

Original Article

# Vanity, Temper, Timidity & Selfishness: Female Portrayal in “*Little Women*” by Louisa May Alcott

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**Abstract** - This paper explores the depiction of women in the novel *Little Women* according to a Feministic perspective. The current focus is on the representation of women in class and gender through characters in a novel from nineteenth-century America. It is a descriptive qualitative study based on a portrayal of women by feminist theorist Showalter. Showalter believes that women can do extraordinary things and work hard to achieve their societal rights because women are socially constructed. The paper argues about the positive and negative nature of females shown in this novel. Further, this paper shows how females make sacrifices to serve their families and their needs and empower themselves. It attempts to describe four different depictions of women in the society of nineteenth-century America. Thus, this study is a feminist intimation made throughout the novel by Louisa May Alcott as an impact of different types of feminism started with Showalter. The female portrayal depicted in this novel shows the image of women existing in real society as being proud, hard workers, weak, and selfish.

**Keywords** - Female portrayal, Female depiction, An image of women, Hardworking, Extraordinary.

## 1. Introduction

In nineteenth-century America, literary works had been made a way to connect with and unquestionably, even distinction to a sovereign who became granted and had importance from the essayist or on the other maker of the abstract work and had a particular reason for the responsiveness of literary writings. This study analyzes the novel *Little Women*, written by Louisa May Alcott, through a feministic perspective, reflecting her domestic life. She is an American writer of the Victorian age, famous for her domestic stories and tales. Literature in society impacts the reader's soul and imitates society's life (Wellek & Warren, 1949).

The novel is prevalently regarded as a female novel that centers on the March family in a time of civil war. The characters mostly include the four sisters of the March family, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Further Ammy, separately. The plot of this novel centers on the four March sisters and their struggle for empowerment for money and rights through life and age. Since this comprises and centers for the most part on all females of one family in a novel with different perspectives and nature, this paper tries to answer the question of how females are differently depicted with a feministic approach. Therefore, this paper will investigate each of the characters separately and examine them to decide whether Alcott retains any sort of feministic approach while composing these characters. The portrayal of women is filled with abstract-managed figures who frequently show up in literary work (Sakinah, 2014). The “theory of Image” is used as a feministic approach given by Showalter in 1997.



The significance of this research is to highlight the female deception with a different outlook in this novel. This study analyzes the women of a family having a thoroughly different nature from each other based on a feministic approach. Many other writers of this age, like George Eliot and Jane Austen, provide a physical depiction of females and their roles in everyday life in their writings. This study explores the portrayal of women with a feminist approach.

Little women have been analyzed by Afriani, Emi & Hum (2020). Their study portrays a picture of females in the *Little Women* novel by Alcott. In this novel image of women cannot be isolated from the issues encompassing women's experience in confounded life, whereas in this novel, one of the characters is described as dedicated to doing remarkable things by protecting her right as a female by acquiring the right to advance her studies. Another work was conducted by Liana Yunike Manurung (2006). She utilized the expressive investigation technique to compose the exploration. The point of the review is to study the life of women in nineteenth-century America, which turns into a post that starts the woman's rights that Little Women reflect. The exploration is that a female has a feministic ability to show self-trust and that a female is not legitimate for that beforehand. Liza Novita Ningrum (2007) concentrates on utilizing subjective examination. This point of the review is to find out the flouting maxim of connection utilized by the characters and the speaker's importance of flouting maxim connection in *Little Women*.

Clare Bender (2017) explores gender and feminism through autobiographical letters and symbols. He portrayed the characters of the novel as gender-stereotypical. He called little women the best example of understanding feminism. Munia Islam (2021) analyzes women through a feminist lens. She concluded that *Little Women* conveyed and fulfills the requirements of different types of feminism like Liberal feminism, Marxist Feminism, Radical feminism, and Existentialist women's liberation. Agustin Dwi Ratnaningrum (2005) utilized humanistic ways to analyze the information. The review aims to track down the impacts of civil war on families. Little Women's novel is exceptionally intriguing to be perused. Louisa May Alcott, through this original, gives a major inspiration in confronting each sort of issue in life, particularly monetary issues. It mirrors the issue of the female job in the family and society. Sumita (2014) permits<sup>the</sup> media picture of female feministic talk. Aftereffect of exploration of the actual female appearance, for example, women make much effort to prove themselves economically and socially powerful.

