

# LESBIANISM IN THE LIGHT OF SARAH WATER'S FINGERSMITH

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## Abstract

*The present study discusses the life of a lesbian and the reasons of lesbianism as shown in Sarah Waters' novel, Fingersmith. The author's portrayal of the character in this novel is the only way to analyse the challenges of lesbians and their sexual illness. Prejudice, stereotyping, and minority stress may all affect lesbians' physical and emotional health. The creation of lesbian partnerships and families is also influenced by political and social perspectives. It's a novel subject in both fiction and reality. The researcher's aim with this issue is to figure out why lesbianism occurs and how it spreads in society.*

**Key Words:** Lesbian, Feminism, Post-modernism, First-love, Minority.

## INTRODUCTION

There are several ways to convey one's thoughts and preferences, as well as one's place in society. Each individual has a tale to tell. Each narrative reveals an individual's identity. Numerous factors may contribute to individuals being melancholy, disoriented, or exhausted. That is why it is necessary to have someone share one's tale. Literature may be used to paint a picture of someone's life in an effort to make sense of it. It is one of humanity's most universal and great inventions in terms of transmitting emotion, soul, or intelligence. Experience is the primary source material for literature. Numerous writers attempt to communicate their opinions via writing about what they have encountered in their life or about what is occurring around them and in the lives of others in their community. Literature aids in personal and intellectual development by providing an objective foundation of knowledge and comprehension.

In general, novels may depict the realities of everyday life and so serve as a record for studying societal concerns. Even the authors may have been inspired by something they saw in the real world that subsequently became the basis for a literary piece of art. The rise of lesbianism as a social phenomenon began in the nineteenth century, and since then it has been a prominent topic of discussion in our culture.

## LESBIANISM

Lesbians are defined in a variety of ways. According to Anna Koedth, lesbianism is "the sexual and romantic yearning of females". In another definition, some writers discuss lesbians. According to Simon Salomon, a lesbian is "a female who is gay or a female who has romantic feelings or sexual desire for other females". The word lesbian is Representation of Lesbian Relationships in Sarah Water's also used to indicate sexual identity or sexual behaviour independent of sexual orientation, or as an adjective to describe or correlate nouns with female or same sex desire.

## THE FACTORS CAUSING LESBIAN

Both mental and physical factors might contribute to lesbianism. Many times, a person displays lesbian characteristics as early as infancy. Lesbian mind is hampered by certain physical circumstances. Lesbianism is not a mental disease, although it has been shown that it is a mental orientation rather than a physical aberration. According to psychology, a large majority of lesbians experience gay impulses as a regression to earlier phases of development. A girl may become a lesbian if she spends more time with another female or girl than she does with a guy. On the other side, if a female dislikes a guy or males for any reason, she may become a

lesbian. Lesbianism may result from an unusual connection to a female or from dislike of guys. Sexual impairments of various types are among the physical causes. In general, homosexuality did not develop for a long time and then became a sedentary behaviour, resulting in anomalies. In such circumstances, as well as in the case of a more severe occurrence, one should seek medical treatment and spiritual assistance from a psychiatrist or psychologist. As a result, lesbians are cognitively and psychologically sound; they just have a different sexual preference. Lesbians' psychological health is, of course, heavily impacted by their social lives. The pressure on her to recognise or embrace her identity inspired the word lesbian. Pressure may come from a variety of sources, including individuals, their families, their communities, their jobs, and society. As a result, many lesbians experience psychological strain as a result of their sexual orientation. Feelings such as shyness, insecurity, guilt, insignificance, and difference are among them.

One of the things that leads to lesbian love is the man's cruel and inhumane treatment of the women, which causes psychological damage to the women on a regular basis. As a result, women are more likely to choose to be lesbians. Typically, women who have experienced sexual violence from men and have not appreciated it, have lost faith in men, and when confronted with an environment in which there are individuals who are also instilling hatred against men, a sense of kinship develops, causing the feelings of two women to become more closely linked.

