



Internal Conflict of the Main Character in the Novel *Langit Senja* by Nadilla TP: A Literary Psychological Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the forms of internal conflict, causal factors based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and the main characters' Responses in the novel *Langit Senja* by Nadilla TP. The research was conducted from January to March 2026 through library research in an academic environment. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a literary psychological approach and an expressive approach. The subjects of this study are the main characters, Niskala Senja Nirvana and Langit Baskara Arkatama. The research instrument was the researcher as the primary instrument assisted by a data corpus table sheet. Data collection techniques were carried out through systematic reading and note-taking techniques. Data analysis techniques applied an interactive model comprising data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. The results show eight forms of internal conflict experienced by the main characters: anger, sadness, fear, disappointment, depression, anxiety, restlessness, and guilt. The causal factors of internal conflict were dominated by the unfulfillment of safety needs and love and belongingness needs. The main characters' Responses in facing internal conflict were manifested in three forms of action: selection or rejection, compromise, and hesitation.

Keywords: internal conflict, main character, novel, literary psychology

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of creative expression that represents human life through aesthetic language. Narrative literary works—novels, in particular—provide an expansive narrative space to explore the emotional, psychological, and existential complexities of their characters. Through the interplay of intrinsic elements such as character, plot, setting, and conflict, the novel serves as a highly effective medium for depicting human psychological dynamics.

Among the constituent elements of a novel, internal conflict is a psychological phenomenon of great significance; it reveals profound insights

into a character's personality and the realities of life portrayed within the text. Internal conflict arises when an individual's internal drives clash with environmental obstacles or an inability to satisfy fundamental psychological needs. Such conflict not only propels the plot but also serves as a vehicle for the author to illustrate the dynamics of the characters' personalities and their psychological development.

The phenomenon of internal conflict frequently appears in contemporary Indonesian novels that address issues such as past trauma, familial rejection, and social pressure. One work that

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intensively explores the turbulent inner lives of its protagonists is the novel *Langit Senja* by Nadilla TP. The presence of past trauma, family rejection, and social pressure in the novel creates emotional fragmentation, triggering various forms of internal conflict in the characters Niskala Senja Nirvana and Langit Baskara Arkatama.

To understand the psychological dynamics of these characters, this study employs a literary psychology approach. Endraswara (2013:96) explains that literary psychology is an interdisciplinary field that views literary works as manifestations of human psychological activity. According to Ratna (2011:312), literary works are created through a blend of the author's imagination and social reality; consequently, the emotional turmoil depicted within them remains connected to the psychological states of real human beings. This view is reinforced by Rafiek (2012:98), who states that literature serves as a medium for projecting the author's emotional turbulence. Tarigan (2011:122) adds that the novel offers authors the scope to portray the motives, backgrounds, and consequences of conflict in great detail. To link the author's inner expression with the text, Abrams—as cited by Siswanto (2008:181)—notes that the expressive approach views literature as an outpouring of the author's emotions and subjective perceptions. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory provides a relevant framework for tracing the root causes of inner conflict. According to Maslow (as cited in Minderop, 2011:49), human behavior is driven by five hierarchical levels of needs: physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. A failure to satisfy these fundamental needs triggers psychological distress in the form of inner conflict.

Numerous relevant studies have previously examined the issue of characters' inner conflict in novels from various perspectives and approaches. Parhana and Hidayatullah (2023) investigated the inner conflict of the protagonist in Reviana Apriliandini's novel *Bumi dan Lukanya* using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, fo-

cusing on the dynamics of the Id, Ego, and Superego structures. A second study by Alfia et al. (2024) analyzed the inner conflict of characters in Dinni Adhiawaty's novel *Kiara* by employing Kurt Lewin's Cognitive Field Theory to identify the directional vectors of the characters' psychological drives. Furthermore, a third study by Wulandari et al. (2023) examined the protagonist's inner conflict in Tere Liye's novel *Selamat Tinggal* through the lens of defense mechanisms.

