

# **CHARLOTTE ANNA PERKINS GILMAN'S SELECTED POEMS: A REFLECTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study entitled “Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman’s Selected Poems: A Reflection of Gender Inequality” aims to find out what aspects or things that can influence gender inequality and examine the effects of gender inequality on women characters portrayed in poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. The object of this study is taken from the poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. This study uses a qualitative research method, where the data is collected by reading the poems by Gilman, analyzing the issue of gender inequality contained in Gilman's poems, then describing in an analysis. Meanwhile, the data were analyzed in the form of a paragraph of exposition of the stanza which will be taken as the quotes for the case under study using the gender inequality theory by Judith Lorber (2001). The result of the study is showing that the aspects of gender inequality come from economic structure, material aspects, and family. Meanwhile, the effects result in the type of women’s work, sexuality, and emotions. Gilman's poems raise the issue or theme of women.

Keywords: Poems, gender, gender inequality.

## **ABSTRAK**

Penelitian yang berjudul “Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman’s Selected Poems: A Reflection of Gender Inequality” bertujuan untuk mengetahui aspek atau hal apa saja yang dapat mempengaruhi ketimpangan gender dan mengkaji pengaruh ketimpangan gender terhadap karakter perempuan yang tergambar dalam puisi karya Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. Objek penelitian ini diambil dari puisi-puisi karya Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif, dimana data dikumpulkan dengan membaca puisi-puisi Gilman, menganalisis isu ketimpangan gender yang terdapat dalam puisi-puisi Gilman, kemudian mendeskripsikan dalam sebuah analisis. Sedangkan data dianalisis diuraikan dalam bentuk paragraf eksposisi bait yang akan dijadikan kutipan untuk kasus yang diteliti dengan menggunakan teori ketimpangan gender Judith Lorber (2001). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa aspek ketimpangan gender berasal dari aspek materi, dan keluarga. Sedangkan efeknya mengakibatkan jenis pekerjaan pada wanita, seksualitas, dan emosi. Puisi-puisi karya Gilman mengangkat isu atau tema tentang perempuan

Kata kunci: *Poems, gender, ketidaksetaraan gender.*

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

Gender is the differentiation of roles, attributes, traits, attitudes, and behaviors that grow and develop in society. Reported by WHO (World Health Organization),

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. (Kari, 2021)

From the definition above, the word gender can be interpreted as the roles formed by the behavior related to women and men. For example, almost all community groups hand over responsibility for taking care of children and doing housework to women. At the same time, working outside and providing finance is given to men. Like race, ethnicity, and class, gender is a social category that largely determines a person's way of life and participation in society and the economy. Women or girls bear the brunt of the inequalities that occur, but basically, these inequalities harm everyone.

Gender inequality that occurs in women is often found in life in every community group or in a country that views women as having a different degree and place from men. According to Lorber (2001, p. 9) "Gender inequality is built into the structure of the gendered social order because the two statuses women and men are treated differently and have significantly different life chances." Those problems are still an important problem that has not been completely resolved and become a serious matter for women in living their lives. Moreover, the issue makes women not always get low views or positions in life and to make women gender-equal to men.

The average case of gender inequality that occurs in society is that women have a double burden where the tasks carried out by women are quite a lot, such as household chores that can be done by men or husbands (for those who are married). For example, a wife (actually a woman) has to do household chores such as cooking, washing, taking care of children, serving her husband's needs, etc., while the wife also works outside the home. The stereotype of most women who are considered maudlin, weak, and always using feelings when doing something is the reason why most women can't contribute to a certain job that is heavy and difficult because women are still considered physically weak. There are some examples of gender inequality that occurs in women. First, is rare to find women working in heavy work such as construction workers and jobs that have a heavy share of the burden in the field of work. Companies employ men more than women because they think that hiring women for heavy work will be a hassle for them and the company.

