BISHNOI: AN ECO-THEOLOGICAL “NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT” IN THE INDIAN DESERT

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ABSTRACT: Although Rajasthan is the “desert” state in the North West of India, it has been a fertile ground for interreligious interactions for last several centuries, welcoming or battling the new groups entering South Asia. In this article I present my fieldwork done with the Bishnois, a Rajasthani community that transcends the boundaries of Hinduism and Islam. Although Bishnois are now considered a caste-group within the Hindu community, they were classified with Muslims in 1891 Census of Marwar. I also note that despite the several common elements of Hindu and Muslim practices and ideas in this community, at present the Bishnois reject any connection with Islam. I conclude that this “Hinduization” can be contextualized with similar process taking place with several other “liminal” communities.
INTRODUCTION

The Bishnoi community is distributed in several north Indian states, but it is most densely located in Western Rajasthan, where their founder Guru Jambheśvara was born. The name Bishnoi means the people of the twenty-nine rules (Bish and Noi, literally twenty and nine). This community is also called the Prahlādapanthi community based on their reverence for the mythical son of the demon king Hiranyakaśyapu in Hindu Puraṇas Prahlāda, who had invoked the Narasiṃha incarnation of Vishnu. Some Hindi authors such as Hiralal Maheshwari have referred to this community as Vishnoi, the followers of Vishnu. This latter name suggests the Hinduization on this (and several other communities) after the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. However, Bishnois themselves insist that the word Bishnoi is based on the Rajasthani words for twenty (Bish) and nine (Noi) representing the twenty-nine rules given by their guru and for this reason they did not approve “Vishnoi” as a replacement for Bishnoi as was done by Maheshwari. 1975 Nagaur District Gazetteer also mentions the connection between the twenty-nine rules and the term “Bishnoi” although the statement of Jambheśvara themselves only mention about Vishnu and do not mention about the twenty-nine rules.
The Chipko movement of Uttaranchal is well known for its tree-hugging campaign to resist the tree felling. Its leader Sunderlal Bahuguna and writers such as Vandana Shiva have speculated that Chipko derived its inspiration from the Bishnois who are famous for sacrificing their lives for similar reasons. Despite this indirect connection of Bishnois with the Chipko movement, little is known about Bishnois’ religious and ecological life. Several prominent Indian ecologists seem to have largely ignored Bishnois except few passing remarks. The Bishnois have also escaped the attention of the scholars of Hinduism. To fill this gap, I began my fieldwork in June 2006. The information I present below is based on my interviews with several Bishnoi people whom I met in Rajasthan. I continued my conversation electronically with some of them ever since. I also collected a large number of Hindi, Rajasthani, and English books that are written by Bishnois based on the history and teachings of their guru Jambheśvara.
BISHNOI COMMUNITY: HINDU OR MUSLIM?

As soon as I reached Mukam in June 2006, the place where it all began, I was facing what can be called the Taj Mahal of the Thar Desert. It was an elaborate white marble structure with a huge tomb in the center above the central shrine dedicated to Guru Jambhesvara. June being one of the hottest months of Rajasthan, the priest guided me to a carpeted walkway to get to the shrine. This is the most sacred site for Bishnois in the village Mukam, about ten miles from Nokha and about 40 miles from Bikaner on the Bikaner-Jodhpur road. Like any other visitor, I was also offered the traditional hospitality by Bishnois. I was invited to lunch by the local Bishnois and was told that fresh food is kept ready throughout the year in the kitchen run by the Bishnoi community. Unlike a Hindu temple, the main shrine at Nokha does not have an idol or a statue. Bishnoi temples and shrines never have any idol or statue of their guru or any other deity, even though they regard their guru to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Only a lamp with ghee (clarified butter) is kept lit while praying, no elaborate ceremonies or rituals are performed by the priests. They perform yajña, the fire ceremony, on Amāväsyā (new moon) night in which the local community offers ghee and grains. The temple priest claimed that the smoke created by these fire ceremonies help cleanse the environment.

When I asked the local Bishnois about the lack of idol worship as a potential influence of Islam on their sect, they immediately rejected my speculation. They rather compared it with the ancient Vedic practices of similar fire rituals. Similarly when I asked them about their practice of burying the dead bodies (like Muslims) instead of cremating rites (like Hindus), they argued that burying is done simply to save the firewood from the trees. One Bishnoi suggested that the practice of burying returns the body to the five elements of nature. Another potential similarity
with Muslims that I found was their covering the heads before entering the shrines and temples. Although these practices are common among Bishnois today, they are not mentioned in the 29 rules laid down by Jambheśvara.