These three studies demonstrate the effectiveness of the psychology of literature approach in unraveling characters' psychological dynamics. However, previous research has generally focused on Freudian psychoanalysis, cognitive field theory, or defense mechanisms in a broad sense. The novelty of the present study lies in its integration of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory and Abrams's expressive approach, specifically aimed at uncovering the causal relationship between the failure to meet basic needs and the resulting emotional states and psychological responses of the protagonists—Niskala Senja Nirvana and Langit Baskara Arkatama—in Nadilla TP's novel *Langit Senja*. Consequently, this study aims to address this research gap while contributing to the development of the psychology of literature within the context of contemporary Indonesian novels.

Based on this background, the research question addressed in this study is as follows: (1) What forms of inner conflict are experienced by the protagonists Niskala Senja Nirvana and Langit Baskara Arkatama in the novel *Langit Senja* by Nadilla TP? (2) What are the factors causing the main character's inner conflict when viewed through the lens of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory? (3) What types of responses does the main character exhibit when facing this inner conflict?

Based on the problem formulations above, this study aims to describe the forms of inner conflict, identify the causative factors using Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, and analyze the main character's response types in the novel



Langit Senja by Nadilla TP. Theoretically, the findings are expected to contribute to the body of literary knowledge regarding the link between basic human need deficits and the manifestation of inner conflict in fictional texts. Practically, the study's results can serve as enrichment material for educators and students, supporting character-based novel appreciation and fostering an understanding of mental health.

METHOD

This study employs a textual approach utilizing a descriptive-qualitative method. Abubakar (2021), Razak (2017), and Yuliani (2018) note that the descriptive-qualitative method is commonly used in various social science studies, including the field of literary studies. According to Ratna (2011:34), the qualitative approach focuses on analyzing data—such as texts, sentences, and narrative facts—to generate an in-depth understanding of meaning. The research approach applied is a combination of the psychology of literature approach (Endraswara, 2011:12; 2013:96) and the expressive approach (Siswanto, 2008:181). The descriptive-qualitative method was selected because the research data consists of words, sentences, and excerpts from the novel, thereby enabling in-depth analysis without the need for statistical calculations.

The primary data source for this study is the text of the novel *Langit Senja* by Nadilla TP, supplemented by secondary data sources such as relevant books on the psychology of literature, indexed scientific journals, and pertinent academic articles. The data in this study comprise words, phrases, sentences, and dialogue indicating forms of inner conflict, factors causing need deficits, and the responses of the main characters, Niskala Senja Nirvana and Langit Baskara Arkatama. Data collection was conducted within an academic setting from January to March 2026.

Data collection was carried out through library research using the "read-and-note" technique. This

stage involved intensive heuristic and hermeneutic reading of the novel's text, the identification of data units, coding, and the recording of data onto a data corpus sheet. The primary instrument in this study is the researcher (acting as the human instrument), supported by tools such as data coding guidelines and a structured data corpus sheet based on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory and an expressive approach.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles et al. (2014:14), comprising three flowing stages: (1) Data Reduction—the process of selecting, focusing, abstracting, and transforming raw data (novel text excerpts); (2) Data Display—presenting organized data in a matrix-style corpus table accompanied by a narrative-interpretative analysis; and (3) Conclusion Drawing/Verification—formulating inductive conclusions regarding the causal relationships between variables. Data validity was tested using theoretical and source triangulation techniques, involving discussions of the findings with literary experts or reviewers.

RESULTS

1. Forms of the Main Characters' Inner Conflict

The research results indicate that the main characters, Niskala Senja Nirvana and Langit Baskara Arkatama, experience seven forms of inner conflict: anger, sadness, fear, disappointment, depression, anxiety and restlessness, and guilt.

1.1 Anger

Inner conflict in the form of anger is observed when the character expresses an outburst of destructive emotion as a reaction against unfair treatment. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpts:

"I hate this situation, Langit! How could my parents be so cruel as to throw me away, as if I were nothing but worthless trash?!" (BK/RM/LS/12)

"I never demanded that you always understand my situation, Baskara.!" snapped Senja, pointing her index finger right in the man's face. Her emotions were out of control. (BKB/RM/LS/293)

1.2 Sadness

Inner conflict in the form of sadness is observed when the character experiences deep suffering and emotional emptiness. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpts:

"I want to meet my biological parents, Langit... are they still in this world? How could they have the heart to leave me at an orphanage? Am I not valuable enough in their eyes?" (BKB/RS/LS/77)

"Please bring back her happiness... Please put an end to all of my Senja's suffering, Mom... Please..." Langit whispered, his weeping intensifying as he held his mother. (BKB/RS/LS/247)

