

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Louisa May Alcott was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, on November 29, 1832. She was the middle kid in four children. Until 1848, she was schooled by her father, Amos Bronson Alcott, and studied informally with family friends like Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Theodore Parker. Residing in Boston and Concord, Massachusetts, she worked as a domestic servant and teacher, among other positions, to help support her family from 1850 to 1862. During the Civil War, she went to Washington, D.C. to work as a nurse. Louisa May Alcott was an American author who wrote under a variety of pen names, before her settling on her own name when she was ready to dedicate to writing. *Little Women* provided her with financial freedom as well as a lengthy writing career. Many of Alcott's writings, most notably *Little Women*, were best-sellers in the late 1800s.

This novel tells about a simple family, Mr. March, with a wife named Mrs. March. In their small home they live with a very wise mother (Mrs. March) and a kind and loyal female assistant, named Hannah. Then the father who was fighting on the battlefield of civil war in Concord. One day Meg and Jo got an invitation to go to a party from a rich family in his city. Then Meg and Jo will attend the party. Because they are a very simple family, they wear old dresses but they creatively integrate to

stay elegant. At first Laurie was an awkward person but eventually they were able to talk together and then dance together. Since then Jo wanted to get to know Laurie better, because according to Jo, Laurie looked lonely and never left the house. One morning Jo decided to go to Laurie's house, Jo felt sorry because he had never played. Laurie welcomed her guests well, in that house there was only Laurie and her eccentric grandfather and several assistants. After a few days of meeting and became closer then they became friends from that moment on. Laurie also often plays to March's family home, Laurie is very happy to have a new friend who is very cheerful.

One day Laurie invites Jo and Meg for a holiday then Laurie invites Mr. Brooke his teacher to take part in their holiday, at the time from which Mr. Brooke likes Meg, but the young Meg does not want to get married soon. Then one day after they came home from vacation, suddenly his mother told them to give a meal that normally be for breakfast to a neighbor who had no food, which in the house was a hungry baby, then March's family began to intensively in assisting the family. In addition to working at the home of March's aunt, Jo also sent her story to the publishers, but she was kept secret from her family, but not with Laurie who knew about it. When it was snowing at that time, suddenly the post box in front of the March family's house contained news that their father, Mr. March was seriously ill, all at once in the house were nervous and crying. Mrs. March then realized that everything had to be done as soon as possible and immediately left to take care of her husband. Then the Laurent family also helped to prepare all the needs of Mrs. March

on the way. Suddenly Jo disappeared, which finally he boldly and sincerely decided to cut hair and sell hair to help with travel expenses and the need to care for his father later. His hair was like a boy's, and gave the money to Mrs. March, they were all moved by his decision. Before his departure Mrs. March advised that they love each other and do the same work as usual and look after each other, he also said they must obey Hannah as long as her mother was not at home. Finally Mrs. March departed accompanied by Mr. Brooke on the orders of Mr. Laurent.

When the four girls were at home without her mother, the house felt empty, but they had to keep as her mother said, Jo continued to work at Aunt March's house, as well as Meg, then Beth sincerely cared for a neighbor's child who turned out to have an infectious disease. And luckily even Beth contracted the disease. Feeling guilty about not taking good care of his sister, Jo took care of Beth with love, then Mr. Laurent brought a doctor to examine Beth's critical condition. They all panicked to make a decision and said that Beth was being critical because of contracting the disease to her mother. Then Laurie sent a letter to Mrs. March tells that Beth is critical. At the day after tomorrow his mother returned home, while Mr. Brooke and Mr. The march stays at Concord. And at that moment Beth's condition had recovered. After weeks of hard times, they were replaced by happiness because their father returned home.

In this novel, there are many lessons that we can take and are very real in everyday life, the story is light discussing family problems and women's problems in

this day. Simple but the message in the novel is very touching, also in this novel tucked in that women must be strong and must have the freedom and purpose of their lives, such as Jo's character who has to work to help financially support his family, and the younger sibling who goes to school. So in this novel a character who is free and does not follow the ideal female desires of society in general.

The classic Novel *Little Women* has its own appeal for readers. The content of stories depicting real life in general does not continuously show excessive luxury from his characters. A simple plot can make the reader feel the warmth of the family while reading the novel. A Novel depicting love and compassion with the family. Readers can take the value of the story told in the novel, and the author beautifully adds the values of feminism that are encapsulated simply. This novel deserves to be discussed and enjoyed, because the plot is simple and depicting real life relating to women who dare to fight bad stereotypes in women.

The reason why researcher choose a novel *Little Women* because the issue of feminism is currently growing, many women are already aware of the importance of feminism. The current issue of feminism continues to develop, because it has been supported by many women in the world. Today's women are aware of the importance of feminism. Because the existence of a feminist movement of justice for women is getting better and more recognized in the world, even though women are not completely free from the bad stigma and unfair treatment that women have always felt. This novel contains the issue of feminism that will be raised in this study,

because in the future the issue of feminism will be more developed and gender equality for women is accepted throughout the world, career opportunities and education for women will be better.

Feminist developments in the world are getting better, women in the world are starting to become aware of this movement. Feminism is a new perspective which is a bright spot for women to find justice. The women's ability and right to participate in the public sphere, at least by vote, was asserted by liberals of the eighteenth century, nineteenth and early twentieth by examining the institution of marriage and law in divorce and property legislation and challenging the practices of denying women access to the same qualitative education as men and professions. Some women argued that men and women were of equal human value to justify their claim; some stated that some females are superior to some males and that so every female should have the chance to show their value and some contended that the virtues of women were superior to the virtues of males, and so justified influence on political and economic activities. According to Jagger classified liberal feminism as philosophy and work that focuses on concerns such as employment equality, education, and political rights. Important issues that exist in liberal feminists are reproductive rights and abortion, sexual harassment, voting, education, "equal pay between women and men", affordable child care, affordable health care, and highlighting the frequency sexual violence and domestic violence against women.

The writer uses a socialist Feminism theory as an approach to analyze this novel, because this novel depicts a women freedom and women struggle, so it is appropriate with Socialist Feminism theory as an approach. By so doing, the researcher gives the title: **WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST GENDER INEQUALITY REFLECTED IN *LITTLE WOMEN* NOVEL: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE.**

B. Problem Statements

This researcher has forms problem statement of this study, as follows:

- a. What are the kinds of gender inequality in the novel *Little Women*?
- b. How is gender inequality reflected in the novel *Little Women*?
- c. How is struggle of the character portrayed through socialist feminism in the novel *Little Women*?

C. Objectives of the Study

Based on the research problems, the objectives of this research as follows:

- a. To identify the kinds of gender inequality in the novel *Little Women*.
- b. To analyze how the way gender inequality is reflected in the novel *Little Women*.
- c. To find out how struggle of the character is reflected in the novel *Little Women*.

D. Limitation of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the writer limits the research as follows:

The object Limitation of this research is study focuses in analyzing feminism reflected in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* novel (1868) based on a feminist approach.

E. Benefits of the Study

The benefits of the study that conducted by the research as follow:

a. Theoretical Benefit

The result of this study is expected to be able to give information the development of the knowledge, and as an academic reference by other researchers to conduct further research and particularly the literary studies on *Little Women* novel.

b. Practical Benefit

The study is expected to broaden the writer's knowledge and experience, as well as that of other students at Muhammadiyah University in Surakarta and other universities that are interested in literary studies on the novel from a feminist perspective.