Figure 2. Image of Jambheśvara inside a Bishnoi Temple (photo by the author)

Although Bishnois are considered a caste-group within the Hindu community, they were classified with Muslims in 1891 Census of Marwar. Some scholars have situated them as a “liminal” community with common features from Hinduism and Islam. According to Singh and
Saxena, the Bishnoi cult originated when a Rajput warrior married a Muslim girl. According to Dominique-Sila Khan, Jambheśvara had claimed that he was neither Hindu nor Muslim since he had raised himself above all castes and sects. Traditionally, his tomb was referred to as *samādhi* by his Hindu devotees and *mukām* by his Muslim devotees. His shrine was likewise viewed as a temple or a darga. However, in 1950s, after the partition of India and Pakistan that resulted in increasing polarization of Hindus and Muslims, the Bishnois were also “Hinduized” like several other “liminal” communities while a small group of Bishnoi followers joined other Muslim groups. A painting of Jambheśvara was hung on the wall above the grave and the main shrine was renamed as *mandir* with *mukām* construed as *muktidhām*, a sacred site where mukti or liberation is obtained. Earlier, his grave was covered with a green *chādar* (like other Muslim saints) but now it is covered by a saffron drapery. Thus, an outsider visiting the shrine is easily convinced of its Hindu identity. According to Krishnalal Bishnoi, Muslims of Malerkotla town, the only town in Punjab with a Muslim majority, continue to revere Jambheśvara even today. According to Bishnoi folklore, Jambheśvara had inspired the local sheikh here to stop the cow slaughter.

However, my Bishnoi informants vehemently rejected the Muslim origins as speculated by Khan. One problem in Khan’s observations is that most of her informants are Meghwals or Muslims who used to be treated as untouchables (*bhīnt*). Because of the long-standing social tensions among Bishnois and other caste groups of that region, there are several alternative narratives available about the origin and birth of Jambheśvara so the information from one group about the other cannot be taken to be conclusive. There seem other inconsistencies in Khan’s observations about Bishnois. For example, she mentions that Jambheśvara is a form of Krishna while he is regarded as a form of Vishnu by his followers. Khan asserts that Bishnois are called
Prahlādpanthis because of their connection with the fifteenth century Muslim saint Prahlāda-Tajuddin. However, one of the statements by Jambheśvara seems to contradict this: Prahlāda su vacha kini ayo bara kaje. This translates into a promise to Prahlāda (a famous devotee child mentioned in the Hindu texts) to take incarnation for 120 million remaining devotees. Moreover, the strong emphasis of Jambheśvara and his followers on revering the animals and trees resemble Hindu practices of pantheism and non-violence. In addition, the wide-spread use of Hindu symbols and myths in the statements of Jambheśvara and his criticism of Muslim practices of killing the beasts do not match the observations by Khan17. On the other hand, Khan’s observations match with the conclusions of Tazim R. Kassam18 who has shown that the Satapanth Ismaili branch of Shi’i Islam that originated in early medieval South Asia did have several Hindu myths and rituals to protect itself from Sunni persecution. Therefore, this syncretism may have continued in other groups originated in the same period and in the same geographic area such as the Bishnois.

