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Representations of Neo-colonialism and Late Colonialism in Contrast to Classical Colonialism: A Postcolonial Reading of Gholamhossein Saedi's *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah*

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Abstract
Postcolonial and late colonial studies constitute an important interdisciplinary field that has been extensively reflected in literary works. This theoretical framework examines the ideological confrontation between the subordinated East and the dominant West, seeking to reveal the discursive relationship between colonizer and colonized. Gholamhossein Saedi's *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah*, one of the most significant works of modern Iranian drama, offers a symbolic representation of the mechanisms through which colonial domination is reproduced in its modern forms. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of Neo-colonialism and late colonialism, this study examines the major characters of the play and demonstrates how their careful construction effectively conveys Saedi's central concern: the transformation of colonial strategies from overt domination into more sophisticated and indirect forms of control. Through symbolic characterization, Saedi exposes the diverse mechanisms of colonial hegemony while depicting the subtle discourses governing the relationship between colonizer and colonized. His dramatic representation extends beyond literary analysis into broader political, sociological, and anthropological concerns, in particular the internal vulnerabilities of colonized societies and the role played by local elites and political authorities in facilitating colonial domination through domestic weaknesses and foreign policy failures. This study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology to investigate the symbolic dimensions of colonial discourse in Saedi's dramatic work and to demonstrate how the play anticipates many of the central concepts developed in contemporary postcolonial theory.
Keywords: Neo-colonialism; Late Colonialism; Postcolonial Theory; Gholamhossein Saedi; *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah*; Characterization.

1. Introduction

The emergence of the Industrial Revolution and the spread of the Protestant Reformation ushered Europe into a new historical era commonly identified as the age of colonialism. During its initial phase—known as classical colonialism—European powers such as Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal relied primarily on military superiority to establish direct control over vast territories across Asia, Africa, and the newly discovered Americas. Military force constituted the principal instrument of colonial expansion, and hard power became the defining characteristic of colonial domination.

Following the end of the First World War, however, growing political consciousness among colonized peoples, together with the escalating economic costs of maintaining direct imperial rule, rendered classical colonialism increasingly unsustainable. Consequently, it evolved into a more sophisticated form of domination that pursued identical objectives through indirect mechanisms. This second phase became known in political discourse as Neo-colonialism, or postcolonial colonialism (Hosseini & Taqipour, 2015, p. 140).

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A third stage subsequently emerged—commonly referred to as late colonialism—as a response to the limitations inherent in neo-colonial strategies. One of the principal weaknesses of Neo-colonialism was its tendency to privilege the interests of colonial powers over those of the dependent states through compliant domestic governments. Such policies frequently generated popular resistance within colonized societies, compelling imperial powers to modify their methods of domination to safeguard their strategic interests.

Late colonialism therefore operates through indirect, decentralized mechanisms implemented within the institutional structures of dependent societies and reinforced through international organizations and transnational networks. Unlike earlier forms of colonial rule, its defining characteristic is comprehensive control exercised simultaneously through cultural, economic, political, and military instruments (Elahi, 2003, p. 72). Other distinguishing features include the discourse of humanitarian intervention, the ideology of civilizational salvation, and the exercise of productive power as mechanisms of global governance.

Political themes have long constituted one of the dominant intellectual currents in Persian literature. Since the Constitutional Revolution in particular, political engagement has become inseparable from the literary identity of many Iranian writers and poets. For numerous intellectuals, literary production has been closely intertwined with political activism, resistance against authoritarian governments, imprisonment, and opposition to both the Qajar monarchy and the Pahlavi regime.

Although Iran was never formally colonized in the conventional sense, significant portions of the country remained under the political and economic influence of foreign powers throughout both the Qajar and Pahlavi periods. Consequently, Iranian society experienced persistent forms of indirect colonial domination through political dependency, economic intervention, and the penetration of imperial strategies into domestic affairs (Mohammadpour & Alizadeh, 2011, p. 162).

The territorial fragmentation of Iran during the Qajar era and the consequent loss of substantial national resources rendered this period one of the darkest chapters in Iranian history. Following the Allied occupation of Iran during the Second World War, the abdication of Reza Shah, and the transfer of power to his son, foreign intervention assumed new forms. Political interference and external pressure intensified, exposing the structural instability of the Iranian state (Foran, 1999, pp. 400–401). As Adibzadeh (2008, p. 20) observes, "from the 1950s onward, the Pahlavi era can be understood through a distinctly postcolonial discourse."

