

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

All men are equal in the sense of the equality in life, occupation and education. This notion means that all have right to acquire things they do not have. According to Park, mankind is a small part of the society whereas man always seeks “honor and dread ridicule, defer to public opinion, cherish their goods and their children and admire courage, generosity and success” (61). What the man seeks is often termed as ambition. The ambition of men is driven by their motives. These motives relate to the reason that men have in achieving everything in the perfect form. Driven by their motives men tend to use all means in getting what they want. As part of the society men are demanded to act according to agreement that has been made by the society. It means that men have right to get what they want and use all means to get. Nevertheless, as part of the society, men’s act is limited by values, norms, beliefs and such things in society.

The rule and limitation set off by the society are different to time and place. Sometimes, a thing that is considered good for certain time and place does not mean that it is also good for other. The limitation and rule, which are the result of the agreement in the society, do not work only for men but also for women. The limitation and rule adapt and adjust through time and place. For an example, the changing condition of women in the past and at the present. Now, women can perform themselves in public life. They have the same right as men in almost

every field. On the contrary, women in the past were not as lucky as the women today. In the past, they were not allowed to perform in public life. This happened because they were seen as weak and dependent creatures. Since women were considered as incapable of doing public matter, they were only taught of how to be a good wife and mother. Even more, at the early age they were told that only by marriage they could get what they wanted. It is ironic for the women at that time, in one side they had ambition to get thing like any other. On the other side, they had many limitations and rules when they tried to get what they wanted.

Nonetheless, women still have opportunity to pursue their want by using the means provided by the society in order to avoid the disharmony. The means provided is through marriage. Marriage is a sacred institution. It involves two individuals with different background and character. Since marriage is the only means, so women use it as a way to pursue their dream. According to Lerner, marriage is not only linked with love but also with financial competence, continuing elements of attractiveness, sexual compatibility and fulfillment (591). Apparently, marriage is no longer seen as a sacred institution that consists of values. It is also treated as a way to get material and status.

Marriage is one of the institutions existing in the society that consists of values. Therefore, the values in the society should be obeyed by every individual. Breaking the value is considered as against the society. Avoiding such problem, men as members of the society, tend to cope with it. It is what Edith Wharton in *The Custom of the Country* tries to reveal.

Edith Wharton is one of the satiric anatomies of American society in the first decade of the twentieth century. She was born as Edith Newbold Jones on January 24, 1862 to George Frederic and Lucretia Jones (Lawson 2). Her parents were descendants of English and Dutch colonists who became wealthy from their shipping, banking, and real estates business. They were considered as an aristocratic New York family. Even so, her parents did not send her to school as her brother. Instead, she educated herself by reading books from her father's library and received lesson from the governess. She had written many novels, such as; *The House of Mirth* (1905), *The Reef* (1912), *The Age of Innocence* (1920) which won the Pulitzer prize for fiction in 1920, and many others (Lawson 4).

Most of Edith Wharton novels were about the people and society in which she lived. One of her novels entitled *The Custom of the Country* was published in 1913. The novel captures the Americans, as ruthless in its social ambitions as in its business and politics. During that time, American society lacked the aristocratic tradition. Each of them competed to reach the top of the social ladder and position constantly to social fame. Wealth and leisure were also being the prerequisite to social advancement. Nevertheless, those were not a guarantee of one's acceptance into the higher class. People started to peer behind a mask, a false image of self, and felt of disillusion. The use of mask in the pretence of well-being leads to hypocrisy and morality (Horton 192). Morality based on the tradition of the new upper class, where it is considered that it is taboo for the upper class women to work.

The Custom of the Country follows the career of Undine Spragg, recently arrives in New York from Midwest. As an extraordinary ambitious woman, Undine uses her beneficial in appearance and sex. She determines to conquer the high society. Once she arrives, she starts making herself as part of the high class by attending every party. She is described as a glamorous, selfish, and manipulative woman. With her sights set on an advantageous marriage, she pursues her schemes in a world of shifting values, where triumph is swiftly followed by disillusion. Marriage remains the one institution through that she can exercise her will, marrying man after man, to get what she wants. Wharton tried to reveal ironic picture of social behaviour inside the doors of upper class America through Undine's character. This make Undine's character becomes more interesting, because she marries one man to another for such a luxurious life.

B. Statement of the Problems

In this novel, Edith Wharton made Undine as the portrayal of the American in 1913s. Her character can be said as the representation of the ambition of the people at that time. Here, the writer wants to know:

1. How does Undine Spragg, the main character, pursue her ambition?
2. How does Undine manipulate the social value of the marriage in order to marry an eligible man?

C. Objective of the Study

As it was mentioned before that Undine as the main character uses marriage to pursue her ambition. Here, the writer wants to reveal:

1. The motive of Undine in pursuing her ambition through marriage.
2. Undine manipulation in order to marry an eligible man..

D. Significance of the Study

The writer hopes that by knowing the society and the culture during the 1913s, especially in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of The Country*, would give a clearer picture about the motive of Undine in pursuing her ambition and the social value of the society that she tries to cope with in order to be able to marry an eligible man..

Nevertheless, the writer also hopes that this work would give some teaching to broaden the knowledge and understanding about the life and all that related to it during the time of 1913.

Eventually, the writer expects that this thesis would contribute something for further literary research in relation to the novel.

E. Scope and Limitation

This research is concentrated on the analysis of the main character, Undine Spragg, in Edith Wharton's novel entitled *The Custom of the Country* toward marriage in which she uses marriage to pursue her ambition. So, she will be able to live in a very luxurious way.

To obtain this purpose, the writer limits the focus of attention to the intrinsic elements of the story, namely setting, and characterization. The two elements are representative enough to relate one another to express the wholeness of impression. While the extrinsic element is focused on the life of people in the society which full of norms and values.

F. Theoretical Background

The intrinsic approach is used to analyse the motive of Undine Spragg in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*. The internal aspects, such as; character and setting, will be used to support the analysis that will answer the statement of the problems due to the main character.

However, to make the analysis more adequate and objective, sociological theory and approach are necessary. Talcott Parson's *Theory of Action* and sociological approach are used to support the analysis of the social influences; the society and the values of the Americans.

G. Method of the Study

Here, the writer uses the library research, since it is dealing with a work of fiction. The writer collects data and information, from various books on criticism and theories, encyclopaedias, articles and other printed material dealing with Edith Wharton's works, especially *The Custom of the Country*. The writer also does it in order to obtain materials and data for the literary theories and approaches.

The writer also uses the description of the problems in the work through the dialogues, events, actions within the story itself. The analysis will also be supported by other information in relation to the work. Then, the writer would specify the data which has the closest relationship to the main topic. The selective data is being cumulated and elaborated into descriptive analysis.

H. Definition of Key Terms:

- Ambition** : The drive to succeed or to gain fame, power, wealth, etc
- Aristocrat** : A person with the tastes, manners, beliefs, etc of the upper class .
- Divorce** : The action or an instance of legally dissolving a marriage.
- Marriage** : The state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law.
- Social advancement** :an attempt to gain a higher social position or acceptance in society

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK