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Darman Moenir's Life and Works: Reflections of Minangkabau Cultural Identity in Indonesian Literature (1970–2012)

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the life and literary contributions of Darman Moenir, a prominent writer from West Sumatra whose works reflect the interplay between Minangkabau cultural identity and Indonesian literary modernity. The research aims to examine how his personal experiences, socio-cultural background, and artistic vision shaped his writings and career trajectory from 1970 to 2012. Using the historical method, which comprises heuristic, critical, interpretative, and historiographical stages, this study analyzes primary sources, including interviews and personal documents, as well as secondary literary materials. The findings reveal that Darman Moenir's works, including *Bako*, *Dendang*, and *Aku, Keluargaku, Tetanggaku*, embody realism, romanticism, and expressionism while addressing social and cultural themes. His achievements and awards highlight his significant contributions to advancing Indonesian literature. The study concludes that Darman Moenir's life and oeuvre represent an enduring dialogue between local wisdom and national literary expression.

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INTRODUCTION

Art may be understood as a deliberate and reflective expression of human creativity that embodies beauty while serving as a medium for communicating ideas and emotions through forms, sounds, and movements endowed with meaning (Ahyar, 2019). The concept of art, derived from the Greek term associated with skill, craftsmanship, and aesthetic refinement, encompasses a broad semantic field that reflects both technical mastery and the pursuit of beauty (Tarsa, 2016).

The process of artistic creation generally unfolds in three interrelated stages. The first is the genesis of inspiration, when the artist experiences an initial impulse or conceptual spark. The second involves elaborating on that impulse into a coherent, creative plan, marking the beginning of the production phase. The third stage—visualization—translates the artist's abstract conception into a tangible and perceptible form (Sukaya, 2009).

Within this framework, a work of art emerges as the culmination of human imagination and innovation, designed to be received, interpreted, and appreciated by its audience. Art invites a response not only from connoisseurs but also from the wider public, who engage with its aesthetic, religious, mystical, historical, educational, social, and economic dimensions (Tarsa, 2016).

Among the many artistic disciplines, literature occupies a unique position as the art form most deeply rooted in language. Originating from the Latin *literatus*, meaning "letters" or "written works," the term *literature*—also used in English, German, and French—denotes the artistic use of written language. Literature functions as a means of articulating meaning through linguistic form, whether by description, interpretation, or critical reflection. It constitutes a mode of creative expression that uses language as its principal instrument for exploring and communicating meaning within specific cultural and linguistic contexts (Taum, 1997).

The literary development of West Sumatra gained significant momentum after Mohammad Hatta resigned as vice president of Indonesia (Abdullah et al., 1978). During President Soekarno's rule, the realm of literature and the mass media was subjected to authoritarian regulation, as the government exercised strict control over public discourse, turning cultural production into a vehicle for political propaganda while suppressing dissent. This pattern

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of censorship persisted throughout the three decades of the New Order regime, during which the Indonesian press faced systematic restrictions. Publications such as *Tempo*, *Editor*, and *Detik* were banned, revealing the extent of the regime's control over cultural and intellectual expression. The repressive effects of this centralized power were also deeply felt in West Sumatra (Susilastuti, 2000).

Despite these constraints, several writers from West Sumatra made significant contributions to Indonesia's literary canon. Notable among them were Abas St. Pamunjtak Nan Sati with *Dagang Melarat* (*Poor Merchant*, 1926); Adinegoro with *Darah Muda Batavia Centrum* (1931); Abu Hanifah El Hakim with *Taufan di Atas Asia* (1949); Abdul Muis with *Hikayat Bachtiar* (1950); and A.A. Navis with *Robohnya Surau Kami* (1955) (Asmarini et al., 2003).

During the New Order era, figures such as A.A. Navis and Darman Moenir operated as mediators of literary ideology, reinforcing the Jakarta-centered standards that defined cultural legitimacy at the time. Literary prestige was primarily determined by recognition from national institutions such as *Horison*, *Kompas*, the Jakarta Arts Council (*Dewan Kesenian Jakarta*), and *Taman Ismail Marzuki*. While this centralization motivated some authors to pursue excellence, it simultaneously marginalized others whose works diverged from the dominant aesthetic paradigm. Within West Sumatra, Navis and Moenir played a crucial role in maintaining these standards. Nevertheless, the collapse of the New Order regime in May 1998 marked a decisive cultural shift, ushering in an era of democratization that opened space for new literary voices from the region (Susilastuti, 2000).

