

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERCEPTIONS OF JO MARCH'S CHARACTER: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH THE LENS OF MEN AND WOMEN IN PAKISTANI SOCIETY

Ansa Ishtiaq

Student in Fazaia Bilquis College of Education for Women, PAF Nur Khan Base

Email: ansaishtiaq55@gmail.com

Sareena Kamran

Student in Fazaia Bilquis College of Education for Women, PAF Nur Khan Base

Email: sareenakamran1708@gmail.com

Umm-e-Rooman Yaqoob

PHD scholar, Lecturer, Department of English, Fazaia Bilquis College of Education for
Women, PAF Nur Khan Base

Email: manooc93@gmail.com

Abstract

This article analyzes the character of "Jo March" from the novel Little Women by Louisa May Alcott for a research study, set in the 19th century during the American Civil War. The story revolves around four March sisters, brought up by their mother alone as their father was away as an army captain. The sisters grew up facing poverty, loss, love, and sacrificing their ambitions. The protagonist, Jo March, is portrayed as an independent and rebellious woman compared to women of the 19th century. Unlike her sisters, Jo rejected the norms of patriarchal society by following her dreams. Instead of getting married and sacrificing her ambition, she chose independence by choosing her career over marriage. The study aims to know the different social and psychological perceptions of men and women in Pakistani society. The article is based on a mixed research approach, where data were collected from participants through a questionnaire. The theoretical framework draws on feminist literary criticism and Marxist theory. By using feminist literary criticism, the study examines gender roles. While using Marxist theory, the class-related influence on female identity is examined. The character is analyzed within the cultural framework of Pakistani society from the perspectives of both men and women, for the perceptions of the people of Pakistan about women like Jo. The analysis shows that women openly support the character of Jo compared to men in Pakistan, which emphasizes how women like Jo are seen in Pakistani society. Both genders have different perceptions about the character, according to which this study highlights cultural tensions related to women's roles in Pakistan.

Keywords: Jo March, Little Women, Pakistani society, female independence, gender roles

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The novel Little Women (1868) by Louisa May Alcott, is an inspiring work of literature set in the 19th century that explores themes like female identity, freedom, and societal roles through the character of Jo March. The character of Jo challenges traditional norms of society. She is the epitome of a woman who values personal determination and desires over conservative expectations. The character of Jo surpasses the cultural contexts and inspires discussion globally. Literature often reflects society and helps readers understand human behaviour, social expectations, and psychological experiences. One of the most influential female characters in American literature is Jo March, the central character of the novel "Little Women" written by Louisa May Alcott. Jo March is presented as an independent, intelligent, ambitious, and strong-willed young woman who challenges traditional gender roles of her time. Unlike many female characters of the nineteenth century, Jo prefers education, writing, freedom, and personal growth rather than focusing only on marriage and domestic life (Ali, et al., 2025). This research explores the social and psychological perception of Jo March's character from the perspectives of men and women within Pakistani society. This study focuses on exploring the intricate relationship between societal expectations and individual behaviour within Pakistani society. Specifically, it examines how social conformity and influence affects

the personal identity, mental health, and social interactions of women (Ali, Anis, & Mazhar, 2025).

Although *Little Women* was written in a Western cultural context, its themes of gender expectations, identity, independence, and social pressure remain relevant across cultures, including Pakistan. Pakistani society, like many traditional societies, often defines different roles and behaviours for men and women. Therefore, analysing how Pakistani men and women interpret *Jo March* helps in understanding changing attitudes toward women's independence and individuality.

Fatima (2019), claimed that in traditional discourses of honour, the vision of a Pakistani woman's sexuality is one being protected from the outside world, where the woman is at risk. The honour and shame of the females of the household isn't just a matter of their individualism but affects the kin and community as a whole. Women live under the constraints of society and this signifies a separation between the activities of men and women.

Socially, *Jo March* represents resistance against strict gender norms. She questions why women must behave in limited ways and shows courage in choosing her own path. In Pakistani society, where cultural values, family expectations, and social traditions strongly influence gender roles, *Jo's* personality may be viewed differently by men and women. Women may see her as a symbol of empowerment, self-expression, and personal freedom, while men may interpret her actions through cultural expectations about femininity, responsibility, and social harmony. Chauhan (2014) stated that Pakistani society is strongly patriarchal in a way that women's positions are mediated by *Zar* (wealth) and *Zamin* (land), and in a way that the degree of men's honor depends on the possession and control of wealth, women, and land.

Psychologically, *Jo March* reflects inner conflicts between personal desire and social acceptance. She struggles with anger, ambition, emotional sensitivity, and the fear of losing independence. These psychological traits make her a realistic character rather than an idealised heroine. Studying Pakistani male and female perceptions allows researchers to explore how the gender influences emotional understanding, empathy, and judgment toward a non-traditional female character.

The purpose of this study is to examine how cultural background shapes individuals' interpretation of literary characters. By analysing responses from Pakistani men and women, this research highlights how literature becomes a bridge between different societies and reveals how gender perspectives influence social and psychological interpretation. Ultimately, the study aims to show that *Jo March's* character continues to inspire discussion about women's identity, freedom, and societal expectations even in modern Pakistani culture.

