

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Social issues can be found in everyday life and often occur around us. The existence of poverty, unemployment, educational inequality, social conflict, and discrimination that occurs can create obstacles that make individuals feel restricted in their social lives. Among these, social class is one of the most influential social issues. Social class refers to the hierarchical distinctions between groups in society, particularly between the lower working class and the upper class. These divisions are not only rooted in economic differences but also in access to power, privilege, and resources, which significantly impact individuals' lives and relationships (Marx & Engels, 1848).

The concept of social class is connected with other social issues. Social class has long been a central theme in literature. Some examples that have been analyzed by previous research are *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga, *Death of Salesman* (1949) by Arthur Miller, and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen. These literary works have examined the impact of class divisions on individuals and their interactions.

In *The Notebook* (1940s North Carolina, USA), social problems as illustrated in the narrative also existed in the American society of those days. Lately, the Great Depression could be over, but its legacies of poverty and inequality of classes were felt quite powerfully. A lot of working-class people stayed in poverty and saw few opportunities, as did the family of Noah, whereas rich people, similar to the family of Allie, had the right to many social privileges and sway. In addition to economic inequality, the 1940s America was characterized by racial segregation that was direct by Jim Crow laws, gender commitments that restrained

women to dependence, and a high sense of social reputation and family respectability. This was part of the general scenarios of the society and led to the extreme nature of the social stratum as well as having far reaching effects on individual life decisions including ideas of marriage and relationships that form a key theme in *The Notebook*.

Another literary work that explores social class is *The Notebook*. The novel was written by Nicholas Sparks and was published in 1996. Nicholas Sparks, the author of *The Notebook*, is a well-known figure in contemporary literature. His works often explore themes of love, loss, and social dynamics. Sparks has received numerous awards for his contributions to literature, including The Goodreads Choice Award for *The Best of Me* (2009) and Family Choice Award for *Dear John* (2013). Including *The Notebook*, fifteen of Sparks' novels have been No. 1 New York Times Best Sellers, and all of his novels have been both New York Times and international bestsellers. Sparks has also often been listed on Forbes annual highest-paid authors lists.

The novel shows the difference in social class between the Upper class and the Lower Class which causes their love story to end. In Nicolas Sparks' book, *The Notebook*, the nature of social structure separates and exists between the two main characters, Noah and Allie. The book shows the interaction between the upper and lower classes; Noah is a man from the lower class, while Allie is a woman from the upper class. Their love is portrayed as a race against society - in Allie's case, her family does not accept Noah as a husband because he is 'beneath' them. Thus, the conflict between love and responsibility forms the novel's plot. The book illustrates how social class determines human relationships, including intimate relationships and life decisions (Sparks, 1996).

This thesis analyzes the overall topic concerning social issues and defines them clearly, before citing various types of social issues which are given with a special emphasis on social class. This is one of the most explored topics in different literary productions. As a matter of

background information, existing novels that depict the theme of social class across cultures are presented.

To further strengthen the theoretical background of this research, the works included from the previous section will be evident due to their similar background and in addition to journals, which deal with the concept known as social class in these novels. For instance, the comparative analysis that presents British or American societies as the context within which *The Notebook* takes its place, with works like “Globalization and Social Class in Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*” by Amar Shankar Mahato (2023) or “Social Class in British Society in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*” by Ahmad a; Badawi (2020) brings up a subject that makes the perspective on the These references will assist in making links concerning social class as a thematic interest in various subtopics concerning cultures and literature that will be useful in analyzing the effect of social class on the relationships portrayed in Nicholas Sparks’ novel.

According to Siahaan and Satria (2022), social hierarchy becomes the key to understanding the nature of romance between Noah and Allie as their differences in social backgrounds impact their interactions. Allie belongs to the upper, wealthy family, Noah is described as working-class, and the strong impact of the disapproval of Allie parents because of the humble position of Noah leads to the romance (Sparks, 1996). Though this vision creates a helpful base, my research goes even further since besides emphasizing the presence of the differences between classes, it reflects on the way the relationship between classes in terms of power shifts and these forms can gradually affect the result of the relationship in the end. In contrast with Siahaan and Satria, who highlight the unchanging quality of the social barriers, this paper discusses how these barriers are changing over a given period, i.e. how the individual development of Noah and the refusal of Allie to conform to the social pressures in which she lives change the class relationships. The discussion presented in Chapter 4.1 is



based on the Marxist theory especially the idea of class struggle as it was first presented by Marx and Engels (1848). Nevertheless, unlike such precedents, Chapter 4.2 breaks down how these class-based shifts impact active transformation in narratives, thus affecting the choice of characters, their agency, and eventually, the denouement of their love plot. This subtle difference in concentrating not only on the mere existence of class disparity but also in its direction as change and outcome is what sets this work apart as opposed to the directions at analysis by Siahaan and Satria.

