

Exploring Feminism in «Little Women»: a Study of Liberal, Marxist, and Radical Feminism in Louisa May Alcott's Classic Novel

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Abstract: This article delves into the realm of feminism within the timeless classic «Little Women» by Louisa May Alcott. Through a thorough analysis of the novel, the researcher identifies three prominent types of feminism – liberal, Marxist, and radical feminism – as portrayed within the characters and their dialogues. The article explores how each type of feminism is exemplified in the story and relates it to the broader context of the women's rights movement.

Key words: Little Women, Feminism, Feminist Novel, Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Radical Feminism, Louisa May Alcott, Gender Roles, Women's Rights Movement, Civil War Era, Gender Equality

Analysis “Little women“ as a Feminist Novel

The Types Of Feminism In The Novel. From the data obtained, the researcher concludes that in the novel there is an issue of feminism. And researchers found three types of feminism, namely liberal feminism, marxist feminism, and radical feminism. All three are obtained from the way the author describes the character and the sentences spoken by the character or her attitude towards the problems faced and the actions are taken. Feminism is a women's movement for equal rights between men and women. According to Mansour Fakih (2001), Feminism is a unified social movement based on various acts of violence against women, such as oppression and exploitation. In addition, it is also accompanied by efforts to overcome cases of oppression and exploitation of women. Liberal feminism; view to putting those women have freedom. Marxist Feminism; class differences such as jobs that look at gender and usually men are superior Radical Feminism, make women's bodies the object of oppression by men.

Liberal Feminism. The basis of Liberal Feminism is a good life, where citizens have dignity and personal freedom as decision-makers and can develop themselves. This kind of feminism can be seen on the front page when four sisters; Meg, Jo, Amy, and Beth enjoy their gloomy Christmas. Then they talk about the results of the hard work they had today. «Mother didn't say anything about our money, and she won't wish us to give up everything. Let's each buy what we want, and have a little fun; I'm sure we work hard enough to earn it,» cried Jo, examining the heels of her shoes in a gentlemanly manner. In the dialogue, the sentence contains elements of liberal feminism, which means they work hard to meet their own needs without male intervention in it. And it can also be said that women should have freedom and be able to meet their own needs. Like the theory put forward by John Locke as a British philosopher who said that humans have natural rights, namely the right to life, freedom and property rights.

Liberal feminists are fighting for equal rights in making their choices as human beings. Because women can fight for their rights as human beings. They have the freedom to choose, such as choosing to marry or not. Like the goal of feminism theory itself, namely equality of opportunity. And in this case the equality of opportunity in question is the opportunity to refuse or accept. Because at that time, women were still considered weak creatures and had to obey men who became rulers. So there is a lot of

violence even within the family, and in this case they are still thinking about whether to marry or not for the sake of their future survival.

According to the data that the researcher get, they can be categorized as liberal feminists, because according to Mary Wollestone as the main character of liberal feminists, men and women have the same reasoning, so for the sake of equality of treatment and rights between men and women must be the same. The direction of the goal of liberal feminism itself is to want women to be free from oppressive gender roles, to achieve equal rights. And in this case it has been reflected in the dialogue between the characters in the novel.

Marxist Feminism. «It's naughty to fret, but I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world. It makes me cross, and my hands get so stiff. I can't practice well at all.» And Beth looked at her rough hands with a sigh that any one could hear that time.» When the four sisters got together and complained to each other about the work they did that day. And Beth says washing dishes is the worst job in the world. However, the work will be done whether or not, because it is one of the tasks of women. Namely as a keeper or who always tidy up and do household chores that were commonly done by women at that time. And Beth did that and thought it was bad because it made her hands stiff and rough. But there was nothing she could do but do it for the sake of her survival.

«Really, girls, you are both to be blamed,» said Meg, beginning to lecture in her elder-sisterly fashion. «You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl, but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady.»