This is qualitative-based research in which data is collected from the text of the novel *Little Women* by Louis May Alcott, published in two volumes, and the form of the feministic approach of Showalter theory, namely the *image of women*. The strategy involved in information assortment is documented study that, with this strategy, makes it simpler for a researcher to survey reports that are straightforwardly connected with the subject the creator is exploring (Simanungkalit, Emil Eka Putra, S.S. M.Hum 2020). The exploration technique is the first step in searching for references and wellsprings about feminism in writing; after this, reading the novel *Little Women* and perusing *Little Women* more than once exhaustively. By studying this, we can track down the depiction of females in the novel.

Feminism is social development and philosophy that adjust social and orientation fairness. The improvement of mechanical advances makes groundbreaking thoughts or contemplations on ladies' privilege with the goal that women's feminism is basic. Women's liberation that turns into a casualty is seen from the demonstrations of brutality that happen to these ladies. In the interim, women's liberation has power in ladies who have similar freedoms as men. In this review, the creators utilized a feminist way to deal with a hypothesis (Showalter, 1997); one of the pioneers behind the abstract analysis and created ideas and practices of gyno-critics or ladies as an essayist. In this situation, the reality is that ladies are seen in their compositions and pictures of ladies. The reason for this examination is for us as peruses to more readily grasp abstract works, particularly to understand women's

liberation. Then to be familiar with ladies, this clever creator utilized this methodology and made sense of pictures of ladies in this novel.

The image of women is a quality of women; in the novel, the portrayal of a woman shows up as often as possible female person in the story and becomes a significant addition to the storyline. As indicated by Ferguson (1977, p. 16) that an image of females is depicted exhaustively by a scholarly essayist. The fact that thing makes the image of a woman cannot be taken because it connects with portraying or making sense of the activities and considerations the object performs. The physical depiction of a female is an art ((Kathy, 1997, p. 27). (Dittmar H, 2004) argues that every adult female gives attention to an ideal body shape. In this paper, Showalter's theory of the image of women in 1997 is used as a framework to describe women with different natures (Vanity, Temper, Timidity & Selfishness) and the feminist approach to the characters of the sisters of the March family.

## 2. Analysis

Louis May Alcott's little woman is full of domestic events which reflect the author's life and encompasses the life span of the four daughters of the March family. Based on the above explanation, data is collected based on Showalter's theory concerned with depicting women who do extraordinary things and describing their nature. A detailed analysis of four March sisters, each with a different percept, is following:

### 2.1. *Vanity through Meg*

Alcott describes vanity in Meg. Meg is a very pretty lady and matures like her mother. Meg March is the first girl of the March family and the eldest of the March sisters, who portrayed the best little girl in the nineteenth-century instructional novel. Meg's personality is sweet but feminine, furthermore heartfelt. She is a self-conceit girl in March's family because she is very beautiful and charming. She is responsible and hardworking but also shows vanity in these aspects. Meg's depiction of vanity can be analyzed through the novel's text.

I know I do teaching those tiresome children nearly all day, when I'm longing to enjoy myself at home, 'began Meg, in the complaining tone again (p.8).

Her complaining tone clearly shows her feelings that she is unsatisfied with her life. She thinks she is beautiful and a source of income in their family and is showing and telling her sisters that she is doing this work for them, not for herself. This is an example of liberal feminism. Liberal feminism is a type of feminism that concerns women's empowerment and building them socially. She is the real depiction of 19<sup>th</sup>-century women who work hard and are proud of themselves. Her character is clearly defined in chapter one, playing pilgrims, in which she says:

Nobody spoke for a minute; then Meg said in an altered tone (p.1)

Meg's tone here also clearly describes her nature, that she is the eldest and gives an order to her sisters like her mother. She always treats her sisters like elder ones, which shows her vanity of being the oldest, but it seems that she is regretful of her vanity.

### 2.2. *Temper of Jo*

This novel depicts Jo as a dreadful-tempered (becoming harsh and angry soon) woman. Jo stands for Josephine, the novel's second March sister and protagonist. With her tomboyish behavior and dissatisfaction over not being brought into the world as a boy, Jo's personality is the same because of as Alcott's. She describes herself in the character of Jo because Alcott also has an elder sister and two younger sisters. Alcott, as Jo in this novel, is frustrated with this world. Her personality is different from the other females of nineteenth-century America.

