



Social Practices of Marginal Class Characters in Brian Khrisna's Novel *Sisi Tergelap Surga* According to Bourdieu's Perspective

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BSTRACT

The novel "The Dark Side of Heaven," published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama (2023), tells a realistic and emotional story about the struggles of life on the outskirts of Jakarta. The book tells the story of 18 characters living behind the glitz and glamour of the capital, highlighting the dark side of poverty, betrayal, and hope. This study examines the social practices of marginalized class characters in the novel *Sisi Tergelap Surga* using Bourdieu's perspective. This novel depicts the lives of marginalized class communities in the suburbs of Jakarta who are faced with economic limitations, social alienation, and the dominance of power structures that limit their space for movement. The purpose of this study is to describe the social practices of marginalized class characters influenced by habitus and capital ownership that can become survival strategies in the novel. This study uses Bourdieu's sociology of literature approach. The research data sources are quotations from the novel *Sisi Tergelap Surga* by Brian Khrisna, published in 2023. The data collection technique was carried out through documentation, with data analysis using the Miles and Huberman flow model. The results of the study indicate that habitus and capital ownership are interrelated in shaping the social practices of marginalized class characters as survival strategies. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the social practices of marginalized class characters are formed through habitus and capital ownership in facing unbalanced social conditions.

Keywords: social practices, marginal class, characters, novel

Praktik Sosial Tokoh Kelas Marginal dalam Novel *Sisi Tergelap Surga* Karya Brian Khrisna Menurut Perspektif Bourdieu

ABSTRAK

Novel *Sisi Gelap Surga* diterbitkan oleh Gramedia Pustaka Utama (2023), mengangkat kisah realistik dan emosional tentang perjuangan hidup masyarakat pinggiran di Jakarta. Buku ini menarasikan 18 karakter yang hidup di balik gemerlap ibu kota, menyoroti sisi gelap kemiskinan, pengkhianatan, dan harapan. Penelitian ini membahas praktik sosial tokoh-tokoh kelas marginal dalam novel *Sisi Tergelap Surga* menggunakan perspektif Bourdieu. Novel ini menggambarkan kehidupan masyarakat kelas marginal di wilayah pinggiran kota Jakarta yang dihadapkan pada keterbatasan ekonomi, keterasingan sosial, serta dominasi struktur kekuasaan yang membatasi ruang gerak mereka. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan praktik sosial tokoh kelas marginal yang dipengaruhi oleh habitus dan kepemilikan modal yang dapat menjadi strategi bertahan hidup dalam novel tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi sastra Bourdieu. Sumber data penelitian berupa kutipan dalam novel *Sisi Tergelap Surga* karya Brian Khrisna yang diterbitkan pada tahun 2023. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui dokumentasi, dengan analisis data menggunakan model alir Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa habitus dan kepemilikan modal saling berkaitan dalam membentuk praktik sosial tokoh-tokoh kelas marginal sebagai strategi bertahan hidup. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian ini, dapat disimpulkan bahwa praktik sosial tokoh-tokoh kelas marginal terbentuk melalui habitus dan kepemilikan modal dalam menghadapi kondisi sosial yang tidak seimbang.

Kata kunci: praktik sosial, tokoh, kelas marginal, novel

Submitted
13/01/2026

Accepted
21/01/2026

Published
23/01/2026

Citation	Dinna, N. R., & Ahmadi, A. (2026). Social Practices of Marginal Class Characters in Brian Khrisna's Novel <i>Sisi Tergelap Surga</i> According to Bourdieu's Perspective. <i>Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra</i> , Volume 5, Nomor 1, Januari 2026, 619-626. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v5i1.1191
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Publisher
Raja Zulkarnain Education Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary urban novels that highlight the lives of marginalized classes represent a growing social dynamic in modern society (Zulfandi, 2024). This marginalized class phenomenon is common in everyday life and is often marginalized from social life because it is identified with small groups. Scavengers, clowns, janitors, and other individuals who work for low wages are examples of marginalized groups.

People in this marginalized class lack sufficient capital to compete in social life (Fatichah & Febrianto, 2025). They seek various means to survive in unfavorable social conditions. This becomes a social problem in society because this marginalized class is hampered in achieving a decent life due to limited capital.

