CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Literary works have always been an interesting thing to be discussed among the public until now, and the discussion will never die while the creators or fans of literary works are still around and there are still many. Literary work itself can be interpreted as an essay or art that is in the imagination or mind of each person and can also be called human creativity. In terms of content, literary works are typically classified as fictional writings that do not contain facts (Damono, 2011). News, biographies, and thesis, differ from fiction in that they convey information in the form of facts. Prose is one sort of literary work, and it is classified into various types, one of which is the novel. Ahyar (2019) described how in a novel, the author usually tries his hardest to steer the reader to hidden messages, such as a picture of life's truth through a story contained in the novel.

Furthermore, literary works are closely related to human daily life. There are so many phenomena that occur that can be lifted into literary works and become amazing works. Where the phenomenon that is still lingered in neighbourhoods is feminism including the gender inequality, women oppression, or violence experienced by women. In the broadest sense, the term "feminist" refers to anyone who is conscious of and works to end all forms of women's subjugation. Feminism is described as the struggle to demand women's rights to be on an equal footing with men (Abbas, 2020). As mentioned by Wallace (2009), the term of feminist was thought to refer to a "cluster" of political and social issues.

With feminism, women can use their voices to get the same rights as men. As a result, women will no longer just be viewed as second class but will also be able to pursue their career, have an equal education, and be treated well by society. Women can prove their own existence and realize their full potential to be on an equal footing with men. However, the issue of feminism has been prevalent in society until now, where some individuals believe that women are weak social beings who do not deserve to be treated equally with men.

One of the issues is regarding gender inequality caused by customary practices. In the research by Napsiah et al. (2023), the Lampung tribe has several customs that govern how men and women engage, which impacts women's status and leads to a lack of women in the public sector. The culture of the Lampung tribe is patriarchal. The heirs of their descendants are their sons. In the meantime, girls in Lampung households have the status of "mikhrul." It means girls are thus denied access, involvement, and authority within the family because of their transient position, i.e., before marriage. Thus, girls are only in charge of the family's property and as the daughter-in-law. Sons, on the other hand, have authority over all parental properties since they fill in for their parents and are in charge of their spouses and dependent family members. Women face gender inequity because of the habit that has been passed down through the years about the priority of males in the household.

Another issue of feminism often experienced by women is violence committed by men, both at home and in public. Violence against women was discovered in an article from the Syrian Network for Human Rights published on August 30, 2023, where many Syrian women have died from violence, such as torture, enforced

disappearances, or sexual violence, since March 2011. And as of 2023, many Syrians have suffered for a long time from the oppression and violence perpetrated by the Syrian regime's forces. All Syrians have been denied their rights as human beings; they have been tortured sexually, mentally, and psychologically, as well as their freedom as Syrian citizens. Most of the people who try to ask the army for help will be forcibly disappeared, especially women; they are forced to surrender their bodies to Syrian regime forces and are often targets of violence there.

The Syrian government has effectively tortured female prisoners by using sexual violence against them as a means to instil fear and humiliation in them. In addition, if they work or want to work in public affairs or community organizations, their suffering will increase. As a result, Syrian women are trying to stop the violence against them that they have long experienced in their own country. They did this by reporting on such actions to journalists in an effort to secure aid and protection for Syrian women. This has been in the news from year to year, but until now there has been no change from the government, so its citizens continue to be tormented throughout the year. Furthermore, even in the current year, Syrian women are still trying to gain freedom from the persecutions of the Syrian regime against themselves and other citizens.

From the 19th century to the present, women have been actively pursuing gender equality through the empowerment movement. Women are seen as the second and less significant gender in society as a result of the discrimination and violence that they endure. Women in the 19th century faced several obstacles. Women were discouraged from working outside the house, and when they did, their

pay was far less than what males in identical positions would make. They were also not allowed to vote, possess property, or have legal rights over their children. They had to submit to their husbands, which made them nearly entirely reliant on males. Existentialist feminists believe that the social structure that separates men and women into two categories—"the self and the other"—where men are lauded and women are submissive—is to blame for this injustice. Therefore, women must thus make a change in order to attain their existence and transform from objects that must always be subservient to men into subjects (de Beauvoir, 1956).

The issues of feminism can also be raised in a literary work such as novels or short stories. According to Nurgiyantoro (2015), fiction narrates the various problems of human life in its interaction with the environment and with others. Therefore, the novel was chosen as the object of research because it is not only a fiction story by the author, but it is also accompanied by facts that exist in the environment or society. Moreover, the issue of feminism is also raised in fiction and non-fiction literary works, such as *Bad Feminist* (2014) by Roxane Gay, *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir, *How to Be a Woman* (2011) by Caitlin Moran, and others.

