

Twitter Thread by Vibhu Vashisth ■■

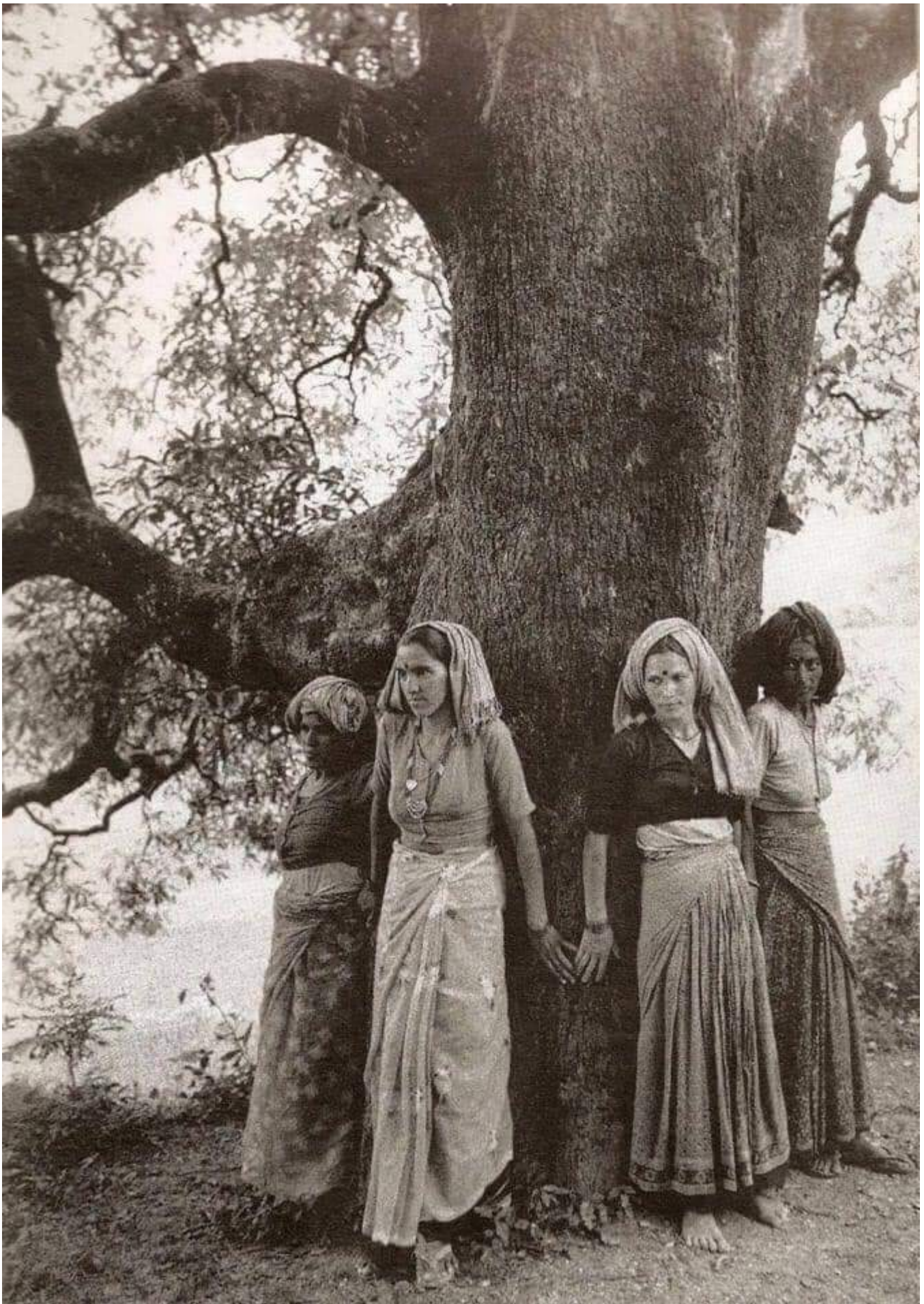


Vibhu Vashisth ■■
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Do you know, how did the term 'Tree Hugger' originate? Who inspired the Chipko Movement and who was Amrita Devi Bishnoi?

