

**THE EFFECTS OF CIVIL WAR ON FAMILIES IN LOUISA
MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*: SOCIOLOGICAL
APPROACH**



RESEARCH PAPER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Little Women is a novel that was written by an American author, Louisa May Alcott. It was first published in 30th September 1868 and in wikipedia.com it is mentioned that *Little Women* became an overnight success, selling over 2,000 copies immediately. *Little Women* was written in two parts. Both parts were called *Little Women, or Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy*. In the UK, the second part was published under the title *Good Wives* that takes three years after the last chapter of the first part. The second part was published in 1869. This novel (part I) consists of 217 pages and the number of chapter is 23. After the success of *Little Women* (1868), she produced *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870), *Little Men* (1871), *Eight Cousins* (1875), *Rose in Bloom* (1876), *Jo's Boys* (1886), and others. Louisa May Alcott was born on 29 November 1832 in Germantown. She dies in Boston in 1888.

Little Women is a novel about the struggle of the four March sisters named Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy in facing their life in a family by the absence of father figure. They four have different characteristics each other which make their life more colorful. Meg, the oldest, is beautiful and rather vain. Jo, the second, is tomboyish and temperament. Beth, the third, is the shy. Amy, the youngest, is the little artist and immature. Their father, Mr. March, is away from home in Washington, where the war is, and Mrs. March cares the

four daughters with their companion, Hannah. The absence of their father because of the war gives bad impacts to the March family especially in financial. The situation makes the children work in order to get the money to help finance life. Meg works as a governess in a rich family, Jo as a companion in Aunt March, an old widow. Mrs. March is a very kind mother. She always cares her daughters with love, motivates them in every situation and teaches them to help the poor. The March sisters build a good relationship with their rich next-door neighbor, Mr. Lawrence, and his grandson, Laurie. The Lawrence always helps The March in facing their life without father especially in financial. One day, a letter comes to the March informed that Mr. March is seriously ill and asked Mrs. March to come. Here, to help Mrs. March finance the trip, Jo, make a big sacrifice to cut her only beauty, her hair, and sells it. By the Marches sacrifice in life, they can make their father, Mr. March, back home.

Little Women puts *Jo* as the major character. She does a big sacrifice to cut her one beauty, her hair, in order to help Mrs. March to finance the trip. Civil War brings the family into a bad condition of financial and *Jo*, although she is tomboy and temperament, can little by little manages herself not to be arrogant because the absence of the father. *Jo* is tomboy so she acts in home as if she is the father.

Little Women as a literary work of course leaves responses from the readers whether they are pro or contra about the novel. It can be seen from *goodreads* internet site. Most readers like and love this novel. One of the

discussant, Susan, gives compliment to this novel by rating it 5 of 5 stars in April 10, 2007. She said “This is high on my reread list along with *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, and *a Tree Grows in Brooklyn*”. Also in this book, we see the perspective of a family coping with the financial and emotional strain of having a loved one away at war. Another response is coming from Corrie who rated it 5 of 5 stars in August 5th, 2008. Corrie stated that the book itself was written after the Civil War, it has purposeful nostalgic tone. The struggle for girls and women to be themselves while following convention is an experience that resonates today. Another discussant of the previous site, Annalisa, recommended that teenagers should read this novel instead of *Twilight* because this novel is fantastic, it gives us the life lessons in every chapter and *Jo*, the main character, shows female qualities in today intelligence. Again, another discussant from the previous site, Carter Hasegawa, stated that this novel is good and he loves it. The story not only tells about sisterhood but also their life during the Civil War.

The good responses have already written above. *Little Women* is not only leaves good comments but also criticism. Although so many readers love this novel, but one of them, Rory, stated in July 2007. He stated that *Little Women* is dull and preachy. He also stated that most of the chapters play like morality plays than a solid plot. A bad comment about the author, Louisa May Alcott that she is an ornery old maid was come from Anna in January 1994. She stated that the children who read the novel will be disappointed by the author of the book they love.

Another site, *Bookspot*, declares that *Little Women* is one of the most popular novels ever written. It is proven by the *Little Women* still on the best-seller list after 100 years Alcott's death. *Little Women* became a movie in 1933 and Katharine Hepburn won best actress for her portrayal of Jo and the movie was nominated for Best Picture.

