

# Chipko, Vanar Sena Memory, and the Children's Climate Movement-Building in *A Cloud Called Bhura* as Indian Knowledge Systems' Genealogies of Protest

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Received: March 29, 2026

Accepted: March 30, 2026

**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines how Indian children's climate movement-building is narrated as an Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) genealogy of protest in Bijal Vachharajani's middle-grade novel *A Cloud Called Bhura*. (Vachharajani, 2024) Situating the text within education-for-sustainable-development concerns, the study asks how protest memory (Chipko and Vanar Sena), naming practices ("Abhiyan"), and institution-facing repertoires (march and PIL) are represented as civic literacy that can support SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 16 (participation, rights, and civic institutions). (Vachharajani, 2024) (United Nations, n.d.) (United Nations, n.d.)

The theoretical framework integrates operationalized New Historicism, focusing on co-texts and circulation (news media, scientific reporting, legal documents) and on how power works through public narratives, with social movement theory's framing tasks and repertoires/diffusion to analyze collective action dynamics. (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000) (Benford & Snow, 2000) Methodologically, the analysis treats the novel as a primary text, read alongside its embedded co-texts, and uses close reading plus thematic coding of (a) protest-memory allusions, (b) diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing, (c) repertoire depictions, and (d) diffusion and networking mentions. (Vachharajani, 2024)

Findings show that the children's initiative, *The Silver Lining Abhiyan* (TSLA), scales through culturally legible naming, relational diffusion ("friends... friends"), and spatial strategy (Google Maps-based neighborhood division), while also building authority through evidence-gathering and institutional encounters. (Vachharajani, 2024) The novel represents the march and PIL as complementary repertoires, teaching procedural participation, permissions, and rights-claiming in ways that align climate mobilization with democratic civic practice. (Vachharajani, 2024) Overall, the narrative performs cultural work by reactivating protest genealogies as actionable memory, enabling young protagonists to translate climate harm into public claims, and modeling how sustainable development can be pursued through knowledge circulation, collective organization, and institutional accountability. (Vachharajani, 2024) (United Nations, n.d.)

**Key Words:** Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) genealogies of protest; *The Silver Lining Abhiyan* (TSLA); Chipko movement memory; Vanar Sena memory; Public interest litigation (PIL) as repertoire

## Chipko, Vanar Sena Memory, and the Children's Climate Movement-Building in *A Cloud Called Bhura* as Indian Knowledge Systems' Genealogies of Protest

This study examines how *A Cloud Called Bhura: Climate Champions to the Rescue* (Vachharajani, 2024) activates Indian genealogies of protest, particularly "Vanar Sena" memory and "Chipko" as an environmental idiom, to narrate children's climate movement-building in Mumbai. I treat these protest genealogies as an Indian Knowledge System (IKS) resource, not as a static archive of "tradition," but as a living repertoire of civic methods, ethical vocabularies, and collective-action skills that can be recontextualized for sustainable development. The IKS framing is consistent with contemporary Indian policy discourse that positions Indian Knowledge Systems as an interdisciplinary domain meant to be preserved, taught, and mobilized for societal purposes. (MyGov, n.d.).

The novel's plot is structured around escalating environmental breakdown and institutional inadequacy, which becomes the narrative precondition for youth participation and organizing. Rather than depicting activism as spontaneous moral feeling, the text foregrounds movement work: naming an "Abhiyan," building networks across schools and neighborhoods, gathering evidence, planning a march, and moving toward legal-institutional action such as a Public Interest Litigation (PIL). These are recognizable mechanisms within social movement scholarship, where collective action is understood as dependent on framing processes, mobilizing structures, and strategically chosen repertoires rather than on grievance alone (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Methodologically, this paper uses New Historicism to read *Bhura* as cultural work produced within circulating discourses of climate risk, youth agency, and Indian protest memory, rather than as an isolated “message text” (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000). In parallel, social movement theory is used to analyze the children’s organizing through framing tasks and repertoires of contention, and to interpret how movement ideas diffuse through social ties (Benford & Snow, 2000; Rogers, 2003). The paper is explicitly aligned to sustainable development as framed by the UN 2030 Agenda, with particular attention to SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 16 (inclusive institutions and participatory decision-making). (United Nations, 2015).

