

# **Bishnoism: An Eco Dharma of the People Who Are Ready to Sacrifice their Lives to Save Trees and Wild Animals**

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## **Introduction**

The concept of sacrifice, in all its different expressions and interpretations is central to Indian traditions. Many scholars of religion believe that theories of sacrifice are at the heart of theories of religion itself, as it demonstrates human efforts to connect with, or construct some kind of sacred reality.<sup>i</sup> This paper therefore takes as its premise that a particular group's notion and practice of sacrifice can tell us a great deal about their worldview generally, and their conceptualization of human/ nonhuman relationships more specifically. The broad concept of sacrifice is a fruitful area in which to examine both the physical and conceptual relationships between humans and nonhumans, particularly in India where sacrificial language dominates the religious scene. The particular focus of this paper will be on the Bishnoi, a small Hindu community most densely located in Western Rajasthan. I will explore what the Bishnoi concept of sacrifice can tell us about human/ nonhuman relationships in their community, and how this relates to broader Indian notions of sacrifice and the nonhuman.

Upon researching the Bishnoi I have come to learn that sacrifice is central to their worldview and religious self conception. Not ritual sacrifice in the traditional sense of the term, rather, they focus on their commitment to self-sacrifice in the service of protecting other species. The heading of a Bishnoi website reads "Bishnoism: An Eco Dharma of the people who are ready to sacrifice their lives to save trees and wild animals."<sup>iii</sup> This theme is emphasised throughout Bishnoi literature and mythology. The story of the Khejadali Massace in which 363 Bishnoi gave their lives protecting trees is the most popular tale among the Bishnoi; but there are countless other stories of Bishnoi sacrificing their lives for trees and animals, as this community continues to engage in often risky environmental and animal activism. This willingness to die for trees and nonhuman animals has become a hallmark of their tradition, used by insiders and outsiders alike to define this distinctive group. In the following pages I will briefly outline the history and central tenets of Bishnoi dharma, and situate the Bishnoi understanding of sacrifice within the broader Indian context by exploring it in relation to Hindu sacrifice, and the practice of *sallekhana* in Jainism. I will focus on human/ nonhuman relationships among

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<sup>i</sup> Smith, 1

<sup>ii</sup> [www.bishnoism.com](http://www.bishnoism.com)

the Bishnoi, using the concept of sacrifice as a lens. Central to this analysis is the understanding that sacrifice is a performance of one's worldview, which informs, and is informed by one's understanding of the relationships between humans and nonhumans.

### **1. The Bishnoi- Background**

As the Bishnoi are underrepresented in the literature, I will provide some necessary background information and basic tenets before engaging in my discussion. The Bishnoi emerged as a distinctive community in the early modern period (circa 1470) when Guru Jambheshwarji introduced the 29 principles that they continue to live by. They now identify as a Hindu sect, but their teachings and practices incorporate elements of many other religious traditions. The 29 principles are central to the Bishnoi way of life. Seven of these principles provide guidelines for good social behaviour, ten of them address personal hygiene and health practices, four provide instruction for daily worship, and eight of them are related to conserving and protecting animals and trees, and encouraging good animal husbandry.<sup>iii</sup> Guru Jamheshvara, born in 1451, lived during a 10 year drought in Rajasthan. He saw the land and animals being destroyed and stripped of resources during this time, so he established the 29 principles to encourage a better relationship between the people and their landscape in order to allow them to live harmoniously and prosperously in the harsh desert climate.<sup>iv</sup> Many people would now label this as sustainability, leading some to describe them as India's first environmentalists; however within the community it is simply understood to be their dharma.<sup>v</sup> They use dung and dead branches as fuel so they don't have to cut down green trees, and are strict vegetarians. Nonhuman animals live among the Bishnoi, roaming in their communities and homes. In fact, many animals seek refuge in their communities during peak hunting hours. It is also common practice for Bishnoi women to breastfeed orphaned fawns. These practices are all based on the strict adherence to the Guru's 29 principles, which have deeply influenced the daily lives of members of the Bishnoi community.