Persian dramatic literature, like other literary genres, has consistently maintained a profound engagement with social and political realities. Among its most significant examples is Gholamhossein Saedi's *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah*, a play that provides fertile ground for postcolonial interpretation. Through its symbolic narrative, the work offers a sophisticated critique of both neo-colonial and late colonial strategies, making it an especially valuable text for examining the transformation of colonial domination in the modern era.

2. Literature Review

A considerable body of scholarship has addressed postcolonial criticism from a general theoretical perspective. Notable contributions include Saei's *An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory and Criticism* (2006), Karimi's *An Introduction to Postcolonial Studies* (2007), and Dehshiri's *From Orientalism to Postcolonial Studies* (2011). In addition, Shahmiri's monograph *Postcolonial Theory and Criticism* (2010) provides a comprehensive account of the theoretical foundations of postcolonial studies.

Despite the growing body of research on postcolonial criticism, no study has specifically examined Gholamhossein Saedi's *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah* through the combined theoretical frameworks of Neo-colonialism and late colonialism. The only closely related work is Abtin Golkar's comparative study, *An Ideological Discourse Analysis of the " intellectuals Other" in Ay Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah and A Not-So-Good Friday*, which investigates the discourse of intellectuals within a postcolonial critical framework. Golkar concludes that the intellectual figures in both plays embrace anti-colonial discourse as an ethical imperative, emphasizing resistance to oppression, steadfastness in the face of domination, and the pursuit of truth as the defining values of the intellectuals' tradition represented in these dramatic works.

Owing to its distinctive dramatic setting, symbolic language, narrative structure, and ideological orientation, *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah* occupies a unique position in modern Iranian drama. Through a highly symbolic dramatic framework, Saedi explores the nature and mechanisms of colonial domination while simultaneously exposing the structural vulnerabilities of colonized societies. The play therefore provides an exceptional literary representation of both colonial power and the internal conditions that facilitate colonial subjugation.

Accordingly, the present study undertakes a descriptive-analytical examination of the play through the dual perspectives of neo-colonial and late colonial theory, treating them as successive stages in the evolution of colonial domination following classical colonialism. By adopting this approach, the study seeks to critically examine Saedi's representation of colonialism, colonial domination, and colonial consciousness, while demonstrating how the play anticipates many of the central concerns of contemporary postcolonial scholarship.

3. Theoretical Framework: Neo-colonialism and Late Colonialism

The term **post-colonialism**, or Neo-colonialism, derives from the combination of the prefix *post*—meaning "after," "beyond," or "against"—and *colonial*. Broadly speaking, postcolonial studies constitute an interdisciplinary field concerned with the political and cultural consequences of European colonialism for formerly colonized societies. The prefix *post* does not merely denote the period following formal colonial rule; rather, it refers to the continuing structures of colonial influence that persist after political independence. Consequently, postcolonialism may be understood as a critical theory of colonial discourse that investigates the enduring mechanisms through which colonial power continues to operate (Ashcroft et al., 2014, p. 352).

Emerging in the aftermath of the Second World War amid the intellectual climate created by anti-racist struggles— in particular the African American civil rights movement—postcolonial theory sought to expose the subtle forms of domination that survived the collapse of formal empire (Bertens, 2012, p. 140). Modern Western imperialism no longer relies solely upon territorial occupation; instead, it reconstructs its hegemony by exploiting multiple dimensions of human existence while simultaneously taking advantage of

the structural weaknesses of nation-states. Contemporary imperial strategies therefore seek to secure both coercive and consensual forms of domination through political, cultural, economic, social, and military means (Eyvazi, 2012, p. 45).

Scholars such as Saad Al-Bazghi argue that classical colonialism has formally ended and has been replaced by a new phase of domination generally identified as imperialism or Neo-colonialism (Al-Bazghi, 2000, p. 92). Under Neo-colonialism —and, by extension, late colonialism—a nation may appear politically independent and retain the formal attributes of sovereignty, while its economic structures and political decision-making remain subject to external control (Smith, 2004, p. 197). From a postcolonial and poststructuralist perspective, this condition invites a critical re-examination of the very concept of "the West" through the deconstruction of colonial discourse, revealing the decisive role of colonialism and imperialism in shaping both Western self-understanding and Western representations of the non-Western world (Saei, 2006, p. 135).