The central claim is that *Bhura* narrates children’s climate mobilization as an IKS-informed civic literacy practice: protest histories are invoked as culturally legible templates that help children build frames, select tactics, and justify participation in the face of compromised media, science communication breakdowns, and political spectacle. By tracing this genealogy, the study contributes to children’s climate fiction scholarship by showing how the novel localizes climate action within Indian civic memory and, in doing so, models forms of sustainable-development citizenship for young readers.

## Theoretical Framework

### New Historicism

New Historicism is used here as a method of interpretation that treats literary texts and nonliterary “co-texts” as mutually constitutive cultural artifacts, shaped by and shaping relations of power, institutions, and everyday practices (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000). In this approach, the analytic unit is not the literary text alone, but a field of circulation in which narratives, policy talk, media genres, and historical memories move, acquire authority, and become actionable. Gallagher and Greenblatt (2000) emphasize recurrent features such as anecdote, attention to representations, the body, neglected details, and skepticism toward ideology, which supports reading *Bhura* through its small but strategic protest-memory gestures like “Vanar Sena” and “Chipko” rather than only through its overt climate plot.

Operationally, New Historicism in this paper involves three moves. First, co-text selection: the novel is read alongside historically and culturally adjacent materials that clarify the circulation of protest memory, including accessible accounts of Vanar Sena narratives and Chipko historiography (Guha, n.d.; “Young ‘Indira’ stuns Priyanka...,” 2018). Second, circulation analysis: attention is paid to how the novel dramatizes the public sphere through media sensationalism and institutional messaging, showing how meaning is negotiated and contested rather than simply transmitted. Third, power/knowledge mapping: the study treats climate knowledge as socially situated, shaped by institutions and authority, aligning with the broader insight that regimes of truth are bound up with power and governance rather than neutral fact alone (Foucault, 1977, 1980).

Within this lens, “IKS genealogies of protest” are approached as a form of cultural memory that circulates in India through schooling, media narration, civic mythologies, and intergenerational story. The interpretive question is not whether the novel offers a historically complete account of Chipko or Vanar Sena, but what cultural work the invocation performs in the present: how it legitimizes youth participation, supplies a script for ethical action, and translates ecological crisis into a recognizable civic genre.

### Social movement theory (SMT)

SMT is used to analyze the children’s organizing as movement-building rather than as individual moral development. The paper draws primarily on (a) framing, (b) repertoires, and (c) diffusion.

First, framing. Benford and Snow’s (2000) synthesis defines framing processes as active meaning-making that helps movements diagnose problems, propose solutions, and motivate participation. The analytic focus is how TSLA constructs a diagnostic frame (what *Bhura* is and who is accountable), a prognostic frame (what should be done and by whom), and a motivational frame (why participation is urgent and legitimate).

Second, repertoires. Social movement scholarship treats collective action as structured by historically available forms of claim-making, often termed repertoires of contention (Tilly, 1978; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Repertoires matter here because the novel explicitly proposes borrowing from Indian protest histories, which suggests a narrative theory of action where the past supplies tactical options for the present.

Third, diffusion. Diffusion theories explain how new ideas spread through communication channels and social networks (Rogers, 2003). For youth movements, interpersonal ties and school-based networks can function as high-trust pathways for mobilization, consistent with network insights that weak ties can accelerate information spread across clusters (Granovetter, 1973).

## Analytic Matrix

The study uses the following analytic matrix to determine evidence for each lens.

### *New Historicism Evidence*

(1) named allusions to protest histories (e.g., “Vanar Sena,” “Chipko”), (2) narrative staging of institutions such as media, state, and science as power sites, (3) micro-anecdotes and “neglected details” that reveal ideology or cultural anxiety, (4) representations of bodies under climate stress (heat, breath, illness) as the material substrate of politics.

