

In pursuit of clean environment:



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VIPS regards protecting the environment as a part of Dharma, duty, virtue, cosmic order and religion. In past centuries, Indian communities did not perceive “the environment” as separate from the other spheres of activity in their lives. A number of rural communities such as the *Bishnois* (living in western Rajasthan on the fringe of the Thar desert), *Bhils* (living in Southern Rajasthan and bordering areas of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra states) and *Swadhyaya* (a devotional movement based in Maharashtra) have maintained strong community practices to protect local ecosystems such as forests and water sources. The conservation-oriented practices are carried out not as “environmental” acts but rather as expressions of dharma. When *Bishnois* protect animals and trees, when *Swadhyayis* build *Vrikshamandiras* (tree temples) and *Nirmal Nirs* (water harvesting sites) and when *Bhils* practice their rituals in sacred groves, they are simply expressing their reverence for creation according to Hindu teachings, not “restoring the environment.” These traditional Indian groups do not see religion, ecology and ethics as separate arenas of life. Instead, they understand it to be part of their dharma to treat creation with respect.

On the lines of Swami Vivekananda’s thoughts, we believe that environmental actions affect our karma and our behavior towards the environment has karmic consequences. Because we have free choice, even though we may have harmed the environment in the past, we can choose to protect the environment in the future, replacing environmentally destructive karmic patterns with

good

ones.

The earth is a goddess and our mother and deserves our devotion and protection. Many Indian rituals recognize that human beings benefit from the earth, and offer gratitude and protection in response. Many people touch the floor before getting out of bed every morning and ask Devi to forgive them for trampling on her body. Millions create *kolams* daily — artwork consisting of bits of rice or other food placed at their doorways in the morning. These *kolams* express desire to offer sustenance to the earth, just as the earth sustains them. The *Chipko* movement represents a similar devotion to the earth. VIPS has decided to become a part of this offering and invites you too, to the movement!