The sociological approach tends to focus on the presence of social structures and the influence of hierarchy on relationships as fixed lines, as was with Siahaan and Satria (2022) discussion of the fact that the romance between Noah and Allie is limited by the fact that their social backgrounds differ. On the other hand, in the study by Marxist vantage, oppositely class inequalities are recognized but the power, struggle and change between the classes is also the locus of concern. Basing the analysis on the way that the character of Noah grows personally, and how Allie refuses to fit the expected norms set by members of her family, the analysis can bring out the changes in class relations over time thus influencing the agency of the characters and the end result of the story. Such a stress on change and class struggles is what sets the Marxist approach apart as compared to the more explanative and conditioned sociological one.

According to Marx, society in the capitalist regime alienates the workers, and in turn, they fail to find meaning in their lives. Together with Friedrich Engels, Marx came up with the theory of Marxism, where the lower class would revolt against the upper class and overthrow the capitalist system as espoused in the Communist Manifesto (Marx and Engels, 1890). In a literal sense, this theory explains the concept of class struggle and how it affects relationships. This is because differences in social status determine the relationships that characters can or cannot have.

Based on the novel *The Notebook*, Noah is a lower-class worker attracted to Allie from the upper class. This social conflict is evident throughout the book, especially when Allie's parents hate Noah and even force their daughter to stop seeing him. This depicts the Marxist concept of class conflict and the economic and social discontent between the Upper class and the lower class, making them strangers. Therefore, the novel is a tender love story and shows further social issues of inferiority and class divisions.

Although social class plays an essential role in how the male and female protagonists in *The Notebook* come together, little investigation has focused on how these class dynamics change and affect the outcome of their relationship. In terms of analyzing the themes in the novel, most literary critics concentrate on what can be referred to as standard thematic issues, including love, memory, and long-standing relationships, and pay less attention to the social relations that cause the characters' suffering (Waugh, 2006). Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by focusing on how social class affects the relationship between the two main characters, Noah and Allie, showing that class differences bring stress inside and outside the couple. Thus, while analyzing the depiction of social stratification in the novel, this study will help better understand how social structure affects individuals' interpersonal relationships in literature.

## 1.2 Identification of the Problems

This study examines Nicholas Sparks' novel *The Notebook*, which raises several important questions concerning the differentiation of social class among characters. The novel portrays a society deeply divided by economic and social status, where class distinctions dictate opportunities, interactions, and societal standing. Social class in the narrative is primarily categorized into three groups: the upper class, which are the capitalists or the moneyed class; the middle class, who have moderate capital and rank; and the lower class, or

the working class or the lowest stratum of society. The central conflict revolves around the love story between Noah, a working-class man, and Allie, a woman from a wealthy family.

The novel uses Noah and Allie's love story to show how socioeconomic status may control individuals' opportunities, limit their independence, and cause conflict in relationships. The thesis examines the novel's use of social class problems and their influence on human interactions. With Marxist theory, the study will examine how social class affects the interactions between the characters, more specifically the conflict between the Upper class (Allie's family) and the lower class (Noah). By examining these themes, the study aims to gain a better understanding of the larger implications of social class in literature and its impact on human relationships.

### 1.3 Review of Previous Studies

The author uses some literature related to this research, which has the same object of study but with different topics different objects but with the same problems. The aim is to add deeper insights and to justify the problem. The author read two articles and four theses from related research from different perspectives.

The first article relevant to this thesis on Mustofia discussed about *Allie's Agency in The Notebook*, is the background analysis of social pressure in the novel. In her work, she notes how Allie's actions are driven by her father's demands that she marries a man from the same social class. Although Mustofia has confined her area of study mainly within the scope of feminism, her insights regarding Allie's struggle against patriarchal oppression provide an unintentional reference to some sort of interaction with the given theme of social class, which is one aspect of the pressure Allie feels in her relationships.

