

SOCIAL MOBILITY OF ELIZABETH BENNET IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

Dida Lioniesa Susilo

Jurusan Sastra Inggris Fakultas Sastra Universitas Udayana

Abstrak

Mobilitas sosial adalah peluang seseorang atau sekelompok orang melakukan perubahan posisi pada hirarkinya, dan meningkatkan status sosial mereka. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui usaha-usaha yang dilakukan Elizabeth Bennet dalam melakukan mobilitas sosial, alasannya melakukan mobilitas sosial, dan menjelaskan faktor-faktor apa saja yang mendukung pencapaiannya.

Data dari penelitian ini diambil dari Pride and Prejudice oleh Jane Austen. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi, dan untuk mengumpulkan data digunakan metode dokumenter. Metode kualitatif digunakan untuk menganalisis data dan disajikan secara deskriptif.

Kata Kunci: Mobilitas sosial, pendekatan sosiologi, Elizabeth Bennet, Austen, Pride and Prejudice

1. Background of the Study

There are two terms of social mobility. They are the upward mobility and the downward mobility. The upward mobility happens when someone improves his or her position in society, while downward mobility is when someone falls to a lower position in the social hierarchy. Education and family are the important factors of the upward social mobility, according to Nobbs, et al. (1989: 45).

Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) was written during the middle of the Romantic period. Elizabeth is the protagonist of the novel. She is lively, quick-witted, sharp-tongued, bold and intelligent. She has pride of her abilities to perceive the truth of situations and of people's characters. However, her perceptive abilities fail her frequently because she is influenced by vanity and judges people rashly. By the end of the novel she overcomes her prejudice through her dealings with Darcy.

2 Problems of the Study

Based on the consideration stated above, the research problems can be formulated as follows:

1. What efforts does Elizabeth do to achieve the social mobility?

2. Why does Elizabeth do the social mobility?
3. What factors support Elizabeth's achievement?

3 Aims of the Study

There are three aims of the study based on the problems, as written below:

1. To describe the efforts that Elizabeth does to achieve social mobility
2. To find out the reason of Elizabeth's social mobility
3. To explain the factors that support Elizabeth's achievement

4 Research Method

A research method is needed to achieve the purpose of the research and to give a clear description of what research has done. In this study, the research method was classified into three parts. They are: data source, method and technique of collecting data, and method and technique of analyzing data.

4.1 Data Source

The primary data of this study were taken from the original novel entitled *Pride and Prejudice*. The original version of the novel was written in 1796-1797 under the title *First Impressions*, and was probably in the form of an exchange of letters. She later renamed the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, and published it in 1813.

4.2 Method and Technique of Collecting Data

The data collection was done by using documentary method. The first step for collecting data was done by doing a comprehensive and intensive reading while understanding the book *Pride and Prejudice* in order to comprehend Austen's ideas on woman's social mobility. The second step was taking notes to choose the quotations of the text as the data dealing with the problem that was investigated, and selecting the data dealing with the purpose of the study.

4.3 Method and Technique of Analyzing Data

The collected data were analyzed and presented descriptively using qualitative method. The analysis was focused on finding the social mobility which was portrayed in Austen's novel. The first step was defining the problems dealing with the purpose of the study. In the second step the data based were analyzed on the classifications and characteristics that refer to the main problem.

5 Data Analysis

5.1 Social Condition in *Pride and Prejudice*

The social condition represented in this novel is the British society in 18th century. It can be seen that the society represented in this novel was divided into some classes or stratifications. According to Weber (1946), 'classes' are not communities; they merely represent possible, and frequent, bases for communal action. It can be defined as 'class' when: (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor markets.

The characters in *Pride and Prejudice* exist in a fixed social structure, and their actions are controlled by the expectations of gender and of the landed gentry and aristocracy, their class expectations. In general, some characters in this novel can be defined based on their social status:

1. Fitzwilliam Darcy, is a representative of hereditary aristocracy, upper-class on this era, wealthy landowner who does not have to work for a living, employs workers to farm his land. The surrounding families depending on his patronage.
2. The Bingleys represented the new landed gentry. Bingley's father acquired wealth through trade, gave up his business, and moved his family to the country. They are now considered the upper class.
3. The Bennets, own land, but they are a middle-class family. The Longbourn House in Hertfordshire brings about £2,000 per year. They

also have to work to cultivate their land, and have only few servants and limited financial resources.