At its core, postcolonial theory emerged from the anti-colonial thought of intellectuals from the Global South who sought to expose the concealed realities of modern colonial domination. Unlike classical colonialism, which justified military expansion under the rhetoric of civilization and development, Neo-colonialism operates by universalizing its own language, culture, and systems of knowledge. Through this process, the East is marginalized, interpreted in accordance with Western epistemological standards, and reconstructed through Orientalist discourse. Consequently, one of the principal objectives of postcolonial scholarship is to challenge imperial subjectivity and Western claims to cultural and political superiority to transcend the colonial paradigm itself (Dehshiri, 2011, pp. 77–78).

As Taslimi (2011, pp. 274–275) observes, postcolonial theory supports the cultures of societies that are no longer formal colonies yet continue to be perceived through a colonial mindset. From the late 1970s onward—and in particular during the 1980s—scholars from Asia, Africa, and Latin America increasingly challenged the universal validity of European literary and cultural theories, questioning their presumed neutrality and exposing their ideological foundations.

Postcolonial studies are therefore closely associated with the concept of cultural imperialism and its influence on identity formation and everyday life. While acknowledging the material and economic dimensions of domination, postcolonial criticism places equal emphasis on the role of discourse and ideology in sustaining imperial power (Shirzadi, 2009, p. 150). This intellectual movement gave rise to a number of influential theorists whose work established the foundations of contemporary postcolonial criticism. Most scholars regard Edward Said's *Orientalism* as the foundational text of the field, later expanded by theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Saeedi, 2015, p. 188). Said is primarily associated with the theory of Orientalism, Bhabha with the dynamics of interaction between colonizer and colonized, and Spivak with the concept of **subalternity** (Taslimi, 2011; Khodaei, 2012; Shirzadi, 2009).

Alongside these figures, Frantz Fanon occupies a foundational position within postcolonial thought. His analyses of race, language, identity, and power— in particular in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*—provided the intellectual groundwork upon which later postcolonial theory was constructed (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2008, p. 80). Fanon's principal contributions may be summarized as follows:

- the psychological consequences of racial hierarchy and the internalization of inferiority among colonized peoples;
- the structural inequalities between developed and underdeveloped nations, whereby colonial powers exploit the poverty of dependent societies while ensuring that political independence alone cannot secure genuine autonomy;
- cultural alienation, through which indigenous cultures gradually deteriorate under the dominance of colonial culture, leading colonized subjects to imitate Western values;
- the intrinsic relationship between colonialism and racism, since colonial domination is predicated upon assumptions of racial superiority;
- the emergence of an imitative bourgeoisie within postcolonial societies that reproduces Western models without achieving genuine independence;
- the inadequacy of nationalism as a sufficient strategy for decolonization unless accompanied by broad-based popular mobilization; and
- a preference for socialism over capitalism, which Fanon regarded as a more effective means of overcoming colonial exploitation (Shirzadi, 2009, pp. 155–161).

Edward Said introduced postcolonial criticism through his influential works *Orientalism* (1978) and Culture, and *Imperialism* (1993). In these writings, he demonstrates how Europe and the United States historically constructed the "Orient" as the cultural Other—a space simultaneously imagined as the birthplace of Western civilization and its civilizational opposite. Said argues that Orientalism is not merely an academic discipline but a discourse through which the West produces knowledge about the East to justify and sustain political domination.

Central to Said's argument is the decisive role of culture in facilitating imperial expansion. Knowledge about the Orient—including philology, anthropology, sociology, geography, psychology, and historical scholarship—became a strategic resource through which colonial powers legitimized their authority and secured political, economic, and intellectual advantages. Accordingly, Said defines imperialism as the practice, theory, and attitude of a dominant metropolitan center that governs distant territories, while colonialism constitutes one of imperialism's concrete historical manifestations through the settlement of foreign populations in occupied lands (Said, 1982, pp. 162–166). In the contemporary era, he argues, colonialism has assumed primarily cultural forms, functioning simultaneously through political, ideological, economic, and social institutions.

Homi K. Bhabha extends postcolonial theory by examining the psychological and cultural relationships between colonizer and colonized. Unlike Said, whose primary concern is the operation of colonial discourse and power, Bhabha investigates the behavior, language, and subjectivity of the colonized individual. He conceptualizes colonial identity as unstable, hybrid, and continually negotiated through cultural interaction. In accordance with Bhabha, the colonized subject responds to colonial authority through a complex mixture of compliance and resistance, thereby destabilizing colonial power itself.

