

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of the background of the study, identification of the problem, scope of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study, and the sequence of chapters. These sections provide a foundation for understanding the study, including its context, key issues, focus, goals, and expected contributions.

1.1 Background of Study

Understanding poverty in its broader context is essential, as it not only reflects economic conditions but also shapes social structures and individual lives. It is a widespread issue that affects individuals and societies on multiple levels. As Banerje et al. (2006:16) argue, poverty is a condition in which individuals or groups lack the resources necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and access to education and healthcare. It is often linked to the inability to access economic and social opportunities, leading to marginalization within society. Poverty can affect various aspects of life, including mental health, social relationships, and personal development. The experience of poverty often results in a sense of powerlessness, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage that are difficult to break. Furthermore, it is not only the poor who are affected, as societies as a whole are impacted by the inequality and social tensions that poverty can create.

The causes of poverty are multifaceted and interconnected. According to the World Bank (2004) as cited in Jannah & Sari (2023: 165), poverty occurs due to low assets and income, as well as the inability to meet basic needs. Economic factors such as unemployment, inflation, and unequal wealth distribution often contribute to the persistence of poverty. Additionally, social factors such as gender inequality, low levels of education, and limited access to healthcare can exacerbate individuals' inability to overcome poverty. Political instability and economic policies that do not prioritize the welfare of the disadvantaged further complicate the situation, creating a vicious cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Therefore, addressing poverty requires understanding both its economic and social underpinnings, which are often reflected in the themes explored in literature.

One of the key ways to understand complex social issues, including poverty, is through literary works. Literature serves as an artistic expression of human experience, often reflecting on societal conditions, individual struggles, and cultural values. Through literature, writers can create characters and narratives that explore the human challenges people face, such as poverty. Literature allows readers to understand of social realities and to empathize with characters who hardship. In this sense, literature becomes a lens through which we act of poverty and other social issues on human lives.



Literary works come in various forms and genres, each with its own characteristics and methods of storytelling. Novels, for instance, as a form of extended prose, provide a rich space for character development and plot progression, allowing readers to see how social issues such as poverty shape the lives of individuals. On the other hand, poetry and drama, with their more condensed and symbolic forms, also address these themes but often in a more emotionally charged or abstract manner. Regardless of the genre, literature has the power to engage with social issues and encourage readers to reflect on the broader human experience. Each form of literature brings a unique perspective on the theme of poverty, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of its implications.

Literature often functions as a mirror of life, reflecting the social, political, and emotional conditions of a particular time and place. By portraying fictional worlds that closely resemble the real one, literature enables readers to reflect on their own lives or understand the experiences of others. Through stories, literature provides insights into human interactions, societal pressures, and individual struggles. It is, therefore, an effective medium for exploring social tensions, such as poverty, that affect individuals and communities. Literature not only entertains but also educates and prompts reflection on important social issues, helping readers connect with the deeper realities of life.

The theme of poverty frequently appears in literature, as it is a powerful force that shapes individuals' lives and the dynamics of society. Literary works that focus on poverty do more than simply depict material hardship; they also examine how poverty influences social relationships, personal identities, and moral choices. Many works of literature show that poverty is not merely a physical condition but also a social construct that can determine one's opportunities, relationships, and sense of self-worth. As such, these works often highlight the resilience and resourcefulness of individuals and communities as they struggle to overcome economic hardship. Literature thus provides a platform for discussing the broader implications of poverty and for critiquing the social structures that perpetuate inequality.

In the context of literature addressing poverty, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* offers a pertinent example. In this novel, poverty is not just a backdrop to the story, but a driving force that shapes the lives and growth of the March sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. After their father leaves to serve in the Civil War, the March family struggles with financial difficulties, which directly impacts their daily lives and aspirations. However, Alcott uses poverty not only to depict hardship but also as a means of character development. Each sister responds to their economic situation in different ways: Meg seeks security through marriage, Jo pursues her dream of becoming a writer, Beth shows selflessness to others, and Amy uses her artistic talent to secure a better future. Through these characters, Alcott demonstrates how poverty can build resilience, foster independence, and create a sense of responsibility and hope.



reflects how women, despite their limited social roles in the 19th century, engage with and overcome economic hardship, highlighting the

importance of character-building and personal agency in the face of adversity. In this way, *Little Women* not only portrays the challenges of poverty but also underscores the strength and resourcefulness of women as they navigate and confront these challenges. Therefore, based on the above description, the researcher is interested in examining the novel through a study titled *The Economic Struggles: Poverty as A Character-Building Force in Alcott's Little Women*.

1.2 Identification of Problem

After reading the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, the researcher finds various points of discourse that can be inspected:

- 1) The Depiction of Poverty in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott
- 2) Navigating Gender Roles and Expectations in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott
- 3) Character Development Through Struggle in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott
- 4) Family Dynamics and Solidarity in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott
- 5) Exploring Moral and Ethical Choices in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

1.3 Scope of Problem

As has been stated in the identification of problem, there are a lot of different issues that can be found in *Little Women*; however, it is important for the researcher to decide on which problem that should be analyzed. Therefore, this research will focus specifically on two key aspects of *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott: the depiction of poverty and its impact on character development.

1.4 Research Question

In accordance with the background of study as well as the identification and scope of problem, the researcher proposed the research questions below:

- 1) How does the condition of poverty depicted in the novel *Little Women*?
- 2) How do the female characters struggle to overcoming the poverty in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*?

1.5 Objective of Study

Below are the objectives of study based on the questions of study:



the condition of poverty depicted in the novel *Little Women*.
the struggles of female characters in overcoming poverty in Louisa
Little Women.

1.6 Significance of Study

This research holds significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enhances the understanding of poverty as more than just a material condition, illustrating how it can serve as a force for character development in literature. By applying Robert Chambers' multidimensional theory of poverty, which includes aspects like powerlessness, vulnerability, and isolation, this study provides a deeper analysis of how economic hardship shapes the characters in *Little Women*. Through the experiences of the March sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy—this research expands the theoretical framework in literary studies by demonstrating how poverty influences not only individual resilience but also moral and emotional growth. The study also contributes to broader discussions on how literature can reflect and critique social issues, offering a more nuanced interpretation of Louisa May Alcott's portrayal of poverty and its role in the development of both personal values and interpersonal dynamics.

Practically, the findings of this research offer insights into how poverty, when coupled with strong family support, can foster resilience and personal growth. By analyzing how the March sisters navigate economic hardship with the guidance of their mother and their close-knit family, the study provides a model for understanding the importance of emotional support in overcoming adversity. These insights can be useful in modern educational settings, helping educators teach literature as a tool for discussing real-world issues like poverty, family dynamics, and emotional strength. Moreover, the practical implications are valuable for professionals working in social services or community support roles, where understanding how individuals cope with economic hardship is essential for providing effective assistance. Ultimately, this research underscores the role of literature in shaping empathy and social understanding, demonstrating how narratives like *Little Women* can offer valuable lessons in resilience and moral development that resonate across generations.

1.7 Sequence of Chapters

This study divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction that contains the background of the study, identification of problems, scope of the problem, research question, objective of the study, and sequence of the study. The second chapter provides a literature review, covering relevant previous studies and theoretical frameworks, including the structuralism approach and the concept of poverty based on Chamber's theory. The third chapter outlines the methodology, detailing the research process to address the research questions, collect and analyze data, and the methods used in the study. The fourth chapter presents the discussion, analysis and interpretation of the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Chapter Five, summarizes the main findings, emphasizes the significance of the study, and provides suggestions for the future research.



CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of a review of relevant literature, including theoretical frameworks, previous studies, and supporting concepts related to the research topic. It provides a foundation for understanding the key themes and arguments that will be explored in the analysis.

2.1 Previous Related Studies

Previous related studies are presented in order to prove the novelty of this research by elaborating similarities and differences between previous studies and this study. In addition, these studies used references or supporting data to help the researcher in the conduction of this research.

Firstly, Lestari (2022) in *Moral Values Analysis of March Family In **Little Women** (1868) Novel by Louisa May Alcott* identify the elements of good character present in *Little Women* (1868) and to elucidate the moral values represented by the March family within the narrative, utilizing Thomas Lickona's theory of good character components as a framework for analysis. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method to provide a comprehensive understanding of the characters and their development. The study reached two main conclusions. First, the elements of good character, including moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, are prominently displayed in *Little Women* (1868) through the actions and decisions of key characters such as Mrs. March, Josephine, Meg, Beth, and Amy. Each sister embodies these components in unique ways, contributing to their growth and the overall moral fabric of the story. Second, *Little Women* (1868) effectively illustrates the moral values reflected in the behaviors of the March family, highlighting themes such as compassion, responsibility, and the importance of family bonds, as outlined by Thomas Lickona. This analysis not only sheds light on the characters' virtues but also emphasizes the relevance of these moral lessons in contemporary society.

Secondly, Ledinski (2023), in *Female Work Ethic in Louisa May Alcott's **Little Women, Jo's Boys, and An Old-Fashioned Girl***, explores how Alcott redefines traditional gender roles by portraying women's labor as a path to both personal development and social impact. The study draws on Max Weber's concept of the Protestant work ethic to show how spiritual notions of labor evolved in the context of industrial capitalism. It also incorporates Transcendentalist ideas particularly those of Emerson and Fuller to emphasize vocation, self-reliance, and moral growth as central to characters. In addition, Marxist critiques are used to highlight how domestic labor was devalued by the capitalist system. Through these articulation reveals how Alcott's narratives promote not only the dignity but also the importance of female solidarity, showing how mutual support enables them to resist social constraints. Ultimately, Alcott's



vision of work becomes a vehicle for empowerment, challenging restrictive gender norms and advocating for broader social change.

Thirdly, Suhud (2015) in *The Vicious Circle of Poverty in Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* analyze the depiction of poverty in Crane's work through the lens of Robert Chambers' poverty theory. Chambers' theory emphasizes that poverty is not merely a lack of material resources but also encompasses social, political, and cultural dimensions, highlighting concepts such as powerlessness and marginalization. Suhud's analysis reveals that Crane effectively illustrates the cyclical nature of poverty, demonstrating how the socio-economic conditions trap individuals like Maggie in a cycle of despair and hopelessness. The results of the dissertation indicate that the emotional and psychological toll of poverty is profound, as the characters' struggles reflect broader societal issues related to inequality and social injustice.

In reviewing previous related studies, these works were identified as relevant to this research. The first study, titled *Moral Values Analysis of March Family in Little Women (1868) Novel by Louisa May Alcott*, shares a similarity with this research in terms of its focus on the same literary work, *Little Women*. However, it employs a different theoretical framework compared to this study. The second study, *Female Work Ethic in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, Jo's Boys, and An Old-Fashioned Girl*, aligns with this research in examining the works of Louisa May Alcott. Nevertheless, it extends its analysis to other novels by Alcott, beyond *Little Women*. The third study, *The Vicious Circle of Poverty in Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, shares a theoretical approach with this research, as both utilize Robert Chambers' theory of poverty. However, it focuses on a different literary work. These studies collectively highlight the intersections of literary analysis, thematic exploration, and theoretical perspectives, providing a foundation upon which this research aims to build. Nevertheless, all three journals offer valuable insights into critically analyzing the economic struggles in literature, which can provide a useful framework for the proposed study.

2.2 Structuralism Approach

The structuralism approach in literary studies is a method of analysis that focuses on the internal structure of texts and the relationships between elements that form meaning. Rooted in the linguistic theory developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, structuralism emphasizes that meaning in a text is not fixed but is produced through the interaction of various elements within a system. Saussure (1959) argues that language is a system of signs consisting of signifiers and signifieds, where meaning arises from the relationships between them. In the context of literature, this approach considers the



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signs that can be analyzed to uncover deeper meanings. Thus, it does not only focus on content or themes but also on how these elements form a whole.

Key figures in the application of structuralism in literature is Roland Barthes's essay, "The Death of the Author," Barthes (2016) emphasizes that

the meaning of a text is not determined by the author's intentions but by the interaction between the text and the reader. He argues that readers play an active role in creating meaning, and therefore, structural analysis becomes essential for understanding how meaning is produced. Barthes states that the text is "a network of references that never ends," indicating that meaning is always open to interpretation and cannot be understood unilaterally. Thus, the structuralism approach provides space for readers to explore various possible meanings contained within the text, making them active participants in the process of meaning creation.

1. **Character and Characterization.** Character in literature refers to the individuals involved in the story, whether as protagonists, antagonists, or supporting characters. Characters can be human, animal, or even objects that possess traits and behaviors that can be analyzed. According to E. M. Forster (1927: 48), characters can be categorized into two types: "round characters" and "flat characters." Round characters are complex and developed, possessing various traits and emotional depth, while flat characters are simple and do not undergo significant development. Forster states that "the round character is capable of surprising us," indicating that more complex characters can provide a deeper experience for readers.

Characterization is the process by which writers develop and describe these characters, giving them depth and complexity. M. H. Abrams (1999: 20) explains that characterization can be achieved through various means, including dialogue, actions, and physical descriptions. He states that "characterization is the means by which writers present and reveal character." By employing these techniques, writers can provide insights into the personalities and motivations of characters, allowing readers to better understand and connect with them. Additionally, characterization also encompasses how characters interact with one another and their environment, which can reveal conflicts and larger themes within the literary work (Abrams, 1981: 32).

Overall, character and characterization are essential elements in literary studies that enable writers to create complex and engaging individuals. Through the analysis of characters and characterization techniques, we can understand how authors construct deep and meaningful narratives, as well as how characters contribute to the broader themes and messages within literary works.

2. **Plot.** Plot is the fundamental structure of a narrative that organizes the sequence of events in a literary work. The classic model for understanding plot is often divided into five main elements: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in building the story and developing its themes and characters.



Exposition is the beginning part of the story where the writer introduces characters, setting, and the initial situation. According to Freytag (1863: 1), exposition provides the necessary context for readers to understand conflicts that will arise. In this section, important information about the background of characters and the setting is conveyed, allowing readers to grasp the motivations and goals of the characters. Freytag

emphasizes that exposition is the foundation needed to build tension in the story.

- 2) Rising action is the part where the conflict begins to develop and tension increases. Here, characters face various challenges and obstacles that lead to the climax. Bordwell and Thompson (2008: 66) explain that "the rising action consists of a series of events that create suspense and tension," indicating how these events build tension and capture the reader's attention. The rising action is the phase where characters start to struggle to achieve their goals, and the conflict becomes increasingly complicated.
 - 3) Climax is the peak of the story, where the conflict reaches its highest intensity. According to Forster (1927: 90), the climax is the moment when important decisions are made, and the outcomes of the conflict begin to unfold. This is the point where readers feel the maximum tension, and characters must face the consequences of their actions.
 - 4) Falling action enters after the climax where the tension begins to subside and the conflict starts to resolve. Freytag (1863: 12) states that the falling action is the phase where the results of the climax become apparent, and the story moves toward resolution.
 - 5) Resolution is the part where all conflicts are resolved, and a new state is established. Here, readers see how characters adapt to the outcomes of the conflicts that have occurred. Bordwell and Thompson (2008: 66) state that "the resolution ties up loose ends and provides closure for the story," indicating that the resolution offers satisfaction to readers by concluding the narrative. Through the analysis of this plot structure, we can understand how writers construct engaging and meaningful narratives.
3. Setting. Setting is an important element in literary works that encompasses the place, time, and atmosphere in which the story takes place. It is a fundamental element in literary studies that helps shape the reader's experience and provides the necessary context to understand characters and plot. Through the analysis of setting, we can gain a deeper understanding of how writers create rich and meaningful story worlds.
- 1) Place refers to the physical location where the story unfolds. According to Abrams (1999: 192), place can include various aspects such as geography, social environment, and culture. The setting of a place can provide important information about the characters and the situations they face. For example, a setting that takes place in an urban area may



