



Woman Struggle in “Woman at Point Zero” Novel By Nawal El Saadawi: Radical and Liberal Feminism Perspective

Irmayani Irmayani^{1*}, Fathu Rahman², M. Amir P³, Herawaty Abbas⁴

¹English Language Studies, Doctoral Program, Hasanuddin University

^{2,3,4}English Language Studies, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Hasanuddin University

*Corresponding author. Email: irmapinko2311@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research aimed at finding out the feminism movement in novel by using descriptive method through feminism criticism which focus on depicting woman in a literary work based on liberal and radical feminism. The results of this research that feminism is women struggle that manifested in movement to refuse the marginalization, subordinate, and oppression by dominant culture in sector of politic, economy, and generally in social live. The causes of main character (Firdaus)’s oppression in “Woman at Point Zero” novel according to radical feminist perspective, is patriarchy system neither happen in the family nor in education sector, also the feminism movement is still influenced by cultural assumption that woman is still less intelligent, less moral, and withdraw into home, gentility and inferior being. Woman is urged to get married or just to be a house wife. On the other hand, Liberal feminism argue that Firdaus not only a victim of patriarchy system, but also injustice victim in accessing education, social, politic and economy system. So that, liberating women from oppression, feminists try to implements their thoughts and acts, because liberal feminism believes that women have the same mental capacity as their male counterparts and should be given the same opportunities in political, economic, and social spheres. Firdaus as main character obtain her freedom by achieving high status economically even though in prostitution world.

Keywords: *Woman Struggle, Novel, Radical Feminism, Liberal Feminism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Women are always taken as an interesting topic to be discussed, either their existence or problems which always appear together with the development of the society. Two individuals interact in their life, so the community of human being becomes larger and larger in this world. People make groups and institutions to facilitate their needs. In a family, society, country, and the larger community, male and female usually play certain role that is generally different according to their ability and capability based on their sexes. This may be called job description between male and female. This is done and established at all groups or society for all cultures. It seems natural; all people realize that such job description is really needed. Culturally, the job description is based on characteristics, men, as strong and rational while female are weak and emotional. Based on these characteristics and job description, women seem inferior from men because women are constructed by culture and social (Asri et al., 2023). Social and culture is dominated by male where it is called as patriarchy which

its due to a system ruled over by men, whose authority enforced through social, political, economic and religious institutions (Muslimat et al., 2023). The belief that men are superior to women justified and maintained the male monopoly or hegemony over social domains and restriction of woman to participate in social affairs (Lois Tyson, 2015).

Some of feminist studying results reveal that the cause of woman’s inferiority is woman culturally constructed in sexual relation such as man’s wife, as the sexual object of male desire, mother, housewife naturally or biologically man and woman different where sex hormones and associated with either femininity or masculinity, and linked to stereotypical female and male behaviors (Betty Friedan, 1963). Considering to find out the cause of woman’s inferiority, every feminist has different view in her conclusion about woman in inferiority, which it caused by they use different method, technic and theory each other. This diversity of feminist in investigating the factors cause woman discrimination actually alongside with ideology, we found such as Liberal feminism, Radical Feminism,

Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, existentialist feminism and so on. Every feminism thought proposes not only the comprehension of the cause of woman inequality but also propose some agendas to change it.

Feminists actualize their struggle in obtain the equality in many forms and domain where one of them is by literary work. In literary work, woman as writer can convey her woman voice through fictional characters, event and so on. for example, novel as one of literary work is written in a certain time related to norms and culture of society. Novel is concerned with “the real life of past or present future.” Hogart (A Teeuw, 2017) said that the good literature (novel) is recreate the sense of life, the life of emotion, the life of the mind, the individual life and the social life, the object-laden world. Good literature (novel) recreates the immediacy of life. In the novel world, a hero breaks with society because of his search for authentic values, so in the real world, some people stay oriented towards use values.

