

Indian Journal of Modern Research and Reviews

This Journal is a member of the '**Committee on Publication Ethics**'

Online ISSN:2584-184X



Research Article

Contribution of Bishnoi Community in Environmental Protection: A Geographical Study

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21308257>

Abstract

The present titled "Contribution of Bishnoi community in environment protection: A geographical study" attempts to analysis role played by the community in Rajasthan with special reference to the Khejarli village incident of the Khejarli tree problem. Khejarli village situated in western Thar Desert of Rajasthan. Amrita Devi native of this village was the first environmentalist of Rajasthan in the Bishnoi community.

Khejarli village situated in Rajasthan, was initiated for wildlife protection and eco-conversation; Bishnoi's are the First Environmentalists of India. King Abhay Singh of Jodhpur ordered trees to be cut for palace construction. Amrita Devi Bishnoi opposed the tree felling by hugging the trees. Her daughters, Asu, Ratni, and Bhagu joined her in protest. The Bishnoi promotes conservation of trees and wildlife. *Sir saantheroonkhrahe to bheesastonjaann.* "Even if the head is sacrificed (meaning, if one's life is given), and a tree is saved, then it's still a cheap bargain". 363 Bishnoi's were killed while trying to protect the Khejri trees. It's known as khejarli massacre. This proverb, rooted in the traditions of the Bishnoi community of Rajasthan, India, emphasizes the profound importance they place on environmental protection and the conservation of trees, particularly the Khejri tree. It signifies that saving trees and protecting the environment is considered a paramount duty, even if it requires the ultimate sacrifice of one's own life. The proverb also serves as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made by individuals within the Bishnoi community who laid down their lives to protect the environment and trees.

Manuscript Information

- **ISSN No:** 2584-184X
- **Received:** 01-01-2026
- **Accepted:** 30-04-2026
- **Published:** 05-05-2026
- **MRR:4(SP1); 2026: 245-249**
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- **Plagiarism Checked:** Yes
- **Peer Review Process:** Yes

How to Cite this Article

Rahul. Contribution of Bishnoi community in environmental protection: A geographical study. Indian J Mod Res Rev. 2026;4(SP1):245-249.

Access this Article Online



www.mrrjournal.in

KEYWORDS: Bishnoi, Khejri, Wildlife, Jambhoji, Amrita Devi, Forest Conservation

INTRODUCTION

The Bishnoi community mostly lives in Marwar area of Rajasthan disciples of by Guru Jambheshwar (Jambhoji), a spiritual saint and environmentalist. The name “Bishnoi” means twenty-nine in Marwari language, referring to the 29 principles laid down by Guru Jambheshwar to follow in their daily life. These principles promote environmental conservation, non-violence, and sustainable living. Bishnoi's prohibit cutting green trees, killing animals, and polluting water sources. Bishnoi community world famous for sacrificing their lives to protect flora and fauna. The community continues to play a key role in wildlife protection and eco-activism today. Their practices have influenced modern environmental movements not only in India but also globally as well. This paper aims to study the contribution of Bishnoi society in environmental conservation.

Environmental conservation refers to the responsible management and protection of the natural environment and its resources to ensure sustainability for future generations. As the world faces increasing threats from climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, pollution, and resource depletion, conservation has become an urgent global priority

1. Objectives of Environmental Conservation

Sustainable Resource Use: Ensuring natural resources (water, forests, soil, and fossil fuels) are used in a way that they can regenerate. **Preservation of Biodiversity,** protecting plant and animal species from extinction **Pollution Control** Reducing the emission of pollutants into the air, water, and soil, **Climate Regulation** Mitigating human impact on climate change through practices like carbon sequestration and clean energy. **Ecosystem Protection:** Maintaining the health of ecosystems that provide vital services such as pollination, oxygen production, and water purification.

2. Major Areas of Environmental Conservation

a. Forest Conservation

Forests play a crucial role in carbon sequestration, regulating rainfall, and housing biodiversity. Deforestation for agriculture, mining, and urbanization is a key threat. **Conservation Strategies:** Reforestation and afforestation Protected areas and national parks Sustainable logging practices Community-based forest management **Wildlife Conservation** Species are disappearing at an alarming rate due to habitat destruction, poaching, pollution, and climate change.

b. Conservation Strategies

Anti-poaching laws and wildlife sanctuaries breeding programs and species reintroduction Habitat corridors and biodiversity hotspots protection international cooperation (e.g., CITES).

c. Water Conservation

Freshwater is a limited resource. Overuse, pollution, and climate change are major concerns. **Conservation Strategies:** Rainwater harvesting efficient irrigation techniques (drip irrigation) Pollution control of rivers and lakes Wetland protection.

