

From Screen to Green: Cultivating Ecological Consciousness in Children through the Indian Series *Chhota Bheem*

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of the Indian animated TV series Chhota Bheem in inducing the awareness of Environment among children. It is framed in eco-pedagogy, focussing on the themes the show incorporates, e.g. forest protection, water preservation, wildlife protection. Thematic analysis of selected episodes is the method used for the qualitative evaluation of the impact of the show as an effective tool for promoting eco-conscious attitudes. The results indicate that Chhota Bheem is a medium that can be used to teach ecological values to children, which shows that animation has a capability to influence the understanding of children about ecological sustainability. The study highlights ten episodes that explicitly represent pro-environmental behaviours, ranging from tree planting to anti-poaching activism, and examines the function of the character Jaggu as a symbol of ecological stewardship.

Keywords: Chhota Bheem; television series; eco-consciousness; children's media; sustainability; Indian animation

1. Introduction

Children's values for the environment have gained a new focus of interdisciplinary research recently, incorporating media studies, environmental education and developmental psychology (Magotra and Simerjeet). Children are captivated by animated programmes, which also form their moral compass, social ideals and knowledge of stewardship of the planet. Unlike live-action programs, animation has a particular versatility: it can bring fantasies to life, in which animals speak, trees are feeling, pollution itself turns into a monster, all of which makes abstract ecological concepts more real and resonate with children's emotions.

Chhota Bheem, a children's programme produced by the Green Gold Animation Company, (2008–2019) is one of the most influential cultural products produced in India over the last ten years. The show is set in an imaginary village of Dholakpur, a paradise of lush forest, which is quite similar to the rural Indian setting; the series is about a young boy who is exceptionally strong and courageous named Bheem and his close friends, Chutki (a cunning girl, but with a kind heart), Raju (a naughty boy but loyal), Jaggu (a witty and agile monkey) and others, like

Dolu, Bholu, Kalia (a rival who picks up moral lessons often). The show's popularity goes beyond India and reaches global audiences; its high-energy adventure, slapstick comedy and vibrant animation are only part of the reason, the other part is the carefully woven moral, social and ecological themes woven throughout.

Chhota Bheem often speaks to preschool and early-elementary children about environmental issues in ways that are easy for them to understand. Bheem and his friends are depicted engaging in significant time outdoors including forests, water bodies, mountains, and in a few instances, the protection of animals, conservation of water, stopping deforestation, cleaning up pollution, etc. Unlike many of the western environmental cartoons which make the environment look like a dystopian crisis (e.g. Wall-E's trash covered earth), Chhota Bheem shows how environmentalism can be a fun, heroic and communal endeavour. This positive framing is especially important for young audiences, as they are more likely to engage in behaviors that they think are fun and are admired by others, rather than those that they think are harmful and that they are ashamed of.

The main research question for this study is: How does Chhota Bheem create ecological awareness and pro-environmental emotions in its child viewers?

This study brings a systematic thematic analysis of selected episodes in the first six seasons to answer this question. We highlight those moments when the characters make a clear statement of pro-environmental behavior such as saving a wild animal, planting trees, rebelling against polluters, saving water, or teaching others about ecological balance. The study reveals a common theme of "eco-heroism" in the manner of the sustainable actions of Bheem and his friends, where strength and courage are not only demonstrated against the monster, but towards the natural world as well.

Additionally, this study examines the use of culturally specific symbols to improve environmental messaging in the series. For example, Bheem's super-human strength is due to the consumption of the laddoos (traditional Indian sweets), a playful way of the Mahabharata's Bhima who acquired strength through a liberal eating of laddoos. The character's cultural anchoring makes him loved and familiar, thus strengthening the influence of his environmental actions. Likewise, the concept of festivals, village councils and folk remedies is used in the narratives on water conservation or organic farming, which place ecological issues in the context of life in India.