The basic idea in literary work research based on feminism perspective is an effort in understanding position and function of woman as reflected in a literary work. The subordinate relation of woman had placed men as leader or superior gender. In fact, this condition, results various discrimination of gender, stereotype, double responsibility of woman, marginalization, and intimidation for woman. The impact of unequal is oppression because the ordinate position includes a big power. Based on the assumption above, concluded that all of the subordinate relation has the same tendency namely “the authority.” Analyzing of feminism should be able to explore aspects of woman oppression that be done by men. Why can the woman politically get the effect of patriarchy? So, it can take the woman in inferior position. Stereotype of woman that only accompany of men, it will be focused of feminism study. According to Yader (in Sugihastuti, (2002:139) Feminism is symbolized as a quilt, that constructed and formed by a piece of soft cloth. This metaphor assume that feminism is studying that having fundamental position of the reader of literary work as woman. This feminism doctrine can be changed the relation of life power between woman and men in literary work communication systems.

“Woman at Point Zero” is a novel that created by Nawal El Saadawi. This is one of realism novel and describes and a unique woman (as main character) with her bravery, fight for the certain power and makes an equal right for live, love, and for freedom, that make her different from another woman. There are numerous research due to study of Saadawi novel “Woman at Point Zero” which focused on feminism issues. (Huda et al., 2023) In her article “Women Access to Education: A Patriarchal Culture Creates Gender Equality in Nawal El Saadawi “Woman at Point Zero” found the society or culture has created woman in inferior class due to woman access on education

system. (Istifadah, Wahyu Indah Mala Rohmana, 2022) in their article “Patriarchal Hegemony in the novel “Woman at Point Zero” by Nawal El Saadawi: A Feminism study and its correlation with Islam, found that woman oppression is caused patriarchal system that put woman as inferior class and man as superior they added that Islam doctrine actually never provoke to oppress woman as inferior creature. (Istifadah, Wahyu Indah Mala Rohmana, 2011) In their article “Depiction of Women as the Primary Architect of their own Oppression: A Masculine Critic of El Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero” assumed that her oppression, sexual harassment, domestic aggression, and intimidation that the Egyptian women are subjected to in her patriarchal social milieu. Through a Masculinity study of the text, this paper not only submits that women create conducive atmosphere for the unhappiness of their own kinds but also subverts the author’s proposition of the way forward for the Egyptian women who are disenchanting under the atmosphere that is besieged with unfair treatment of the women. The same perspective also proposed by (Research Scholar (PhD), English Literature, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India & Quyoom, 2017) through her articles “Woman Struggle: A Critical Analysis of Woman at Point Zero and The Color Purple”, she concludes that the Woman at Point Zero generally depicting woman suffering and woman struggle against male domination as the representation of patriarchy system. Similar study conducted by Wangmo and Sharma (Wangmo & Sharma, 2018) in article “Masculinity and Femininity: An Analysis of Woman at Point Zero by Nawal El Saadawi” where they argue that the men hegemony and domination has created inequality social based on sex. Inequality of sex culturally also create dehumanization in male side as human being and assign woman as inferior, the other, subordinate class. Another perspective in analyzing of El Saadawi’s work “Woman at Point Zero” is Addison’s articles (Addison, 2020) “Radical Feminism and Androicide in Nawal El Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero where she reveals that Firdaus as main characters has used androicide strategy in facing patriarchy system. Thus, in radical feminism perspective androicide dues to the strategy to overthrow patriarchy system by killing man as representation of a certain gender where it is represented by Firdaus’s act to kill the pimp that made her get death penalty by the court.

Considering articles above that generally study on Nawal El Saadawi’s novel “Woman at Point Zero” where generally those articles focused on patriarchal system as main factor in creating woman oppression by depicting generally the socio-cultural situation faced by woman. Meanwhile Addison’s article even though give us the new perspective particularly in radical feminist, but by killing men physically as woman strategy is to simplicity conclusion because Firdaus also get recognition as subject or human being by Ibrahim’s love even only for a moment. So

that, this moment can be interpreted as killing men is a necessary thing when she faced the brutal or cruel man and also as symbolic act how men must be change their paradigm on woman as human being.

