relation with one-another, retaining difference and distinctness and construing in terms of continuity. Matthews further adds that the theoretical dimension needs to be complimented with strategic implication which means the creation of new normative practices that cultivate both at the personal and social levels (The Dilemma of Dualisms: 67).

This paper revolves around the fact that “the importance of religion and spirituality in certain communities and its reflection not only in the conception of nature but also in the practices of ethics of care” (Ruether, Gaia and God, Starhawk, Spretnak). Similarly Matilde Martin studies “the influences of the precepts of Shinto, Japan’s native religion and Confucianism in Watanabe’s fiction wherein integrative models of the self are deployed which bind the spirits and forces of a natural Eco-system conceived as alive and in constant flow with the human world”. Adding to this, the spiritual dimension not only conveys the deconstruction of a hierarchical system of thought (nature vs. civilization; life vs. death; humans vs. non-human nature and animals) but also in a more practical manner in an ecological ethic of care that Martin sees in Watanabe’s characters. In this context, the Bishnoi community is taken as a case study in this paper. The next sections of the paper analyze the various dimensions of the community and its leader’s philosophy. It becomes a good case to propagate the Indian examples of Ecological Feminism. Although the prevailing Ecofeminism literature provides a good critique of inter-related social systems of domination, it severely lacks in providing any solution-based approach. Here, the framework of Ecological Feminism is much more significant.

This new framework helps in grasping the Indian approach to the environment cause. Since, within the Indian religious traditions there are many examples of the authority of female gurus-who are the women from social backgrounds which would not accept a woman in an authoritative role. In these communities’ women occupy an ambivalent position.

Results of the field research

Bishnoi and Ecological Feminism: a study of historical background

Guru Jambheshwar who is very popular among the Bishnoi community people in Jodhpur spent as many as 27 years grazing cattle in the wilderness, sitting alone and meditating. He channeled his thoughts and emotions to love, compassion, equanimity, quietness and confidence. He also pondered over the miserable conditions of his people and the causes which had brought them down to a subhuman level. The death and destruction caused by the unusually long famine must have pierced the tender heart of Guru Jambhoji. The herds of blackbucks had completely disappeared due to animals hunted by the royal families of the time. At the age of 34, he observed that men were in conflict with nature and ravaging the Earth that sustained him. He thought that his deep insight could foresee that if trees are protected, wild animal life would be sustained and the community would survive. He wanted

his land to be again covered by an abundance of Khejri and Kankeri trees; he wanted herds of blackbucks and Indian Gazelle to frolic again. He started to tell the people that it was not nature, but human intervention in nature that was the root cause of the destruction. He explained that the human exploitation of nature, felling of trees and killing of the wild animals on the pretext of civilization was the main cause of famines which in essence were man-made.

After the death of his parents, he left his home in 1484 AD and started living on the Samrathal Dhora, sandhill of Mukam village situated in Nokha tehsil of Bikaner district of Rajasthan. He also emphasized compassion toward nature and protection of wildlife as the supreme religious goal to his followers in the preaching.

He founded the Bishnoi sect in 1485 AD corresponding to the first day of the black fortnight of the month of Kartika of the year 1542 of the Vikrami Era at Samrathal Dhora and prescribed 20 commandments dealing with various aspects of life. He expounded his religious philosophy and the essence of these principles in the form of verses, which Bishnois refer to as the Shabadvani and considered it as their most sacred text. Jambhavni or Shabadvani is a collection of 120 Shabads, composed in Rajasthani dialect, "Marubhasa". These spiritual verses have vigor of their own and are vibrant, passionate and sincere.

Religious-environment discourse

The recondite philosophy and metaphysics behind Guru Jambheshwar ji's preaching are that, man is a microcosm of the universe, therefore, everything done by an individual is reflected in the macrocosm, and the higher reality is affected by his acts. Thus man's evil infects nature. His degeneration precedes the degradation of the ecosystem. If the equilibrium in nature is to be restored then man, the fulcrum of the world, must be reformed. Unless he sheds evil and begins to lead an orderly, purposeful life, the ecosystem could not be put back on the rails. For this reformation of humanity, he founded the Bishnoi sect in which people from all the castes were given entry.