While David Lorenzen19 has sought to dichotomize the medieval Bhakti gurus into Nirguṇa and Saguna categories, Wendy Doniger has suggested that Nirguṇa category is a “concoction of monistic scholars” who sought a compromise between Advaita and the popular love mysticism of prema bhakti that was directed toward the worship of images20. Based on my observations about Jambheśvara, I would agree with Doniger and other scholars who have noted the apparent artificiality of Nirguṇa Bhakti. Daniel Gold has dealt with some of the issues related to the tradition of sants in North India21. Jambheśvara matches several features common among Sants of North India as noted by Gold. Jambheśvara stresses the nirguṇa role of Vishnu rather than the saguna worship as was propounded by Marathi saints such as Nāmdeva. Although Bishnoi devotion to Vishnu does not denote a piety in which the is conceived as absolutely
“without qualities” – the literal meaning of *nirguṇa*, it implies that Bishnois do not perform rituals around the idols or images of Vishnu as some of the other Hindu communities do. On the other hand, Jambheśvara also mentioned Vishnu as a *saguṇa* deity, as a being with Vaishnava name with suggestive, personifying analogies that is different from the Sufis who talk about the in aniconic ways. Also like Kabir, Jambheśvara rejected the yogic practices of nāths and emphasized simple devotion using the repetition of holy name of Vishnu. Rohatāsa Suthāra also notes similarities in Jambheśvara and Kabir and situates Jambheśvara in the bhakti tradition founded by Ramananda in the medieval North India. According to Hiralal Maheshwari, Jambheśvara established his sect of Bishnois before similar sects were founded by Nanak, Kabir, and Dadu in the fifteenth century North India. Maheshwari also situates Jambheśvara between Nirguṇa and Saguṇa modes of theologies. Although Jambheśvara emphasized chanting the supreme name of Vishnu and rejected idol-worship like other Nirguṇa saints, he also acknowledged different incarnations of Vishnu. Moreover, the language of Jambheśvara’s statements is distinct from the other saints of his time so he cannot be included with the other Bhakti saints of medieval India who all used similar language and style in their statements and verses. Bishnoi folksongs celebrate Jambheśvara as a combination of both Nirguṇa and Saguṇa.

**GURU JAMBHEŚVARA IN THE 15TH CENTURY DESERT ECOLOGY**

The founder of Bishnoi community, Guru Jambheśvara was born in 1451 CE, in a Panwar Rajput family at Peepasar village of Nagore district in Western Rajasthan. He was contemporary of other Bhakti saints such as Kabir (1440-1518), Surdas (1483-1563), and Nanak
(1469-1538) but there is no historic record of their meeting each other. Jambheśvara resembles Nanak and Ravidas as a founder of new community based on his new set of teachings, unlike Tulsidas and Surdas who had more “catholic” appeal. Kabir represents the Nirguna bhakti movement that spread to Dadu panth in Rajasthan and Sikh panth in Punjab. There are several similarities in the rituals and texts of the Kabir Panth and of Bishnois. Also like the other medieval saints, the biography of Jambheśvara is largely based on the hagiographical accounts of his followers and other poets in the Bishnoi community. There is very little, if any, mention of him or his followers in other historical writings pertaining to that era.

His father Lohat and mother Hansa were devotees of Viṣṇu. Both of them had to worship Viṣṇu for a long time to seek the boon of a child, according to Bishnoi folklore. This influence from a Vaiśnava family is obvious in many of Jambheśvara’s statements. Jambheśvara regarded Kṛṣṇa highly, as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In turn, the Bishnoi community regards Jambheśvara as an incarnation of Viṣṇu and sees several similarities in his life with the legends of Kṛṣṇa. The day of his birth is the same as that of Kṛṣṇa, the eighth day of bhādo month of the Hindu calendar. Like Kṛṣṇa, Jambheśvara also grazed cows in his early life for twenty-seven years. His cows followed his orders just as they enjoyed the flute of Kṛṣṇa! When he was about 25 years old, a severe drought hit Western Rajasthan for next ten years. This coincides with a general period of summer monsoon failures confirmed by paleoclimatological reconstruction. There was a severe shortage of water and cattle fodder. People cut down a large number of trees to sell the wood in the nearby towns. The animals, such as chinkara and blackbuck, were widely hunted and killed for meat-consumption. Most of the villagers left the area in search for greener pastures. Deeply moved by this disaster, Jambheśvara began his quest for the solution.
After the death of his parents, he left his home in 1484 CE and started living on Samarathal, sand hill of Mukam village in Nokha Tehsil near Bikaner. Finally, after many years of practicing meditation and austerities, at the age of 34, he had a spiritual experience. In his vision, he saw people quarreling with nature and destroying their environment that sustained them. He decided to reform such society and concluded that humans will have to sustain the environment around them in order for nature to sustain the humans. In 1485 CE, he founded the Bishnoi community on the eighth day of the black fortnight of the month of Kārtika of the Vikram Samvat 1542. His first disciple was his uncle Pulhojī. Based on his teachings about natural resources relevant to the drought years, he succeeded in conserving and protecting several local resources and soon developed a large following among the masses. Even the local ruler sought his blessings. Some of the kings who met him were Sikandar Lodi of Delhi, Mohammed Khan Nagauri of Nagaur, Rao Santal of Jodhpur, Rao Bikajī of Bikaner, Rawal Jait Singh of Jaisalmer, Rao Doodajī of Merta, and Rāṇā Sāngā of Mewar.

