



Social Stratification in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Gadis Pantai* Based on Max Weber's Theory

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-10-03 Revised: 2026-10-20 Accepted: 2026-10-20 Keywords: <i>social stratification;</i> <i>Gadis Pantai;</i> <i>Max Weber</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.12797 Corresponding Author: Ecel Pelia Lakadjo lakadjoececpelia@gmail.com Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program, Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo	<i>This study aims to (1) describe the forms of social stratification depicted in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel <i>Gadis Pantai</i>, and (2) analyze the influence of this social stratification on the social relationships among the characters in the novel. Social stratification is examined using Max Weber's theory, which views the layering of society through three forms, namely class, status, and power. This is a descriptive qualitative study using a sociology of literature approach. The research data consist of narration and dialogue among the characters in <i>Gadis Pantai</i> that display social stratification, and the data source is Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel <i>Gadis Pantai</i>. Data were collected through reading and note-taking techniques and were then analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results show that social stratification in <i>Gadis Pantai</i> is represented through social class differences that shape relationships among the characters in feudal Javanese society. Social stratification in the novel affects relationships among the characters, including dependency relationships between the lower and upper groups, resulting in social and psychological impacts on the main character in the form of social alienation, identity crisis, psychological pressure, and difficulty adapting to a new environment. Overall, <i>Gadis Pantai</i> shows that a hierarchical social system can affect a person's life socially, culturally, and psychologically.</i>

1. Introduction

Wealth is one of the main measures that distinguish individuals' social positions, so that people with abundant wealth tend to be classified as upper class, while those who live modestly fall into the lower class. The relationship between rich and poor groups shows differences in position within the social structure that form particular layers in society (Febriyanti et al., 2025). These differences relate to access to resources, social standing, and power held by particular individuals or groups, and refer to the concept of

social stratification, namely the division of society into layers based on certain criteria such as social status, wealth, education, and power (Natasari & Asriwandari, 2024).

Social stratification refers to the arrangement of individuals or groups into social layers according to differences in resources, social position, honor, and power. Such differences influence access to opportunities and shape the way individuals interact within society. In literary works, social stratification can be represented through characters, settings, conflicts, dialogue, and patterns of interaction. Literature can therefore function as a medium through which social structures and their effects on individuals become visible.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Gadis Pantai* presents a social world marked by hierarchical relations in Javanese society. The novel follows a village girl from a fishing community who is married to Bendoro, a priyayi with a considerably higher social position. The movement of the protagonist from a relatively simple village environment into the priyayi household exposes differences in economic resources, social recognition, cultural practices, and authority. The contrast between priyayi and wong cilik is consequently not limited to material conditions; it also determines how characters speak, behave, receive respect, and exercise authority.

Previous studies have examined *Gadis Pantai* from several perspectives. Nining (2019), for example, discusses social class discrimination in the novel through a Marxist perspective and highlights inequality between the upper and lower social groups. Stevi (2020) examines social phenomena in the novel from a sociological perspective. Farida and Andalas (2019) focus on the representation of socio-economic inequality between coastal and urban communities. Mardhatillah and Hayati (2023) also discuss the representation of Javanese social stratification in *Gadis Pantai*. These studies demonstrate that the novel contains substantial social issues, but the present study specifically approaches the text through Weber's multidimensional conception of class, status, and power.

Max Weber's theory is useful because social position cannot be reduced to economic ownership alone. In Weber's framework, class is related to economic opportunities and access to resources; status concerns social honor, prestige, lifestyle, and recognition; while party or power concerns the capacity to influence decisions and obtain compliance (Adnan, 2021; Weber, 2023). The three dimensions can overlap and reinforce one another. In *Gadis Pantai*, economic privilege, priyayi status, and authority are repeatedly connected in the formation of unequal relationships.

Based on this background, the study addresses two questions: (1) What forms of social stratification are represented in *Gadis Pantai*? and (2) How does social stratification influence social relationships among the characters? The study aims to describe the forms of social stratification and analyze their influence on character relationships. The study is expected to contribute to sociology of literature, particularly research concerning the representation of social hierarchy through Weber's class, status, and power dimensions.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method with a sociology of literature approach. The qualitative method was selected because the research focuses on interpreting meanings, social representations, and relationships between social structures and literary texts rather than measuring numerical variables (Fadli, 2021;

Yuliani, 2019). The sociology of literature approach was used to examine the social relations represented through the characters and events in *Gadis Pantai*, while Weber's theory of social stratification served as the analytical framework.

The primary source was *Gadis Pantai* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. The data consisted of narrative passages, dialogues, and events that indicate social stratification and its effects on relationships among characters. The data were selected when they represented differences in economic position, social honor or status, authority, domination, dependence, inequality, or the relationship between priyayi and wong cilik.