be a different atmosphere compared to a setting in a rural area. By describing the place in detail, writers can help readers visualize the world of the story and understand the dynamics within it.

Time is the element of setting that encompasses historical periods, time periods, or the duration of time that passes in the story. Forster (1927: 90) states that time can influence the development of characters and plot.

For instance, a story set during a time of war may have different themes

and conflicts compared to a story set during a time of peace. Time can also create tension or a sense of urgency in the narrative, depending on how the writer chooses to structure the timeline of the story.

- 3) Atmosphere refers to the emotional ambiance created by the setting. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2008: 56), atmosphere can be shaped through the use of description, tone, and visual elements in the narrative. A dark and gloomy atmosphere can create a sense of tension or anxiety, while a bright and cheerful atmosphere can evoke comfort and happiness. Writers use atmosphere to influence how readers feel and respond to events in the story. By creating the right atmosphere, writers can enhance the themes and emotions they wish to convey.
4. Theme. Theme is one of the most important elements in literary works, referring to the ideas, messages, or meanings underlying a story. According to M. H. Abrams (1999: 197), a theme is "the central idea or meaning of a literary work." Themes can vary from work to work, encompassing a range of issues such as love, death, struggle, identity, and morality. Themes often emerge from the interactions between characters and the conflicts they face, providing insights into the human condition and life experiences. Forster (1927: 87) indicates that themes can be expressed through symbolism and recurring motifs in literary works, where writers use certain elements to reinforce the messages they wish to convey.
5. Furthermore, Eagleton (2008: 66) highlights that themes are not only limited to the meanings expressed in the text but can also be influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which the work is written. Eagleton states that "the theme of a literary work is shaped by the historical and cultural context in which it is produced," indicating that the understanding of a theme can vary depending on the background of the reader and the broader social context. Overall, theme is a fundamental element in literary studies that provides meaning and depth to a work, allowing readers to reflect on and interpret the broader significance of the story.

2.3 Robert Chambers' Theory of Poverty

Robert Chambers developed his influential theory of poverty in 1995 in his work titled *Poverty and Livelihoods: Whose Reality Counts?*, published by Intermediate Technology Publications. In this book, Chambers emphasizes the importance of understanding poverty not merely as a lack of material resources but as a condition involving power, helplessness, and social marginalization. He argues that poverty is "the lack of basic needs and participate in social and economic life" (Chambers, 1995). This approach leads to a more holistic understanding of poverty, encompassing material and cultural dimensions, and highlights the importance of the voices of those who experience poverty themselves.



allows us to view poverty as a result of larger social structures, where individuals often lack access to the resources and opportunities necessary

to improve their quality of life. In this context, he emphasizes that the voices of those living in poverty should be prioritized in decision-making processes related to poverty alleviation. In doing so, Chambers seeks to change the societal view of poverty from mere statistical figures to a complex and diverse human experience.

Research by Narayan et al. (2000: 4) supports Chambers' view by emphasizing that poverty is a multidimensional experience that involves more than just a lack of income. They state that "poverty is not just about income; it is about the lack of capability to participate in society." This approach shows that poverty can lead to social isolation and an inability to access the resources needed to improve one's quality of life. In the context of literature, Chambers' theory can be used to analyze how characters living in poverty struggle to gain voice and recognition in society, as well as how their narratives reflect broader realities of social injustice.