### THE LIFE OF LESBIAN PORTRAYED IN SARAH WATER'S NOVEL FINGERSMITH

*Fingersmith* is one of many works that address lesbianism. Sarah Waters is the author of the book *Fingersmith*. This book debuted in 2002. It is a Victorian-inspired criminal fiction storey set mostly in nineteenth-century London. Indeed, the term "Fingersmith" refers to a minor thief. Additionally, the term "Fingersmith" may apply to someone who has mastered a talent that requires the use of one's fingers. This tale is about two ladies from different worlds who are pulled together in this historical drama by hardship and forbidden passions. Waters wishes to demonstrate the lesbian's existence at that age with the book *Fingersmith*.

Susan Trinder, the main character in *Fingersmith*, is lesbian. This character's female homosexuality is not passed down from parents, but rather the result of a lot of different things. Susan Trinder, also known as Sue, has lived a rough life with other criminals. This has made her a good thief because she knows how to get what she wants quickly. She is known as a Fingersmith because of her skill and dexterity with her hands.

Sue lives with her two adoptive brothers, who are taken care of by her mother, and they are all very happy. Sue's unpleasant experience makes her more determined to face the truth. The way her mother has raised her is that she is a money machine. They are better than the boys because she always tries to get money. There are three ways to look at *Fingersmith*, and each one is different. Susan Trinder's point of view is shown in the first section.

My name, in those days, was Susan Trinder. People called me Sue. I know the year I was born in, but for many years I did not know the date, and took my birthday at Christmas. I believe I am an orphan. My mother I know is dead. But I never saw her, she was nothing to me. (Fingersmith,3)

The author has detailed the state of the main character. She is said to be unaware of her date of birth. She chose Christmas night as her birthday since it is a joyous time for everyone. Her mother is also reported to have passed away. She is unconcerned about her biological parent. She doesn't seem to mind since Mrs. Sucksby is hers. In the beginning, it is revealed that Sue's mother committed suicide by hanging herself. She is embroiled in a controversy with a London Nob in Borough's Lant Street. Because there are no police or courts at the time, individuals who commit such a heinous crime will face the death penalty. Sue is left in the care of Mrs. Sucksby. Sue's mother is a brilliant thief, as Waters recounts in the novel. Sue's mother kissing her before handing her over to the baby sitter expresses her love for her daughter, yet she must leave Sue due to their financial situation. Waters makes no mention of Sue's ancestors. Sue's father is never mentioned by her. Ironically, it is possible to deduce that she is a child from an illicit relationship. Sue may mourn her biological mother, but she has a deep resentment for her since she believes her mother abandoned her. So, what makes her fall in love with a gay man? It will be covered in detail in the following sub-chapters.

The bond between a maid and her master is the starting point for this novel's lesbian love tale. From the above remark, it may be deduced that lesbian love has no regard for social standing or class. It is the polar opposite of the Victorian era's reality. In that age, a lady would only marry a guy of her own social level. Only a gentleman will be married by a woman. Lesbian love is, on average, purer than male-female love. The writer attempts to illustrate the first time the two ladies meet till they fall in love. Maud's personal maid, Sue, works for her. Maud is a wealthy young girl who will inherit her family's fortune once she marries. Sue works at that home for a variety of reasons, the first of which is the large pay and her desire to amass a large sum of money. After Sue

meets Maud, they are altered. Sue provides and prepares whatever she needs, including removing her dress or trousers and following her everywhere she goes. Maud has been cared after and escorted by nurses at the Mental Asylum since she was a youngster. It causes her to grow reliant on someone. When there is someone near her, she is at ease.

