

Conference Paper

Towards Shangri-La Marriage Through Louisa Alcott's Novel *Good Wives*

M. Manugeran, Zulfan Sahri Nasution, and Muhammad Fatih Suhadi

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara

ORCID:

M. Manugeran: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7840-8936>

Abstract

The marriage vows spoken out through the wedding have existed for a long time. Even the first expression of love should always be remembered. The married couple, when undergoing problems in the household, must always remember the beautiful moments during the loving relationship to relieve conflicts between them. This is because people cannot erase mistakes, either intentionally done or not. This is the essence of this research, which focused on the ways to the Shangri-La marriage. Qualitative descriptive research methods were applied in this study by analyzing words, phrases and sentences in the novel *Good Wives*. The research found that the elements that must be owned by the couple are: phlegmatic attitude and anti-violence; responsibility and awareness of realizing their obligation; forgiving, implemented on the basis of the consideration that every human makes mistakes; and a sense of humor, an effort to cheer up life with the thought that there must be a balance in life, between tragedy and comedy, or sadness and happiness.

Keywords: *Shangri-La*, Phlegmatic Attitude, Responsibility, Forgiving, Humor.

Corresponding Author:

M. Manugeran

willyman1299@yahoo.com

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1. Introduction

Marriage has social, cultural and also legal ties so that each partner has the rights and obligations to carry out a household life. These bonds then form a kinship relationship and become an institution in the local culture. Legalization of marriage must of course be adjusted to conventional norms and values which then refer to the purpose of the marriage itself and this purpose is again adjusted to the local culture. This is in line with Hidayati (2018) stating that marriage is a series of ceremonies conducted by two human beings to justify all deeds that have to do with the life of husband and wife, aiming to create a family and also continue the lineage. In general, marriage in Javanese ethnic starts from the consideration of social, cultural and educational background of the bride and groom to be. (Hidayati: 2018)

According to the marriage law of Republic of Indonesia, Number 1, 1974, marriage is a physical and spiritual bond between a man and a woman, happy and eternal based on

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the belief in the only one God. From this provision, it needs to be clarified that marriage consists of three important elements: physical and spiritual bond between a man and a woman; unification as husband and wife; and a sacred design to form a happy and eternal family. (Marriage Law: 2019)

Physical bonds are formal, binding the husband and wife to the marriage institution that has been ratified. Spiritual bonds are abstract and can only be felt by husband and wife through their daily relationships. Marriage, especially in Indonesia, can only occur between a man and woman. Husband and wife ties include internal and external conditions. Internal conditions include those directly related to the institution of marriage, such as the willingness to be husband and wife and the absence of coercion from any party. External conditions include legal formalities, such as age and status. Creating a happy and everlasting family is not only related to married couple, but also related to all family members, which means that the institution of marriage already ratified does not have any bad impact on all parties; it is then expected that that the marriage will run well, without significant obstacles. Awareness of the Almighty God is also required, meaning that marriage must be based on religion as a guide in life so that its sacredness can be felt by all parties.

As a marriage, based on the law must be based on religion in which there is love, the purposes of marriage in general are:

1. Developing and spreading love and affection.
2. Having posterity.
3. Fulfilling human desire to channel lust and shed affection.
4. Fulfilling religious vocation, and getting rid of evil deeds.
5. Fostering sincerity and responsibility as well as fulfilling obligation and implementing rights
6. Establishing a happy family as a contribution to form a peaceful society. (Ghozali: 2015)

Through a simple summary, the illustration above shows that love is the main pillar towards a harmonious marriage, a marriage happiness and mutual understanding. Love meant here is the true love, love that does not expect rewards, love based on the attitude of sacrifice for the sake of the couple's happiness. Husband and wife must understand that love and affection are a choice. Therefore, they have to give the best for their partner, not by waiting for the presence of love in them. Love which is interpreted in the frame of choice, becomes active love. In this way, a marriage does not experience significant obstacles.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken. (Shakespeare: 2015)

The flames ignited at the time of marriage, on the basis of sincerity and sincerity continue to light, illuminating the couple's journey in navigating the ark of their marriage. They do not meet any obstacles in their marriage because all obstacles disappear with the power of love. All problems can be solved properly if there is love. True love does not decay with time and true love never changes with time and age. True love survives and becomes an eternal compass. Love is not affected by the pounding waves of life. This is the power of love needed in running a married life.

