

GENDER DISCRIMINATION REFLECTED IN *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD* BY ZORA NEALE HURSTON: FEMINIST APPROACH

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze gender discrimination reflected in novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. This study reveals kinds of gender discrimination as reflected in the novel and how the gender discrimination affects characters as reflected in the novel. This study employed feminist approach. The writers only focused on analyzing gender discrimination issue limited on woman. The results show that the kinds of gender discrimination found in the novel were natalivity inequality, mortality inequality, household inequality, special opportunity inequality, and professional inequality. The effect of gender discrimination covered physical problems, psychological problems, impact on women's family and dependent, and impact on social.

Keywords: *feminist approach, Their Eyes Were Watching God, gender discrimination*

Introduction

Kind of written work by human to express their feelings, as media to share information, or as reflection of human life and environment is called literature. Rees (1973) states that "literature is a permanent expression in words of some thoughts or feeling or idea about life and the world." It means that literature portrays life through words. Literature shows new point of view, insert beliefs, art and also tradition in it. The author sends messages, gives information, and influences the readers' mind by their writing explicitly or implicitly. Indirectly, people get new information from reading literature whether it is poem, play or prose.

Generally, literature can be divided into drama, poetry and prose. According to Pawar (2012) drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance. Drama is performed by actors according to the written script on the stage. It is a form of action performing arts that represent the actions, conflicts and crisis to the audience through oral literary and performance. According to Arbuthnot (as cited in Regie Routman, 2005), "poetry is a type of literature in which the sound and meaning of language are compiled to create ideas and feelings." Poetry is any kind of writing typically reserved to express feeling in artistic way.

In this research, the writers chose "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*", a novel by Zora Neale Hurston because a human female must have their right to be treated as equal as male, to voice, their thoughts and to decide their own choice for life. Moreover, the writers hoped the reader is interested to read this novel and can take the messages that can be found in novel especially for women, students, parents and the teachers. the writers investigate What are kinds of gender discrimination as reflected in "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*" A Novel by Zora Neale Hurston ? and How does gender discrimination affect characters as reflected in "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*" A Novel by Zora Neale Hurston ?

Based on the explanation above, the writers was interested in doing a study entitled "Gender Discrimination Reflected in "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*" by Zora Neale Hurston : Feminist Approach."

Literature Review

According to Pawar (2012), “novel is a book of long narrative in literary prose.” A novel belongs to prose and is also different from short story and novella in amount of words. In a novel there are some aspects built, i.e. intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements are the elements which develop the literary work from inside such as plot, theme, setting, character and characterization and of course point of view. While the extrinsic are the elements which build the novel from outside. Readers who want to analyze a novel have to understand the background of the author, the social background where the novel has been created, the psychology of the characters of the novel, the world view about the novel itself and those are called extrinsic elements.

Their Eyes Were Watching God was published for the first time in 1937. This novel follows the life of Janie Crawford, a girl of mixed black and white heritage, around the turn of the century which was not an easy time to be of mixed race. Janie’s first marriage, to farmer Logan Killicks, was planned and executed by Janie’s well-intentioned grandmother, Nanny. Unfortunately, Nanny's plan did not go so well. In this marriage, Janie chafes under the uninspired but reliable Logan. After he threatened to kill her for not obeying him, Janie leaves Logan for the suave and ambitious Joe Starks.

Joe took Janie to Eatonville, Florida, America’s first all-black city, where she lived the high life as the mayor’s wife. However, Janie found that her husband had very rigid definitions of a woman’s role. Joe often silenced Janie and refused to listen to others’ opinions which were no kind of good.

After enduring mostly unhappy marriage with Joe, Janie finally met a young, uneducated wastrel named Tea Cake. She thought she could find genuine love for the first time, but fate intervenes, and Janie feared she had to choose between his safety and her own.

To research this book precisely, the writers used feminist approach. According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004:27), feminism is a theory that the position and right of men and women is equal in economic, politic and social life. People who believe in the theory of feminism called feminist. They make struggles to make the right and position of woman and men equal.

The struggle on the equality then leads to the issue of gender discrimination. According to Henning and Laulom (2012:8), gender discrimination can be formed in sexual harassment, gender inequality at work and goods and services. Gender is not same as sex. Sex is a given chromosome, hormones, genes and sexual organ which differs man and woman, while gender refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex. Misconception of gender and sex results gender discrimination appears among society. Women are usually considered to be treated unfairly than men, receive inequality right as human in civic, social, politic and even in a family. The gender discrimination can be rejection, restriction and exclusion from one gender to another.

There are some kinds of gender discrimination faced by women as Sen (2001) states such as natality inequality, mortality inequality, basic facility inequality, special opportunity inequality, professional inequality, ownership inequality and household inequality.

Method

This study was qualitative research because it cannot be treated with statistical procedures, as the variables are not those of quantitative research. According to Hancock (1998), qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena.

The purpose of the study was focused on analyzing kinds of gender discrimination and its effects to the characters. In order to achieve this purpose, the writers did library research.

George (2008) mentions that “library research method involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point.”

This method is an attempt to trace the sources of information which are relevant to the study. Library research was a research in a library or in a room that the writers employed to get some data and information from various books or other reading sources which are related to the topic chosen.

Discussion

The writers analyzed gender discrimination issue in the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* which was written by Zora Neale Hurston in 1937. This study used feminist approach for understanding the story from a view as a woman because the main character of this novel was a woman. According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004), feminism is a theory about the position and right of men and women which is equal in economic, politic and social life. Then, main issue of this novel was about gender discrimination issue. According to Alsaleh (2012), gender inequality refers to the unequal valuing of the roles of women and men. Thus, gender equality can be defined as equal treatment of women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities and society at large.

Based on the data analysis, the writer found out some of gender inequality in this novel are natality inequality, mortality inequality, household inequality, special opportunity inequality and professional inequality. The women character suffered the effect of gender discrimination, such as effect on physical problem, psychological problem, impact on woman’s family and dependent and impact on social.

Murthy, Upadhyay and Nwadinobi (2009) mention that violence against women can be form in discrimination, emotional and also physical abuse. One of those of violations is sexual subjugation, such as rape. As the consequence of sexual violence, abortion is one of the way to ignore baby girl born to life or they let the baby born but gender violence will raise more, such as female infanticide, physical abuse, neglect, poor nutrition, and lack of immunization and medical care.

In this novel natality inequality was reflected when little Janie was neglected by her mother because she got depression after she had been raped by her school teacher and got unwanted pregnant. Janie’s mother, Leafy chose not to abort her pregnancy but Leafy decided to bear Janie to the world although it was very bad condition for her. Then, Nanny as Janie’s grandmother took a role as parent for poor Janie after she was neglected and left by her mother.

In mortality inequality, the domination of men towards women especially in this novel is drawn in the relationship of master and his slave in violation of women and sexual subjugation. Alsaleh (2012) argues that, in some countries where male dominates the women, they feel like have more power in controlling women in any aspect of life, such as clothing, driving license, right to travel and marriage. It was reflected on how Nanny, Janie’s grandmother who was a black woman slave had been raped by his master and got pregnant. She has to submit his master’s command even if it would damage her. As a child who was born as rapist victim, Leafy, Janie’s mother experienced tragic sexual subjugation too. Nanny took care of Leafy and let her go to school for reaching her dream as a free woman. Unfortunately, her dream was broken out by a tragic incident. Leafy was raped by her school teacher and got pregnant.

Furthermore, the writer found household inequality in Janie’s life. According to Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (2002), kinds of spousal abuse in domestic

violence such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, destruction of property and pets, verbal abuse and isolation. In household inequality, Janie got verbally abused from Logan Killicks who was her first husband and Joe Starks who was her second husband.

Besides verbally abused, Janie was physically hurt in domestic violation by Joe Starks because of little mistakes she did. Janie was dominated by both of her husband, it could be seemed in her marriage with Logan Killicks who treated her like a slave rather than a spouse, then her second husband, Joe Starks also dominated her life by forbade her to socialize with others because her status as a Mayor's wife which made Janie felt lonely and isolated from society. Furthermore, Joe Starks ordered Janie to wear head-rag which was only wear by old women in that town at that time. It was her right what to wear but Joe got involved in her personal right.

Glick and Fiske (2006) state that job for most female dominated in domestic work, such as nursing, day care worker, house cleaning and do supporting job like receptionist. In special opportunity inequality was reflected in Joe Starks act, how he did not allow Janie and forbade her to make a speech in public after Joe Starks was announced as Eatonville's Mayor because she was a woman and making a speech was not a skill of woman. Sharing the idea and opinion was right of every human, so Joe Starks carried away Janie's special opportunity in her life.

Reflection of professional inequality was drawn by Nanny; she told Janie her view about black women position at work. As Glick and Fiske propose (2006:167) "...leadership positions stereotypically require masculine traits and because simply being male is associated with status and authority." Nanny told woman was in the lowest ranking at work, they had to do what man could do by themselves, but woman had to do that just because they were women. Then Janie got professional inequality by herself when she worked in the store and had to debate with Joe Starks, her husband. He compared between man and woman understanding about something. He said women just understood a thing when they saw a thing, in another hand man could understand many things when they saw a thing.