Guru Jambheshwarji is considered to be the 10th incarnation of Vishnu. His teachings encourage being patient, nonviolent, compassionate, truthful, pure, and non-judgemental. According to Pankaj Jain, many situate the Guru between nirguna and saguna theologies, as there is no idol worship, but they still recognize the names and incarnations of Vishnu.<sup>vi</sup> In addition to his 29 principles, there is a set of 120 statements, or sabdas in which these and other teachings are elaborated. They demonstrate that the Guru was strictly against the cast system and gender hierarchies, and many of his teachings emerged out of a rejection of animal sacrifice, which was commonly practiced in other religious traditions. Jain explains that,

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<sup>iii</sup> Apendix A

<sup>iv</sup> Chapple, *Religious Environmentalism*, 339

<sup>v</sup> Jain, *Dharma*, 77

<sup>vi</sup> *Dharma*, 58

He criticised tantric yogic practitioners sacrificing the animals to *Bhairav*, *Yogini*, or other deities and asked them to understand the real meaning of yoga. Similarly he asked the Muslims to understand the real message of the Quran. In his tenth sabda, he reminded the Hindus that Rama never asked them to kill animals... In his sixteenth sabda he chastised people who follow frauds as their guru and kill animals for their rituals.<sup>vii</sup>

His teachings elaborate an ethic of extreme nonviolence toward other species, not just in cases of ritual slaughter, but all harmful acts. One of the Guru's verses asks "by whose sanction do butchers kill sheep and goats? Since even a prick of a thorn is extremely painful to human beings, is it proper to indulge in those killings? Therefore, these animals should be treated as own kith and kin and should not be harmed in any way."<sup>viii</sup> This ethic applies to all creatures great and small, as he also teaches that dung and wood must be inspected for bugs before being burned.

### 1.1 Khejadali and Other Sacrifices

Although not a formal tenet of the tradition, self-sacrifice for the protection of plant and animal life has become foundational to Bishnoi dharma. The most commonly told story among the Bishnoi is that of the massacre at Khejadali; this event is also one of the most common themes of Bishnoi art.<sup>ix</sup> The story goes that 363 Bishnoi women, men, and children, led by Amrita Devi, sacrificed their lives to protect the khejari trees from the soldiers of King Abhay Singh of Jodhpur who sought to chop down the forest in September 1730.<sup>x</sup> Amrita Devi embraced a tree and said "Sir Santhe rooke rahe to bhi sasto jaan" meaning, "if a tree is saved from felling at the cost of one's head, it should be considered a good deed"<sup>xi</sup> She was decapitated in front of her two daughters who stoically followed her example, clinging to the trees and meeting the same end. People flocked from the village and hundreds died before the King stopped his men and ordered a decree forever protecting Bishnoi land from hunting and deforestation. Their land is still protected today, and because of their continued efforts one can go to prison for hunting or chopping down trees on Bishnoi land. The events of Khejadali are also celebrated annually at their "Tree Fair," and the site of the sacrifice has been turned into a large monument with depictions of the event and all the names of those who gave their lives.

The Khejadali Massacre is the most dramatic and most frequently told Bishnoi story, but certainly not the only example of self-sacrifice for nonhuman others. Jain has

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<sup>vii</sup> Dharma, 60

<sup>viii</sup> Jain, Dharma, 72

<sup>ix</sup> Appendix B

<sup>x</sup> Jain, Eco-Theological, 2010

<sup>xi</sup> Amrita Devi's quote "*Sir santhe rooke rahe to bhi sasto jaan*" has been translated in several ways, including "First my head, then the tree," "A chopped head is cheaper than a felled tree" and "If a tree is saved even at the cost of one's head, it's worth it."

documented several other examples from Bishnoi manuscripts and Indian newspapers. The most recent being Gangaram Bishnoi, who sacrificed his life trying to protect a chinkara gazelle from poachers in August of 2000, and Chhailluram Singh Rajput who died trying to save blackbucks in 2004. Jain lists 12 other incidents, many involving multiple people, and explains that there are dozens of other documented events such as these.<sup>xii</sup> The Bishnoi website that I referenced above explains that “Bishnoi themselves can be hungry & thirsty but they will never allow an animal or bird to die due to lack of fodder/ food or water.”<sup>xiii</sup>

In reading newspapers, websites and other media and academic sources, it has become clear that self sacrifice is the defining feature of this community; central to both their self-conception, and to the way they are perceived by others. This distinctive feature is a source of pride and the individuals who sacrifice themselves are considered to be heroes. Interestingly, this custom is not just an ideal, or a practice from myth and legend; it is relatively commonplace and has happened dozens of times in the past few centuries. It makes up an essential part of the lived tradition. I have not come across a single story of someone giving their life for another human; the focus is entirely on the willingness to sacrifice oneself for *nonhuman* others. This practice evidently demonstrates something profound about the understanding of human and nonhuman roles and relationships among the Bishnoi.