Among the most prominent of these figures is Darman Moenir, a writer from Padang, born in Sawah Tangah, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra, on 27 July 1952. The eldest son of Moenir, an Indonesian language teacher, and Sjamsidar, he had three siblings: Oriza Sativa Moenir, Zafrita Moenir, and Fauziah. His formal education began at an elementary school in his hometown, continued at a public junior high school in Simabur, and culminated in his graduation from the State Indonesian Fine Arts School (SSRI) in Padang in 1970.

In 1971, Moenir entered the Prayoga Foreign Language Academy in Padang, where he initially studied German before shifting to English and completing his program in 1974. He later pursued a degree in English Language and Literature at Bung Hatta University, earning his bachelor's degree in 1989 with a thesis titled "*The Language Used in the Tambo: A Preliminary Study on Classical Minangkabau World*."

He was married to Dra. Darhana Bakar, with whom he had six children: Haiyyu Darman Moenir, S.I.P., M.Si.; Abla Darman Moenir (deceased); Hoppla Darman Moenir; Tahtiha Darman Moenir, S.S.; Tastafti Darman Moenir, S.Pi.; and Asthwa Darman Moenir, S.E. Professionally, he served as a staff member at the West Sumatra State Museum (Adityawarman Museum) until his retirement in August 2008.

Throughout his career, Moenir actively participated in national and international literary forums, including Literature Day in Ipoh, Malaysia (1980); the Asian Writers Conference in Manila (1982); Malay World meetings in Malacca (1982) and Sri Lanka (1985); the International Writing Program in Iowa City (1988); the International Visitor Program in the United States (1988); the Cultural Congress (1991); and the Indonesian Arts Congress (1995) in Jakarta (Badan Bahasa, 2022).

Moenir began writing at the age of eighteen, producing an impressive body of work that spans novels, poetry, short stories, essays, and translations. His writings were published in numerous reputable outlets, including *Horison*, *Titian*, *Panji Masyarakat*, *Pertiwi*, *Kartini*, *Ulumul Qur'an*, *Kalam*, *Kompas*, *Pelita*, *Sinar Harapan*, *Suara Pembaruan*, *Suara Karya*, *Media Indonesia*, *Indonesia Raya*, *Republika*, and *Berita Minggu* (Singapore), as well as local newspapers in Padang (Badan Bahasa, 2022).

Among his most celebrated works is *Bako* (1980), a 102-page novel that portrays a young man's existential search for meaning within the Minangkabau matrilineal kinship system, focusing on the concept of *bako*, or paternal lineage. Written for a novel competition organized by the Jakarta Arts Council in 1980, *Bako* won first prize and was later published by Balai Pustaka in 1983 (Rozak, 2019).

The literary trajectory of Darman Moenir thus represents a crucial site of inquiry for understanding the interplay between biography, history, and creativity in modern Indonesian literature. This study aims to examine his life, intellectual experiences, and literary contributions, highlighting how his personal and cultural contexts influenced his creative imagination and shaped the thematic substance of his works.

METHOD

This study employs the historical method, a systematic approach that involves the critical examination, evaluation, and synthesis of sources to construct an accurate and verifiable historical account. In accordance with established procedures in historical research, the method consists of four principal stages: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography.

The heuristics stage concerns the identification and collection of historical materials pertinent to the study's focus. Two categories of sources were utilized: primary and secondary. Primary sources were obtained through the gathering of archival documents and interviews with individuals who possessed direct experience with, or personal knowledge of, Darman Moenir. Secondary sources comprised scholarly works, books, journal articles, and other written materials that discuss Moenir's life, literary activities, and cultural significance.

The second stage, criticism, aims to assess the validity and reliability of the collected sources. This stage operates through two complementary forms of evaluation: (1) External criticism, which determines the authenticity and originality of a source by analyzing its physical characteristics, provenance, and formal attributes; and (2) Internal criticism, which evaluates the credibility, consistency, and accuracy of the content itself. Through this dual process, the researcher scrutinizes the context, coherence, and factual reliability of the information to ensure that the data used in subsequent analysis rest upon a sound evidentiary foundation.

The third stage, interpretation, involves the analytical and synthetic processing of historical data. Analytical interpretation consists of examining and comparing information from diverse sources to identify relationships, patterns, and thematic continuities. Synthetic interpretation, in turn, integrates these findings into a unified conceptual framework that clarifies the broader meaning and historical implications of the subject under investigation.