To conclude, this paper suggests that Chhota Bheem can be a successful informal learning tool for achieving environmental literacy. The multiple environmental messages woven into the exciting and culturally engaging stories encourages pro-environmental values, a period when children are being shaped in terms of their moral and behavioral development. The research is a part of the growing body of research in the field of media and environmental education especially on the topic of non-Western Animation.

2. Review of Literature

The study of children's cartoons has grown considerably in the last 20 years, and it is no longer confined to issues of violence and consumerism, but also explores the role of these drawings in promoting children's learning in the social context and the environment. In a large-scale study in South Punjab, Mahmood and his team discovered that cartoons are an important factor in the personality development of children, especially in cognitive, emotional and social fields. The finding is directly applicable to environmental education: if cartoon characters consistently demonstrate pro-environmental behaviors, then young viewers may come to accept these behaviors as normative.

Lenka et al. used a tool called natural language processing (NLP) to study popular Indian cartoons such as Chhota Bheem. They found that cartoons had narrative forms and language

patterns that could be used for educational purposes, ranging from vocabulary development to moral reasoning.

Hamadneh and Alqarni carried out an experimental study with students with learning disabilities in the specific field of EE. They discovered that the cartoon intervention did have a significant effect on these students' awareness of environmental protection concerns like pollution, recycling and conservation of wildlife. They show how animation can be used as a tool that embraces all learners with complex ecological topics, including those who may find reading a challenge.

Through arts-based research techniques (drawing, acting, and narration), Sorin et al. discussed and investigated the understanding of environmental sustainability among young children. Gough and Horacek looked at the work of feminist environmental educators and cartoonists who created critical environmental cartoons together. Their work shows that cartoons can not only inspire passive consumption and enjoyment, but can also stimulate reflection on socially critical environmental issues like climate justice, company pollution and extinction of species. But not every research about the environment and the cartoons is critical. Specifically, Soni and Jain discovered that the anthropomorphic characters of Chhota Bheem creates strong emotional bonds in children that marketers exploit by launching branded products – toys, stationery, snack foods and clothes. A kid that sees Bheem saving a forest can also get a plastic Bheem toy wrapped in non-recyclable materials, which directly contradicts the message. The authors are not negative about the positive aspects of the show but significantly emphasize the fact that the brand extension may be given priority over pedagogical consistency.

Lastly, Yong et al. investigated the potential of big-screen animated movies as a means of raising awareness of tropical biodiversity conservation. They discovered that animated programs, such as Rio and The Jungle Book, were able to generate a great deal of public interest in the featured species and habitats, but that the impact on actual conservation actions was more difficult to determine.

Majority of studies are based on cartoon cartoons from the West (Disney, Pixar, Nickelodeon) or on the short, ad hoc production of eco-cartoons for advocacy purposes. The research studies the huge gap in ecological contents.

3. Methodology

The qualitative thematic analysis is used in this study to analyze the ecological messages in Chhota Bheem. This study focuses on the textual analysis of the narrative and visual elements of the Chhota Bheem episodes and not on empirical reception data of child viewers. This study has 10 episodes from Seasons 1-6 that were thematically relevant, i.e. requiring explicit pro-environmental action (rescue, planting, cleaning, protesting) with nature (forest, river, animals) central to the storyline. The theoretical framework combines two models of ecological consciousness that are complementary. First, the theory of Ecological Consciousness by Chang posits environmental consciousness as having five interconnected dimensions: awareness of ecological problems, empathy for non-human, knowledge of ecological systems, ethical commitment to protect the environment, and action – tangible pro-environmental behaviour. Second, Bannan-Watts' concept of spiritual ecological awareness that incorporates some sense of interrelatedness and ethical duty that goes beyond parochial self-interest.

Eco-Consciousness in Chhota Bheem, examining pro-environmental behaviours through different characters (Bheem, Chutki, Tuntun, Indumathi) throughout several episodes. The second is Jaggu as a Symbol of Eco-Consciousness, analysing his consistent role the series' environmental steward.