4. Lady Catherine de Bourgh of Rosings Park illustrates the typical aristocrat of the era in which *Pride and Prejudice* is set. She acts as the most superior of the fixed social structure that Austen is accessible to. Lady Catherine is a rare example of an independent woman who inherits the estate of her father, though on that time property would be passed through several generations within a family; usually closest male relative; this term is known as the entailment.

On that time, party characterized the people. Gatherings of the elite in the 18th century were no small affair. In *Pride and Prejudice*, party has become a dominant factor of life in British society in the 18th century. Many chapters of this novel tell about the dance party, who come to the party, and who got the invitation for the party or the balls. It is clearly seen that party is a prestigious event in British 18th century communities. The party can be defined as a social gathering, and sometimes it usually implies a social gathering for celebration of family. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the party takes special places. It can be seen from the excitement and the eager preparations of the Netherfield's girls. The importance of social gathering at that time made party become the traditional social arrangements on that time.

One of the balls is held by Sir William Lucas, father of one Elizabeth dearest best friend, Charlotte. His father had been formerly in trade in Meryton where he had made a tolerable fortune and risen to the honor of knighthood by an address to the king, during his mayoralty.

According to Weber in *Essay of Sociology* (1946: 194), party may represent interests determined through class situation or status situation, and they may recruit their following respectively from one to the other. There are many parties and balls found in *Pride and Prejudice*. The party becomes the traditional social arrangements in the British 18th century society. It is such a form of acquaintanceship between one family with other family to give assessment of

position or as a place to show skill knowledge which possessed by some families attending the party.

5.2 Social Mobility in *Pride and Prejudice* and in the English 18th Century English Society

18th century Britain shows that the middle class was above the common laborers, who had no assets and were usually tied to the land they lived on by tradition. The middle class also had to work for a living and had little or no land assets, but they did have significant liquid and material assets (Boyd-Graber, 2006: 3).

The majority of the middle class, were commercial or industrial capitalists who had a stock of money, acquired by paternal gift, inheritance or loan, which they continually turned over to make more money. They also, together with the upper part of mankind, employed the mechanics, who had no stock of money and so depended on others for their living (Earle, in Boyd-Graber, 2006: 3).

The people of this time divided themselves into two social classes, middle and upper classes. They always had plenty of the finest items of the time period. The two classes lived together in somewhat harmony. The men of this time typically made most of the money in the household. Women did most of the housework. So women, however, did go outside of the home and find work.

5.3 The Factors that Support the Success of Elizabeth

There are some factors influencing social mobility. According to Nobbs, et al., (1989: 45) in their book *Sociology*, the factors which affect the social mobility are occupational structure, education, distribution of opportunity, motivation, family size, and marriage.

In *Pride and Prejudice* there are some factors which support Elizabeth's social mobility, those are family and education. They become the main factors to support Elizabeth's success in society. Elizabeth's parent, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet is in charge of their child's education, but they also require support from them, and this aspect, which become the influent root of social mobility. The factors that support Elizabeth's social mobility will be described below.

5.3.1 The Family Factors which Support Elizabeth's Social Mobility

According to Nobbs, et al., (1989: 45), one of the factors that affect the social mobility is marriage. In another moment, the act of Elizabeth's mother is undignified and forced her daughter, Jane, to come to Mr. Bingley's invitation without carriage.

The social conditions that support Elizabeth's mobility become more concerned. Elizabeth has a strong motivation to prove at public, which at time that not all Mrs. Bennet children agreed with her mother's statement that get married with rich man surely gets promising the future. According to Marx (in Nobbs, et al., 1989: 33) "Everything depended upon the ownership of capital (wealth) – it shaped religion, government, and even the family." Elizabeth somewhat agrees with this view, nevertheless, in a marriage, it is better to get married with a man who we love and not based on possession and fortune.