## 1.2 Self-Sacrifice and Human/ Nonhuman Relationships among the Bishnoi

This physical act of self-sacrifice demonstrates a radical reversal and rejection of common hierarchies, in which animals and trees die for man. The most useful theoretical model that I have come across for exploring this practice and what it can tell us about human/ nonhuman relationships is that of George Bataille; although I’m sure many other theories of sacrifice could be explored in relation to this. Bataille theorizes two distinct world orders, the “real” or rational order, and the “intimate”. He believes that there are moments in which we are able to break through the rational, ordered world and access the intimate. Encounters with death, chance, the erotic, and even sacrifice often allow people to do this. Bataille discusses his theory in relation to animal sacrifice specifically, but I believe that it can be extended to explore the Bishnoi practice of self-sacrifice.

Although the Bishnoi do not harm or kill animals, they do use them for milk and other material needs. Animals make up part of the Bishnoi economy, and they participate in the ordered, hierarchical, material world in which the Bishnoi live. According to Bataille, acts of sacrifice can allow people to connect with the intimate and break with the “cold calculation of the real order.”<sup>xiv</sup> He explains that “Sacrifice restores to the sacred world that which servile use has degraded, rendered profane. Servile use has made a *thing* (an *object*) of that which, in a deep sense, is of the same nature as the *subject*, is in a

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<sup>xii</sup> Jain, Dharma, 66-70

<sup>xiii</sup> <http://www.bishnoism.com/thefirst.php>

<sup>xiv</sup> Bataille, 174

relation of intimate participation with the subject.”<sup>xv</sup> There are of course other Bishnoi practices that demonstrate an intimate connection with the nonhuman, and the denial of objectification, such as breastfeeding fawns for example. But these acts of self-sacrifice have the potential to not only deny the objectification of the nonhuman, but reverse and break with constructed hierarchies which organize our rational world. These acts offer moments which demonstrate not only that nonhumans have value beyond *material* value, but that the nonhuman has value above and beyond *human* value. This offers a degree of intimacy beyond traditional sacrifice which, according to Bataille, allows one “to consume *profitlessly*,” disconnecting from the material world of profitable activity.<sup>xvi</sup> Not only is this act of self-sacrifice not advantageous or rational, it is utterly disadvantageous, and results in the loss of one’s life, or the loss of a friend or relative. In this way it is the entire community that participates in these acts, because death is not an individual experience, but one that is felt by the community as a whole.

Though of a different and arguably more extreme nature, the practice of self-sacrifice may therefore similarly allow access to “the intimate”, which Bataille explores in more traditional forms of sacrifice. Regular acts of self-sacrifice allow the community as a whole to detach “from the *real* order, from the poverty of *things*, and restore the *divine* order. The animal or plant that man *uses* (as if they only had value *for him* and none for themselves) is restored to the truth of the intimate world; he receives a sacred communication from it, which restores him in turn to interior freedom.”<sup>xvii</sup> This practice allows all Bishnoi people to connect with the nonhuman on a more intimate level both physically and conceptually. These acts of self-sacrifice evidently have a profound effect on human self-conception, and the conception of nonhumans in the community, as these physical acts inform, and are informed by their conceptual understanding of the world and their place in it.

## 2. Sacrifice and Human/ Nonhuman Relationships in the Indian Context

Now that we have explored the practice of self-sacrifice among the Bishnoi, and some of its implications for human/ nonhuman relationships in this specific community, I would like to explore how these ideas and practices fit within the broader Indian context. Sacrifice is central in all dharma traditions, though it is articulated in very different ways across the numerous groups in this diverse religious landscape. These diverse articulations of sacrifice are very telling of the nature of human/ nonhuman relationships in each individual community. This topic is far too broad to exhaust in a short essay, as there are countless communities with countless different conceptions of sacrifice. I have therefore selected just a few topics within Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism, which will allow me to contextualise and explore the Bishnoi practice of self-sacrifice in relation to broader Indian notions.

