



Capital, Class and Social Exclusion: A Bourdieusian Analysis of Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water*

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ABSTRACT

This research highlights the social injustices through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital. Systematic injustices are fabricated, maintained, and challenged in fictional works that mirror real-world societal structures.

Bourdieu's concept of capital includes social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital which help acquire dominance in postcolonial societies like Pakistan. As capital gives power and value within a social circle, those who own any form of capital exploit others by using their power. Capital works as a double-edged sword: sometimes it brings hope for people to leave the systematic obstructions and sometimes it functions as a medium of exclusion resulting in marginalization. Fiction is a powerful tool for societal interpretation that helps understand sociological dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

This House of Clay and Water (2017) emphasizes the impediments of Pakistani society through an examination from cultural, social, and moral perspectives. This offers a critical perspective by stressing the stratified society of Pakistan. Mansab depicts the relationships between the privileged and marginalized through the personal experience of the characters. Culture is a set of collective opinions, customs, traditions, and lifestyles that represent members of a specific society (Wagner, 2016). Pakistani society is mainly separated through class lines in which social status and wealth highlight the value of a person. The characters in Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water* are struggling hard in order to get capital that can help them fit in society. Cultural aspects shape the experiences and identity of people. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital suggests

different forms of capital: cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, and economic capital. The idea of capital shows that the capital owned by different people highlights their position in society. Since every person's life is not the same people ultimately end up with different amounts of these resources. Space cannot be neutral rather it is constructed discursively by the dominant group of the society (Tariq, 2024, p. 410). Money and class are not everything but rather it is just a little part of their lives enriched with other events as well, but here in this society the "Capital" has all the value and respect. Class means a lot to people. The attitude of people "being modern" is just because they want to be accepted by society as they belong to an elite class (Saeed & Rehman, 2021, p. 70). Pakistani society as shown in this text is extremely divided along class lines where wealth and social status highlight an individual's value or worth. The study of social inequality and power in literature demands a theoretical lens that is very substantial in highlighting the indistinguishable threads that bind people to systemic oppression. Bourdieu's theory of capital offers this framework by explaining how inequality does not just extend through economic conditions but also through social and cultural norms.

Literature Review

While evaluating Pakistani literature, Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water* has gained attention for its representation of composite social structures, identity crises, and power dynamics in Pakistani society. It is the society that helps shape the identity and individuality of a person. The ability of social forces to "create categories of the other based on identities" causes an inequity in power because the dominant groups consider themselves as the self and eventually the rest are considered as other (Prince, 2020). Social forces include societal norms and cultural practices that shape perceptions about identities. This classification is not unbiased; it is driven by the interests of dominant groups. "Social power is the ability to get one's way in a relationship despite resistance" (Arnold, 2017 p.108). Anyone with social power can declare their will and get desired outcomes even though the other groups within society do not agree. England (2013) in her thesis *The Attraction of Imperfection: Depreciating Social Capital in Victorian Marriage Plots* analyzed *Pamela* (1740) and *Northanger Abbey* (1817) by using the theoretical framework of social capital. She argues that the social capital of these heroines in the marriage plot is not just shaped by their "virtue but rather by damaged reputation" within society (p. 2).

Social capital includes an extensive range of social settings which starts from family connections and leads towards a never-ending chain of political and voluntary institutions. Fine (2004) criticized that the concept of capital has been "extended prodigiously" in both scope and depth (p. 26). Franklin's (2003) reading of Anthony Trollope's *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867) suggests that every relationship revolves around different types of exchange which include marriage, charity, and inheritance. Bourdieu (2018) in *The Forms of Capital* explains that capital not only includes monetary circulation but also more disguised currencies of social and cultural capital. Just like the financial situation of a person social capital can also vary. Armstrong (1998) highlighted the representation of cultural capital in Austen's work *Northanger Abbey* like how Catherine Morland, during her stay in Bath, learned the "art of consumption" (p. 385). She learned which items to buy and how to show them publically because in this way she could make herself more valuable and desirable within her social circle. Southworth (2012) explained how Woolf used social capital both as a resource for herself and as a theme in her work *Orlando*. She particularly focused on the preface. The list of people in the preface reflects her bonding and interaction with a complex social network and great influencers of her time which includes writers, family, and friends. Social status is constantly judged by appearance. The

way a person looks or the way he represents himself in society facilitates others how to treat him. If it appears that the person belongs to a wealthy background then people start giving him respect and admiration and ultimately the person can achieve the status of a capital.