In any case, the thesis on *The Notebook* has been summarized by Michelle Natasha, who uses Max Weber's Sociology of Literature Approach to study *the social class differences*



of the characters between Noah and Allie's families, specifically, what role social class plays in anticipating their love. In Natasha's opinion, social class is critical to maintaining the status of society: in this story, Allie's parents would never approve of Noah because he comes from a different class. This story shows that love triumphs over social status while the theme of social status reigns. The researcher points out that Noah's position can move from lower class to middle class as wealth develops, advancing the idea that social class issues can be quickly resolved with respect.

The third study is also relevant to the topic of Villeneuve's *The Beauty and the Beast* novel, written by Nazira Ezlyn from Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University and published in 2022. In this context, this thesis adopts a qualitative research method, in which Karl Marx's Social Class Theory is used along with a sociological perspective to assess the context of Villeneuve's *The Beauty and The Beast* film. This research will try to analyze the role of social class in the story to provide a Marxist perspective on society by determining the interactions between characters from different classes.

The fourth is a research by Inggrid Fauzi is a thesis from Andalas University, Indonesia, that deals with the work *Exploring Social Classes' Impacts to Romantic Relationship in Normal People* by Sally Rooney. The researchers used a method called qualitative research and considered Marxist thinking, while using the concepts of classism from Lois Tyson and the literature of the working class by Raymond Williams. The study sets out to observe how the characters' social classes influence both of them on their own and as a couple. Evidence helps prove that class-related differences affect both the behavior and emotions of families. It is in his university days that Connell, a working-class student, feels inferior and alone, while Marianne, being from an upperclass family, experiences only confidence and chances to move ahead in life. This suggests that, just like in Marx's theory, the problem of class difference is a big obstacle affecting their relationship.

The fifth relevant research, *Social Class Reflected on Tony Montana in Brian De Palma's Scarface* by Rizki Chaidier Hafiezd, M. Natsir, and Fatimah M., was published in 2021 by researchers from Mulawarman University. This research uses a qualitative method, using Karl Marx's sociological approach to examine how social class is portrayed as a central social phenomenon. The authors aim to show how social class becomes a driving force in the protagonist's life, shaping his aspirations to gain fame in society, love, and wealth. The film *Scarface* serves as the primary research object, with the character of Tony Montana representing the social dynamics analyzed by the researchers.

The sixth relevant research, *Marxism in Arthur Miller's The Death of a Salesman* by Enggar Juni Astuti, Fida Lusiana, and Dion Tira Erlangga from Mulawarman University, was published in 2022. This research uses a qualitative method and Karl Marx's sociological approach to analyze how the principles of Marxism are represented through the characters' lives, especially Willy Loman's family. This research illustrates how the Loman family embodies materialistic values, alienated from their true identity and community due to the capitalist system. This depiction aligns with Marx's theory of materialism, which states that capitalism fosters materialistic tendencies and alienates individuals from their humanity and relationships.

The seventh study by Muhammad Ali, Iskandar, and La Sunra (2023) in *Performance: Journal of English Education and Literature* examines the category of social class and prejudice in Solanas' *Upside-Down*, by analyzing Bourgeoisie and Proletariat through Karl Marx's perspective. Prior studies in this area largely focus on the following representations of the social class in the media, where the bourgeoisie enjoys power and freedom, whereas the proletariat struggles with poor economic situations, restricted educational opportunities as well as resource bases, thus reproducing discrimination. Extending this discourse, this paper examines how *UpsideDown* captures such classes and explains the social economical, and



psychological effects of discrimination on characters of these classes. This work joins the other works as a contribution in analyzing how this celluloid portraying real-world social stratification and the pernicious impacts of creating class divide on society gives novel insights to the significance of media works in sensationalizing and demystifying the social issues of the society.

The eighth study article of Manuela Indriati Siahaan and Robby Satria (2023) tries to explore *the representation of social class conflict in Nicholas Sparks' The Notebook* that employs sociological method for envisioning the distribution and transformation of society's class in the novel. Miner focuses on a situation where two men both fall in love with the same woman and how due to difference in status the two men develop tension and conflict of interest. The thesis analyses the effects of class differentiation above all, the division into the upper and the middle class using the principles of social class theory and sociology of literature. Thus, economic factors, as well as cultural and power aspects of social class, which the authors discuss, describe how the upper class's inability to recognize the middle class as one of their equals leads to social segregation. According to them, this bifurcation is virtually demonstrative of various relationship and attitude strifes in the characters, which are reminiscent of social themes surrounding the existence of class division. The conflict between the social classes is the main conflict of the study and is examined with the help of the sociological theories of Max Weber and Karl Marx.