The followers of this community perform the ritual of fire altar (Havan), every morning with love and devotion to attain heaven. This principle is directly related to the purification of nature. The offerings in Havan constitute coconut, dry wood of Khejri, pure ghee and a fragrant mixture containing gugal (Indian Bdellium, used as perfume and medicament). They release pure, fragrant particles in the atmosphere, cleansing them of impure, bad-smelling, harmful gases, disease-causing agents and air pollutants. The religious incantations produce spiritual vibrations. The performance of the Havan is evident on all life cycle ceremonies, sacred days of the month, festivals and on Amavasya.

"Be compassionate towards all living beings, do not injure a green tree". These principles embody the ideology of non-violence and are interrelated. Protection of wildlife entails the protection of the forests, which is their natural habitat. The exploitation of one endangers the life of the other.

As a result, the followers of Guru Jambhoji have spearheaded a Crusade for five centuries in the cause of protection of green plants and animals against human encroachment. The most famous incident of mass sacrifice took place in village Khejarli of Jodhpur in 1730 A.D. when 363 Bishnois gave up their lives to save the auspicious green trees of Khejri. Since then there have been many cases of Bishnois giving up their lives for the safety and endurance of deer, peacocks, partridges and other living beings. As a result, the state is also recognizing the micro-level efforts of Bishnois in eco-regeneration and eco-preservation.

Interview with Om Prakash Bishnoi, Director of Jambhoji research institute, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur. Through his 29 commandments, the man was told, with vigor and passion, about the interrelation and interdependence of all life. Understanding the needs of mankind and livestock, Guruji found a simple way of teaching science and conservation principles to his followers, who were mostly rural, uneducated and farmers by incorporating them into religion. He knew beforehand, that for the simple, god-fearing people, this was the

only way to learn and remember. The conservation principle was ingrained in this religious philosophy. His message is one of truth, non-violence, cleanliness, conservation of natural resources to maintain the ecological balance, tolerance, simplicity, right action and humanism, which hold good even today as well as in the past.

Consequently, the people of his community became the torch bearers of environmental protection. One historical incident proved the severity of it, when Maharaja Abhai Singh, ruler of Marwar (Jodhpur) state wanted to construct a new royal mansion namely phool mahal for which lime was required. Limestone was already available but it was to be burnt before use, for which fuel was required. Therefore, he sent his soldiers to Jambheshwar ji's area where trees were in abundance. But the villagers protested, and when the soldiers did not pay attention to the protests, his followers led by a woman "Amrita Devi" hugged the trees to protect them with their bodies. She spoke these words,

"If a tree is saved from falling at the cost of one's head, it should be considered as cheap bargaining", saying these words she offered her head. As when the soldiers kept on killing the villagers, more and more followers came forward to honor the religious injunction of their Guruji. The massacre continued till 363 persons were killed defending trees.

When this news reached the King, he stopped the operation and apologized for the mistake committed by his officials, and gave the followers state protection for their belief. Such an incident has not occurred in any part of the world. In remembrance of this, the Government of India has instituted "Amrita Devi Bishnoi" Wildlife Protection Award in 2001.

Religion and science are complementary and supplementary to each other in the true sense. It would be good to recall what the greatest scientist had said, "Science without religion is blind and religion without science is lame".

Discussion

Jambhoji's principles: globalization and capitalism

The media and information technology have turned the world into a village. This is the main reason that one incident occurring in any part of the world trembles the whole world like never before. The main medium is television through which the developed nations have propagated the principle of Globalization worldwide. The advertisements on television create unnecessary wants in the citizens of the less developed countries. This is why people have abandoned the life of simplicity and contentment. The nudity shown on television is making the youth very lazy and perverted. And they have been enslaved by various types of drugs and alcohol habits.

Globalization has also made violence very trendy and handy. Today the world has become the marketplace of various destructive weapons. In such times a worldwide acceptable definition of violence will have to be formulated. The developing nations could not escape this manipulation of the developed world. As a result, economic imperialism through globalization has become a new reality. All of this needs a significant shift through the inculcation of new ideas which can be taken from religious philosophy as well. These ideas need to be conjoined with the present-day crisis.

