

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

B.1 Theoretical Framework

This research uses liberal feminism theory to help analyze the object of the research. This theory is used to answer the research questions in the previous chapter. It focuses on the social issue of women's struggles for education. So, liberal feminism theory is chosen.

This research concerns female characters as the object of the analysis, so the most appropriate approach is the feminist approach for understanding women's lives and issues (Mulvey, 1988). Feminism is concerned with larger social change and social justice, and it is dedicated to improving the lives of women. As a result, the purpose is to deepen awareness of women's experiences, both past and current, and to foster appreciation of women's significance in the world (Tyson, 2006). For this study, the writer reviewed one type of feminism, which is liberal feminism. Liberal feminism is a theory that talks about a woman as a human being who has the same human rights as others (Eagleton, 2008). Thus, the basic understanding of liberal feminism is demanding equal rights for everyone, including women. This form of feminism aims to establish that women and men have equal access to the public sphere and to bring about changes through their struggles. Therefore, this approach

is considered suitable for this study due to the literary work consisting of female characters that show their struggles for education.

B.1.1 Liberal Feminists' Ideas on Women's Education

Mary Wollstonecraft proclaims that women must be granted their rights and personhood. As she noted, women and men receive the same education since all human beings deserve an equal chance to develop their relational and moral capacities to realize full personhood (Beasley, 2008).

Such an education, she believed, should be built on strengthening a woman's intellectual faculties, particularly by emphasizing the skills of logical reasoning and abstract thinking through the mastery of such subjects as mathematics, science, history, literature, and languages.

At the beginning of her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft sent a letter to Tallyrand that discusses the basics of the ideas presented throughout the article. She explains why she believes women's education is so important. Her main argument for women's rights is based on the simple principle that if she is not educated to become a man's companion, she will block the advancement of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be ineffective in terms of influence on general practice. How can women be expected to cooperate unless they understand why they should be virtuous? Unless freedom develops her reason and she understands her job and how it relates to her true good. If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism,

their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues springs, can only be produced by considering humanity's moral and civil interests; however, a woman's education and situation currently prevent her from engaging in such investigations. (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), a pioneering liberal feminist, argued that the misery and inequality faced by women stem largely from their neglected education. In her seminal critique, she expressed dismay over how civilization had failed to offer equal opportunities, especially in intellectual development. Wollstonecraft condemned the system of education shaped by male thinkers who perceived women more as objects of desire than as rational beings. This led to a curriculum that prioritized beauty and charm over strength and reason, making women ornamental rather than capable. She likened this to flowers overfed by rich soil—visually pleasing but short-lived and underdeveloped. As a result, many women were taught to aspire to love and admiration rather than respect and personal achievement, weakening their minds and stunting their growth as individuals. Her call for reform emphasized that women deserve an education that nurtures their capacity to be rational, independent, and morally grounded—qualities essential for meaningful participation in society (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

Mary Wollstonecraft critiques the prevailing approach to women's education, noting that it has primarily targeted upper-class "ladies," rather than women as a whole. She asserts that middle-class women are in the most "natural" state and thus most capable of benefiting from rational education. Wollstonecraft argues that the wealthy, raised in artificial conditions detached from everyday human needs and affections, become weak and vain—a result of being denied meaningful duties and moral development. This premature refinement, she claims, spreads immorality and vanity throughout society, weakening virtue at its core. Instead of strengthening the mind and character, the education of upper-class women renders them superficial and helpless, concerned more with amusement than with substance. In her view, a true liberal feminist education must emphasize character, rational thought, and moral strength over ornamental charm, especially for women who are not insulated by wealth and status (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

B.1.2 Liberal Feminists' Ideas on Women's Labor

The latest Betty Friedan's book, *Beyond Gender: The New Politics of Work and Family*, can be looked at as the alpha and omega of American liberal feminism. In *Beyond Gender*, Friedan claims that The Feminine Mystique was revolutionary: "Breaking through that age-old definition of a woman only in sexual relation to a man--wife, mother, sex object, housewife--never as a person defining herself by her actions in society, was, in fact, a

paradigm shift". The liberal feminist solution to gender equality was for women to have productive lives outside the home and to achieve economic and emotional independence. Unfortunately, most women who work outside the home now work a second shift within it. There is ample research that shows that women's productivity in their paid jobs does not suffer because of it, but jobs are still classified as "men's work" and "women's work," and women's jobs still pay less than men's. Friedan claims that she wants to go beyond gender, but, as a liberal feminist, the furthest she would go is to argue that women and men should equally share child-rearing and have equal job opportunities (Lorber, 2000).