d. Soil Conservation

Soil erosion, salinization, and degradation affect food production and ecosystem stability. **Conservation Strategies:** Crop rotation and organic farming Contour plowing and terracing Afforestation and grass planting-controlled grazing

e. Marine Conservation

Oceans regulate climate, absorb carbon dioxide, and provide food. Threats include overfishing, oil spills, and plastic pollution. **Conservation Strategies:** Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) Ban on single-use plastics Sustainable fisheries management Coral reef restoration

3. Methods and Approaches

a. Legal and Policy Measures

Governments worldwide have enacted laws such as: The Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act (USA), Environmental Protection Act (India), International agreements like the Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol.

b. Technological Solutions

Renewable energy (solar, wind, hydro), Waste recycling and management Carbon capture and storage (CCS), Environmental monitoring tools (satellites, GIS), Community Involvement Environmental education and awareness campaigns Citizen science projects Indigenous knowledge systems Eco-volunteerism.

c. Economic Instruments

Carbon pricing and trading, green taxes and subsidies, Ecosystem service payments (PES) Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

4. Challenges in Environmental Conservation

Lack of political will and enforcement, Economic growth vs. environmental protection debate, public apathy or misinformation, Resource constraints in developing countries Climate change as a multiplier of existing threats

5. Importance of Environmental Conservation

For Human Survival: Clean air, water, and food depend on healthy ecosystems. **Economic Stability:** Agriculture, tourism,

and fisheries rely on natural systems. Cultural and Aesthetic Value: Natural landscapes and biodiversity enrich human life. Intergenerational Equity: Responsibility to pass on a healthy planet to future generations.

Environmental conservation is no longer an option—it is a necessity. It requires coordinated global, national, and local efforts, involving policy, science, community participation, and education. The success of conservation initiatives depends on understanding the interconnectedness of human and natural systems and acting responsibly to maintain the balance.

Amrita Devi Bishnoi Wildlife Protection Award

To honour the legacy of Amrita Devi Bishnoi and sacrifice for wildlife conservation, the Government of India instituted the Amrita Devi Bishnoi Wildlife Protection Award, a prestigious national recognition for individuals or institutions working to protect wildlife. The Amrita Devi Bishnoi Wildlife Protection Award is a national award instituted by the government of India for wildlife conservation. The award is in the remembrance of Amrita Devi Beniwal, who was killed in the 1730 Khejarli massacre while trying to protect a grove of Khejri trees in Khejarli, Rajasthan.

The governments of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh initially started the state-level Amrita Devi Bishnoi Award for contributions to the protection and conservation of wildlife. The award consisted of cash ₹25,000. Later in 2013, the Ministry of Environment and Forests instituted the Amrita Devi Bishnoi National Award. The cash award consists of ₹1,00,000 given to individuals or institutions involved in wildlife protection.

The first Amrita Devi Bishnoi National Award for Wildlife Conservation was conferred on 11 September 2001, posthumously on Ganga Ram Bishnoi of Chirai village in Jodhpur, Rajasthan by the Union Environment and Forest Minister. Ganga Ram was chasing some hunter who had killed a deer and was shot dead by the hunters. September 11 is celebrated as National Forest Martyrs Day.

The Bishnoi community was started in 1485 by Guru Jambheshwar in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan. In 1730, Along with Amrita Devi more than 363 other Bishnoi's died saving the Khejri trees. The Bishnoi community spread over the Western parts of Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh gained recognition in India after the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. It inspired the Chipko movement of Uttarakhand. The Bishnoi community took Bollywood actor Salman Khan to court for allegedly killing two blackbucks during a movie shoot near Jodhpur, Rajasthan, in 1998.

Protection of Biodiversity: The Bishnoi Movement strongly advocates for the conservation of flora and fauna. The community is deeply committed to preserving native species and maintaining ecological balance in their region. Promotion of Health and Hygiene: Guru Jambheshwar emphasized

cleanliness, personal hygiene, and community health. The Bishnoi Movement encourages habits that lead to physical well-being and social responsibility. Prevention of Deforestation: A cornerstone of the Bishnoi philosophy is the absolute prohibition against cutting green trees. The movement actively resists deforestation and promotes sustainable use of natural resources.

Compassionate Animal Care: The Bishnois are known for their care toward animals. They oppose hunting and poaching and have long practiced co-existing peacefully with wildlife, often nursing injured animals back to health.

Bishnoi in Rajasthan

Location & Population: The Bishnoi community is mainly found in the western Thar Desert and parts of northern India, with around 600,000 followers across the country. Founder: Established by Jambhoji, a 15th-century village near Jodhpur, who became Swami Jambheshwar Maharaj after experiencing a spiritual awakening during a severe drought. Origin Belief: Jambhoji believed that the drought and hardships were caused by human disruption of nature's balance.

