

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Nowadays, there have been many cases on women oppression. Women oppression is a common thing. Several years ago, many victims of the oppression especially the violence, were afraid to tell about their experiences to other people. Nowadays, many victims of the violence have the courage to tell their experiences to other people. Many law institutes handle the case of violence against women. These institutes aim to assist the victims to get their rights as a human being.

The oppression against women is caused by some factors such as men's domination within the family, men's power on making decision, cultural contexts, gender distinction, et cetera. The society differentiates men and women not only based on their gender but also their roles. It means that gender is a certain stereotype for men and women that are constructed by social and cultural background.

Patriarchal society uses rigid gender roles to keep women passive – affectionate, obedient, responsive, to sympathy and approval, cheerful, and men active – aggressive, curious, ambitious, responsible, original and competitive (Tong 49).

As a matter of fact, the gender distinction in the society always serves many disadvantages. Almost in many aspects, women are 'oppressed' by men and are placed as subordinate group. As a result, many women become the victim and the main object of violence.

Every cultural background has its norms and attitudes. It is very different from one country to another. For example in Afghanistan, the cultural practice such as “bride price” , “force marriage” or “child marriage” is common (Tapper 115). Many girls stop going to school when they are considered mature enough to get married. Some parents try to marry their daughters as soon as possible to avoid bad opinion from the society. The main factor of bride-price, force marriage or child marriage is the reaction to extreme poverty. Many people claim that “force marriage” or “bride price” or “child marriage” is the primary factor of the oppression against women. Tapper states that the oppression against women and girls in Afghanistan is pervasive. Afghan women and girls live with the risk of abduction, rape, force marriage and face daily discrimination (120).

The oppression against women appears within the family. Mostly, women depend on men when they are married. In a marriage life, sometimes their husbands misuse their authority. It means that the husbands have a full authority to control and limit women’s freedom. They often beat their wives and children as symbols of honor and ownership. The imbalance of power relationship and male domination in a family may cause domestic violence. Domestic violence is about control and power within the marriage life or family. Domestic violence against women is often built in a societal structure that devalues women and overvalues men. In certain society, for example in Afghanistan, according to Dupree, domestic violence is a family problem rather than public problem. Therefore, the society creates a norm that if a woman experiences such violence, she may not tell it to others. As a result, the society would mark her as “immodest” or “immoderate” if she disobeyed the rules (90). A husband or a father has the right

to control both domestic and public sphere within the family. As the result, it has placed men as superior and women as subordinate.

Most victims of the domestic violence feel trapped and hopeless. They are afraid to leave the relationship because they do not know how they will manage their children, economic security or physical safety (Deaton, 10). Domestic violence has wide range and sometimes long-term effects on the victim. Deaton argues that the effects can be both physical and psychological. Long term effects of domestic violence may include depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, unrealistic expectations and feelings of danger (Deaton 13).

A Thousand Splendid Suns is one of literary works that explores the oppression toward Afghanistan women represented through the eyes of Mariam and Laila. This novel tells about the women's oppression and struggle to end the miseries within their life. Both, Laila and Mariam as the representation of Afghanistan women, suffer a gender-based abuse. Mariam and Laila are two Moslem women who were born in different background in the terms of class, culture, and family. Those two female characters endure the brutality of their husband, Rasheed. When Mariam's mother dies, she lives with his father and stepmothers. Then, they quickly arrange Mariam's widower, Rasheed. Her marriage turns into a nightmare when she suffers a miscarriage. Since the accident, Rasheed's behavior radically changes. Many things that Mariam do in order to please him no longer satisfy him. Rasheed is no longer cordial to her, and verbally and physically abuses her (Hosseini 94). Kate Millet says in *Sexual Politics* that traditional patriarchy grants the father nearly a total ownership over wife and children, including the power of physical abuse and even murder and

sale (34). This condition shows that women depend on men. Women do not have a right to complain, speak up, and give suggestion. They are expected to be passive and submissive.

Besides suffering ill-treatments from their husband, Mariam and Laila also suffer from the oppression under the Taliban regime that makes their life more sorrowful. The Taliban immediately makes some strict rules such as women are forbidden to work and go to school; women are forbidden from being alone on the street unless accompanied by their husband; women are forced to wear *burqa* in public; women are forbidden to seek a healthcare, et cetera. Under the Taliban regime, they live in fear, uncertainty, insecure and these conditions affect their psychology. Women and girls are systematically discriminated and marginalized. Their human rights are violated.

