

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of five main parts. The first is the background of the study, which chatters about the writer's reasons for choosing this topic. The second is research questions, which contain the problem formulation to analyze. The third is the objectives of the study, which explain the purpose of the study and meet the research questions. The fourth is the significance of the study, which describes the theoretical and practical benefits of the study. The fifth is the scope and limitation of the study, which describe the field and the element in the literary works that represent the focus of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Oppression is used to describe the unfair or cruel use of power. Economic, political, cultural, or social oppression is any form of oppression that restricts or denies rights, opportunities, or resources to certain people or groups. There are examples of oppression in several areas and across history. Racial, gendered, socioeconomic, and religious oppression are a few common causes of oppression. Acts of injustice, such as oppression, frequently occur when the dominant group asserts its superiority over the subordinate group or individuals (Kristami, et al., 2022, p. 275). The social group in a particular society that has greater privileges, power, or influence is referred to as the dominant group. This group frequently establishes the rules, beliefs, and norms that define society. Individuals or groups that are subjugated to a lesser social, economic, or political position are referred to as subordinate groups. In comparison to the dominant group, they could experience prejudice, limited opportunity, and other types of disadvantages.

A social and political movement known as feminism aims to abolish the different types of oppression that women historically faced and create gender equality. The term feminism first came into being in the mid-1800s, when it is used to describe "the virtues of women." But it is not until 1892 when the 1st International

the Women's Conference in Paris introduced it to the English language as a way of believing in and fighting for women's rights based on the idea of gender equality (McAfee, 2018, p. 2). This phenomenon is raised into a story, which is set in the 19th century, in the 1860s to be precise time setting in the *Little Women* novel. In this novel, the female protagonist Josephine March has feminine traits. Feminism is an outstanding ideology that opposes the abhorrent idea of sex-based discrimination (Ranjan, 2019, p. 120). Through feminism, gender injustices caused by the patriarchy system experienced by women can be eliminated. Feminism is not only about equalizing the role of women in society but also in the social, cultural, educational, and economic fields.

Women should no longer be oppressed just because of the patriarchy. As a countermeasure from patriarchy, the feminist movement exists to create equality between women and men. The feminist movement is divided into several parts, one of them is radical feminism. The foundation of radical feminism is the idea that men's dominance of women's sexuality and reproduction lives, as well as their sense of self-identity, self-esteem, and self-respect, is the most fundamental of all oppressions (Tong & Botts, 2018, p. 37). Radical feminism views patriarchy as the primary source of gender-based violence and discrimination. Patriarchy is deeply rooted in the structure and organization of society and is not just a matter of personal belief or behavior. Patriarchy is considered an authority structure that oppresses and criticizes women. According to Asnani (2020, p. 9), the basic principle of radical feminism is that patriarchy is the main cause of gender inequality and female oppression. Radical feminism is renowned for its unchanging opposition to male supremacy and the necessity of questioning men's privilege and authority in society.

Radical feminism is classified into two different categories: radical-libertarian feminism and radical-cultural feminism. The writer tries to focus on women's oppression experienced and struggle against the oppression that represents radical-libertarian feminism by the female protagonist in the *Little Women* novel. According to Tong & Botts (2018, p. 37), radical-libertarian feminism argued that an exclusively female gender identity could restrict a

women's growth as a full human being, so they encouraged women to be androgyne, to represent both the positive and negative aspects of feminine and masculine genders, or, more controversially, any appealing mix of any gender. This theory is based on the idea of male supremacy being the cause of women's oppression. Radical-libertarian feminism emphasizes freedom for women in both personal and social matters. Tong & Botts (2018, p. 46) explain the way radical-libertarian feminism seeks to abolish roles for women like mothers and sexual partners. Once women become less physically involved in the process of reproduction, they will have more opportunities to devote their time and energy to engaging in society's productive activities.

