

**THE MEANING OF FAMILY AND HAPPINESS IN LOUISA MAY
ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN* (1868): FEMINIST APPROACH**

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**THE MEANING OF FAMILY AND HAPPINESS IN LOUISA MAY
ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN* (1868): A FEMINIST APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

The problem of this study is “what is the meaning of family and happiness” reflected in Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women novel. The objective of the study is to analyze the meaning of family and happiness in Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women novel based on the feminist approach. The type of this study is descriptive qualitative research. The object of this study is Little Women novel by Louisa May Alcott. There are two data sources that are needed to do this study, namely : primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data sources of this study is Little Women novel (1868) by Louisa May Alcott. And the secondary data sources are from other sources related the study, such as: website, dictionary, biography of Louisa May Alcott and some books that support the analysis. Based on the analysis, the author draws the following conclusions. Based on feminist analysis, it reflects women’s position, women’s role, women’s right, and women’s participation.

Keyword: *The meaning, Family and Happiness, Little Women, A Feminist Approach.*

A. Introduction

Little Women is a novel that was written by Louisa May Alcott. Louisa May Alcott was an American novelist. Louisa was born on November 29, 1832, in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Her novel was originally published in two volumes in 1868 and 1869. In wikipedia.com it is mentionned that *Little Women* became an overnight succes, selling 2,000 copies. This novel is loosely based on her childhood experiences with her three sisters. After Louisa succeeded with her novel *Little Women* (1968), she also writes another novel such as *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870), *Little Men* (1871), *Eight Cousin* (1875), *Rose in Bloom* (1876), *Jo's Boy* (1886), and others. The novel follows the lives of four sisters Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March detailing their passage from childhood to womanhood, and is loosely based on the author and her three sisters. Louisa May Alcott died on 1888 in Boston, Massachusetts.

Little Women tells about women struggle. Struggle of Mrs March and her sister, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy without Mr March. In the *Little Women* novel, *Jo* is a major character. She does a big sacrifice, she cuts her crown, her hairs, to help her mother to finance her trip to look out Mr March. Civil war gives the family a bad condition of financial.

The meaning of family and happiness which are reflected in *Little Women* are one of interesting aspects to be studied. Alcott, the author of the novel wants the readers to know about March family. Although, the civil war gives their family a bad condition especially in financial condition and because Mr March works as a preacher in the war, but their family is still happy life with a mother who always fight for her daughters and her family. And Jo, she does a big sacrifice, cuts hairs and sells her hairs to help her

mother. Those effect can be studied in feminist term which studies in women's life without a man around them.

As long as the writer knows *Little Women* novel by Louisa May Alcott has been analyzed by Agustin Dwi Ratnaningrum in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. The aim of the study is to find the effects of civil war on families.

The second is study which was conducted by Liza Novita Ningrum in University of Muria Kudus. The aim of the study is to find out flouting maxim of relation which is employed by the characters and to find out the speaker's meaning of flouting maxim of relation in *Little Women* novel.

And the last researcher is Liana Yunike Manurung in University of North Sumatera. The aim of the study is to analyze women's life on 19 century who becomes a pole starting the feminism that is reflected by *Little Women* novel.

The researcher here tries to analyze this novel again but in different perspective. The researcher want to analyze the meaning of family and happiness in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* by using feminist approach.

The research paper concerning about the meaning of family and happiness. Family is a social group in society typically consisting of one or two parents and their children. The family can provide the child with affection, a sense of belonging, and validation. Every area of a child's life is affected by the family.

According to Mark Foster (1988: 5) the family is being attacked and defended with equal vehemence. It is blamed for oppressing women, abusing children, spreading neurosis and preventing community. It is praised for

upholding morality, preventing crime, maintaining order and perpetuating civilization. Marriages are being broken more than ever before and being constituted more than ever before. The family is the place from which one desperately seeks escape and the place to which one longingly seeks refuge.

Meanwhile, according to Freud's concept of family there are three major blocks that prevent Freud from conceptualizing the family: (1) a therapeutic practice based on curing an individual; (2) a miscomprehension of the individual and his relation of society; (3) a false concept of society (Mark Foster, 1998: 76).

According to Jaques Danzelot's book,

"Under the ancien regime, the family was both a subject and an object of government. It was a subject by virtue of the internal distribution of its powers: the wife, the children, and the other members of the household (relatives, servants, apprentices) were answerable to the head of the family" (Jaques, 1979:76).

Happy family is that family members stay together for quality time and they have a big, extended family. Happy family is that the couple can have intimate communication and they have connection with social status. In a word, happiness is not based on material wealth. Happiness is something as humans are entitled to and guaranteed as a right. Happiness by definition is a state of being, not a destination.

According to Nicholas White the history of happiness is no ordinary history, and the subject is by no means ordinary either. The idea of happiness points us to an all inclusive assessment of a person's condition. It makes a claim, at least, to take into account all considerations about what's desirable and worthwhile. The history of happiness might thus claim to be relevant to everything concerning human, or even other, beings. On both sides, the

concept and the history, there seem to be no boundaries within which to work. On various grounds, some contours and limits are called for (Nicholas P. White, 2006: 8).

Happy and success based on our relationship. Bo Zanches said in his book How to Build a Happy Family (Bo Zanches, 2010: 9)

“Your happiness, your success, your health and your dreams depend on relationship. Show me a person with every happy relationships and I’ll show you a very happy person. Show me a person with miserable, dysfunctional relationships and I’ll show you a very miserable person.”

Nevertheless some philosophers seem to have assumed this: happiness is something that anyone, no matter what his values, can detect in himself or another person. And other philosophers seem, at least implicitly, to have held the contrary (Nicholas White, 2006: 143).

To know the meaning of family and happiness reflected in novel *Little Woman* by Louisa May Alcott the writer uses feminist approach. This theory is appropriate to analyze the meaning family and happiness for woman reflected.

When discuss about women’s problem, the world that always into people’s mind is feminism. Feminism is a women’s position is equal with man’s position and should be treated equal.

In Gayle book Feminist Research in Theory and Practice (Gayle, 2003: 24)

“Human equals man and woman is considered in relation to man and as deviation of his essential humanity: She is partial man, or a negative image of man, or a convenient object of man’s needs” (Westkott, 1990: 59).

The British social scientist Christ Weddon in Mandel states, “feminism is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between woman and man in the society” (Mandell, 1995:4).

Meanwhile, according to Gayle Latherby (2003: 4), feminism, we know, is not a unified project. While all feminist are concerned with understanding why inequality between women and men exists and, relatedly, reasons for the overall subordination of women, feminist do not all agree on where to find the causes of male domination nor how to combat this achieve liberation for women.

According to Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace (1996:23) to counteract any mistaken notion that feminism is “over” or that we have somehow gone beyond the need to engage with the issues that a feminist perspective raises. “Feminist” was understood as referring to a “constellation” of social and political concerns, all rooted in the fact of persistent “gender inequality.” Theory itself, far from being abstruse or inaccessible, was understood as the key that would unlock and facilitate meaning, identify connections, and ultimately expose the stakes of any intellectual enterprise: “Family Systems Theory,” for instance, promises to explain debilitating (Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace, 24).

According to Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) argued that women’s writing should experience and not just draw comparisons with the situation in society of men.

B. Research Method

While analyzing the novel, the writer uses a descriptive qualitative research. According to Anderson and Taylor (2009), qualitative research typically involves fieldwork in which the researcher observes and records behavior and events in their natural setting. This type of research data is a text taken from two data sources: primary data sources and secondary data

sources. The primary data sources of this study is *Little Women* (1868) novel by Louisa May Alcott. The secondary data sources are from other sources related to the study, such as: website, dictionary, biography of Louisa May Alcott and some books that support the analysis. Both the collected by Reading the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, identifying the topic of novel, determining the major and minor character, and reading some books to find out the theory. In this research the technique that is used analyze the data based on feminist approach that analyze the meaning of family and happiness in *Little Women* novel by Louisa May Alcott. The writer analyze the structural element of the novel and then analyze the meaning of family and happiness in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* based on feminist approach.

C. Research Findings and Discussion

After analyzing the novel the researcher gets some research finding.

The research finding has some cases to be discussed.

1. Findings

The writer gets some research finding in analyzing *Little Women* novel. There are some social background of America in the late 20th century until the beginning of 21th century.

a. Social Aspect

The US is often as a classless and egalitarian society but there have always been social and economic differences between Americans. Arguably these constitute a class model of American consist of working middle and upper class, based on job, status, income, religion, capital and sometimes birth (Mauk and Oakland, 1997:243).

Social classes are economic or cultural arrangement of groups in society. Class is an essential object of analysis for sociologists, political scientist, economist, anthropologists and social historian. In the social sciences, social class is often discussed in terms of social stratification. In the modern western context, stratification typically comprises of three layers: upper class, middle class, and lower class. Each class may be further subdivided into smaller classes (e.g. occupational).

Little Women tells the phenomenon about rich and poor of America in late 20th until the beginning of 21th century. When the reader reads the novel, the reader can see the different society of life. When the reader reads and know about the Hummel's family, the reader can classify the Hummel's family in upper class because Alcott explain that the Hummel's family is very poor. They live in a miserable room with broken windows, no fire, ragged bed-clothes, a sick mother, wailing baby, and a group of pale, hungry children.

Little Women novel by Louisa May Alcott describe about relationship between poor family and rich family. It can be seen in the relationship between Laurie's family and March family. Laurie's family always help March family. And the otherwise, March family always help Hummel's family. This is one of evidences of good relationship in social life.

b. Economic Aspect

The U.S is the world's biggest economic power in term of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This include the goods, service,

capital and income, which the country produce. Mauk and Oakland (1997:244) state that 24 per cent of GDP from mining, energy, industry, manufacturing, and construction; and some 73 per cent from transportation and the service industries.

Historically, manufacturing and industrial production have been a crucial factros in the U.S economy. A 2005 encyclopedia shows that the most important development in the economy since World War II has been tremendous growth of service industries, such as goverment service, professional service, trade, and financial activities.

From the 1994, according to Mauk and Oakland (1997:250), most economic indicators were positive in the America. The economy recovered steady, and the interest rates were stable. Meanwhile, between 1997 and 1996, America created millions new job and leads the world in this sector, even though the equality of jobs varies. These have resulted in the stablility of price and wage, the improvement of productivity and growth rates, and the performance of dollar, which as been relatively strong, although with fluctuation.

In *Little Women*, shows the economic condition of March family. Mr March lost his wealth in trying to help an unfortunate friend. Their economic is getting worse, because Mr. March going to Washington to works. And March family got difficult in financial.

c. Political Aspect

The fundamental strength of America comes from the big participation of America in United Nation. First, The United Nation

(UN) is an international organization whose aims to facilitate cooperation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress, human rights, and achievement of world peace. The UN was founded in 1945 after World War II to replace the League of Nations in order to stop wars between countries and to provide a platform for dialogue. It contains multiple subsidiary organizations to carry out its missions. United Nation itself is located in America.

The political parties in the United States are dominated by two major parties: The Republican and the Democratic Party. According to a study, from the end of World War through the 1980s, the Democrats were divided into two major factions. The northern Democrats handled national action to solve social problems, emphasized the government regulation of the economy, and initiate strong action to aid minorities. The southern Democrats were more conservative in fiscal, economic regulation and social matters.

In the twentieth century, the Fourteenth Amendment, which requires states to respect the rights of US citizens by extending to them 'due process of law' and the 'equal protection of the laws', has proven particularly important in restricting state government actions that limit the civil rights of individuals (Mauk and Oakland, 1997:129).

From the novel, Louisa May Alcott shows her hateful to the war because it only brings suffering especially on the family conditions.

d. Science and Technology Aspect

The early technological and industrial development in the US was facilitated by a unique confluence of geographical, social, and economic factors. The relative lack of workers kept US wages nearly always higher than corresponding British and European workers and provided an incentive to mechanize some tasks.