Alcott sketches the character of Jo with her bold, daring, and tempered real nature. Jo is also a writer in this novel as Alcott. So we can say that Jo's nature depicts Alcott's nature.

Her boyish behavior throughout the novel is against the society of that time. Through Jo's character, Alcott wants to empower women to grow up in their way and whatever she wants to be. This is clearly shown in Jo's dialogue:

"Let's each buy what we want, and have a little fun" (p.3).

This dialogue depicts Jo's nature of being feminine and her ability to take care of herself. Jo satisfied the criteria of the Marxism movement. Meg attempts to assume the ropes of the family when Jo slices in to announce herself as the man of the family with this assertion:

I'm the man of the family now Papa is away (p.6).

Her tone and the way she cuts Meg describe her temper as being angry nature as well. She breaks the societal gendered stereotypical norms of the nineteenth century. Toward the start of the novel, in a scene where Jo places her hands in her pockets and starts whistling, the going accompanying exchange occurs between Jo and Amy:

Don't, Jo. It's so boyish!

'That's why I do it.'

'I detest rude, unladylike girls!'

'I hate affected, niminy-piminy chits! (p.2)

Jo determined nature to be rude and inclined to be striking and stay outside as opposed to remaining at her home a day, communicated in the above lines. This specific nature of Jo shows her interest and hints toward existentialist feminism described by Showalter in her theory. This type of feministic movement focuses on the freedom of women and questions the patriarchal system of that age. Jo does not enjoy her job but is doing her job to overcome her financial issues. Jo's lines of disliking her job show her daring nature and open opinion about something:

You don't have half such a hard time as I do,' said Jo. 'How would you like to be shut up for hours with a nervous, fussy old lady, who keeps you trotting, is never satisfied, and worries you till you you're ready to fly out the window or cry? (p.8).

In the given lines, Jo demonstrates her opinion about her job with his old aunt. She is unsatisfied with her job and wants to make her career in writing. Jo is interested in writing stories and wants to finish her work. She continues her writing even going through the tough circumstances of her family. She wants to make her name in writing at the time of a male-dominant society. Alcott criticized the patriarchal system of that time and raised the point that females were not allowed to compose their work. This is documented in a novel by Jo:

Having told how she disposed of her tales, Jo added, And when I went to get my answer, the man said he liked them both but didn't pay beginners, only let them print in his paper, and noticed the stories. I am so happy, for in time. (p.150- 151).

These quotes that s shown above describe her hardworking nature of Jo, and her belief in success. She wants to publish her work and be known as one of the famous writers to make her life and family happy. Jo's ambition to be successful and hardworking is an extraordinary thing to do, as described in Showalter's theory that females

can do extraordinary things. "Work is healthy" (Alcott 111), she declares.

Another aspect of Jo shown in this novel is her boy-like behavior. She never believes in love and does not want to be merry in life. We can see her confession to Jo to her mother and Laurie:

I'm sick of people who think only love is suitable for a woman (p.30)

I don't believe I will ever marry. I'm happy as I am and love my liberty too well to be in any hurry to give it up (p.170)

She never wants to be married in life and wants to become a successful woman in society because she thinks that people think that love is only concerned with women, not men. She is against this stereotype and wants to be famous and equal to men. Her tomboyish behavior eliminates her desire to be a man and her passion for conventional female roles in nineteenth-century society. In short, Jo's character is mainly famous due to its feminist depiction and her rude or boy-like behavior throughout the novel.

### **2.3. Timidity in Beth**

Beth is the third sister of the March sisters. She is an unconfident and shy lady. She is a weak and loving pack of her family who loves music and playing the piano. She always takes care of other people and is loved by everyone. Beth is closer to Jo and depicts the real image of a typical nineteenth-century woman. Her character is so gentle and softhearted that she dies of the disease she got from a young boy.

"I planned to spend mine in new music," said Beth, with a little sigh" (p.2)

This line from chapter one of the novel clearly describes her image and interest. She has the virtue of self-sacrifice for others "The ethics of mutual altruism and homegrown collaboration, be that as it may, demonstrated to March young ladies before they could perceive the importance of some ethics for their self-acknowledgment" (Elbert 2000). Beth is soft and has a delicate approach, and gets emotional at every little thing.