Khalid (2021) observes that another important aspect of *Jo March* is her struggle between individuality and social acceptance. Throughout *Little Women*, *Jo* desires to live according to her own dreams rather than follow traditional expectations placed on women. She wants to become a writer, earn her own living, and maintain her independence. She does not want to get marry and depend on men. She chooses career over marriage. This attitude makes her socially different from other female characters who accept marriage and domestic roles as their main goals. In Pakistani society, where family honour, obedience, and gender expectations still play an important role, *Jo's* character creates meaningful discussion about how far a woman can express independence without facing social criticism. Studying male and female reactions helps reveal whether modern Pakistani society is becoming more of accepting the strong and independent female identities. In the novel, *Jo March* represents emotional realism and personal growth. She openly expresses anger, frustration, love, jealousy, and ambition, which makes her a relatable human character rather than a perfect heroine. Her emotional struggles show how individuals try to balance personal desires with societal pressure.

From a Pakistani perspective, women are often encouraged to remain patient, modest, and emotionally controlled, while men are socially allowed greater freedom of expression. Therefore, analysing how Pakistani men and women psychologically interpret Jo's emotions provides insight into gender-based emotional understanding. Chauhan (2014) states that, as to the issue of the representation of women in the public sector, the chapter points out that while women work in all sectors of the economy, their representation in the public sector is abysmally low. This research helps explain how cultural values influence empathy, judgment, and acceptance towards women who challenge the traditional social roles, making Jo March a powerful figure for cross-cultural psychological analysis. "In the patriarchal culture of Pakistan, support for gender discrimination and gender bias is embedded in the culture. Women are thought of as the traditionally feminine, and men are taken as stereotypically masculine" (Khalid, 2021). This research article investigates how Pakistani women and men observe the character of Jo. The focus will be on her independence, challenging gender norms, and the judgments of society.

The study applies theories of Feminism and Marxism to analyse these perceptions and how differently men and women of Pakistan will observe Jo's character. In today's world, although women in Pakistan are marked by growing visibility, honour-based norms, and gender division in a male-dominant society, they show how independent women are judged. In this context, Jo's character is taken as a psychological and social mirror for Pakistani men and women when their interpretations are divided. The character of Jo March is important because she represents a woman who refuses to be limited by society's expectations. In the novel *Little Women*, Jo challenges traditional ideas about femininity by behaving confidently, speaking openly, and prioritizing education and creativity. She cuts her hair, rejects conventional feminine behaviour, and focuses on becoming a successful writer. Such actions were unusual during the time the novel was written, and even today, they can create mixed reactions in conservative societies. When people of Pakistani society analyse Jo's personality, their responses frequently reflect their own cultural beliefs about gender roles, independence, and acceptable behaviour for women. Therefore, Jo March becomes a useful character for understanding how literature interacts with social values.

This study examines how men and women of Pakistani society interpret Jo March differently based on their experiences and social positions which will reveal their social perspective. Pakistani society is gradually changing due to education, media influence, and increasing awareness of women's rights, yet traditional expectations about marriage, modesty, and family responsibility remain strong. Women may view Jo March as an inspiring figure who represents courage and self-confidence, while men may evaluate her character through social responsibility and cultural norms. These differences in perception show how gender influences interpretation, proving that both genders do not understand the character of Jo March in the same way; instead, their understanding is shaped by their social environment and cultural upbringing. Furthermore, this research highlights the psychological connection between both genders and literary character. People often relate fictional personalities to real-life experiences, emotions, and social struggles. Jo March's ambition, emotional independence, and desire for self-identity allow individuals to reflect on their own personal conflicts between freedom and societal expectations.

In Pakistan, young women especially, may recognize their own struggles in Jo's journey toward independence, while men may reconsider traditional ideas about women's roles and abilities. By studying these psychological responses, the research demonstrates how literature encourages social awareness, emotional reflection, and cultural dialogue. Ultimately, the analysis shows that Jo March remains a timeless character whose personality continues to

influence discussions about gender equality, identity, and social change across different societies and generations.

1.2 Research Questions

- How does the Pakistani society socially and psychologically perceive the character of Jo March from *Little Women*?
- How do the perceptions differ according to gender of the respondent?
- What cultural tensions and conflicts emerge when comparing male and female interpretations of Jo's independence and resistance to traditional gender roles?

1.3 Research Objectives

- To identify the social and psychological perception of Jo's character within the Pakistani society.
- To analyse how the perceptions differ according to gender in Pakistan.
- To examine cultural tensions and points of conflict in Pakistani society regarding female independence, using *Jo March* as a literary case study.