Literature reflects the unsaid words and ideas that have a real impact on people's lives and identities. Some brilliant literary works bring forward the struggles of marginalized groups within society who are in a constant search for identity. These people are not accepted by the mainstream society. Raza et al. (2022) highlight that gender discrimination is a form of natural "hegemonic cultural violence" (p. 126). The married lives of Sasha, Nida, and Seerat highlight the traditional gender roles in society which are deeply rooted. Butler (2004) argues that society responds with brutal behavior to non-heteronormative conduct. Hadi (2017) claims that the conventional patriarchal system in modern Pakistani society is highly institutionalized. The world revolves around binaries in which one group appears as superior and the other becomes inferior intensifying the class system. The exaggeration of feminism has shown men as unkind, barbaric, and inhuman and this leads to the disappearance of male rights within society (Tariq, 2024, p. 414). The third gender is invisible in the society because it is dominated by both men and women. Sometimes class prevails while sometimes gender. Women and intersex have no place in Pakistani society (Rana & Saeed, 2023, p. 364). Intersexes always experience social exclusion, because they are not even part of the binary. Intersex is always abandoned, their dreams and desires have no value in society (Nadeem & Javed, 2020, p. 69). The problems involved in communal mobility within a weak job market are linked with the point that societal relations intend to react with a caste system from which people develop firm labels of identity and discrimination and that's what they apply to their daily relationships (Vitolo, 2024, p. 63).

Theoretical Framework

Pierre Bourdieu, influenced by Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, and Max Weber, extends their ideas. Capitalism is an economic system in which private units and businesses control production. Other forms of oppression such as racism and gender discrimination also induce the problems of society (Marx, & Molitor, 1965). Influence, authority, or genuine power comes from the overproduction of goods because more capital eventually results in more power. The state can "wither away" if the common laborers take control of the means of production (Kilic, 2023, p. 35-36). The early capitalists focused on working hard and saving money not because they were looking for happiness but rather they took it as their moral and religious duty (Weber & Kalberg, 2013). In neoliberalism, people are considered "entrepreneurs of their own lives". They treat their talents, knowledge, and abilities as human capital to manage and improve. Wages are seen as the profit on the investments they make in themselves (Donzelot, 2008, p. 129). Capitalism depends on ways like market regulation and competition.

Marx's idea of Capital focuses on economic inequity but Pierre Bourdieu prolonged this concept and gave different forms of capital to explain how other components also play a significant role within society. Bourdieu in his work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984) describes how the taste of different people is related to their social class. Educational institutions play an important role in educating students on what is the best and latest taste that they should adopt, thus redefining their cultural priorities (Bourdieu, 1984, p.26). This form of capital does not contain economic resources but rather noneconomic resources that improve a person's status within the social circle.

Depending on the conditions in which people "acquire their cultural capital" is expected to be connected with the markets in which they can get more profit (Bourdieu, 1984, p.12). This idea helps in realizing why children who belong to wealthy families perform better

academically. Their success is directly linked to the cultural resources which they receive from their families. Academic capital is the obvious product of mutual “effects of cultural transmission by family and school” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 23). Cultural capital is frequently misunderstood as personal worth other than hereditary privilege. The more someone is aware and can use these cultural possessions, the more impact they can exert in social or cultural competition (Bourdieu, 2018, p. 20). Its importance lies in how people within a society employ it in different fields such as art or knowledge in order to get advantages. Some groups are essentially created through connections in which people support and admire each other. Being a member of such a group acts like an authentication that gives people certain benefits or a sense of confidence within the group (Bourdieu, 2018, p. 21). These relationships occur through a practical approach of material support and consistent interactions which can help to make the bond even stronger. Sometimes people do not join these groups just to gain advantages but they do so because they feel a sense of belonging with the people around them (Bourdieu, 2018 p. 22). Social relations are developed through thoughtful strategies. People create relationships that can be beneficial in the short or long term. Bourdieu defines social capital as the tangible or intangible resources that individuals acquire through institutionalized relationships of joint association and recognition (Bourdieu, 2018, p. 21). Consequently, social capital is injected within people and is tied to the social connections they can use to benefit themselves.