Four experts—Joreen Freeman, Gayle Rubin, Kate Millett, and Shulamith Firestone—also provide an explanation of radical-libertarian feminism in the book *Feminist Thought* by Tong and Botts. One of the experts named Joreen Freeman who explains about radical-libertarian feminism is used by the writer because her theory is suitable to answer the research question, namely the struggle against oppression of female protagonists that depicts radical-libertarian feminism. She refers to radical-libertarian feminism woman as Bitch and she is also called androgynous woman. She explains, “What is disturbing about a Bitch is that she is androgynous who is defined as ‘masculine’ as well as ‘feminine’” (Fahs, 2020, p. 290). A bitch or androgynous woman is a woman who not only has feminine traits but also masculine traits. She refuses to be a full-fledged woman and considers it an oppression for her if she is told to behave like a woman in general. Joreen Freeman also explains the characteristics of bitch, namely personality, physical, and orientation, which is used as a theory to answer this second research question.

This type of radical-libertarian feminism can be analyzed through the novel *Little Women* on the female protagonist, Josephine March, or Jo. The book *Little Women* tackles topics like family, friendship, love, and ambition. It is a great depiction of many aspects of life. It is a lovely representation of numerous facets of life. It is a novel that beautifully illustrates various aspects of life because it provides a window into the social and cultural traditions of the 19th century while staying current in its examination of interpersonal relationships and personal development.

Literature is a media for the author to deliver their creativity and it can be in the form of poetry, prose, and drama (Eliyana, et al., 2021, p. 239). Additionally, it constantly conveys human emotions and uses narrative approaches (Ramrao, 2016, p. 150). Through the narrative approach, the authors deliver some issues in their literary works. For some female authors, they elaborate the women issue in their literary works in order for their voices to be heard and for people to understand the way they feel (Dominilla, et al., 2020, p. 663). One of the genres of literary works is novels. A novel can portray the lives of people and serve as motivation for those who read it (Riyanti, 2018, p. 35). In the novel, there are many things that can be learned. Discovering the story of an event can educate about the meaning of life by looking at the life of characters as a life lesson. Knowing what the characters are experiencing can help to understand the complexities of social life.

One of the female authors who concerns to show women's issues is Louisa May Alcott. In her novel entitled *Little Women*, she elaborates the issue of women who experience oppression and their struggle against gender inequality. The story narrates the female protagonist named Jo who experiences oppression. The female protagonist in this novel is Josephine March, who is the second sister of the four siblings. Jo is an aspiring writer and a tomboy. Her mother, friend, and sisters force her to marry and to be feminine. Nevertheless, she refuses all the oppression against her. She chooses her masculinity in her daily life and she decides not to get married.

In this study, the writer analyzes a novel to find the oppression and struggle experienced by Jo March in the novel *Little Women* set during the Civil War in the 1860s when women at that time experienced a lot of oppression and gender injustice compared to men. It happens because the patriarchy system is applied in society. It is a system that gives men's privilege and dominance in some areas of moral authority, political leadership, social rights, and property ownership (Widyaswara, 2022, p. 130). It is caused that the men in society are perceived as strong, leaders, brave, assertive, and rational, while women are perceived as weak, sensitive, timid, indecisive, and fickle.

In the novel *Little Women*, the narrative is semi-autobiographical, based on Alcott's own family life. The issues of oppression against the female protagonist and her struggle to achieve gender equality invite the writer to analyze the novel in title *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Besides, the writer selected this novel because it is extensively read and released in two volumes in 1868 and 1869. The novel's first volume quickly became a bestseller and is well-received by reviewers; thus, the second book, *Good Wives*, is released and is similarly a commercial success. The work was later released in 1880 in a single volume. Louisa May Alcott wrote the *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886) sequels to *Little Women*, which also included the March sisters. A play (1912), musical (1912), animation (1981), opera (1998), and film (2019) have all been adapted from the *Little Women* novel.