The ninth study in the work of Aprilia Trianingtyas and Zuhurul Anam (2023), the text examines *working-class struggle against capitalist domination in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger*, with the Marxist critical approach. This paper expounds on the analysis and description of the oppressed working class and the dominant capitalist class in the Indian novel. It examines the ways in which the capitalist class wants to ensure they retain their dominance and social stability, and the working class, having been socially dominated throughout and

placed at a disadvantage, becomes emancipated. Marxist perspective is identified in the analysis with regard to ways through which the class of capitalists apply control over production resources to suppress the class of the lower working population, forcing class conflict as a form of rebellion. The authors of the text underscore that Adiga manages to represent an inherent antagonism of the capitalist model of the society and the suppression of the working population leading to their struggle for freedom.

Unlike previous investigations, this research looks at Social Class and Relationship using a Marxist approach. While some researchers examined *The Notebook* using feminism and the sociology of Max Weber, this paper only explores how social class shapes romantic relationships using Karl Marx's ideas and Fredric Jameson's Marxist theories. Alternatively, this thesis contrasts with Ingrid Fauzi's study which looks at class differences in Sally Rooney's *Normal People*, by focusing on how a culture of fixed differences between southern America's workers and wealthy populations shaped society in the 1940s. Unlike many other similar studies on *Scarface*, *The Death of a Salesman* and *Upside Down* films on class struggle, this work investigates the particular method by which unequal incomes affect the feelings shared by partners and, by extension, their level of compatibility. Hence, this study joins the field by exploring romance using Marxist theory and pointing out that social class impacts the emotional results of romances in *The Notebook*.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

The study of The Impacts of Social Class Seen in Nicholas Sparks' *The Notebook* addresses two main areas of analysis:

1. In what ways does Nicholas Sparks use *The Notebook* to depict social and economy status as a reflection of American society in the 1940s?

2. How does the Marxist interpretation of the novel show that issues of class struggle have influenced the main character's personal relationships, and describe the similarities and differences between this interpretation and previous non-Marxist interpretations of the text?

### 1.5 The Scope of the Research

Considering the novel *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks, this research addresses two main characters, Noah Calhoun and Allie Nelson, as two different classes that constantly create turning points in the novel. This is a social class conflict as Noah comes from the working class, having to endure a low income with little prospect of moving up, hence the restrictions. On the other hand, Allie is the child of a wealthy family: there are no material restrictions to what she wants to do or have. This reasoning guides this analysis that social class is an important feature that defines their relationship, the goals and problems they face, and how this represents the trajectory of their love relationship.

Furthermore, the study analyzes how social class affects the personal decisions and relationship struggle of Noah and Allie. The novel depicts aspects of social class, including, in part, unemployment, injustice, oppression, and the search for individual fulfillment and romance in the face of all odds. These issues are connected to other problems of social injustice and show how social pressure and one's status affect one's lives and interactions. Thus, this study identifies how the social class barrier becomes both a barrier and a mediator for the lovers Noah and Allie, and the ways in which it shapes the lives of individuals in a literary work.



## 1.6 The Objective of the Research

This research has the goals of approaching the issue of social and economic status representation in the novel *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks and its connection to the bigger picture of American society of 1940s. Particularly, this paper aims to examine how Sparks can be seen to exhibit the class system and social inequality disparities through the characterizations, scenes and conflicts stipulated in the plot, thus presenting a reflection of the socio-economic conditions at the time. In addition, the study shall examine how a Marxist approach to the novel may reveal the manner in which class conflict influences individual relationships, especially the love affair between Noah and Allie, since these two people have different social backgrounds. With the help of Marxist criticism, this paper is not only aimed at demonstrating the way in which the class disparities can interfere with emotional satisfaction and personal agency in romantic relationships, but also at contextualizing these results in the structure of overall socio-economical marriages. Also, this study attempts to draw parallels between Marxist interpretations and the earlier non-Marxist interpretations of *The Notebook* and, therefore, outlines both similarities and differences in the scholarly opinion regarding the way of constructing and understanding issues of class in the novel.