Economic capital is the most direct form of capital which refers to financial resources that can be easily transformed into money and are frequently authorized through property rights. Unlike social and cultural capital the economic capital is predictable and creates the foundation for other forms of capital as well. An important aspect of economic capital is its ability to be measured (Easy Sociology, 2024). Moreover, economic capital plays a significant role in deciding a person’s rank within the social circle. Economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, are never entirely reducible to that definition (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital can be assembled over time and inherited across generations. This process of collecting assets contributes to the continuance of social inequalities because in this way wealth is just limited to specific families or social groups. Inherited economic capital offers a major advantage to those born into wealthy families by enabling them to maintain and improve their social status. Symbolic capital includes the possessions of a person depending on reputation or recognition. It is different from cultural and economic capital because it functions in a social domain as a form of acknowledgment that depends on the reactions and opinions of others. Symbolic capital is termed a concealed form of economic or material capital and its power is acquired from its capacity to hide its material roots (Bourdieu, 1977). A well-off family might be involved in luxurious social displays like extravagant marriages to lift their symbolic capital even though they have to go through a great economic expense. These actions determine wealth and status by strengthening their societal position (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 171). Contributing to public welfare may not return immediate economic profits but can create reputation and social standing which can later be “cashed in” as inspiration or trust (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 177). Society takes symbolic capital as natural and not as a result of material wealth. This misinterpretation enables symbolic domination in which those who hold symbolic capital maintain power without direct application or economic pressure.

Analysis

Faiqa Mansab’s *This House of Clay and Water* (2017) is an emotional and heart-touching work on search for love and identity. It is mainly divided into strong class lines and some characters like Nida and Bhanggi are suffering from social alienation. While some of the characters like

Sasha and Saqib are constantly trying to make relations with the prominent personalities within society. These relationships provide access to other resources and opportunities. The influence and quality of these relations define how constructive and beneficial the social capital is. In *This House of Clay and Water*, Saqib belongs to a political family and he is very proud of the good relations that he has with big political leaders. When Saqib asked Nida about the big political leaders whom she did not know, his “voice oozed satisfaction, with a trace of Victory: Ask your brothers. They’d know” (Mansab, 2017, p. 6). The reason behind his satisfaction is that he is going to have lunch with the MPA which highlights how social capital functions in the society. Saqib also advised Nida that she should also try to engage in talks with the wives of these politicians to make relations even stronger because “It’s all about contacts these days” (Mansab, 2017, p.60). These interactions serve as a space to tactically expand the connections.

Social capital depends on a system of common trust and exchange. People can exert power over others due to their strong social circle. Nida tries to stop Aukaf clerk from beating Bhanggi at Dargha. “A begum was only a little more acceptable in the eyes of such men because she commanded power through her husband or father” (Mansab, 2017, p. 61). Through social capital, people can get access to opportunities that they might not get otherwise. “When relationships between individuals and groups in society are invoked, the idea of cultural capital becomes entwined with that of social capital” (Throsby, 1999, p. 4). Nida also takes part in the victory of Saqib by “visiting the houses of all the prominent political workers, meeting their wives and children” (Mansab, 2017, p. 81). She tries to make strong relations with people to achieve capital that are based on personal interest. When Nida tries to meet the people after the elections, Saqib argues: “Are you serious? Why would you want to waste your time? You can visit them near the next elections” (Mansab, 2017, p. 82), suggesting how the relations are.

Cultural capital – non-monetary possessions like education, manners, skills, cultural knowledge and all the other assets valued by society and aligned with the dominant culture – enables the people to gain social mobility and maintain their position in society. Bourdieu highlights three different forms of cultural capital which include embodied cultural capital, objectified cultural capital, and institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Embodied cultural capital belongs to the individual’s traits and includes their habits, manners, and ways of speaking. In other words, it is about knowledge and culture as it is communicated through a person’s mind hexis (Bourdieu, 1990). These features are assimilated through socialization and upbringing. On the other hand, objectified cultural capital refers to material objects which include artwork, books, antique or expensive jewelry, or even fashion sense which symbolize the cultural taste of a person. Taste can be mapped on a person’s social status (Bourdieu, 1984): “I looked at my watch long enough for him to see my diamond bangles” (Mansab, 2017, p. 61), a perfect example of objectified cultural capital that highlights the wealth and higher social status of Nida. The act of making the bangles visible highlights an attempt to strengthen Nida’s social position in the eyes of the Aukaf clerk and the people around them. This act goes beyond mere wealth; it shows the intentional use of cultural capital to communicate distinctiveness and dominance. People who own these objects not only display their access to resources but also understand the way to properly appreciate and utilize them: “I flashed my diamond-studded fingers in the sun by flicking the veil up” (Mansab, 2017, p. 61). Money and wealth demand to be publicized to gain a respectful position in society. People who belong to the lower class their actions and way of speaking show how they give respect to others. In this novel, Bhanggi used the word “ji” in order to give other people respect. These actions are embodied cultural capital that can help people get access to different opportunities and social networks. In this novel,

Sasha insists to her daughters that it is “important to have a social life” (Mansab, 2017, P. 54). Sasha’s view on social life shows a cultural disposition that gives more importance to mutual relationships and connections. Cultural capital is a powerful concept that continues to be noteworthy in analyzing major issues of class, social mobility, and education by offering critical views into how societies construct opportunity and segregation.