Among Bhabha's most influential concepts is **mimicry**, whereby the colonized imitate the language, culture, and institutions of the colonizer. Yet such imitation never becomes complete; instead, it produces ambivalence that ultimately undermines colonial authority. Language, as one of the most significant cultural instruments of colonialism, is transformed through its encounter with indigenous societies, thereby reshaping both colonizer and colonized. Whereas Said emphasizes binary oppositions such as East versus West or colonizer versus colonized, Bhabha highlights their shared spaces of negotiation, proposing the concept of **hybridity** as an alternative model of colonial relations (Shirzadi, 2009, p. 174).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak further develops postcolonial theory through her influential concept of the subaltern, a term originally derived from Antonio Gramsci's writings on marginalized social groups. For Spivak, the subaltern denotes those excluded from dominant structures of political and cultural representation. Drawing simultaneously upon Marxism, poststructuralism, feminism, and postcolonial theory, she argues that the Western construction of itself as masculine, rational, and superior necessarily positions the East as feminine, subordinate, and voiceless (Taslimi, 2011, p. 283). Silencing the voices of the subaltern, she contends, represents a continuation of the imperial project, while recovering those voices becomes an essential strategy for exposing colonial intervention and its underlying ideological assumptions (Young, 2011, p. 410).

While these theorists primarily examine neo-colonial forms of domination, late colonialism represents a further evolution of colonial strategy. Its principal objective is no longer territorial occupation but the indirect cultivation of dependent elites through educational systems, media institutions, and cultural organizations, while simultaneously denying any formal relationship between these actors and foreign powers. By operating through local intermediaries, colonial states significantly reduce the political costs associated with direct intervention, including popular resistance and revolutionary movements that historically threatened neo-colonial regimes (Hosseini & Taqipour, 2015, p. 141).

Late colonialism therefore relies not only on domestically dependent elites, but also on compliant political leadership. More significantly, its primary target is no longer the territorial state but the individual human subject. Through advances in information technology, global communications, and transnational media, late colonialism transcends national borders. It seeks to influence individuals directly, transforming every person into a potential object of colonial governance (Mansouri, 2014, p. 30).

In light of these theoretical perspectives, many literary works— in particular those produced by politically engaged intellectuals —lend themselves to analysis through the complementary frameworks of Neo-colonialism and late colonialism. Such an approach enables scholars to uncover an author's ideological understanding of colonial domination and its enduring transformations. Among modern Iranian writers, Gholamhossein Saedi occupies a particularly significant position. His play *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah* offers exceptional potential for postcolonial interpretation, and the following sections examine the work in light of the theoretical principles outlined above.

Table 1. Evolution of Colonialism: From Classical to Neo-colonialism and Late Colonialism

Characteristics	Instruments of Domination	Major Consequences
Direct military domination	Military force; territorial occupation	Popular resistance; high costs for the colonial power
Indirect political and economic domination	Dependent political elites; economic control; foreign policy	Government dependency; social conflict; resistance by intellectuals
Soft and covert domination	Mass media; culture; international organizations	Public pacification; marginalization of intellectuals; consolidation of ideological hegemony

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Neo-colonialism and Late Colonialism

Indicator	Neo-colonialism	Late Colonialism
Mode of domination	Direct political and economic influence exercised through dependent governments	Indirect and covert domination exercised through institutions, media, and culture
Primary instruments	Economic control; foreign policy, and dependent elites	Culture, mass media; international organizations, and soft power
Defining characteristic	The interests of the colonial power take precedence over those of the dependent state	Diffuse and comprehensive control across cultural, political, and economic spheres
Public response	Popular resistance and independence movements	Public pacification and gradual ideological domination through media and cultural influence
Role of elites	Open dependence on colonial powers	Acting as intermediaries who legitimize and facilitate covert domination
Principal outcome	Heightened social conflict; organized resistance	Consolidation of domination at the level of culture; consciousness, making resistance increasingly difficult.

