

**THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUAL SOCIAL STATUS IN CHOOSING SPOUSE
REFLECTED IN WILLIAM S.MAUGHAM'S *UP AT THE VILLA* (1941):
A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**



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Abstract

This study is about Equality of Social Status. The problem of this study is how importance of equal social status in choosing spouse is reflected in Up at the Villa novel. The object of this study is Up at the Villa novel by William Sommerset Maugham. It is analyzed by a sociological approach. This study belongs to qualitative research. In this method, there are two types of data source, namely primary and secondary data source. The primary data source is the Up at the Villa novel and the secondary data is other material related to the study. Both data are collected through library research and analyzed by descriptive analysis. The result of this study shows the following conclusion. Based on analysis it is quite obvious that there is a close relation between this novel and the social reality in England in early middle twentieth century. William Sommerset Maugham wants to show social phenomena within society about equality of social status in terms of choosing spouse in England in early middle twentieth century through Up at the Villa.

Keyword: Equality, Up at the Villa. Sociological Perspective

A. Introduction

The prior theme of *Up at the Villa* is the importance of equal social status in choosing spouse. Equality in social status becomes a fundamental key for marriage. According to Spencer (Sugihen, 1996:139), a status that can be achieved by someone can be determined by analysis and measurement of certain key factors. These factors are education, gross family product, and breadwinner. Those can be accumulated in the form of a scale resulting in an accurate gauge for a person's social status.

Social statuses are "important because of their implication for social behaviors" (Babbie, 1982:62). It can affect their social interactions but some behaviors are not rigidly exclusive to one class. Schaefer (1989:124-125) defines that social status can be achieved through three ways namely ascribed status, achieved status, and master status.

Ascribed status is declared to person by society without respects for characteristics or unique talents of the human as a member of society (Schaefer, 1989:124). Achieved status is special activity that it accounts for a person's individual struggles and is based on a person's social mobility through sheer effort. A master status is "a status that dominates others and thereby determines a person's general position in society" (Schaefer, 1989:125).

Human as a society member needs to keep on their life through having husband or wife which normally called spouse (Bull, 2008:425). It means that human as social being cannot live separately with other people around them.

According to Abraham Maslow (Hjelle, 1992:448) there are five basic needs for human such as psychological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem and self-actualization.

Having spouse is the crucial need for human being and it belongs to the love and belongingness needs. This statement means that having spouse is human need and it will create human anxiety if its need cannot be fulfilled. Therefore, people need to consider equality of social status among their spouse. Social status will determine social relation for spouse in the future.

William Sommerset Maugham is one of fiction authors who deliver his idea to the reader that people need to consider equality of social status in choosing spouse through writing *Up at the Villa* novel. Therefore, the researcher wants to study and analyze the novel by using a sociological approach (Swingewood and Laurenson, 1972:11).

B. Research Method

This study belongs to descriptive qualitative method. In this method, there are two types of data source, namely primary and secondary data source. The primary data source is the novel itself, meanwhile the secondary data sources are other materials related to the study. Both data are collected through library research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:3).

In collecting data, the writer will take some steps as follow: reading the novel thoroughly and repeatedly, reading the synopsis to get more understanding, reading more related references to observe the theory, data and information, taking notes of important parts both primary and secondary data

source, classifying and determining the relevant data, browsing the internet to search for information that relates to the novel, and drawing conclusion.

In analyzing the data, the writer applies descriptive approach. The writer analyzes the data based on sociological perspective. Focus will be paid on the meaning of equal social status related to *Up at the Villa* novel and in England in early middle twentieth century.

C. Research Findings and Discussion

The writer gets some research finding in analyzing *Up at the Villa* novel. Each finding has some cases to be discussed. After they have examined, all components will be consolidated in a schematic manner in discussion.

1. Findings

In analyzing *Up at the Villa* novel, the writer gets some findings. They are about the importance of equal social status in choosing spouse within the novel and social status equality in reality of England in early middle twentieth century. The practice of social aspect can be seen thoroughly below:

a. Social Aspects within Novel

William Sommerset Maugham clearly emerges social aspect in *Up at the Villa*. It involves social aspects such as social structure, race and ethnicity, social mobility, social relation, culture and religion.