Many feminist critics said that these representations – weak, submissive, dependent, nurture – belong to the traditional gender role which has had to be obeyed by women. According to Millet, patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women. Men are always dominant or masculine and women are always have the subordinate or feminine. This ideology is so powerful that men are usually able to secure the apparent consent of the women they oppress (Tong 49).

A Thousand Splendid Suns was published in 2007 and won many awards. The novel has received many reviews from Publisher Weekly, Library Journal, Booklist and Kirkus Reviews. This novel is Khaled Hosseini's second bestseller novel after his first novel entitled *The Kite Runner*. In addition, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was published in 25 countries.

Khaled Hosseini is one of novelists who focuses on social issues in Afghanistan. He uses Afghanistan as the background and the inspiration in making the story. He was born in Afghanistan (Kabul) in 1965 and moved to United States in 1980. His father was a diplomat in the Afghanistan Foreign Ministry. His mother taught Farsi and History in a large high school in Kabul. The Hosseini's have sought and were granted political asylum in the United States. In September 1980, Hosseini's family moved to San Jose, California. Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and enrolled at Santa Clara University where he earned a bachelor's degree in Biology in 1988. In the following year, he entered the University of California-San Diego's School of Medicine, where he earned a Medical Degree in 1993. He completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. In 2006, he was named as US goodwill envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency. (<http://www.khaledhosseini.com/hosseini-media.html> page 3).

There are some reasons why the writer uses the novel as the study. First, the writer is very interested in analyzing Mariam and Laila's life as the victim of domestic violence and oppression. Second, the thesis writer is interested in Mariam and Laila's struggles to end up their miseries and oppression.

B. Statement of the Problems

Based on the background of the study above, there are two questions arise as follows:

1. How is the oppression against the main characters portrayed in the novel?
2. How do Mariam and Laila struggle to end the oppression?

C. Objective of the Study

The Objectives of the Study is to find out:

1. How the oppression against the main characters portrayed in the novel.
2. How Mariam and Laila struggle to end the oppression.

D. Scope and Limitation

In the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, there are many problems, events, and conflicts, which can be analyzed through various perspectives. Therefore, this study must have a focused issue, so that the research will not be too wide-ranging. The writer limits the discussion and focuses the analysis only on the oppression against Mariam and Laila and their struggles as the victims of their husband's ill-treatment and any other oppression.

E. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to create women's awareness that they are not the victims of the oppression. They are able to change their life if they have courage to struggle and change their life. This study also aims to create new stigma that women are equal to men and women are not the object.

Finally, the writer expects that this study can give any contribution to the study of literature in general, especially in women's studies in the English Department of Airlangga University.

F. Theoretical Background

In analyzing the novel, the writer applies feminist criticism to see the oppression against the main characters and their struggles. It is used to find out how women are oppressed by the traditional custom. It is chosen because feminist criticism is largely concerned with women issues that are closely related to patriarchal system. Patriarchy is a system in which the societies portray men's domination over woman and it continues to the male dominance in all aspects in society (Kandiyoti 80). In *Contemporary Feminist Theories* Jackson argues that according to the patriarchal society, the archetypal good woman starts as a virtuous, obedient daughter, and ends as a submissive wife and nurturing mother (8). The social status and economics of women depend on the man in her life. Furthermore, her happiness depends on her goodwill.

Dealing with domestic violence, In *Sexual Politics*, Millet says that the traditional patriarchy grants the father nearly a total ownership over wife and children including the power of physical abuse and even murder and sale (34). If a woman accepts her social condition as a passive side, it drives her to defenseless both physical and emotional towards man's assault (36).

G. Method of the Study

To make a proper analysis, there is the technique of data collection consisting of several steps. The first step is library research. The main source is taken from the novel itself *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Library research aims to gain the information that can support the analysis. It is applied by gaining and

collecting the important information from printed materials such as books, dictionaries and from internet.

After collecting data, the next step is close reading. Close reading aims to determine what is to be analyzed. It is applied by exploring the data and the problem found in the work through the dialogues and events in the novel. This method is applied based on the work itself and supported by other information concerning this work. In addition, the writer will use some quotations from various sources to confirm and support the analysis.

The third step is the technique of data analysis by using descriptive analysis, which is applied to give descriptive explanation of the problems found in the work through the dialogues, events, and actions in the story.

The fourth step is conclusion. It is the last step in the study. The conclusion is adapted through descriptions which are implied in the study.

H. Definition of the Key Terms

Domestic Violence : any form of abusive behavior that occurs in a marriage life.

Patriarchy : the concept of male domination or authority to control women's life.

Oppression : a domination or repression toward the marginalized group.

Victims : a person who suffers from violence and oppression.

Gender : a certain stereotype that constructed by the society based on the sexual identity.