I've known it for a good while, dear, and now I'm used to it, it isn't hard to think of or to bear. Try to see it so and don't be troubled about me, because it's best, indeed it is. (p.124)

Beth is confessing her timidity and is showing to face her weakness. She is emotionally a weaker person in the family because of Laurie. She loves him but has no courage to tell him and is a shy woman. Beth tells Jo her secret of love because she gets it whenever her sister is with Laurie. Beth loves Laurie because he has the same nature as her and shows feminist activities like playing the piano and writing songs. This novel depicts her as an angel and dies of the disease.

Yes, I gave up hoping then, but I didn't like to own it. I tried to think it was a sick fancy, and would not let it trouble anyone (p.123).

She confesses her love for Laurie to her sister. Even though Beth is weak and shy, she has the power to tolerate big troubles in her life. Morally she is strong and does not want to hurt her sister at any cost, but Jo understands her feelings. Here Alcott shows an image of a woman by describing Beth's character, and she can bear her feelings and emotions for her family, portraying women's patience.

### **2.4. Selfishness through Ammy**

Ammy is depicted as a selfish and jealous woman of society. She is the last and youngest lady of the March family. However simple as it could be to cherish nature of Jo, it is as simple to hate Ammy's personality as a result of her arrogance and her ruined nature. Being most youthful, her nature is also ruined normally come

while possibly but not characteristically. Even though Ammy grows up to be a mature lady as the novel progress toward finishing, her personality demonstrates her exceptionally hard for the common user with no guarantees.

One significant occasion that gets it done is when Ammy tries to burn Jo's original copy since she was at home while a wide range of various sisters went out to the theatres with Laurie. This event shows her selfishness and jealousy of her sister. Her premium to live and be engaged with high society appears to be very snobbish in the first place, yet being their mom's little girl, before long, understands the worth of love and family over cash, so she is closer to her elder sister. Mr. March remarks that "she has figured out how to consider other individuals m mineral and herself less" (Alcott 209).

At the point when Ammy gets rebuffed from school because of the obliviousness of her companions, then Mrs. March remarks were:

"I don't approve of corporal punishment, especially for girls. I dislike Mr. Davis's manner of teaching and don't think the girls you associate with are doing you any good" (p.121).

Mrs. March's dissatisfaction with Ammy's discipline hints toward the conditions of Radical feminism, which states that abuse of women is firmly connected with their organic direction. It rejects how the female body is viewed as frail and is viewed as an image of oppression. Through this dissatisfaction concerning Amy's discipline, the mindset of censuring any such conduct, particularly towards ladies, indicates extremist feminism.

Based on the above discussion, it can be demonstrated that Meg's character in this novel has vanity in her nature and is an example of liberal feminism also. Jo's character is highlighted throughout the novel, and her tomboyish behavior and hardworking nature are examples of Existentialist feminism that satisfy the criteria of Showalter's theory's "image of women". Beth is depicted as shy and has less courage lady in the novel. Amy's character is depicted as being snobbish and selfish because she burns her sister's original work and marries Beth's lover. This explores the image of women in social and domestic approaches. Jo's character mainly shows the feminine, which is different from the writers of that era. Alcott Jo's character as a hardworking woman and her behavior and thought that females are not only interested in love or marriage, she can do extraordinary things in her life and become successful as Jo.

It tends to be presumed that elements of feminism are found in the novel through the struggle of the characters and endurance of the March sisters in a men's reality by actively placing themselves in it as opposed to remaining in the background. Little Women probably will not be a feministic novel in traditional views given right now. However, women's novels from that time mirrored different types of feminism by depicting the female characters in a man's reality to make due all alone, in their particular manners.

### 3. Conclusion

Based on the above data and discussion, it is concluded that the depiction of women in little women is analyzed based on theory, namely the image of women in which the picture of women doing extraordinary things has been shown. The female portrayal depicted in this novel is females doing hard work and extraordinary things to support their families and raise women's voices in society. All four March sisters are depicted differently in the novel and show the image of women existing in real society as being prideful due to their beauty and thinking, hard workers by doing jobs and writing stories, weak but careering by putting their life in danger for others and selfish for just being thinking about her own life. So, this study focuses on women with different perspectives related to real life.



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