

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Oppression becomes right definition in reflecting the way in which the world gives freedom to women in the past. Oppression leads a way to prevent others from being free or equal. Oppression is the use of authority, law, and physical or non-physical force to prevent others from being free or equal. Oppression is a type of injustice.

Men's existence becomes dominant and more recognized than women. Men hold more power over the world and everything in it, including women who are known as weak persons and have low power in society.¹ Oppression towards women in many different aspects, such as social, political, and economic aspect is no longer a rare thing.

After many centuries of surviving with the oppressions that have been done by men, feminist movement is finally appeared. Feminists around the world began to express opinions, critics, and ideas through literary work. All literary works refer to the way women should live in freedom and equality, without intervention of men.

Men are always dominated, while women are considered the other (Beauvoir, 1949). As the "other", women cannot have freedom to express feelings, ideas, or critics and the spaces are also limited. Men become the subject and women become the object. Beauvoir said that all of us, men as well as women, should be considered as human

¹ Smith, Morgan. 2008. *Confronting Injustice and Oppression*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
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beings.² Women do not have any chance to be independent and create better life for themselves. They cannot be truly liberated if patriarchal society's system itself was not overthrown.

Besides that, Beauvoir said that motherhood becomes a way to turning women into slaves. It should not be like that way, but it always ended up that way. They were forced to focus on their divine nature, such as motherhood and femininity instead of any activities outside. It kept continue and turn into an experience of sex abuse or become a sex object.

Oppression towards women can be found in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel written by Margaret Eleanor Atwood in 1985. Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer and born in 1939. In *The Handmaid's Tale* novel, women, through Offred's character is oppressed by sexism and system. Offred worked as a handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. Gilead has followed a patriarchal system. Men have power over women includes their rights and their bodies. Women play roles as an object of prostitute. Become a handmaid means must do reproductive slavery, so they can get pregnant with the commanders. They have to bearing child and become man's pleasure, and for them it is their jobs. Offred had a husband named Luke and a little daughter, but she has to leave them. Offred worked for one of commanders named Fred and she has to serve his sexual desire all the time.

In this research, the researcher would analyze about oppression by sexism and system towards Offred as the handmaid and imply it to feminism theory of Simone de Beauvoir. Since Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* novel becomes the best-known novel of

² De Beauvoir, Simone. 1949. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., New York.
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Atwood and relate to women's oppression cases, so this novel will be the right object for this research.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In accordance to background of the study, the researcher classified the problems as follows:

1. How did Gilead oppress Offred as a handmaid in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel?
2. How did Offred survive as a handmaid through oppression in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel?

1.3 Objective of the Study

In accordance to statement of the problem, the researcher classified the objectives as follows:

1. To find out how Gilead oppresses Offred as the handmaid in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel.
2. To find out how Offred survives through oppression as a handmaid in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The research only focuses on how Gilead's society oppresses Offred and how she survives through oppression based on Simone de Beauvoir's feminism study.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The research is supposed to enrich the theoretical bases of literary studies, especially in analyzing feminism study. In addition, the research could be useful and bring any benefits for the readers, the researcher and other researchers. Through the research, readers would be able to understand how oppressions happened to women through Offred's journey of life as a handmaid. Also the research can influence people or other researchers through this.

1.6 Approach to the Study

As a key of the research, the following are some of approaches that has been done by the researcher. The researcher will accomplish with the help of primary and secondary data sources. In order to analyze the research, the researcher will re-read Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* novel and uses Simone de Beauvoir's feminism theory with the support of her book entitled *The Second Sex*.

1.7 Organization of the Paper

The research is classified into five chapters in order to help readers understand the purpose of the research.

Chapter one or introduction consists of background of the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, approach to the study, and organization of the study.

Chapter two presents about Margaret Atwood's biography as the novelist of *The Handmaid's Tale* and a short synopsis of the story.

Chapter three, review of related literature that consists of definition of the theory that the researcher used which is Simone de Beauvoir's feminism study, definition of women's oppression, novel, character and some previous studies that the researcher used.

Chapter four consists of analysis and discussion about oppressions that happened to women through Offred's journey of life as a handmaid and the survival done by her. This chapter will answer the statement of the problem in first chapter.

Chapter five ends with conclusion and suggestion of the research.