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**Complexities in Heterosexual Relationships: A Study of Girish Karnad's  
Nagamandala and Hayavadana**

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**Abstract:**

This article explores the complexities and difficulties in the heterosexual relationships through the selected plays of Girish Karnad. The selected plays are *Nagamandala* and *Hayavadana* which portray the complex relationship between men and women. This article analyses the psychological and social factors that make the relationship complex. The main objective of this article is to show how the society influences the men and women in a relationship. This also aims to show the emotional complexities in the heterosexual relationships. This article not only talks about the marital relationship but also the other illicit affairs. Case studies and secondary sources are used in this article to give the deeper exploration of the complexities in these interrelationships.

**Keywords:** Complexities, heterosexual, relationships, psychological, society

**Introduction**

Heterosexual relationship is a consensual relationship between opposite genders. Like all interpersonal relationships, these involve various complexities which arise from a combination of psychological, social, cultural and personal factors. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, heterosexual relationship is "of, relating to, or characterized by sexual or romantic attraction to or between people of the opposite sex". (7) In recent years, divorce rate has been raised in India by 30-40 percentage. Men and women, being emotionally incompatible pave way for misunderstanding. One of the key factors contributing to this issue is lack of reciprocation and ineffective communication. Having different communication styles lead to conflicts and unmet expectations. Due to this, there arises insecurity and lack of trust which further leads to accusations. According to Dr James Scott, "Having expectations isn't a bad thing, but not communicating expectations while still holding someone accountable to them creates trouble." (13)

Though these complexities arise by personal interference, family expectations and societal influence also significantly shape the relationship dynamics. Family and society have strong opinions in relationships especially when it comes to marriage. External pressures from these two institutions lead to potential conflicts within the marital relationship. According to Oscar Wilde, "Ultimately the bond of all companionship, whether in marriage or in friendship, is conversation". (12) Married people face various complexities in their relationships. These challenges vary depending on the individuals, their circumstances and the society. According to the society, men have to maintain their financial status whereas women have to take care of the family. The cultural differences also play an important role in shaping an "individual's perception and expectations regarding marriage and family". (3) In this article, these problems will be dealt with in detail using Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* and *Hayavadana*.

Girish Karnad, a distinguished Indian playwright, director and actor has made remarkable contributions to Indian literature and theatre. His plays widely regarded as significant in the post-independence era. He skillfully integrates History, Mythology and folklore to address contemporary societal issues. By employing traditional storytelling techniques, he presents human emotions in a manner that resonates with modern audience. His themes allow for a critical examination of gender roles, identity crisis and the nature of relationships. He has received the Jnanpith Award for his contributions to Literature and Theatre in 1999. He has received Sahitya Akademi Award in 1972 for his play *Yayati*. In recognition of his outstanding contributions to the Arts, he has received Padma Shri in 1974 and Padma Bhushan in 1992. He is also honored with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1998 for his contribution to Theatre. He has received many honors and awards not only in Literature but also in Cinema. In 1971, he has received the National Film Award for his film *Vamsha Vriksha*. His awards reflect his contributions to Indian Literature, Theatre and Cinema. M.K. Choudhury appreciates Karnad's contribution to the growth of Indian English Literature by saying "Karnad's drama offers a spectacular views of the ills of the self-divided orthodox and tradition bound Indian society at different levels-social, political and metaphysical". (234)(1)

The two selected works of Girish Karnad highlight the dynamics between love, societal norms and personal desires. In these two works, the complexities, being shaped by the personal emotions and the societal expectations, underscore the conflicts in the relationship. The amalgamation of both the traditional and western aspects is seen. These works delve deeply into the complexities of heterosexual relationships and also explore the themes of love and desire. Due to the fluidity of human emotions, the conflict arises between the characters in the plays. The strategic use of allegory provides deeper insights into the psychological desires of the characters.

### **Complexities in Heterosexual Relationships**

*Nagamandala*, a feminist play, questions the rigid norms of marriage and gender roles in Indian society. "Nagamandala is a folktale transformed into the metaphor of the married woman." (Ghosh 2) (5). The story revolves around Rani who has been trapped by her

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husband Appanna after marriage.Naga,being a non-human, wins the love of Rani and changes her life.He disguises as her husband and visits her every night.The conflict arises when Rani becomes pregnant by Naga.The play effectively represents the themes of love,desire,transformation and power.The skillful blend of mythology with contemporary themes challenges the traditional perspectives on gender roles.This play has received Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award in 1989.

*Hayavadana*, a philosophical play,explores the themes of identity and human desire.The plot revolves around three major characters Kapila, Devadatta and Padmini.Kapila and Devadatta shares their love for Padmini.Their lives have completely changed after the interchange of heads between the two men.This play shows the conflict between mind,body and soul.This play has received Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1972.P.Dhanavel says “*Hayavadana* is to Indian drama what James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is to the Western novel”.(122)(2)

The primary conflict in both the plays revolves around the theme of fluidity..As appearances always deceive,Rani mistakes Naga for her husband.Despite her loyalty,her husband accuses her.Their relationship lacks trust and intimacy. In *Hayavadana*,though Padmini marries Devadatta,she admires Kapila.This leads to the conflict in their relationship.Padmini loves both Devadatta and Kapila.She admires the mental ability of Devadatta and physical fitness of Kapila.This play highlights the instability of Padmini’s emotions and desires,showcasing her internal conflicts and evolving affections.

In *Nagamandala* and *Hayavadana*,Appanna and Padmini being self-centered , demonstrating a lack of regard for their partner’s emotion.Lack of understanding and love leads to the failure of their marriages.In *Nagamandala*,Appanna says“Look,I don’t like idle chatter.Do as you are told,you understand?” to Rani(*Nagamandala* 7).He treats her like a doll and expects her to obey his words.Appanna does not care about Rani and he goes behind the whore. In this relationship ,Appanna’s emotions take precedence and his desires hold greater significance and worth.

When it comes to the relationship between Naga and Rani,the desires of both deem significance.Naga says“If you want me to stay,tell me why.If you want me to go,say why.” to Rani(*NG* 23) .Rani ,being ignorant ,sows seed for the conflict in their relationship.Appanna uses her lack of understanding and knowledge about marriage and goes behind the whore.Initially,Rani exhibits a fear of intimacy,reflecting her emotional hesitation and vulnerability informing deep connections.However,as Rani becomes more comfortable and emotionally fulfilled with Naga,this leads to the conflict in the relationship.

In *Hayavadana*,Padmini hides her love for Kapila.Though Devadatta knows about it,he does not enquire Padmini .He has assumed and sacrificed himself.She neither cares about Devadatta nor Kapila. When they both have sacrificed themselves,she says,“They’ll all say the two fought and died for this whore.They’re bound to say it.Then what’ll happen to

me?”. (HD 31)

Padmini prioritises her own life over her partner's. This demonstrating a lack of true love and commitment in both her relationships. It is evident that Devadatta is not fully content with Padmini. But unlike her, he remains loyal to their relationship. “Devadatta is a scholar and a poet, so he symbolises thought or mind or head in the play.” (Gill 99)(6). In the forest, she sees Kapila and says “Your body gave him to me.” ( HD 54)(2). She asserts that her son is born from Devadatta's body, which is now possessed by Kapila. Her behavior clearly demonstrates the absence of loyalty to her husband.

According to the Triangular Theory of Love, the interpersonal personal relationship should possess “an intimacy component, a passionate component, and a commitment component.” (Sternberg 332)(11). But the heterosexual relationship in both the plays lack these three components. Though this constitutes only their personal influences, the other societal influences are also there.

In *Nagamandala*, Appanna says “You shame me in front of the whole village, you darken my face, you slut - -!” to Rani (NG 36). This shows how Appanna does not want other people to think badly about their relationship. In spite of his disloyalty, he accuses Rani. The society forces him to throw her out. The societal norms always expect women to be loyal and not men. Likewise in *Hayavadana*, Padmini fears only about the society after the death of Devadatta and Kapila. She does not want others to accuse her for their death. This shows how society plays a crucial role in a relationship.

In the same way, in Karnad's *Yayati*, he uses a myth from Mahabharata which explores the themes of desire, power and sacrifice within the framework of heterosexual relationships. The play *Yayati* delves into the conflicts between personal aspirations and social obligations, revealing the intricate and oppressive dynamics that govern both the romantic and marital relationships. Despite being married to Devayani, Yayati's uncontrollable attraction to Sharmishtha leads to various conflicts in the play. Sharmishtha belongs to the lower strata of society. His illicit affair creates a triangular dynamic that complicates the notions of passion, loyalty and commitment. Yayati faces an ethical dilemma whether to conform to his duties as a king or to his personal desires.

Devayani marries him with a lot of expectations but he shatters all her dreams by having an affair with Sharmishtha. On the other hand, though Sharmishtha shares a romantic relationship with Yayati, she remains socially inferior to Devayani. Karnad presents marriage in *Yayati* as a social contract rather than a romantic relationship. The dissatisfaction of Yayati with his marriage and his pursuit of pleasure outside the marriage expose the emotional void in his relationship. Being in a patriarchal society, men blame women for all their follies. Even in this play, Yayati blames Sharmishtha for his mistakes. He says “You are the cause of all this. You are responsible. You trapped me with your wiles.” (YT 42)

The plays of Karnad highlights how marriage, far from being a sacred bond of love, often becomes a dissatisfaction. By using mythologies in his plays, Karnad universalises the themes of love and loyalty across different cultures and eras. Despite their publication years, all the three plays share the similar complexities when it comes to interpersonal relationships. These plays force the audience to question the foundations of love, marriage and commitment. S.R. Jalote says, "Instead of becoming emotionally involved in the stage action, the spectator should remain a dispassionate observer and judge." (264)(8)

### **Conclusion**

Both the plays explore the complexities in heterosexual relationships, revealing the tensions between desires and societal expectations. In *Nagamandala*, the power dynamics within the relationship highlight the themes of oppression and transformation. Similarly, *Hayavadana* examines the instability of human emotions in a relationship, particularly focussing on the themes of physical and mental struggles in a relationship. Both plays challenge the traditional notions of love and commitment and also illustrate that relationships are not only shaped by inner conflicts but also by external factors. Through Karnad's rich narratives, these plays underscore the fluidity and the unpredictability of human emotions.

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