The first tree huggers were 294 men and 69 women belonging to the Bishnois branch of Hinduism,who,in 1730,died while trying to protect the trees in their...



..village from being turned into the raw material for building a palace. They literally clung to the trees, while being slaughtered by the foresters. But their action led to a royal decree prohibiting the cutting of trees in any Bishnoi village. And now those villages are...



...virtual wooded oases amidst an otherwise desert landscape. The Bishnoi community is often called the protector of wildlife and environment in Western Rajasthan, at times going to lengths for their cause. One of the more well-known cases that catapulted them to fame was when...

...the community dragged Bollywood actor Salman Khan to court for allegedly killing two blackbucks in 1998 near Jodhpur. The community followed the case with dogged conviction for 20 years.

Bishnoism as a sect has 29 tenets that its followers are expected to abide by,...



...refraining from cutting green trees is one of them. In 1730, a local woman called Amrita Devi Bishnoi of the present day Khejrli village near Jodhpur was so steadfast in her belief of this tenet that she stood with an unwavering courage against a royal troop assigned to cut..

KHEJARLI

Khejarli or Khejadli is a village in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan, India, 26 kilometres (16 mi) south-east of the city of Jodhpur. The name of the town is derived from Khejri (*Prosopis cineraria*) trees that were once abundant in the village.

In this village 363 Bishnois sacrificed their lives in 1730 AD while protecting green Khejri that are considered sacred by the community. The incident was a forebear of the 20th-century Chipko Movement.



Thakur Surat Singh, of Kharda thikana, a small estate in Jodhpur pargana. was granted the estate of Khejarli in the same pargana, by Maharaja Abhai Singh of Marwar in 1726 AD, and he became the first 'Thakur of Khejarli'.

Khejarli was the site of a forebear of the Chipko movement. In September 1730, a royal party led by Giridhar Bhandari, a minister of the maharajah of Marwar, arrived at the village with the intention of felling some Khejri trees that were sacred to the villagers. The trees were to be burned to produce lime for the construction of a new palace.

A local woman called Amrita Devi Bishnoi protested against the tree-felling because such acts were prohibited by the Bishnoi's religion. The feudal party said that they would only cease if she paid them a bribe, which she refused to do because she saw that as ignominious and an insult to her faith. She said that she would rather give away her life to save the trees. She and her three daughters (Asu, Ratni and Bhagu) were then killed by the party. News of the deaths spread and summons to a meeting were sent to 83 Bishnoi villages. The meeting determined that one Bishnoi volunteer would sacrifice their life for every tree that was cut down. Older people began hugging the trees that were intended to be cut and many were killed. These efforts failed to have the desired impact and Bhandari claimed that the Bishnois were sacrificing ageing people whom they no longer saw as useful to society. In response to this, young men, women and children began to follow the example of the old. The development shocked the tree-felling party. The group left for Jodhpur with their mission unfulfilled and the Maharaja Abhai Singh of Marwar subsequently ordered that no more trees should be felled. 363 Bishnois died in the incident.

...Khejri trees in her village by the then king of Marwar. In the act of defiance-Amrita Devi and her three daughters hugged the trees to save them, and in response, paid with their heads being severed-was followed by others of the community leading to the massacre of 363 people.



Shocked, the king's troops finally relented and this episode went on not just to galvanise the Bishnoi community's staunch belief in the world, but also to inspire Uttarakhand's famous Chipko Movement.

Chipko movement (chipko means "to cling" in Hindi) that started in the 1970s, when a group of peasant women in the Himalayan hills of northern India threw their arms around trees designated to be cut down.



Within a few years, this tactic, also known as tree satyagraha, had spread across India, ultimately forcing reforms in forestry and a moratorium on tree felling in Himalayan regions.

Photo: The village women of the Chipko movement in the early 70's in the Garhwal Hills of India, protecting the trees from being cut down. - Avantgardens.