The final stage, historiography, involves composing and presenting the research results in a coherent narrative form. At this point, the verified historical facts are systematically organized, interpreted, and articulated within a reasoned and contextually grounded discussion. The resulting account seeks not only to document the subject matter accurately but also to offer a critical and interpretive narrative that situates Darman Moenir's life and literary career within their broader historical and cultural milieu.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Childhood and Family

Darman Moenir was born in Sawah Tangah, Batusangkar, Tanah Datar, West Sumatra, on 27 July 1952. Sawah Tangah is one of seventy-five villages in Tanah Datar Regency, located within Pariangan District at the foot of Mount Merapi, one of West Sumatra's active volcanoes. The village, covering approximately 521 hectares with a population of 1,532 people as of 2016, is known for its fertile land and scenic highland environment (Dt. Kari & Damri, 2018).

He was the eldest of four children born to Moenir and Sjamsidar. His siblings are Oriza Sativa Moenir, Zafrita Moenir, and Fauziah (Hamimi, personal communication, August 2024). Born with a physical disability caused by polio, Darman faced mobility challenges from an early age. His father worked as an Indonesian language teacher at a public elementary school (*Sekolah Rakyat*). At the same time, his mother, a homemaker with a passion for the arts—particularly classical and *keroncong* singing—nurtured her son's creativity and encouraged him to pursue higher education (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Growing up in an art-loving family, Darman developed a strong sense of creativity and diligence. His artistic surroundings never hindered his academic achievements; he consistently excelled in school and demonstrated an impressive ability to balance his studies with his creative pursuits. Despite his physical condition, Darman enjoyed a lively childhood filled with play and social interaction, through which he learned about discipline, respect, and empathy (M. Chan, personal communication, 5 August 2024).

Darman's curiosity extended to various forms of art. When he was in the second grade of elementary school, he began learning to play musical instruments. Fascinated by his father's violin performances, he joined his father's village orchestra, *Hujan Panas*, where his father played the violin and Darman played the drums. Through this

experience, he learned to play several instruments—including guitar, drums, and *tifa*—and mastered popular rhythms such as rumba and *caca* (Moenir, 1980; M. Chan, personal communication).

His admiration for art later expanded to literature. Inspired by his father's extensive book collection, which comprised religious texts, educational works, pedagogical studies, traditional histories (*tambo*), and magazines, Darman developed a deep appreciation for knowledge and storytelling. His creative curiosity led him to pursue formal education at the Indonesian Fine Arts School (*Sekolah Seni Rupa Indonesia* or SSRI) in Padang, where he refined his artistic skills and discovered his passion for writing. His experiences at SSRI not only shaped his artistic identity but also expanded his network among fellow artists, laying the groundwork for his literary journey (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Darman and his siblings grew up in Nagari Sawah Tangah, close to their paternal family (*bako*). Although they came from a modest background, their parents instilled in them the importance of education (Fauziah, 2024). Through persistence and discipline, Darman completed his undergraduate studies in English Literature at Prayoga Foreign Language College in Padang (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

His academic background not only strengthened his linguistic competence but also deepened his engagement with literature. After graduation, Darman worked as a staff member at the Adityawarman Museum in Padang, where he developed a stronger connection with cultural heritage. He also served as a proofreader and journalist for the *Haluan Padang* daily newspaper, contributing articles on culture, literature, and social issues. Through journalism, he refined his writing skills and positioned himself as a voice of the community, bridging artistic expression and societal realities. These diverse experiences solidified Darman's role as a prominent cultural and literary figure in Padang (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

On 18 May 1975, Darman Moenir married Darhana Bakar, whom he met in 1973 when she was studying at a Religious Teacher Education (Pendidikan Guru Agama/PGA) school, equivalent to high school. Their first child, Tahtiha Darman Moenir, was born in Padang on 30 May 1976. She completed her bachelor's degree in English Literature at Universitas Andalas and currently works at the Padang Language Center (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

The couple was later blessed with several other children. Their second son, Abla Darman Moenir, sadly passed away at the age of five. Their third child, Haiyyu Darman Moenir, was born on 21 December 1980. He earned his bachelor's degree in International Relations from Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY) and later completed a master's degree in the same field at the University of Indonesia. He currently serves as a lecturer in the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Andalas (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Their next son, Hoppla Darman Moenir, was born on 14 December 1982 and later became an entrepreneur. Their daughter, Tastafti Darman Moenir, was born on 29 May 1984, graduated in Fisheries from Universitas Riau, and works at the Padang City Fisheries and Marine Affairs Office. Their youngest child, Atshwa Darman Moenir, was born on 23 June 1994, graduated with a degree in Economics from Universitas Bung Hatta, and now also works as an entrepreneur (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