The social structure in England society within *Up at the Villa* is divided into four social structures such as upper class, middle, working

class, and under class. First, upper class consists of Edgar Swift as a Governor of Bengal India, Rowley Flint as a British Empire Builder, Mary Panton as a daughter of British Empire Builder, and Sar Ferdinando as a Princess in Italy. Second, middle class belongs to Mr. and Mrs Atkinson who occupy as an entrepreneur. Third, working class within this novel is reflected in Ciro and Nina as a manservant. Fourth, underclass is indicated by immigrant who is homeless and hopeless. It is reflected in character of Karl as an illegal immigrant from Austria as a homeless.

Social relation contributes enough in making character within *Up at the Villa* novel. It appears how Rowley Flint feels hateful and underestimates Edgar Swift because of their social status disparity. Social mobility also chips in character within this novel. It can be seen that social mobility possibly happens through amalgamation. It is reflected in character of Marry Panton, Karl and Edgar Swift.

Economic aspect obviously contributes to the economic condition of characters. *Up at the Villa* is reflected in England economical aspects in early middle twentieth century through describing characters in the story that belong to royal family, entrepreneurship, property owner, and empire builder. Meanwhile, political aspects evidently contribute within character in *Up at the Villa*. It is reflected in character of Edgar Swift as a Governor Bengal who deals a business with Princess Sar Ferdinando.

Cultural aspects contribute to the characters of the novel. It is reflected in British's paradigm which still believes in norms and values in terms of choosing spouse with equal social status. It can be found that Mary considers social status among her lovers. On the other hand, religious aspects clearly contribute to the character within *Up at the Villa*. William wants to convey the existential of religion plurality through emerging a character. It is reflected in Edgar Swift's character as a Governor of North-West Province which is able to create a unity in religion diversity among Islam, Hindu and Buddha.

2. Problem Solving

William Sommerset gives a solution of social status phenomena in England into this novel. It is reflected in theme that people need to consider equality of social status in choosing spouse. William tells a final decision of Mary Panton to choose Rowley Flint to become her spouse because he is quite eligible to be her spouse as having equality in social status.

3. Social Reality in England

The writer will discuss the social background of English society in early middle twentieth century through some aspects of discussion. These cover social structure, economic aspect, political aspect, cultural aspect, and religious aspect.

a. Social Aspect in England

Social structure indicates a set of relations between elements in society that has some measurements of coherence and stability (Bernardi et al, 2006:162). First, social structure of England society is divided into four classes namely underclass, working class, middle class and upper class (Marshal, 2005:38). Second, According to Cook (2003:27), Ethnic group in England society had some ethnic group such as White people (British, Irish, Schottish), Mixed (White and Black Carribean, White and Black African, White and Asian), Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and other Asian), Black (Carribean, African, other Black) and other ethnicity. Third, social mobility shows competitiveness in terms of ingraining social mobility among societies. Martin (2014:4) said in his article *Britain 'Has Worst Social Mobility in the Western World and Becomes Ingrained in Children as Young as Three'*, social mobility in Britain is “the worst in the Western world and the gap between rich and poor has become ingrained in children as young as three. Miles (1999:7) also said British social mobility research had shown a high profile relative to mobility measurement and it showed far in terms of perfect mobility.

Fourth, social relation in England society still shows discrimination within society. William (2000:2) said about inter-ethnic group relation which exist racial discrimination in some

sides of life in England. Social relation inter-ethnic group have become a high light issue until now. Shepard and Walter (2013:34) convey poverty is a big case for minority ethnic. Poverty gets sort of discrimination in terms of seeking job, education opportunity, low salary and achievement.

Economic condition inn early middle twentieth century or World War II poverty still became a big matter within society. It can be caused many aspects in terms of workforce. Nevertheless, Lambert in his article entitled *Daily Life in Britain in the 20th Century* reveals periodically a percentage number of poverties within England society. It can be seen as follows:

At the beginning of the 20th century surveys showed that 25% of the population of Britain were living in poverty. They found that at least 15% were living at subsistence level. They had just enough money for food, rent, fuel and clothes. They could not afford 'luxuries' such as news papers or public transport. About 10% were living in below subsistence level and could not afford an adequate diet. The surveys found that the main cause of poverty was low wages. The main cause of extreme poverty was the loss of the main breadwinner. If dad was dead, ill or unemployed it was disaster. Mum might get a job but women were paid much lower wages than men.