4. Analysis of the Characters in *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah* through the Lens of Neo-Colonial and Late Colonial Criticism

4.1. Synopsis of *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah*

The first part of the play, *Ay Bi Kolah* ("The Hatless One"), opens in the middle of the night when an elderly man awakens the residents of his neighborhood after witnessing a strange monster entering an abandoned house. Initially, one of the neighbors dismisses his account as delusional. A physician, who is also one of the neighbors, urges the residents to remain calm. Another resident, the Man on the Balcony, confirms that he too has seen the creature. Although one of the neighbors gathers to discuss the incident, no one is willing to approach the abandoned house. Amid the confusion and growing anxiety, the door of the deserted building suddenly opens, and an older woman carrying an oversized puppet emerges. The Man on the Balcony laughs at the crowd, who, embarrassed and irritated, return to their homes, leaving only him and the older man behind.

The second part, *Ay Ba Kolah* ("The Hatted One"), begins with a group of bandits entering the same abandoned house. Having witnessed their arrival, both the older man and the Man on the Balcony attempt to warn one of the neighbors once again; however, they

are ridiculed and ignored. While the Man on the Balcony continues his efforts to enlighten the community, the physician distributes sleeping pills, encouraging everyone to return peacefully to sleep. Ultimately, the bandits—now appearing in overwhelming numbers—invade one of the neighbors and plunder every house (Saedi, 1967, pp. 1–93).

4.2. Reinterpreting the Characters of *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah* through the Framework of Neo-colonialism and Late Colonialism

Since characterization constitutes one of the principal dramatic devices through which playwrights construct narrative meaning, this section examines the major characters of *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah*, focusing on their actions and interactions as the driving forces of the play's narrative structure. By portraying a small/hood as a microcosm of society, Saedi symbolically represents the broader social order. Within this miniature social structure, individuals from diverse social backgrounds—including a mechanic, a physician, the school caretaker, and ordinary residents—collectively determine the community's ultimate fate through their choices and behavior.

As in many of Saedi's dramatic works, the characters remain unnamed. Rather than functioning as psychologically individualized figures, they serve as social types representing distinct segments of society. Their beliefs, language, and actions consistently reflect the ideological and social characteristics of the groups they symbolize.

4.2.1. Identifying the Protagonists and Their Relationship to the Other Characters

The Protagonists

A close reading of *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah* identifies the older man and the Man on the Balcony as the principal protagonists of the play. They are the only fully awakened members of the community, recognizing the impending danger and attempting to awaken others to its presence. Although their fates ultimately diverge—the older man is overwhelmed by the indifference of the people, whereas the Man on the Balcony survives the bandits' assault—their contrasting destinies reflect an important social reality: dissenting voices are frequently marginalized, and survival under oppressive conditions often depends upon vigilance, caution, and individual awareness.

The Antagonists

At first glance, the Bandits appear to be the obvious antagonists of the play. However, because they enter the dramatic action only in the final scene and because the play primarily explores the reactions of different social groups and intellectual currents to the threat of neo-colonial domination, they function more appropriately as secondary antagonists.

The true principal antagonist is the Physician. By anesthetizing the community—both literally and metaphorically—he lulls the people into complacency, clears the way for the unrestricted advance of the bandits, and ultimately facilitates the community's defeat. His actions make him the central agent through whom colonial domination becomes possible.

The Secondary Characters

The ordinary residents, one of the neighbors, function as secondary characters. They are interchangeable representatives of the general public rather than individually developed personalities. Their passivity, negligence, and inability to recognize the dangers surrounding them ultimately render them vulnerable to exploitation and plunder by the bandits, who symbolically embody the forces of modern colonialism.

4.2.2. The older man as the Central Protagonist

The older man is one of the most psychologically and symbolically complex characters in the play. On the one hand, he is wise, vigilant, and committed to awakening others. On the other, he is neither flawless nor heroic in the conventional sense. He suffers from physical frailty, frequent urination, fear, and the ordinary limitations of old age. Yet despite these weaknesses, he alone raises the call for resistance. Simultaneously cautious and actively engaged, he refuses to remain silent in the face of impending catastrophe.

Rather than representing an idealized hero, the older man resembles the archetypal elder whose wisdom derives from long experience. His accumulated knowledge enables him to recognize danger before anyone else and to expose what others cannot perceive. More broadly, he symbolizes the collective conscience of the society—a conscience that, despite repeated marginalization and suppression, never entirely disappears.

The decisive turning point in the older man’s journey occurs when he encounters the mysterious monster. He reacts immediately, employing every means available to restore security to one of the neighbors. His efforts, however, are ultimately frustrated by the people's indifference and by the carefully orchestrated conspiracy of the bandits. This failure reflects the complexity of colonial strategy itself. One of colonialism's most effective mechanisms is its ability to render colonized societies indifferent to their own condition, thereby facilitating domination with minimal resistance.