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<sup>xv</sup> Ibid, 170-171

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid, 172

<sup>xvii</sup> Ibid, 172

While some Bishnoi practices and beliefs may sound fantastical to Western ears they are in fact based on many common and widely held notions within Indian philosophy. Many Indian traditions live according what Tim Ingold defines as an “ontology of dwelling,” which he describes as “taking the human condition to be that of a being immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with constituents of the dwelt-in world.”<sup>xviii</sup> Though descriptive of hunter-gatherer societies I believe Ingold’s theories present a constructive way for thinking about certain Indian philosophies as well. It is not uncommon for Indian traditions to focus on embodied perception and embeddedness in a reciprocal world. Concepts such as vegetarianism, non-violence, compassion, non-dualism, karma, rebirth and kinship have been extremely widespread since the Axial Age, particularly within shramanic philosophies. All of these concepts are deeply embedded in Bishnoi philosophy, and evidently had a huge impact on the origins and development of their tradition. It is therefore imperative to explore certain practices and philosophies from other dharma traditions in order to develop a more complete understanding of self-sacrifice and human/ nonhuman relationships among the Bishnoi.

### 2.1 *Samsara*

The deep sense of kinship with the nonhuman demonstrated by Bishnoi practices and teachings is fundamental to their worldview and their willingness to give their lives to protect other species. Kinship is central to all dharma traditions because it is intimately connected to the widespread concept of *samsara*. The concept of rebirth highlights the interconnectedness of life. Christopher Chapple, referring to Buddhism, explains that “in the long course of *samsara*, there is not one among living beings with form who has not been mother, father, brother, sister, son, or daughter, or some other relative. Being connected with the process of taking birth, one is kin to all wild and domestic animals, birds, and beings born from the womb.”<sup>xix</sup> He explains that in Jainism and Buddhism “Animals are regarded to be none other than our very selves.”<sup>xx</sup> The concept of *vasudhaiv kutumbakam* in Hinduism also refers to this sense of kinship, meaning that all earth’s beings are an extended family.<sup>xxi</sup> For this reason one of the most serious offenses that one can commit in Jainism, and some branches of Buddhism and Hinduism, is violence toward other life forms. It is widely accepted, although to varying degrees, that all living being suffer and feel pain, have a right to live and have the common goal of liberation from the cycle of *samsara*.

As the Bishnoi live by the same principles of karma and rebirth as these other dharma traditions they hold many similar practices and teachings. For example, Chapple explains that “in the Jataka Mala, the Suvarnaprabhasa, and the Avadana-kalpalata a story

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<sup>xviii</sup> Ingold, 34

<sup>xix</sup> Chapple, Nonviolence, 27

<sup>xx</sup> Ibid, 42

<sup>xxi</sup> Dwivedi, 123

is told in which a Buddhist throws himself before a hungry tigress so that she may feed her cubs.<sup>xxii</sup> This story is reminiscent of Bishnoi practices, demonstrating that both traditions emerge from a similar worldview, and the Bishnoi concept of self-sacrifice is not necessarily unique. However, the story of the tigress makes up part of Buddhist mythology, not their regular practice as it does with the Bishnoi. I am not aware of any Buddhist communities that act on this teaching, regularly sacrificing themselves to feed or protect nonhuman animals. I would propose therefore that while the conceptual relationships between humans and nonhumans may be similar in all dharma traditions, including Bishnoism, the physical relationships and concrete interactions between the Bishnoi and nonhumans may offer something unique. For now, suffice it to say that the profound commitment to nonviolence and the notions of karma and kinship among the Bishnoi are right at home in this religious landscape.

## 2.2 Hinduism

### 2.2.1 Animal Sacrifice

From the early Vedic texts that focused on ritual animal sacrifice, to Classical Hindu ideals of internal sacrifice elaborated in the Upanishads, sacrifice has remained absolutely central in Hindu traditions. In the early Vedic period *yajna* rituals were performed by the Brahmins according to strict rules. These animal sacrifices were not considered to be violent and they were understood as being necessary in order to sustain the universe, as death brings forth life. Suchitra Samanta, in describing modern day animal sacrifice to the goddess Kali, explains that there is often an identification made between the animal and the negative aspects of the sacrificer. Sacrifice therefore represents the destruction of the animal/ demonic quality of the practitioner.<sup>xxiii</sup> This is reminiscent of the Judeo-Christian concept of the scapegoat and many other similar examples from different religious traditions. This practice can evidently tell us a great deal about the relationship between nonhumans and humans (particularly their evil/ demonic/ sinful aspects). There is certainly a sense of identification between human and nonhuman animals, but it seems to manifest strictly in negative terms. The human is seen as the superior, whose well-being and survival is worth more than that of the victim. Animal sacrifice is always done for the benefit of the human sacrificer. Bishnoi philosophy, emerging out of a strict rejection of animal sacrifice, in many ways represents the opposite approach to sacrifice. Rather than giving the other in order to save self, the Bishnoi ideal is to give the self in order to save the other. While it's still a substitution of sorts, the roles are inverted. As discussed earlier, Bishnoi acts of self-sacrifice can be understood to demonstrate a reversal of traditional hierarchies such as those typically found in animal sacrifice.