Political aspects have two major parts, namely domestic politic and foreign politic. Domestic policy in England in early middle twentieth century can be seen a number of political parties and political system. Meanwhile, Foreign politic consists of three things which are related with a main British diplomacy such as bilateral relationship, European Union, and United Nation Security Council.

In cultural aspect, the researcher presents main point of cultural aspects such as value systems and norms. British as a member of

society definitely have a value system which becomes main role of human living in society. England society has value system like courage and self-esteem, truth, honor, fidelity, discipline and duty, strong, survivor, and perseverance. On the other hand, norm can be found through society and it was convention. Unwritten norm in England cannot be found the legality and the responsibility because it is signed from each class in society (Christopher, 1999:20).

In religious aspect, Bruce (1995:13) stated the main religions in England in early middle twentieth century are Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Sikhism. Meanwhile, England society in early middle twentieth century also has no religion but it only small number within majority.

D. Discussion

Story is a reflection of social phenomena that occurs within a society at that time. The researcher criticizes some aspects in the story such as social aspect, economic aspect, political aspect, cultural aspect, and religious aspect. The social aspect consists of social structure, race and ethnicity, social relation and social mobility. William Sommerset Maugham displayed an existential of social diagrams within society.

The economic aspect in *Up at the Villa* exhibits the economic condition of England in early middle twentieth century. It is described from economic condition among characters. Some characters belong to the rich and the rest belongs to the poor and its properties and fashions.

Political aspect contributes to the character of Edgar Swift. He has a powerful authority of governing England for bilateral diplomacy between England and India. It displays there are foreign and domestic politics in England in early middle twentieth century. Social cultures are reflected within the story and it can be seen in plot. It indicates of Edgar Swift life as being a great Governor of Bengal India. He has a very great position of government officer but it is bounded by conservative Indian cultures to have a perfect and good reputation for leader. Religion plays a fundamental role in making a character. It emerges toward Edgar Swift. He is a good reputation as making peaceful among religion plurality in India. It is reflected in India that shows existential of religion plurality and its horizontal conflicts.

According to the sociological analysis of *Up at the Villa* novel, the researcher can conclude the idea of sociological aspect of England in early middle twentieth century. William strongly focuses on emphasizing an idea of social status which appears as social phenomena within society. It is reflected how social status becomes a main role of life system in England.

William Somerset Maugham wants to display social phenomena within England society through emerging a theme. The theme of this novel is people need to consider the equality of social status in choosing spouse. It is reflected in Mary Panton who is caught among three different men. Three of them have different social structure and social status. In terms of overcoming a choice, Mary needs to consider equality of social status among them. William Somerset Maugham wants to deliver the messages of this novel through

performing how social status still exists among society and it becomes a significant value within society. England people are a conservative country. He presents to the reader to understand social phenomena occur in society because of disparity in social status. Different social status in marriage will create a social jealousy and discrimination. Nevertheless, it will create boomerang problems in life.

E. Conclusion

After analyzing thoroughly of *Up at the Villa* novel, the researcher draws the following conclusion. First, based on the structural analysis it is palpable to *Up at the Villa* that William Sommerset Maugham conveys a key message about the importance of equal social status in choosing spouse. He delivers a theme that people need to consider equality of social status in choosing spouse. In order to deepen and elaborate the message, William Sommerset Maugham creates character of Mary Panton. She is caught among three expert men who have different background and different social status. Through emerging three main characters of men, William wants to enlighten that social status disparity exists among characters. William obviously shows that Mary will choose one from them because of social status. William makes every element consolidated to one another to form a good unity.

Second, it is authentically apparent that there is a strong relation between this novel and the social reality in England in early middle twentieth century. *Up at the Villa* shows an important of equal social status in choosing spouse in marriage. Therefore, people need to consider equality of social

status. It is also reflected the social class phenomena which exist in England in early middle twentieth century. English people still believe and lean in value and norms. Meanwhile, social relation of different classes seems much disparity.

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