### *SMT evidence:*

(1) explicit statements that diagnose causes and assign responsibility (diagnostic framing), (2) proposals and plans that specify solutions (prognostic framing), (3) calls to join, recruit, or persist (motivational framing), (4) depictions of tactics such as naming an Abhiyan, evidence-gathering, marching, and PIL strategy (repertoire selection), (5) passages describing outreach across schools and neighborhoods or reliance on networks and mapping tools (diffusion).

## Methodology

### Research objectives and questions

The study is a qualitative, interpretive analysis with an explicit IKS and sustainable development orientation. It aims to (a) document how Indian protest genealogies function as IKS resources in the novel, (b) explain how those genealogies enable children’s climate movement-building, and (c) interpret the novel’s civic-literacy implications for SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 16 (inclusive participation and accountable institutions) as articulated in the UN 2030 Agenda. (United Nations, 2015).[\[sdgs.un\]](#)

The guiding research questions are:

1. How does *A Cloud Called Bhura* invoke protest memories such as “Vanar Sena” and “Chipko,” and what cultural work do these invocations perform as IKS civic repertoires?[\[ppl-ai-file-upload.s3.amazonaws\]](#)
2. How does TSLA’s movement-building in the novel align with social movement mechanisms such as framing tasks, repertoire selection, and diffusion through networks?[\[kirkusreviews\]](#)[\[ppl-ai-file-upload.s3.amazonaws\]](#)
3. What forms of sustainable-development citizenship are modeled through the children’s organizing, particularly in relation to SDG 13 and SDG 16?[\[sdgs.un\]](#)[\[ppl-ai-file-upload.s3.amazonaws\]](#)

### Data sources (primary text and co-texts)

Primary data is the novel (Vachharajani, 2024). Co-texts are selected to support New Historicist circulation analysis and to avoid treating protest genealogy as purely internal to the fiction, including a major Chipko historiographic source (Guha, n.d.) and accessible accounts of Vanar Sena narratives as a cultural memory object in contemporary discourse (“Young ‘Indira’ stuns Priyanka...,” 2018).

### Analytical procedure

The procedure combines close reading with thematic coding, consistent with qualitative thematic approaches that systematize pattern identification while retaining interpretive depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was conducted in four predefined buckets derived from the theoretical framework: (i) protest-memory allusions, (ii) framing tasks (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational), (iii) repertoire and tactic depictions, and (iv) network and diffusion mentions (Benford & Snow, 2000; Rogers, 2003). Analytical memos were written for each key scene to connect textual evidence to IKS and sustainable development claims, and to maintain an audit trail of interpretive decisions.

## Findings and their discussion

### Genealogies of protest as narrative memory-work (Chipko, Vanar Sena, “Abhiyan”)

A central finding is that *A Cloud Called Bhura* stages movement-building as a genealogy rather than a sudden “awakening,” by making children’s activism emerge through layered protest memories and already-available cultural vocabularies. (Vachharajani, 2024) The text explicitly reactivates the Vanar Sena as a remembered template when Tammy proposes, “Indira Gandhi had rallied together thousands of children and called it the Vanar Sena... We can be the Vanar Sena Returns.” (Vachharajani, 2024) This is not

presented as a history lesson in the conventional curricular sense, but as a usable past that can be renamed, remixed, and redeployed for a different crisis. (Vachharajani, 2024)

The novel also surfaces Chipko as a protest metaphor, not as a dated event but as a portable tactic-memory that helps children imagine what “sticking with” a crisis could look like. (Vachharajani, 2024) Amni asks, “How about Chipko?” while recalling “people had protested the cutting of trees by hugging them,” and the moment is immediately tested by her friends’ sarcasm, which shows how protest memory enters as an option to be negotiated rather than reverently repeated. (Vachharajani, 2024) That negotiation is precisely the cultural work the narrative performs: it turns IKS-inflected memory into a deliberative resource that can be accepted, rejected, or transformed in relation to contemporary climate precarity. (Vachharajani, 2024)

A third and crucial memory layer is the naming of the children’s initiative as “The Silver Lining Abhiyan (TSLA)”, where “Abhiyan” marks the movement as locally intelligible, institution-facing, and rhetorically serious even while it remains youth-led. (Vachharajani, 2024) Tammy argues for the name by explicitly linking it to movement strength and collective purpose: “Abhiyan because we will be a powerful movement.” (Vachharajani, 2024) Within an Indian Knowledge Systems alignment, this naming matters because it foregrounds how civic action is culturally situated and linguistically anchored, rather than imported as a generic “campaign.” (Vachharajani, 2024)