Another common feature of animal sacrifice seems to be the concept of the voluntary victim. For example, Samanta explains that the animal is understood to go

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<sup>xxii</sup> Chapple, *Nonviolence*, 24

<sup>xxiii</sup> Samanta, 793

willingly, and express a desire to be reborn as a man.<sup>xxiv</sup> The Bishnoi reject this notion; they believe that all nonhumans suffer and want to live. Like other traditions, the Bishnoi believe that humans are the only species capable of recognizing their state in *samsara*; they are therefore logically the only species capable of truly being willing victims. This *human* willingness to sacrifice is celebrated among the Bishnoi and demonstrated in their stories. For example in the version of the Khejadali story told on the Bishnoi website, Amritra Devi's daughters are said to have unflinchingly followed in their mother's footsteps; after they saw her murdered, it reads "her three young daughters were not scared and offered their heads too."<sup>xxv</sup>

This history of animal sacrifice evidently had a huge impact on Bishnoism, and many other dharma traditions that emerged out of India. It seems as though the practice of self-sacrifice among the Bishnoi is not just a rejection of animal sacrifice, but a radical inversion of it, where the human becomes the willing victim, and the animal is saved. It could be however that the same mechanisms are at work in both practices; the same understanding and celebration of a sacrificial world in which death maintains life. At the very least, according to Battaille's theories, both practices can equally be understood as attempts to connect with the intimate through "profitless consumption."

### 2.2.2. Sacrifice in the Upanishads

With the Upanishads came the internalization of sacrifice through meditation and fasting, as animal sacrifice began to be considered violent by many. The focus changed from calculated rituals to personal wisdom, with the goal of self-realization and liberation. Concepts such as *ahimsa* and vegetarianism gained traction in Classical Hinduism, likely influenced by Jainism and Buddhism. These changes in the conception of sacrifice reflected a transformation in the understanding of the divine, and the understanding of human/ nonhuman relationships. While in the early Vedic period the divine was understood to be distinct from the self (*dvaita*), the Upanishads introduced *advaita* philosophies in which the divine was understood to be part of everything (Atman=Brahman). Ideas about karma and rebirth also emerged at this time and brought with them a deep sense of interconnectedness as described above.

*Advaita* philosophies resulted in the attempt to see oneself as being fundamentally the same as others and to develop a sense of respect for all life. One of the central ideas in the Bhagavad-Gita is that the Supreme Being resides in everything; chapter 7 verse 19 states that, "Krishna is all that is." Chapple explains that this sense of "monism, or non duality demonstrated in the Mahabharata offers a method for deconstructing the objectification of the other."<sup>xxvi</sup> One example of this is the Karni Mata rat temple in Deshnoke Rajasthan, where devotees are encouraged to see the presence of the divine in

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<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid

<sup>xxv</sup> <http://www.bishnoism.com/thefirst.php>

<sup>xxvi</sup> Chapple, Nonviolence, 111

everything, even the rats. According to this philosophy, everything in nature is seen as “appendages of god” and therefore fundamentally the same.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Bishnoi philosophy has been profoundly influenced by these widespread Hindu concepts. One of the Guru’s statements, translated by Jain, reads: “Seekers of moksha should regard creatures born of sweat, birds born of eggs, mammals born of womb, and plants born of sprouting, all of them as God.”<sup>xxviii</sup> This *advaita* philosophy not only shapes the conceptual relationships between human and nonhuman, but deeply affects their physical interactions, provoking a willingness among humans to give their lives for nonhumans. This demonstrates once again that Bishnoi philosophy is quite at home in the Indian context. This common Hindu orientation towards the world is fundamental to Bishnoi worldviews and provides the foundation for their practices of self-sacrifice. This practice can be seen as an extension of the concepts of *ahimsa* and *advaita* to their extreme, as it demonstrates such a deep sense of kinship and respect that one is willing to die for the other.

