

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Gender equality becomes a frequently topic to be discussed, debated, and to be struggled. Gender (n) in Merriam Webster means a) sex; the feminine gender, b) the behavioural, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex. In some references, gender is a cultural concept that attempts to differentiate men and women's roles, behaviours, mentalities, and emotional natures that promoted in society (Tierney, 1989).

Gender as a sexual type divided into two, man and woman. They have their own right and identity. Talking about identity, many things come to my mind such language we speak, our faith, our religion, our passion and how to express it, our inhabitation, the way we wear, the way we choose our style, and everything about choice, and right to choose. In general, men and women have their specific rights and responsibility after married, such a wife must serve her husband while the husband must earn a livelihood for their welfare. Little life called family, women play a major role in educating their children. Not only in a family, but women also become the main resource for life, have a prominent role in the society development.

The role of women in various fields such as politics is still being empowered even though the proportion of women is only a few percent compared to the men in a parliament. This shows the phenomenon of gender inequality that occurs in society. Some women assumed that their rights are still lagging behind men. Gender inequality inhibits efforts to improve the quality of life for women. The low roles of women in society are irrespective of the patriarchal culture that still inherent in many countries in the world, which always suppose that men have to lead and seek money, while women just remain at home, kitchen, and mattress.

Gender equality is often discussed by several writers. One of them is Margaret Eleanor Atwood. *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood is a dystopian novel, a speculative fiction set in the US. Offred-the birth name is

June- is one of the Handmaids in the Republic of Gilead with her manager Commander Frederick Waterford. Handmaids here are assigned to bear children from their Commander, be a national resource for the country as the downscale of the drastic birth rate. The Republic of Gilead is a theocratic ruled by conservative Christians through biblical fundamentalism but contains unfairly human rights. Women were oppressed, prohibited to read, write, having job and control money. All women's movement and conversation are being controlled by the state police named 'Eyes' who may exist wherever of the city. Men have the biggest power in this religious government while women's identity is taken, especially for the Handmaids, even their real name (birth name) is forbidden to use anymore.

Margaret Eleanor Atwood is one of Canada's best-illustrious writer. She is internationally known in her novel, poem, and critical essays. Atwood was born in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada on November 18, 1939. In her childhood, she fond of writing books, poems, comics, and had started a novel. The bachelor's degree in 1961 she received at Victoria College, University of Toronto. Then she continued her master's degree in 1962 in Radcliffe College, Cambridge. She also studied at Harvard, Cambridge from 1962 till 1967. Most of Atwood's fictions have translated into more than 30 languages, her works are mostly appertained as sarcasm towards the society who fight through their identity, survive for the trap where the participant stuck in their own entrapment. Her novels got some prizes and awards include *The Blind Assassin*, *Alias Grace*, *The Robber Bride*, *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale* that made into a TV series. *The Testaments* is a sequel novel of *The Handmaid's Tale* will be published in 2019 and it tells about Offred's life in 15 years after.

The Handmaid's Tale narrates a Handmaid named Offred. She works for Commander Frederick Waterford and his wife, Serena Joy. Offred is not a real name, it means 'of Fred', the last name signed that she belongs to Fred. Every month as a fertile time of Offred, the whole house members include the Handmaid, Commander and his wife, household assistant and the Guardian

must hold a ceremony. First, the Commander will read one of the biblical verses (Genesis 30:1) that describes Jacob and Rachel who not blessed to have children, then Rachel begged Jacob to impregnate their Handmaid, Bilhah which later Bilhah must hand over her baby to Rachel and Jacob.

After that, the Commander, the Wife, and the Handmaid come into the bedroom. Offred lies down on the mattress where her head is on Serena's lap. Serena holds down Offred's arm while Fred stands face to them and fertilize Offred. This 'non-erotic' sex happens because of the downscale of the birthrate in the country. A religious group named 'Sons of Jacob' believed that the 'fertility apocalypse' caused by the women on pornography, prostitution, free sex, homosexuality, contraception, pill, alcohol, etc. So this cause God mad, their wombs are polluted, can't produce the descent for the state's popularity. Women focus on their careers, not struggle on their God's will to bear and bring up children. 'Sons of Jacob' extremely took over the rules by claiming a state coup, reorganizing and drawing up the new state namely Gilead, according to their beliefs based on Biblical fundamentalism.