ECOLOGICAL TEACHINGS AND ACTIVITIES OF JAMBHEŚVARA

As mentioned earlier, Jambheśvara laid down twenty-nine rules for his followers. Of these rules, eight are about conserving and protecting the animals and trees, including non-sterilization of bulls, keeping the male goats in sanctuary, prohibition against killing of animals, cutting down of any types of green trees, and protecting all life forms. He also forbade wearing of blue clothes, because the dye for coloring them is obtained by cutting several shrubs. Seven other rules were about the social behavior. They directed his followers to be simple, truthful, content, abstentious, and pure, also to avoid adultery, and making false arguments. In addition,
he prohibited criticizing others and to tolerate the criticism by others. Ten rules concerned personal hygiene and maintaining good health. These were instructions about drinking filtered water, taking a daily bath, improving sanitary conditions, prohibiting the use of opium, alcohol, tobacco, and other narcotic substances. Meat was excluded from the diet. Ritual prohibition for thirty days after childbirth and five days during menstruation was prescribed for women. Four other rules provided guidance for spiritual practices, e.g., one must always remember that God is omnipresent, perform rituals daily, and observe fast and perform communal havan on every Amāvasyā (new moon). In addition to his twenty-nine rules, his teachings are preserved in his 120 statements known as the śabdas. I will now describe some of his śabdas that directly relate to environmental resources. Fifteenth century Rajasthan had already seen the arrival and assimilation of Muslims, and Jambheśvara criticized both the Hindus and the Muslims for some of their corrupt and destructive practices and habits.

In his second śabda, Jambheśvara warned the people against harming the animals. He cautioned the people killing the animals that at their deathbed, they will hear the cries of slain animals and will have to repent for their deeds. In addition to animal protection, Jambheśvara also inspired his followers to protect the trees in many of his śabdas. In the seventh śabda, he forbade cutting trees on Somavati Amāvasyā and on Sundays by referring to the trees as the gatekeeper to the heavenly happiness. In his tenth śabda, he criticized the people who kill animals in the name of Muhammad because Muhammad neither killed animals himself nor asked his followers to do so. In his tenth śabda, he pleaded for raham, mercy, to Muslims. He criticized the 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 śabda, he reminded the Hindus that Rāma
never asked them to kill animals. In his eleventh śabda, he forbade violence because both the action and its motive are condemnable. In his sixteenth śabda, he chastised people who follow frauds as their gurus and kill animals for their rituals. He advised people to follow only those gurus who preach non-violence. In his 38th śabda, he also added that killing the creations of God in the name of God is not only wrong but is also an act of arrogance.

According to Jambha Sāra, another collection of his discourses, Jambheśvara advised his followers to follow six rules to avoid violence. First is the Jhampari Pāl that prohibits the animal sacrifice. Second is the jeevani vidhi to filter water and milk. Third is putting the water-creatures back into the water. Fourth is to make sure that the firewood and the cow dung for fuel do not have any creatures or insects that might be accidentally burnt. Fifth is the badhiyā, to avoid harming the bullocks, to sell them to the butchers, or to send them to animal shelter centers. Sixth is the protection of deer in forests like cows, goats and other non-violent beasts (Parik 2001). Although Bishnois generally follow these nonviolent rules, they have occasionally demonstrated violent means of protests against poachers and hunters.

The above rules laid down by Jambheśvara have been the dharmic foundation of Bishnoi community. In his 120 śabdas, he uses the term “dharma” several times to signify both the socio-spiritual order as well as moral duty. These words of Jambheśvara are also supported by the examples of protection and conservation of environmental resources in the hagiographical accounts of Jambheśvara narrated across several generations of Bishnois by their saints and poets. Although all the examples from his life are beyond the scope of this paper, I present one such example here.

