

PORTRAIT OF A PEOPLE

*They're environmentalists, advocates for peace and feminists all rolled into one. French photographer **Franck Vogel**, who travelled to the sandy deserts of Rajasthan to capture this ecological community on camera, shares photographs from his series Bishnois with Verve*





Bishnoi wedding in Ketolai, Sunita Devi is attending the ceremony with her sisters and cousins



Anchi Devi Bishnoi

About 14 years ago, the Paris-based lensman set off to explore the world, searching for special 'human encounters'.

Franck Vogel's quest led him to Western India's Bishnoi sect, named after their 29 principles (*bish* means 20, *noi* nine) – all of which follow the path of non-violence and compassion. His images are both striking and evocative, bringing to light the ways and traditions of the indigenous society.

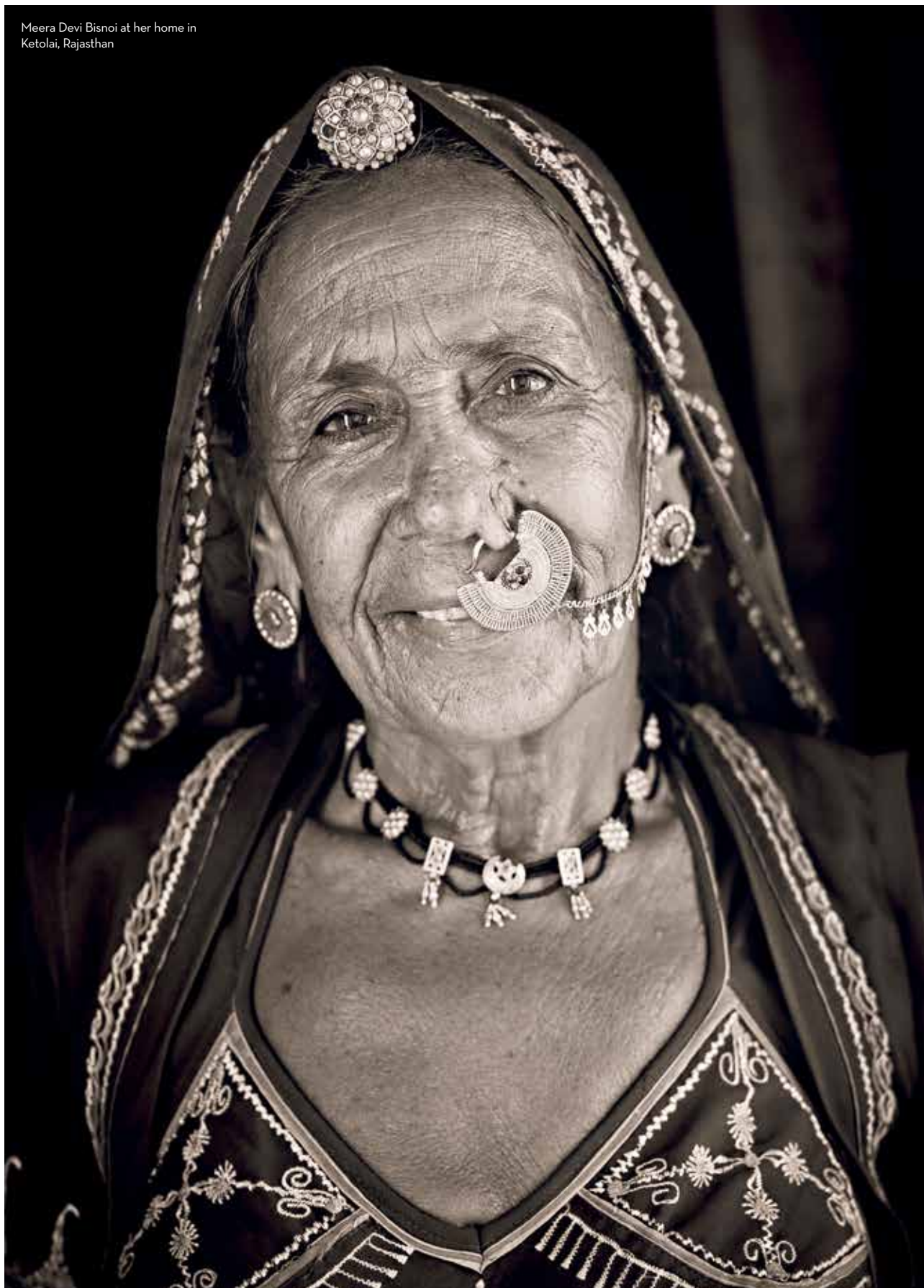
NEW BEGINNINGS

"A friend told me about the Bishnois in 2006, but initially I thought they were a legend! I didn't know much about their philosophy – only that they live in harmony with nature and wildlife, and are ready to give up their lives to save animals and trees. I didn't find much on the internet except some information about Sunil Bishnoi, a web designer from Hisar. I contacted him and he invited me to come visit – it was my first contact with the community and its leaders."

FASCINATING DISCOVERIES

"While working on the project, I decided to focus on the women. The founder of the tribe issued 29 rules – two of which are concerned with maternity leave and rest during menstrual periods, and are directly

Meera Devi Bisnoi at her home in Ketolai, Rajasthan



Bishnoi women carrying dry wheat near Jodhpur, Rajasthan




Bishnoi women giving food to their friend at her wedding near Jaisalmer

related to respect for and the well-being of women. The Bishnois were always ahead of their times and it would be smart of modern society to take inspiration from their wise ways.”

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

“To be allowed to take photos during their holiest festival in Mukam, Bikaner, where 5,00,000 Bishnois gather every year, was quite difficult. Bishnoi means 29 – it’s like a magic number for them. I was 29-years-old at that time, and the leaders saw this as a sign. It wasn’t just by chance that I was there, it was destiny. I presented my idea to spread their philosophy around the world, and they finally let me photograph their revered places.”

WORDS TO CHERISH

“The legendary Steve McCurry, whose work inspired me to follow the same profession, told me that this project was amazing. What a huge compliment!” 

-HUZANTATA