

Lesbianism and Cultural Erosion in Claire. G. Coleman's *Enclave*

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ABSTRACT

This research article aims to analyse the well-being of humanity in adhering to one's own culture and identity. Though humans are exposed to various cultures, at times intrusion of Eurocentric culture of the Coloniser can result in the erosion of native culture and identity of the colonised Aboriginals. Similarly, due to the impact of the colonisation, Australian Aboriginals lost their own culture and ethos. Claire G. Coleman, the Australian Aboriginal writer, in her novel *Enclave*, brings out the perils of cultural erosion caused to the Australian Aboriginal culture and community. The paper also discusses the harsh realities of racism, homophobia, and the destruction caused to the cultural values of the Aboriginals of Western Australia. The very opening of the novel introduces the protagonist Christine who enrolls herself in

university for her master's degree in mathematics. Christine's father gifts his daughter an apartment for her twenty first birthday. But unfortunately, Christine forms a lesbian relationship with Sienna, and her father punishes her by seizing the apartment from her. A lesbian relationship in the Australian aboriginal community is considered a taboo and the writer, through the characters Christine, Sienna and Christine's mother, highlights the difficulties experienced by lesbian women and warns against the havoc caused to the Aboriginal societies and the threat caused to the humanity.

Keywords: Humanity, Identity, Culture, Ethos, Colonizer, Eurocentric, Intrusion.

Lesbianism is the tendency of having sexual and emotional attraction between females. Like heterosexual orientation, homosexual orientations also produce a variety of behavioural changes in society. Lesbians feel love and sympathy for other lesbians in society. Further, lesbians also undergo racial prejudice and society discriminates against them because of the crisis in their sexual identity which is considered taboo. In the contemporary society lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer LGBTQ persons are discriminated in a variety of ways. LGBTQ communities encompass a variety of sexual orientation and self- identifications.

Stigmatization, social discrimination, and minority status can cause more problems and make them feel more oppressed. In an article, "Understanding the Concept of Lesbianism: To Social Phenomenon" the writers discuss the problems faced by lesbians in society as follows:

For many years, women have undergone oppression throughout their life. They have met oppressions from public and private spheres such as the workplace, academic field, family surroundings and social circles. In addition to this, if a woman is found as lesbian and chooses to lead a life with her fellow woman, she inherently becomes a victim and doubly oppressed as a

woman and as a lesbian. Female homosexuals experience numerous violence, stigmatisation and discrimination due to their sexual orientation (1006).

Most of the homosexual people are forced to hide their gender identity or conceal their sexual orientation. To escape from society, some lesbians hide or deny their lesbian orientation and get ready to marry a heterosexual partner, to be accepted by their families and communities. They are afraid of being discriminated against by their family, friends and society. Revealing their true gender identity results in abuse, discrimination, forced marriages, etc. In the book *Fleeing Homophobia: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Asylum*, Sabine Jansen opines:

In large parts of the world people feel compelled to hide or conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity. They stay 'in the closet,' because they fear harm from others: their family members, friends, neighbours, society in general or state authorities. The reactions to disclosure ('coming out') can take the form of abuse, discrimination, forced marriage, torture, rape, murder, etc. (1).

Lesbians are more often affected by mental and physical issues. This results due to lack of understanding about lesbian sexuality on women's health. Like many gay men, many lesbians in long time relationships have grief over the lack of legal recognition of same sex unions. Further, sexual orientations are also determined by the combination of biological, environmental and psychological factors.

In the novel *Enclave*, Claire. G. Coleman introduces the character Christine who enrolls in the university. In the very beginning of the novel, Christine dreams of the harsh realities faced by the aboriginal people and fears about the impending dangers from the outside world. Coleman brings out the horrors of war which takes place in the aboriginal society as, "The criminals, the murderers, the attackers, the rioters, the thieves, the people shot by police for carrying guns were all the colour of the staff who had just walked into the door" (71).

Christine gets frightened about the criminal activities and bothers about the condition of people outside her world, because of her lesbian relationship with Sienna. Christine's father gives his daughter an apartment for her twenty first birthday and has great expectations from Christine regarding her university marks. Her father remarks, "It's connected to the trust I set up for you," (Coleman 32). Christine's father envisions to make his daughter a renowned person by getting her a job in an agency, especially in the Funds. At this juncture, he says, "You should have enough to go on with until you are ready to work somewhere. I am sure I can find you a position somewhere in the Fund" (Coleman 32).

Christine's mother wants her daughter to be more attractive and makes her daughter ready for marriage proposals. She decides that Christine should groom herself as she advises, "Perhaps you could have gone and had a haircut. You need to get rid of that ridiculous student hair; maybe have a choice to find a husband" (Coleman 13). Christine rejects the idea of her mother and her suggestion of getting married. Moreover, she cannot marry any man. To avoid the sneer and mock of society, she confines her lesbian identity, by saying that she would marry her boyfriend, Jack. The incident is described as "She could not imagine marrying anybody. But the other girls mocked and laughed at her so she learned to say she would marry Jack" (Coleman 49). Homosexual individuals often conceal their sexual orientation and try to marry heterosexuals to avoid social violence. In fact, Christine and Jack are only friends who are closely associated with each other in the research process. But unfortunately, Christine gets attracted to a brown-skinned maidservant working in her home. She identifies herself as a lesbian and intentionally has a sexual relationship with the servant Sienna. Lesbian orientation is vividly exposed in the novel *Enclave* as follows: On impulse, she half sat, draped an arm around the woman and kissed her hard, like she had done only once before with a boy. That time, it had been sticky and slimy, his tongue attacking her mouth. She had felt sick. She had told everybody she was never going to marry, because the words 'you may kiss the bride' made her feel ill (Coleman 104).