Once on his way to Jaisalmer, near Nandeu village, Jambheśvara saw “tāla”, a plain piece of land and wanted to build a water-tank there. The tank, completed in 1514 CE was known as
“Jambhasar” or “Jambholav” which is about 2000 meters wide, 400 meters long, and 25 meters deep. It is said that Jambheśvara had told his disciples that whoever will clear sand from this tank using his own labor or money, will attain heaven. This tank is near Falaudi in district Jodhpur. This place was known as the “Jungle of Lohavat” before the tank was built here. Bishnois consider this tank as sacred as pilgrimage to the river Ganga. Here, on the Amāvasyā of the Hindu month of Caitra, an annual fair was held from 1648 CE onwards. Another fair has been held on the full moon night of Bhādava month from 1699 CE onwards. It is believed that Jambheśvara liked this place as dear as Samarathal. He stayed here for a long time and also met the famous Rajput king Rāṇā Sāngā. Jambheśvara also built a huge water tank at Sohajanee in district Muzaffarnagar in UP. In addition, he is credited with indicating the appropriate sites for building new wells and reconstructing old ones.

**EXAMPLES OF ECOLOGICAL PROTECTION BY BISHNOIS**

While media and scholars have celebrated Indian women environmentalists and activists such as Medha Patkar, Arundhati Roy, Gaura Devi, and Vandana Shiva among others, the story of Indian ecofeminism, as of today, rarely mentions Amrita Devi. According to my Bishnoi informants, she led a massive sacrifice for the protection of trees in September 1730 in the village of Khejadali, near Jodhpur. As many as 363 Bishnoi men and women, led by Amrita Devi, sacrificed their lives to protect the khejari trees from the soldiers of the king Abhay Singh of Jodhpur.
The names and villages of the 363 people who died here are recorded by Mangilal Rao and Bhagirathrai Rao, two men from Mehlana village of Jodhpur district. Both worked for two years from 1976 to 1977 to gather this information from traditional writings. The Raos have been traditional recorders of historic events in Rajasthan since ancient times. From their research, it is revealed that people from 49 villages sacrificed their lives, 294 of them were men and 69 were women, 36 of them were married couples including one newly married one who was passing by Khejadali village when the massacre was taking place. This event is believed to have taken place on 9 September 1730. On 12 September 1978, the corresponding day according to the lunar
Hindu calendar, a large fair was held at Khejadali for the first time to commemorate the massacre which now has become an annual celebration.

In another well-known incident, the Hindi film actor Salman Khan was sentenced to five years imprisonment for killing a blackbuck on September 26, 1998 (The Frontline April 22, 2006), the sacred antelope of the Bishnois (The New York Times November 29, 1998). This has been possible largely due to the active involvement of Bishnois in the entire legal process. Similarly, in January 2007, local Bishnois of the village Agneyu in Bikaner filed complaints against another film producer when a horse died at the sets. Similarly on March 14, 2008, The Akhil Bhartiya Jeev Raksha Bishnoi Sabha demanded the ouster of Indian cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni for sacrificing an animal (New India Press March 14, 2008). In October 1999, Bishnois surrounded the local police station in Churu, Rajasthan, after more than twenty Indian gazelles and three peacocks were found dead near the village of Sansatwar. Authorities had to suspend the local police officers for their alleged negligence in failing to prevent these killings (BBC News Oct 28, 1999). Another episode of Bishnoi ecological activism comes from Abohar Wildlife Sanctuary. Its Divisional Forest Officer regularly depends on local Bishnoi community in night patrolling against the poachers (The Times of India June 8, 2003). In Haryana also, Bishnois are often first to report poaching incidents (The Times of India, January 12, 2003).

In my fieldwork, I met Gurvindar Bishnoi in Jodhpur who had founded an NGO called the Community for Wildlife and Rural Development Society. Like other Bishnoi examples, his mission is to save and protect animals that are injured by accidents or by hunters (The Times of India April 11, 2006). Whenever a deer or blackbuck or any other animal or bird is injured, people call Gurvindar Bishnoi for help. He rushes at the location, takes the injured animal to the
hospital, and takes other legal action if necessary against the hunter. He had also produced a video documentary about Bishnois and Jambheśvara.

