

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Study

Sexual orientation plays an important role in the development of human behavior and human personality. A person's sexual orientation is a fundamental aspect of sexuality and identity. Many people identify themselves as having a certain sexual orientation based on who they are attracted to or fall in love with. Some people know that they are attracted to people of the same or opposite gender since young age. For others, knowing certain sexual orientation can be an evolving process. Sometimes it may cause confusion for some people to define their sexual orientation because they believe that type of sexual orientation is only one that is heterosexuality.

Sexual orientation describes a pattern of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to men, women, both sexes, or none of them. Commonly, people only know heterosexuality as a common type of sexual orientation. In fact, however, there are more than one type of sexual orientation: homosexuality, bisexuality and asexuality. People in the society get used to ignoring homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality as types of sexual orientation. Homosexual, bisexual and asexual people are usually discriminated.

The studies of homosexuality can be said to begin in 1869 when a generation of medical doctors established the profession of sexology

(Zimmerman, 2000). The earliest object of study was inversion. Inversion is a term that signifies a range of behaviors and attitudes classified under the term homo-sex. Zimmerman (2000: IX) states that inversion redefined same sex desire as an aspect of human personality or essential being, not a sin laden act against nature.

Often lesbian, gay, bisexual and asexual people feel afraid, different, and alone when they first realize that their sexual orientation is different from the community norm. This is particularly true for people to become aware of their gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation in their childhood or adolescence, which is uncommon. They depend on their families and their communities. They may have to struggle against prejudice and misinformation about homosexuality. They are afraid of being rejected by family, friends, co-workers, and religious institutions because of misunderstanding or stereotype. Some homosexual people worry about losing their jobs or being harassed at school if their sexual orientation is revealed. The discrimination of homosexual people is usually based on assumptions, prejudices, stereotype, misunderstanding because of the lack of understanding from heterosexual people in the society. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are at a higher risk for physical assault and violence than heterosexuals. Hate-crimes violence against homosexuals in America grew in number. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs reported that violent crimes against people because of their sexual orientation are increased almost 13% in 2010<sup>1</sup>.

There are millions of people across the world who face execution, imprisonment, torture, violence and discrimination because of their sexual

orientation. As the major and common sexual orientation, heterosexual people tend to judge homosexual people.

Understanding sexual orientation is an important part of understanding the society people live in. People are free to choose their own sexuality because it is one of their rights as human being. As a part of society people have right to feel equal with one another. As human being people are free to live their own life as long as they do not disturb other people.

There are numerous theories about the origins of a person's sexual orientation. Most scientists today agree that sexual orientation is most likely the result of a complex interaction of environmental, psychological, cognitive and biological factors. For most people, sexual orientation is shaped in an early age. It is important to recognize that there are probably many reasons for a person's sexual orientation, and the reasons may be different for everybody, either gay, lesbians, bisexual or heterosexual person.

Sexual orientation has become the focus in several literary works that depict of the life of person including her or his sexual life. In fact, literature and life cannot truly be separated as literature is a copy of reality. In the literature world, there are some literary works that illustrate women discrimination and sexual orientation. One of them is Alice Walker's Novel *The Color Purple*. This book is about an African-American woman who struggle under the patriarchal system and after some experiences, she finds herself as a lesbian.

Literature is the art of written works. Morris (1993: 6) stated that literature is cultural practice involving the writing, reading, evaluation, teaching and so on

of the literary canon. Some people say that literature is a copy of reality. The creative forms of writing can offer special insight into human experience and sharpen our perception of social reality. Literary texts can provide a more powerful understanding of the ways in which society works to women's disadvantage. Literature constructs a representation of that already existing reality by means of words.

In 1982, Walker stepped across the line of a highly forbidden taboo with her portrayal of Celie in *The Color Purple*. Taking place mostly in rural Georgia, the story focuses on female black life during 1930s in the South America. This novel examines not only black people oppression but also incest, bisexual love, and lesbian love. Walker's *The Color Purple* illustrates women's role in the late nineteenth century through the main character, Celie. This novel takes place at a time when women were supposed to follow their husbands and were not allowed to have their very own desire and opinion. At the time when the novel was published, the society demanded women to follow its values. They were expected to be daughters, wives and mothers. Women had no voice in family, and mostly women were servants for their own husband.

In Walker's *The Color Purple*, the oppressions of women are illustrated. We can see how the society describes women at that time. Celie has been abused by her step father since her childhood and she cannot tell anyone because her step father forbids her to talk. Celie thinks that every woman has to obey what men say. Besides her abusive step father, Celie has to struggle against her abusive husband.

After the years she considered herself as a subordinate of men, she meets a woman who lives freely and equality with men, Shug. Shug has inspired her and becomes her romantic interest. The readers are brought to see the transition of Celie after she meets Shug. The relationship between Celie and Shug can be considered as lesbian.

In 1983, *The Color Purple* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, making Walker the first black woman to win. Pulitzer Prize is an American award for achievement in newspaper, journalism, literature and musical composition. This award is made in categories relating to newspaper journalism, arts, and letters and fiction. To win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction category, a work has to be written by an American author and the story has to talk about American life. The story usually talks about important issues. There are important issues which Walker wants to show to the readers. *The Color Purple* illustrates the condition of African-American women and the society, the condition where African American women were being mistreated and discriminated. This novel also illustrates more than one type of sexual orientation which was taboo in the society, but Walker is brave enough to write about it. Walker is also the first black woman who wins the National Book Award. This book is written by a woman for women, so we can see the struggle of a woman to gain self-esteem as a woman. This novel with its story, plot and characters inside awakens the readers to be more aware of gender discrimination and sexual orientation.

## **B. Research Focus**

This research focuses on the sexual orientation of Celie, the main character of *The Color Purple*. Celie is an African woman who lives under the oppression of men in patriarchal society. Walker sets her story of Celie's transformation from a passive woman to become an independent woman within the culture of southern black rural society. This novel becomes one of the examples of feminist novels. Walker also uses the main character of the story as a model of lesbian woman.

There are some problems that occur in the novel. Some of them are racial problem, women oppression and sexual orientation. The problems to analyze in this research are about the main character, Celie, with her sexual orientation. The analysis focuses on the transformation of her sexual orientation and the factors that turn her to be a lesbian.

The theories of sexual orientation, lesbianism and the developmental of homosexual identity process are used in this research. Feminism is used as the basic point of view to analyze this research. The theories are appropriate to be used to examine sexual difference. The theory of sexual orientation and lesbianism are used to analyze the factors that cause someone to be a lesbian from the feminist perspective. The theory of homosexual identity development process is used to analyze Celie's homosexual identity development process.

Based on the previous explanation, the research questions are:

1. What are the factors cause Celie to become a lesbian?
2. How is the development of Celie's sexual orientation identity process?

### **C. Research Objectives**

In this research, the research has some objectives, they are:

1. to reveal the factors that cause Celie to become a lesbian,
2. to explain the development of Celie's homosexual identity process

### **D. Research Significance**

1. The significance of this research is to enrich the research in literary field especially in lesbian feminism.
2. This research is expected to give students, especially those who study literature, the knowledge of understanding and appreciating literary works, especially written by women or the literature works about women.
3. It is hoped that this research can attract people's interest in reading literary works written by female writers and make people more aware of the existence of women.
4. This research tries to give people more understanding about homosexual people, that homosexuality is not a disease and we should not avoid them.