Environmental Ethos

They hold a deep respect for all life forms and strictly avoid harming animals or cutting green trees. Pioneers of Conservation: Known for their eco-conscious lifestyle, they practice sustainable living and actively protect local biodiversity. Economic Activity: The community is skilled in dairy farming and is also known for producing high-quality dairy products and handmade soap. Natural Habitat: Their homeland near Jodhpur is lush with trees and supports a diverse range of wildlife, thanks to their conservation efforts. Funeral Practices: Though they follow Hinduism, Bishnoi bury their dead instead of cremating them conserving wood and aligning with their environmental values. Bishnoi Movement Success Royal Intervention: After the turning point of the Bishnoi movement, the Maharaja of Marwar issued a royal decree banning the cutting of trees in all Bishnoi-inhabited villages. Historical Significance: The origins of Bishnoism around 1730 AD laid the foundation for the concepts of tree-embracing and environmental activism in India.

29 Principles: Swami Jambheshwar laid down 29 commandments to guide the community's lifestyle, focusing on environmental conservation, compassion, and non-violence. The 29 principles (20 [Niyamas](#) + 9 [Yamas](#)) of Bishnois are as follows:

1. Observe a 30-day state of [impurity after childbirth](#), and keep the [mother](#) and [child](#) away from [household activities](#).
2. Observe five-day segregation from households activities such as cooking food, serving water, etc. while a woman is in her [menses](#).
3. [Bathe](#) daily in the morning before [sunrise](#).

4. Obey the ideal rules of life: modesty, [Kshama](#) (patience), or [Santosha](#) (satisfactions), [Shaucha](#) (cleanliness).
5. [Puja](#) (Pray) twice every day (morning and evening).
6. Eulogize God, Vishnu, in the evening ([Aarti](#))
7. Performance of [Yajna](#) ([Havan](#)) is said by Guru Jambhoji to symbolize Homa as the process to distance lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego from oneself to attain ultimate freedom, bliss, peace and truth. This is also said for being a better human being.
8. Use filtered water, milk, and cleaned firewood or use cooking fuel after removing [living organisms](#) around it.
9. Speak [Satya](#) (Pure words) in all [Arjava](#) (Sincerity)
10. Practice [Kshama](#) (Forgiveness) and [Karunā](#) (kindness) from the heart.
11. Be merciful with sincerity.
12. [Achourya](#) (Do not steal) nor harbor any intention to do it.
13. Do not condemn or criticize.
14. Do not lie.
15. Do not indulge in disputes or conflicts.
16. [Vrata](#) (fast) on [Amavasya](#).
17. Worship and recite the name of Lord Vishnu in adoration.
18. Be merciful to all living beings and love them. And, love is when you do not demand, possess and expect.
19. Do not cut green trees, save the environment.
20. Keep away from [Kama](#) (lust), [Krodha](#) (anger), [Lobha](#) (greed), and [Mohā](#) (attachment). Use one's strength for the right cause and fight for righteousness till the last breath. This will take one to eternity.
21. Cook one's own food and be self-sufficient.
22. Provide shelters for abandoned animals to avoid them from being slaughtered in abattoirs.
23. Do not [sterilize](#) bulls, do not abandon male calves from dairy farms. Pay for their welfare to shelter them.
24. Do not use or trade [opium](#).
25. Do not smoke or use [tobacco](#) or its products.
26. Do not take [bhang](#) or [hemp](#) or any addiction which can weak human mind or body.
27. Do not drink alcohol/liquor because alcohol degrades health very rapidly.
28. Do not eat meat; always remains vegan or ethical lacto-vegetarian.
29. Do not wear blue attire of blue colour as this colour is extracted from the indigo plant.

“Jeev Daya Palani” – Show compassion to all living beings. “*Runkh Lila Nahi Ghave*” – Do not cut green trees. Ecological Awareness: Jambaji observed that cutting trees during droughts to feed animals led to further ecological damage. His teachings emphasized the need to protect both trees and wildlife. Legacy: These principles laid the foundation

for one of the earliest and most consistent grassroots environmental movements in India.

Bishnoi Community

Geographical Presence: The Bishnoi community has lived for generations in western Rajasthan, especially around the Thar Desert region. They hold a deep respect for all life forms and strictly avoids harming animals or cutting green trees. They know for their eco-conscious lifestyle, they practice sustainable living and actively protect local biodiversity. The community is skilled in dairy farming and is also known for producing high-quality dairy products and handmade soap. Their homeland near Jodhpur is lush with trees and supports a diverse range of wildlife, thanks to their conservation efforts. Though they follow Hinduism, Bishnoi's bury their dead instead of cremating them conserving wood and aligning with their environmental values.

Bishnoi Movement Success

Royal Intervention: After the turning point of the Bishnoi movement, the Maharaja of Marwar issued a royal decree banning the cutting of trees in all Bishnoi-inhabited villages.

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