Data were collected through reading and note-taking. The novel was read repeatedly to understand its storyline, characters, social setting, and interactions. Relevant passages were then recorded and grouped according to the research focus. This process yielded 72 data, namely 30 data on the forms of social stratification and 42 data on the influence of social stratification on relationships among characters. Data analysis proceeded through four main analytical operations: identification of relevant data, classification according to Weber's class, status, and power dimensions, contextual interpretation of the passages, and formulation of conclusions. Representative quotations were selected to demonstrate how the social structure operates in the novel.

3. Result

The analysis yielded 72 data in total, consisting of 30 data on the forms of social stratification and 42 data on the influence of social stratification on relationships among characters. The 30 data on forms of stratification were classified into three forms according to Weber, namely economic class, social status, and power, with 10 data each (Table 1). The 42 data on the influence of stratification consist of dominative relations (10 data), dependency relations (10 data), inequality relations (7 data), priyayi-wong cilik relations (8 data), and social and psychological impacts on the main character (7 data) (Table 2).

Table 1. Forms of Social Stratification

Form of stratification	Main indicators	Number of data	Social implication
Economic class	Wealth, residence, clothing, occupation, food, access to facilities	10	Creates material distance between priyayi and wong cilik
Social status	Titles, honor, manners, language, lineage, recognition	10	Creates prestige and symbolic distance
Power	Authority, decision-making, control, commands, permission	10	Creates domination and patterns of compliance
Total		30	

A. Economic Class

Economic class is represented through sharp differences in material life between the priyayi environment and the fishing community. One representative passage states, "Tubuhnya dibalut kain dan kebaya yang tak pernah diimpikannya bakal punya" [Her body was draped in a cloth and kebaya that she had never dreamed of owning] (Toer, 2000:2). The clothing is meaningful because it is presented as something outside *Gadis Pantai*'s previous economic experience. Similarly, the description of a thin gold necklace

(Toer, 2000:2) signifies access to material goods associated with the upper social environment.

The contrast becomes clearer in the depiction of the lower community: “Kami orang-orang miskin saja, setahun sekali saja makan nasi. Biasanya kami makan jagung” [We are just poor people; we eat rice only once a year. Usually we eat corn] (Toer, 2000:185). The statement explicitly identifies poverty and shows that food consumption itself can become an indicator of economic position. The difference between rice as an occasional food and corn as an ordinary staple illustrates unequal access to material resources.

The class distinction is therefore represented not merely by possession of wealth but by different life opportunities and everyday experiences. The priyayi environment offers facilities, clothing, food, and living conditions that are unfamiliar to Gadis Pantai. Her movement into that environment creates a form of cultural and social dislocation because her previous habits and resources no longer correspond to the new setting.

B. Social Status

Social status is represented through honor, titles, manners, language, lineage, and social recognition. One example is the address “Terima kasih, Bendoro Putri” [Thank you, Bendoro Putri] (Toer, 2000:140). The title “Bendoro Putri” marks a socially recognized position and distinguishes the person addressed from ordinary members of the community. The status is not only verbal; it is reinforced through bodily behavior and social etiquette.

Another passage describes how a person’s face is met with a lowered gaze and a smile (Toer, 2000:140). Such behavior indicates that recognition of social rank is embodied in everyday interaction. The novel also links status to lineage through references to being the child of a priyayi (Toer, 2000:7). This suggests that social position can be inherited or attached to family origin, making status a relatively durable category within the feudal social structure.

Status also influences the interpretation of marriage. The novel contrasts the experience of ordinary people with that of major priyayi: “Bagi orang kebanyakan seperti saya ini, kita kawin supaya semakin menjadi susah. Tentu beda dengan para priyayi besar, mereka kawin supaya jadi senang” [For ordinary people like me, we marry only to become even more miserable. It is certainly different for the great priyayi; they marry to be happy] (Toer, 2000:41). The contrast indicates that social groups attach different meanings to the same institution according to their position and experience.

C. Power

Power is represented through the ability of higher-status characters, especially Bendoro, to determine decisions, regulate conduct, and influence the lives of others. A representative statement reads, “Mana aku tahu? Itu urusan Bendoro” [How would I know? That is Bendoro’s business] (Toer, 2000:7). The statement positions Bendoro as the recognized center of authority. Decisions are treated as matters belonging to him rather than matters that can be negotiated equally by everyone.

Power also appears in restrictions on speech and participation: “Di sini yang boleh terdengar hanya suara pembesar yang datang bertamu ke mari. Dan Bendoro sendiri tentu” [Here, the only voices that may be heard are those of the dignitaries who come to visit here. And Bendoro himself, of course] (Toer, 2000:8). The passage indicates unequal

access to the social space of speaking and being heard. The authority of the priyayi is therefore reproduced not only through explicit commands but also through rules governing interaction.

The extent of Bendoro's influence is further expressed in the statement, "Kalau kita salah pada Bendoro, di mana pun kita bakal dapat kesusahan" [If we wrong Bendoro, wherever we go we will find trouble] (Toer, 2000:50). Fear of consequences encourages people to regulate their own behavior and avoid conflict. Power thus becomes a mechanism of social control that reaches beyond formal decisions into everyday conduct.