The reality of the world bank, international monetary fund and world trade organization are very mysterious. On the surface, these organizations pretend to help developing nations in removing poverty but in reality, they are controlled by the developed nations. The main values and principles of these organizations are dictated by the elites of the developed nations. Therefore the long-term vision of these organizations is to indirectly pursue the interests of the developed nations.

This paper recommends that India should propagate its culturally-rooted principles such as the one in Jambhoji's commandments. India should strongly put these normative values in the international organizations and contribute to a new epistemology of knowledge in the

counter effect of existing ones. This would make a paradigm shift at the level of the knowledge-power in which the developed nations manipulate the rest of the world. The new terminologies, concepts, agendas, goals should be formulated by deriving the knowledge from age-old communities in India. The people of these communities have even given their lives for the protection of the environment. They certainly would have had the vision of environmental protection long ago. The environment is not the only aspect in the domain of global issues. There are many other issues too which can be resolved through the help of the age-old principles, norms and values.

Today humanity is in despondency because of the poverty they are witnessing because of the domination of capitalist forces. Today, the individualistic monetary possession has become significant which is leading to the overly selfish nature of the people. The communitarian ways of living are diminishing in society. Jambhoji's commandments also advocated the service of other human beings.

Jambhoji's philosophy: women as agents of environment conservation

Society in collaboration with religious and political authority has relegated women merely in the bodily domains. Historically women have been looked at from a demean angle. As a result, it has got hold of the human psyche to view women as degraded human beings. The long historical brainwashing is the reason for this. Guru Jambhoji became a torchbearer for the upliftment of women's status within society. He raised their consciousness above the mere shackles of the male dominant and ego-centric ideology. He considered Sita to be a good, ideal woman who is sincere, silent, beautiful, kind and caring. She had to be protected, that is why so many men such as Ram, Lakshman, Garud, Vibhishan all risked their lives for her protection. She did not ask for it but they had so much respect for her that they waged the greatest war for her life. Even the wild animals had so much affection for her that monkeys, bears and other animals stood for her protection.

Environment, religion and women: an Indian path to environment protection

Jambhoji used his mind and weaved the movement of environment conservation into religious philosophy. He could be considered a very erudite and articulate policymaker. He knew that human beings are all the time striving toward any energy higher than the existing one. The human eagerness to be the best and highest version of themselves leads them to follow the religious commandments. The existing religious philosophy in the form of Vedas, Upanishad, Gita, Gurbani, Gorakhbani all had some normative aspects about human existence. Although achieving and following all the norms was impossible, striving toward them gave human beings a purpose to live with zest and enthusiasm. This constant striving toward something that is highest in the human evolution theory made human beings religious in nature time and again in history. The strongest institutionalization, if there is any, then is Religious institutions across the world. No part of the world is untouched by this human endeavor toward higher realms of existence. All these religions have been psychologically conjoined with other agendas be it imperialism, capitalism, terrorism. All of these agendas have pursued human selfishness and egocentrism under the veil of religious commandments. With time the religion became subservient to the human agenda even when the objective was to lead humanity toward better. The subservience has made the religion of many parts of the world irrelevant and dogmatic. This emptiness and shallowness had left humanity in a very dark vacuum. The outcome is the global challenges we face today. Such as climate change, extremism, political instabilities, failed social movements and civilization decay.

In this above context, it is important to see the trajectory of the history of the Hindu religion. It is very fragmented, divided yet cast, deep and impactful. From time to time it has been challenged by the people within its communities. One such example is the religious

philosophy propagated by Guru Jambhoji. He challenged the dogmatism of the existing dominant religion and propounded his new commandments. He lived a very austere life to make such a big contribution to humanity. The way other religions are associated with different agendas, it is only in India that a religious philosophy is being conjoined with two very important human agendas. And articulation was done centuries ago but is not being taken seriously even today. He strongly propagated environmental conservation and women's liberation in his twenty-nine principles to live a better, meaningful, purposeful human life. Nowhere in the world has environmental protection been given a religious dimension. This is the reason that human sensitivity is not yet completely devoted to nature in many parts of the world. As a result of this indifference and neglect, the results are very much visible in the environment.