Another example is that women have fewer retirement benefits or pay than men, the news was taken from Independent.co.uk, written by Oppenheim,

We must have the means to track and evaluate the progress of initiatives targeted at reducing inequities in the pension system and the larger policy landscape that affects it. According to a survey released last year by the Pensions Policy Institute, women save barely a third of what men do by the time they retire. While women in their 60s have an average of £51,100 in private pension pots, men have £156,500, according to academics. This disparity is attributed to time spent away from women's careers to care for children, as well as the gender

pay gap. The controversial state pension age increase from 60 to 66 for women born after March 1950 impacted about four million women, with the change having pushed some women into destitution and homelessness. The move was accelerated in 2010 and saw them reach parity with men, at 65, in 2018. (Oppenheim, 2020)

The case above stated that when women did not have sufficient income in their work compared to the income and type and occupation of men. As a result, they do not have enough savings in their old age from their work. Even they do not have the finances in living their lives. The issue of gender is not only found in real life but the issue is also raised in literary works such as one of them in the form of poetry. Meanwhile, the issue of gender inequality is represented by the author to illustrate how one gender does not get equality in their life, as happened to women. In addition, in literary works, a description of how a gender problem uses language is more interesting by using various kinds of language styles.

An example of a gender issue in poems directed toward women is written by the one famous American writer, Sylvia Plath entitled "The Applicant". The poem was first published on January 17, 1963, in *The London Magazine*. In that poem, Plath is known for her comments on the gender stereotypes and her condemnation of these stereotypes for women in married life. Women as mothers and motherly beings rather than focusing on the work they produced and other qualities that would otherwise give them substance. It's a satirical 'interview' those comments on the meaning of marriage, how is the view of women in marriage in the case of gender inequality, and details the loss of identity one feels when adhering to social expectations. The next poem is entitled "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou, which the poem is themed about a struggle for women in overcoming people's views

of women and injustice. This poem is one of her most popular poems. In addition, the poem describes where they are must speak out against the government and others to equalize freedom and status in their lives, and no matter what the circumstances

This study explores how gender inequality in women occurs which is described in several poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. Several aspects cause gender inequality and they have effects on women's life. Gender inequality is explained and illustrated in the women characters in the poems. The writer wants to analyze Gilman's poems from 5 different poems, which are, *The Anti-Suffragists*, *To the Indifferent Women*, *The Mother's Charge*, *The Housewife*, and *To the Young Wife*. Those poems have the issue of women, especially about Gender Inequality in women in living their life.

The object that the writer chose is poetry, which is one of the works of literature. In poetry, the author uses imaginative language and uses figurative language to give more interesting impression than words or vocabulary in general. Wordsworth (1802) argues that "Poetry is a spontaneous outpouring of strong feelings; it stems from the emotions accumulating in tranquility". Wordsworth (1802) also mention, "The emotion is contemplated by the species of reaction, the calm gradually disappears, and the emotion" from the statement that poetry is also created from emotion, the author contemplates what will later be poured into stanzas or words that will become a poem

The reason why the writer chose Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's poems is that her poems focus more on issues of women's lives and feminism. This is where the verses in Gilman's poems tell the story of how the women are seen and exposed to inequality in living their life. Gender inequality in women is seen and exposed in each of her works. Whereas in this study the writer analyzes in terms of the aspects and effects in the life of women characters in the poems. The title and issue are taken because until now the problem of gender inequality has not been

resolved and is still an important problem, especially for women who have gotten negative and detrimental impacts. In addition, Gilman's poems are interesting to analyze in terms of the dominant gender inequality. Therefore, the writer chooses "Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's Selected Poems: A Reflection of Gender Inequality" as her study.

### **1.2 Statements of the Problem**

From the explanation above, the problem is formulated in the form of the question as follows:

1. What are the gender inequality aspects of women characters portrayed in the poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman?
2. What are the effects of gender inequality on women characters portrayed in the poems of Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman?

### **1.3 Scope and Limitation**

The scope taken for this study is literature that focuses on Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's selected poems. Moreover, the writer limits this study to analyze the aspects and effects of gender inequality in women characters. To discuss the study that the writer chooses, the writer put several points about the problem to be analyzed by using the gender theories from Judith Lorber (2001).

### **1.4 Objectives of Study**

1. To examine the aspects of gender inequality in women characters in selected poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman.
2. To analyze what effects or things can influence gender inequality in women characters in the poems Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's verse.

### **1.5 Functions of the Study**

1. To increase the writer's knowledge about the influence of gender inequality on women in the verse of the poems.
2. To examine the issues of gender inequality in the verse of the poems.
3. To explore more deeply gender inequality in women's aspects and affects their lives as stated in the verse of the poems.