When Christine has a sexual encounter with her boyfriend, she feels a sort of discomfort and she hates the encounter forever. It even creates a nightmare for her to think about marriage and have physical contact with her boyfriend. Sienna warns Christine about the situation. The situation becomes worse when Christine's father comes to know about their lesbian relationship. Sienna says, "We are both in danger. I don't know what to do, but I have to warn you. I could lose my job. I need this job. If your parents knew, I don't know what they would do" (Coleman 108).

The above incidents clearly illustrate how the family and society ostracize lesbian partners. Lesbians feel disapproval not only from society but also in the working place. Agency man who works in the Funds spies and informs their sexual activities to Christine's father. Christine's father gets disappointed and out of his anger, he scolds his daughter for having a lesbian relationship with a black girl as, "I saw you kissing that black . . . that animal. I saw you. My own daughter, a filthy dyke, a monster, an Abo lover" (Coleman 114).

Coleman brings out this unapproved relationship between Christine and Sienna which makes them desperate. Further, the writer brings out the harsh realities of alcoholism which further affects the mind of the Aboriginals which is realistically depicted in the novel. Australian aboriginals consider their spirituality and ethos as the essence of Australian culture and society with the collective wisdom and spirituality. Culture binds people together with society and shapes the environment for the survival of humanity. It also plays a vital role in the development of human beings, making them retain their culture and identity.

In the Australian aboriginal society, lesbian relationships are forbidden. Christine longs for the affection of her family and her friend Jack. She has no idea of marrying him but searches for lost love in her best friend Jack. Again, she searches for her brother Brandon in need of support and shelter for her survival. But in the campus buildings at the university, Brandon insults Christine and does not allow her to know about the secrets of the Business Department in the University. He ignores Christine and says, "You

can't be here" (Coleman 100). Many LGBTQ people experience social stigma, oppressions from their own families and communities and even from workplaces. They also struggle to get proper education, employment, health and even housing. Akshat Anunay in "Same Sex Marriages in India; A Complete overview" opines, "Discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals remain prevalent in Indian society, and many continue to face stigma and marginalization from their families, communities, and workplaces. Transgender individuals face multiple forms of discrimination, including limited access to education, employment, healthcare, and housing."

Lesbian relationship in the community is considered a taboo, and the writer portrays the idea of neglect and rejection through Christine's father. As a loving and responsible father, he loves Christine. But he loses hope in her completely when she takes a lesbian partner with her. The situation becomes worse when her partner is racially different from her, in colour and class. This intersectionality is very well evident through the words of Christine's father, "I look after you. I give you everything you need, everything you want. I would do anything for you and this is how you treat me, how you treat this house, this family. Kissing a woman is disgusting enough, but she is not even our people, not even our colour, not even our class" (Coleman 114).

Lesbians usually don't have a place to live in society and family because it is like violating societal norms, where the families don't accept but abuse them. Christine's father abuses her for having a relationship but her mother comforts her by bringing out her own experience. She says, "I flirted with the idea for a while when I was your age but you should have stayed with your own type, with our class, with our race. why couldn't you have done this with some girl from your school, with someone like us, like everyone else?" (Coleman 11).

The above incident highlights the fact that though lesbian relationships are considered a taboo, the discrimination becomes worse, due to race, class and gender. High rates of family rejections are

associated mostly with health outcomes because lesbian people isolate themselves even in a crowd. Lesbians are prone to high stress, depression, and anxiety in society. Coleman explores the condition of lesbians, their longings, rejection, and domestic disharmony, which make the characters more critical and suppressed in the novel. The thought of getting rejected from her parents and the isolation from them make her shed tears, "Realising she would never see them again, tears filled her eyes. She had expected to be crying over missing her parents. Not after their betrayal. Not after they had exiled her. She should hate them, but couldn't" (Coleman 154).

In the organisation, Refugees and Exiles, Christine finds herself protected and searches for accommodation. There, a lesbian woman describes her unpleasant experience as a lesbian, where a relationship between two women is considered a sin. She advises Christine that a woman marrying another woman is offensive and says, "The idea that women could marry women was so improbable that Christine was unable to process it" (Coleman 252). Christine wants to marry the lesbian woman Sienna without considering her father's rejection. Her father even goes to the extent of shouting at her and ordering the securities, to "Arrest her, lock her up!" (Coleman 304).

Sexuality is valued in religion in greater aspects in relation to definitions of marriage. The purpose of marriage is to ensure successful procreation and child rearing. As religion and spirituality is considered, same sex marriage is considered a taboo, and a sin. In *Being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Intersex and Christian*, same sex union is described in Christianity as, "Christian doctrine considers same-sex feelings and sexual practices sinful and unnatural. Regarding gender identity and expression, the idea that gender is a sociocultural and political construct is, for Christianity, a way of distorting God's original plan for the sexes." Homosexual or same sex marriages violate the order of nature, which can be a threat to the human species. Further it can cause destruction, and human species will become extinct. This society sanctions only the heterosexual concept of marrying male with a female.

Many religions like Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism all speak with more than one voice on this issue and contradict the idea of homosexuality. Cultural erosion happens due to lesbianism, and it affects society. Concerning the welfare of humans and respecting the values of culture, this paper makes the point that lesbianism should not be considered a practice to be followed in human society. Human species will not exist if lesbianism continues forever and there will be a great loss in restoring the culture.

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