Liberal feminists argue that women's labor—both paid and unpaid—has long been undervalued due to structural inequalities rooted in discriminatory social norms and limited access to education and opportunity. They advocate for equal pay, anti-discrimination laws, workplace rights, and the recognition of domestic labor as a legitimate economic contribution. Thinkers like Betty Friedan emphasized that the confinement of women to housework and caregiving roles, especially in middle-class households, represents a waste of talent and ambition. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan famously criticized the cultural myth that women find complete fulfillment in domesticity, pointing out that this ideology led to widespread dissatisfaction among educated women. Liberal feminists promote reform through legal and policy channels—supporting childcare provisions,

workplace flexibility, and equal employment opportunities—as a means to empower women to participate fully in public life and economic productivity without being penalized for their gender (Friedan, 1977).

B.1.3 Women's Condition in rural China in the 2000s

In the 2000s, after economic reform, China experienced rapid economic growth. In the era of economic growth, it turns out that rural women do not enjoy the benefits like other groups in society. There is inequality between women and men in China, which leads to the marginalization of rural women. Rural women constitute 31% of the total population in China (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2001). Rural women remain at the bottom of the social strata.

Since the mid-1980s, women have become the main productive force in agriculture. With the rapid economic growth in cities, rural men serve as a steady supply of cheap labour to perform work that city residents refuse to take up, such as construction. With rural to urban migration, agricultural work, once performed primarily by men, is now carried out by women, especially middle-aged women. Furthermore, the process of women's marginalization is aggravated by the regional discrepancy between coastal and inland provinces. Many rural women in the poorer western regions are locked in the cycle of poverty as a result of the feminization of agriculture (Jacka, 1997; Rempel, 2002). In these poorer and more remote regions, women are confronted with poor arable

lands, limited infrastructure, and a lack of access to loans, technology, knowledge, and training.

Chinese rural women's marginality continues to be reinforced by the perpetuation of the patriarchal social structure in rural areas and the revival of patriarchal values after the economic reforms. The recent migration of men working in urban centres has led to a new pattern of gender relations in rural China. The gender division of labour reflects a change in the cultural dichotomy in men's and women's work. In Chinese patrilineal society, men were responsible for the 'outside realm' of the family and women the 'inside realm'. It is a common expression in Chinese that "men rule outside and women inside". Although the content of women's work and men's work is changing, the division remains, as does the secondary value placed on women's work relative to men's. The traditional proverb, "men plough and women weave," has now been replaced by "men work, and women plough." (Judd, 2002). The feminization of agriculture has redefined agricultural production as 'inside work.' (Jacka, 1997), meaning that such work is carried out in the household domain. When more village men go to work in urban centres for a prolonged period, they leave their spouses to manage the household (Cheung et al., 2010).

Rural women in China are frequently left alone to work on their families' contractual land. These women are referred to as "liushou funu,"

or "women who stay behind on land." They are most often laboring on land that was contracted by their husbands' families. At the same time, these women do the majority of the reproduction, while men have relocated to cities for work. Farmers in the countryside face challenges such as slow income growth, rising costs of living and social services, outdated agricultural production, and underdeveloped rural areas due to China's urban-biased economic orientation (Chen, 2008).

B.2 Review of Related Research

These are some previous studies that relate to this research. The first is a thesis from Tiana (2015) already conducted An Analysis of Characterization in the *Diary of Ma Yan*. This study examined Ma Yan, the main character, and her parents to better understand the characterization technique using figurative language toward them, which was based on Albertine Minderop's theory, and how the characterization method may help construct the topic of the autobiographical book. According to the findings, Ma Yan is a sensitive and enthusiastic girl who uses metaphorical language to describe herself in her journal. Moreover, she used the terms "sweat and blood" to depict her parents' hard labor. Furthermore, the autobiographical novel *The Diary of Ma Yan* discusses the battle to survive in the face of adversity.