1.4 Problem Statement

In existing studies, *Jo March* has been widely studied in Western feminist and psychoanalytic contexts, but overlooks how an independent and rebellious woman like Jo is perceived within a cultural context. This study addresses the lack of research on how men and women of Pakistan interpret Jo's resistance against society, independence and ambition within their culture. While scholars such as Tao and Li (2025) have examined Jo's cross-cultural portrayals in early Chinese translations, no comparable research exists for the Pakistani context. This study fills that gap.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The research is constrained due to the fact that it used questionnaires that were administered to the majority of the participants who were educated and resided in urban centers; therefore finding might not reflect all aspects of Pakistani society, especially rural population and less-educated demographics. Also, they were not checked as to whether they were already familiar with *Little Women*, which could be an indicator of the depth of their answers. In the future, qualitative interviews and a more diverse sample should be included.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 *Jo March* as a Feminist Icon

Jo March is a feminist icon whose character moves past the limits of her time. In the novel, Louisa May Alcott shows how women struggle to earn their own money in a society which is run by men (Smith & Shardai, 2021). According to Gilbert and Gubar (2000), Jo goes against the rules of society and questions the idea of a "perfect woman" seen in Victorian books. She even cuts her hair and chooses to wear simple clothes, which shows she is pushing against society's rules about how women should act and look (Rehmawati et al., 2025).

Feminist literary criticism focuses on women like Jo who build their identity inside a male-dominant society (Showalter, 1991). Jo's resistance is not only for show, but it reflects feminist awareness that values your own choices rather than giving priority to norms of society. Usually feminism is about women fighting for their independence, education, and happiness. All of these traits can be clearly seen in Jo. Jo refuses to marry and chooses to become a writer. This shows that she chooses her independence and wants to control her own life by supporting women's right in education, money, and social equality (Sari, 2024).

Sofia (2024) says that Jo represents liberal feminism because she rejects the idea that women should get married at young age and be dependent on men for money. In the novel, Jo proves that women can be independent and successful by their own hard work without depending on men and following the rules and norms of the society. Jo's feminist awakening can be compared to the lives of women in Pakistan, where gender inequality is still a big issue.

Even today, women in Pakistan still face difficulties getting an education, jobs, and even moving around freely because of the strict culture and rules. Though women play a major role in society, most of them still do not know about their basic rights. Research shows that society's rules still keep women at home, and many of them cannot take part freely in public life or business because of such strict rules (Syed et al., 2023).

2.2 Marxist-Feminist Perspectives

According to the Marxist point of view, gender roles are tied to economic power. Althusser (1971) says that social ideologies sustain structures of dominance that restrict people based on class and gender. In this view, Jo's rejection of old feminine rules and her work as a writer, which was a field controlled by men at that time, shows she is fighting both gender and class unfairness (Eagleton, 1976). The novel shows women's fight against social wrongs like being treated as objects and not given much importance, and problems like these still exist in today's world. Louisa May Alcott supports the idea that women should be free from unfair rules and deserve equal rights to choose their own path (Zhang, 2021). In the end, Jo prioritises her career over marriage, being rebellious and choosing independence over the social norms makes her a symbol of early feminist rebellion in books.

2.3 Gender Dynamics in Pakistani Society

Jabeen and Afzal (2023) discuss how gender differences manifest in the Pakistani society through writings of women, showing their systemic gender discrimination. Tackling the discourses of gender identities and roles in Pakistan, Grunenfelder (2013) examines the discourses with respect to women and non-domestic work in political representations. The study shows that state discourses have tended to portray working women as a threat to the nation, and have constructed them as imperfect Pakistani women. In a television talk show, Gul Naseeb Khan of the Jamiat Lema-e-Islam explicitly stated: "there is no need for women to seek employment because the responsibility for their upkeep lies on the shoulder of men," adding that the only two professions women can take up are teaching and medicine (cited in Grunenfelder, 2013, p. 72).

This ideological position is a direct parallel to Jo in *Little Women* where she experiences the same arguments as to the proper role of women. That such attitudes are still present in modern Pakistan, almost 150 years after Alcott wrote, is a testament to the continued relevance of the resistance that Jo was fighting. Tabassum and Amin (2020) examine the representation of women in Pakistani dramas and its effect on the society and culture, showing how media images and representations strengthen or challenge gender norms. They find that even when progressive narratives are put across, they are usually undermined with the traditional resolutions, a trend which may affect how the Pakistani audiences perceive the literary characters such as Jo.

Investigating the aspects of femininity and patriarchy in Pakistan and the political representation of women in the country, Ahmad and Anwar (2018) state that: "Gender practically cuts across all aspects of social life and results in an apparent level of inequality between men and women in Pakistan. Gender gaps in education, health employment and legal system are quite visible in Pakistani society. They also observe that women are considered as less skillful, incompetent and unreliable members of the political system and are judged based on feminine qualities mostly. In modern Pakistani journalism we find more and more in records the plight of women in demanding independence. According to Ali (2025), as the level of education and the number of women entering the workforce continues to increase, more women will be interested in gaining independence in their personal and professional lives. But, this autonomy is accompanied with serious challenges. According to a Dawn analysis (2025) the rate of female labour participation in Pakistan is only 22.6% of women aged 15-64, which is

very low compared to the world average of 52.6% and even lower than the South Asian average of 25.2%.

According to the World Bank, an increase in the proportion of female labour participation by 10% would boost the GDP growth rate of Pakistan by 1.5% per annum (Dawn, 2025). Such economic realities put into perspective the understandings of Jo March by Pakistani respondents. When Pakistani women are reacting to the situation when Jo is struggling to be economically independent and pursue a career instead of getting married, they are responding to the circumstances that are still quite topical in the modern Pakistan. According to one of the women who were living independently in Karachi: "Growing up in Pakistan, I was always told that I will leave the house of my mother and go to the house of my husband. The only interim freedom you get is when you go out of the country to the university of your husband.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This is a mixed research study which uses a cross-sectional survey design to compare and examine the perceptions of men and women of Pakistani society about the character of Jo. Data analysis included comparative gender analysis and thematic categorization to identify divergences in perceptions. The approach is associated with qualitative content analysis methods (Elo & Kyngas, 2008), which provides insight into cultural attitudes toward gender norms through the lens of literary figure of Jo March.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population consists of Pakistani male and female individuals aged 18 -35. This particular age group is selected because they have grown up and seen both traditional and modern values. So their view about Jo will be more meaningful for this study. Data were collected using non-probability convenience sampling from Pakistani men and women. Participants were not screened for prior knowledge of Little Women. The questionnaire was structured to collect data from both men and women according to their perceptions by asking certain questions about Jo's independence, resistance to social norms, and gender role challenges.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

Using Feminist Literary Criticism (Butler, 1990) one can critique the ideas that restrict the role of women, support gender equality, challenge narrow conceptualizations of femininity. Jo March is a feminist who finds resistance in the predestined roles in the society and refuses to think in patriarchal terms of having to marry and hence dependent on men. This framework examines the responses of the Pakistani participants with reference to Jo in terms of her emotional independence and choices on career over marriage.

The Marxist Theory (Marx and Engels, 1848) is the analysis of social relations based on the following: class struggle and ideology. Jo is a person who makes sacrifices by cutting off her hair to contribute to the family budget and to reject male dependence, which is shown by resisting both gender and class oppression. In this case, gender oppression is correlated with economic structure. This theory sheds light on the impact of social and economic expectations on the gender roles and the views on female independence. Their integration adheres to the Marxist-feminist approach (Anon., n.d.; Berutu et al., 2024), where gender oppression cannot be fully understood without considering the economic aspects of it, and the opposite is true as well.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Thematic Framework in the Method of Analysis

The analysis is structured around four major themes based on the data in the questionnaires: (1) Perceptions of Jo Independence and Career Choices, (2) Emotional

Autonomy and Rejection of Traditional Relationships, (3) Resistance to Social Norms and Gender Role Challenge, and (4) Cultural Embeddedness and Social Judgment. In each of the themes, the responses of both female and male participants are compared and contrasted.

4.2 Impression of Female Respondents

4.2.1. Theme 1: Independence and Career Choices

Women respondents had a high identification and match with Jo March. The responses are a strong sense of appreciation towards Jo, and the recognition of her as an example of freedom and resisting against the traditional norms due to the progressive and empowering qualities in her. Stating that Jo was independent, the female respondents were, consistently, and unanimously, in agreement with these statements. In the case of Jo cutting her hair, female participants did not interpret the act of hair cutting as a loss of femininity but instead saw it as an exercise of strength. This paper aims at investigating the complex nature of the relationship between the expectations of a society and the behavior of individuals in Pakistani society (Ali, Anis, and Mazhar, 2025). Women respondents perceived Jo as being practical as rejecting societal norms of beauty. Women produced high levels of agreement with the independence of Jo as shown by the aggregated data of one of the respondents, and perhaps due to their own experiences within the Pakistani society where such kinds of sacrifices have to be made by women. According to Fatima (2019), the notion of honor and the discourses based on it have always influenced the life of women in Pakistan (p. 6). Female respondents were conscious of this relationship at an implicit level and they were in support of Jo rejecting honor-based restrictions of female conduct. The female participants were overwhelmingly supportive of Jo March being confident in competing with men as an indicator of gender equality, which is signs of internalization of feminist ideas regarding equal ability and opportunity.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Emotional Autonomy

The emotional autonomy of Jo, which is often viewed as arrogance in traditional society, was highly supported by the female participants. Women were big supporters of Jo in the emotional decisions made such as turning down the marriage proposal by Laurie. This is an important finding since marriage pressure still is high among Pakistani women. According to the current reporting, families often pressure daughters to focus on marriage rather than on careers, and the women who do not get married are stigmatized by society (Ali, 2025; Dawn, 2025). The information also found that all the women of Pakistan did not necessarily agree with Jo in the fight against social pressure. Female responders who interpreted this practice as being rebellious admitted that resistance still has a role to play in Pakistan today. This ambivalence, in which Grunenfelder (2013) identifies as the so-called contested issue with regard to non-domestic work of Pakistani women is as follows: admiring the rebellion of Jo but reading between the lines and acknowledging the negative social aspect of the situation.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Gender Role Challenge

Most of the women were unanimous in a few propositions: (a) women who reject roles assigned to them by society challenge gender norms; (b) women are judged as being even more deserving of punishment than men with the same characteristic; (c) families want their daughters to concentrate on marriage and not on careers; and (d) strong independent women like Jo attract more criticism than men with similar traits. According to Fatima (2019), Pakistan is rapidly modernizing that is called as a fractured modernity (p. 14). This notion of fractured modernity is a characterization that reflects the experiences of female respondents: modernization exists but alongside the traditional rules, mobilized to attack women. Despite the fact that women are considered to be inappropriate in society, the decision of Jo to choose career over marriage was positive according to female respondents. Generally, Pakistani women considered Jo as an example of behavior to follow- a discovery that aligns with cross-cultural feminist interpretations of Little Women (Berutu et al., 2024; Sari, 2024; Sofia, 2024).