By connecting the agenda of the environment with religion, he brought human sensitivity to it. He made this initiative in 1542. He also gave importance to the significance of rituals in protecting the environment. According to him, Yajna cleans the air in the atmosphere. The Yajna or sacrificial fire, apparently done to worship one or the other deity, also helps in purifying the air and thus keeping the environment healthy.

The history of environmental pollution started with European industrialization. It spread to the whole world and India was no exception to it. Therefore, India because of the absence of knowledge power got affected by a similar outcome as any other part of the world. This is the reason now that Jambhoji's philosophy should be put forth in the International platforms to come up with some new ideas to protect the environment.

The Bishnoi model

The nature-based "Bishnoi environmental protection model" is unique in itself and is a role model for the present-day world to save the mother Earth from perishing. His 29 commandments include higher moral values inlaying, a nature-based self-contained lifestyle, maintaining purity of natural resources, e.g. Water fuels, compassion and non-violence based behavior with the living being and trees. As a result, the recent scientific studies based on satellite imageries have confirmed that Bishnoi habitations have more greeneries than the rest of the habitations. Similarly, it is a well-established fact that wildlife, e.g. blackbucks, chinkaras, birds, peacocks, endangered species find a haven in Bishnoi villages. Bishnoi traditions and practices not only protect animals from animals but also help them to lead a healthy life, by allowing them to graze freely in their surroundings, keeping volunteer's water points and feeding centers during lean periods of the year. These practices include resource shelters (like the one at Jajiwal) where they take care of the injured animal by treatment, feeding and leaving them back in the meantime.

Based on Jambhoji's teaching it has been found that in all Bishnoi villages water protection is very significant. Traditionally the leading personalities dug Talabs and Khadins on the periphery of villagers with pious catchment and surrounding protected ORAN (Social Forestry) with local plant species. Nobody is allowed to defecate and urinate into the catchment. Such protection and conserving community rainwater harvesting is old wisdom. Similarly at the individual household level construction of TANKA and their connection with rooftop and developing surrounding catchments are very well-known practices. The TALAB, ORAN and rainwater harvesting and freely moving animals is a wonderful example of an integrated village eco-system.

In the Bishnoi villages, biodegradable vegetables and other agro waste are used for composting and manure. The lifestyle based on Jambhoji's teachings and philosophy can ensure that the modern-day environment reduces pollution levels by adopting a simple nature-based lifestyle, visiting less energy, practicing the traditional wisdom of water conservation and re-use and recycling waste. These practices can save us from the pollution

of natural resources, over pollution at concentrated places (big cities) and reduce carbon footprints. The eco-based model propounded by Jambhoji's teachings for the protection of the environment and wild animals needs to be spread across the world.

Bishnois-ecologists practices

Thar Desert – one of the most difficult and inhospitable terrains for survival. And yet, the Bishnoi community, guided by the teachings of Jambhoji thrives in this region, providing support and protection to plants and animals. The environmental consciousness is inbuilt in their rituals and has become a part of their culture. Today, when the world is sliding into an irreversible climate change scenario, with billions being pumped to reverse the damages, this part of the world silently started its environment-friendly life almost 500 years back. Largely unnoticed by any major ecological group, their practices form the basis for their survival and reinforce the notion that traditional wisdom is a deeply scientific approach to sustainable living, which leads to overall prosperity and balanced living.

One incident took place in January 2007, when the local Bishnois of the village Agneyu in Bikaner filed complaints against a film producer when a horse died at the sets. Adding to this, the divisional forest officer of the Abohar Wildlife Sanctuary regularly depends on the local Bishnoi community for night patrolling against the poachers. In Haryana, Bishnois are often first to report poaching incidents.

Gurvindar Bishnoi in Jodhpur has founded an NGO called the community for wildlife and rural development society. His mission is to save and protect the animals that are injured by accidents or by hunters. He also produced a video documentary about Bishnois and Jambhesvara.

There is one Sri Jagatguru Jambheshwar Goshala Sanstha at Mukam. This cow shelter takes care of about 1,335 cows. This institution is inspired by Amar That, an animal shelter institution mentioned in one of the verses by Jambheshvara's disciple Udoji Naina. He said animals should be considered as the kin of human beings and should not be killed in any way.