Beside transportation, environmental awareness in America was progressively increases, proven by the development of center recycle building for aluminum can.

In the twentieth century many technological innovations had been introduced in the US. Communications satellite orbited the earth, computers performed day-to-day function in many businesses, and the internet provides instant information on most aspect of US life via computer. In this decade America's communication system are among the most developed in the world. Television, radio, newspapers, and other publication, provide most of the country's news and entertainment.

From *Little Women* novel shows some seen technology aspect. The technology is telegraph. Telegraph is one of electricity , which is function to get message and send message. In March family, telegraph is very important. And telegraph used to communicate each other. For example, Mrs March got telegraph from Washington tells that Mr March is fell a sick.

e. Cultural Aspect

America follows Liberalism as its Ideology. Liberalism in US is a broad political philosophy centered on the unalienable rights of the individual. The liberalism deals freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion for all belief systems, and the separation of church and state, right to due process and equality under the law are widely accepted as a common foundation across the spectrum of liberal thought. The main focus of modern liberalism in the US includes issues such as voting rights for all adult citizens, equal rights, protection of the environment, and the provision by the government of social services, for example: getting the equal education opportunities, equal access to health care, transportation infrastructure, basic food for hungry and basic shelter for the homeless.

There are three facts dealing with cultural aspect of the US. They are mental, behavioral and physical facts. Mental facts include the norms, values, custom, the regulations, etc. Behavioral facts contain how the people behave in their living, and the physical facts involve the language, art, education, movie, etc.

The three major cultures have produced a composite Americanism. They have also partly influenced an international culture, for good or bad. They are expressed, for example, through Hollywood films, television and radio, newspaper and magazine, music and art, professional and amateur sport, patterns of consumption, well-

known chain stores and brand names, and corporate and financial institutions (Mauk and Oakland, 1997:8).

Louisa May Alcott shows a kind of song and Louisa conveys when the March sisters play an Operatic Tragedy on Christmas Night.

f. Religious Aspect

The religious composition of the US was modified significantly by immigration and tended to become stabilized. During the first two decades of twentieth century, migration from Europe became heavy and included a large number of Jews and Roman Catholics.

The last twentieth century of the US is primarily Christian, but other religions and a large variety of denominations and sects add. Religious Protestant churches are most numerous, the largest single American religious group consists of Roman Catholic.

Some people are indicated very interested in spiritual matters and acknowledge that religion was very important to their lives, but some others argue that faith and religious belief were unimportant. As Mauk and Oakland (1997:350) state that the belief and formal membership of religious domination are not always translated into active participation.

This particularly strengthened the Roman Catholic Church, but it also included a range of Asian religions, such as Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam, as well as considerable numbers of Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution in Europe. Eastern Orthodox churches were also established by Greek, Russian, Armenian and Syrian immigrants. Such

groups tended to concentrate in the bigger cities and retained their own language in religious and daily life (Mauk and Oakland, 1997:359).

2. Discussion

After the researcher analyzed the novel *Little Women* by using feminism theory, it is clear that this novel reflects the meaning of family and happiness reflected Louisa May Alcott *Little Women* novel. Louisa conveys many complication in the novel, but March family can give solution with it. So the researcher gives issues the meaning of family and happiness.

After analyzing the novel using feminist approach, finally the researcher finds that there is correlation between underlying theory, the social background of America in the late 20th century until the beginning of 21th century, also the structural elements of the novel.

D. Conclusion

After analyzing *Little Women* novel by Louisa May Alcott, the researcher describes the following conclusion. Based on the feminist analysis, it can be conclude that in *Little Women* novel by Louisa May Alcott reflects the essential objective of the study about women in society. *Little Women* novel by Louisa May Alcott reflects the condition of the novel dealing in the women's position, role, right and participation. *Little Women* tells about the struggle of the four March sisters named Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy in facing their life in a family by the absence of a father figure.

Related to the conclusion above, the writer suggests to the researcher to study the novel through other perspectives such as psychological, marxism, psychoanalytic, and sociological

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