I also visited Śri Jagatguru Jambheśvara Goshalā Sansthā, at Mukam. This cow shelter takes care of about 1335 cows. This institution is inspired by Amar Thāt, an animal shelter institution mentioned in one of the verses by Jambheśvara’s disciple Udojī Naina. Naina stated “Bakrā pāley thāt kar, tanni nahin nakho,” which means that the goats should be looked after in thāts and bullocks should not be castrated. Although Jambheśvara prohibited keeping goats as pets, he ordained against slaughter of goats and sheep in another verse, Kinnri tharpi chhali roso kinnri Gadar gai, sool chubhijey karak duheli to hai jayo jeeva no ghai, which means by whose sanction do butchers kill sheep and goats? Since even a prick by 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. In another verse, while preaching another disciple Nathajī, Jambheśvara says, Chhery bheri ādi ko par upkāri mann, rakshā main tatpar rahey so buddhimān, which means that goat, sheep, etc. are rendering service to others, and the one who protects them is wise person. Currently, there is only one Amar thāt in village Rotu, in district Nagaur in Rajasthan. As a rule, following the Holi festival, villagers participate in a public auction to take care of the Amar thāt for the next year.

P. Sivaram, a sociologist at the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, conducted a study at two Bishnoi villages in Luni block of Jodhpur district in 2000. 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, Bishnois were more prosperous than other communities were. He also found several sacred
groves in the villages managed by Bishnois, including some that were claimed to be about 400 years old.

Based on several examples of environmentalism practiced by Bishnois, it is evident that the religious charisma of their founder guru has successfully endured over last several centuries. Bishnois effectively act as a deterrent against the hunting expeditions by outsiders. The deer and other animals tend to concentrate near Bishnoi houses during the late afternoons and early evenings that are the common times for hunting.

Jambheśvara also offers traditional interpretations of Hindu myths and legends without any major reinterpretation or reconstruction. He simply reinforces the powerful influence of the term “dharma” among his followers. Introducing his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi mentioned, “In my experiments, spirituality means morality, and dharma means ethics; morality practices with a spiritual view is dharma (Gandhi 1951)” Like Gandhi, Jambheśvara also saw morality, ethics, and spirituality intertwined. For example, in his 72nd śabda, he emphasizes that only moral virtues such as truthfulness, honesty, and compassion evict the evil from a human and transform oneself into a true human being. In his 11th, 23rd, 77th, 99th, 106th and several other śabdas he emphasizes moral actions as a prerequisite for religious life.

CONCLUSION

Overall, we see an overlap of religious, personal, and ecological attitudes in these Bishnoi examples and also that the term “dharma” is used interchangeably to refer to one’s religion, duty, and socio-political order of the universe, both by the founder and the followers of the Bishnoi community. Most of the Bishnois are barely aware of the Western scientific discourse about
“global warming” or “biodiversity”. For the Bishnoi, a tradition based on the words and life of their guru is sufficient to take up the cause of environmentalism. This is much beyond the recognition of bio-divinity based on the Hindu cosmology or Hindu texts. I have noted a clear evolution from the textual or ritualistic reverence for trees and animals toward practical everyday implementation of ecological activism. Thus, Bishnoi 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.
Eco-limelight that they have been getting from the media, they now have started calling their tradition as “Bishnoism: An environmentalism is only a small "Ecologization" since 1980s. Although, their sacrifices for ecological resources are embedded in their history, tradition by influence from local Ismaili communities.

Nizari Ismailis. According to Chandla to Nizari Ismaili branch of all castes and sect Bishnoi tradition, Islamic tradition, while the latter insisted that he was a Hindu. Eventually, both went to see the saint. According to a number of customs, rituals, or beliefs of Bishnois, the former asserted that his spiritual teacher belonged to the guru Jambheśvara’s disciple, quarreled with the king of Bikaner, also claiming to be his follower. Pointing to a similar to post-independence “Hinduization” of Bishnois, Bishnoi community has been undergoing “Ecologization” since 1980s. Although, their sacrifices for ecological resources are embedded in their history, environmentalism is only a small part of the whole tradition laid down by Jambheśvara. However, with all the limelight that they have been getting from the media, they now have started calling their tradition as “Bishnoism: An Eco-Dharma” (personal communication with Rajendra Bishnoi).
None of the Bishnoi could confirm the existence of any green covering. (personal communication with Mukul Bishnoi, January 2008)


Muslims are portrayed as butchers and vultures by Jambheśvara based on their violent practices of killing the cows and other beasts.


For complete translation of his 120 śabdas, please see my forthcoming book.


One such account of this legend can be seen at a Bishnoi website www.Bishnois.com


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http://nird.ap.nic.in/clic/reshigh_2k_13.html