P. Sivaram, a sociologist at the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad conducted a study at two Bishnoi villages in the Luni block of Jodhpur district in 2003. The respondents mentioned that they were staunch followers of twenty-nine principles due to which their cattle population, green patches and soil fertility have increased. Based on these benefits, the Bishnois were more prosperous than other communities were. He also found several sacred grooves in the villages managed by Bishnois, including some that were claimed to be about 400 years old. Bishnois effectively act as a deterrent against the hunting expeditions by outsiders. The deer and other animals usually roam around Bishnoi houses during the late afternoons and early evenings that are common times for hunting.

Water conservation is the most precious gift of Nature. Bishnois know it as it is recognized by them in their fundamental principles of living and being a Bishnoi. Guru Jambhoji could visualize the reason for the scarcity of water in the desert land of western Rajasthan. All his teachings directly or indirectly lead one to commit oneself to the conservation of water and realize it as the most sacred duty in a Bishnoi's life.

While remaining in the desert, Guruji, though a widely traveled person himself, concluded that the desert land is the best place to live in only if water was utilized properly by its inhabitants. He knew it very well that people would not change their ways unless it was ingrained in their faith to conserve water and work toward the creation of conditions conducive to better rainfall by planting more trees and cutting no green trees. Thus conservation of water came to be in Bishnoi's DNA over the last 500 years of living a life dedicated to the conservation of water and the environment.

The ritual of touching the water to the ears of every newborn baby was included in the Bishnoi faith to emphasize the social moral and ethical importance of respecting water. On all important occasions of Havan, there is an earthen pitcher full of water which is sanctified by

recitation of some Mantras and then the holy water is distributed among the followers as a token of taking a pledge to abide by the principles of Bishnoism. This was his way of giving importance and respect to water which is still being followed by his followers.

While performing the Havan, Kalsh Puja (water worship) is performed in which some of the shlokas are exclusively made in respect of water which the shlokas say is the most important of the five basic elements of life on Earth.

Jmabhoji has mentioned various forms and ways related to water such as river, sea, oceans, rain, clouds, ponds, thunderbolt, pond, Anrit, boat, pitcher, irrigation, tirath, fish, crocodile, tortoise and fisherman. He initiated the construction of many ponds and inaugurated barriers for the collection of running water and planted trees.

In villages, his followers Bishnois construct ponds for animal use and household use separately and also construct underground water tanks in their houses for human use to store rainwater in low-lying areas where the soil is less porous and absorptive. The way of living is also such that less water is consumed in daily chores. They do not use Indigo for whitening in clothes as the blue was made of Indigo plants and also too much water was wasted in applying and removing the blue. The indigo plant needed land to plant and grow and the fertile land was certainly converted barren where no vegetation would grow and the underground water would also get affected. They recycle the water for many uses. They started drip irrigation systems and other modern water conservation methods in recent times to cope up with the food grain requirements.

Guru Jambho Ji: beat plastic pollution and healthy lifestyle

In recent decades, scientific advances, as well as growing environmental problems such as global warming, are helping us to understand the countless ways in which natural systems support our prosperity and well-being. The world's oceans, forests and soils act as vast stores for greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane, farmers and fisher-folk harness nature on land and underwater to provide us with food; Scientists develop medicines using genetic material drawn from the millions of species that make up Earth's astounding biological diversity. Billions of rural people/farmers around the world spend every working day connected to nature. Appreciate full well their form of fertile soil. They are among the first to suffer when ecosystems are threatened, whether by pollution, climate change, or over-exploitation. Nature's gifts are often hard to value in monetary terms. Like clean air, pure water they are often taken for granted, at least until they become scarce.

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Beat Plastic Pollution, the theme for World Environment Day 2018, is a call to action for all of us to come together to combat one of the great environmental challenges of our time. Chosen by this year's host, India, the theme of World Environment Day 2018 invites us all to consider how we can make changes in our everyday lives to reduce the heavy burden of plastic pollution on our natural places, our wildlife and our health. Nearly one-third of the plastic packaging we use escapes collection systems, clogging our city streets and polluting our natural environment. Every year, up to 13 million tons of plastic leak into our oceans, where it smothers coral reefs and threatens vulnerable marine wildlife. These can end up circling the Earth four times in a single year and it can take up to 1,000 years before it fully disintegrates. During the national conference, awareness is being created to meet the national theme of Beat Plastic Pollution.