Elizabeth rejected Mr. Collins offer to marry her, if someone wishes to get married not based on the fortune or possession, but the marriage is based on love. Although, Mrs. Bennet insists her to marry Mr. Collins, she still rejects that. Another conflict happens, Elizabeth was shocked by her younger sister, Mary Bennet. Mary, at the Netherfield ball, began her songs. She thought it was such an opportunity of exhibiting and she found it very delightful. Elizabeth was making signs to his father to stop Mary, because she knew that Mary's powers were by no means fitted for such a display; her voice was weak, and her manner affected.

5.3.2 The Education Factor Support Elizabeth's Social Mobility

Education is an important factor in upward mobility, because the better an education one has, and the higher the qualifications that they gain, the more likely it will be that an occupation higher up the social scale can be obtained (Nobbs, et al., 1989: 45). In *Pride and Prejudice*, it can be found that Elizabeth's education mostly starts in Mr. Bennet's library. It is why Elizabeth was close to Mr. Bennet rather than her mother, Mrs. Bennet. She is actually reading in Mr. Bennet's library and then her knowledge is higher than her other sisters. This novel is trying to give some explanations that higher knowledge is not always acquired in a school or educational institutions. Elizabeth becomes someone, who is educated

from Mr. Bennet habitually, because Elizabeth has wide knowledge by reading books in her father's library.

Dancing is also one of Elizabeth's parts of education, because it shows to the society how to refuse and accept its bargain. The interesting aspect about Elizabeth's manner in society is her attitude in the balls well-known good.

5.4 The Elizabeth's Efforts of Upward Mobility in *Pride and Prejudice*

When someone improves his or his position in society, this is known as *upward mobility*. A much rarer occurrence is when someone falls in to a lower position in the social hierarchy and this is termed *downward mobility* (Nobbs, et al., 1989: 45). Someone wants to change social status for better life. For example, education is one of important factors in upward mobility, because the better education they have and the better qualification they gain, the more likely it will be that an occupation higher up the social status can be obtained.

The effort also happens in the novel. It happens to Elizabeth's move upward. Here are the analyses of Elizabeth's efforts in social mobility.

Elizabeth Bennet is the character who moves upward from the position of a girl who has not good institution of education, but she is knowledgeable. The number of children in a family will also play its part in social mobility (Nobbs, et al., 1989: 45).

Marriage is one of the factors affecting the social mobility (Nobbs, et al., 1989: 45). Elizabeth has a principle in her life, specifically in a marriage that it is better to get married to a man whom we love and not based on possession and fortune.

Elizabeth is very different from her mother, Mrs. Bennet and the other sisters. Elizabeth is more educated than the others Bennet's daughters. As the obvious, that it can be seen in the novel, Elizabeth is not attracted to a man because of his fortune but she prefers to married to a man of low income as long they love each other.

Elizabeth's effort in overcoming her prejudice has come to the result that she decides to ignore Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine's, to avoid Darcy. However,

Elizabeth refuses to be bullied. Elizabeth feels no fear, so she is so much relying on her believes in Darcy, and even her feeling toward him becomes stronger.

Her resentment toward Lady Catherine leads her to claim that she would marry him and no one could prevent it. Lady Catherine has indirectly vanishes her prejudice against Darcy. Unconsciously, Elizabeth's feeling of love toward Darcy has getting bigger than before. In a situation like this, in which she has oppressed, Elizabeth would fight for her will and against Lady Catherine's. In fact, Elizabeth's effort in overcoming her prejudice against Darcy has strengthened Elizabeth's love to him. They falling in love generally same indistinguishing the social. The two will obtain satisfaction, deserts, or hobby in interacting other. This can be seen through her decision to pursue Darcy's love. It is to note that Elizabeth is the only person who is not intimidated by Rosing's Park and its monarch. She dares to answer Lady Catherine's questions in a way as to put her in her place.