In 2019, after struggling with lung cancer for approximately fifteen years, Darman Moenir was hospitalized at Dr. M. Djamil Hospital in Padang. His condition worsened during treatment, and he was transferred to the hospital's High Care Unit (Sastra, 2019). On 30 July 2019, at 2:40 p.m., Darman Moenir passed away at the age of 67. He was laid to rest in the Universitas Andalas cemetery complex (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Darman Moenir's Educational Background

Darman Moenir began his formal education in 1958 by enrolling in a Sekolah Rakyat (SR, now known as elementary school) located in Nagari Sawah Tangah, his birthplace. At the time, he was six years old. The school was situated close to his home, which allowed him to walk there every day with his peers. These morning walks were not merely routine but also served as meaningful social and emotional experiences that shaped his early character and sense of community (M. Chan, personal communication, 5 August 2024).

During his years at *Sekolah Rakyat*, Darman demonstrated remarkable intelligence, discipline, and enthusiasm for learning. He was known as a diligent student who consistently ranked first in his class each semester, reflecting both his intellectual capabilities and perseverance (M. Chan, personal communication, 5 August 2024).

In 1964, Darman continued his studies at the State Junior High School (*SMP Negeri*) in Simabur, a nearby village. During his time there, the school was relocated from Nagari Simabur to Nagari Sawah Tangah. However, it retained the name *SMP Negeri Simabur* as a tribute to its historical roots (M. Chan, personal communication, 5 August 2024).

Every day, Darman walked approximately 600 meters to and from school with his classmates. He remained highly motivated and consistently achieved outstanding academic results. Teachers and peers described him as intelligent, disciplined, and creative—a student who consistently ranked at the top of his class (M. Chan, personal communication, 5 August 2024).

After completing junior high school, Darman initially planned to continue his studies at a high school in Batusangkar. However, his father advised him to pursue the arts, recognizing his son's natural talent for drawing. Following this guidance, Darman enrolled at the Indonesian Fine Arts School (Sekolah Seni Rupa Indonesia or SSRI) in Padang from 1967 to 1970. Although he majored in painting, his interest in writing began to grow, encouraged by his Indonesian language teacher. Under this mentorship, Darman started to develop his literary skills and discovered his passion for creative expression (Rosyadi, 2012).

In his final year at SSRI, he wrote his first short story, *Senja Penentuan* (*The Decisive Sunset*), inspired by a personal teenage experience. The short story was later published in *Haluan Padang*, one of the leading newspapers in West Sumatra, marking the beginning of Darman Moenir's professional writing career (Damono, 2018).

After completing his studies at SSRI, Darman decided to further his education in a different yet related field—language and communication. In 1971, he enrolled at the Prayoga Foreign Language Academy (Akademi Bahasa Asing Prayoga) in Padang. Initially, he intended to study at the Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts (Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia or ASRI) in Yogyakarta. Still, his family did not permit him to study far from home.

At Prayoga, he studied for three years. During the first four semesters, he majored in German, but later switched to English, which became his primary focus. This academic transition expanded his linguistic proficiency and cultural insight, skills that later supported both his literary and professional endeavors (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

After graduating from the Prayoga Foreign Language Academy, Darman worked as an English teacher at the INS Kayu Tanam Education Center. In 1981, he decided to pursue a bachelor's degree at the Faculty of Literature, Universitas Bung Hatta. Two years later, in 1983, he was appointed as a civil servant at the Adityawarman State Museum. Due to his professional responsibilities, he transferred to the Prayoga College of Foreign Languages in Padang in 1984 (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

In 1989, Darman completed his studies, earning a bachelor's degree in English Literature. His undergraduate thesis, titled *"The Language Used in the Tambo: A Preliminary Study on Classical Minangkabau Work"*, explored linguistic and cultural dimensions of classical Minangkabau narratives, reflecting his early commitment to artistic and literary scholarship.



Figure 1. Darman Moenir at his graduation in 1989
Source: Darman Moenir's Personal Documents.

