

Bishnoi Movement – UPSC Notes

Bishnoi Movement was started around 260 years back in the early part of the 18th century in Rajasthan by the Bishnoi community. A large group of them from 84 villages led by a lady called Amrita Devi laid down their lives in an effort to protect the trees from being felled on the orders of the Maharaja (King) of Jodhpur.

About Bishnoi Movement

- The Bishnoi movement is one of the first organized proponents of eco-conservation, wildlife protection, and green living.
- The Bishnois are considered the first environmentalists of India. They are born nature lovers.
- In the history of environmental movements, this was the movement that, for the first time, used the strategy of hugging and embracing trees for their protection.
- The famous Amrita Devi's movement is considered to be among the pioneering efforts for environmental protection.
- King Abhay Singh of Jodhpur, in the 1730s, when building his new palace, ordered his soldiers to cut down the trees for wood in Khejarli village.
- As a symbol of protest, Amrita Devi stood against the soldiers and fought for the life of trees by clinging onto them.
- Her three daughters, Asu, Ratni, and Bhagu also stood by their mother.
- Supporting them, the other people of this community also stood up for the trees and wrapped their arms around the trunks.
- The soldiers continued to axe the trees down, without paying heed to the requests of the people.
- The prime reason behind opposing tree cutting was embedded in the cultural belief of the Bishnoi community as described in the principles of their sect, advocating the protection of trees and wildlife conservation.
- Another reason was immediately related to their rural livelihood, as they depended on the forest for the supply of fuelwood and fodder.
- Bishnoi from Khejarli and other villages came to join this agitation and hugged the Khejri trees one by one to protect trees being cut at the cost of their head.

- In this movement, 363 Bishnois laid down their lives for the protection of Khejri trees in the Khejarli village of Rajasthan.
- This movement has left an indelible mark on the memories and a long-lasting effect on the psyche of the people.

Objectives of Bishnoi Movement

The movement had four major objectives:

1. Conservation of bio-diversity to ensure eco-friendly social life for the community.
2. Promoting personal hygiene to ensure a healthy life.
3. Advocacy against cutting of trees.
4. Preservation of biodiversity and animal husbandry.

The success of Bishnoi Movement

- After this incident, the maharaja gave a strong royal decree preventing the cutting of trees in all Bishnoi villages.
- The concept of tree-hugging and tree huggers has roots in the history of Bishnoism in the year of 1730 A.D.
- This movement and sacrifice not only inspired the Chipko Movement in the 20th Century which was led by Sunder Lal Bahuguna but also the Government of India in the form of the “Amrita Devi Bishnoi Wildlife Protection Award” and Government of Rajasthan in the form of “Amrita Devi Bishnoi Smrithi Paryavaran Award” for contributing to the protection of wildlife and environment conservation respectively.