The writer found out some of gender discrimination or inequality effects were suffered by the victim, such as physical problem effect, psychological problem effect, impact on woman's family and dependent, and impact on social.

World Health Organization (2002) explains some of the effect of gender discrimination physical problems, such as injury, bruise, contusions and fractures, physical disability, chronic health problems (irritable bowel syndrome, gastrointestinal disorders, various chronic pain syndromes, hypertension, etc.) or even death. Additionally, the victim of sexual subjugation might be suffered in sexual and reproductive health problems (contracting sexually transmitted diseases, spread of HIV/AIDS, high-risk pregnancies, etc).

The effect on physical problem was experienced by Nanny who got unwanted pregnancy after she had been raped by her master when she was a black woman slave. Then, Leafy as Janie's mother experienced the same incident too. Leafy got pregnant after she was raped by her school teacher when she was a teen girl. Both of these women had to suffer physical problem effect they did not want to. They had pregnancy, but did not have spouse who took responsibility for them.

Furthermore, the gender inequality that the victim suffered deals with psychological problem too. According to Pickup, William and Swetman (2001), the gender violation victim can lead to some of psychological problems and impact in economic and social life. In psychological problems, the women might feel some of these negative feelings, such as anxiety, fear, mistrust of others, inability to concentrate, loneliness, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide, psychosomatic illnesses, withdrawal, smoking, alcohol or drug use.

The problems above are found in the novel too, when the master's wife got mad after she had known that Nanny had born the baby of her husband. Nanny felt scared and worried all the time about that. Then, after Nanny escaped from her master's house, she decided to be a single parent for her child. She did not want to get married because she lost her trust to others. She did believe that anybody would mistreat her baby, so that she wanted to take care of her baby by herself.

Furthermore, Leafy suffered psychological problem effect too after the rape she experienced. She was in stressed condition because of the pregnancy; then she released her depression by drinking liquor, staying out nights and finally leaving her mother and her newly-born baby.

Henceforth, Janie as Mayor's wife of Eatonville often felt fear and lonely of domination from her husband towards her life. The character of Joe Starks who was ambitious and megalomaniac made Janie felt isolated from society since Joe Starks restricted her to socialize with people of Eatonville. As the result of fear and lonely feelings, she began to withdraw from others. Janie also became uncommunicative person because her husband would like to silence her or began a new debate of everything she talked about.

The gender inequality victim whose family or dependents might be faced some impacts, namely divorce, or broken families, jeopardized family's economic and social development, babies born with health disorders as result of nutritional lacking of mother during pregnancy (i.e premature birth or low birth weight), increased domestic violence. Kaur and Garg (2008) state that effects on children who witness violence at home can get collateral effect emotional and behavioral disturbance, for instance withdrawal, low self-esteem, nightmares, self-blame, aggression against peers, family members, and property.

Subsequently, the victim of gender discrimination impacts on their family and dependent. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's daughter got collateral effect to get violence since her mother was a victim before. Nanny could not save her daughter of being sexual subjugation when Leafy was a teenager. Then, her granddaughter, Janie had broken her marriage with Logan Killicks because she was treated like a slave and experienced verbal abuse.

According to Murthy, Upadhyay and Nwadinobi (2009), the victim of gender violence tends to reduce ability to participate in social and economic activities, jobless due to absenteeism as a result of violence and negative impact on women's income generating power and has acute fear of future violence which extends beyond the individual survivors to other members in community. Besides, the victim also passes through economic and social impact as causes of gender violation, such as rejection, ostracism and social stigma at community level.

Impact on social was reflected by rejection from master's wife towards Nanny after she knew that Nanny gave birth to husband's child. She would send Nanny to the officer to be whipped because she hated Nanny and her baby. Moreover, Janie was also ignored and bullied by her friends at school because she did not have father and they talked about tragic incident of her mother. Because of the discriminations, Nanny and Leafy had acute fear of future violence that would harm Janie. As a result, Nanny became over protective to her granddaughter. She asked Janie to marry Logan Killicks after she saw Janie was kissing Johnny Taylor under the tree. She forced Janie to marry Logan Killicks who was a wealthy farmer that would protect her from gender discrimination and violation.

Conclusion

There are some points which the writers conclude from the results of this study. This study analyzed gender discrimination issue in the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. This study employed feminist approach for understanding the story from

a view as a woman because the main character of this novel was a woman. Besides, the main issue of this study is kinds of gender discrimination reflected in the novel and how the gender discrimination affects the women characters.

The writers concluded that in this novel there were natality inequality, mortality inequality, household inequality, special opportunity inequality, and professional inequality. Such inequality and discrimination led to the effects experienced by the victims such as physical and psychological problem, impact on woman's family and dependent, and impact on social life.

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