Darman Moenir's Work

In 1970, Darman Moenir began his professional journey when he received his first honorarium for publishing a short story. This achievement ignited his passion for writing and marked his formal entry into the literary world. The joy of seeing his work in print strengthened his determination to write consistently and continue submitting his manuscripts to various newspapers and magazines (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

After completing his studies in English Literature at the Prayoga College of Foreign Languages, Darman Moenir briefly worked as an English teacher at the INS (*Indonesisch Nederlandsche School*) in Kayu Tanam, Padang Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra, in 1975. However, his teaching career was short-lived. In the same year, following his marriage to Darhana Bakar, Darman decided—with his wife's encouragement—to shift his career toward journalism. He subsequently joined the daily newspaper *Haluan Padang* (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Haluan Padang is one of the oldest daily newspapers in Indonesia and the first newspaper established in West Sumatra after Indonesia's independence. At *Haluan Padang*, Darman served as a proofreader and journalist, ensuring the accuracy and quality of published content. His responsibilities included editing manuscripts, correcting typographical errors, and maintaining linguistic and stylistic consistency. Beyond his editorial duties, Darman also contributed to the newspaper's creative development by designing its logo and proposing its motto—an indication of his deep commitment to shaping the publication's identity and appeal to readers (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Despite his demanding schedule as a journalist, Darman never abandoned his passion for writing. He consistently set aside time to create literary works, demonstrating an exceptional ability to balance his professional and creative lives. His experience in journalism further enriched his literary sensibilities, sharpening his observations of human life, culture, and social change. His dedication serves as an exemplary model of how one can effectively integrate multiple roles—teacher, journalist, and writer—while maintaining artistic integrity and productivity (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Between 1982 and 1991, Darman worked as a freelance journalist and columnist for various regional and national newspapers. In 1992, he joined the daily newspaper *Semangat* as an editor and staff reporter, a position he held until the publication ceased operations in 2002 (Krisna, 2011). Through his involvement with *Haluan Padang* and *Harian Semangat*, Darman made significant contributions to the growth of journalism in West Sumatra, helping to establish both newspapers as credible and influential sources of public information in the region.

In 1984, Darman Moenir began a new chapter in his professional life when he was appointed as a civil servant at the Adityawarman Museum in Padang (Daswarman, personal communication, 27 December 2024). The

Adityawarman Museum serves as a center for the preservation of Minangkabau and Indonesian cultural heritage (Kecamatan Padang Utara, 2022). As a museum staff member, Darman worked as a curator and cultural manager responsible for collecting, documenting, and presenting artifacts of Minangkabau culture. He also organized exhibitions, wrote and edited museum publications, and translated exhibition labels into English. Additionally, he participated in research and educational programs aimed at increasing public awareness of West Sumatra's cultural heritage (Daswarman, personal communication, 27 December 2024).

Darman's career as a civil servant concluded in 2008 when he retired from the Adityawarman Museum. His dedication, spanning more than two decades of service, transformed the museum into a vital center for cultural learning and intergenerational knowledge exchange. His curatorial work helped connect younger generations to the richness of Minangkabau tradition, ensuring that local heritage continued to thrive in modern society.

Retirement did not mark the end of Darman Moenir's creative journey. On the contrary, it provided him with greater freedom to explore his artistic potential. After leaving public service, he remained actively involved in the arts and literature. Darman continued writing poetry, short stories, essays, and critiques, while also participating in cultural events and literary discussions. His unwavering commitment to writing and culture reflects a lifelong dedication to creativity and the preservation of Minangkabau intellectual traditions (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

The Twists and Turns of Being a Writer and His Works

Darman Moenir was first introduced to the world of writing during his studies at the Indonesian School of Fine Arts (*Sekolah Seni Rupa Indonesia* or SSRI), which is equivalent to senior high school. His interest in literature was sparked by his Indonesian language teacher, who played a pivotal role in fostering his enthusiasm for reading and writing. During his time at SSRI, Darman also developed close relationships with several teachers, including Hasnul Kabri (painting), Ardy Samah (sculpture), and Wisran Hadi (theatre). He deeply admired their achievements—particularly those of Wisran Hadi, who received numerous awards for his creative works. From these mentors, Darman drew motivation and confidence to pursue his own artistic and literary endeavors.

Interestingly, Darman's early exploration of writing began with an unconventional approach: he wrote poetry by transforming prose into verse. This creative method allowed him to express his emotions and ideas more deeply, shaping his early poetic sensibilities (Hierlina, 1994).