Read through the study’s New Historicist lens, the novel’s protest genealogies circulate through contextual forms inside the story world, including news media (“Khabar Bhayankar”), newspaper writing (Urmi Sheth), scientific reporting (the Climate Coalition report), and legal documentation (permissions and court notices). (Vachharajani, 2024) The narrative repeatedly shows children reading, screenshotting, summarizing, and distributing knowledge, so that activism is depicted as a textual and institutional practice rather than only a street performance. (Vachharajani, 2024) This emphasis on circulation also clarifies how power attempts to fix meaning: the head minister frames Bhura as “anti-national” and an “international conspiracy,” which is a classic move to displace ecological accountability into security rhetoric. (Vachharajani, 2024)

### **Diagnostic, prognostic, motivational framing: how TSLA makes “climate crisis” actionable**

Across the narrative arc, TSLA’s movement-building is best explained as sustained framing work in the sense used in social movement studies, especially the core framing tasks that link problem-definition to action. (Benford & Snow, 2000) The diagnostic dimension in the novel begins with competing accounts of Bhura: divine warning (“act of God”), media spectacle, and state conspiracy claims, all of which attempt to manage uncertainty and avoid structural responsibility. (Vachharajani, 2024) Against these, Vidisha’s report-based explanation identifies Bhura as materially composed of pollution and aerosols, and explicitly names “human-accelerated climate change,” offering a causal story that can support accountability. (Vachharajani, 2024)

The children’s diagnostic framing does not stay at the level of abstract climate discourse, because the novel locates harm in embodied and local registers: Nanu’s breath “rattled,” lines outside clinics “tripled,” and ordinary routines fracture under heat, water cuts, and illness. (Vachharajani, 2024) TSLA meetings open by eliciting impacts, for example, Tammy foregrounds how breathing becomes difficult and how households face water and power cuts, thereby translating climate harm into everyday injustice that peers can recognize. (Vachharajani, 2024) This matters analytically because diagnostic frames become durable when they align with lived experience and when participants can point to repeated scenes as evidence. (Benford & Snow, 2000)

The **prognostic** dimension, in turn, is depicted as multi-pronged rather than singularly technological. (Vachharajani, 2024) The narrative juxtaposes an elite techno-fix spectacle, the SUK-UP9 “engineering marvel,” with the children’s slower strategy of evidence-gathering, network-building, and legal escalation. (Vachharajani, 2024) The techno-fix is staged with pageantry, celebrity performance, and official endorsement, while it also carries a denialist claim that Bhura is “nothing but a weather anomaly,” revealing how power can use “science” as a public-relations costume rather than as accountable knowledge. (Vachharajani, 2024)

By contrast, TSLA’s prognostic framing treats solution-building as civic work: researching emissions, asking schools about carbon footprints and water plans, learning “how the court works,” and seeking a lawyer. (Vachharajani, 2024) The storyline explicitly frames children as “reporters,” thanking the press and marginalized urban workers for helping them see the city beyond elite windows, which connects ecological causality to social inequality. (Vachharajani, 2024) In SMT terms, this is a move from awareness to coordinated collective action, where “what should be done” includes institutional encounters and not only lifestyle change. (Benford & Snow, 2000)

The motivational dimension is made explicit through direct calls to act and recruit, including the TSLA video: “We need your help... Share this video with at least ten of your friends... help us with research... spread the word.” (Vachharajani, 2024) Motivation is also sustained by a peer ethics of staying with the city, where Amni rejects becoming one of the “leavers” and frames persistence as a civic choice in conditions of slow disaster. (Vachharajani, 2024) This motivational framing is not merely affective; it is organizational, because it ties emotion to tasks, deadlines, meetings, and role-taking. (Benford & Snow, 2000)

