

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents several sub chapters, background of the study, statements of the research problem, objectives of the study, significances of the study, scope and limitation of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Gender discrimination is happened when women are treated unfairly in society. Similarly, there are many categorial distinctions in society (Fish & Syed, 2019:6), one of them is gender and when a woman recieves an unfair treatment due to her gender here a gender discrimination is happened. Gender is a social construction that divides men and women and how they should behave to fulfill social expectations that need to be done to support society (Simoni, 2014:3). In the other words, society distinguishes that men have roles and are responsible for the public sphere, while women have responsibilities only in the domestic sphere.

These differences in gender roles cause women to experience gender discrimination that women often get limitations and rejection by society. Discrimination between men and women can be seen starting from the family to sociocultural, economic, legal, technical and educational aspects. As stated by Pilcher and Whelehan(2004:12) that women only have obligation to stay at home and look after the household, besides that, women's advancement is constantly being denied and their right is always restricted. The quotation implies that women are considered only to be able to stay at home to continue their offspring, nurture children, and care for their husbands. Whereas, men are the holders of the rules and decisions in a family, while a woman's opinion is often ignored. This kind of discrimination does not only occur within the family but also becomes the culture of society. Discrimination against women in society makes it difficult for women to obtain their rights and existence.

Gender discrimination makes women more challenging to stand up for their rights and existence since their men-dominated society that defines what it

means to be a woman. They are restricted in showing their rights and existence because they do not realize about their life, ability, and choices to get a freedom of themselves (Salamun, 2006:5). Actually, they should be allowed to acquire freedom of choice without being interfered with by public opinion or the law. Every person is free to choose who they will be and what they will be without influenced by others. It meets with Mandell (1995:12) who writes that every person has equal opportunity and civil rights. Therefore, women have to fight to gain their position, rights, and existence.

The spirit of women to realize their existence continues to grow and it is in line with the struggle of feminism. Feminism is the assertion of women's equality with men as well as their desire for access to roles and positions in public life that have previously been thought to be exclusively reserved for men (Davies, 2018:28). Feminism fights for the equality of position between men and women in terms of equality of things received, rights and obligations. Feminism argues women's weakness is not the nature of women, it is something that is born from habituation and doctrine that goes on continuously. When a woman believes in the doctrine that she needs a man for his bodily weakness, the other problem arises. As stated by Simone de Beauvoir (2010:569), after all women have been taught to accept masculine authority. It means women are taught to accept the doctrine of men as the self or the subject, making women play the role of the other. In her book *The Second Sex* (2010), Simone de Beauvoir introduces four strategies women can use to win their position as the subject or to transcendence her immanence. The first strategy used by women to obtain a subject position is to work outside the home. Women can gain financial and social freedom by working because they can meet their needs without depending on men. The second strategy is to become intellectual. Intellectual women can bring changes to the fate of themselves or other women. The third strategy is by achieving social transformation. This means that if a woman wants to gain freedom, it is not enough to be economically independent. She must be able to bring change to society. The last strategy is to refuse to internalize the otherness. Women must

refuse to internalize themselves with the point of view of the dominant group in society.

Restrictions on free choice and role of women in India have existed for a long time ago until now creates injustice for women and the inability of women to determine their own lives. India has one of the greatest rates of gender inequality in the world, claims Goel (2022:1). The inability of women to leave the home due to seclusion norms is a significant sign of gender inequality in India. Women's freedom of movement outside the home is restricted by seclusion norms (Kantor, 2002:149). The fact that Indian society sees the honor of women as being important, led to the presence of the norm to limitations on the women's movement. Indian women are at a disadvantage, undervalued and exploited in all areas of society domestic policy for discussions within the government. Indian women suffer significantly due to the lack of acceptability from the country's predominately male society, even though they are legally citizens of the nation and have equal rights as men (Padmasree & Thangamuthu, 2022:9736). It means that women are weak and mistreated both within and outside the house, despite the fact that the country's constitution declares that they have an equal position to man.

The lives of Indian people, especially women, are always interesting to discuss as their existence is incorporated into the traditional cultural rules that have alienated them. As stated by Mohan (2022:51), "India adheres to a Brahmanical patriarchal society since it is referred to as a society founded on the caste system. Brahmins explain religion rejects the independent existence of women". However at the same time, the acceleration of modern life is changing every part of the world. So knowing what is happening in relation to the reality of women's lives in countries where still thickly bound with patriarchal culture is clearly a very interesting phenomenon for the global community.

The problems of women's lives endlessly represented in literature, one of them in the form of novels. Gender injustice, sexuality and domestic violence are some of the topics that appeared variously and draw attention. As well as in the novel titled *The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi published in 2020 also represents

about the problems of women's. *The Henna Artist* is the debut novel of Alka Joshi which is included in the New York Times Best Selling Author. Alka Joshi's novel debut brings us back to 1950s post-independence India. She exposes a society's rigid system, misogyny, superstition and age-old traditions in her novel. The novel is now being translated in 23 languages and soon will be made into TV adaptation.