Darman Moenir's literary works are renowned for their idealism, realism, and critical tone, often grounded in the social realities of his time and place. He used literature as a medium to voice resistance and express dissatisfaction with injustice, yet without overt moralizing. For him, literature should not instruct but rather provoke thought; messages should be implicit rather than didactic. He believed that readers possess the autonomy to interpret meanings for themselves and that literary works should avoid dogmatic or slogan-like language (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Stylistically, Darman's writing is direct, bold, and honest, characterized by simplicity and emotional intensity. He portrayed life as it is—without embellishment or euphemism. This realism made his works accessible to readers seeking authentic depictions of everyday experiences. Although his writings were often grounded in Minangkabau regional and socio-cultural contexts, Darman's contributions enriched Indonesian literature as a whole by amplifying local perspectives that were frequently marginalized in the national literary scene (S. Ariffin, personal communication, 26 January 2025).

His creativity and intellectual curiosity produced a wide range of works with distinct Minangkabau characteristics. These qualities are evident in his poetry collection, *Sajak-Sajak Tanpa Makna* (*Poems Without Meaning*), and in his acclaimed novel, *Bako*. Many of his writings drew inspiration from personal experiences and explored the traditions, values, and cultural wisdom of Minangkabau society.

Darman's first published short story, *Senja Penentuan* (*The Decisive Sunset*), marked the beginning of his literary career. The story, inspired by his youthful experiences and feelings of first love, subtly portrays themes of affection and emotional awakening during adolescence (S. Ariffin, personal communication, 26 January 2025). *Senja Penentuan* was published in *Haluan Padang*, one of the most prominent newspapers in West Sumatra at the time,

providing young writers with a crucial platform to showcase their work. The publication not only signaled Darman's arrival as a promising writer but also demonstrated how personal experiences can be transformed into meaningful art that resonates with readers (Krisna, 2011).

By 1970, Darman began pursuing literature with greater seriousness and consistency. Starting with poetry, he soon expanded his writing to include prose, criticism, and essays. The success of his first publication strengthened his resolve to continue producing diverse literary works across multiple genres (Krisna, 2011).

One year later, his short story *Gantunganku Sudah Putus* (*My Rope Has Been Cut*) was published in the national newspaper *Indonesia Raya*. He later contributed an essay, *Surat dari Padang* (*Letter from Padang*), to *Horison* magazine—one of Indonesia's most prestigious literary journals. His works also appeared in *Aman Makmur*, *Semangat*, *Singgalang*, and *Padang Post*, expanding his readership and influence. Around this period, Darman also began experimenting with journalistic writing, producing news articles that reflected his keen sense of observation and commitment to public discourse (Krisna, 2011).

In 1973, Darman became a member of the "Krikil Tajam" Literary Study Group, founded by A.A. Navis. The group brought together emerging writers such as A. Chaniago Hr, Asnelly Luthan, Harris Effendi Thahar, R. Lubis Zamaksjari, Sjahida Siddiq, Sjaiful Usmar, Zulfikar Said, Yalvema Miaz, Susianna Darmawi, Bakthtaruddin Nasution, Sjaiful Bachri, and Tabah R. Rawisati. Under Navis's mentorship, the group met weekly for nearly a year to study and critique literature. The *Krikil Tajam* group gained attention from prominent literary figures, including Mursal Esten, Chairul Harun, and Nasrul Siddik, becoming one of the most vibrant literary communities in Padang (S. Ariffin, personal communication, 26 January 2025).

Darman's creative journey and growing network of literary peers eventually led him into close contact with Ali Akbar Navis (A.A. Navis)—one of the leading figures of Indonesia's post-independence realist movement and a renowned writer from West Sumatra. Navis became both mentor and motivator, challenging Darman to broaden his horizons by publishing his works in Jakarta-based newspapers and magazines, which are at the heart of Indonesia's literary scene (H. E. Thahar, personal communication, 26 January 2025).

Navis's encouragement proved pivotal. At that time, Jakarta was considered the center of literary prestige, and many believed that a writer could not be regarded as a true *sastrawan* (literary author) until their work reached the capital's readership. This challenge inspired Darman to expand his creative ambitions and strive for national recognition, marking a pivotal turning point in his literary development (H. E. Thahar, personal communication, 26 January 2025).