1.3 Fear

Inner conflict in the form of fear arises when the character feels pressured by physical threats or traumatic fears. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"Why are you grabbing my hand?! Let go!" Senja protested. "No!!! Let go, I said!" Senja refused. "Help! Help!" Senja screamed, calling for assistance. (BKB/RT/LS/10-11)

"I'm afraid you'll leave me. I'm afraid you'll walk out of my life. I'm afraid of having to live without you in my life, Langit," Senja explained through her tears. (BKB/RT/LS/214)

1.4 Disappointment

An internal conflict involving disappointment arises when a character's expectations clash sharply with a bitter reality. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"Ma'am, did they come?" Senja asked hopefully, addressing one of the orphanage caretakers who used to look after her. The woman shook her head. "No one came, Senja," she replied. Senja hung her head in disappointment. (BKB/RK/LS/124)

"We don't need a girl. We only need a boy..." (BKB/RK/LS/229-230)

1.5 Depression

Internal conflict manifesting as depression represents an advanced stage of accumulated trauma, triggering social withdrawal and even self-destructive behavior. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"Senja hadn't left her room for three days. She refused to touch the food Shena brought her, spending her time curled up facing the wall..." (BKB/DE/LS/261)

"Ngit, come here right now. I'm begging you. Senja has passed out—she's unconscious—and there are pills scattered everywhere. I'm terrified; please, help me right now."

1.6 Anxiety and Restlessness

Anxiety and restlessness manifest as mental tension and excessive worry regarding uncertain situations. These findings are illustrated in the following excerpts:

"Negative thoughts began to fill my mind. What if something bad happened to Langit on the way? I paced back and forth in the living room, repeatedly checking my phone screen..." (BKB/CG/LS/185)

"I can't do it; I'm so nervous, Langit," said Senja, who had been panicking and tense about meeting her boyfriend's mother. (BKB/CG/LS/115)

1.7 Guilt

Guilt arises as a form of self-punishment stemming from the belief that one has caused harm to others. These findings are illustrated in the following excerpts:

"Because of me, your life has turned into such a mess, Langit. You shouldn't have bothered with a troubled girl like me." (BK/RB/LS/188)

"I was so stupid to take you for granted yesterday. I was foolish to act indifferent when I was



actually devastated at the thought of losing you..." (BKB/RB/LS/305)

2. Factors Causing Inner Conflict (Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs)

Research results indicate that the protagonist's inner conflict is influenced by the failure to satisfy Maslow's five levels of basic needs:

2.1 Unmet Physiological Needs

The most fundamental needs—nutrition and rest—are neglected due to depression. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"Senja hadn't left her room for three days. She refused to touch the food Shena brought..." (FPKB/KF/LS/37)

2.2 Unmet Safety Needs

A lack of security resulting from external intimidation erodes the character's emotional stability. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"Sign this agreement stating that you will never interfere with Senja's life again," Langit clarified. (FPKB/KK/LS/165)

2.3 Unmet Needs for Love and Belonging

Parental abandonment since infancy has caused the character to experience a chronic affective crisis. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"I don't even know what it feels like to be hugged by a mother..." Senja murmured softly. (FPKB/KC/LS/88)

2.4 Unmet Self-Esteem Needs

Social stigma and rejection damage the character's self-concept and self-worth. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"You're just an outcast, Senja! Don't dream of standing on equal footing with the Arkatama family!" Shilla snapped cynically. (FPKB/KP/LS/142)

2.5 Unmet Self-Actualization Needs

A lack of family validation and a failure to achieve existential wholeness trigger a crisis regarding the meaning of life. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"That is why Senja has come here—simply to ask for Papi's blessing; because, after all, Papi and Mami are Senja's parents." (FPKB/KA/LS/315)

3. The Main Character's Responses to Inner Conflict

Research findings indicate that the main character exhibits three types of psychological responses:

3.1 Selection or Rejection Response

A rejection response is employed decisively to put an end to injustice. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"If the true purpose of this meeting is simply because you want Senja to donate her liver... then I think we should end this meeting right here." (RTU/MM/LS/229)