This fundamentalist regime takes power by capturing the residuary fertile women in order to stabilize the population in Gilead. People separated from their family, their jobs, and freedom. In the past, June as an assistant editor lived with Luke, her husband and a daughter named Hannah. Her mother is a Feminist, she also has a masculine-female friend named Moira who also captured with her in Gilead. Just the same as June, the other Handmaids are previously live as independent women. They have their own choice, they argue freely because democracy is legal, they were in self-determination, free to choose their sexual orientation, have occupations and got salary, live with happy family as middle-or upper-class American life. But when the fundamentalist regime comes into power, women denied her rights, reduced to be a 'livestock' for their population. June is not June anymore.

To make it seems legitimate and proper, the government used some references of the Bible. If there is one of the people violates the rules that not

under the Bible's teaching, the government will punish them such as murdering and hanging their bodies on the walls of the city and cutting hands. Although it sounds radical, the conservatives in Gilead believed that the Lord Jesus would forgive the punitive actions, those all done for the sake of the scripture.

The Handmaid's Tale got some positive and negative responses from the readers. Manda, in wordpress.com, said appreciatively that she amazed by the writer who made the tale so touching and has a complete characterization from all sides. It's mature and memorable, all chapters have an unpredictable plot twist. Patrick, in amazon.com, reviewed that Atwood has created a horrifying tale in an alternate reality. The narration of this speculative fiction runs so well and revealed the significant detail as if in a real-life

In spite of good responses, Denise, in amazon.com critically reviewed the book is confusing. Given the hype around bring up the question such "How can it go on so long while major changes happen and don't react by people outside the US?" There is no information detailed about how Handmaids, Marthas, the religious people, and economic advisers were chosen to support the main problem inside. Kate, in goodreads.com, said that the novel ignores the importance and logical tale components. "Society doesn't change overnight", she said. The clarification for the changes is suddenly happened just because of the wickedness.

Hence the researcher was fascinated to analyse *The Handmaid's Tale* novel because of several reasons. First, the cases inside are qualified with the phenomenon in society. Second, the tale was curious by the scope of religion. Third, the issues inside the novel are mixed up related to the conservative and Feminist perspectives. Based on the reasons, the researcher appoints the title **"STRUGGLES FOR GENDER EQUALITY AGAINST THE FUNDAMENTALIST REGIME IN *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* NOVEL (1985): A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE"**.

1.2. Problem Statement

Related to the background of the study above, the author interested to find some questions as follows:

- 1.2.1. What is the indicator of struggles for gender equality against the fundamentalist regime in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel?
- 1.2.2. How are the struggles for gender equality depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel?
- 1.2.3. Why did the author address the issue in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* novel?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Based on the problem statements and the formulation of the issues, then this research is aimed:

- 1.3.1. To describe the indicator of struggles for gender equality against the fundamentalist regime in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel
- 1.3.2. To discover the struggles for gender equality depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel
- 1.3.3. To clarify the author's purpose through the issue in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel

1.4. Benefits/Advantages

The findings of the present research study are expected to have importance to the author and readers as follows:

- 1.4.1. The author

That literary study can certainly help the author to find motives in the literature that people have not to expect in advance, to find new methods for the author questions, etc. and it can accelerate the accessible output of the author's creativity.

- 1.4.2. The readers

To increase social contact, to find out relationships in this world that antecedently unknown and relate the readers by understanding

various characters and issues of the tale. Hence with reading they subconsciously develop a new thinking pattern within many preferences.

1.5. Paper Organization

This research will be disunited into three chapters. The first chapter is the introduction that provides an overview of research, including the background, problem statements, objectives, and benefits. The second chapter is the literature review, which shows several previous researches related to the same study and the underlying theory of the study. The third is a chapter covering how the data of the study was obtained from, including the type and objectives of the study, type of data and data source, method of collecting data and technique of analysing data. The forth is finding and discussion based on the structural element. And the fifth is the conclusion and suggestion about the research.