

## THE STUDY OF GENDER INEQUALITY FOUND IN DEBORAH ELLIS'S NOVEL "THE BREADWINNER"

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**Abstract:** Inequality is clearly an important issue that requires much more attention in the world. Inequality practices in the community still trapped in the old paradigm such as treat someone by their race, culture, religion, and gender. However, is not easy to eliminate an inequality in the society. The current study analyze the topic namely gender inequality that happened to the main character's life in "The Breadwinner" novel by Deborah Ellis. This study aimed to analyse the kind of inequality and the effect of it on main character's life, the writer used qualitative descriptive method. Moreover, Parvana as a main character was selected based on her experience in gender inequality. In addition, Longwe's women empowerment framework was used to prove that there are gender inequality happen in the story of the novel. The result showed that gender inequality positively occurs in the life of the main character because the story of the novel does not fulfil the five levels of equality (welfare, access, conscientisation, participation, and control) that Longwe describes in her women empowerment framework. Moreover, the lack of equality that happend in the story has resulted in several negative effects such as poverty, lack of choice, absence of security, discrimination, and power abuse.

**Keywords:** *inequality, gender, novel.*

### INTRODUCTION

Inequality is a huge issue that requires much more attention to people with a various background from all of the country in the world. The inequality practices in the community who still trapped in the old paradigm which caused unfair actions to the people just because their race, religion, skin color, and gender are different. Galliano (1995: 3) stated that "the study of gender is the study of women and men". Furthermore, he also explained from the beginning of the creation of a history that many people wrote about men and women. In addition, men are described as rational, masculine, powerful. In the concept of gender, Khan (2012) stated that equal right, responsibilities, and opportunities of men and women equality does not mean that women and men are exactly the same but equality in gender is about women's and men's right which refers to their biological sex. According to Firestone (1998), gender inequality is from the division of society into two distinct biological classes for procreative reproduction. this statement means that gender inequality from social perception to different men and women based on their sex to gain reproductive function.

There is one study which related to this research that was conducted by Niken Lestari about "Human Right Reflected in Malala Yousafzai & Christina Lamb's I am Malala (2013), Memoir of Sociological Approach". Malala is an inspirable girl from Pakistan who faced the Taliban to fight for education right for all the women of Pakistan. The object of this study is to analyze "Human Right Reflected in Malala Yousafzai & Christina Lamb's I am Malala (2013), Memoir of Sociological Approach". Moreover, this study employs a qualitative method which uses two data analysis those are the primary data source was the memoir itself and secondary resource were the books about sociological, especially in gender issues. The data collection's method is library research and the technique is a descriptive. In addition, based on data analysis, the study shows that the problem of gender

issue faced by a minor and the major character. It is proved by the condition of women of Pakistan who experienced in discrimination and violence attack by the Taliban army.

Based on the statement above, the writer is interested in analyzing the novel that has the story about the gender issue. One of the literature that explores the issue of gender inequality is Deborah Ellis's novel called "The Breadwinner". This is an International bestseller book that has earned several awards such as the Middle East Book Award and Young Manitoba Readers' Reader Award for her originality to talk about gender issues. Deborah Ellis herself is an activist and feminist writers who really care about women's lives. She's been volunteers in Afghanistan and Pakistan, she was inspired to write about woman's life there. One of her famous works is a novel called "The Breadwinner", this novel has a story about a little girl from Kabul who struggles to survive under the territory of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Shah (1999) stated that women were punished for exposing an ankle, laughing in public, or wearing shoes that made too much noise. The women are also forbidden from attending school and must wear a burqa to cover their bodies and faces, as well as not being allowed to go outside without a man. After her father was imprisoned by the Taliban army, she has to fight alone to support her mother and her siblings. "Parvana" had to survive under the rules of the Taliban that forbid women to go outside from home, she transformed herself into a boy, cut her hair, and wear boy clothes. In spite of the fact that she always finds a way to survive and protect her identity as a woman from the Taliban.

Gender inequality is taken as the focus in this study because it is rarely studied in the form of fiction novels or literary works that adapt to feminism. Moreover, in this study the writer wants to show that there are many women in the world who are still trapped in inequality. It is also expected that this study can show women's struggles to survive in conflict areas such as Afghanistan. Although, it is only in the form of fictional writing.