4. To portray how important the influence of gender inequality is on women's lives.

### **1.6 Systematical Presentation**

The study in this thesis is divided into 5 chapters, including:

Chapter I is an introduction consisting of a background of the study, a statement of the problem, scope and limitation, objectives of the study, function of the study, and systematical presentation. The background of the study consists of a general explanation of the topics and issues being studied, the objects to be studied, and also the reasons for taking the study. The statement of the problem that is examined is then narrowed down in scope and limitation so that the scope of the analysis is not too broad. Furthermore, the purpose of the study understudy and also the function of the study is to show the benefits obtained from the research. And the last is a systematical presentation to make it easier for readers to find out the contents of each chapter in this study.

Chapter II consists of related studies, a review of literature, and a theoretical framework. Related studies take some previous research related to the topic or issue taken by showing the similarities and differences between these studies and the studies taken by the writer. Then the review of the issue to be studied is described in the review of literature by adding quotes from experts for the explanation used in the study. The most important thing is a theoretical framework that becomes the basis of the research conducted, namely taking research experts in analyzing gender inequality in women from a perspective of gender inequality and the theory that the writer uses.

Chapter III is a research methodology, which this chapter discusses the approach of the study and focuses on the types of research methods used. Furthermore, the data source is taken from verses in Gilman's poems. How to the technic of data collecting, and methods of data analysis are focused on using expert theory in research.

Chapter IV consists of finding and discussion, the poems that the writer analyzed are formed data from verses of Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's Selected poems. Moreover, the analyzed is supported by Judith Lorber, *Gender Inequality Feminist Theory and Politics*.

Chapter V consists of the conclusion and suggestions. This chapter includes the conclusions of summaries from the data analysis in chapter IV, suggestions for the writer in particular, and the readers in general.

### **FINDING AND ANALYSIS**

This chapter contains to analyzes the aspects and effects on women characters revealed through stanzas in selected poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman. From the selected poems, the writer analyses poems about gender inequality to reveal various aspects and effects on women in living their lives at home and in their families. The aspects and effects that are revealed in this selected poem have an impact on the status of women which can lead to gender inequality.

#### **4.1 Aspects of Gender Inequality in Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman Poems**

Some aspects of gender inequality make one gender look weaker and lower in position, especially what often happens to most women. Women are excluded or disadvantaged concerning decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Lorber (2001, p. 40) argues, "Marxist and socialist feminist theories identified the economic structure and the material aspects of life as the main source of gender inequality". Another statement from Lorber that relates to explains aspects is, "every major change in production—from hunting and gathering to farming to the industrial revolution—changes the social organization of work and family" (Lorber, 2001, p. 40). It can be pointed out that women are not equal in position and status to men, this is one aspect of gender inequality that occurs in women. This is depicted in several poems by Gilman.

The poem represents how women play an important role in the lives of their families, women who often do all kinds of work and even

almost all work in the house. They will inherit or teach what they do and do to their children, especially their daughters who later have to do what they do. According to Lorber (2001, p. 185), "The family is a prime site for the maintenance of gender differences." The mother gives positive and loving words to her family and children, she wants her daughter to be independent and happy in living their life. The position of women in the family is very important, the mother teaches the things that must be owned by her daughter when they grow up and she is no longer there. Of course, a mother (woman) who has a daughter will approach because her daughter will also play a role in her family (husband and children). Women will continue to be workers at home in taking care of their families. According to Lorber (2001, p. 26), "women were confined to a main "job" of wife-mother, with anything else they did have to take a backseat to child care and housework." From what Lorber said, it can be interpreted that women, especially wives (a mother) have the main work as housewives even though they have other jobs outside.

#### **1. Work Aspects**

In lines 3-4, "*come here, my daughter/ ...your duty here;*" housework continues to decline for women, daughters have responsibilities for household chores and others when their mother's role is no longer there (died), gender women do it without exception. "*My duty once*" (in line 5) is the main job of a mother who is good at doing household and of course, her daughter must also be able to do it. According to Ridgeway (2011, p. 129), "a father's care is not fully equal to that of a mother" A mother (woman) will explain and teach her children especially to her daughter how to do the household properly. Each line in the poem contains about what jobs she usually does every day and what her daughter must do someday with the aim that her daughter can work well. It is the woman who is responsible for all the housework, "*keep the boys at home-*" (in line 26) as a statement by Lorber (2001, p. 185), "Men's jobs around the house are usually outdoor work,

