

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitation of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

The study of women is an interesting topic to discuss. Literary works written by female writers position the writers themselves as character in their own works (Djajanegara, 2007 as cited in Asri et al., 2020). Female writer express the traits of women better than male writers. For a long time, women have been trying to break out of the patriarchal zone that controlled them, as they needed to express their opinions to create their own system. There has been a lot of discussion about women's issues over the years and the topic is still being studied as time goes on. Women are often perceived as weak and their positions as inferior to men. Many writers today produce famous works, including women's literary works.

Women have often been the subject of study in literary works. A line of reasoning developed by Showalter (1997) continues to divide efforts by women to rebuild the feminine framework into three groups: the Feminine (1840–1880), the Feminist (1880–1920), and the Female (1920–ongoing). Women writers are still working on their literary works today, rather than attempting to reject men's images of them or write without using a male pseudonym, we can already easily locate women writers and their works. The feminist movement is extending feminist criticism to literary forms and techniques, also they're rejecting imitation and protesting against experiences as independent sources of creativity.

This study focuses on a selection of poems created by Maya Angelou, which highlight the pressures that women often face to meet standards that are not directly imposed by society. In an attempt to gain social acceptability in line with feminine values and to empower women's voices, Maya Angelou wrote several poems about how black women face hatred, discrimination, and injustice.

Women's empowerment and feminism are closely related. Women empowerment means giving women the opportunity to control their lives, to

realize their full potential, and to have equal opportunities and rights. As part of this, women must have access to education, healthcare, employment, decision-making power, and freedom from discrimination, violence, and oppression. In addition to the benefits women receive individually, empowering women contributes to the well-being and development of society as a whole.

The first poem chosen by the writer is titled "*Phenomenal Woman*" which describes how her life experience as an African-American black woman living in a white majority. Furthermore, the poem titled "*Still I Rise*" which contains about her able to accept the difficulties she faces because of her gender and skin color, and she has a strong personality and self-confidence. Her next poem "*Equality*" is about how African-American women are seen and treated in the eyes of men, and calls for an end to gender and racial inequality. She also discusses the importance of equality and freedom without segregation, discrimination, and racism. Finally, the poem with title "*Woman Work*" discusses how society forces women to perform gender roles. For a long time, people in positions of authority determined the roles that men and women were expected to play in society. She depicts in this poem the struggles that women face as a result of the roles that have been forced upon them. It is accurate to say that Maya Angelou takes control of her identity and defines it through her poetry. That is, based on Elaine Showalter's (1981) theory of gynocriticism which focuses on women's writing about women's experiences as in her work entitled "*Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*".

Gynocriticism is the study of women who develop and create literature and art. It investigates the issues of female creative writers. Gynocriticism provides innovative ways for studying female writers rather than using male writers' models (Showalter, 1981).

As a source of data, the writer chooses this topic because it highlights the significant themes of women's empowerment and resilience, which are central to Maya Angelou's poetry and remain relevant in discussions of gender equality today. The selected poems are particularly powerful in their portrayal of women's strength, struggles, and triumphs, making them ideal for an in-depth analysis

through the lens of gynocriticism. Furthermore, Maya Angelou, as a writer, holds a unique position in literature due to her ability to interweave personal and collective experiences of womanhood, race, and identity. Analyzing her work provides valuable insights into the ways literature can challenge societal norms and inspire change, particularly from a feminist perspective. Research of the same nature has already been carried out in previous studies, and the writer uses them as references. Studies in the past have been done in the form of thesis regarding the same topic. The first, a thesis entitled “*The Specialty of Women's writing in Selected Poems by Susan Nguyen: A Gynocriticism Study*” by Isnaeni in 2021. Second, a thesis entitled “*Identifying The Specialty of Margaret Dilloway's Writing in How to be An American Housewife (A Study of Gynocriticism)*” presented by Dewi Purwati Ningsih in 2017. Third, the thesis entitled “*The Analysis of Female Character under Patriarchal Society in The Holy Woman Novel by Qaisra Shahraz*” by Tantriani in 2021. Fourth, the thesis that uses same theoretical, gynocriticism by Elaine Showalter. *Demolishing Androcentric Culture and Values in Qaisra Shahraz's Zemindar's Wife* by Ainun Nufus (2017).

The previous studies collected to be the references based on the same theory or data that will be used in this study. The writer use previous studies with the same theory and data since they can serve as references and can help them to understand the problems related to the study. While the differences between the study conducted by the researcher and the existing previous studies is the data taken from the poems by Maya Angelou has not been analyzed by using the theory of gynocriticism.

This study combines literary analysis with feminist theory, specifically using the gynocriticism theory. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how Angelou's poetry empowers women within the literature and feminist discourse. By examining how Angelou empowers women in her poetry, this study adds to understanding of both her work and the broader movement for women's empowerment in literature.

1.2 Research Question

1. How is women empowerment portrayed in Maya Angelou's selected poems?

1.3 Objective of the Study

1. To find the portrait of women empowerment in Maya Angelou's poems *Phenomenal Woman*, *Still I Rise*, *Equality*, and *Woman Work*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

As an initial theoretical contribution, this study aims to provide an understanding of the main theories of gynocriticism. This study aims to demonstrate the empowerment of women's through Maya Angelou's poems entitled *Phenomenal Woman*, *Still I Rise*, *Equality*, and *Woman Work*, which have been selected by the writer based on the theory of gynocriticism by Elaine Showalter. A practical significance of this study is that it can serve as a reference for future researchers.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

There are various aspects to analyze in these poems, but this study focuses only on the analysis using Elaine Showalter's theory of gynocriticism in relation to women in Maya Angelou's selected poems entitled *Phenomenal Woman*, *Still I Rise*, *Equality*, and *Woman Work*. Using *The Complete Collected Poems* of Maya Angelou as a source, the data include four poems by Maya Angelou that portray women's empowerment. Researchers are expected to use more data sources when examining women's writings on empowerment.