Saedi further illustrates this process through the staged appearance of the oversized puppet in the first part of the play. The puppet deliberately alters public perception of the older man, transforming him in the eyes of the community from a credible witness into a delusional and senile figure. Symbolically, the puppet functions much like the mass media employed by late colonial systems: it silences critical voices, manipulates public opinion, and reconstructs social reality in ways that ultimately advance colonial objectives. As a result, the people reject the older man's warnings, leaving him defeated—not because he is mistaken, but because colonial manipulation, combined with public apathy, has rendered truth itself unbelievable.

Through the older man's failure, Saedi offers a penetrating political and social critique. Rather than attributing colonial domination solely to external forces, he exposes the internal conditions—public complacency, manipulation of perception, and the marginalization of critical voices—that make such domination possible. In doing so, he invites readers to reconsider the responsibilities not only of political authority but also of ordinary citizens and intellectuals in confronting systems of oppression.

4.2.3. Symbolic Dimensions of the Older Man's Character

4.2.3.1. Physical Appearance and Symbolic Significance

The older man's advanced age symbolizes accumulated wisdom and experience. Traditionally, old age commands respect and lends authority to one's words. Within the play, however, the Physician interprets the older man's age as evidence of mental deterioration, dismissing his testimony as the product of hallucinations caused by digestive problems rather than genuine perception (Saedi, 1967, p. 18). This tension between wisdom and presumed senility creates one of the play's central dramatic ambiguities, compelling both the audience and the other characters to question whether the older man's extraordinary claims should be believed.

His old age also positions him as the embodiment of a society's vigilant moral conscience—one that perceives danger earlier than others and persistently attempts to alert the community. Yet Saedi deliberately avoids portraying him as an idealized or invincible hero. His physical ailments, including leg pain, chest discomfort, and general frailty, restrict his mobility and prevent him from confronting the threat directly. In a society lulled into complacency, even those who remain awake often lack the physical or political strength required to resist an overwhelmingly powerful colonial force.

4.2.3.2. Recognizing the Monstrous Face of Colonialism

The older man's terror upon encountering the monster is grounded in reality rather than superstition, for he alone has witnessed its true appearance. His experience symbolizes the heightened awareness of a collective national conscience capable of recognizing the true nature of colonial domination before others do.

Throughout the play, the older man repeatedly attempts to describe the monster:

Doctor: "So you actually saw it?"
Older man**:** "Yes, sir. I certainly did."
Doctor: "Well then, who was it? What did it look like?"
Older man**:** "It was a strange monster, sir!"
Doctor: "How do you know it was a thief?"
Older man**:** "Perhaps it wasn't a thief."
Doctor (surprised): "If it wasn't a thief, then who was it?"
Older man**:** "A murderer, sir. A criminal—or perhaps something even worse than all of those..." (Saedi, 1967, p. 16).

The monster thus becomes a symbolic representation of colonialism itself: elusive, terrifying, and more dangerous than conventional forms of violence because its true identity remains concealed.

4.2.3.3. Prudence and Strategic Caution

The older man's attempts to awaken the residents and warn them of the bandits' presence are guided primarily by prudence and strategic caution:

Daughter: "Father, why don't we go up to the roof and shout to alert everyone?"
Older man**:** "Shout? Are you out of your mind? Should we climb onto the roof and put ourselves on display so that he'll recognize us? Huh?"
Daughter: "He might recognize us anyway."
Older man**:** "That's unlikely. Besides, what if our shouting gives him the chance to escape?"
Daughter: "So what if he escapes?"
Older man**:** "Exactly. He escapes tonight and comes back for us tomorrow—have you thought about that?" (Saedi, 1967, pp. 10–11).

Rather than indicating cowardice, the older man's caution reflects wisdom and strategic foresight. Although he is committed to awakening the community, he carefully considers the possible consequences of every action before acting.

4.2.3.4. Awakening Others and Educating the Younger Generation

Apart from the Man on the Balcony, the older man is the only character who has witnessed the bandits and recognizes the imminent danger they pose. His overriding concern is to awaken the community. He is not merely interested in exposing the intruders; he is determined to mobilize the residents to confront and ultimately defeat them.