Economic capital is one of the most significant concepts by Bourdieu in order to understand inequalities in social dynamics. It includes tangible and measurable form of property, money, or any other asset that can be easily converted into financial value. Society believes that people with money live a happy life and money is the solution to every problem. This idea is highlighted by Mansab in this novel through her characters. As Bhanggi addresses to Nida her life could never get hard because she is a “begum with money” (Mansab, 2017, p. 92). People struggle hard to get economic capital because they believe that this can solve their every problem: “I had always thought that people with money had no problems,” says Bhanggi in *This House of Clay and Water* (Mansab, 2017, p. 97). Sasha gives so much “importance to material things” (Mansab, 2017, p. 99). People give you importance when you represent yourself as rich because indirectly they are not valuing you but your possessions. “Societies have varying degrees of economic inequality” (Nishi et al., 2015, p. 1). “A person who grows up in a wealthy family could be more easily offered an opportunity to study abroad and gain some valuable qualifications and experience. This advantage can be seen as a form of cultural capital” (Huang, 2019, p.45).). Nida asked Shama that her son must have been admitted to Oxford University because her “husband was a Rhodes Scholar” and it must be an “easy choice” (Mansab, 2017, p. 113). Shama says that he has preferred Yale to Oxford because degrees from esteemed institutes need economic stability available to the rich only. Nida “caught the latent pride and the hidden joy” in Shama’s voice because her son has the exceptional opportunity of refusing Oxford University (Mansab, 2017, p. 114). Economic capital plays a crucial role in determining one’s worth in society.

People like Bhanggi with restricted economic resources face systematic obstruction and social alienation. Eventually, Bhanggi wishes to become a nightingale because they are important and everyone treats them well also “they bring in the big bucks” and they get “the best bits in the curry” (Mansab, 2017, p.9). Social life is strongly connected with economic capital. People who have access to economic capital try to flaunt it in their social circle because this can further enhance their respect. “She carried a big bag in her hand, inadvertently announcing to everyone that she had so much money to carry” (Mansab, 2017, p. 34).

Symbolic capital is not just about money or financial assets but it is about the respect, honor, and prestige of a person. Symbolic capital cannot be inherited but rather it is earned. “Symbolic capital, together with the forms of profit and power it warrants, exists only in the relationship between distinct and distinctive properties, such as the body proper, language, clothing, and interior furnishings”(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013, p. 297). Meanwhile, wealth under economic capital can be converted into symbolic capital. The interactive nature of symbolic capital occurs when people see it and legalize it. Nida describes that people like Sasha choose “diaphanous designer lawn-wear, imported bags, and shoes”, all these things worth a fortune (Mansab, 2017, p. 23). Nida always admires Sasha’s aura. Mansab suggests that class is a major concern of Pakistanis. They mostly ask such questions to know about the family whether it is “important or non-entity” (Mansab, 2017, p. 25). The question about “which family are you from” demonstrates how family line and status are valued in Pakistani society (Mansab, 2017, p. 25). Symbolic capital is used to validate a specific social chain of command. “Money comes and

goes, class doesn't" (Mansab, 2017, p. 26). Financial resources might get replaced but class can never be changed.

Conclusion

The four different forms of capital in Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital include social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital. The unequal distribution of capital within society can cause social injustice in which the upper class is valued and the lower class becomes the victim of social alienation, suggesting that systemic inequalities and the brutal mechanisms of power that direct society. People make networks and social connections for their benefit and after getting the benefit they exploit others the way Saqib does to his voters. After winning the elections Saqib even did not want to celebrate his success with them. The people, who owe any form of capital, exploit others by using their power: capital is inseparably linked with systemic power. The people who struggle hard for capital are often those who are systematically denied. For the margin, the attainment of capital is not just a matter of personal wish but often a need for existence.

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