Analyzing the novel *Little Women* can assist in making people aware of and reinforcing the importance of feminism in order to recognize, encourage, and support the feminist movement. Feminism can reduce sexism, gender inequality, violence, discrimination, and other gender issues. Therefore, the writer wants to examine the feminism depicted in the female protagonist of the *Little Women* novel by Louisa May Alcott (2018). The novel *Little Women* chosen to analyze is to deliver the ideals of radical-libertarian feminism performed by the female protagonist in the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (2018).

There are some previous studies that become the references for the writer to find the gap of this study. The first previous study published by Desmawati (2018) entitled "Analysis of Feminism in the Novel of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott". This previous study focuses on the feminist characteristics of Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women*. The purpose of this previous study is to describe various feminisms and how they are reflected in the *Little Women* novel. The second previous study conducted by Putra and Simanungkalit (2019) entitled "An Analysis Image of Women in *Little Women* Novel by Louisa May Alcott". This previous study analyzes Louisa May Alcott's image of women in her book *Little Women*.

The third previous study conducted by Lestari (2022) is entitled "Moral Values Analysis of March Family in *Little Women* (1868) Novel by Louisa May Alcott".

The previous study is focused on examining the good character and the moral values that are presented in *Little Women* using Thomas Lickona's definition of good character. The fourth previous study by Santi and Rahmi (2019) is entitled "Feminism Value in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*". This previous study demonstrates that the feminist principles in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* consist of Equality, Difference, Choice, Care, Time, and Experience.

The fifth previous study by Suraya and Kurniawati (2023) entitled "Women's Struggle in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*". The purpose of this previous study is to examine women's rights struggles as portrayed by the female characters in the story. The struggle from freedom, happiness in the areas of art, education, and economics. The sixth previous study by Ekasanti and Hernawati (2019) entitled "Representation of Gender Stereotyping in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*: Endorsement of Traditional Gender Roles". This previous study explores how the female characters in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* eventually conform to the stereotypical roles expected of women in the late 19th century, despite the fact that American women were actually opposing the ideology of "separate spheres" in light of the prevalent gender stereotypes they encountered. The seventh previous study by Piri, et al (2022) entitled "Sisterly Bonds in Alcott's *Little Women*: An Analysis of Female Sibling Relationships". Through a feminist approach, this previous study examines how *Little Women* depicts sisterhood and female sibling relationships.

There are many differences between those previous studies and this study. The writers of the previous studies use different focus and theories. Those previous studies above focus on several female protagonists of the March family in the novel and use several theories from different experts. In this study, the writer focuses on observing the female protagonist, Josephine March, using the theory from Tong and Botts in the book *Feminist Thought* (2018), namely radical-libertarian feminism. Therefore, this study needs to be conducted to present the newness because this study is different from the four previous studies above.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the previous explanation, the writer then formulates two research questions:

1. How is women's oppression experienced by Jo March elaborated in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*?
2. How is Jo March's struggle against the oppression that represents radical-libertarian feminism delivered in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the two problems formulated above, the writer aims to answer the questions. The first point is the writer who elaborates the oppression of women experienced by Jo March in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. The second point is the writer who delivers the struggle of Jo March, or Jo as the female protagonist against the oppression representing radical-libertarian feminism in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the writer hopes that this study will be used as a reference to understand the content of the novel *Little Women* in the feminist perspective. In other words, this study expects that students of literature will be able to reference it as a source while studying the principles of feminism. Additionally, through this study the readers will understand better about radical-libertarian feminism in literature or in real life.

Practically, this study will lead the readers who are concerned about literary criticism to be able to analyze literary work based on feminism. Through this study, they will see in detail the description of radical-libertarian feminism. They will notice the struggle of radical-libertarian feminism to make personal freedom important on the value of sexual autonomy and having control over one's own body, including decisions on sexual orientation, reproductive rights, and romantic relationships. Observing the literary works through feminism theory can help us understand more about overcoming unequal and oppressive gender relations.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study is the field of feminism by Tong (2018) in particular radical-libertarian feminism in the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (2018). This study is limited to the author narration, monologue, and dialogue that demonstrate radical-libertarian feminism in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*.