repairs, and car maintenance.” The sentence of the poem illustrates that men do not need to do household tasks such as ironing, preparing ingredients, sweeping, cooking, and others. It shows a gender difference in doing work, the role of the mother in the poem is something that happens in real life where the spirit of a woman in carrying out her duties without complaining directly, she prefers to save her fatigue and do her work, “*and smile, smile always, dear-/Be brave, keep on*” (in lines 28-29) she must look happy in doing all her work even though in reality she feels tired, sad, etc. the verses of the poem related to Lorber statement in his book, Lorber (2001, p. 185), “Keeping your house neat, dressing your children in clean clothes, and feeding your family means you are a good woman” the family aspect that shows in the verse of the poems that woman character (a mother) in the poem must be patient to do her duties as a household worker in her house. Women's role is very important even though they often get unfair treatment and status of those who are considered inferior to the male gender either in employment or status.

#### **4.2 Effects of Gender Inequality in Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman's Poems**

The occurrence of gender inequalities in life, especially for women in living their lives, creates an effect that plays a significant role for them, in the first place. The statement shows that if gender inequality is not stabilized in women's lives, it will cause several things as written by Lorber in his book, “Policies that could establish true gender equality are not seriously implemented because they would erode the exploitation of women's labor, sexuality, and emotions” (Lorber, 2001, p. 258). Women are required to work properly and correctly for the work that is their responsibility and must control their emotions to be calm to do the work or problem. As well as from some of the female characters in Gilman's poems where women are required and play the role of house workers or do household chores which are the main tasks in their lives. These inequalities may cause effects

their work, life, views of society, as well as their personality.

#### **1. Women's Labor**

The next poem entitled "To the Indifferent Woman" focuses on how a woman lives her life just to think about her family. The effect shown in the poem is about the women's emotions or feelings women in doing the duties for their family. She can do what makes her happy but again women are confined to doing work in the house. According to the poem, it is a natural thing and what she should do, "Today, housework and childrearing are considered work and given due value in divorce settlements." (Lorber, 2001, p. 260), from these activities women do not have freedom in life, in choosing a job, and in their career. According to Bianchi et al. (2006) in Ridgeway's book (2011, p. 128), “Women also spend about twice as many hours caring for children as men do” women spend more time at home than men who have more time outside the home like work and meet his friends so have a little time being at home. In the snippet of the poem, there is the word, “*overworked*” (in line 2) work which is shown to the woman where she does too much work every day with the same work and to be repeated every day. The mentioned quotation state in Lorber's statement, “At the same time, no one demands that a married woman spend her whole life cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children.” (Lorber, 2001, p. 260). It is not something that can make her look lower than she should be, the views of people who make the female gender look inferior with the status and position they have. When all the work is done by her but rarely gets the appreciation as if to make her happy. As we can see women are always in household labor “*You cannot keep your small domestic peace*” (line 31) the verse refers to Ridgeway's (2011, p. 131) statement “The effect, as we will see, is often to slow the potentially equalizing impact on household work of women's growing involvement in the labor force” it means that women are often unable to differentiate between

their jobs because they have the main job, which is household.

## 2. Emotions Effects

In line 9, "*That you are licensed to avoid the care*" the emotions effect how women force their feelings to look fine in front of their families (her husband and child) with all the things that happened. What she did was wrong because she didn't care about other things. The author asks women to see life outside the home and the world about how they should be happy and feel free. "*Is to promote the progress of the world/ In truth, in wisdom, truth and love*" (lines 14-15) the verse relates to the statement by (Lorber, 2001, p. 258), "women's important contribution to the food supply and their evident role in the procreation" she ignores the truth of the effect of her life and hides her feeling her emotions by only doing household chores every day. "*Spread everywhere in strong and fruitful love*" (line 24) women have stronger emotions and feelings than men, which makes them prefer to use their emotions in doing things. The explanation of the verse refers to Beauvoir's (1953, p. 247) statement that "Woman prefer the emotions to reason" that women prefer to voice their feelings towards something with their emotions as well as the effect of gender inequality that makes women look more emotional. They also choose to attach importance to what they consider important to their lives as in the verse in the poem that reads "*Content to leave all else without your care*" (in line 18), according to Beauvoir (1953, p. 57), "woman is more emotional, more nervous, more irritable than usual," almost all women cannot control their emotions even with their family.