In this case, the researcher categorizes this as a Marxist Feminist, because Karl Heinrich Marx or more popularly known as Karl Marx as a philosopher from Germany and is the originator of Marxist feminism, formulator of the approach to conflict in people's social life. For Marxists, women belong to the oppressed group. The weaker physical condition of women should not be used as an excuse to put women in a lower position. Physical differences that are received from birth are then strengthened by the hegemony of cultural structures, customs, traditions, education, and so on. And in this novel, is described through dialogues between characters that tell about their working conditions. Finally, Jo became the substitute for his father as the person in charge of her family.

Radical Feminism. Radical Feminism is feminism that holds that oppression of women is caused by a patriarchal system. In the case of this novel, the writer finds that this feminism happened when Amy was in school and made a mistake so that she was punished by her teacher in front of her friends. Then she told her mother about the punishment she had received. Because she felt uncomfortable with the punishment her teacher did to her because it felt condescending to her.

«I don't agree with corporal punishment, especially for girls. I don't like the way Mr Davis teaches and don't think the girls you hang out with are doing anything good so I'll ask your dad for advice before I send you doing anything good, so I'll ask your dad for advice before I send you anywhere else. The words spoken by Mrs. March can be classified as Radical Feminism which is shown by protesting against the oppression of women.

The Issue of Feminism in the Novel

The feminist movement supports women to play an active role in various fields of life, such as economic, social, cultural, without any restrictions or oppression. Feminism is the recognition that there is an imbalance of power between women and men, where women are deliberately placed in a lower role than men (Hannam, 2007). Feminism can also be interpreted as a women's emancipation movement that speaks about the position of women and rejects the difference in degrees between women and men.

Wollstonecraft is best known as a writer, philosopher, and liberal feminist figure in the late 18th century. As a feminist, Wollstonecraft fights for women's rights to have equal rights with men in politics, education, and employment. So that women are not only confined in the house doing work that is motherhood and just a tool or instrument for the pleasure, happiness, and perfection of men. In addition, the way the author presents the issue of feminism in the novel is by presenting it through dialogue between characters and the actions of the characters in the novel. And in the novel, Louisa May Alcott, as the author, writes and describes that feminism is indeed contained in her novel, although it is not too obvious.

According to Adib Sofia (2009), the reasons behind the attitude of women to reject men's power are none other than education, understanding of the law, and the people around them. Feminist theories, as a tool for women to fight for their rights, are closely related to class and racial conflicts, especially gender conflicts. Feminism rejects injustice as a result of patriarchal society, rejects history and philosophy as male-centered disciplines, subjects as ego-centric (using thoughts), while women as hetero-centric (others). According to feminist groups, the influence of men in language is very strong, the arbitrary nature of language is used to the fullest by patriarchal culture.

In relation to literature, relevant fields of study include: female literary traditions, female authors, female readers, characteristics of women's language, female characters, popular and female novels, and so on. Feminists, especially issues regarding women are generally associated with emancipation, the movement of women to demand equal rights with men, both in the political and economic fields, as well as socio-cultural movements in general.

According to the researcher, the novel which is set during the civil war period, has several values taught by Mrs. March told his children about the importance of trying and never giving up to achieve their goals. And what is more important is to have mental strength, and regardless of what the world gives them, they are equal to men and because they have the same rights in achieving their goals. And the types of feminism depicted in the *Little Women* novel are liberal, marxist and radical feminism.

Liberal feminism was first born in the 18th century formulated by Mary Wollstonecraft in her writings «A Vindication of the Right of Women» (1759-1799) and the 19th century by John Stuart Mill in his book «Subjection of Women and Harriet Taylor Mills» in his book «Enfranchisement». Then in the 20th century Betty Friedan in «The Feminist Mystique and The Second Stage». Liberal feminism is fighting for equal rights between women and men. As depicted in the novel *Little Women*, four sisters named; Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy want freedom. Such as freedom about work so that they can be equal to men and can fulfill their own needs, unlike women who at that time were always depicted as always at home, doing housework such as sewing or washing dishes. Because at that time women were not allowed to work, or if they worked, it was a tough job like Mrs. March, the mother of four sisters, who works so hard that she doesn't even have time to have dinner with her children. Because indeed at that time women seemed to be given many rules and their freedom to choose was minimal. Like to get time women seemed to be given many rules and their freedom to choose was minimal. Like to get married or not. Like Jo's choice when she was talking to her mother if she would choose not to marry rather than marry and become an unhappy wife in her life. Also like Meg her decides who she wants to marry because she has the right to choose. Whereas at that time there were indeed many arranged marriages that ended in domestic violence and also only rich people would marry. And also the freedom to education for women. Remembering Meg and Miss Kate's conversation about education. At that time only men were required to be educated so that many women were left behind in many things, especially those related to education. And they want their freedom to be educated so they can be like the women in Mr. Brooke's country is free to work and be educated just like the men do. According to Eka Desmawati (2018) with

