

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an introduction. In this chapter, it contains the background of the research, research questions, research purposes, research significance, and finally the definition of key terms.

### 1.1 Research Background

Literary works exist as a concrete form of reflection on life that is rich in meaning emotions, and experiences. In every piece of literature, the author not only creates stories or fictional characters but also includes realistic portrayals of daily life, whether social, cultural, political, or psychological. The realities of life become important elements in a literary work because they help readers build emotional connections and reflect on the situations around them. Literature serves as an effective medium to express life's various issues, record social changes, and give social criticism that is sometimes hard to express directly. Therefore, literature functions not only as a source of entertainment or artistic creation but also as a mirror of the realities in society and a way to understand the complexity of human beings and the world they live in.

One of the themes that often appears in literary works is women's resistance. This theme becomes important because it reflects the struggle of women in facing various forms of injustice, oppression, and domination that come from social, cultural, economic, and political systems. In many literary works, female characters are portrayed not only as individuals who suffer, but also as active subjects who dare to resist, fight back, and struggle to gain their rights. Through these narratives of resistance, literature becomes a means to voice women's experiences, highlight gender inequality, and inspire readers to see the role of women in society more critically and fairly.

According to Sheila Rowbotham in her book *Women, Resistance, and Revolution* (1972), women's resistance is the role and attitude of women who

challenge economic, social, political, and other systems through collective action and revolution (Rowbotham, 2014). She emphasizes that women have the power to create significant change when they unite and express their rejection of the systems that oppress them. This resistance does not always take the form of direct or physical action, but can also appear through symbolic acts, writing, social organizations, and participation in revolutionary movements. Rowbotham's view strengthens the understanding that women's resistance is an essential part of the process of social change, and literature functions as a medium to record, express, and expand the meaning of that struggle.

Throughout the history of societies that embrace the patriarchal system, women often become victims of injustice that extends across various aspects of life, such as access to education, opportunities and treatment in the workplace, roles and positions within the family, and their interaction and existence in the broader social environment. In this context, it is important to highlight the thoughts of Sylvia Walby, who sharply reveals the essence of the patriarchal system. As Walby states in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*, patriarchy is a social structure in which men dominate and exploit women (Ramadessela, 2021). This statement emphasizes that gender injustice does not arise from biological differences alone but is the result of social constructions that place women in a disadvantaged position.

Therefore, male dominance in patriarchal culture creates inequalities that become increasingly difficult to eliminate without awareness and collective efforts to fight for equality between men and women. This inequality is not only reflected in the unequal distribution of social roles, but also in various discriminatory practices that have become part of the social structure and continue across generations. In this situation, critical awareness from both individuals and groups is necessary to deconstruct the social construction that places women in an inferior position (Risman, 2018). This statement emphasizes that gender inequality is not something natural, but rather the result of a social system that is created and maintained to uphold the dominance of one group over another. That is why resistance emerges as a conscious effort carried out by a group of people or

communities within society to free themselves from the oppressive chains of patriarchy.

The issues related to the patriarchal system are not only found in everyday life, such as in family environments, schools, workplaces, or society, but also are often raised and criticized through various literary works. In this case, literature has the power to reflect social realities and serve as a medium to voice the injustices experienced by women within a system that place men at the center of power. Through stories written with cultural backgrounds and everyday life settings, readers are invited to understand how women are often treated unfairly and they are limited in their roles simply because of their gender. One of the literary works that strongly raised the issue of women's resistance to the patriarchal system was a novel entitled *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini.

The novel of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* published in 2007 achieved great success, including winning the California Book Award for Fiction in 2008. In addition, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* became a best selling book, selling millions of copies. This novel belonged to the genre of historical fiction and took place within a real historical background. The novel illustrated the struggles, suffering, and inner conflicts experienced by its two main characters, Mariam and Laila. They faced injustices in their lives, such as discrimination, domestic violence, and unfair treatment by society. Moreover, with the genre of historical fiction within a real historical background, the novel portrayed the lives of Afghan women who had to struggle against the harsh traditional and social systems that placed them in weak positions without a voice.

However, behind all the suffering experienced by the Mariam and Laila as the main characters, they did not simply remain silent and accept their fate, but they continuously tried to resist the patriarchal system that constrained their lives. Through their characters, readers could see how women faced various forms of discrimination, violence, and injustice rooted in the patriarchal culture that dominated their environment. This is as one reason the novel is chosen to be the

research object. Besides, it is as one of the important examples of how the issue of patriarchy could be voiced and criticized through literature, allowing society to become more aware of the importance of fighting for women's rights and equality.