4.3 Impressions of Male Respondents

4.3.1. Theme 1: Acknowledgment of Gender Inequality

The data show that male respondents accept the presence of gender inequality and social limitations of women in Pakistan and at the same time show progressive attitudes to female autonomy. The majority of men were in support of Jo being strong and confident. The male respondents concurred that women who challenge and compete with men is an indication of gender equality. Male respondents concurred that the Pakistani society perceives women such as Jo as being rebellious. They also admitted that women are more harshly judged than men, that women are pressured to choose marriage over career and that strong, independent, ambitious women are frowned upon. This exposes the realization by Pakistani men on the double standards that women have to deal with in their daily lives.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Ambivalence Towards Emotional Independence

The analysis, however, also indicates that the male gender was not as much supportive in the same way as women. Majority of the men said that they were not sure about the emotional independence of the women, and believed that they feel less comfortable when the women make independent decisions in life, especially those to do with rejection of traditional relationships. It has been split with some men in support of the independency of women, and others disagreeing with the idea that women do not have to rely on men. Ahmad and Anwar (2018) give some background by stating that feminine gender identity is the extent to which a female identify herself with the socially constructed attributes that are designed by a particular society. The feminine identity is largely determined by the gender roles established in the society and developed through the process of gender socialization (p. 26). This implies that ancient ideas of female reliance on men still exist and some men still feel inclined to adhere to traditional set-ups.

4.3.3 Theme 3: The Borders of Progressive Attitudes

Male participants, in general, exhibit changing attitudes that are not complete. They know and accept the decisions made by Jo and are aware that women in Pakistan are victims of gender inequality. According to Ahmad and Anwar (2018), the following issues are quite apparent in Pakistani society: gender gaps in education, health employment and legal system. But in the context of emotional independence and breaking social norms, men are less comfortable by supporting all the actions of Jo. This trend resembles that which Tao and Li (2025) found in cross-cultural reception: readers believe Jo as an intellectual-creative woman but have issues with her whole gender-nonconclusive implications. The admirable professional ambition of Jo, coupled with her reluctance to acknowledge an emotional autonomy in her life, is admired by the Pakistani male respondents but is hesitantly accepted by them, indicating the ongoing investment in patriarchal structures.

4.4 Comparative Gender Analysis

Dimension	Female Respondents	Male Respondents
Jo as role model	Strongly affirmative	Conditional affirmation
Career over marriage	Strongly supportive	Supportive but qualified
Emotional independence	Strongly supportive	Mixed/unsure
Rejection of traditional femininity	Supportive	Less comfortable
Awareness of gender double standards	High	Moderate-high

Jo	Personal identification with	Strong	Limited
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Chapter 5: Discussion and Data Findings

The responses show that both men and women of Pakistani society recognize Jo as a strong, independent female character who challenges typical gender norms set by society by choosing her career over marriage and rejecting typical feminine roles. Female respondents express positive views toward Jo's character by showing strong agreement for her independence, emotional autonomy, and her rejection of traditional roles. They view her as a positive model for changing women's roles in Pakistani society.

On the other hand, male respondents also acknowledge Jo as a strong and confident character, but they show more diverse and unsure attitudes especially regarding emotional independence and rejection of traditional norms. Grünenfelder (2013) stated that the reading of the literature suggests that state discourses have also represented most "working women" as a "danger" to the nation and, in this way, constructed them as imperfect Pakistani women. According to the analysis it can be seen that men agree that Jo is a positive character but at the same time they show divergence for her emotional independence and challenging traditional norms. However, men similarly as women, acknowledge double standards and social pressure that influence women's lives.

Both genders appreciate Jo's character. Women openly support the character of Jo while men display a broader range of opinions. Although male participants admire independent women and acknowledge the gender inequality there is still a conflict which reflects the cultural tensions around gender roles in Pakistani society. Grünenfelder (2013) stated that the relation between the ideal Pakistani woman and non-domestic work has been a contested issue throughout Pakistan's history. The analysis of responses collected from male participants reveals a complex and multi-layered perception of the character of Jo March, particularly in relation to themes of femininity, independence, gender roles, and societal expectations. Overall, the findings suggest that while there is a noticeable shift toward accepting progressive representations of women, traditional cultural norms continue to influence interpretation which results in a hybrid and sometimes contradictory outlook. As the World Bank (cited in Dawn, 2025), excluding women from the workforce imposes measurable economic costs. Female respondents' support for Jo's career choice implicitly recognizes that economic independence is prerequisite for true autonomy, while male respondents' ambivalence may reflect unconscious defense of economic structures that privilege male breadwinners.