This research deals with how to obtain a marriage that is truly ideal and the term used is *Shangri-la* marriage. The term *Shangri-la* was first used by James Hilton (1930) in his novel entitled *Lost Horizon*. *Shangri-La* is the name of a lost valley in Tibet that previously inhabited by a group of monks separating themselves from the hustle and bustle of the world. They live peacefully. This book is so well known and has had great success because of its booming sales. This proves that humans actually yearn for a quiet place like heaven on earth. James Hilton gets inspired writing *Shangri-La* from the myth of *Shambala* originated from Tibet. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Shambala is a secret kingdom hidden behind the ice peaks of the Himalayan Mountains. The location of *Shambala* remains a big question mark and is still being debated, including an understanding of *Shambala* as a place without physical form but can only be reached by a pure mind. The word *Shangri-La* is then increasingly popular until now and has the meaning of a state or place of peace and happiness. (Normand: 2007). *Shangri-La* marriage is certainly a heavenly marriage and the people involved in it always live in great happiness and gratitude. Through a clear mind, a *Shangri-La* marriage can be obtained.

This study aims to obtain a picture of how to obtain a *Shangri-La* marriage through the novel *Good Wives* by Louisa May Alcott (2000), a female writer from America. Alcott comes from a simple family and at a young age, she must work to help his family's finances and this in turn inspires her that a daughter must have a good personality to be a good wife; like the old saying, stating, *A good daughter will make a good wife*.

Alcott writes a lot about stories for children. Alcott's success as a writer emerged when his novel *Little Women* was published in 1866. The four main characters in *Little Women*: Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy are members of the March family and this book is considered a representation of Alcott's childhood; or it can be said that *Little Women* is a semi autobiography of Alcott living happily with her three sisters in Concord, Massachusetts and the novel *Good Wives* is a continuation of *Little Women*.

In this novel the four sisters have become adults and they are formidable women, the product of their mother's training, Mrs. March, who has a good personality and wise mindset. After all this time living together with their parents, the four sisters now begin to live their own lives. Meg is getting married soon and she is trying hard to become a good wife and mother; Jo is working hard to start her career in literature; Amy is preparing for her departure for Europe and only Beth is no so lucky owing to her illness. The journey of the four sisters is full of joys and sorrows and their various sad events inspire the reader that life is not a bed of roses, where all that is desired is not necessarily obtainable. But in all things or events they experience, they are always tough, and of course all this is obtained from the lifestyle of their mother, modest and grateful for whatever she has obtained and this personality is certainly an epitome of goddess-like mother.

Five points of discussion in this research leading to *Shangri-La* marriage are: Phlegmatic Attitude, Responsibility, Forgiving, and Sense of Humor and all of these points are focused on two main characters in the novel,; John Brooke and Meg March.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Phlegmatic Attitude

Attitude is a person's feeling or thought in behaving towards something liked or disliked with three basic components: emotions, behavior and cognition. In other words attitude is a reaction to something and this attitude can be learned and adjusted to the needs. Attitude is also a bridge connecting an individual with other individuals, an individual with society and an individual with nature. Through attitude a person can control himself when interacting with other parties. (Chaiklin: 2011)

The word *phlegmatic* generally means ability to be calm in a dangerous or frightening situation. (Rundell: 2002). Someone who is calm in facing an unstable situation is said to have a phlegmatic attitude. However, the term *phlegmatic* originates from a terminology in the study of personality in the realm of temperament.