3.2 Compromise Response

A compromise response is adopted through ego alignment for the sake of maintaining the relationship. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"Upon hearing her lover's words, Senja immediately realized that there was a man whose life was already intertwined with hers. 'I'm sorry, Langit.'" (RTU/KP/LS/262)

3.3 Ambiguity or Hesitation Response

A response of hesitation arises when the character experiences psychological ambivalence stemming from past trauma. This finding is illustrated in the following excerpt:

"Langit, our backgrounds are worlds apart. [...] I'm too scared to accept you, Langit," Senja said, expressing her concerns. (RTU/RB/LS/49)

DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the main character's inner conflict in the novel **Langit Senja** by Nadilla TP, employing a literary psychology approach that integrates Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory with M.H. Abrams's expressive approach. The analysis covers three key points: the forms of inner conflict, the factors causing the inner conflict, and the types of psychological responses exhibited by the main character. The following discussion directly analyzes each finding based on excerpts from the research data, supported by theoretical perspectives and relevant scholarly references.

The character Senja's anger is expressed directly in response to rejection by her biological family. The excerpt "I hate this situation, Langit! Why did my parents have the heart to throw me away as if I were nothing but worthless trash?!" (BK/RM/LS/12)—along with the emotional outburst captured in data (BKB/RM/LS/293)—demonstrates that Senja's anger is not merely a raw emotional release but a reactive defense mechanism against threats to her dignity and self-worth. This finding aligns with Berkowitz's (1993) view that anger is a natural response to frustration and the violation of an individual's personal boundaries. In a literary context, Ihsan (2023) adds that inner conflict in fiction essentially reflects an imbalance between a character's intrapersonal drives and the pressures exerted by their social environment. The angry outbursts of Senja and Langit demonstrate that anger functions as an ego defense mechanism to reject social rejection and interpersonal injustice.

The powerlessness experienced by Senja and Langit in the face of their suffering (BKB/RS/LS/77; BKB/RS/LS/247) represents a manifestation of profound sadness. Senja's expressions regarding her lack of worth in the eyes of her biological parents reflect a depletion of emotional energy and an existential crisis. Consistent with Minderop (2013), feelings of sadness and the early loss of a protective figure trigger psychological suffering that gradually erodes mental resilience. Herman

(2015) reinforces this argument by stating that repeated traumatic experiences tend to give rise to complex grief, as the memories of such wounds fail to become fully integrated into daily life. Therefore, the protagonist's grief is not merely a dramatic narrative device but an accurate representation of how traumatic memory functions.

Senja's fear—manifesting as a reflexive, defensive reaction when facing physical threats (BKB/RT/LS/10-11) and a traumatic anxiety regarding the loss of Langit (BKB/RT/LS/214)—aligns with Maslow's explanation regarding a lack of security. This fear functions as a psychological early-warning system whenever the character perceives a lack of control over their physical or emotional safety. According to Horney (cited in Feist & Feist, 2017), neurotic fear and anxiety arise from the absence of a social environment that provides emotional security. The combination of real-world threats in public spaces and past trauma transforms the protagonist's fear into a multidimensional, reactive defense mechanism.

The profound disappointment Senja experiences upon discovering that her biological parents rejected her solely due to her gender (BKB/RK/LS/229-230) highlights a vast chasm between her ideal expectations and objective reality. Years of waiting in an orphanage, which ultimately resulted in a sense of emptiness (BKB/RK/LS/124), shattered the character's optimism. According to Endraswara (2013), such chronic disappointment triggers a crisis of self-confidence and a disintegration of the will to live. Barokati (2022) asserts, through an expressive approach, that the author utilizes the character's disappointment to voice criticism regarding child neglect and gender-based stigma within the family unit.

The advanced stage of this accumulated, unresolved inner conflict manifests as extreme depression. The excerpt "Senja had not left her room for three days... and spent her time curled up facing the wall..." (BKB/DE/LS/261), along with the incident involving a suicide attempt using



medication (BKB/DE/LS/257), illustrates a state of total paralysis regarding existential motivation. Beck & Alford (2009) and Apriliandara (2022) state that an accumulation of trauma and rejection—persisting without healthy coping mechanisms—leads to clinical depression and self-destructive urges. Senja's depression represents the culmination of an ego failure to bear the weight of her psychological burden, thereby necessitating external intervention and support.