One of the most prominent findings is the general acceptance of Jo March as a symbol of strength and independence. A significant majority of participants responded positively to statements emphasizing her autonomy, confidence, and resistance to traditional gender roles. Most respondents interpreted Jo's sacrifice of her physical appearance as an act of strength rather than a loss of femininity. This indicates a growing willingness among Pakistani male participants to redefine femininity beyond conventional standards of beauty and physical appearance. Similarly, strong agreement with statements related to women competing with men and rejecting dependence on men further reinforces the idea that participants recognize and value female empowerment in both personal and professional contexts.

Another key finding is the acknowledgment of gender inequality within Pakistani society. A majority of respondents agreed that women are judged more strictly than men and these strong-willed women are often evaluated more critically than men. Additionally, many participants recognized that families frequently expect daughters to prioritize marriage over career advancement. These responses suggest that male participants are not only aware of existing unequal treatment between genders but are also capable of critically reflecting on

societal norms. This awareness is significant, as it indicates a level of social consciousness that aligns with broader discussions about gender justice and equality. Mazhar (2025) term the "intricate relationship between societal expectations and individual behavior" in Pakistani society. Women increasingly seek autonomy; men remain invested in family-based social structures.

However, the findings also reveal areas of hesitation and ambiguity, particularly in relation to emotional and relational aspects of independence. Data reveals that responses which focused on Jo's rejection of Laurie as a sign of emotional independence were notably divided. While some participants viewed this decision as a positive assertion of self sufficiency, others disagreed or remained neutral. This suggests that although independence in general terms is accepted, its expression in romantic or emotional contexts is more controversial. Similarly, mixed responses to the emotional independence in women are still sometimes perceived as arrogance. Grünenfelder (2013) stated that in a television talk show, he [Gul Naseeb Khan of the Jamiat Lema-e-Islam] "there is no need for women to seek employment because the responsibility for their upkeep lies on the shoulder of men", he said, the only two professions women can take up are teaching and medicine. This reflects a lingering bias in how assertive behavior is interpreted based on gender, highlighting the persistence of traditional attitudes toward female emotional expression.

The data also demonstrates a strong awareness of cultural context and its influence on behavior. A large number of participants agreed that Jo's resistance to societal expectations would be considered rebellious within the Pakistani society. This suggests that respondents are conscious of the gap between literary representation and real-life social norms. While they may admire Jo's character, they simultaneously recognize that such behavior may not be easily accepted within their own cultural environment. This dual perspective indicates a form of cognitive negotiation, where individuals appreciate progressive ideas in theory but remain aware of practical limitations imposed by society. This aligns with Ahmad and Anwar's (2018) observation that women are evaluated primarily on feminine traits, which are most relevant in private domains.

Another important finding relates to the role of literature as a channel for social reflection. Many participants agreed that characters like Jo March encourage discussions about women's changing roles in society. This highlights the potential of literary texts to influence perceptions and initiate conversations about gender roles and social expectations. However, the presence of neutral responses in this area suggests that the impact of literature is not uniform across all participants. For some people, Jo March remains a fictional character whose influence does not significantly extend into real-life attitudes or beliefs.

Furthermore, the findings reveal an interesting tension between acceptance of individual ambition and recognition of societal constraints. A majority of respondents agreed that when a woman prioritizes personal ambition over social expectations, such behavior is often considered inappropriate in many societies. This indicates an awareness of the societal barriers that women face, even among those who personally support gender equality. In other words, participants are able to distinguish between their own beliefs and the broader social reality, acknowledging that progressive values may conflict with well-established cultural norms.

The presence of neutral responses across multiple questions is another significant aspect of the findings. Neutrality appears particularly in questions related to emotional interpretation, personal influence, and cultural judgment. This suggests that many participants occupy a middle ground, where they neither fully accept nor completely reject the ideas presented. Such responses may reflect uncertainty, lack of exposure, or internal conflict between traditional

upbringing and modern influences. From a research perspective, this neutrality is important, as it indicates that attitudes toward gender roles are still evolving rather than firmly established.

In addition to neutrality, the data also includes a small but consistent group of participants who expressed disagreement with several statements related to female independence and gender equality. These responses highlight the determination of traditional or conservative viewpoints within the sample. Participants in this group are more likely to associate femininity with conventional roles and may be less receptive to feminist interpretations of Jo March's character. Although they represent a minority, their presence is crucial, as it demonstrates that societal change is not uniform and that resistance to new ideas continues to exist.

Overall, the findings suggest that Pakistani male perceptions of Jo March are shaped by a combination of progressive awareness and traditional cultural influence. On one hand, there is clear recognition of her independence, confidence, and role in challenging gender norms. On the other hand, hesitation and disagreement in certain areas reveal that these perceptions are not fully internalized or consistently applied. This duality reflects a transitional phase in societal attitudes, where individuals are increasingly exposed to global ideas about gender equality but remain influenced by local cultural frameworks.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The study shows that Jo March's character from "Little Women" is taken as a symbol of female strength and independence in Pakistani society where women support the character while men display a broader spectrum of acceptance which reflects cultural tensions in Pakistan. The findings reveal the patriarchal and gender inequality in Pakistani society. The analysis of character inspires important discussions about gender roles, highlighting the need for cultural shifts toward gender equality (Ali, et al., 2025).