Temperament refers to the characteristic phenomena of an individual's emotional nature, including his susceptibility to emotional stimulation, his customary strength and speed of response, the quality of his prevailing mood and all the peculiarities of fluctuation and intensity of mood, these phenomena being regarded as dependent upon constitutional make-up and therefore largely hereditary in origin. (Allport in Clark: 2005)

Temperament is a characteristic symptom of an individual's emotional nature, covering the susceptibility to emotional stimulation, the strength and speed of his reaction, the quality of his mood strength, and all the means, rather than fluctuations and intensity of mood. These symptoms depend on constitutional factors. Temperament is also related to character and humans have different and unique characters. Human characters or personalities can be learned, and human personality sometimes has similarities with one another. Human personality has been studied and summarized into four types. All the four are in proto-psychological theories, and they are further divided into four basic types of temperament: *Sanguine* (impulsive and pleasure-seeking); *Choleric* (ambitious and leader-like); *Melancholic* (introverted and thoughtful); *Phlegmatic* (relaxed and quiet).

Owing to having a pacifist attitude, someone with a Phlegmatic attitude is also:

1. Wise: able to be an intermediary in the problem or a consultant in solving problems.
2. A good listener: a good friend to share.
3. Not open: smart in closing feelings and free of complaint.
4. Quiet: in all respects so that all problems resolved properly.
5. Consistent: especially in appointments or keeping secrets.
6. Conservative: out of drastic changes.
7. A good observer: sensitive to a situation. (Okal: 2012)

2.2. Responsibility

Responsibility by definition is a human awareness of behavior or acts both intentional and unintentional. Responsibility also means acting as an expression of awareness of the obligation. Responsibility is natural, which means that responsibility has become part of human life that every human being must have a responsibility.

Responsibility is a characteristic of civilized humans because every individual is aware of the consequences of a good or a bad deed so that to get good result, a person

requires a responsibility. Although responsibility is natural, awareness of responsibility must be increased through moral education both formally and informally so that a person understands the form of responsibility that he has to play, such as responsibility to God, oneself, family, community, nation and state. Thus conflict can be avoided. (Wisneski, et. Al: 2016)

Regarding family responsibilities, the couple must understand the duties and obligations to be carried out. In general, a husband must make a living and be responsible for the family financial problems so that his wife and children are out of troubles; likewise, a wife also has responsibilities that are not smaller than those of a husband. Education, welfare and personality development of children generally lie in the responsibility of a wife. Then the best thing is the responsibility towards the family must be borne by husband and wife together.

2.3. Forgiving

In the interaction of everyday life, humans are sometimes faced with a trial that can make feelings become upset and angry. Responding to someone's behavior that makes annoyance and anger by expressing emotions is a natural expression for every human being. In fact, in life no human is perfect. Mistakes can be made by anyone, whether consciously or not.

The nature of forgiving is indeed difficult, especially to people who have hurt, done unjustly, harassed, broken down trust, committed violence and various other cruel treatments that cause injuries in the whole body and soul; moreover if the mistake is made intentionally and has a negative impact on one's mental and future development. But apparently, it is far more difficult if someone does not forgive, because the person concerned will continue to be eroded by his own feelings of revenge and can adversely affect his mental stability and subsequently can have a negative impact on his health.

But whatever the problems are, as a human being who is aware of imperfections, one must give forgiveness to anyone who has done wrong to himself. Forgiving is a decision that is consciously taken to release feelings that are hurt by the actions of others. Forgiving is usually given to someone who is basically unfit for forgiveness, but someone with a big heart does not see that worthiness; To forgive is to give, that is all. This needs to be made clear that forgiving is not only limited to the mouth, forgiving must be done sincerely so that all negative feelings about those who have hurt us are completely erased. (McCullough and Witvliet: 2001)

2.4. Sense of Humor

A person with a sense of humor usually sees things from a funny angle, so how bad someone's treatment to him, or no matter how severe the problem faced, he is not easily offended and not easily gives up.. People who have good sense of humor are also easier to get along with so they always have a broad circle of friends and this sense of humor is also very useful in married life.