The anxiety and restlessness Senja experiences—manifested in behaviors such as pacing back and forth and fearing rejection by her partner's family (BKB/CG/LS/185; BKB/CG/LS/115)—illustrate cognitive distortions stemming from a vulnerable personality. Wolf & Fisher (2023), in their stress appraisal theory, explain that anxiety arises when an individual perceives the demands of a situation as exceeding their available coping resources. Maslach & Leiter (2022) add that prolonged emotional tension, devoid of a sense of security, significantly depletes psychological energy. The protagonist's anxiety reflects a tendency to project worst-case scenarios driven by past trauma.

The guilt expressed by Senja in the data entry “Because of me, your life has become a mess like this, Langit...” (BK/RB/LS/188), along with the regret shown in (BKB/RB/LS/305), represents a form of self-administered punishment. Senja views herself as a burden unworthy of love. Minderop (2011) explains that guilt arises from an overly harsh intrapersonal evaluation of one's own weaknesses. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this condition indicates that the character's superego is delivering an internal judgment that shatters her peace of mind and creates a lingering moral burden.

The factors underlying the internal conflict—triggered by the failure to meet physiological needs (FPKB/KF/LS/37) and safety needs (FPKB/KK/LS/165)—demonstrate that obstacles at the most basic levels of the hierarchy of needs directly undermine an individual's emotional stability.

Neglecting nutrition and sleep amidst depression further erodes psychological resilience. Furthermore, parental abandonment during infancy (FPKB/KC/LS/88) hinders the fulfillment of belongingness and love needs, which Feist et al. (2017) identify as the root causes of identity crises and chronic loneliness. This impediment cascades into a failure to meet esteem needs—stemming from the stigma of being an “abandoned child” (FPKB/KP/LS/142)—and the stifling of self-actualization needs (FPKB/KA/LS/315). Oktarini (2014) and Clarke-Stewart (2021) reinforce these findings by demonstrating that a lack of emotional support from family is a primary driver in the collapse of self-concept among young people. The protagonist's modes of responding to internal conflict—namely rejection (RTU/MM/LS/229), compromise (RTU/KP/LS/262), and hesitation (RTU/RB/LS/49)—illustrate the dynamics of an adaptive ego. Langit's firm refusal to allow the exploitation of his liver represents an active defense mechanism aimed at halting an injustice. Meanwhile, Senja's decision to compromise and survive for Langit's sake marks a turning point in her psychological recovery. According to Lazarus & Folkman (cited in Endraswara, 2021), these variations of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping reflect the character's conscious efforts to alleviate inner tension. Through Abrams's expressive approach, the author skillfully portrays the character's maturation process, tracing the journey from a state of despair toward emotional recovery.

This study offers a significant advantage by conducting a systematic analysis that grounds every finding directly in the textual evidence of the novel *Langit Senja*, thereby ensuring an objective and empirically grounded basis for interpretation. Compared to the research by Kartikasari & Edy (2018), this study excels by integrating Maslow's psychoanalytic framework with Abrams's expressive theory to unravel the causality of the conflict. However, the study has limitations; it focuses predominantly on the two

main characters through the lens of Maslow's theory without deeply exploring the sociological background of their families or the supporting characters. Therefore, future research is encouraged to incorporate perspectives from trauma psychology or the sociology of literature to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that the protagonists—Niskala Senja Nirvana and Langit Baskara Arkatama—in Nadilla TP's novel *Langit Senja* experience complex inner conflicts manifested in seven emotional forms: anger, sadness, fear, disappointment, depression, anxiety/restlessness, and guilt. These psychological upheavals stem from the failure to meet Maslow's five levels of basic needs—specifically deficits in safety needs and the need for belongingness and love—resulting from trauma associated with abandonment and social stigma. To cope with this internal pressure, the characters exhibit three types of psychological responses: choosing/rejecting, compromising, and hesitating. This research demonstrates that the approach of literary psychology and the hierarchy of needs theory can reveal the causal relationship between the failure to meet basic needs and the complexity of fictional characters' inner conflicts. These findings offer a theoretical contribution to the development of contemporary Indonesian literary psychology studies and a practical contribution to mental health awareness education. Future research is encouraged to develop analyses using approaches from the psychology of trauma or the sociology of literature to enrich the understanding of interpersonal dynamics among characters in literary works.

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