Literary Style and Characteristics

As a writer, Darman Moenir possessed a distinctive personality and literary character. He was known for his seriousness and pursuit of perfection in every piece of work he produced. During his university years, he diligently studied foreign languages—particularly English—as he believed that mastering a second language would expand his understanding of world literature. To enhance his proficiency, he frequently read and translated English texts, as well as Greek, English, and German myths (S. Ariffin, personal communication, 26 January 2025). Darman never treated his writing lightly; whenever he worked on fiction—whether short stories or novels—he constantly revised and refined his drafts until he achieved a sense of artistic and personal satisfaction.

Unlike many writers who submit their work for exposure, Darman Moenir was highly selective about publication. He would only submit a piece once he was completely confident in its quality and publication prospects. This deliberate approach underscores his deep commitment to literature and his respect for readers. His writing habits reflect a disciplined and perfectionist personality that values precision and integrity in artistic expression (S. Ariffin, personal communication, 26 January 2025).

Darman Moenir also emphasized that he wrote only about subjects he truly understood. He admitted to being unable to fabricate or write convincingly about things beyond his experience. According to him, authentic writing emerges from lived experience and long-term familiarity with a topic or emotion (S. Ariffin, personal communication, 26 January 2025).

In poetry, Darman acknowledged being influenced by the styles of two renowned Indonesian poets—Chairil Anwar and Goenawan Mohamad. However, he consciously sought to develop his own poetic voice, distinct from theirs. For Darman, writing poetry was an act of translating memories and emotions into language. He drew inspiration from the natural beauty around him, the howling of dogs at night, a tense atmosphere, or even a meaningful smile that captured his imagination (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

In prose, his inspiration stemmed from deeply personal experiences that were often difficult to articulate. When writing his novel *Bako*, for example, Darman explored the unique social dynamics of living in his father's family home—a situation uncommon in the matrilineal Minangkabau system. Although he and his family lived patrilineally within a matrilineal society, they were not marginalized or ostracized. This personal experience of navigating dual cultural identities became the emotional foundation of *Bako*, shaping the novel's exploration of belonging and kinship (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

According to Djoosuroto and Kinayati (2015), every literary genre reflects the attitudes, spirit, and worldview of its creator. In Darman Moenir's case, his literary style reveals an interplay between realism, romanticism, and expressionism, each contributing to the distinct texture of his works. His realism manifests in his detailed depiction of everyday life and his ability to capture social and cultural realities with accuracy and empathy.

The romantic elements in his writing emerge through his exploration of deep emotions—particularly love and longing—that move readers beyond mere narrative structure. Meanwhile, his use of expressionism allows him to portray complex inner states through evocative imagery, symbols, and emotional intensity. By weaving these three artistic tendencies together, Darman Moenir successfully produced works that are not only aesthetically appealing but also rich in meaning and reflection (Rumbiati & Taslima, 2018).

His writing invites readers to contemplate life, love, and the complexities of human emotion. Through his literary craft, Darman built bridges between reality and imagination, creating a profound and lasting connection between art, literature, and the lived human experience.

Winning Prizes from Various Competitions

Darman Moenir, a prolific writer from Padang, produced a wide range of literary works, including novels, short stories, poems, and translations. Each of his creations reflects not only his creativity and intellectual depth but also his dedication to delivering a meaningful reading experience for literary enthusiasts. Throughout his career, he received numerous awards that recognized his significant contributions to Indonesian literature.

The first significant recognition came from the Jakarta Arts Council (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, DKJ)—a national cultural institution renowned for fostering literary and artistic excellence in Indonesia. In 1980, Darman Moenir submitted his novel *Bako* to the DKJ Novel Writing Competition. The story, deeply personal in nature, was inspired by the author's own experiences and explores Minangkabau social structures through the lens of paternal kinship, as reflected in its title, which means "father's family" in Minangkabau culture.

The competition jury consisted of four prominent Indonesian literary figures: Ali Audah, Sapardi Djoko Damono, Dami N. Toda, and Toeti Heraty Noerhadi. In February 1981, the jury announced *Bako* as the first-prize winner, followed by *Olenka* by Budi Darma (Surabaya) and a novel by Nasjah Djamin (Yogyakarta). The winners received a prize of Rp. 200,000 each. Five additional works received honorable mentions: *Den Bagus* (Sudarmono K., Surabaya), *Dicari Hari yang Cerah* (E. Nohbi, Jakarta), *When the Lights Are Red* (Hamsad Rangkuti, Jakarta), *Merdeka* (Putu Wijaya), and *Panggil Aku Sakai* (Ediruslan Pe Amanriza), each awarded Rp. 50,000 (Senandung Pena, 2012.).