the title «Analysis Of Feminism In The Novel Of Little Women By Louisa May Alcott», the conception of women is determined by work. At that time work could only be done by men and women was identical to housework. Therefore, four sisters and their mother work to make ends meet while their father is not with them. Whereas Marxist feminism is class differences such as jobs that view gender and usually men are superior. Women are usually considered weak creatures and become humans who are easily oppressed. And they have a few rules of being a lady that's for sure Friedrich Engels' theory was developed to form the basis of this school. The status of women fell due to socio-economic inequality.

In the research of Novita Yolanda Santi, Awliya Rahmi (2019) entitled «Feminism Values In Louisa May Alcott's Little Women», also discusses the problem of Jo who struggles to defend her rights as a woman. Which also discusses Jo who became a substitute for her father who was on the battlefield. It was a men's job and responsibility, but Jo could do it until her father returned from the battlefield. And there is an opinion from an expert named Karl Heinrich Marx or more popularly known as Karl Marx as a philosopher from Germany and is the originator of Marxist feminism, the formulator of the approach to conflict in the social life of society. And it does happen in their social life which is constrained by the rules that have been given. Such as physical differences that are received from birth and then strengthened by the hegemony of cultural structures, customs, traditions, education, and so on.

Radical Feminism sees firmly the relationship or power relations between men and women. The source of the problem is the ideology of patriarchy. There is a view that oppression of women occurs as a result of the patriarchal system. And radical feminism is a feminism that makes women's bodies the object of oppression by men. The oppression by men and the manifestation of sexual violence is one of the basic causes of women's oppression (Desmawati, 2018). As experienced by Amy who was punished by Mr. Davis is a very disciplined teacher and keeps his every word. He punished Amy by hitting her hands right in front of her friends and she had to stand up during class hours, because she brought limes to share with her friends. And Mrs. March did not approve of Mr. Davis because she did not like corporal punishment to girls like her daughter. In her book, Kate Millet (1970), entitled «Sexual Politics», discusses individuals who have masculine and feminine characteristics. This relates to what happened to Amy who made her hands an object worthy of punishment.

The three feminisms discussed above are interrelated, where they both fight for their lives and rights as human beings. Even though they are different genders they still want to get the same rights even though they can not all be the same. At least women are not always weak creatures who can not do anything and always depend on men. And men have always been unrivaled powerful beings and always on top like a king. Because in reality women can be the head of the household, for example in today's times they are single parents. Where a woman becomes mother and father at the same time. Even though they can't meet the needs of their children to receive a father's love, women can do it. And this is related to the novel where women in their day were still rife with domestic violence, so they had the right to choose. Just as Mrs. March when her husband is not by her side, she is responsible for her family.

According to Aswarini Sentana (2019) wrote in his journal article entitled «Jo's March Antudes Toward Feminity As Reflected In Alcon's Little Women: A Feminist Approach», which describes Jo March who is not feminine and the extent to which she deviates from the behavior of women in her day. As has been discussed if Jo wants her to be a man because there are not many rules and is free to do whatever she wants without any rules, Meanwhile, according to Heny Rahayu (2018) wrote in his thesis entitled «An Analysis of Woman Struggle in Louisa May Alcot's Novel Little Women», if the author of the novel uses feminism theory. Judging from the struggles of the characters in the novel, especially the character Jo, who stands out the most. Their struggle is described as the struggle of women to find happiness in life, daily life and also in fighting for their dreams. And at the end of the novel, although the end of the story