Humor can be the best asset for someone. This skill can make a person easier to interact with others, improve health, and even help alleviate difficult situations. One thing that needs to be understood is that a person does not need to be a funny person to have a sense of humor, he just needs to look at the situation from a lighter perspective. Humor is an emotional reaction when something happens unexpectedly and the reaction does not go hand in hand with disappointment, instead it goes hand in hand with fun so that happiness is not interrupted. So in short it can be defined that humor is something funny and humor is a trigger for laughter. (Martin in Suyasa: 2010)

This is in line with Freud's theory of humor stating that humor is like a dream; both are a means to inhibit obstacles from outside or obstacles that already exist in a person. In dreams ideas that are not in line with expectations can be manipulated while in humor the same thing happens, namely the manipulation of a reality. (Christoff, and Dauphin: 2017)

3. Research Method

This research is conducted by means of qualitative descriptive method, observing, understanding and analyzing social phenomena reflected in the novel, *Good Wives* (Alcott: 2004). Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena about what is experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perception, motivation, actio holistically, and by means of descriptions in the form of words, in a special natural context and by utilizing various natural methods. (Moleong: 2012).

This research is also supported by a library research in the form of documentary techniques, collecting data from various sources as a complete data analysis process. The data are obtained from the novel while the sources of the data obtained from the novel are in the forms of words, phrases and sentences referring to the realization of *Shangri-La* marriage. The data analysis technique is a qualitative analysis of interactive models, proposed by Miles and Huberman consisting of four main steps: data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusions. (Miles and Huberman: 2014)

4. Results and Discussion

The novel provides a clear picture of the importance of character building as a forerunner to living a calm and harmonious life, especially in carrying out family life. Character building must start at home; home is the first educational institution for children and through this novel it is seen that the role of a mother is very significant in forming a good personality. Mrs. March in this novel has proven that a good attitude is necessary for someone to get peace in life; she manages to educate her children to be good and this picture is clearly seen from Meg who has an attitude that deserves to be emulated and coincidentally Meg meets John Brooke who also has a good personality, so they do not get significant obstacles in their togetherness.

4.1. Phlegmatic Attitude

On one occasion, Meg is standing at the side of a road and John sees her and asks where Meg is going. Meg tells John that she will go shopping for home needs and at the same time offers John if John wants to be bought something. John refuses her gently but John also offers a lift to Meg. (Alcott, 2004: 21)

This conversation seems normal, someone meeting a friend and greeting each other; but behind this conversation a good personality is hidden. John and Meg, sincerely, want to help each other, creating a harmonious atmosphere. They have the moral awareness not to harm any party. This is called the phlegmatic attitude. For John, Meg is a kind, friendly and impressive girl.

In a soliloquy, John says that he knows a lot of girls and they are all good; but he feels something different when being together with Meg. Meg has a personality not owned by other girls; Meg has a personal power that really catches John's attention. Besides that Meg is also a beautiful girl and good at everything. John feels powerless against Meg, even he could not say much when facing Meg; and all this makes John fall in love with Meg. (Alcott, 2004: 31)

John confesses the significance of Meg's attitude making him infatuated. Every man certainly craves a girl with a good personality because a girl who has a phlegmatic attitude can certainly be a reliable wife; likewise a man who has a phlegmatic attitude can also be a good husband. A wife or husband is not just a wife or husband; a good wife or husband should be a friend to consult and can also be a teacher giving some moral teachings or inputs.

4.2. Responsibility

Responsibility is the realization of one's awareness to carry out his obligations. John and Meg are responsible people. From their friendship so far, they realize that they have fallen in love with each other and later they show their responsibility for their feelings in the forms of verbal clarification.

With a full sense of responsibility, John says directly to Meg that he loves Meg and previously he also apologizes to Meg, if he is considered presumptuous in expressing his heart; he hopes Meg is not offended by his statement. John goes on to say that he does not have anything fancy to give to Meg; he only has sincere love and with that sincere love John promises to make Meg happy. Meg also says the same thing, as a realization of her responsibility, that she accepts John's love because Meg also loves John. Meg also says that she is worried if she deserves to be John's wife. (Alcott, 2014: 42)

It is clearly illustrated here that John and Meg are people who have strong moral responsibilities and they are always modest. People who have a modest attitude are people who are responsible and those who are responsible always try as much as possible not to disappoint others. Their sense of responsibility is then conveyed officially when they get married. John, with full confidence, says that he is ready to be Meg's husband and promises to stay with Meg in both joy and sorrow and he would always love Meg. Meg also says the same thing, that she is ready to become John's wife and would remain with John in joy and sorrow. (Alcott, 2004, 54) Through this marriage vows they officially show that they have responsibility to care and love each other.