The lives of Danang and the three children of Pak Badut Ayam in Brian Khrisna's novel "The Darkest Side of Heaven" represent a social life maintained by utilizing the capital they have in the metropolitan city of Jakarta. This marginalized class must survive and work hard in the capital, which is seen as a center of high-income life (Subandiyah et al., 2025). They sacrifice various things to maintain their survival, even though the process is not easy.

The phenomena found in this novel are part of the study of the sociology of literature. Social inequality is a form of social dynamics that influences people's lives and shapes social structures (Watif et al., 2024). Lower-class people experience difficulties in accessing various resources, so they are accustomed to having to work harder to obtain the things they desire. This also becomes a survival strategy for the marginalized class.

In the study of the sociology of literature, Bourdieu considers literary works to be products born of specific social structures (Bourdieu, 2005). This shows that literary works and social life are closely related. Experiences and actions are interconnected, shaping individual behavior in society. Furthermore, this behavior shapes the social structure as a meeting place for various interests within it. In the study of the sociology of literature, according to Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1993), habitus and

capital ownership can be used to analyze the power dynamics in literary works that are formed within a social environment.

Habitus is a person's mindset, habits, and how they respond to various problems in life (Bourdieu, 1996). Habitus is formed from life experiences that shape certain tendencies and influence individual actions in facing the realities of life. Furthermore, habitus also functions as a strategy used by characters to survive, maintain dignity, and gain recognition in society.

Meanwhile, capital ownership is a resource possessed by an individual or group of people to survive in social life (Bourdieu, 1996). Capital is divided into four types: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. These capitals are interrelated and function as resources utilized by individuals to survive in harsh environments. This study focuses on the economic and cultural capital used as a survival strategy by the characters Danang and the three children of Pak Badut Ayam.

Economic capital can take the form of money or wealth owned by an individual. Furthermore, economic capital is also evident in the jobs held by the characters. These jobs serve as a source of income that marginalized characters utilize to meet their living needs. Meanwhile, cultural capital consists of the education and skills possessed by individuals. Cultural capital in the form of education can be acquired through formal or informal education. Skills, on the other hand, are acquired through everyday life experiences.

Based on the above background, the research problem can be formulated as follows: (1) What is the habitus of marginalized characters in the novel? And (2) How are economic and cultural capital used as survival strategies by marginalized characters in the novel?

The objectives of this research are, first, to describe the representation of the habitus of marginalized characters in the novel *The Darkest Side of Heaven*. Second, to describe the forms of capital possessed by the marginalized class in the novel *The Darkest Side of Heaven* as a form of survival strategy for marginalized characters in the novel *The Darkest Side of Heaven*.



This research is expected to contribute to the development of literary studies, particularly in the field of literary sociology, by applying the concept of habitus and the ownership of economic and cultural capital as social survival strategies according to Bourdieu to contemporary urban novels. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide a theoretical foundation for future researchers. Furthermore, this research is expected to enhance critical understanding and foster social sensitivity to the inequalities that persist in society.

Previous research relevant to this study will be described as follows. The first study was conducted by Kepakisan and Aji in 2023. The results of the study (Kepakisan & Aji, 2023) found a structuring of power and symbolic violence encompassing four capital resources of power according to Bourdieu. This study, in contrast to the author's research, utilizes Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Literature theory.

The second study was conducted by Sulistyowati and Surana in 2021 using qualitative descriptive methods. The results of the study (Sulistyowati & Surana, 2021) explore the manifestations of social phenomena in the lives of the characters in the novel *Mulih Ndesa*. This study uses Bourdieu's perspective, namely based on habitus, arena, capital, and social practice.

The third study was conducted by Sofiana and Apriyanti in 2025 using qualitative descriptive methods. This study used Bourdieu's perspective. The results of the study (Sofiana & Apriyani, 2025) were three interrelated lifestyle configurations: independent, simple, and modern, which emerged from the interaction between limited economic capital, high cultural capital as high-achieving students, and symbolic capital derived from modern religious imagery.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method to interpret the discussion in depth (Waruwu, 2024) because the object of the study is a novel. The data source used in this study is the novel "The Darkest Side of Heaven" by Brian Khrisna, published in 2023. This novel was published by Gramedia

Pustakan Utama. The data used are dialogues between characters and narratives relevant to the research. Data analysis uses Bourdieu's perspective in examining the relationship between habitus and capital ownership as a survival strategy for marginalized class characters in the novel. The results of the study are presented in the form of data in the form of speech and behavior of characters in the novel, analyzed with attention to cultural and social backgrounds.