is still hanging, it can be determined if they can slowly reach their respective dreams. From the two previous studies, it was written that Jo's character was the most prominent and displayed many struggles for her people. She even cut her hair when her mother went to town because her father was sick. Even though it was a very taboo thing in her day where women had long hair which was synonymous with elegant women. What's more, Jo's body posture is tall and slightly brown compared to her three sisters, as well as her nickname that seems masculine. Actually she wants to be like men because men don't have many rules and are free to do anything and even have authority in everything. It can add to the issue of feminism and Jo's character who wants to be like a man. However, Jo is still a woman, and it's just her wish to be able to live as freely as she wants too. Meanwhile, the issue of feminism can be seen from the actions of the characters and the attitudes of the characters in each scene. As in the article entitled «Women's Emancipation in the Domestic Area in the Novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcon». Bella Saputri Indrapuri, Eggy Fajar Andalas (2019) which includes a mother's struggle to support her children, as Mrs March who works all day for his children. Meanwhile her husband was on the civil war, leaving her with her four daughters. Then in the educational aspect as happened between Miss Kate and Meg's conversation. In the social aspect, such as when Mrs. March invites her children to do good by sharing their food with people in need. Meanwhile, according to Aswarini Sentana (2019), Jo's very unfeminine attitude like a lady in her time was one of the things that showed her protest against regulations that were hindered in her time was one of the things that showed her protest against regulations that were hindered by gender. These things can show the issue of feminism contained in the novel *Little Women*. According to Maggi Humin, feminism is thought in liberating the situation of women who experience injustice because of gender. Nina Baym believes that Women's fiction has its roots in the novels of manners with 'mixed heroes and in British moralist fiction (Baym, 29), Women's fiction is an umbrella term for women-centered books focusing on women's life experiences that are marketed to female readers, and include many mainstream novels or Books on Women's Rights. And this opinion is related to the novel *Little Women* because in the book there are several struggles that involve interlocking women's rights. While the theory of feminism began when the emergence of ideas and thoughts about the debate on women's rights in the socio-cultural field. Men construct the definition of women in the socio-cultural realm with the meaning as the role of housewives, having a gentle attitude, and being obedient to men, which women then begin to suppress (Hannam, 2007). The development of the feminist movement is increasingly visible, which is marked by the emergence of various social organizations related to feminism in the 60s to 70s to fight for women's rights, which include civil and political rights. Such as the right to proper education and the right to vote (Walters, 2007). According to the researcher, the novel «*Little Women*» does at least describe the actions of feminism starting from the conversations and attitudes and behavior of each character and the most prominent is Jo's character. So the issue of feminism can be seen from the way the author describes and explains every attitude, action, and behavior of the character. And also the portrayal of strong characters from writers like Jo, who tends to be stubborn but has a writing talent. Beth, who always felt unwell and fragile, but had a sweet demeanor. Amy, is a child with talent and beauty and has a spoiled nature typical of the youngest child. And Meg represents the nature of a woman who wants to be loved, wants to get better marks than all women, but is less sure about her appearance.

Little Women is a novel about the feminist movement. Where women not only stay at home but also work for their living. In this novel it is stated that there are three types of feminism. First, liberal feminism, which wants women to be free from oppressive gender roles, to gain equal voting or equal rights. Secondly, Marxist feminism, Karl Marx as a German philosopher and founder of Marxist

feminism, compiler of a conflict in social life, where women are an oppressed group due to their physical condition considered weak and inferior to men. And third, radical feminism is the feminism that argues that the oppression of women is caused by a patriarchal system.

The issue of feminism in the novel *Little Women* depicts the issue of feminism by the story described and also by the dialogue used by each character. Jo reflects feminine behavior in the novel, such as her masculine style, tall stature and slightly darker skin than her three sisters, she also cut her hair short, which was highly taboo at the time. And she is one of the most against the rules of women, she often does what men like by whistling or is responsible for taking care of her three sisters and mother, which is the advice of her father.

According to the researcher, the novel «*Little Women*» at least depicts the actions of feminism, starting with the conversations, attitudes and behaviors of each character and the most important is the character of Jo.

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