The novel of *The Henna Artist* tells about Lakshmi who is the well-known henna artist among the wealthy and upper class women in Jaipur. Actually behind Lakshmi's success, she has gone through a long journey. She is coming from parents who care about an education who live in rural area. Her father is a teacher in that area, and when Lakshmi is still a child, she is always helping her father to teach the student. Whereas, her father is one of the supporters of independence and he give up all his wealth for independence which caused their family to live in poverty in rural areas. Therefore, Lakshmi secretly dreams about becoming a teacher like her father. However, her dreams fade when her father had arranges the marriage for her in the age of fifteen because he can afford to live her.

After married, Lakshmi moved to live with her husband and her mother-in-law "saas". Her husband is a demanding and abusive husband. He does not hesitate to hit her if she did not obey him. He also beats and curses her because she does not give birth right away so he thinks she is a disgraceful woman. Fortunately, her saas is a very patient and loving person. Her saas is an herbalist, she teaches her various herbal medicine and also taught her about art. Armed with the knowledge of herbal medicine and the arts that saas teach, she ventures to leave her abusive husband and go to the pink city of Jaipur.

The novel also tells about the story of Lakshmi after she managed to get her freedom. When she moves to Jaipur, she tries hard to fulfill all her needs to achieve her freedom. However, it turns out that the freedom life she is fighting for takes a risk. She must experience the consequences of her life choices. Even after she left the village where she lived, she still experienced many difficulties. However, she is still passionate about pursuing her dream even though she experiences many difficulties in her struggle.

The writer is interested to use *The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi as the data of the study is for several reasons as follow. First, the novel tells about the ambition of a woman against patriarchy that limits her to get the meaning of life according to her own. Unlike other women, she rejects the definition and nature given to her by something outside herself, especially if it is negative to her. She is a woman who never gives up on being able to exist as a free human being, even though she has to face more consequences for her choice to realize her freedom. She is not a woman who is in bad faith because she never surrenders to restrictive conditions. Second, the storyline takes place in India, one of the countries that are thick with patriarchal culture and classism. In addition, this novel represents a literary work feature as a reflection of actual life. Through studying this novel, we will take what has taken place as a lesson to stand real life. Additionally, the writer interests to use this novel because it is a debut novel which is included to New York Best Selling Author. This novel is already translated in 23 different languages and will be adapted into TV. Based on the descriptions above, the writer considers this novel an extraordinary novel about the struggle of woman's ambitions to determine her own identity. A woman's struggle against the destiny that restrains her makes this novel an inspiring reading and an example of women's struggle against domination. This novel is still relevant for analysis and as a medium for taking the meaning of life.

Several studies have examined several novels using existentialist feminism theory. First, a study was done by Muh. Iskandar Susilo a student from Alauddin State Islamic University Of Makassar entitled *The Struggle of Women Reflected in Cigarette Girl By Ratih Kumala* (2019). In his analysis, he focuses on analyzing on the woman struggle to refuse their status as being the other in the society. Second, a study was done study is by Kamariah student of Putera Batam University entitled *Woman's Struggle in Novel "Room" by Emma Donoghue : A Feminist Approach* (2020). The focus analysis of her study is to analyze the main female character struggle to against violence. Another study is by Mutiara Okatvia Herlina the student from State University of Padang entitled *Breaking Women's Stereotypes in Novel Convenience Store Women by Sayaka Murata* (2022). The

study focuses on analyzing the stereotypes of women that exist in the novel. The last study is done by Desti Maulani Rahmah the student from Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University of Jakarta entitled *Abtony and Cleopatra by William Shakespeare: a Character Analysis of Cleopatra Based on the Existentialist Feminism Theory* (2006). Her study intended to describe the character of main female character of the drama and describing the feminist movement done by Cleopatra.

From the explanation above, no previous studies which have been mentioned as source of data a novel *The Henna Artist*. This study analyzed the struggle of women against patriarchy to show her existence. The main character of the novel shows she has the ambition to determine her own existence. That is the reason existentialist feminism by Simone de Beauvoir is appropriate to analysis the main character of *The Henna Artist*.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the explanations on the background of the study above, the focus of this thesis can be formulated as into following question:

1. How is Lakshmi's struggle the patriarchy society to show her existence reflected in *The Henna Artist* by Alka Josh against?
2. What are the consequences experienced by Lakshmi in showing her existence in *The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research question, the objective of this study is formulated as follows:

1. To describe the struggle of Lakshmi against the patriarchy society to show her existence in *The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi.
2. To describe the consequences that Lakshmi experienced in showing her existence in *The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi.

1.4 Significances of the Study

This study is expected to be able to provide the theoretical and practical benefits as the significances of study. Theoretically, this study can enrich the knowledge of the theory of existentialist feminism, particularly in the novel entitled *The Henna Artist* which is authorized by Josh Malerman. This study can inspire other students especially the students of Trunojoyo Madura University to develop this study in other forms or other sources of data. Practically, this study can be applied in daily life, especially for women, to make they are aware and understand that women have struggles to show their existence in overcoming injustice due to patriarchal values.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of the study is existentialist feminism by Simone de Beauvoir. Theory of existentialist feminism can help to understand about the way of women to express and determine the way their existence. This study focuses on describing the struggle of Lakshmi to show her existence as the main character in *The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi. Moreover, it will analyze the consequences experienced by Lakshmi in showing her existence. The limitation of this study is the author's narrations and the character's utterances that related to the research questions.