Several studies related to the topic of women's resistance to the patriarchal system have been conducted previously, some of them are:

The first research was written by Yasin, Waqar, Javed, and Naeem (2021) entitled "*Endurance of the subaltern: A study of A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khalid Hosseini.*" This study explained that the female characters in Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* were portrayed as a group that was subordinated, marginalized, and not given a voice either in the social or religious system. The female characters such as Nana, Mariam, and Laila still showed endurance and carried out resistance through resilience. This study was analyzed using the Subaltern theory of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), who in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* argued that the subaltern basically did not have a voice because they were always silenced and represented by the dominant class; nevertheless, this article showed that in the context of the novel, the female characters were able to step out of silence.

The second was conducted by Kurnia, Rokhman, Rustono, and Mardikantoro (2024) entitled "*Women's Resistance to the Customary Practice of Captive Marriage in the Novel Women Cry to the Black Moon*"PAPER". The highlighting of this research was the resistance of women carried out by a character named Magi in facing the oppressive patriarchal system, particularly through the practice of forced marriage, which was considered part of culture and tradition. The resistance carried out by Magi was not open or frontal, but she chose to fight in a careful and strategic way. Magi secretly made a plan to free herself from the patriarchal system that had been restraining her and tried to regain the freedom that had been taken away from her. The hidden form of resistance carried out by Magi showed that women possessed strength and courage to challenge the oppressive system.

The third was employed by Rosemary and Arianto (2023) entitled "*Woman Resistance toward Domestic Roles in 'Little Women' Novel by Louisa May Alcott: Feminist Approach.*" This study presented the resistance against domestic roles that had long been attached to women, becoming an important focus in this story, where the character Jo March and her sisters firmly rejected the traditional view that positioned women only as housekeepers and servants to their husbands. Jo March, as one of the most prominent characters, showed her resistance by choosing a life path that was different from the social expectations of her time. The resistance carried out by Jo March and her sisters was not aggressive or openly rebellious but was manifested through courageous life choices.

The last was written by Salsabila, Panjaitan, and Mandela (2023) entitled "*Resistance Toward Subordination of Women in The Breadwinner Novel by Deborah Ellis: A Feminist Study.*" This research focused on the resistance carried out by Parvana in the novel *The Breadwinner* was a real form of women's efforts to oppose the practice of subordination that had long placed them in lower positions in society. Faced with this unfair situation, Parvana and several other women chose to resist in an intelligent and strategic way, namely by disguising themselves as men so that they could leave the house, work, and contribute to their families. This disguise was not merely an effort to survive, but also a form of silent protest that showed women had the same right to be in public spaces and to determine their own destinies.

From the previous studies mentioned above, all of them were related to this ongoing research. The similarity lies in the theme of women's resistance against the patriarchal system. Although those studies similarly discussed women's resistance, the difference highlighted by the researcher is in the research object and the theory used. The novelty of this research entitled *Women's Resistance to The Patriarchal System in Khaled Hosseini's Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the use of a different theory and a deeper exploration of the topic discussed.

## 1.2 Research Questions

Based on the research background, the researcher finds some problem to be analyzed in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The following questions constitute the central focus of this study:

1. How are the forms of women's resistance to the patriarchal system in *Khaled Hosseini's Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns*?
2. How is the impact of women's resistance to the patriarchal system on their own lives and their communities in *Khaled Hosseini's Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns*?

## 1.3 Research Purposes

Based on the research questions mentioned above, the main purposes of this study are:

1. To describe the forms of women's resistance to the patriarchal system in *Khaled Hosseini's Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns*.
2. To describe the impact of women's resistance to the patriarchal system on their own lives in *Khaled Hosseini's Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

## 1.4 Research Significances

In line with the research question, the main purposes of this study are:

1. Benefits theoretically

This research is expected to provide information on the analysis of women's resistance to the patriarchal system, especially in Khaled Hosseini's Novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Moreover, this research is expected to provide benefits in applying feminist theory in analyzing women's resistance to the patriarchal system in Khaled Hussein's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

2. Benefits practically

This research can provide valuable knowledge and references regarding the analysis of literary works, especially in Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, by applying feminist theory as the main analytical framework. Through this study, readers and future researchers are expected to gain a deeper understanding of women's resistance to patriarchal systems as depicted in the novel, as well as how feminist perspectives can be used to critically examine gender inequality in literary texts.