In 1987, Darman earned his second major award when his novel *Aku, Keluargaku, Tetanggaku* (*Me, My Family, My Neighbors*) won second place in a novel writing competition organized by *Kartini* magazine. The work examines the complexities of interpersonal relationships and community life in urban Indonesia (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024). Following this success, *Balai Pustaka* published the novel in 1993, bringing his realistic and socially reflective narrative style to a broader audience (Moenir, 1990).

Darman continued to receive national recognition throughout his career. In 1992, he was awarded the National Literary Prize by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia for his novel *Dendang* (1988). The award

acknowledged his outstanding contribution to Indonesian literature and his ability to intertwine cultural identity with humanistic themes (Moenir, 1990). A year later, in 1993, he received recognition again from *Kartini* magazine, where he was listed among the main winners in the magazine's national literary competition (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Beyond his accomplishments in novel writing, Darman also excelled in short fiction. In 1986, his short story *Jelaga Rumah Tanggaku* (*The Soot of My Household*) won second place in a national short story competition organized by *Pertiwi* magazine. The competition attracted writers from across Indonesia, and Darman's award reinforced his reputation as a versatile writer capable of mastering both long and short literary forms (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

In 2015, Darman received a Literary Achievement Award from the West Sumatra Language Center (*Balai Bahasa Sumatera Barat*) for his lifetime contributions to regional and national literature. The award was presented alongside other prominent West Sumatran writers, including poet Rusli Marzuki Saria, short story writer Harris Effendi Thahar, and playwright S. Metron Masdison. This recognition underscored his enduring influence and leadership in the literary landscape of West Sumatra (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

Darman Moenir later received further recognition from the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, acknowledging his sustained excellence in exploring cultural, social, and humanitarian themes through literature. Additionally, he was honored by *Balai Pustaka*, Indonesia's oldest publishing house, and by various literary communities across the country. These honors collectively represent not only public admiration but also scholarly appreciation for his innovation, creative depth, and lifelong dedication to Indonesian literature (T. D. Moenir, personal communication, 26 August 2024).

CONCLUSION

Darman Moenir stands as one of West Sumatra's most influential literary figures whose life and works reflect the rich interplay between culture, intellect, and creativity. Throughout his life, he consistently demonstrated commitment, discipline, and intellectual depth, qualities that shaped both his artistic identity and his contributions to Indonesian literature. From his early fascination with art and music in Sawah Tangah to his academic pursuit of English literature and his active involvement in journalism and cultural preservation, Darman Moenir's journey embodies the spirit of a lifelong learner and creator.

His literary works, including *Bako*, *Dendang*, *Aku, Keluargaku, Tetanggaku*, and *Sajak-Sajak Tanpa Makna*, reveal an author who is deeply grounded in the realities of Minangkabau society while simultaneously engaging in universal human questions. Darman's style—rooted in realism, romanticism, and expressionism—illustrates his ability to balance emotional depth with intellectual critique. His works do not merely narrate life but dissect it, exposing the nuances of human relationships, cultural identity, and moral reflection.

As both a writer and cultural worker, Darman Moenir contributed far beyond the written page. His involvement in journalism, education, and curatorial work at the Adityawarman Museum underscores his dedication to preserving and interpreting West Sumatran heritage for future generations. His achievements, recognized through numerous national and regional literary awards, reflect not only personal excellence but also his broader role in advancing Indonesian literary and cultural consciousness.

Ultimately, Darman Moenir's life represents the inseparable link between literature and lived experience. His works remind readers that art is not merely a product of imagination, but a dialogue between memory, reality, and reflection. By blending authenticity with creativity, Darman Moenir forged a legacy that continues to inspire writers, scholars, and readers who seek to understand the cultural and human dimensions of Indonesian literature.

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List of Informants

1) Tahtiha Darman Moenir, 48 Years Old, Padang City, interviewed on 26 August 2024
2) Mirwan Chan, 72 Years Old, Sawah Tangah Village, interviewed on 5 August 2024
3) Daswarman, 55 Years Old, Padang City, interviewed on 27 Desember 2024
4) Sastri Yunizarty Bakri, 66 Years Old, Jakarta, interviewed on 5 Januari 2025
5) Harris Effendi Thahar, 75 Years Old, Padang City, interviewed on 26 Januari 2025
6) Syariffudin Arifin, 68 Years Old, Padang City, interviewed on 26 Januari 2025
7) Hamimi, 22 Years Old, Depok, interviewed on 6 May 2024

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