The theory of feminist and Marxism are applied to clarify that how gender roles, class system and ideologies bend together to shape female identity. Jo's representation challenges these structures and offers a framework to predict social change in Pakistan and similar cultural contexts. This study has a number of theoretical contributions. First, it applies feminist literary criticism to non-Western contexts and shows that Western feminist literary characters create their separate interpretive communities in Pakistan. Second, it demonstrates how the Marxist-feminist approach remains relevant today to comprehend the influence of economic limitations on gender perceptions. Third, it enriches the studies on cross-cultural reception by recording the difference in functioning of Jo March between the male and the female readers in a patriarchal society.

Jo March is a character of great importance not only in American literature but in the worldwide discourse on gender, independence, and social change. In Pakistan where women are increasingly gaining education, careers, and lives that their grandmothers could never imagine, the story of Jo rings new deafening urgencies. The fact that the Pakistani women identify themselves with Jo, that they identify with their struggles, ambitions, and frustrations in a 19th-century American literary figure, speaks of the power of literature to transcend cultural, temporal boundaries. At the same time, the observation that the perceptions of men are more ambivalent is a testimony to the very tensions that the change of gender brings about.

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Appendix

Survey for the character of Jo March from novel "Little Women"

If you do not know about the character of Jo, then here is the simple description of her character. Jo March, the protagonist of Little Women, navigates adolescence amidst the Civil War. She's fiery, independent, and dreams of being a writer. Jo clashes with societal expectations of femininity, preferring tomboy activities. Her temper often gets her into trouble, but she's fiercely loyal to her family rejects Laurie's proposal because she values her independence and doesn't see him romantically. She views him more as a friend and brother. As she grows, Jo learns to balance ambition with love, letting go of anger and embracing relationships. She marries Professor Bhaer, pursuing writing while valuing family.

This questionnaire aims to explore the perception of Jo among Pakistani men and women. We seek to understand in our research that how these interpretations reflect or challenge societal norms in Pakistan.

Your responses will help us analyze the intersection of character perception, gender, and cultural context, providing insights into the complexities of Pakistani society.

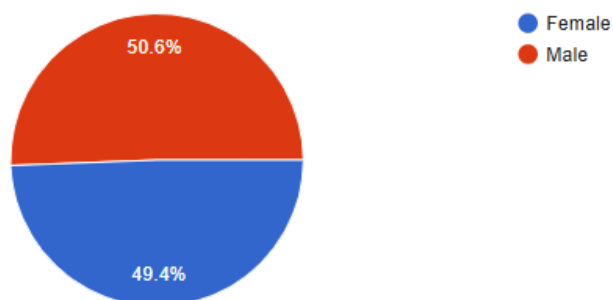
Ethical Assurance

Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be kept confidential. The data collected will be used solely for research purposes, and individual identities will remain anonymous

Appendix no 1

What is your gender?

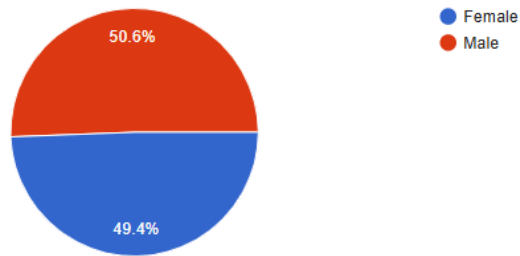
85 responses



Appendix no 2

What is your gender?

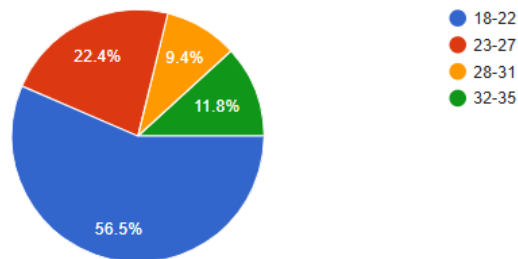
85 responses



Appendix no 3

What is your age?

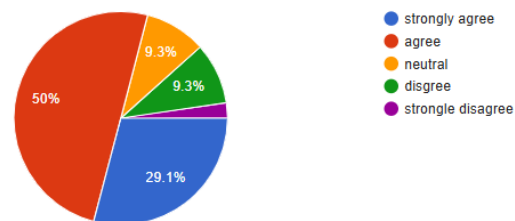
85 responses



Appendix 4

1. When Jo sacrificed personal appearance for practical or financial reasons (e.g., cutting her hair to support family), it reflects strength rather than loss of femininity.

