

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of The Research

Understanding women through the lens of gender involves recognizing their roles, struggles, and contributions in various domains of life, from the domestic sphere to the professional arena. Women, in the context of gender, embody a diverse spectrum of identities and experiences that transcend biological definitions. They navigate a complex interplay of societal expectations, cultural norms, and personal aspirations. This perspective invites a deeper exploration of how gender dynamics shape and are shaped by women's experiences, offering insights into the broader quest for gender equality and justice. The gender gap is still common even though it seems that equality has been evenly distributed. The gaps are sometimes not exposed or the impression is covered so that they do not appear to the surface. Feminism is a movement that supports women's rights in general. This movement itself is accommodated to protect women from gender inequality or violence against women. According to Hannam ( 2007), feminism can be defined as the acknowledgment of a gender power imbalance, with women playing a smaller role than men. The belief that women's situations are socially constructed and thus changeable by emphasizing women's autonomy. The situation of women as an oppressed gender began in the nineteenth century. Most men believe that women are powerless and weak. This feminist movement emerged in the 18th century and grew by increasing in the 20th century. Mary Wollstonecraft's book *In Defense of Women's Rights*, considered one of the earliest feminist writings, contains a critique

of the French Revolution that applies only to men and not women. A century later, in Indonesia, Raden Ajeng Kartini also criticized the situation of Javanese women who, apart from criticizing Dutch colonialism, did not have the opportunity to receive an education equal to that of men.

Feminist issues are also found in several novels, including *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf, and *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. The researcher analyzes Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* from several examples of classic novels that raise feminist issues. Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, published in 1985, engraves this image in our minds through its depiction of a future dystopia. This novel tells of life in the future where an incident occurs where the level of human fertility decreases. Life is governed by authoritarian (patriarchal) leaders where women are persecuted whereas women with exception (commander's wife) must experience reproductive slavery for their elite which is symbolized by the red robe and white headscarf. They are servants who have the name "off" followed by the name of the owner (commander). When moved, the name also changes to follow the owner. In this novel there is a main character named Offred because the master is named Red and who is the narrator of this story.

From the novel "*The Handmaid's Tale*" there are several classifications of women based on their status and duties. They can be distinguished by the color of their robes. Like the blue robe intended for the wife of a high official. But when her husband died and became a widow, they wore black robes. While girls: adopted children of the ruling class wear white clothes until the time of marriage under

government regulations. The handmaid wore a red robe with a white hat. The handmaid's trainer aunt in a brown robe. Marta is a barren old woman who has household skills and is obedient and serves as a maid. Economic wife, a woman who marries a man who has a lower rank and does not come from an elite group.

To further raise the issues of feminism from this novel, the researcher finds several phenomena related to the study of feminism:

As for my husband, she said, he's just that. My husband. I want that to be perfectly clear. Till death do us part. It's final.

Yes, Ma'am, I said again, forgetting. They used to have dolls, for little girls, that would talk if you pulled a string at the back; I thought I was sounding like that, voice of a monotone, voice of a doll. **She probably longed to slap my face. They can hit us, there's Scriptural precedent. But not with any implement. Only with their hands.** (Atwood. 1985, P.20)

This conversation is found in chapter 3, which is when the maid "Offred"

had just come to the house of the new commander or master and she was engaged in a conversation with the commander's wife. Although this novel depicts patriarchal leadership but does not fully tell about the oppression of men against women but also oppression among several groups of women. This type of oppression is usually carried out by people from the upper class against the lower class.

Another phenomenon of this novel related to the right to freedom is:

Luke and I used to walk together, sometimes, along these streets. **We used to talk about buying a house like one of these, an old big house, fixing it up. We would have a garden, swings for the children. We would have children.** Although we knew it wasn't too likely we could ever afford it, it was something to talk about, a game for Sundays. Such freedom now seems almost weightless. (Atwood. 1985, P.32)

From the quote above it can be concluded that freedom such as being free

to travel anywhere, own a house, and have children were lost during the reign of

Gilead. That freedom disappeared because at that time they were governed by the system of government wherever they were.

Furthermore, *The Handmaid's Tale* novel has received widespread acclaim in the form of journal articles. This is related to this research which uses the novel as a reference material. The first journal article 'The Rise of The Right Wing and its Implications to women's Right in *The Handmaid's Tale*: a feminist perspective by Margaret Atwood was written by Rahmadhani (2021). previous researcher examined the rise of the right wing and its impact on women's rights, while this study will examine the forms of restrictions on women's rights and sexism that occur. and the second research was conduct by Deboranti & Wedati (2020), "Offred As the Victim of Totalitarianism in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*". The reserach was used descriptive qualitatve method to focus on the influences of totalitarianism held in the Republic of Gilead and how Offred resists totalitarianism in the novel by theory from Friedrich and Brzeziinski and Hannah Arendt about Totalitarianism. The similarities between the previous researchs are both using the novel "*The Handmaid Tale*" by Margaret Atwood as primary data and this research will use the same method as the previous research. but both use the different theories. There have been no recent researchers who have reviewed this study.

## **1.2 Identification of the problem**

From on the research background, researcher identified several problems related to feminism:

1. Gender Inequality in Patriarchal Societies in “Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood
2. How the Internalized Misogyny and Oppression Among Women in “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood
3. The form of restricting women's rights in the novel "Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood
4. The reasons of resistance that is practiced by main character in “Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood

### **1.3 Limitation of the problem**

Based on the identification of the problem, the researcher formulated several questions about feminism, namely:

1. The form of restricting women's rights in the novel "Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood
2. The reasons of resistance performed that is practiced by main character in “Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood

### **1.4 Formulation of the Problem**

Based on the limitations of the problem, this study raises several questions about feminism:

1. What are the forms of restricting women's right in the novel "Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood with feminist studies?
2. What is the reasons of resistance that is practiced by main character in “Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood?

## **1.5 Objective of the research**

The research objectives are:

1. To describe the forms of restricting women's rights in the novel "Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood with feminist studies
2. To describe the reasons of resistance that is practiced by main character in "Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood

## **1.6 Significance of the research**

### **1. Theoretical significance**

Theoretically, the researcher has the will that if one day in the future the research will have a special contribution to the field of literature in terms of research. The researcher also hopes that this research will educate about the acts of restricting woman rights and provide education with a theoretical view of feminism. and researchers also hope that this research can be used as reference and comparison material in the future.

### **2. Practical Significance**

This research and understanding how to implement its theories. Practically researcher hope that this research is useful for readers and hopefully with this research life in our society will not occur acts of restrictions on women's rights in all respects. Researcher think that through doing study in social contact or family interaction, there will be no longer be inequalities in women's positions and types of oppression in terms of social, economic, and political oppression.

## 1.7 Definition of key terms

**Feminist** : Feminism can be defined as the recognition of a power imbalance between the sexes, with women playing a lower role than men often perpetuated by societal structures, cultural norms, and historical practices that have marginalized women's voices and contributions and seeks to challenge and dismantle these power dynamics by advocating for equality, autonomy, and the full participation of women in all aspects of life.. (Hannam, 2007)

**Patriarchal** : The dominance of men over women has historically shaped many aspects of society, from political systems to cultural traditions and often resulted in the marginalization of women, limiting their access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making roles. (Walby, 1990)

**Sexuality** : control over female sexuality reinforces patriarchal norms, dictating how women should behave, dress, and express themselves according to male-defined standards and is viewed as a primary site of male dominance over women, where males impose their idea of femininity on women. (Walby, 1990)