The data collection technique is a documentary technique (Ahmadi, 2021) by reading and marking important sections relevant to the research. This technique allows researchers to dig deeper into information related to literary works based on the predetermined focus of the study. There are four stages in data collection: (1) the researcher reads and marks important sections; (2) the researcher identifies relevant findings; (3) the researcher classifies the obtained data according to the problem formulation; (4) The researcher validated the data with the relevant authorities to ensure its validity.

The data analysis in this study used the flow model by Miles and Huberman (in Ahmadi, 2019). This model is divided into three stages: selecting and grouping the collected data, analyzing and interpreting the data by linking the narrative in the novel to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of literary sociology, and formulating conclusions based on the interpretations. According to Ahmadi (2019), the data validity technique involves data triangulation with three types of validation: data examination by the researcher by rereading the data according to the research focus, examination of the research data sources, theoretical framework, and relevant research references by colleagues who are experts in the field of literary sociology to obtain suggestions for the research that has been compiled, and examination by lecturers who are experts in the field of literary sociology.

RESULTS

This research yields findings related to the social dynamics in Brian Khrisna's novel *The Darkest Side of Heaven* through the application

of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory of literature. These findings are structured based on the research problem formulation and presented descriptively. The following are the results of the research on marginalized classes in the novel:

1. Habitus

The results indicate that the characters' habitus in the novel can be identified through their dialogue and attitudes in social interactions depicted in the narrative. The habitus analysis in this section focuses on the life experiences that shape the characters' perspectives on themselves and others, as well as the tendencies that influence their choices. The following data demonstrates the habitus of the character Danang, formed by the demands of living expenses.

"No! Your work is hard. You're only a junior high school graduate, so you have to work hard. The salary is also small. You're a graduate. You have to find a good job. One in an office, one with air conditioning, neat clothes, and hanging out with smart people."

It hurt. Danang's heart ached when those words came out of his mouth. He swore to himself that his younger sibling should never experience the hardships Danang endures to survive. His younger sibling had to live without knowing the cruelty of the world Danang now finds himself in. (Khrisna, 2023: 126)

This data shows that Danang's habitus is shaped by harsh life experiences and limitations. Danang's educational background, with only a junior high school diploma, places him in a weak social position, allowing him to only access low-paying, menial jobs. This situation shapes Danang's mindset that he must work hard to support himself and his family. Danang's statement to his younger sibling demonstrates his desire to protect her from a harsh and stressful world. Furthermore, the habitus formed by a harsh social environment is also reflected in the character of Ratih, one of Pak Badut Ayam's children, in the following data.

Ratih obtains school supplies cheaply. Sometimes she picks them up off the classroom floor, from unknown sources. If she finds more

than one, she always gives them to her younger siblings. Her shoes are loose, so they can be worn for years to come. To compensate for this looseness, Ratih usually stuffs the toes with old newspapers. Sometimes, when she was short on money and food, Ratih would come home with a mango she'd picked from the tree behind the school to share. Ina and Erlin each got half, while Ratih ate the remaining flesh, including the pit. (Khrisna, 2023:189)

The data shows that Ratih's habitus is shaped by her experiences living under economic constraints, allowing her to think creatively to survive. This is evident in Ratih's actions, such as picking up school supplies dropped in the classroom when the owners are absent. Furthermore, Ratih wears shoes that are too large to last for years by stuffing the toes with old newspapers. These actions stem from social conditions that prevent Ratih from obtaining adequate school supplies.

2. Capital Ownership

The results of this study indicate that the economic and cultural capital possessed by marginalized class characters is used as a survival strategy in these limited circumstances.

2.1 Economic Capital

Economic capital in the form of money or employment can be used by marginalized class characters as a survival strategy. The following is data on Danang's economic capital ownership in the novel.

On the other hand, if he's very lucky, Danang will get clients from an app installed on his phone. Once he gets a client, Danang won't be asked to dress up as a woman, but rather as a man. Yes, he'll be used as a bottom, or vice versa. (Khrisna, 2023:124)

This data shows that Danang has financial capital gained from his work as a male sex worker, sometimes transforming into a woman at the request of a client. This work serves as his primary source of income to meet his daily needs. Furthermore, Danang also works to finance his



younger sibling's education, who is currently attending college. This situation indicates that Danang is in a limited economic position, requiring him to exchange his body for money. Furthermore, one of Pak Badut Ayam's children, Ina, has to contribute to the family's finances despite her young age, as shown in the following data.

