

Developing Ecological and Spiritual Consciousness through Girish Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain*

(A Constructive Approach Towards Sustainability)

AUTHORS: Deepali Seth¹, Dr. Sonal Singh², Prof. J.K. Verma³

AFFILIATIONS:

¹Deepali Seth, Research Scholar, Department of English Studies, Faculty of Arts, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India.

²Dr. Sonal Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of English Studies, Faculty of Arts, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India.

³Prof. J.K. Verma, Head of the Department, Department of English Studies, Faculty of Arts, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract

With the study of Girish Karnad's, *The Fire and the Rain*, which is structured within the principles of the Constructive Approach, educators will be able to help their learners, develop an understanding of the environment and their spiritual selves. In an endeavour to assist our learners, this research work develops a conscience-driven perspective that will benefit them towards becoming better citizens. The capacity of the learners to develop both environmental and spiritual consciousness can be aided by potent dramas like "*The Fire and The Rain*." The present research study makes our learners more conscious of their effects on the environment and the need to maintain its delicate balance by thinking about the individuals and their perspectives on nature. We can develop a deeper sense of responsibility for the natural environment and a greater understanding of its value and beauty by realising how everything is interconnected.

Keywords: Girish Karnad, Ecological Consciousness, Constructive Approach, *The Fire and the Rain*, Spiritual Consciousness

Introduction

A learner-centred approach that emphasises active involvement and the development of knowledge via personal

experiences and reflection is referred to as a constructive approach to teaching and learning. Constructivism, a learning theory

that contends that learners actively design their knowledge based on their experiences and past knowledge, is the foundation of this approach to learning. According to the constructivist theory of education, learners should be recognised as unique individuals and allowed to collaborate with others while learning through observation, discussions, and collaborative endeavours. (Mascolo & Fischer, 2005). Hence, integrated intersubjective interpretation leads to an in-depth analysis of the subject being taught. Being a researcher in the field of Drama, I acknowledge the fact that through dramatic explorations and techniques, learners can master their knowledge along with reasoning, creativity and development of their interpersonal skills.

The *UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity* mentions, "Culture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual. Therefore, Arts Education is a universal human right for all learners." With this, we can comprehend that drama is a potent medium that enhances the critical, analytical and reflective skills of learners and helps them in becoming conscience-

driven individuals. Downing Cless in his introduction to his book *Ecology and Environment in European Drama* argues that "Although theatre is largely human-centred" the drama can "powerfully bring on stage the other-than-human world and its endangerment" (1).

Therefore, an attempt is being made through the present study to understand Karnad's vision of developing ecological and spiritual consciousness in his readers/audience depicted through the plot structure, themes and characters of his play *The Fire and the Rain* (1994).

Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain* (1994) brings to the foreground the abiotic and biotic sphere of the natural environment on the stage. The title of the play mentions the abiotic elements, i.e., fire (*tejas*) and rain/water (*jala*), out of the five basic elements – the *panchmahabhutas* – that are life-sustaining elements of Nature. This paper tries to analyse the symbiotic association between the human and non-human spheres of the biosphere and its importance in establishing ecological consciousness and sensitivity among learners. As mentioned in the article entitled *Ecological Thinking*,

Consciousness, Responsibility, Panov V.I. writes, "Ecological consciousness can be understood as a reflection of the psyche of a variety of man's relationship with nature, which mediate its behaviour in the "natural world", and express the axiological position of the subject of consciousness concerning the natural world". His studies show that environmental consciousness is a complex process that includes cognitive, regulatory, emotional, ethical, and other aspects.

It is important to mention that the play *The Fire and the Rain* (1994) emphasizes the importance of spiritual consciousness in one's life. As the play revolves around the central themes of the detrimental effects of vengeance, the absurdity of superficial knowledge, and the fragility of human nature, hence it completely aligns with the ideology of the contemporary global scenario where every individual is trapped in the vicious cycle of extracting the maximum advantage from others. In this drama, Karnad has portrayed the enigma of evil that resides within people and prevents them from moving forward in life. Hence, it becomes extremely important for educators to incorporate a sense of brotherhood among their learners

through the constructive method of teaching. The Educators must make the learners understand the essence of selfless attitude, compassion, mercy and dutifulness towards humanity and Mother Earth by Lev Vygotsky's social aspects of acquiring knowledge which believes that society and culture play an integral role in the socio-cognitive development of an individual.