Table 1: Episodes Analyzed from Chhota Bheem

Episode Name	Season & Episode	Eco-Theme	Chang's Dimension(s)
Chutki and the Butterfly	S1E5	Wildlife rescue, empathy	Empathy, Action
Save the Trees	S1E26	Forest conservation, activism	Awareness, Ethics, Action
Animal Rescue	S2E14	Anti-poaching, biodiversity	Empathy, Knowledge, Action
The Magical Garden	S2E19	Rare plant protection	Knowledge, Ethics
The Water Crisis	S3E8	Water conservation	Awareness, Action
Garbage Monsters	S3E25	Waste management, recycling	Awareness, Action
The Forest Festival	S4E15	Coexistence, ecology, cultural	Empathy, Ethics
River of Life	S5E7	Industrial pollution, collective action	Awareness, Ethics, Action
The Last Seed	S6E45	Deforestation, tree planting	Ethics, Action
Mariner with Animals	S6E122	Global biodiversity	Knowledge, Empathy

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Eco-Consciousness in *Chhota Bheem*

S1E5: Chutki and the Butterfly – Chutki helps a butterfly that has been trapped, playing Chang's "empathy" dimension. Chutki knew that every small creature has the right to live freely. Non-human life has intrinsic value rather than human use. The butterfly later grants a wish, but not Chutki's – for her friend's sick grandmother. The scenes also reflect Asian cultural values, as awareness of care for animals and humans originates from the same cultural impact, values of caring for the environment.

S1E26: Save the Trees – A greedy contractor is wanting to clear a forest. Remarkably, Bheem doesn't use his superhuman power; instead, he begins by thinking about the "knowledge" dimension of Chang with an explanation of how forests are important (for oxygen, animals' homes, rain). If left unchecked, he stages a protest with homemade signs (a literal interpretation of the "ethical commitment" aspect of civic action as "collective" civic action). The village

elder introduces a new forest protection law and the contractor is forced to bend. The episode exemplifies collective peaceful civic action – children can challenge environmental destruction by persuading and being united.

S2E14: Animal Rescue – Poachers set traps in the jungle, capturing deer and birds. A baby deer trapped in a wire snare and Bheem and Chutki came and they free it. Chang's "empathy" (Jaggu feels the deer's suffering) and "knowledge" (he knows how to summon help, without facing danger directly) are both shown in this moment. They release the deer together and search for the poachers, thus freeing all of the captured animals. This episode teaches reporting and collaboration – children should not put themselves in danger, but should report and/or collaborate. Also, the interspecies collaboration (monkey and human) underscores Bannan-Watts' interconnectedness principle: ecological challenges need collective, cross species solutions.

S2E19: The Magical Garden – A magical garden with glowing, healing plants is at risk from thieves. Bheem and friends protect the garden then construct a fence. The second line of the episode says, "Some treasures don't belong to you, they belong to all of us." This episode asks kids to accept protection for its own sake, an important, though tough, moral lesson, as opposed to one where they are rewarded with something tangible for their environmentalism.

S3E8: Villagers blame the gods or other villagers. Elephants' migration route has changed and Jaggu follows them to a secret underground spring. The episode is unique in representing Chang's "knowledge" dimension as traditional ecological observation – the ability to observe animals and use their behaviour as a source of environmental intelligence. Rather than store water, he instructs the villagers how to construct a well and collect rain water. The non-hoarding, even though they have exclusive access, carries out both Chang's "ethics" and "action": water is not a commodity, it is a shared common. The episode is a model of observation-based problem solving, of the observation of the behaviour of animals as an aspect of their ecology.

S3E25: Garbage Monsters – Garbage is thrown in the forest, forming "garbage monsters." They cause trouble to kids with sticks, but only more trash. The botched attempts at violence teach us the lesson that brute force is no solution to pollution. The actual solution – which is to sort waste in the village into compostable, recyclable and toxic – requires knowledge and collective action. The monsters disappear. The episode treats waste management as a game and not as a task, in line with positive framing pedagogy, children learn recycling as a heroic act and fun.