Day by day, their proximity draws them closer and closer together, as if they were siblings. Furthermore, the sensation shifts from sisterhood to intense love, exactly as it does between a man and a woman. They do not want to lose each other. Sue, as well as Maud, secretly look after each other. Sue's concern for Maud is something Maud admires. Sue has an uncanny ability to treat her in a unique manner. Sue brushes her hair, takes off her clothes, walks with her, and makes her feel cherished. The more days pass, the more she loves Sue, and Sue, who admires Maud's beauty and body form, feels the same way. Maud has nightmares till midnight. Sue, who is in the room next to Maud's, hears Maud's scream and rushes over to her. Maud wants Sue to sleep in that room with her because she is afraid. Sue listens to Maud, but she is terrified of Maud's uncle, who would be angry if he finds out. He believes that a maid does not have the right to sleep in the same room as her mistress. Sue maintains a distance from Maud due of her changing behaviour. Maud persuades her to chat more regularly, invites her to dance with her, and lends Sue her lovely gown. Until Sue begs her to touch her one night. Sue is asked by Maud to describe how a guy touches a lady on their wedding night.

She wet her mouth. 'Do you think me good?' she said. 'I wish you would tell me, 'She said, 'what it is a wife must do, on her wedding-night!' Then I felt her make herself steady. 'I think,' she said, in a flat, unnatural voice, 'I think he will kiss me. Will he do that?' Again, I felt her breath on my face. I felt the word, kiss. Again, I blushed. 'Will he?' she said. 'Yes, miss.' I felt her nod. 'On my cheek?' she said. 'My mouth?' 'On your mouth, I should say.' 'On my mouth. Of course...' She lifted her hands to her face: I saw at last, through the darkness, the whiteness of her gloves, heard the brushing of her fingers across her lips. The sound seemed greater than it ought to have done. The bed seemed closer and blacker than ever. I wished the rush-light had not burned out. I wished—I think it was the only time I ever did—that the clock would chime. There was only the silence, with her breath in it. Only the darkness, and her pale hands. The world might have shrunk, or fallen away. (Fingersmith, 147)

The strange thing is that Sue does not object. She excels at it. From a biological standpoint, Maud and Sue function as man and woman. Sue is asked by Maud to play a guy who adores her. Their passions are constantly visible in the way they gaze at one other and laugh. The garden is the safest spot to enjoy their proximity. It's an area where Maud used to go to paint and hunt for ideas. Maud's uncle and head of maids are likewise unaware of the location. They express their passionate love in Maud's chamber as well as in the yard.

'My lips?' she answered, in a tone of surprise. 'They are here.' I found them, and kissed her. 'Don't be frightened,' I said at once. That's what I thought. So, I kissed her again. Then I touched her. I touched her face. I began at the meeting of our mouths—at the soft wet corners of our lips—then found her jaw, her cheek, her brow—I had touched her before, to wash and dress her; but never like this. So smooth she was! So warm! It was like I was calling the heat and shape of her out of the darkness—as if the darkness was turning solid and growing quick, under my hand. She began to shake. I supposed she was still afraid. Then I began to shake, too. (Fingersmith, 149)

Sue forgets about herself and her initial purpose as a maid at the Briar because of their bliss. A young artist called Richard Rivers proposes to Maud as his wife a few weeks later. Maud, who despises him, rejects the proposition. Richard Rivers does not lose up; instead, he proposes Maud's uncle, Christopher Lily, as a potential spouse for his lovely niece. Christopher Lily persuades Maud to accept Rivers' proposal because of Rivers' family history. Maud has no choice but to do what her uncle commands. Sue's heart breaks as she accepts Rivers' proposal. She is distressed.

If I had said, I love you, she would have said it back; and everything would have changed. But if I did that, she'd find me out for the villain I was. I thought of telling her the truth; and trembled harder. I couldn't do it. She was too simple. She was too good. If there had only been some stain upon her, some speck of badness in her heart—! But there was nothing. Only that crimson bruise. A single kiss had made it. How would she do, in the Borough? (Fingersmith, 245)

Sue has yet to hear about this from Maud. She does not want to let Sue down. Their blazing love's fervour has waned. Maud chooses to remain in tomorrow instead of reading a book to her uncle's visitors. She then intends to explain everything to Sue. She wants to inform Sue that that is not her intention. Maud approaches Sue a few days before her wedding and informs her that she will be married. Maud informs her that it is not her will, and she is asked to respect her position. Sue feels deceived by her adored one after hearing the tale. In front of Maud, she appears to be cheerful. They grin, but their thoughts are still pondering the next step. Sue believes

that her life should return to her childhood home, which she has practically forgotten. Her mother, she imagines, will be unhappy when she returns without any pennies in her hand. Maud attempts to taunt and amuse her since her early ambition was to get a lot of money by working and stealing. Maud then provides a last impression to Sue, the one she loves, in the dead of night. Sue sees herself as a servant, and Maud as her Mistress, hence Maud is more forceful in making love. Both of them are tormented by their fear of being apart. They hug one other throughout the night, as though the death angel is about to take them up.