Developing Ecological Consciousness among learners

Girish Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain* is a highly structured play that examines the interrelationship of a man with elemental nature and supernatural powers. In the narrative, the central conflict is around the relationship between Parvasu, Vishakha, his wife, and Yavakri who was her former lover. Besides this, the story of Aravasu and Nittilai, the hunter girl is presented in the subplot. The drama begins in a parched environment where humans and animals are starving and thirsty. Since there is no water, inhabitants of the communities are fleeing to other locations in search of food and water. Thus, elemental nature poses a long-term threat to human life from the very beginning of

the play. Here, it becomes extremely crucial for educators to develop a sense of ecological consciousness among the learners by making them understand how human actions impact the environment and the associated ecosystem.

It must be acknowledged that the approach of the two binary cultures represented by Brahmins and the tribal towards nature is completely different in the play and thus they result differently, too. The king chooses Parvasu as the chief priest and plans a Yajna rite to appease Indra and bring rain. Thus, when Yavakri returns from the forest, Parvasu has been away from his house for seven years. Like Parvasu, Yavakri also completes his penance and gains the power of supreme knowledge. But his knowledge does not alter the hatred and retaliation that fuels his inner self toward Raibhya. To take revenge, he takes advantage of Vishakha's isolation and despondent attitude. Yavakri's view regarding life in the forest also displays his overall attitude towards nature. As he says:

YAVAKRI: ... life in the jungle is sheer hell. Flies, giant ants, beetles, pests,

leeches attacking at the suspicion of moisture, and vipers lurking in the bowls of dust. The relentless heat, not demons but mosquitoes to torture you— ("Fire and Rain" 119)

As a result, the forest is malevolent to Yavakri while appearing beneficent to Nittilai, the hunter girl. The contrast in the attitudes of both the binaries is present due to the difference in the outlook of the two classes of the society: the upper Brahmin class and the lower tribal class. Nittilai, like any indigenous girl, is well versed in the ways of the forest's wild animals since she can identify every species by its odour, sound, or footprints. In such cases, the cognitive, ethical and emotional aspects of an individual are all regulated through the lens of ecological consciousness. Not only are the 'two worlds, running parallel to each other, totally different in "the religious beliefs and practices" but also in their attitude to the elemental nature (Chatterjee 169).

Nittilai is considered to be the daughter of the forest. As the tribal hunters are accustomed to living in the forest, the

portrayal of the forest and Nittilai's close relationship with it is a faithful reflection of truth. Thus, the tribal community and the forest share a symbiotic association and this could be examined through the lens of sustainability. For better sustenance on planet Earth, a counter co-dependence must exist between the human and non-human spheres of the biosphere.

The learners can observe the existence of the forest as an offstage character in the life of Nittilai who is never out of food and water, even during the catastrophic hours of her life. Even in this crisis, she depends upon the forest to hide where she will be safe enough as the forest is like a home to her. Similarly, one must address the interdependence of humans on the rich sources of energy provided by Nature for survival and thus make an effort in becoming more in touch with Nature and develop a value system which prioritises the environment above our individual needs.

Through the character of Nittilai, educators can make their learners understand that one must discover potential methods to achieve sustainable development and understand the co-

dependence of humans and the environment.

Developing Spiritual Consciousness among learners

Through, the play *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad has also endeavoured to establish the importance of Spiritual Consciousness. Here, the narrative of Yavakri projects how in the absence of spiritual consciousness, people tend to misuse the knowledge and intellectual capacities they acquire from the Gods through rigorous penance. Unlike the other self-centred characters, Aravasu who belongs to a lower class is enlightened enough to use his knowledge in the right way and starts his penance and worships the Sun God to save the life of others. The character of Nittilai is also portrayed as a strong individual who despite being a tribal girl stands out in comparison to other learned characters of the play. According to her, if Yavakri's knowledge does not help people with their basic and acute problem of drought, it is futile.

Through these instances, educators can make their learners understand the purpose of human existence for the betterment of oneself and society, at large.

The human spirit can reach higher levels of consciousness and is thus meant for a higher purpose. With these trivial actions of inhumanity as shown in the play, individuals lose their essence of existence and perform demonic acts out of revenge and for worldly pleasures. An insight into the spiritual dimension of a man will help the learners to awaken the spiritual consciousness in themselves. The research conducted by Daniel Olsson on Student sustainability consciousness (2018) reveals that the knowingness of an individual develops the right attitude which leads to the development of the corresponding behaviour and thus results in the righteous actions of an individual.

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be concluded that Girish Karnad played a pivotal role in enlightening his readers/audience from the ecological and spiritual perspectives through his play *The Fire and the Rain*. From the aspects of teaching drama also, it can be established that educators can employ a constructive approach in teaching this play to attain the objective of developing ecological and spiritual consciousness among the learners.

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