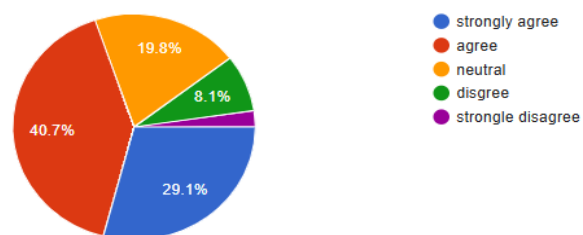
86 responses



Appendix no 5

2. As a reader, Jo's character affected your perception of a strong independent woman.

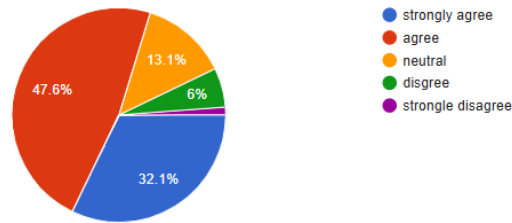
86 responses



Appendix no 6

3. A woman like Jo who openly competes with men in professional or creative fields demonstrates confidence

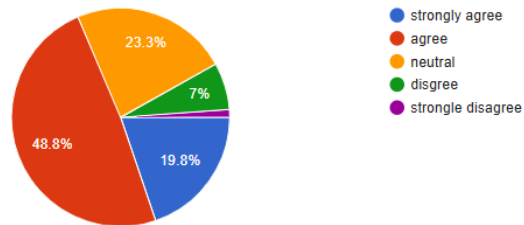
84 responses



Appendix no 7

4. Emotional independence of Jo is misunderstood as arrogance.

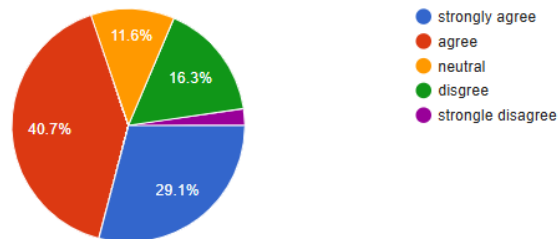
86 responses



Appendix no 8

5. Jo depicted through life decisions that a woman is not dependent upon a man.

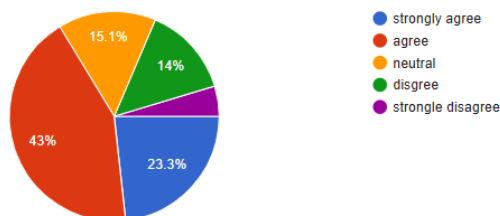
86 responses



Appendix no 9

6. Jo rejected Laurie's proposal as a portrayal of her emotional independence.

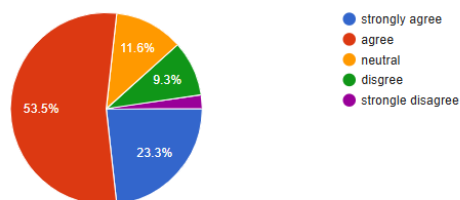
86 responses



Appendix no 10

7. Jo's resistance towards handling the social pressure and behave modestly and quietly may be viewed as rebellious in Pakistani society.

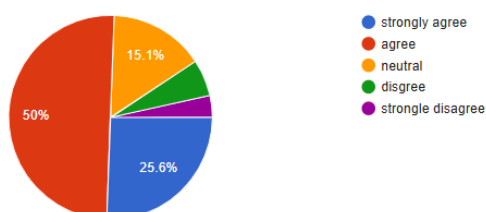
86 responses



Appendix no 11:

8. Characters like Jo March encourage discussion about women's changing roles in Pakistani society.

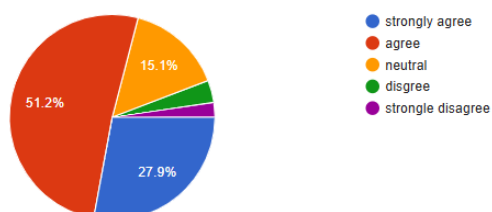
86 responses



Appendix 12

9. When a female character prioritizes her personal ambitions over social expectations, such behavior may be considered inappropriate in many societies.

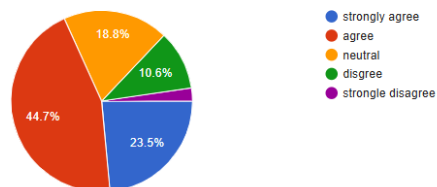
86 responses



Appendix 13

10. When a woman rejects traditional feminine roles and adopts qualities often associated with men, this challenges established gender norms.

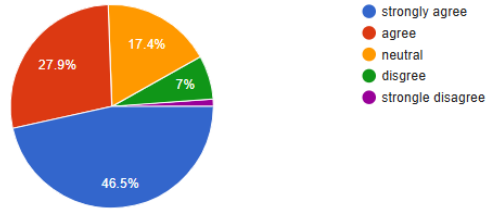
85 responses



Appendix 14

11. Society tends to judge women's behaviour more strictly than men's behaviour in Pakistan

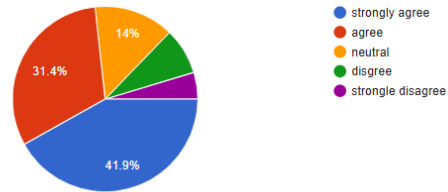
86 responses



Appendix 15

12. In Pakistani society, families often expect daughters to prioritize marriage over career advancement.

86 responses



Appendix 16

13. A strong-willed female character may be judged more critically than a strong-willed male character.

86 responses