### 2.3 Jainism

Jainism embodies many shramanic concepts about samsara, karma, and nonviolence (with variation of course) that also form the foundations of the Bishnoi understanding of the nonhuman. In many ways the two traditions are quite similar in fact. One could easily engage in a lengthy comparison between the two, but I would like to focus on the Jain practice of *sallekhana* because I think it offers the most interesting and relevant comparison to self-sacrifice among the Bishnoi.

*Sallekhana* is a fast to death, which represents the ideal death for a Jain because they die in a state of non-consuming, and therefore non-violence. It is a nonresistant death, void of passion or desire, in which all worldly ties are severed. This is the ideal death for a Jain because they understand everything in the world to have a soul, including food and water, and they believe that non-violence to other beings is of utmost importance on the road to liberation. It is therefore noble to let the body go, rather than kill other living beings in order to survive.

The Bishnoi orientation toward the nonhuman and their ethic of non-violence, are therefore in line with many Jain teachings. The centrality of *ahimsa* expresses respect for individual living beings as subjects who are equal and have the capacity to feel pain. Being human is a privilege because of one’s awareness of samsara, but it does not imply greater moral worth. Like Bishnoism, Jainism therefore provides a challenge to traditional hierarchies, envisioning a more intimate connection with other living beings. Like Bishnoi teachings, the Jain *Acaranga Sutra* explains that no being wishes to suffer or die, and each being should be allowed to live and evolve without interference.<sup>xxix</sup> The

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Dwivedi, 121

<sup>xxviii</sup> Jain, Dharma, 161

<sup>xxix</sup> Tobias, 145

nonhuman is therefore absolutely central to the construction of the ethical self in both of these traditions. Anne Vallely explains that for Jains, moral worth and enlightenment can only be attained through our embodied experience and interactions with the nonhuman.<sup>xxx</sup> She states that “nature is the moral theatre within which one’s ethical being is established.”<sup>xxxii</sup> This statement is made in reference to Jainism specifically, but it could certainly be extended to include Bishnoism as well. For both of these traditions, *physical* interactions with the nonhuman are of central importance, over and above conceptual relationships. It is because one can only progress towards liberation by deeply engaging with the nonhuman that we find the concept of *sallekhana* in Jainism, and self-sacrifice in Bishnoism. For both, these are considered good deaths worth celebrating because they demonstrate the correct engagement with the nonhuman according to each respective *dharma*. As James Laidlaw explains, these practices are not understood to be in tension with the ethic of nonviolence, but rather in harmony with it.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Though there is evidently a deep connection between these two practices, there are also some significant differences. The Jain practice of *sallekhana* requires a complete lack of passion; it is expressed as a path of non-action. The focus of the practice is self-effort and the goal is self-realization. It is an individual and inward looking path that requires patience and withdrawal from the world. A common name for the practice of *sallekhana* is *samadhi-maran*, which means “death while in meditation.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> The Bishnoi practice of self-sacrifice on the other hand is often explained in very passionate and active terms. Stories of men chasing poachers and disabling their vehicles are celebrated. These acts are often fervent and spontaneous, far from the meditative, renunciatory ideal of the Jains. Both Jains and Bishnoi are willing to die to uphold their ideals of nonviolence, but they each have a different understanding of what that interaction should look like, and how to achieve *ahimsa*. For Jains the answer is withdrawal, while for the Bishnoi the answer is active engagement. There is of course active engagement in the name of *ahimsa* within the Jain community, for example their *panjrapoles* (animal shelters), which are popular in India. This engagement is only demonstrated among the householders however, and does not embody the ideal of renunciation, or the spirit of *sallekhana*. For Jains this ideal moral state can *only* be attained through disengagement and isolation from the world.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Jains reject the idea of a sacrificial world in which death brings forth life; believing that the cycle is ultimately meaningless. However as suggested above, the Bishnoi may be more accepting of a sacrificial understanding of the world. One challenge that is important to remember when exploring these questions is the difficulty of distinguishing between the ideals of the tradition and the lived *dharma* of community members who engage in these practices. It is necessary to make some generalizations in order to reflect on these questions, but one must remember that there is a wide variety of ways in which practitioners might experience their traditions and practices.

