CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature has a close relationship with the social, cultural, and historical conditions in which it is produced. Literary works, particularly novels, are often used to portray social life, including the values, beliefs, and conflicts that exist within a society. Through characters, plot development, and narrative techniques, authors are able to present prevailing social norms as well as illustrate how individuals conform to or challenge them. Therefore, literary studies can help readers understand the relationship between society and individual life experiences.

In traditional societies, social norms play a significant role in regulating individual behavior and determining social status. These norms govern various aspects of life, such as social class, gender roles, marriage, and moral conduct. Society generally expects individuals to comply with established rules in order to maintain social acceptance. However, over time, these norms may change or be questioned. The tension between social expectations and personal desires becomes an important issue to examine within social life.

Such conditions can be found in English society during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During this period, English society maintained a rigid social structure and strongly upheld traditional values, in which social status was largely determined by wealth, land ownership, and family lineage (Davidoff & Hall, 1987). Social class greatly influenced an individual's position and opportunities within society, including access to education, marriage prospects, and social acceptance (Stone, 1977).

In addition, women experienced significant limitations in economic independence and personal decision-making due to patriarchal social structures and inheritance systems that excluded them from property ownership (Poovey, 1984; Davidoff & Hall, 1987). As a result, marriage was regarded as particularly important, especially for women, because it functioned as a primary means of securing economic stability and maintaining social status within the community (Stone, 1977). Consequently, personal feelings and individual choices were often subordinated to social expectations, family interests, and economic considerations

rather than being treated as a priority (Poovey, 1984; Rahayu, 2021).This social situation became even more apparent during the Regency Era (approximately 1793–1815), when England was politically affected by revolutionary conflicts and the Napoleonic Wars, creating political tension and social pressure within British society (Black, 2006; Porter, 2001). These circumstances created social and economic pressures, yet they also opened opportunities for changes in class structure and social mobility. English society at the time was clearly divided based on social class, land ownership, and inheritance. An individual's social status largely depended on wealth and family connections.

Within this social structure, women occupied a vulnerable position due to their lack of inheritance rights and unequal legal status compared to men (Davidoff & Hall, 1987). As a result, marriage was often perceived as the primary means for women to attain economic security and social stability rather than personal fulfillment (Stone, 1977). Moreover, social life was governed by strict norms and codes of conduct that emphasized honor, reputation, and propriety as central measures of moral worth in social interactions, particularly within the English gentry (Poovey, 1984).These rigid social conditions were frequently reflected in literary works of the period. In 1813, Jane Austen, a novelist well known for her portrayals of early nineteenth-century English society, depicted these conditions in her novel Pride and Prejudice. Through this novel, Austen presents English social life and its governing rules, including social class distinctions, codes of conduct, and societal attitudes toward marriage among the English gentry.

Through interactions among characters, Austen demonstrates how social rules influence human relationships and individual life choices. This portrayal reveals that despite numerous social constraints, individuals still possess the agency to form their own attitudes and perspectives. This is evident in the character of Elizabeth Bennet, who is portrayed as a courageous woman who refuses marriage without love and strives for personal freedom amid social pressure.

One of the central themes of Pride and Prejudice is the conflict between social conventions and individual freedom. This theme is particularly evident in the lives of female characters whose choices are heavily shaped by societal expectations. Elizabeth Bennet, as the protagonist, is depicted as an independent

thinker who does not easily conform to conventional views regarding marriage and social status. She prioritizes personal happiness and moral principles over material advantages. Her rejection of proposals that conflict with her values illustrates her courage in confronting social pressure.

In contrast to Elizabeth, the character of Charlotte Lucas represents a more accepting attitude toward existing social norms. Charlotte's pragmatic view of marriage reflects how social and economic pressures often limit individual choices, particularly for women with fewer opportunities. The differing perspectives of Elizabeth and Charlotte illustrate that life decisions are influenced by both personal circumstances and the social environment. Through these characters, Austen presents diverse ways in which individuals respond to social expectations.

In addition to portraying conflicts between individuals and social norms, Pride and Prejudice reflects the emergence of new awareness regarding individual values, personal morality, and the position of women in society. Austen does not merely present a romantic narrative but also offers social criticism of gender inequality and the rigid class system that restricts individual freedom. This critique is also evident in the development of characters such as Mr. Darcy, whose transformation demonstrates that individuals can learn to value others based on character rather than social background.

Such developments suggest that social norms are subject to change over time. The depiction of shifting social values in the novel indicates that individual freedom can still emerge even within a society that upholds traditional norms. Austen does not entirely reject these values but emphasizes the importance of honesty, mutual respect, and freedom in making life choices.

Therefore, Pride and Prejudice is relevant to be examined through the theme "Social Norm Changes and Individual Freedom in the Structure of Traditional English Society," as it illustrates how evolving social values begin to provide space for individuals to define their own choices and identities.

Given the novel's strong social themes, Pride and Prejudice is appropriately analyzed using a sociological approach to literature to understand how English society is portrayed and how individuals function within its social structure.

Accordingly, this study focuses on analyzing social norm changes and individual freedom in Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen. Employing a

qualitative descriptive method and a sociological approach to literature, this research aims to explain how the conflict between social conventions and personal freedom is represented in the novel. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of Austen's social criticism and the role of literature in portraying and challenging the social realities of its time.

1.2 Research Questions

This study seeks to analyze how changes in social norms and individual struggles for freedom are represented through the structure of traditional English society in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. Based on the background outlined above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1.2.1 How does Elizabeth Bennet represent shifts in social values and the struggle for individual freedom within the traditional society depicted in Pride and Prejudice?

1.2.2 How are social norms represented within the structure of traditional English society in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice?

1.2.3 How is individual freedom reflected through the characters in relation to social norms in Pride and Prejudice?

1.2.4 How do social norms influence the characters' choices, particularly in terms of marriage and social relationships, in Pride and Prejudice?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to analyze the representation of social norms and individual freedom in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice within the structure of traditional English society. Specifically, the objectives of this research are:

1.3.1 To identify and describe the social norms represented in traditional English society as depicted in Pride and Prejudice.

1.3.2 To analyze changes in social norms as portrayed through the characters and plot development in the novel.

1.3.3 To examine how individual freedom is expressed and negotiated by the characters in relation to prevailing social norms.

1.3.4 To investigate the influence of social norms on the characters' choices, particularly those related to marriage and social relationships.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is divided into theoretical and practical significance.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to contribute to literary studies, particularly in the field of sociological approaches to literature. By analyzing social norm changes and individual freedom in Pride and Prejudice, this research provides a deeper understanding of how literary works reflect and critique social structures within their historical contexts. The findings are also expected to serve as a reference for future studies on Jane Austen's works and the relationship between literature and society.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

Practically, this study is expected to benefit students and readers of English literature by enhancing their understanding of social norms and individual freedom as depicted in classic novels. Furthermore, this research may help readers appreciate the social criticism conveyed by Jane Austen and recognize the relevance of her work in discussions of social values and personal autonomy, both in historical and contemporary contexts.