



## Pierre Bourdieu's Capital: A Sociological Reading of Simin Daneshvar's Female Characters

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### Abstract

The Modernisation of societies resulted in the emergence of the novel which truthfully reflects the society. This article tries to analyse women's social position in the society, before the Islamic revolution, through a sociological reading of Simin Daneshvar's novels, including *Suvashun* (1969), *Wander Island (Jazireh-e Sargardani)* (1993), and *Wandering Cameleer (Sarban-e Sargardan)* (2001). Simin Daneshvar is among the most prominent contemporary novelists. Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, philosopher, anthropologist, and critic views capital not only in term of economics but also from other perspectives such as culture, social life, and symbolism. In this comparative study, we have analysed the influence of capital in the lives of the female characters of each story and explored the degree to which they managed to increase it. The present article reveals that women are not very successful in acquiring all kinds of capital. Zari and Hasti, the main activists of the stories, are comparatively more prosperous than other women. They both represent ideal women in their societies; Hasti, who lives three decades after Zari, has more concrete cultural and social capital and is more dynamic in acquiring economic capital.

**Keywords:** Pierre Bourdieu, Simin Daneshvar, Socio-criticism, Contemporary Novels, and Women's Capital

### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

Compared to other types of literature, fictional literature – especially the novel – is more efficient and relatively more popular, not only because they have special features in developing topics, incidents, and characterization, but also

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because they reflect the prevailing atmosphere of the society in a more efficient way. The novel appeared as a result of the modernisation of societies and can plausibly and convincingly reflect their facts and cultures.

In contemporary Persian fiction, there are various manifestations of the role of women in the society, including the production of culture, adherence to or freedom from traditions, modernism, education, and scientific progress. Also, female identity, revitalization, gender-related discourses, the need for modern education, women's language, housekeeping, and similar topics are all presented in the form of various roles in the family. In this regard, many studies have been conducted in women's studies – an interdisciplinary field that is closely related to sociology. The sociology of literature is a scientific analysis of a literary work that assesses events, relationships, and phenomena in accordance with the principles of sociology and examines literature not in terms of aesthetics but as a content-oriented work.

Considering that the contemporary Persian story reflects the dominant atmosphere of the real society of Iran, the sociological examination of these works will be quite useful in understanding the social facts of the time. Therefore, this research examines the capitals of female characters in Simin Daneshvar's novels, using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Pierre Bourdieu not only coined many terminologies in social sciences but also redefined many existing technical terms in the field. He discusses capital not only in term of economics but also from other perspectives such as culture, social life, and symbolism. Habits, field, and capital are Bourdieu's key concepts. Habits are stable characteristics that a person internalises in the process of socialisation in accordance with his or her social position. The field is the power that imposes its specific decisions on those who enter it, and anyone who wants to enter the field must bring a minimum amount of capital. Here, capital is the most important factor that stands out in the field and, in a sense, defines the boundaries of a field and plays an important role in it. Economic capital is the capital that is measured in accordance with a person's benefit from financial enterprises and can be in the form of the owner's rights. Bourdieu considers cultural capital in addition to education, habits and skills, talent, ability, and educational efficiency, and considers three types of cultural capital: embodied cultural capital, institutionalised cultural capital, and objectified cultural capital. A person's social capital is derived from his or her interactions with the network of his or her relationships. Symbolic capital is any type of capital that community members understand, recognize, and value. Bourdieu's theories have been highly influential in the sociological studies of works of literature.

### **3. Methodology**

In the first step, in a thorough study of the novel, the capitals of the female characters are explored and categorized in accordance with the theory of Pierre Bourdieu's types of capital. Then, in order to determine the extent of their transformation and, accordingly, the change of position and status of the women in Daneshvar's novels, we will compare and contrast the ways the female protagonists of the stories enjoy and explore the creation, recreation, and transformation of the capitals in the society. In the next stage, keeping in mind the research questions, we analyze the data on the way Simin Daneshvar has created her major female characters, their outstanding features, which make them different from common women in her contemporary society, the way they confront various challenges, what makes them superior to others, and most importantly, what goals she is pursuing.

### **4. Discussion and Analysis**

The article shows that women have not been very successful in acquiring all kinds of capital. Zari and Hasti, the main activists of the stories, are comparatively more prosperous than other women. They both represent ideal women in their societies; Hasti, who lives three decades after Zari, has more tangible cultural and social capital and is more dynamic in acquiring economic capital.

### **5. Conclusion**

After analysing the female characters' capital in the selected novels, we focus on two women: Zari, who typifies women in the 1940s, and Hasti, who represents women in the 1970s. Their unique characteristics distinguish them from their contemporaries. They both possess a decent amount of cultural and social capital which makes them stand out from common woman and positions them in a higher social status. It must be added that Hasti has more concrete cultural and social capital and is more dynamic in acquiring economic capital. The novels, however, reveal that possessing economic capital does not necessarily help women to acquire other forms of capital. Neither aristocratic women in the novel are able to possess other forms of capital, nor Hasti, due to her economic problems, is deprived of them. Daneshvar has tried to portray her female characters in accordance with the social facts embedded in each novel in order to conceptualise her own understanding of the 'ideal woman' as a person who climbs the social ladder through cultural and social capital. Daneshvar's 'ideal woman' returns to the society as a guiding beacon for other women and keeps the dialogue between the novel and the society alive.

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