### **Scaling mechanisms: diffusion, spatial strategy, evidence practices, and repertoires**

A second major finding is that the novel provides an unusually concrete depiction of how youth activism **scales**, including diffusion mechanisms, neighborhood logistics, and repertoire choices. (Vachharajani, 2024) The children describe network diffusion in explicitly relational terms: “We reached out to our friends, and they reached out to their friends, who reached out to their friends on social media,” and they expand further by “activat[ing] the school and tuition and hobby classes network.” (Vachharajani, 2024) This is a narrative model of movement diffusion as social relay rather than as broadcast persuasion, where recruitment travels along friendship and everyday institutional ties. (Vachharajani, 2024)

The novel then adds a spatial strategy that converts diffusion into coverage: “Everyone took on different parts of the neighborhood using Google Maps... chalked out the areas, divided them, and started just talking to other children.” (Vachharajani, 2024) This detail is significant because it depicts mobilization as spatial labor that blends digital tools with face-to-face engagement, a hybrid form well-suited to urban India’s density and infrastructural unevenness. (Vachharajani, 2024) Within the IKS orientation of this study, the key point is not “technology” as novelty but the practical coordination of relational knowledge, locality, and linguistic-cultural accessibility in everyday gallis and public spaces. (Vachharajani, 2024)

A further scaling practice is evidence-gathering as movement method. (Vachharajani, 2024) The narrative repeatedly shows children reading and summarizing the Climate Coalition report, distributing accessible versions to peers, and generating “out-of-the-curriculum” questions about emissions, water conservation, and the Anthropocene, turning schooling into a site of civic inquiry. (Vachharajani, 2024) Even secrecy and risk are represented through the circulation of coded messages on walls and by letter, which indicates that the novel understands mobilization as contested and surveilled rather than frictionless. (Vachharajani, 2024)

In SMT terms, these practices align with a repertoire of contention that includes campaigns, communication routines, and public displays, not only a single protest event. (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015) The repertoire most visible in the later plot is the march, framed as legitimate participation rather than disorder: the children carry “permission,” present it to the police, and the police step aside, suggesting negotiated space for youth assembly. (Vachharajani, 2024) The march is depicted as expansive and cross-class, as participants come from “schools, colleges, slums, dumping grounds... high-rises,” and the crowd refuses disposable cups, carrying their own mugs and bottles, which links protest performance to sustainability practice. (Vachharajani, 2024)

The second repertoire element is explicitly institutional: TSLA plans and then files a public interest litigation (PIL) to ensure demands are “taken seriously,” and later the head minister receives notice that “They have filed a public interest litigation against us!” (Vachharajani, 2024) Importantly, the children themselves articulate the PIL as a rights-claiming tool, and at the rally Amni states that they filed the PIL “asserting our rights to a life without Bhura Cloudus and to live in a city that has a clean environment.” (Vachharajani, 2024) This movement choice is pedagogically consequential because it depicts legal literacy, procedural knowledge, and institution-facing documentation as accessible to youth when supported by adult allies (lawyer, parents, journalist, bureaucrat). (Vachharajani, 2024)

Connecting back to framing, the PIL functions as a prognostic anchor that stabilizes the children’s narrative of responsibility, because it demands institutional response rather than only individual adaptation. (Benford & Snow, 2000) It also strengthens the movement’s motivational frame by making “hope” actionable, as success is not imagined as heroic victory but as procedural pressure, coalition-building, and persistence. (Vachharajani, 2024) The result is a depiction of children’s climate activism as movement-building in the full sense, including diffusion, tactics, and encounters with authority. (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015)

### **SDG 16 and SDG 13: TSLA as civic literacy for sustainable development**

A third major finding is that the novel can be read as a form of **civic literacy** aligned to SDG 16 because it repeatedly stages participation, rule-following protest, and legal access as central to climate

action. (Vachharajani, 2024) SDG 16 includes targets on access to justice, accountable institutions, and inclusive decision-making, which is precisely the institutional terrain TSLA enters through permissions, public speech, and litigation. (United Nations, n.d.) When the narrative emphasizes that the children are “legally protected” and that the permission “proves you have the right to protest,” it models lawful assembly as a civic skill rather than a rebellious exception. (Vachharajani, 2024)

The PIL storyline also resonates with SDG 16’s emphasis on rule of law and access to justice, because it shows young people using institutional channels rather than being limited to symbolic expression. (United Nations, n.d.) At the same time, the narrative does not romanticize institutions: officials attempt to reframe Bhura as anti-national conspiracy, insurers invoke “act of God” clauses to deny claims, and media personalities sensationalize uncertainty, illustrating the struggles through which civic institutions become sites of contest. (Vachharajani, 2024) This is a crucial sustainable-development insight: procedural access alone is insufficient unless narratives of legitimacy and accountability can also be contested in public. (Benford & Snow, 2000)

The novel also aligns strongly with SDG 13 by representing climate action as mobilization plus education, not merely as awareness. (United Nations, n.d.) SDG 13 explicitly includes education and awareness-raising on climate change as a target area, and TSLA’s story is built around learning practices: reading scientific reports, asking about emissions and footprints, and translating complex findings into shareable summaries for peers. (United Nations, n.d.) The TSLA video’s recruitment script and the mapped neighborhood outreach also show how climate action becomes collective capacity, where mitigation and adaptation are discussed through the lens of urban infrastructures, public health, and governance. (Vachharajani, 2024)

Finally, the IKS genealogy matters for sustainable development because the novel frames climate movement-building as culturally rooted and ethically relational. (Vachharajani, 2024) The movement draws not only on global language (“Kids4Climate”) but also on Indian civic and protest vocabularies, including “Abhiyan,” Ambedkar’s “Educate, Organize, Agitate” as a planning prompt, and the remembered templates of Chipko and Vanar Sena, which together situate climate justice as an Indian civic tradition rather than a borrowed agenda. (Vachharajani, 2024) In that sense, the narrative functions as sustainable-development pedagogy: it teaches how climate action can be built through knowledge circulation, accountable institutions, and culturally intelligible collective practice, linking SDG 13 (mobilization, climate literacy) with SDG 16 (rights, participation, civic institutions). (United Nations, n.d.)

## Conclusion

This study argued that *A Cloud Called Bhura* constructs children’s climate organizing as an IKS-inflected genealogy of protest, where Chipko memory, Vanar Sena recall, and the locally resonant idiom of “Abhiyan” together enable climate action to appear as culturally continuous rather than newly imported. (Vachharajani, 2024) Through a New Historicist lens, the novel’s “climate movement” is produced by circulation across co-texts that include news spectacle, scientific reports, and institutional documents, demonstrating how power attempts to control meaning by reframing ecological accountability as either divine fate or anti-national conspiracy. (Vachharajani, 2024) (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000)

Read with social movement theory, TSLA’s growth is not depicted as spontaneous moral awakening but as disciplined framing work that links diagnosis (what Bhura is and who is responsible), prognosis (what can be done, including evidence practices and legal routes), and motivation (why peers should join, and how recruitment spreads through everyday networks). (Benford & Snow, 2000) (Vachharajani, 2024) The narrative’s attention to diffusion through “friends... friends,” spatial organization via Google Maps-based division of neighborhoods, and the coupled repertoire of march plus PIL shows how civic participation is learned through doing, including negotiating permissions and approaching courts. (Vachharajani, 2024)

These findings position the novel as climate-facing civic literacy that productively connects SDG 13 (mobilization and climate education) with SDG 16 (participation, access to justice, and accountable institutions). (United Nations, n.d.) (United Nations, n.d.) In policy terms, the novel’s insistence that children read, summarize, and publicly communicate science and rights claims can be read as aligned with NEP 2020’s broader emphasis on holistic, socially responsive education within India’s contemporary curriculum discourse. (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020)

A key implication is that literary narratives can function as rehearsal spaces for sustainable-development praxis: they teach how to translate environmental harm into shared public problems, how to build coalitions, and how to sustain action without erasing local knowledge lineages. (Vachharajani, 2024) The study is limited to one primary text and selected co-texts, and future work should expand the corpus to

comparative Indian children's climate fiction and to ethnographic reception studies of how young readers interpret "Abhiyan" as a civic form.

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