### **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

The definition of key terms is made to clarify the meaning and avoid misunderstandings in understanding the meanings of research terms. The following is an explanation of the terms in research:

#### **1. Discrimination**

Discrimination is the unfair treatment that occurs when an individual or a group of people is treated differently or unequally based on certain characteristics such as gender, social status, religion, culture, race, or other factors inherent to their identity (Fulthoni, Aminah, Sihombing 2009). In practice, discrimination can appear in various forms, whether explicitly or implicitly, and can take place in many areas of life, including the workplace, education, healthcare services, legal systems, and everyday social interactions. These discriminatory actions not only harm the individuals who are subjected to them but also reinforce social inequalities that are deeply embedded within the structure of society.

#### **2. Patriarchy**

According to Nurcahyo in Murniati's book, patriarchy is a male-dominated system where men hold power to determine what is allowed and what is not in various areas of life (Beti, Kolne, Korbaffo, 2024). This system not only describes male dominance in the context of households or personal relationships, but also reflects how male authority is socially and culturally structured in different aspects of society, including decision-making in families, the division of social roles, and



control over women's bodies and choices. In a patriarchal system, men hold a superior position that society legitimizes both historically and culturally, while women are often placed in subordinate roles with limited freedom. Patriarchy also affects formal institutions such as education, law, and politics, where policies and practices often reproduce gender inequality in a systematic way.

### 3. Women's Resistance

According to Sheila Rowbotham in her book *Women, Resistance, and Revolution* (1972), women's resistance is the role and attitude of women who challenge economic, social, political, and other systems through collective action and revolution (Rowbotham, 2014). This view emphasizes that women's struggle cannot be separated from the oppressive structural context, where women are not only victims of the patriarchal system but also active agents of change through their involvement in revolutionary movements. Rowbotham sees women's resistance not merely as an expression of individual dissatisfaction, but as a form of collective consciousness that grows from the real experiences of oppression faced by women in various sectors of life. Through her ideas, she highlights the importance of women's involvement in the broader dynamics of social struggle and rejects the notion that social revolution can occur without a fundamental transformation of women's position in society.

### 4. Novel

Novel is a literary work in the form of narrative prose (Supriyanto, Astuti, Munifah, 2023). As a form of fiction, a novel has richness in delivering stories, both in terms of plot, characters, setting, and the messages the author wants to convey. In this context, a novel is not only a medium of entertainment, but also a reflection of social, cultural, and psychological realities of society and individuals, imagined through aesthetic and communicative language. In addition, a novel has a complex structure because it is built from two main elements: intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements include the components that form the body of the story itself, such as theme, characters and characterization, plot, setting, point of view,



language style, and moral message. Meanwhile, extrinsic elements refer to various factors outside the text that influence the creation of a literary work, such as the social, cultural, political, economic, and even psychological background of the author or society at the time. The combination of intrinsic and extrinsic elements makes a novel not only interesting to read but also rich for critical and in-depth analysis, as it represents human life in various dimensions and perspectives.

## 5. Women's Oppression

The women's oppression serves as the fundamental root of the emergence and continuation of gender inequality. When women continuously experience various forms of oppression, such as symbolic violence, restrictions of rights, social exclusion, and control over their bodies and minds, they remain in an unequal position compared to men. This inequality does not occur naturally; rather, it is constructed and maintained by patriarchal cultural, political, and economic structures. As explained by Nawal El Saadawi in *The Hidden Face of Eve* (2015), gender inequality in Middle Eastern societies directly results from institutionalized oppression through social norms and power systems that position women as second-class citizens. El Saadawi emphasizes that the low status of women does not stem from Islamic teachings, but from deeply rooted socio-economic systems and political forces that render women an inferior group.

This situation clearly appears across various regions of the Middle East, where many women still face limitations in accessing formal education. A significant number are forced to drop out of school due to social or economic pressures, or because they are married off at a young age. This inequality is also reflected in the high rates of teenage pregnancy and the lack of female representation in public decision-making processes. Oppression that begins in early childhood, whether through cultural practices or discriminatory state policies, creates a cycle of inequality that is difficult to break. Therefore, to truly eliminate gender inequality in the Middle East, the first step must be to dismantle the deeply embedded forms of oppression within social, economic, and political systems.