In S4E15 a role reversal, Jaggu invites Bheem and friends to a Forest Festival, which is all organized by forest animals. The directive statement: "The forest is a culture and celebration in its own right – not something that belongs to humans." This episode directly confronts anthropocentrism or the feel like the needs of humans are always more important. Through these traditions reflects Bannan-Watts' spiritual ecological consciousness through mutual respect and coexistence. This episode questions anthropocentrism – the notion that the needs of people are paramount at all times. It conveys a value of living in coexistence and respect for the non-human life worlds.

S5E7: River of Life – A factory pollutes the river, and children become ill, while fish die. The owner states, "I'm in business to run." Bheem and Jaggu investigate, confront him and the elder of the village files a complaint. This is one of the rare occasions when it models environmental justice, in which the vulnerable (children, animals, the poor) are affected by pollution. A clash with the economic power player, the factory owner, helps children learn that profit takes a back seat to ecological and human rights. A filter is installed by the owner and Bheem conducts a physical clean up. The episode educates the public on environmental justice, that is the poor are the ones who suffer from pollution, and that common people can stand up two polluters.

S6E45: The Last Seed – Dholakpur is left barren due to drought and deforestation. There's one blessed seed left, but a bad guy takes it to make a mine. Children put the cracked seed in the ground and water it with tears, while Bheem gets it. Bheem collects the cracked seed and children put it in the ground and water with tears and sing a traditional song. The seed sprouts, restoring the forest. "One seed is enough – if we take care of it", Bheem says. This allegory is a direct challenge to eco-despair, a documented risk of dystopian environmental stories. It's the inclusion of a traditional song that provides ecological hope within cultural continuity.

S6E122: Mariner with Animals – A mariner brings exotic animals – including one shape shifter piglet. The villagers wish to keep them as their pets, but Bheem says animals should be in their natural habitat. In this episode biodiversity ethics is taught in the form of ecological belonging: taking an animal out of their ecosystem affects the individual animal's welfare as well as the greater ecological web. The colour of the piglet's distress is its own, grey for "sad" (and showing no colour for "happy") which makes its distress more palpable, and gives the abstract word "habitat" a palpable, emotional meaning to young children.

4.2 Jaggu as a Symbol of Eco-Consciousness

The monkey, Jaggu, which is not the protagonist of the show, but rather the most consistent and unambiguous environmental symbol, emerged out of our analysis. A monkey named Jaggu was one of the most constant and clearly environmental symbols that emerged from our analysis. Jaggu is not only a comic sidekick, but he is the personification of all five aspects of ecological awareness in Chang, and Bannan-Watts' interconnectedness. Jaggu's strength is not going to solve any problem like that of Bheem but through knowledge, watching and talking to nature. He is an inhabitant of the trees, can communicate with the animal world, and is the first one of the human characters to perceive changes in the environment.

Awareness: Jaggu is the first to know threats. When he sees loggers coming, he raises the alarm in S1E26 (Save the Trees). In S3E8 (Water Crisis), he is able to see elephants changing their migration – a clue to hidden water. Awareness if not followed by action is impassive, Jaggu's awareness always sparks a response.

Empathy: In S2E14 (Animal Rescue), Jaggu finds a baby deer that is trapped in a snare set by a poacher. His distress calls bring Bheem and Chutki, he can't free it alone but his vocalizations of the deer's pain bring them. His emotional response is a testament to not sentimentality, but to moral need to be empathetic towards non-human beings.

Traditional ecological knowledge – Jaggu has traditional ecological knowledge. In S3E8, he takes elephants to a below-ground spring and teaches them how to catch rainwater. In the organic farming episode, he shows how to use compost and organic pest control methods. This knowledge is not in isolation but is applied and passed on to the community – in line with Bannan-Watts' belief that ecological awareness extends beyond personal awareness.

Ethics – In S4E15 (The Forest Festival), Jaggu proposes to humans to attend a festival which is being held by animals. The obvious message: "Man is an intruder, not a master." This is an antidote to Anthropocentrism and confirms that animals have their own culture and rights. He carries a protest sign – ethical commitment as civic action – in S1E26.

