

A Bourdieusian Reading of Kobra Saeedi's Novella *Tuba*, Focusing on the Status of Women in Pre-Revolutionary Iranian Society

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ABSTRACT

Article type: Research Article	Nowadays, given the fundamental role of women in the growth and progress of societies and the consequent need to pay attention to their status and position, the necessity of studying women is more obvious than ever. Women's stories usually reflect women's pains and concerns. Kobra Saeedi's long story Toba focuses on the status of women in Iranian society before the revolution. In this study, women's capital and their actions in the field of action are examined using a descriptive-analytical method with the sociological approach of Frenchman Pierre Bourdieu. In addition to the economic concept of capital, Bourdieu also mentioned other capitals such as social, cultural, and symbolic capitals; therefore, by examining the extent of women's access to these capitals, an attempt is made to present a clear picture of the status of women in the situational context of that society. In the long story Tuba, by addressing the living conditions of women in the society before the Islamic Revolution, the author has revealed the inferior position of women in various fields and has shown the weakness of various types of capitals such as insignificant social capital, inefficient economic capital, and the poverty of women's symbolic capital.
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Introduction

Literature serves as a significant mirror of social realities and a rich source for sociological inquiry, particularly concerning gender studies. This study investigates the novella *Tuba*, written by the Iranian author Kobra Saeedi (Shahrzad), to analyze the status, challenges, and lived experiences of women in pre-revolutionary Iranian society. Literature often reflects women's pain and anxieties, and this novella explicitly addresses the subaltern position of women across various social fields. The central concern of this research is to examine the structural inequalities faced by female characters, questioning how their access to capital—or lack thereof—and their social status influenced their life trajectories within the patriarchal context of the time. By utilizing the sociological framework of Pierre Bourdieu, this paper seeks to provide a clear picture of women's standing in that historical and social context, exploring how the interplay between personal agency and social structures dictates the outcomes for women.

Method

This research employs a descriptive-analytical methodology rooted in the sociological theories of Pierre Bourdieu. The study focuses on three core Bourdieusian concepts: *Field* (the social arenas in which actors compete), *Capital* (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources), and *Habitus* (the internalized structures and dispositions that guide behavior). The analysis treats the narrative world of *Tuba* as a social microcosm, examining how different “fields”—such as the family unit, the educational system (school), and the labor market—function. It investigates the characters' access to these four forms of capital to understand how they navigate their environment, confront structural violence, and attempt to improve their status. The research systematically maps the characters' actions to their habitus, showing how these dispositions were formed by the harsh, often violent, realities of their lives.

Results

The analysis reveals that the female characters in *Tuba* suffer from a severe scarcity of capital across all studied fields.

- **The Field of Education:** The school is depicted as a “workshop for the reproduction of inequality.” Teachers and the system act as instruments of symbolic violence, valuing students with greater economic and social capital (like the character Nasrin) while stigmatizing and humiliating those from lower classes (like Tuba and Fati).
- **The Field of Family & Labor:** The family is portrayed as a highly insecure and violent space. The protagonist, Tuba, is subjected to physical and symbolic violence, including child abuse and forced marriage. In the labor market, women are forced into precarious work, such as dancing in cafes, which subjects them to further social stigmatization and sexual harassment.
- **Access to Capital:**
- **Economic Capital:** The family’s minimal resources are often drained by the father’s addiction, forcing the protagonist into child labor.
- **Cultural Capital:** Although Tuba strives to obtain educational credentials, this capital does not translate into higher symbolic or economic status.
- **Social and Symbolic Capital:** Women in the narrative are almost entirely devoid of social and symbolic capital. They are marginalized, treated as commodities, and lack the social prestige afforded to men.

The findings demonstrate that while Tuba displays significant resilience and agency, her attempts to escape her circumstances are constantly blocked by the structural forces of a patriarchal society that refuses to acknowledge her worth.

Conclusion

The study concludes that *Tuba* is a poignant representation of the systemic suffering of women in pre-revolutionary Iran. The author does not present a Manichean view of gender; rather, she emphasizes the structural conditions—the prevailing cultural habitus and the lack of accessible capital—that relegate women to a subaltern status. Even when Tuba



succeeds in acquiring “cultural capital” through education, it fails to improve her symbolic standing or protect her from social marginalization, underscoring the rigidity of the prevailing power structures. Ultimately, the research illustrates that the cycle of suffering is not merely a product of individual men’s behavior, but a result of a society that systematically denies women the tools (capital) required for empowerment, effectively reproducing their low status across generations.