As argued earlier, the older man embodies the awakened conscience of society. His sleeplessness, his repeated knocking on the doors of neighboring houses, and his persistent warnings all symbolize his unwavering commitment to raising public awareness (Saedi, 1967, p. 43). Even when he is forcibly put to sleep, he resists until the very end.

Equally significant is his determination to awaken his daughter, who symbolically represents the younger generation. By urging her to accompany him in warning the neighbours, he seeks to pass on both awareness and responsibility to those who will inherit the future of society (Saedi, 1967, p. 12).

4.2.3.5. Intellectuals Curiosity and Independent Inquiry

Rather than relying on radio or television, the older man devotes himself to reading. His preferred books concern esoteric knowledge and metaphysical subjects, including works such as *Knowledge of the Soul* and *Ancient Sciences* (Saedi, 1967, p. 20). Symbolically, these readings may be interpreted as representing profound political and social insight—forms of knowledge that remain hidden or suppressed within authoritarian societies lacking intellectual freedom.

His ability to recognize the monster stems from this deeper understanding rather than from irrational fear. The Physician, however, dismisses his perceptions as hallucinations caused by indigestion and the physical ailments associated with old age, reducing genuine political awareness to psychological instability (Saedi, 1967, p. 25). Through this contrast, Saedi illustrates how authoritarian systems frequently discredit critical voices by pathologizing them instead of engaging with their arguments.

4.2.3.6. Critique of the Nation and Its People

When one of the residents refuses to fetch a rifle unless the older man accepts full responsibility for its use, the older man reacts with

deep frustration, declaring:

"We are a nation that will never learn" (Saedi, 1967, p. 36).

His criticism is directed not at the nation itself but at the passivity and irresponsibility of its people. Instead of confronting the crises threatening their society, they choose the comfort of uninterrupted sleep over collective action. Saedi thus suggests that colonial domination succeeds not solely because of external aggression but also because of internal apathy and the unwillingness of ordinary citizens to resist oppression.

4.2.3.7. Awakening the Intellectuals Class

The older man instructs his daughter to knock on the only house whose light remains on during the night (Saedi, 1967, p. 10). Symbolically, the illuminated house represents the enlightened mind of the Man on the Balcony, who embodies the intellectual class within the society.

The older man, as the collective moral conscience of the community, therefore seeks first to engage the intellectuals before appealing to the wider public. In a society rendered indifferent to the gradual penetration of colonial power and authoritarianism, he places his greatest hope in those who remain intellectually awake. His initial effort to mobilize the intellectuals suggests Saedi's belief that meaningful social awakening must begin with the critical consciousness of the educated elite.

4.2.3.8. Pragmatism and Commitment to Resistance

The moment the older man encounters another sympathetic individual, he abandons silence and begins running through the streets, shouting to awaken the residents. In symbolic terms, the collective conscience emerges from isolation as soon as it discovers the possibility of solidarity and shared awareness.

While other characters remain passive, endlessly debating the nature of the monster, the older man alone insists upon action. He is the only character who consistently calls for movement rather than discussion and who attempts to inspire others to act. Although his age and physical limitations prevent him from confronting the bandits directly, he repeatedly rushes through the streets warning the community. Frustrated by the people's continued passivity, he eventually resolves to face the bandits alone, although the residents prevent him from doing so (Saedi, 1967, pp. 29–30).

Likewise, when the Physician attempts to neutralize the Man on the Balcony—the symbolic representative of the intellectual class—the older man intervenes in an effort to protect him from political paralysis (Saedi, 1967, p. 28). Upon learning that another resident possesses a rifle, he immediately asks for it, revealing his readiness to engage in active resistance against colonial oppression (Saedi, 1967, p. 35).

His commitment to exposing the truth reaches its highest point when he even imitates the monster itself before the assembled crowd, explaining:

"I am willing to make any sacrifice if it helps reveal the truth" (Saedi, p. 1967, p. 40).

This statement encapsulates the older man's symbolic role throughout the play: he is not merely a witness to oppression but an active moral agent prepared to sacrifice his own safety to awaken society to the realities of colonial domination.