One of the novels that discuss an issue of feminism is "Little Women" by an American poet and writer named Louisa May Alcott. This novel explores the topic of women's struggles in achieving their goals and desires and highlights the issues faced by women in the 19th century. At the time, American culture was a big challenge for women, as social status and patriarchal culture influenced the way women dressed, behaved, and lived their daily lives. Compared to men, women's

roles and possibilities were still restricted. Women are confined to a setting that develops from culture and environment, which results in a gender gap in societal perspectives. A structure that cornered women was also born out of this perspective.

The novel was originally published in two volumes, and they were combined into a single volume in 1880. This work is categorized as semi-autobiographical because it is based on the lives of Alcott and her three sisters. Following "Little Women's" instant commercial and critical success, fans demanded further details about the characters. Numerous translations and adaptations of this novel have been produced.

The novel tells the story of a family whose simple livelihood is far from the definition of wealth, occupied by a mother (Mrs. March), her four children (Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy), and also a kind-loyal female assistant, named Hannah. Their father, Mr. March, was fighting in the Civil War in Concord. This novel is about four children who represent four different personalities. Meg is the oldest, the most graceful and feminine of the group. Jo is a temperamental tomboy who loves to read, and the second child. Beth is the third child, she is quiet, obedient, and a talented pianist. Amy, the youngest child, who is actually spoiled but wants to look mature and enjoy painting.

This novel discusses the issue of feminism through the character Jo, who is independent and always resists the norms that limit her independence. Jo's character has received the most attention. Jo is a peculiar and anti-mainstream female character. She objected to laws that targeted women. She had big dreams, spoke honestly and openly, acted like a man, and never cared about stylish dresses. She

occasionally undervalues the idea that a woman's happiness is complete once she marries, moves into her husband's mansion, and gives birth to adorable children.

> **'I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China Aster! It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boy's games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy. And it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with Papa. And I can only stay home and knit, like a poky old woman!'** (Alcott, 2004, p. 22)

According to the quotation above, a woman must create into a self, a subject that transcends categories and definitions. Jo was pressured to change her appearance and was taught to dress and behave like a real woman rather than a man. Jo is always doing things in her way and does not care what others think about her. In the nineteenth century, a woman was shown as wearing a long skirt and having long hair. On the other hand, Jo points out the fact that she was born as a woman and wonders why she was not born as a man. Women are unable to represent themselves before the law. She had to be looked after by her father, husband, uncle, or brother at all times.

Although it is natural for every girl to dream of a comfortable life, a nice house, beautiful dresses, and other pleasures of life. All that can be obtained if a rich man comes to make her the mistress of her palace. Jo prefers to get all the dreams on her own. Jo is happy when she can achieve all her dreams, but it will all be lost or hindered because of her status in society. Her status as a woman is what requires her to stay at home, behave gently, and not be reckless in her behaviour.

> **'If I was a boy, we'd run away together, and have a capital time, but as I'm a miserable girl, I must be proper and stop at home.** Don't tempt me, Teddy, it's a crazy plan.' (Alcott, 2004, p. 225)

The quotation above shows that Jo really does not like her status as a woman because she cannot be free to do whatever she wants. Jo must follow the norms that exist in society to behave as a woman who is gentle and kind. The social situation that views men's position highly, both in the family and in the public sphere, makes Jo, a woman, sometimes pessimistic about her dreams. The demand for women to stay at home is still fertile, even though someone has tried to uproot it. On the other hand, Jo always has a strong determination and always tries to make her dreams come true.

The two phenomena above can be revealed more deeply by using the concept of feminism proposed by Simone de Beauvoir in existentialist perspective. The concept of feminism was expressed by de Beauvoir in her book entitled "Le Deuxieme Sexe" (1949), but it was reprinted in 1956 with a translation in English entitled "The Second Sex". According to de Beauvoir (1956), existentialism encourages women to live freely and make their own decisions about their future without outside support or guidance. Therefore, women try to fight for their rights so that they can exist for themselves. de Beauvoir (1956) stated there are several attempts by women to get an existence like women get to work, intellectual, and women reject "liyan" or otherness. As long as they fight for it, women will also experience obstacles. According to de Beauvoir (1956), women will face two obstacles, such as the perspective from society and self-fear of society's perspective.

Furthermore, many other researchers have also studied this novel with various approaches and theories because the story is phenomenal and interesting to study.

The researcher took several journal articles to use as research references and comparison materials. The first article was written by Asriyanti et al. (2022). This research aims to explain how women's reliance on males is portrayed in "Little Women" (1868) using Dowling's (1982) theory of Cinderella Complex Syndrome from a psychological perspective. This research used qualitative methods. The study's findings demonstrate how much the Cinderella Complex affects characters as seen from their thoughts and behaviours, both consciously and unconsciously. The fear of losing one's femininity and one's self-concept are the two main contributing factors to Meg's Cinderella complex. Cinderella Complex syndrome unknowingly represented Meg and Jo.