Secretly, Darcy is falling love with Elizabeth, then daring him to propose Elizabeth. However, Elizabeth has also rejected the Darcy proposals to married with him. Darcy speaks a good deal about his pride and makes Elizabeth feel she is socially inferior to him. He acts likely the proposal to her is a divine honor, which Elizabeth cannot turn down. Elizabeth, furious over his superior attitude, spares no words in refusing him. She accuses Darcy of separating Jane and Bingley, of treating Wickham horribly, and of acting in an arrogant manner. Darcy accepts these accusations without apology, but it hurts him when she says that his demeanor is not gentlemanly.

Elizabeth's *prejudice* about Darcy comes to its end when she visited to Lambton with the Gardiners, where she will see Darcy in a more favorable light. In Darcy residence, Elizabeth, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner are greeted by the housekeeper, who shows them around; Elizabeth is impressed with all she sees. She also listens carefully to the housekeeper who generously praises Darcy as a sweet-tempered and benevolent young man. She claims he is an excellent landlord, unselfish, kind, and humane; she also explains that he is a devoted brother to his sister.

Pride and prejudice are central concerns of Austen in this novel. Early in the book, she defines *pride*, by several of the characters, including Elizabeth, displays some measures of destructive pride, Darcy reflects one which has the fully embodiment of a totally proud and arrogant man. Although *pride* is a natural adjunct to an aristocrat, in Darcy's case it becomes his worst foe. Initially, it binds him within the narrow confines of the upper crust of society and gives him distaste for the world that lies outside. Although he is attracted to Elizabeth, he is condescending towards her because of her inferior social level and her crass family. Even when he realizes his love for her and proposes, he is insulting and proud in his manner, causing Elizabeth immediately reject his offer.

Elizabeth already holds a blind "prejudice" against him for the way in which he has earlier treated her and because of Wickham's lies about him. Elizabeth's rejection hurts Darcy's pride and causes him to do some self-analysis. Darcy's later kindnesses to her and her family case Elizabeth to do a similar self-analysis. In the end, the couple rises above their *Pride and Prejudice*, finding true love for and admiration of one another. Elizabeth class mobility raised to the society, from middle class becomes the upper class after she married Darcy. Through Darcy and Elizabeth, Austen clearly shows the harm that could do when people do not see the truth about themselves or others.

6. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion, the following points can be presented as conclusions are:

1. Elizabeth's effort in overcoming her prejudice about Darcy by ignoring Lady Catherine's demands to avoid Darcy. Elizabeth also builds successfully good behavior and good relationship of many people, especially Darcy so that they can get married and completes Elizabeth effort to do upward social mobility.
2. There are some reasons of Elizabeth's social mobility in *Pride and Prejudice* that are concerned with the reality at that time. The first reason Elizabeth does social mobility is her willingness to have better life. The other reason of Elizabeth's upward mobility is the fact that Elizabeth is an independent woman who is not afraid to overstep social conventions and assert her free-

will, and she finds a complicated ways with Darcy on their love story that sends her into success.

3. To reach all successes, hard work is a way for all people to be successful. In *Pride and Prejudice*, there are some factors that support Elizabeth social mobility success, from middle class to upper class. Family and education really influence Elizabeth's social mobility. The low, bad mannered family forces Elizabeth to build better perspective on mannerism, to have good manner so that she can be accepted in society. Although she does not have formal education, Elizabeth reads many books from her father library. Her access to the books makes her a knowledgeable person. This also contributes to her intelligent and good manner.

7. Bibliography

Austen, Jane. 2010. *Pride and Prejudice*. London. Collins Classics.

Boyd-Graber, Jordan. 2006. *The Emerging English Middle Class: Illusory Upward Mobility and the Static Elite*. -.-.

Nobbs, Jack, et al. 1989. *Sociology*. London. Macmillan Education Ltd.

Weber, Max. 1946. *Essays in Sociology*. New York. Oxford University Press.

Wellek, R and A. Warren. 1949. *Theory of Literature*. New York. Harcourt, Brace and Company Inc.