Furthermore, Chambers (1995: 12) also highlights the importance of a participatory approach in understanding and addressing poverty. He argues that involving communities in decision-making processes and development planning is key to creating effective and sustainable solutions. This approach aligns with the view that literature can serve as a tool to give voice to the marginalized, allowing readers to understand the experiences and challenges faced by individuals in the context of poverty. In many literary works, authors use the voices of marginalized characters to highlight social injustices and encourage readers to reflect on the conditions faced by those living in poverty.

Thus, Chambers' theory of poverty is not only relevant in social studies but also in literary studies, where narratives of poverty can evoke awareness and empathy in readers regarding issues of social injustice. Through this analysis, we can see how literature not only reflects social realities but also has the potential to be an agent of change that promotes awareness and action regarding poverty issues. By understanding this theory, readers can better appreciate the complexities of the experience of poverty and how it is reflected in literary works.

2.3.1 Five Key Concepts by Chambers

Robert Chambers' theory of poverty is a comprehensive framework that elucidates the multifaceted nature of poverty and its implications for individuals and communities. Chambers identifies five key concepts that encapsulate the various dimensions of poverty: (1) Poverty, (2) Powerlessness, (3) Vulnerability, (4) Dependency, and (5) Isolation (Chambers, 1995: 188). Each of these concepts provides insight into the complexities of poverty and the challenges



who experience it.

erty: The first concept refers to the inability to meet basic needs. Chambers (1995: 188) defines poverty as "the inability to meet basic needs and participate in social and economic life." This definition emphasizes that poverty is not merely a lack of financial resources but encompasses a broader spectrum of deprivation that affects individuals' ability to lead a fulfilling life. It includes access to food, shelter,

healthcare, and education, which are fundamental for survival and well-being.

- b. **Powerlessness:** The second concept addresses the issue of powerlessness, which indicates that poverty often leads to a lack of agency and the inability to attain social justice. Chambers (1995: 190) argues that "the poor are often excluded from decision-making processes that affect their lives," which perpetuates their marginalization. This powerlessness can manifest in various ways, such as limited access to political representation, social services, and economic opportunities, further entrenching individuals in a cycle of poverty.
- c. **Vulnerability:** The third concept is vulnerability, particularly in the face of emergencies or crises, such as natural disasters or economic downturns. Chambers (1995: 189) notes that "the poor are often the most affected by emergencies, as they lack the resources to cope with sudden changes." This vulnerability means that when disasters strike, those living in poverty are less able to recover, leading to long-term consequences for their livelihoods and well-being. Their inability to withstand shocks exacerbates their precarious situation and can lead to further impoverishment.
- d. **Dependency:** The fourth concept is dependency, which refers to the reliance on external parties to address problems, particularly regarding income generation. Chambers (1995: 189) explains that "dependency can create a cycle where the poor become reliant on aid or assistance, which can undermine their ability to become self-sufficient." This dependency can hinder individuals from developing their own capacities and resources, making it difficult for them to escape poverty in the long run.
- e. **Isolation:** The fifth concept is isolation, which describes the social and geographical distance from centers of welfare and resources. Chambers (1995: 189) states that "isolation can prevent communities from accessing essential services and opportunities." This isolation can be physical, such as living in remote areas without access to healthcare or education, or social, where individuals feel disconnected from broader societal networks. As a result, isolated communities may struggle to improve their circumstances, further entrenching their poverty.

Chambers' five concepts of poverty provide a nuanced framework for understanding the complexities of poverty and its impact on individuals and communities. To address these dimensions, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners can develop strategies for poverty alleviation that address not only the material aspects of poverty but also the structural barriers that perpetuate their marginalization.