Little Women is an interesting novel to be read. It has many appeals. First, the story reflects the different in unity. The four March sisters have different characteristics but they can make it beautiful through any kinds of life problems. Second, Louisa May Alcott, the author, through this novel gives a big motivation in facing every kind of problems in life especially in financial problems. Third, it reflects the issue about women's role in family and society. The main character, Jo, is a tomboy who is arrogant and unfeminine while the family wants her to be feminine and graceful, acts like the common girl in nineteenth century. Women's role is an interesting issue to be discussed. Fourth, the novel depicts the family devotion through sacrifice done by the member of the family like what Jo has done to sacrifice her one beauty, her hair. She cut and sold it in order to help mother to finance the trip to Washington where the father is. The most appealing aspect of this novel is it draws the effects of civil war. The family fell into poverty because the father, the man who must earn money for the family living, is away from home where the war is.

The effects of Civil War which are reflected in *Little Women* are one of the appealing aspects that interesting to be studied. Alcott, the author,

wants the readers to underline that Civil War in America in 1860's causes the bad effects to the family especially in economic aspect. The family is drawn in poor condition by the poverty caused by the Civil War. Not only in economic aspect, Civil War also caused effects in education aspect which is drawn by the one of the character, Amy, who left out the school. Those effects can be studied in sociological term which studies the social life of a human.

Related to literature, sociology plays a big role. A literary work is created by the people who are the member of a society. Sociology studies the relation between people and society. Sociology discusses the social condition of the author. What makes a literary work interesting can be studied through sociological approach.

By the information above, the writer decided to conduct a paper about Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* by using sociological approach. The title of the work is "THE EFFECTS OF CIVIL WAR ON FAMILIES IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*: SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH".

B. Literature Review

The study conducted by the writer has a close relationship with the study was conducted by Anita Widiastuti, a Muhammadiyah University student (2003), entitled "JO'S STRUGGLE FOR BETTER STANDARD OF LIVING IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*: AN

INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY ANALYSIS". She uses individual psychology analysis to analyze the data. The aim of the study is to find the influences of Jo's struggle for better standard of living on her personality development. The result of the data shows the following conclusions. Firstly, the structural elements of the novel present a good unity. Louisa May Alcott employs the traditional plot that begins with exposition followed by complication, climax, and resolution. She tries to give a moral message through this novel that life is a struggle to reach her life goal. She takes it as the theme of the novel. Secondly, the result of the psychological analysis shows that the struggle has influenced Jo's personality. Jo changes from tomboyish into more gentle and feminine that is influenced by her struggle for better standard of living.

Different from the previous writer, the writer has different perspective in analyzing the data. The writer uses sociological approach to analyze the data. The writer analyzes the effects of civil war on families in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* by using sociological approach.

C. Problem Statement

Knowing that the problem is the most important part of research, the writer proposes the problem "How the effects of civil war on families are reflected in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*?"

D. Limitation of the Study

The writer focuses this research in analyzing the effects of civil war on families of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* the novel based on sociological approach.

E. Objective of the Study

The objectives of the research are:

1. To analyze Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* novel based on its structural elements.
2. To analyze the effects of civil war on families in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* based on sociological approach

F. Benefit of the Study

Theoretically, it gives additional information to literary works dealing with Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* novel.

Practically, it adds the writer's knowledge on Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* novel particularly based on sociological approach.

G. Research Method

1. Type of Research

In this study, the writer applies qualitative research which focuses on the effects of civil war on families in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*.

2. Object of the Research

The object of this research is Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* novel.

3. Type of the Data and Data Source

In doing the study, the writer uses two sources of data. The primary data source is taken from Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* novel. The secondary data are taken from other sources which are related to the primary data that support the analysis. They are books and virtual references.

4. Technique of Data Collection

The methods used for collecting data are library research and browsing.

They are as follows:

- Reading the Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* novel carefully.
- Identifying the topic of the novel.
- Determining the major characters.
- Taking a note of the important information.
- Reading some related books to find out the theory.

5. Technique of Data Analysis

In this research the technique that is used to analyze the data is based on sociological approach that analyzes the effects of civil war on families in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* novel. The writer analyzes the structural elements of *Little Women* and then analyzes the effects of civil war on families in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* based on sociological approach.

H. Paper Organization

Paper Organization of this research comprises six chapters. Chapter I is introduction which covers background of Study, literature review, problem statement, limitation of the study, objectives of the study, benefit of the study, research method, and paper organization. Chapter II is underlying theory that the writer uses to conduct this research. It covers the notion of sociological approach, and the major principles of sociological approach. Chapter III is social background of America during the civil war which covers social aspect, political aspect, economic aspect, science and technology, cultural aspect, and religious aspect. Chapter IV is structural analysis. This chapter is dealt with structural analysis of *Little Women* novel. Chapter V is sociological analysis. This chapter explains the sociological analysis of *Little Women* novel. Chapter VI is Conclusion and Suggestion.