4.3. Forgiving

Apologizing or forgiving is not a bad act. The good thing of forgiving is to give a way for someone to do good and also improve relationships and communication. Forgiving is a noble act of freeing others from mistakes or feelings of guilt. Forgiving always increases self-esteem and respect from other parties.

Meg goes shopping one day without being accompanied by John. After shopping, Meg realizes that she has spent money beyond reasonable limits and she feels very sorry and guilty for being a wasteful person. She immediately goes home and asks for forgiveness from John for his negligence using money and John at the same time forgives Meg. (Alcott, 2004: 76)

This attitude of forgiving is also seen on another occasion. Meg goes to her friend's birthday party, and John does not accompany her because John feels Meg needs to be entertained by hanging out with her friends. After the party, Meg comes to know that she has lost the necklace John gives her when they are married. Meg feels very guilty and she is also afraid that John would be angry with her. Arriving at home Meg immediately says that he is not worthy of being a good wife because she could not take care of the items given by her husband. Meg apologizes and at that time John forgives Meg saying that what he worries about is not losing the necklace, but losing Meg. (Alcott, 2004: 121)

Mutual forgiving is a very important thing to be preserved in a marital relationship. Everyone makes mistakes, and as a couple who have made a commitment to live in joy and sorrow, forgiving must always be implemented. Forgiving gives bright colors and lighting to a marriage.

4.4. Sense of Humor

Laughter is the most pleasant thing and tied to this, the role of humor is very big to make people laugh. Humorous people will see things from funny viewpoints, including mistakes, so that their lives will be calm and not easily offended. Humor is also important in married life to get rid of boredom and to improve love. John and Meg, in addition to having good attitudes to emulate, also have a high sense of humor so that their togetherness is always tinged with joy.

Once, Meg tells John about her resentment with David, the milk boy, but her resentment is changed into joy. David is late in delivering milk and Meg asks on the reason for the delay. David simply answers that the cows get up late, so they are also late for milking and they laugh together. Meg also tells John that they have to learn a lot from David, as David does not know the meaning of sadness and David's life is always full of joy. (Alcott, 2004: 143)

John does not want to be defeated by Meg either in terms of making jokes. He tells Meg that he has guests, three men with big and strong bodies, thick mustaches, in short their faces are scary. John feels disheartened about them. But how surprised John is when they speak because they speak like a grandmother in 70s, full of gentleness and politeness. (Alcott, 2004: 143) John and Meg finally laugh and they always do this to balance the various problems in their togetherness. Humorous attitude makes a healthy relationship.

5. Conclusion

A *Shangri-La* marriage is a heavenly marriage, a marriage full of love, happiness, quietness and free from violence. This marriage is certainly a dream of every couple because the road to the *Shangri-La* marriage is very difficult and also steep with various obstacles coming in turns; but this does not mean that such a marriage is only an illusion or delusion. Everyone can succeed as long as they have high trust, tenacious effort and also patience. Nothing is impossible as long as the destination is still under the sky.

Through this novel the reader can understand and learn and find ways to *Shangri-La* marriage. There are four things to be possessed as provisions for *Shangri-La* marriage: Phlegmatic Attitude, Responsibility, Forgiving and Sense of Humor. These four points of discussion are found in the novel and have been possessed and also carried out by the two main characters of the novel, John Brooke and Meg March. They are the epitome of the *Shangri-La* couple. However, behind their success as a *Shangri-La* couple, there stand a mother, Mrs. March, as an exemplary teacher in their family educational institution, keeping on providing character building to her children.

Phlegmatic attitude makes a couple free from domestic violence; responsibility, strengthening marital institution; forgiving, providing a religious nuance making all the family members always feel grateful for all the blessings received; and a sense of humor livening up or refreshing the atmosphere. All of this depicted in the novel, is the key to the success of a *Shangri-La* marriage.

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