Nature's gifts are often hard to value in monetary terms. Like clean air, pure water they are often taken for granted, at least until they become scarce. Environmental challenges are

multifarious in the Rajasthan desert. The Bishnoi community as a custodian of the desert environment is continuing to contribute and serve in its management by giving protection to flora and fauna.

The solution to many climate problems lies in decoding and integrating Vedic Knowledge like traditional water practices with the present lifestyle. In-universe, the divinity of water directly governs the quality and harmony of life. The water scarcity crisis cannot be solved only by drilling water wells, installing desalination plants and constructing water storage reservoirs.

An integrated approach consisting of all water sectors- R&D, water supply and sanitation demands, agriculture, energy development and environmental management must be acted upon to alleviate water shortages. Traditional water harvesting structures, water conservation and drinking water practices followed by desert populations including Bishnoi families have survived desert flora and fauna in extreme summer seasons and drought years.

By practicing 20 principles Stated by Jambhhoji, yoga-naturopathy and adopting the natural art of living with organic food free from pesticides and chemical fertilizers one can not only connect the people with the environment but also achieve stress-free life, peace and harmony. A balanced person with holistic health and Indian ethos is bound to be virtuous, imaginative, productive and an asset to society.

Conclusion

Environmental management in India: an urgent necessity for new solutions

India's economic growth over the past few years has raised the prospect of eliminating extensive poverty within a generation. But this growth has been clouded by a degrading physical environment and the growing scarcity of natural resources that are essential for sustaining further growth and eliminating poverty. It is no coincidence that the poorest areas of the country are also the most environmentally stressed regions, with eroded soils, polluted waterways and degraded forests.

Simultaneously, rapid growth has unleashed greater public awareness and an unprecedented demand for the sound management of natural resources including water, forests and biodiversity. Environmental sustainability is rapidly emerging as the next major development and policy challenge for the country and will be central to the 12th five-year plan which is currently under preparation.

In rural areas poverty has become intertwined with resource degradation – poor soils, depleted aquifers and degraded forests. To subsist, the poor are compelled to mine and overuse these limited resources, creating a downward spiral of impoverishment and environmental degradation. There is growing pressure to better protect India's pockets of mega biodiversity which are increasingly recognized as being of immense significance for global biodiversity, yet are increasingly threatened. Greater investment in the protection of these natural assets would yield a double dividend of poverty alleviation and the improved sustainability of growth.

The health impacts from pollution are comparable to those caused by malnutrition and have a significant impact on productivity, health and quality of life. Environmental health challenges are largely caused by poverty-related risks associated with poor access to basic services, such as safe drinking water and sanitation and poor indoor air quality.

Sundarbans Sustainable Socio-Economic Development-the objective of the Non-Lending Technical Assistance is to assess measures that would build the resilience of the socio-economic and biophysical system and achieve long-term sustainable development. Historic sea level rise from deltaic subsidence, salinity intrusion, flooding, and nutrient loss in local soils have all conspired over the past century to render it one of the most hazardous areas in the Indian subcontinent.

Overall in this paper, we see an overlap of religious, personal and ecological attitudes in the Bishnoi examples and also that the term “dharma” is used interchangeably to refer to one’s religions, duty and socio-political order of the universe both by the founder and followers of the Bishnoi community.

Most Bishnoi community people are barely aware of the western scientific discourse about “global warming” or “biodiversity”. Still, they serve as one of the most powerful examples of environmentalism that is rooted in their dharmic tradition. Unlike other religious movements, the dharma of Bishnois is not just limited to their religious rituals or scriptures, but it includes natural resources beyond their religious sites as is evident from the examples of their sacrifices done in the farmlands of their villages.

Notes

1. <https://feminisminindia.com/2019/10/29/is-ecofeminism-relevant-today/>
2. <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/803/1169>

Further reading

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Smuts, B.B., Cheney, D.L., Seyfarth, R.M., Wrangham, R.W. and Struhsaker, T.T. (Eds) (1987), *Primate Societies*, University of Chicago Press.

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