The second is an article from Hendriani (2016) with the title *Girls' Education: Dangers and Resistances in Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb's I am Malala and Deborah Ellis's My Name is Parvana*. This research examines

the difficulties and obstacles that the main characters experience when pursuing an education, particularly for girls. It also examines the works' major educational themes. This research employs liberal feminist theory. According to the study, three hurdles to girls' education exist: their low social status, poverty, and war. Both characters resist getting equal educational opportunities. They seek a better education while criticizing disparities. The resistances in both literary works take distinct forms. Malala maintained that women should be treated equally with men; therefore, she never gave up opposing danger, even after being shot by the Taliban. Meanwhile, Parvana argued that there must be equality of roles between women and men. Unfortunately, her effort fails, and she gives up. The significant issues, Malala and Parvana are aware of the advantages of education; therefore, they resist all dangers they faced.

The third is a thesis from Annas (2016) entitled *Liberal Feminism of Female Characters as Seen in Frozen Movie*. It is proposed to find out the liberal feminism values as it is reflected by the female characters, Elsa and Anna. In conducting this research, the researcher applies liberal feminism theory. By using that theory, the researcher divides liberal feminism values of the female characters into three parts: women as androgynous people, women as autonomous decision-makers, and women as intelligent creatures. From the analysis of women as androgynous people, Elsa and Anna are the figures of androgyny. They can present their feminine and masculine sides

through their manner, power, and character. Women as autonomous decision-makers part; they are firm and decisive characters in making decisions. From the women as intelligent creatures' part, both female characters are smart and quirky. They have skills dealing with negotiation and rational thought as well.

The fourth is an article from Pramesti and Widayanti in 2019 entitled / *Am Malala: A Woman's Struggle for Her Rights in Education*. This article discussed women's rights in education by using Liberal Feminism. The result of the novel's analysis showed the struggle of the main character, Malala, who received several wrong perceptions from her society, family, and tradition about the position of women. The false perceptions became the cause why her suffered from the inequality of education between men and women.

The fifth is a thesis from (Gunawati et al., 2021) entitled *An Analysis of Liberal Feminism in The Notebook Novel (1996) by Nicholas Sparks*. This research aims to find the traits of Noah Calhoun and Allison Nelson as the main characters that reflect liberal feminists in the novel. The findings stated that Noah Calhoun and Allison Nelson are liberal feminists. The traits of the main characters as liberal feminists are patient, sensitive, devoted, responsible, appreciative, powerful, confident, firm, forceful, carefree, and independent. The research found that the liberal feminist traits in the novel occurred 241 times. Allison Nelson and Noah Calhoun are androgynous liberal feminists. Their traits are a combination of positive feminine and masculine traits.

The sixth is an article from Purwarno, Mardhatillah, and Suhendi (2021) with the title Liberal Feminism in Ika Natassa's Novel *Critical Eleven*. This study applied liberal feminism as proposed by Lewis (2018). It claims that liberal feminism focuses on the issues of women's equality in the workplace, education, and political rights. The research results show that of the three matters focused on in liberal feminism as proposed by Lewis (2018), those of women's equality in the workplace and education are described in the novel by the character named Anya, who had a prestigious education and also has a good career as a management consultant. Equality in political rights is not found in the novel.

The seventh is an article from Dewi, Resen, and Sidhakarya (2021) entitled Analysis of Liberal Feminism in the Novel *Mulan's Secret Plan* by Tessa Roehl. Liberal feminism can be seen in the character of Mulan. She struggled for her right to get educational opportunities the same as men and to choose what she wanted to do. The theory of liberal feminism proposed by Tong (2008) was utilized in this study. The result indicates that these two aspects of liberal feminism in Mulan's character were equal education and equal liberty.

Based on the previous research above, there are similarities and differences between the research and the researcher's study. The studies above used the theory of liberal feminism to analyze the characters of the object. The researcher's focus on this study is how the main character, Ma Yan, and her mother represent the issue of women's education in the book *Diary*

of *Ma Yan* by using the liberal feminism theory from Mary Wollstonecraft and Betty Friedan.