D. Influence of Social Stratification on Social Relationships

The influence of social stratification on relationships among characters was found in 42 data classified into five categories, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Influence of Social Stratification on Social Relationships

Pattern of relationship	Representation in the novel	Number of data	Impact
Domination	Higher-status characters direct or control lower-status characters	10	Interaction becomes hierarchical and unequal
Dependence	Lower-status characters rely on decisions and protection from higher-status figures	10	Autonomy becomes limited
Inequality	Different rights, treatment, and opportunities follow social position	7	Social distance is reproduced
Priyayi–wong cilik relation	Social identity determines forms of address, behavior, and access	8	Interactions follow established hierarchy
Social and psychological impact	Status transition separates Gadis Pantai from familiar social environment	7	Alienation, identity disruption, pressure, and adaptation difficulties
Total		42	

4. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the three dimensions of Weberian stratification operate together rather than as isolated categories. Economic class provides material differences, social status gives those differences symbolic recognition, and power enables the higher social group to maintain authority over others. The relationship between these dimensions is especially visible in the position of Bendoro. His priyayi status is accompanied by material privilege and authority, while Gadis Pantai enters the household from a lower economic and social position (Faruk, 2021; Weber, 2023).

The representation of economic class is consistent with the earlier finding that *Gadis Pantai* contains a strong contrast between coastal poverty and the more privileged social environment. Farida and Andalas (2019) identify socio-economic inequality as an important aspect of the novel. The present study extends that observation by interpreting material differences as one dimension of Weberian stratification and by connecting them to status and power. Clothing, food, residence, and access to facilities are not simply

descriptive details; within the social structure of the novel, they function as visible signs of different life opportunities.

The findings concerning status also complement previous sociological readings of the novel. Status is reproduced through titles, forms of address, manners, language, lineage, and public recognition. This means that social hierarchy is maintained symbolically as well as materially. A character may experience a change in material environment after entering a priyayi household, but the new status does not automatically erase the cultural distance between the character's previous identity and the expectations of the new social group.

Power provides the clearest mechanism through which stratification affects interpersonal relations. The authority associated with Bendoro enables him to make decisions that affect other characters and to establish boundaries around their actions. In Weberian terms, the issue is not simply that one character possesses greater resources, but that the social relationship creates opportunities for one side to obtain compliance from the other. The dominance described in the novel is consequently connected to recognized status and institutionalized social expectations.

The influence of stratification is especially evident in the relationship between Bendoro and Gadis Pantai. Their interaction is not symmetrical. The lower position of Gadis Pantai limits her freedom to determine social encounters, express disagreement, and shape decisions affecting her life. This corresponds to the finding that stratification produces dominative relationships in which directions predominantly move from the higher position to the lower one. The pattern is reinforced by language, etiquette, and fear of consequences.

Dependence is another consequence. Lower-status characters often have to adjust their conduct to decisions made by those with greater authority. Dependence is not necessarily expressed through a single explicit command; it can appear through expectations that characters should seek permission, follow established rules, or avoid actions that might offend the powerful. The social structure consequently becomes part of everyday behavior.

The distinction between priyayi and wong cilik also demonstrates that stratification is relational. A social category becomes meaningful because it is recognized in relation to another category. The identity of the priyayi is reinforced by the presence of ordinary people who are expected to show respect, while the position of wong cilik is marked by restricted access and limited authority. This relational character explains why the novel repeatedly presents social distance through speech, bodily behavior, titles, and access to spaces.

Finally, stratification affects the protagonist beyond her external social position. The novel depicts the loss of a familiar world, separation from previous social ties, pressure to adapt to a new environment, and difficulty negotiating a changed identity. Thus, the effects of stratification are social and psychological at the same time. This finding supports the broader sociology-of-literature perspective that social structures represented in literary texts can shape not only public relationships but also characters' experiences of themselves and their surroundings.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that social stratification in *Gadis Pantai* is represented through economic class, social status, and power in accordance with Max Weber's multidimensional framework. Economic class appears through differences in wealth, residence, occupation, clothing, food, and access to facilities between priyayi and wong cilik. Social status is represented through titles, honor, manners, language, lineage, and social recognition. Power is represented through the authority of higher-status figures, particularly Bendoro, to make decisions, regulate conduct, and influence other characters.

These forms of stratification influence social relationships by producing domination, dependence, inequality, and hierarchical interaction between priyayi and wong cilik. The stratified structure also affects *Gadis Pantai* through social alienation, disruption of identity, psychological pressure, and difficulties in adapting to a new social environment. The findings indicate that the novel represents stratification as a multidimensional social structure in which economic resources, social honor, and power mutually reinforce unequal relationships.

Future studies may examine *Gadis Pantai* through other sociological perspectives or investigate related issues such as social mobility, gender relations, discrimination, hegemony, or social injustice. The novel can also be used in literature teaching to encourage students to connect literary representation with critical understanding of social relations.

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