This article tries to comprehend the novel in feminist perspective particularly the liberal and radical by using the liberal to depicting in Firdaus’s acts to obtain her freedom in patriarchy system. Liberal Feminism through the work of Wollstonecraft where she argues that humanity as rational being and social construction equally being as it is provoked by modern philosopher such Descartes, John Lock and so on, must be involved woman and treat them equally. Thus, Mary Wollstonecraft convinces the opportunity in education or woman get proper education affect to the woman quality in gaining her identity rationally. The Wollstonecraft’s conception about what woman should be struggled in obtaining her identity, is delivered by John Stuart Mill (in Paddy McQueen, 2014:99) with her arguments that woman must demand her right to be recognized as capable in attaining the same level of rationality and self-control as men.

Meanwhile, radical feminism has certain view by considering the patriarchy as the main factor of woman inequality. Millett argues (Josephine Donovan, 2000) patriarchy ideology is that the male supremacy, which conditions women to exhibit male-serving behavior and to accept male roles. Th radical feminism insistence that men’s control of women’s sexual and reproductive lives and their self-identity, self-respect, and self-esteem constituted the most fundamental of all the oppressions.

2. METHOD

The method used by the writer in this research is descriptive method. Descriptive method is a method that intends to describe everything related to topic of the research. Data is divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data is the main data as the object of the research. In this case, the primary data is the novel will be analyzed. The secondary data is reference, which has relation to do the topic of the research. The data collected is analyzed intrinsically by using feminist criticism perspective which this perspective refers to the examine the way in which literature reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, cultural and psychological oppression of woman (Tyson. 2015:83). The process of analyzing the novel through following steps: reading the novel by focusing to the main character and identifying selected or represented dialog, paragraph and so on related to research domain. This research is analyzed internally and the writer will use liberal and radical feminism.

The liberal feminist perspective according to Mary Wollstonecraft (in (Josephine Donovan, 2000) woman must obtain her rationality, accessing in education and

public domain such as politic, economy and so on. So that, it can be applied in literary work by identifying how the female character is characterized as rational, free and autonomy woman; how social or public affair provides wide access for woman in education, economic to politics domain. Meanwhile, in the radical feminist perspectives (Josephine Donovan, 2000), refers to an assumption that patriarchy system as the root of woman oppression, through some radical feminist propose agendas such as: eliminating of marriage and the family, raising the principle (emotion, intuition, love etc), ending tyranny of the biological family, and so on. Thus, in literary work, radical feminist evaluate how woman comprehend her relation in family and marriage, and her relation to men in social affairs.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Depicting Main Character in “Woman at Point Zero”*

The novel “Woman at Point Zero” is begun with a confident, concerned woman psychologist and author trying to learn the story behind quiet and patient through how the conflict of Firdaus as the main character in facing her life trouble, particularly her suffering life under patriarchy from her father’s violence to her mother, her uncle’s sexual abuse to her husband’s domestic violence. She leaves all them for elude her suffering life, and seeking life that he lives in properly and freely. However, the life under patriarchy system dominating all public domain, culture, politic, social to economy, affect to her chance to obtain better life. Finally, she involves in prostitution world. Her name is Sharifa, and she is a prostitute, who take Firdaus and teaches her to become a high-class prostitute. Sharifa makes money from Firdaus’s body until one night when her friend comes over. Firdaus becomes her own boss and eventually has a beautiful home and expensive things after she leaved Sharifa’ home and run her business as a whore. During in prostitution world, Firdaus has been realizing and feeling herself as woman freely that has dignity, own desire, freedom to choose as human. However, she is persuaded by her costumer that prostitution is unrespect job even though she has obtained her popularity. Firdaus decides to apply a job in and get position in big industrial. But she fails to get “respect, because at that work, she works under man’s hegemony and domination through that made her get inferior stigma to sexual abuse or desire of men. Firdaus goes back to be a whore again which finally she realizes that man’s domination still shadows her in her life. Her name is Marzouk, a cruel pimp who extort and intimidate her violently that mad Firdaus stub him by knife. Finally, Firdaus is arrested and sentenced to be death by the court.

The Novel of "Woman at Point Zero," illuminate the sufferings of Egyptian women for a larger audience. Firdaus is the main figure in this novel. Firdaus takes readers through her turbulent childhood, from being abused and witnessing the abuse of her mother by her father, to her mysterious female circumcision as a young woman, to the twisted molestation by her uncle, betrayal by lovers, and on to bitter exploitation by pimps, and last and possibly most ruthless, the persistent taunting of men, women, and law enforcement as she struggles to live an adult life, she has been given no tools to live. Firdaus is a woman struggling to live a dignified life in a society in which women have limited options or alternatives to choose. Firdaus is a disappointed woman, but even she loses hope, she still challenged and fight for a certain power that make unequal rights for women. Firdaus is perfect figure as the victim of patriarchy system which put woman as inferior above man's hegemony and domination.

Firdaus is a unique woman, not only for her performance, her bravery and her way to walk but also her attitude and refusal to still survive. The most important, that she is not afraid of death. She realizes about the society around her which dominated by man "I discovered that all these rulers were men, what they had in common was an avaricious and distorted personality, a never ending appetite for money, sex and unlimited power (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:26). However, Firdaus keeps fighting to find the way where she can actualize herself or at least he can survive. She wants to be educated woman, but she realizes that higher education in university is privileged for men "El-Azhar only for men (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:14). She loses hope to better human, because the woman is restricted in education. So, by her secondary school certificate, she realizes to get a job. There is not a chance for her to get a good job, instead of one thing that can be done for her that is to get a job in prostitution.

"But right from from my early days my father, my uncle, my husband, all of them, thought me to grow as a prostitute" (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:109)

In the prostitution world, Firdaus feel herself as woman, even though she knows that prostitution world is created by men to fulfil their sexual desire.

"I knew that my profession had been invented by men, and that men were in control of both our world, the one on earth, and the one in heaven" (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:99)

However, in the prostitution world, Firdaus has discovered that she can exploit the desire that many men have for her by getting money for it. She learns that people with money can also command respect. But having money and

commanding respect do not make Firdaus feel respectable, because men or people assume prostitution is forbidden either culturally to religion. she dreams of studying and becoming a scholar, the life of a prostitute is disappointing and demeaning, yet Firdaus also suggests that the life of a prostitute might be a sure path to dignity and self-determination than the "respectable" life of an office assistant. At least as a prostitute Firdaus doesn't need to show deference toward even the most powerful of men.

"I preferred to live in, refused the man from whom I felt an aversion no matter what the reason, and the choose the man I wish to have" (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:74)

Firdaus has achieved her status economically as a high-class prostitute, she feels offended when someone told her that prostitute is the proper way to be acknowledged and respectful human. But in fact, she realized after she got job in big office, she feels unhappy and oppressed because patriarchy culture in her office. Her existence in office as men's sexual fantasy and abuse, so she believes on prostitution world is truly domain she feels as free woman "After I had spent three years in the company, I realized that as prostitute I had been looked upon with more respect, and been more valued more highly than all female employee (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:81). The seeking happiness and the meaning of life as human, not only by economically achievement but Firdaus realize that there are principal values she wants to find out. She seeks the life where she is acknowledged and loved as human "I gave everything I had without ever counting the cost. I wanted nothing at all, except perhaps one thing. To be saved through love from at all (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:94), even though she realizes that such hope is only her fantasy. Ibrahim's love (Firdaus the office teammate) which is expected to be a momentum moment to be acknowledged as equal human, but Ibrahim's modus in having sex with Firdaus freely. Firdaus frustrates with this situation which she has been treated unfair, unequal and oppressed as woman by men (her father, uncle, husband, friend and so on) since she born in this world. Her frustration become hatred of men "However, every single man I did get to know filled me with but one desire: to lift my hand and bring it smashing down on his face (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:10). There is no exception for Firdaus about man, her hatred only actualized to smash him, because he has created patriarch system that dispose woman as object of man's sexual desire, power to domination. The climax of Firdaus's hatred is expressed by killing the pimp, Marzouk. Killing Marzouk, is a "struggle" or radical moment for him to kill a man (creator of woman suffering) and patriarchy system. she stubs Marzouk's neck by knife without hesitate.