Then, the second article was written by Piri et al. (2022). The purpose of the study is to investigate certain connections' characteristics and how they relate to the novel's themes. The methodology for this study was qualitative. The research shows that the sisterly relationships portrayed in the book are intricate and diverse. Despite their tight bond, the four March sisters occasionally argue and misunderstand one another. Although the sisters' divergent goals and personalities first cause conflict and envy, in the end they support one another and come to value their differences. In addition, "Little Women" offers a complex portrait of female sibling relationships and sisterhood that emphasizes both the benefits and disadvantages of these bonds.

The resemblance between the two previous studies is that they both used the same data source, namely "Little Women." Both of the studies also used the qualitative method. However, their theories and the way they are analysed are very

different. The first article analysed the characters in "Little Women" using Dowling's (1982) theory of Cinderella Complex Syndrome from a psychological perspective. Then, the second article analysed the "Little Women" novel by investigating certain connections' characteristics of March Sister and how they relate to the novel's themes.

The analysis of the research in this study differed from that of the previous studies. The researcher used the same data source which is "Little Women". However, the difference is in the theory used which is the existentialist feminism. In addition, the focus of the present research is to analyse the women's struggle and its obstacles to achieving the existence. Using a feminist approach, this study explores the nature of women's struggles and obstacles, involving factors such as class, race, or societal norms, to achieve their existence in public. In addition, this study also offers insights that contribute to how societal and cultural views were obstacles to women achieving gender equality and recognition of their existence in the 19th century by highlighting the novel "Little Women" by Louisa M Alcott.

The researcher is interested in delving deeper into the "Little Women" novel using a feminist approach based on Simone de Beauvoir's theory, presented in her book The Second Sex (1956) and supported by Tong (2014), which maps out the branch of feminism. According to the previous study above, the research is analysed based on the object of the study, which led the researcher to do research entitled "Womens' Struggle to Achieve the Existence Portrayed in the "Little Women" Novel by Louisa M Alcott: A Feminist Approach."

1.2 Identification of the Problem

After looking at the background of the research written above, the researcher identified several problems related to feminism. Below are some of the problems:

1. Gender inequality experienced by women in society.

2. Violence against women by men in various ways.

3. Women's struggles to achieve the existence represented by the characters in the novel "Little Women" by Louisa M Alcott.

4. Obstacles that women face to achieving their existence in the novel "Little Women" by Louisa M Alcott.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

The researcher limited the difficulties of feminism to be studied in light of the problems listed above. The following are some of the limitations:

1. Women's struggles to achieve the existence represented by the characters in the novel "Little Women" by Louisa M Alcott.

2. Obstacles that women face to achieving their existence in the novel "Little Women" by Louisa M Alcott.

1.4 Formulation of the Problem

Regarding the problem that has been limited, the researcher formulated several problems as follows:

1. What are the women's struggles to achieve the existence represented by the characters in the novel "Little Women" by Louisa M Alcott?

2. What are the obstacles that women face to achieving their existence in the novel "Little Women" by Louisa M Alcott?

1.5 Objective of the Research

The researcher found two objectives as the reason for doing this study. Below are some reasons:

1. To find out the women's struggles to achieve the existence represented by the characters in the novel "Little Women" by Louisa M Alcott.

2. To discover the obstacles that women face to achieving their existence in the novel "Little Women" by Louisa M Alcott.

1.6 Significance of the Research

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, the researcher has a lot of aims in order to make a greater contribution to science in the future, especially in this study's field of literature. This study, according to the researcher, will also contribute knowledge and some theories regarding feminism, as well as information on the oppression that women still tolerate, both physically and mentally. Finally, the researcher believes that this study might be used in the future as a comparison and reference.

2. Practical Significance

In terms of practice, this research and understanding of how to apply it are crucial. According to the researcher, readers will gain from the findings. Researcher predict that as a result of this social interaction or family interaction research, there will be no disparities in women's social, economic, or political status or oppression.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Feminism : In Western Europe and the United States, feminism emerged in the 18th century as a modern social movement ideology that advocated for women's freedom and advancement in secular society. Feminism originated in England in the 14th century and is based on the ideas of emancipation in secular society. Feminism is a response to the issue of gender equality that often emerges in society as well as the general belief that men are of a higher status than women and hence insensitive to the rights and dignity of women (Dinshaw, 2007).

Gender : Gender is defined as two or more subclasses or sex roles, and it is important because before the gender system can be changed, people must recognize their place within it, how their gender specific roles are formed, and how sexual identity is marked in a variety of discourses and fields of study (Lieske, 2009).

Struggles : The act of straining or battling with obstacles or hurdles in order to accomplish a desired result is called a struggle. It entails making an effort, overcoming challenges, and frequently enduring suffering or misfortune in the pursuit of an objective or a solution. Physical, emotional, mental, and social struggles are all common, and they are an essential part of being human as people deal with and manage life's challenges (French, 2008).