They behave as if they have found happiness at home, "*Life where all nations in untroubled peace/ Unite to raise the standard of the world/ And make the happiness we seek in homes*" (in lines 21-23) as a state by Lorber (2001, p. 258) "gender got inextricably built into stratification and inequality, producing a subordinate group, "women," whose labor, sexuality, and childbearing could be exploited."

Woman character in the poem often hide their feelings, seeing and making their families happy is the most important thing in their lives, besides they have to put aside their egos and voices to be free from household chores that bind them to equal status with their husbands, who of course are male gender. In the last stanza, the author writes, "*We all may have our homes in joy and peace*" (in line 37) the author hints that life will be happy if women and men can work together and share their empathy and "*its rich power of love*" (in line 38) Women are the "rich" gender with things, feelings of love and power that they have.

The Poem represents the different statuses experienced by women. The speaker describes the life of a woman who is not far from the household which makes the gender inequality at home. Lorber (2001, p. 258) states, "The subordination of women persists because it produces a group that can be exploited as workers, sexual partners, childbearers, and emotional nurturers, in the marketplace and in the household." In addition, the female character in the poem is more concerned with the feeling and emotions her hide to give the happiness for her family. This poem is to show the effect that a woman receives in her life that is women's emotions effect, where she is not concerned with her feeling because of the repetition of the word "care" in every stanza which means she must also she has to keep herself and his mind first. Because for the case that is happening now where times are changing that women have to think about themselves as well as taking care of their families.

The character of the woman in the poem illustrates that she is only in the house, "*House to Hold Me*" (in 1st line) that the house is her main place and everything has been hugged by the house. Lorber (2001, p. 260) states, "At the same time, no one demands that a married woman spend her whole life cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children" The sexuality of being a woman in a family makes a woman the main goal

in all matters and matters relating to her home (her husband and children). Use the word “*here*” which shows that everything is in the house all she has, as stated in the 2nd line “*Here is my lord and my love, here are my children dear-*” “*Lord*” which means God is encouraged to the role of the husband where she has considered her husband to be a person who contributed to her life and is the one, she loved the same as “*My Children*” that she lived for her husband and children and what she did or worked was for their services. She could not be separated from her duties, the verse of the poem relates to the effect of sexuality of women in gender inequality as a state by Lorber (2001, p. 260), “the physiological and procreative sex differences between females and males and look for ways to make them socially equivalent.” “*Bound with the Bands of Duty, rivetted tight;*” (in line 6) The sexuality effect of the female gender makes women bound to a household job that cannot be separated from their lives. Women are described as living things from the gender that works a lot in the house which is the main task for a long time, “*Duty older than Adam — Duty that saw*” (in line 7) tasks such as cleaning the house, preparing food, and others have happened from ancient times to now, according to Lorber (2001, p. 22), “wives were expected to be hostesses and supervisors of the household servants.” Which makes the view of work of women gender are lower than men at home, that such tasks are the duty of women and have become an obligation as a woman. Like at this time even though many women can live independently but cannot be abandoned that there are still many women who live their lives are only confined and work only inside the house taking care of their families, this is very different from the work that men do and causes gender inequality experienced by women.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

### 5.1 Conclusion

Based on the analysis in chapter IV, the writer finds the aspects and effects of gender inequality in women according to Lorber (2001), The aspects come from economical structure,

material, and family. Women have absolute housework jobs such as cleaning and taking care of the family, as well as different views that where women are the gender that has a lower position than men and women are on the wrong side while men are in the truth. As stated in the Lorber theory which has been described in the analysis women should not get such a difference in status from the kind of work they do.

As for the effects of gender inequality on women, which has been analyzed from several selected poems by Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman, it can be concluded that from the aspect of sexuality in women's gender status and emotions possessed by women and shown from the work they have, women inevitably have to work taking care of the household. and put aside their ego. From the effects in causing things that are not good their emotions

### 5.2 Suggestion

The writer will give some suggestions for the readers of this study, as listed below:

- a. The writer suggests that this scientific study be an example if the reader wants to do a similar topic of scientific study.
- b. The writer suggests the readers and future writers conduct similar study using other literary objects to make different and better study on similar issues.
- c. The writer suggests that readers get the benefit from this scientific study, by how readers see a case of gender differences in the real world or those that have been made in a literary work of poetry, short stories, and other literary works.

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