The purpose of this study to describe gender inequality and the know the effect of gender inequality that happens in the main character's life, Nowadays, the issues of inequality as well as racial inequality, gender inequality, and education inequality become worldwide issues. Everybody in the world talks about committing action against it. The brief example of gender inequality is discrimination, however, there are only some people that have the courage for struggling for equality. Even though the issue of gender inequality is not brand new issue and it is already discussed in many literary works in the past.

The Breadwinner is one of literary works which talk about the gender issue. According to Islam (2016), literature, in general, can be inferred by its name. However, literature has been published in written media and has been inherited for the tradition of storytelling, myths, ritual speeches. The author presents works to convey his ideas to readers with literary form. Moreover, This novel is different from other novels because Debora Ellis uses a little girl point of view to deliver the message for the reader. The reader can see how the main character and other women in Kabul to survive from gender inequality and also this study can be an inspiration for the next researcher in the selection of topics or research subjects.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this research, the researcher uses descriptive qualitative research and this kind of research has a purpose to analyze literature using an objective approach because the writer only focused on the content of the novel. Moreover, the writer also uses "Women Empowerment Framework" by Longwe to prove and describe the gender inequality which happened in the novel. "Women Empowerment Framework" was created by Sarah Hlupke Longwe. This framework aims to help plan the question of what is meant by women's empowerment and equality in practice. In addition, Longwe's framework is based on the idea of five different levels of equality those are Control (This term denotes women's control over the decision making process. Moreover, equality of control means a balance of control between men and women.), Participation (Based on Longwe's perspective,

equality of participation means involving women in making decisions in their community.), Conscientisation (Conscientisation involves a belief that sexual division of labor should be fair in both sexes and this not involve the economic or political domination of one gender by other.), Access (This is defined as women's access to the factors of production on an equal basis with men, equal basis to land, labor, credit, training, marketing, facilities, and all public services and benefits.), and Welfare (Based on Longwe's perspective, this point defines as the levels of equal access between men and women. This includes equal access to food supply, income, and medical care).

The Longwe framework allows gender and development workers to analyze the level of commitment in development organizations towards equality and empowerment of women by identifying which 'level of equality' is handled by specific interventions and by assessing the 'level of recognition' of which women's issues are in the project. In addition, this is also used to generate profiles of all development programs, as well as to categorize projects in terms of level of equality, and their level of recognition of women's issues. This may be part of an exercise carried out by organizations and individuals who want to assess the entire work program from a gender perspective.

The technique that the writer uses to analyze the data is descriptive analysis. The steps which was taken by the writer in analyzing the data are as follows. The first is analyzing the data based on the script of conversation and paragraphs. The second step is analyzing the data based on Longwe's framework. Moreover, the focus will be paid on the gender inequality faced by the main character.

## **RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Kind of Gender inequality**

#### **1. Welfare**

One of the points of gender inequality is found in Welfare level which happens when society put women into disadvantages situation in facilities, income, and food supply. It can be seen in the paragraphs bellow.

She wasn't really supposed to be outside at all. The Taliban had ordered all the girls and women in Afghanistan to stay inside their homes. They even forbade girls to go to school. Parvana had had to leave her sixth grade class, and her sister Nooria was not allowed to go to her high school. Their mother had been kicked out of her job as a writer for a Kabul radio station. year-old Ali. (MAR/THBRDWR/ 2002/PG1)

Buses were not permitted to carry women who did not have a man with them. They would have to walk the whole way. What if Father was being held somewhere else? What if they were stopped by the Taliban in the street? Mother wasn't supposed to be out of her home without a man, or without a note from husband. (WEL/THBRDWR/2002/PG30)

Based on five levels of equality in Longwe's women empowerment framework prove that the above paragraphs do not fulfill the level of welfare (facilities, income, food supply) because it shows that the main character in the novel does not have any right for education, medical care, and any facilities such as library and public transportation. She also cannot go outside and use public transportation without a men member from her family.

## 2. Access

Another proof of gender inequality toward women that is men more powerful and has a free access in production, work, and public services than the women under Taliban territory. It can be seen from paragraph below.

Women were not allowed to go into the shops. Men were supposed to do all the shopping, but if women did it, they had to stand outside and call in for what they needed. Parvana had seen shopkeepers beaten for serving women inside their shops.

( WEL/THBRDWR/2002/PG46)

"What's your name?" Parvana asked. The woman kept crying. "I'll tell you my name, then. It's Parvana. I should tell you that my name is Kaseem, because I'm pretending to be a boy. I'm dressed like a boy so that I can earn some money, but I'm really a girl. So now you know my secret. (WEL/THBRDWR/2002/PG134)

Based on Longwe's women empowerment framework, the above paragraphs do not fulfill the equality level in access (production, work, public services) because the above paragraph shows the different rules between the right of men and women under Taliban territory. Men tend to be dominant in the public services and working area because of the religious doctrine of the Taliban which only allows men to work and do the activity outside their home. They are free to go outside for shopping and working without any punishment from the Taliban.

## 3. Conscientisation

The most significant proof about gender inequality towards women is that the women live in the second position, receive a second treatment, and never become a priority. Many regulations are made without considering gender fairness. The kind of subordination can be seen in the paragraph below.

Sitting in the marketplace day after day, she had seen a lot. When the Taliban were around, what she wanted most of all was to be invisible. (CON/ABSNCSCRT/THBRDWR/2002/PG2)

According to Longwe, the above paragraph found related to the equality level of conscientisation (gender fairness) because it does not show a sign of equality in gender. Moreover, women in the Taliban era do not get any gender fairness treatment in society. As a woman, the main character loses her right to security in the public area such as market place.

## 4. Participation

Another proof of gender inequality toward women that the women always lived around androcentric society means that men are the main control and the main ruler. In the Taliban era, men tend to be dominant and has a control to anything such as making a decision, planning, testimony, and information. The kind of inequality can be seen in the paragraph below.

"I can read that letter as well as Father can," Parvana whispered into the folds of her chador. "Well, almost." She didn't dare say those words out loud. The man sitting beside her father would not want to hear her voice. Nor would anyone else in the Kabul market. Parvana was there only to help her father

walk to the market and back home again after work. She sat well back on the blanket, her head and most of her face covered by her chador.  
(PAR/THBRDWR/2002/PG1)

Based on the above paragraph, it can be proved that the women who lived under Taliban territory cannot be trusted to provide the ideas, decision making, and testimony even though they are knowledgeable about it. This kind of gender inequality is related to the participation (decision-making, policy making, planning, testimony, and administration) point in the five levels of equality by Long we because there is no fulfillment of women's rights in their participation to cast their ideas.

## 5. Control

Gender inequality causes people to behave differently toward men and women. This only creates unbalance control, discomfort, gaps, and only give fortune to one dominant gender. The proof is explained bellow.

Parvana whirled around to see a Talib glaring at her, anger in his eyes and a stick in his hand. "You must be covered up! Who is your father? Who is your husband? They will be punished for letting you walk the street like that!" The soldier raised his arm and brought his stick down on Parvana's shoulder.  
(CON/THBRDWR/2002/PG47)

According to five levels of equality in Longwe's women empowerment framework, the kind of the story on the above paragraph does not fulfill to the equality level of control (the balance control between men and women) point. In this paragraph shows us that there is no power for the main character to control her right at that moment. Moreover, she also gets discriminate act by Taliban in the public area because she does not obey the rules which not allow women to leave the house without accompanied by the men member of their families such as the father or male siblings.

## The Effect of Gender Inequality

### 1. The Effect of Welfare and Access

The effect of welfare and on Parvana's life shown in the conversation between Parvana and her friend. Parvana is opposed infertility lack of access by experiencing on poverty that causes her lack of material, income, shelter, clothing, furniture, food, and this also tends to include poor access to public services. Moreover, poverty also put into a minority gender by a dominant gender. The effect of poverty that happens in the main character's life will be explained below.

"We have to remember this," Parvana said. "When things get better and we grow up, we have to remember that there was a day when we were kids when we stood in a graveyard and dug up bones to sell so that our families could eat." (ACC/PVRT/THBRDWR/2002/PG101)

"No, Mother, we're not," Nooria said. Mother spun around to scold Nooria for talking back, but Nooria kept talking. "We have nothing left to sell. What Parvana earns keeps us in nan, rice and tea, but there's nothing extra. We need money for rent, for propane, for fuel for the lamps. If she can make money this way, and she's willing to do it, then I think she should be allowed."  
(WEL/PVRT/THBRDWR/2002/PG106)

The above Paragraph shows how women really suffer to survive from hunger, Even for just a kid like Parvana. She must be a breadwinner for her family because her father is taken by the Taliban army. To support her family, Parvana must dig the grave to collect human bones and sell it to the trader. In addition, her mother does not agree about how Parvana does to get money, but they have no choice because there are no other jobs for women anymore.

## 2. The Effect of Conscientisation and Participation

Many women lose their life choices because their life is in an inferior position. The lack of choice caused by women's subordination because there is no awareness in Taliban rules that the women have a right to participate in decision making and it makes parvana's life in an unfavorable position. Parvana not only feel a lack of choice in society, but Parvana also experiences the lack of choice in her own family. It can be seen from the paragraph below.

Parvana knew she had to fetch the water because there was nobody else in the family who could do it. Sometimes this made her resentful. Sometimes it made her proud. One thing she knew—it didn't matter how she felt. Good mood or bad, the water had to be fetched, and she had to fetch it.  
(PAR/LCKCHC/THBRDWR/2002/PG14)

The above paragraph explains the role of Parvana in her family is very important because her father got injured in his leg and cannot do any activities without his family members to carry him. Even though she was sick and tired, she has no other choice to avoid her responsibilities because she is the only one who looks like a boy and safe to do activities outside her home with her appearance. Another proof about the lack of choice that happens in Parvana's life will be explained in the paragraph below.

Parvana watched helplessly as two soldiers dragged him down the steps, his beautiful shalwar kameez ripping on the rough cement. Then they turned a corner, and she could see them no more.  
(CON/LCKCHC/THBRDWR/2002/PG25)

The above paragraph explains that Parvana has no choice but keeps quiet and let the Taliban arrests her father because her body is a very weak to fight the Taliban army. The last proof about lack of choice in Parvana's life that she has to stay at home and to not to do anything because she has no friend to play outside. In the Taliban era, many people decide to stay at their home rather than doing an activity outside. The paragraph below will confirm the proof.

It may have been safer, Parvana often thought, but it was also lonely. Maybe there was another girl her age, right close by, but she'd never find out. Father had his books, Maryam played with Ali, Nooria had Mother, but Parvana didn't have anybody. (CON/LCKCHC/THBRDWR/2002/PG17)

The above paragraph explains how Parvana's feeling, she wants to find a friend or something that could entertain her like other family's member. But she has no choice because there are no other people in Kabul who is interested to communicate and play with other people besides their family members. Not only that, all of the public facilities such as the library, playground, and mall are closed.

Another proof an absence of security in Parvana's life is when Parvana does not feel safe with her neighbors. The paragraph below will confirm the proof.

Other people lived in the part of the building that was still standing. Parvana saw them as she went to fetch water or went out with her father to the marketplace. "We must keep our distance," Father told her. "The Taliban encourage neighbor to spy on neighbor. It is safer to keep to ourselves." (CON/ABSNCSCRT/THBRDWR/2002/PG17)

When they walk to the market, Parvana's father tells her to stay away from people around their house because in the Taliban era, they never know who is the enemy and who is friends. Everyone thinks that other people who are not from their family are spies of the Taliban.

The last proof about an absence of security that happens in main character life is about how easy to get injured in the area of Kabul city because in every corner of the city had been installed land of mines that will explode in anytime. The paragraph below will confirm the proof.

Parvana remembered the time someone from the United Nations had come to her class with a chart showing the different kinds of land mines. She tried to remember what they looked like. All she could remember was that some were disguised as toys special mines to blow up children. (CON/ABSNCSCRT/THBRDWR/2002/PG99)

The above paragraph tells the story about the representative from the United Nations who comes to Parvana's school to warn them about the land of mines which is installed by the Taliban to kill the children of Afghanistan. The mines are made in various forms because it makes children interested in approaching the mines. This paragraph shows how threatened their lives when the Taliban ruled the country.