Ina always wakes up at dawn and goes to a small shop at the end of the village. She picks up a thermos of popsicles, almost half her body size. Then, deftly, she leaves the popsicles at stalls and vegetable vendors. Fortunately, they don't sell much, only 200 rupiah each. A small change that is sometimes thrown away by the well-off. (Khrisna, 2023: 188)

This data shows that Ina has economic capital derived from selling popsicles. Ina usually wakes up at dawn and goes to the stall at the end of her village to pick up a thermos filled with popsicles. Ina leaves the popsicles at stalls and vegetable vendors. Although the income from the popsicle sales is not much, Ina is always grateful because it allows her to supplement her family's income while they are struggling to survive.

2.2 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital takes the form of formal education or skills possessed by an individual that are used as survival strategies. Cultural capital in the form of education can be acquired through formal or informal education. Meanwhile, skills are acquired through everyday life experiences. The following data is found in the novel.

"We were shocked, because we knew Bang Danang did this kind of work. But Bang Danang explained, saying he didn't have any clients that day, so he could pray without needing a ritual bath. Then, stupidly, Pulung asked Bang Danang why he was praying. Isn't it true that people like us don't have their prayers accepted? But Bang Danang explained that God's business is vertical, upward. How we treat others is horizontal. So, God's business is with ourselves. No matter how sinful you are, pray anyway. Whether your prayers are accepted or not is no longer a human matter, it's God's business. Just keep praying. That's what

he said. In the end, the four of us prayed together. Bang Danang became the imam." (Khrisna, 2023: 140)

This data shows that Danang possesses cultural capital in the form of religious knowledge that has influenced his life. This was evident when he emphasized to the three teenagers at the guard post that prayer is an obligation that must be carried out above all other interests. Danang explained that prayer is a vertical relationship with God, so it must be performed even if one has many sins. Furthermore, Danang invited the three teenagers at the guard post to perform congregational prayers with him as the imam. This action demonstrated that Danang still upholds religious values. Furthermore, the following data shows that Mr. Badut Ayam's three children are still in school, aiming to change their lives for the future.

Ratih, the eldest, shook her head. "Not yet, Bro." Her high school final exams were only a few months away, so Ratih had to focus on her textbooks under the dim light of a reluctantly lit bulb.

Gofar entered carrying two packages of spring rolls. Ina, the youngest, who is still in elementary school, immediately greeted them happily, but Ratih immediately reminded him to save one package for her father.

While they were enjoying the spring rolls, Erlin, the middle child, who is still in junior high, touched Ratih's shoulder. She didn't speak, looking down at her feet. (Khrisna, 2023: 182)

The data shows that Ratih, Erlin, and Ina possess cultural capital in the form of formal education, which they continue to pursue despite their families' limited economic circumstances. This is evident in Ratih's focus on studying for her final high school exams. Ina, who is still in elementary school, and Erlin, who is still in junior high school. These three children of Pak Badut Ayam (Chicken Clown) are determined to continue their education, despite the economic pressures and uncertainties of daily life.

DISCUSSION

The habitus portrayed through the characters of Sobirin and Tomi confirms Bourdieu's (1993)

view that habitus is a system of dispositions formed through life experiences and specific social conditions. In the context of Danang, working as a male sex worker is a survival strategy against a social structure that is not in his favor. Danang must earn money for his sister's survival and education, so he does whatever he can to earn money.

This aligns with the reality of life where many marginalized groups still work as prostitutes to survive in unequal social conditions (Persada & Legowo, 2021). Thus, Danang's thought patterns and actions reflect a habitus shaped by unfavorable life experiences, forcing him to do whatever it takes to maintain his and his family's survival.

Meanwhile, Rani's habitus demonstrates a different form of adaptation. Ratih's act of bringing mangoes from behind the school to eat with her younger siblings at home when she has no money for food demonstrates a frugal lifestyle. Ratih only eats the remaining mango flesh, including the pit, while she gives the rest of the fruit to her younger siblings. This reflects Ratih's habitus, which is shaped by the demands of life, prioritizing family survival over personal needs. This aligns with the social reality of lower-class Indonesians, where marginalized communities must make daily adjustments due to structural poverty and urbanization (Kadir & Macpal, 2025). Thus, the experience of living with limitations shapes Ratih's way of thinking and acting.