"A question flashed through my mind. Why was it that I had never stabbed a man before? I realized that I had been afraid, and that the fear had been within me all the time, until the fleeting moment when I read fear in his eyes." (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:104)

That moment creates awareness for Firdaus that man has an afraid notion as well. Firdaus feels a sensation feeling, a satisfying feeling when she kills the pimp, Marzeouk. Killing the pimp is not criminal act for Firdaus, but as freedom moment to liberate from men or patriarchy. Therefore, rejecting to mail President for remission is right decision for her. Besides, Firdaus rejection is to elude herself to do same thing *"If I go out once again to the life which is yours, I will never stop killing"* (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:111).

3.2. Reading Woman at Point Zero in Liberal Feminism Perspective.

In Liberal feminism, prostitution is conceived of in the contractarian sense of being a private business transaction. Other feminists, on the other hand, view a prostitute as a human being who has been reduced to a piece of merchandise. Donovan (2000: 24) exposes that there are some principal in early liberal feminism for woman in gaining her subjectivity such as; the belief about the faith in rationality; the belief that woman and men's soul and rational are same; education is important mean in developing woman's rationality particularly her critical thinking; either woman and man is an individual or agent who able to find her/ his truth through operating her/his rationality: the belief that woman should not accepted equally in politically right, particularly the right to vote. Thus, Mary Wollstonecraft convinces the opportunity in education or woman get proper education affect to the woman quality in gaining her identity rationally (Donovan, *ibid*). In this Novel, main figure, Firdaus has performed her critical, commitment, rationality and analytical character as human. She has reserved the false public opinion particularly the patriarchy's assumption of woman's stereotype which describe woman as inferior, irrational, or inconsistent human. Even though she just has secondary school certificate, because high education or university is man's privilege, she tried her best for take small opportunity in public affair to show her existence as woman or human. Her struggle to obtain her wealth economically is the manifestation of woman's effort to gain equal opportunity in economical domain, even though she works in "sinful" job as prostitute.

Since the all aspect of social domain have been constructed in patriarchy values, there is small chance or hope for woman to participate equally with man. The prostitution field is invented by man to localize woman as man's sexual desire and as object to manipulate woman body as economical object. The limitation of woman to participate

in social domains and the problem of poverty faced by woman affect to her to choose the prostitution as her final hope to get better life. Firdaus has such understanding and she realizes that to be prostitute is her chance to obtain human existence then. She has her own body which her body as man's sexual desire object which this to be advantage for him and become her strength over man. She can arrange freely or independently and also to decide the price she want to. Thus, Firdaus is a unique woman that has a certain power to refuse the opinion that prostitute is one of job that can destroy the morality of women. Firdaus also argue that it is better to become prostitute better than to become a woman who sell her body without any payment, and woman who work in office under patriarchy. This moment for Firdaus as the freedom consciousness and as the manifestation of self as human which she did not feel it before in her child life (family domain) or in her marriage (domestic domain), even when she got a job in big company.

3.3. Radical Feminist: Patriarchy as Main Factor of Woman's Oppression

In radical feminism perspective, Weedon (Mary Eagleton, 2003:117) argues radical and revolutionary feminists in the 1970s, to reclaim women's subjectivity from patriarchy was to uncover a subject who would be lesbian in orientation. The central argumentation of radical feminism is patriarchy or male domination as the root of women oppression so that women should unite to fight against oppressor or what it is called by to end "the tyranny of biological family" (Josephine Donovan, 2000:162). Patriarchy as a system ruled over by men in all domain which it is constructed by one of factor that is the interpretation of biologically difference between male and female through create conclusion that male is more superior over female. Thus, the picturing the woman identity in patriarchy system can be seen for instance, as it is pictured by Naomi Weisstein (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019) who the pioneer of psychologist feminist, which she argues that woman is stereotyped as "inconsistently, *emotionally unstable, lacking in a strong conscience or superego, weaker "nurturant" rather than productive, "intuitive" rather than intelligent, and if they are at 'normal' suited to the home and the family.* Some radical feminists have different view to overcome the patriarchy system, for instance Shulamith Firestone argue (Josephine Donovan, 2000) that the elimination of marriage institution can be one of solution to free woman from patriarchy.

In Woman at Point Zero, the effect of patriarchy is reflected in Firdaus life such as in her child life, in her uncle's life, her husband's life and her social life as prostitute or employee in big company. The patriarchy culture in her family life reflected the male treat particularly her father over her. Firdaus must be self as patriarchy wants to, that

is woman with only to do the domestic affair. Firdaus also observes how her father treat her mother as a slave, Firdaus believe that her father is symbolized as male's patriarchy consciousness. This reflected in the following sentence "when one of his female children died, my father would eat his supper, my mother would wash his legs, and then he would go to sleep, just as he did every night. When the child that diad was boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep" (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007:17). The Patriarchy also curb woman to get access in education which Firdaus only gets her school only in the middle school. Firdaus's desire to study at university is forbidden by her uncle because university is only accessed by men.

In her marriage, Firdaus also gets domestic harassment form her husband even though her husband is a respected sheikh. Therefore, Firdaus finally walks away from her husband which actually her escape is a moment to run away from patriarchy life either her family or marriage life. She involves in prostitution world where she finally obtains her feel or consciousness as free woman in that world. Whereas she obtains her life as truly self even though she works as prostitute, radical feminist believes that prostitution is simple sex work that liberated woman from patriarchy and he can express her sexuality freely (Rosemarie Tong, Tina Fernandes Botts, 2018). However, the free world inhabited by Firdaus, but always shadowed by patriarchy values around her. It is reflected when she finally to be employee in big company where her dream to be respected woman has vanished because sexual abuse from her male friends. The patriarch has created as woman as inferior being, and this patriarch that has run over social domain such as politic, economic or cultural affair, has created frustrated woman. Firdaus realizes that male domination affects to her view of male emotionally where she got her climax outrage when Firdaus kills a pimp who force her to be his slave. That moment according to Firdaus is climax moment of her struggle against patriarchy system and she has no hesitate and regret to do that even though she is called as criminal. Firdaus argues that "For what you call my crime was no crime" (Nawal El Saadawi, 2007). A pimp is symbolized as cruel or fascist man who use patriarchy system to oppress or attack a woman). What Firdaus did is a culmination of woman anger, frustration, suffering and so on above male domination or patriarchy. The extreme way to overcome the patriarchy is by killing a man which this moment can be a warning signal or struggle representation of woman again oppressor (male domination).

4. CONCLUSION

The Novel "Woman at Point Zero" by Nawal El Saadawi reflects the life of Firdaus as woman in Patriarchy system. Firdaus has experienced as inferior being since she was born, in domestic (in her family, uncle marriage life) and in public domain (education, social, economic and law affair). The male domination has created imbalance social construction in all aspects of social life. Woman is viewed as weak, irrational and inferior being, therefore they life only to be male slave or as the other. Feminists deal to how the create equivalent life between man and woman by seeking the root or the cause of woman's oppression. Liberal feminists argue that woman actually has same capacity with man has, so that they believe the society must give same opportunity for woman in political, education and economical domain. Firdaus in liberal perspective, despite of she fails to get high education but she obtains what liberal feminist called as independent or autonomy woman in economically (she has own earnings). In radical feminist perspective, the root of woman's oppression actually is patriarchy system who has penetrated in all social domains. Patriarchy affects to form social interaction, assumption to stratification between woman and man. Radical Feminist argues that destroying such unequal social order and building a society based on feminist principles is one of their agenda. Patriarchy has created a Firdaus as inferior, frustration, and anger woman of her peoples and society through create her as "killer".

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