### **3. The Effect of Gender Inequality in Control**

The effect of unbalance control toward women caused them to get an act of discrimination and abuse of power because they are considered as weak human beings, whereas men are considered as powerful human beings. In addition, this also caused people to behave differently between both genders.

The effect of discrimination that happened to Parvana when she is threatened by the Taliban at the market place. The proof of discrimination is stated in the following paragraph below.

"I have no son at home, except for an infant," he would explain. Parvana would slump down further on the blanket and try to make herself look smaller. She was afraid to look up at the soldiers. She had seen what they did, especially to women, the way they would whip and beat someone they thought should be punished. (CON/DSCRMNT/THBRDWR/2002/PG2)

The above paragraph clarifies about discrimination from Taliban to women who dares to leave their home without any men member of the family. Parvana is forbidden to explain to the Taliban about the reason why she is outside the house.

The next proof about discrimination is stated in the following paragraph bellow.

The fruit and vegetable stand was next. Before she had time to make a selection, a voice behind her shouted, "What are you doing on the street dressed like that?". Parvana whirled around to see a Talib glaring at her, anger in his eyes and a stick in his hand.

(CON/DSCRMNT/THBRDWR/2002/PG47)

The paragraph above proves that Parvana got discrimination from Taliban army, even she goes outside to buy food for her family but, Taliban will not tolerant and still discriminate against Parvana because she is insisted to leave the house alone without any men from her family. Moreover, the most significant effect of stereotype is power abuse toward women and it happens on the main character's life such as violent attack, this includes torture and abuse. To prove that statement will be shown in the paragraph below.

"Get out of my house!" she yelled. She threw herself at the soldiers with such force that they both fell to the ground. She swung at them with her fists until she was knocked aside. She heard rather than felt the thwack of their sticks on her back. She kept her head hidden in her arms until the beating stopped and the soldiers went away. (CON/PWRABS/THBRDWR/2002/PG26)

The above paragraph shows that Parvana got a hit and tortured by the Taliban army when she wants to fight them to save her father. Taliban will torture anyone who blocks and disturbs them, even though she is only a little girl.

"The Breadwinner" describes gender inequality towards women of Afghanistan. There are five problems of gender inequality which reflected in the novel. Such as infertility, lack of public conscientisation, lack of participation, and lack of control. The writer used various theories about literature research and gender inequality to identify those kinds of gender inequality. In addition, the writer also used women's empowerment framework by Longwe as references to prove that there is gender inequality exist in this research. Moreover, based on the five levels of equality in the Longwe's framework those are welfare, access, conscientisation, participation, and control. The writer found that gender inequality positively occurs in the novel and especially in the life of the main character because the equality of women who live under Taliban Territory does not fulfill based on the five levels of equality. From that point, the writer can identify that gender inequality exists in the novel. Furthermore, the most dominant gender inequality point that the writer found are in the welfare and access problems because the main character faced several problem of infertility and lack of access in facilities, income, food supply, production, work, and public services which controlled by Taliban who does not allow the women to work and to enjoy the public facilities such as library and park, and also to go outside their home without accompanied by men member of their family. In fact, all those rules only give one fortune to one gender and a lot of negative economic impacts on women who lives under Taliban territory.

According to the story of the novel, those aspects of gender inequality have become the main problem in Afghanistan since the Taliban ruled the country. Women do not have any right to make their own decision. They are forbidden to speak up about their opinion and prohibits to take high education and proper job than become housewife. In fact, many women and children become a victim of the Afghanistan conflict and also lose their men as a breadwinner. Moreover, the most significant problem is violence towards women including indiscriminate attack, torture, and abuse by the Taliban army. Taliban are given the extensive authority to dominate the lives of women in Afghanistan. They have privilege right both in domestic and social lives. They possess the power to control their own lives and the life of the women in that country. In the other hand, gender inequality also happens in several countries such as Pakistan which is also become the area of Taliban territory.



However, gender inequality that happened in that country is not severer than Afghanistan because in the practice of discrimination and violence against gender has happened in the very long span of time and has become the most highlighted humanitarian issue in the world.

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