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<sup>xxx</sup> Vallely, *Being Sentiently*, 3

<sup>xxxii</sup> Vallely, *Liberation*, 213

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Laidlaw, 181

<sup>xxxiiii</sup> *Ibid*, 180

<sup>xxxv</sup> Vallely, *Liberation*, 203

## Conclusion

India provides very fertile ground for the exploration of both sacrifice and human/nonhuman relationships which, as I have suggested, are deeply related. I have demonstrated in the above pages that one's orientation toward sacrifice can be very telling of one's orientation toward the nonhuman. After examining Bishnoi philosophy in relation to other Indian philosophies we have learned that their worldview is not necessarily unique, demonstrating an intimate connection to Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. However, I would like to suggest that although their conceptual relationships with the nonhuman represent commonly held Indian notions, their physical relationships with the nonhuman are unique. It seems as though they demonstrate a stronger sense of kinship in their concrete interactions with nonhumans than is demonstrated among other Indian religions. The Bishnoi do not only demonstrate an internalisation of sacrifice like in Jainism and the Upanishads, but a reversal of sacrifice, in which the physical sacrifice still takes place, but the roles of human and nonhuman are reversed.

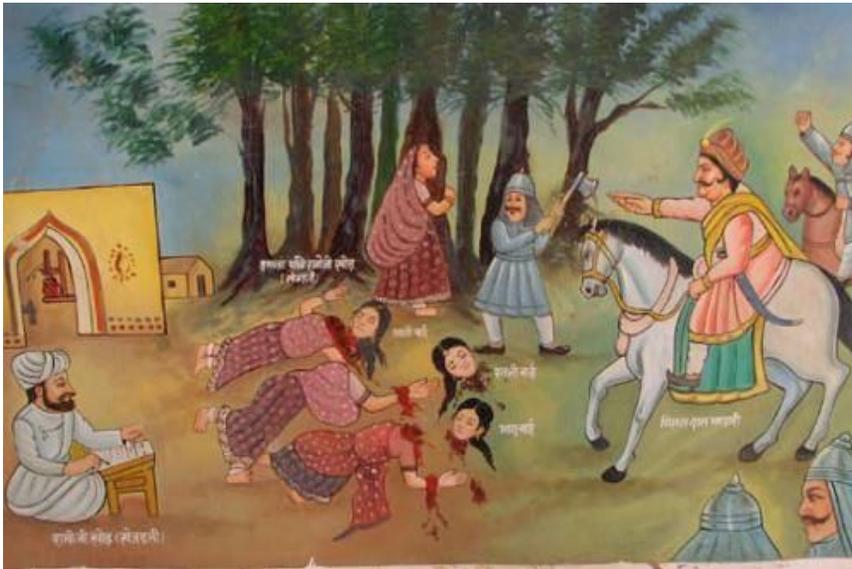
## Appendix A\*

1. Observe 30 days state of sutak (state of ritual impurity) after birth and keep mother and child away from household activities
2. During menstrual period, keep woman away from household activities for 5 days
3. Take a bath daily in the morning
4. Maintain modesty
5. Maintain good character, be content, and patient
6. Maintain purity and cleanliness
7. Pray two times a day (morning and evening)
8. Eulogise God, The Lord Vishnu in evening hours (Aarti)
9. Perform Yajna (Havan) every morning with feelings of welfare, devotion and love
10. Filter the water, milk and firewood
11. Speak pure words in all sincerity
12. Practice forgiveness, pardon, and absolution from the heart
13. Do not steal
14. Do not condemn or criticize
15. Do not lie
16. Do not waste the time on argument
17. Fast on Amawas (last day of the dark half of a month) and offer prayers to Lord Vishnu
18. Have pity on all living beings and love them
19. Do not cut the green trees, save environment

20. Crush lust, anger, greed and attachment
21. Eat home cooked food/ Don't eat food cooked or kept in impure conditions
22. Provide shelter for animals so they can complete their life with dignity and don't get slaughtered
23. Don't sterilise the ox
24. Don't use opium
25. Don't smoke and use tobacco
26. Don't take bhang or hemp
27. Don't take wine or any type of liquor
28. Don't eat meat, remain pure vegetarian
29. Never use blue clothes or blue colour extracted from green indigo plant

\*There are several different translations of these rules; this list is representative, but by no means an official translation

## Appendix B



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