Action – Jaggu always moves forward. In S3E8, he tells the location of the spring. In S2E14 he takes the lead of the rescue. During the farming scene, he educates the villagers on the benefits of farming and forest. Action is always collaborative and fun – not a responsibility.

Bannan-Watts theory of interconnectedness is always played out in Jaggu's character and his constant demonstration of the health of the ecology being tied to the health of the human. The more animals he saves, the better the village is. When it comes to water, they all drink when he finds it. His very body – a monkey living among humans – symbolizes the boundary-crossing

interdependence of species.

To put it simply, Jaggu is the show's conscience of the environment. He translates abstract ecological concepts to repeatable, observable actions – turning eco-consciousness into real for young viewers. Jaggu's consistency as an environmental educator is enhanced by his language and his actions. He does not use his knowledge for self-serving purposes. He is always ready to use his expertise to reveal ecological concepts. And he is always cheerful – environmentalism in Chhota Bheem is never shown as a burden, or even a sacrifice, but a source of joy, community, and adventure. Such a positive framing is essential when dealing with young audiences, as they are more likely to imitate actions related to positive emotions.

4.3 Comparative Analysis: *Chhota Bheem* and *Wall-E*

4. 3. 1 Dystopian Warning vs. Joyful Solutions

Comparing Chhota Bheem and Disney's Pixar Wall-E, reveals differing cultural and pedagogical perspectives. According to Madureira, Wall-E's dystopian, garbage-covered Earth with passive humans in space- an apocalyptic warning against consumerism. The environmental message of the film is deeply worded and even apocalyptic: consumerism, waste, ecological negligence will make Earth uninhabitable. This cautionary tale has worked well with older children and adults, but the emotional tenor of the film – loneliness, decay, extinction – is a risk of inducing eco-anxiety in the younger viewers.

Unlike Chhota Bheem, it's a very different story and a very different emotional journey. Dholakpur environmental issues are not apocalyptic. A dry river is shown as a local problem, solvable, and even fun to fix; a deforested area is shown as a local problem, solvable, and even fun to fix; a few trapped animals are shown as local problems, solvable, and even fun to fix; a pile of trash is shown as a local problem, solvable, and even fun to fix. In "Garbage Monsters" (S3E25), kids playfully battle garbage, instead of fearing it, they sort it and recycle it. In "River of Life" (S5E7), the episode concludes with a celebration of the village, rather than a funeral. This upbeat message is not sentimental; rather, it's a pedagogically sound for young children, who cannot yet distinguish between imminent and distant threats.

4. 3. 2 Reactive Loneliness vs. Collective Repetition

The two works are also different in their conception of environmental heroism. Wall-E's main character is a lonely, survival-driven bots who react, while the change among man is not visible, only implied. Chhota Bheem, on the other hand, demonstrates repeatable, visible and community-oriented pro-environmental actions in each episode of the show. In the trees, Bheem, Jaggu and Chutki teach kids to plant trees, organise protests, clean rivers, and educate adults – all over the seasons. This repetition is essential for young children to "learn" a behaviour. A child who watches Wall-E, may feel sadness; a child who watches Chhota Bheem, may pick up litter like Jaggu.

4. 3. 3 Universal Abstraction vs. Local Symbols

The cultural embeddedness is also one of the salient differences. Wall-E's environmentalism is universalist and somewhat abstract – consumerism, waste, corporate greed. Ecological action is culturally rooted in the symbol of the laddoos, the potential for eco-heroism; village elders invoking dharma to preserve rivers; forest festivals celebrating animal cultures. Culturally-embedded messages are more persuasive since they do not feel forced upon the audience, as Soni and Jain suggest. When Bheem saves a banyan tree (which has its own significance in the Hindu tradition) or Jaggu teaches some kids about the traditional practice of harvesting rain water, the concept of environmentalism does not seem like some foreign idea thrust upon them

by Westerners; it feels like it's part of their own culture.