The ownership of capital in the novel is reflected in the actions of marginalized characters in maintaining their lives. Economic and cultural capital serve as survival strategies employed by marginalized characters in harsh environments. The economic capital of the marginalized characters in the novel is minimal, unstable, and heavily dependent on the informal sector. This condition aligns with Bourdieu's (1993) view that economic capital is the primary resource determining an individual's position in the social environment.

The character Danang possesses economic capital in the form of work as a commercial sex

worker, a survival strategy due to his lack of access to decent employment due to limited education. Danang's actions reflect the social reality in Indonesia. Structural poverty and limited access to formal employment push some marginalized communities into risky work (Dimas et al., 2024). Unfriendly employment opportunities force them to sell their labor, time, and even their bodies as a means of survival. Thus, Danang's economic capital forces him to take on risky work for the sake of his survival.

Meanwhile, Ina's economic capital demonstrates another aspect of the reality of the marginalized class. Ina's actions reflect the social reality of marginalized communities in Indonesia. Early childhood is forced to work to support the family economy due to structural poverty (Awalokita et al., 2025). This situation makes it difficult for children to access education and better life opportunities. This situation demonstrates that Ina's economic capital is small and unstable, yet it remains a pillar of her family's survival.

The cultural capital of marginalized community leaders plays a crucial role as a survival strategy. Formal education can be a survival strategy in the face of social imbalance. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1993) concept that Danang possesses cultural capital from his formal education at the Islamic boarding school, which he still holds dear in his life. Danang's religious knowledge serves as a means to maintain his honor in an environment that often negatively views others' lifestyles. In marginalized communities in Indonesia, religious values are often held in high regard because they are seen as providing moral reinforcement that God still governs their lives (Nabilah, N.A. & Darmaningrum, 2023). Thus, Danang's cultural capital, in the form of religious understanding, helps him maintain his social standing. This positively impacts his relationships with local residents.

Meanwhile, the cultural capital possessed by Pak Badut Ayam's three children demonstrates another form of cultural capital: future success after struggling to attend school and work during childhood. Pak Badut Ayam's children's efforts to



maintain their education reflect the reality of marginalized families in Indonesia's urban periphery. When parents work hard with uncertain incomes, education is seen as a pathway that opens up opportunities for families to escape the cycle of poverty (Ali & Asriwandari, 2024). In these circumstances, school becomes a space that offers hope for children from marginalized families living on the outskirts of large cities. Therefore, the cultural capital of Pak Badut Ayam's three children in education represents an effort to build a better future.

Both forms of capital possessed by each character, economic and cultural, serve as survival strategies in an unbalanced social environment. Danang utilizes religious values to return to God after engaging in various deviant activities to survive and earn a living. Meanwhile, Mr. Badut Ayam's three children, namely Ina, Erlin, and Ratih, continue to strive for education in their lives, until they are finally able to achieve success in the future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research into Brian Khrisna's novel "The Darkest Side of Heaven," using Bourdieu's perspective, it can be concluded that the social practices of marginalized characters are shaped by the interaction between habitus and capital ownership within a particular social environment. These concepts are interconnected and function as survival strategies in the face of structural pressures that are not in their favor.

The characters' habitus in the novel reflects patterns of thought and action formed from experiences living under constraints. Danang demonstrates a habitus of survival through risky work to meet family needs. Meanwhile, Ratih demonstrates a habitus of sacrifice to live frugally for the survival of her younger siblings. These habitus demonstrate that experiences living in marginalized conditions can shape dispositions that influence how characters think and act in dealing with social realities.

Ownership of economic and cultural capital is also a crucial factor in the survival strategies of

marginalized characters. The economic capital they possess is minimal, unstable, and dependent on the informal sector, as experienced by Danang and Ina. Meanwhile, cultural capital, particularly in the form of education and religious understanding, serves as a source of moral strength and hope for the future. Danang finds hope when he believes that God is all-forgiving and still exists in his life. Meanwhile, Pak Badut Ayam's three children struggle to continue their education despite facing many limitations in their lives. This cultural capital plays a role in maintaining their social position and opening up opportunities to escape the cycle of poverty.

Overall, this research demonstrates that the interaction between habitus and capital ownership can shape the social practices of marginalized class characters in the novel. This representation reflects the social conditions of urban Indonesian society, which are characterized by structural inequality and limited access to resources. Thus, the novel not only depicts the realities of marginalized class life but also conveys social criticism of the unjust social structures that continue to reproduce poverty.

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