Sue returns to London, to her adoptive mother, Mrs. Suksby, when Maud marries Richard Rivers and leaves her uncle. A year later, word gets out that Maud's marriage isn't working. Her spouse has betrayed her. Rivers proposes Maud since he knows she will receive her family's whole fortune. He departs Maud after acquiring all of Maud's assets. On Rivers, a horrible event happens: he is slain by a baby day care in London. Maud returns to Briar as a result of the accident. Maud subsequently learns that her uncle has died, and because she is still Lily's heir, she decides to remain with her maids. Sue travels to Briar after learning that Maud has returned. Maud is taken aback when she sees Sue, the woman she loves and misses, standing right in front of her.

I looked at her, not understanding. I looked at the paper in her hand. Then my heart missed its beat. 'You are writing books, like his!', I said. She nodded, not speaking. Her face was grave. I don't know how my face seemed. I think it was burning. 'Books, like that!', I said. 'I can't believe it. Of all the ways I thought I'd find you— And then, to find you here, all on your own in this great house—' (Fingersmith, 527)

Sue's inquiry is really about why she hasn't remarried and started a new family. Maud, who is aware of the situation, admits that she is waiting for someone. Sue is being awaited by Maud. Sue is unflappable in her demeanour. Maud can tell by her look that she is dissatisfied with Maud. Maud is someone she despises.

'Hate you!', I said. 'When I have fifty proper reasons for hating you, already; and only—' Only love you, I wanted to say. I didn't say it, though. What can I tell you? If she could still be proud, then so, for now, could I... I didn't need to say it, anyway: she could read the words in my face. Her colour changed, her gaze grew clearer. (Fingersmith 582)

Sue still has feelings for Maud, as shown by the passage above. Her heart is covered with disappointment and anger. Maud is her favourite. Her love is unadulterated. They remain quiet for a long, staring at one other. They embraced and kissed a few minutes later, releasing all the aching feelings. The maids learn that Maud Lily and Susan Trinder are lovers. They hope their love will endure a lifetime. And they resolve to stay in Briar, guiding one another until death comes to claim them.

The life of a lesbian represented in Sarah Waters' novel *Fingersmith* is identical to that of a regular person. Lesbian couples often have private spaces in which to express their desires, such as their garden or bedroom. To pass the time, they discuss, chat, and laugh about a variety of topics. In their discourse, they do not discuss their biological desires. Waters shows a lesbian couple from various socio-economic backgrounds whose familial backgrounds are virtually identical in this study. The plot is on a gorgeous woman who falls in love with a servant whom her family eventually rejects. A lesbian prefers to keep her love life private, but she is interested in hearing about her friend's love life. Lesbians who have experienced trauma frequently avoid direct contact with males.

*Fingersmith*, set in the Victorian era, is a kind of lesbian novel. Many sources in that period talked on the trust in plurality and how lesbians came to exist. Waters seems to shatter people's perceptions by stating that lesbians existed in the Victorian era. Many causes contribute to the presence of lesbian love in the Victorian era.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, it is observed from this study that Lesbians are influenced by three factors: social status, violence, and the surrounding environment. Sue, the story's central character, takes a job as a personal aide in order to better her lot in life. Even though she has a better life than her uncle and husband, Maud Lily's experience with mental and physical violence has left her with a pessimistic outlook on men. Sue, like her, has made a promise to herself to find a lady to love. Some violence has left her scarred. They are drawn together by their likeness and decide to spend the rest of their lives together as lovers.

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