4. 3. 4 Feature Film vs. Television Series

Lastly, the two works appeal to different age and attention span. Wall-E is a 98-minute feature film that demands a sustained attention to the story. The episodes of Chhota Bheem come up with a duration of 11-22 minutes, which falls within the attention span of 4 to 8 years children. Unlike films, television programmes can be used for the purpose of cumulative learning: the same characters will demonstrate the same ecological values week after week. As Yong et al. discovered, films can be effective at creating interest in biodiversity, while television series can create more lasting behaviour change, as viewers watch them repeatedly. However, for environmental educators who want to implement interventions which will last longer, they might be better suited to a long-running series such as Chhota Bheem, rather than a single screening. Wall-E is a strong eco-cautionary narrative and Chhota Bheem is a culturally appropriate and developmentally suitable tool for children to learn about ecological awareness.

4. 4 Discussion

Our analysis contains that Chhota Bheem implements all of Chang's five dimensions of ecological consciousness in several episodes. In the awareness dimension, characters are aware of environmental issues (dirty river, trapped animal, dried up wells). Children are seen weeping for hurt animals and being sad about dead trees, vividly capturing empathy. In general, knowledge is passed on by Jaggu or the village elder who will explain the cause-and-effect relationships (e.g., if we cut all the trees, there will be no rain). Ethics are demonstrated by decisions – not selling rare seeds, standing up to polluters, putting animal welfare over convenience. Children are always represented as capable of action, from picking up litter to planting seeds, to warning adults.

The cultural relevance of the show, using Indian symbols and stories, adds to the convincing power of these messages. In this show, Bheem becomes a hero to save the forest by consuming laddoos which imparts strength to him, thus tying together the act of saving the environment with traditional Indian sweet that is loved by children. As the village elder calls out dharma (righteous duty) to save the river, the show taps into a rich cultural well of righteous duty. This cultural specificity might be the reason why the show has remained so popular and effective for the children as an educational tool: they do not see lessons about the environment as imposed on them or foreign, but rather as a part of their own world.

This study does have a few downsides, however. First, we only looked at the content of the show, not how it was received. Children may have tuned out or overlooked the environmental messages in Chhota Bheem, and focused instead on the action and humor. Experimental studies are needed in the future, such as comparing differences in children's attitudes (self-reported or stated), drawing content, or observed behaviour (e.g., willingness to pick up litter) among treatment and control groups exposed to a conservation-themed and a neutral episode, respectively. Secondly, our sample of 10 episodes may not be a representative sample of the total series. Thematic emphases for later seasons (after 2015) may vary. Thirdly, the marketing of the show's products and commercial tie-ups (Soni and Jain) counteracts the environment campaign. Give a child a plastic Bheem toy in non-recyclable packaging after watching "Save the Trees" is a form of sending mixed messages.

Notwithstanding these constraints, shows such as Chhota Bheem have a global outreach and can be a partial solution to environmental education. Hasanagić et al. found that 95% of children aged 4-6 years watch cartoons regularly, while 78% of children aged 7-10 years still watch them regularly. These statistics indicate that early childhood – where values, attitudes and habits are

being shaped – is the same time of peak cartoon viewing! Incorporating environmental issues into well-known cartoons is therefore a high leverage intervention – it is reaching children in their homes, in their preferred entertainment medium and at a developmentally sensitive age.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals how Chhota Bheem has integrated ecological consciousness in five ways: awareness, empathy, knowledge, ethics and action and mostly through the character of monkey Jaggu. The show models' pro-environmental behaviours as fun, social and culturally known (laddoos, festivals). This is especially important in the climate crisis to help children build hope and agency while reducing the risk of eco-anxiety, as a good way to make stewardship a desirable identity.

Limitations: The study has analysed only 10 selected TV episodes (not films). Results are not necessarily representative of the entire series.

Future scope: (1) Experimental reception studies to investigate the effects of watching such episodes on children's real-world environmental behaviours (e.g., recycling, water usage). (2) Analyze the Chhota Bheem case example and other Indian animated shows (Motu Patlu) to identify culturally effective environmental storytelling strategies.

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