4.2.4. A Symbolic Analysis of the Man on the Balcony (Protagonist)

The **Man on the Balcony** is a highly complex symbolic character. He represents the voice of the intellectuals whose response to shifting—and often contradictory—social realities changes in accordance with historical circumstances. More than an individual character, he embodies the historical experience of the intellectuals' tradition itself. At different moments, he assumes different roles: at times, alienated by the ignorance and populism of society, he withdraws from public life, adopting a detached and elevated position while remaining silent. At other times, confronted with the passivity and indifference of the people, he ridicules them, exposing their complacency through irony, satire, or direct criticism. Yet when society faces a profound crisis, he steps forward, assumes a leading role in resistance, and attempts to mobilize collective action. Nevertheless, because the social conditions are not conducive to meaningful change, he is eventually forced to retreat from the public arena. Against his own wishes, he abandons active resistance and limits his ambitions to mere survival amid an increasingly oppressive social order.

Accordingly, the Man on the Balcony should be understood not merely as a representative intellectual but as the symbolic embodiment of the intellectuals' movement itself. Throughout the play, he consistently remains vigilant, resistant, and committed to warning society of the dangers it refuses to acknowledge.

The Man on the Balcony also serves as one of the principal driving forces of the narrative. Like the older man, he has witnessed the monstrous figure that terrifies the community. Unlike the others, however, he was awake and therefore recognized the true nature of the threat without succumbing to fear. Rather than allowing the incident to intimidate him, he transforms it into an opportunity to awaken the public and encourage collective action. Repeatedly, he urges the residents to confront the monster, occasionally exaggerating its danger or employing deliberate rhetorical overstatement to impress upon them the urgency of the situation.

From a postcolonial perspective, the **monster** symbolizes the subtle and pervasive mechanisms of contemporary colonialism, operating through sophisticated media technologies and ideological influence. Unlike classical colonial domination, which relied upon visible military occupation, modern colonial power functions covertly by shaping public opinion, manipulating collective consciousness, and, at times, manufacturing or amplifying fear to redirect society toward objectives that ultimately serve colonial interests. Hidden behind modern instruments of influence, this new form of colonialism exercises power indirectly while concealing its own presence.

Despite the Man on the Balcony's persistent efforts, however, the residents remain too deeply immersed in complacency and intellectual inertia to heed his warnings. Their unwillingness to recognize the invisible mechanisms of domination ultimately renders them incapable of resisting the forces that threaten them, thereby ensuring the success of colonial power.

4.2.5. Symbolic Analysis of the Character of the Man on the Balcony

4.2.5.1. A Satirical, Sharp, and Uncompromising Voice

The Man on the Balcony is distinguished by his sharp wit, biting humor, and often sarcastic manner of speaking. At times he is

remarkably direct and outspoken; at others, he employs irony and ridicule as rhetorical devices to expose hypocrisy and reveal uncomfortable truths. This characteristic not only contributes to the play's dramatic humor but also serves as an effective instrument of social criticism.

Ironically, however, it is precisely this frankness that alienates him from the people and gradually drives them toward the Physician, whose polished manners and courteous demeanor make him appear more trustworthy. The Physician, however, symbolizes the self-serving intellectual elite—those who have surrendered their independence and, from the perspective of late colonial criticism, function as local agents of colonial power. By the conclusion of *Ay Ba Kolah*, the Man on the Balcony openly distances himself from the crowd. Laughing at their gullibility, he remarks to Naneh Ali, "You certainly fooled them well—well done!" (Saedi, 1967, p. 52), thereby placing himself in direct opposition to the community.

4.2.5.2. Vigilance and the Awakening of Society

Alongside the older man, the Man on the Balcony is the only fully awakened character who continually observes and interprets the unfolding events. Even the stage design reinforces his symbolic role:

"A few dim lights can be seen through a number of *windows. Only the house with the balcony remains illuminated"* (Saedi, 1967, p. 9).

The illuminated balcony symbolizes an enlightened mind and an awakened consciousness (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2008, p. 201). His repeated references to his light sleep and habitual wakefulness further distinguish him from the sleeping community below.

Within a postcolonial framework, the sleeping residents symbolize a society incapable of recognizing the covert operations of contemporary colonialism. Immersed in complacency, they unknowingly facilitate the penetration of foreign political, cultural, and ideological influences. By contrast, the Man on the Balcony survives precisely because he remains vigilant. In the final scene, the bandits deliberately avoid attacking his house while plundering every other home in the neighborhood, underscoring the protective power of critical awareness (Saedi, 1967, p. 98).

4.2.5.3. Exposing False Certainties and Cultivating Intellectual Skepticism

Much of the audience's understanding of the play's characters emerges through the Man on the Balcony's observations and revelations. He is in particular effective in exposing the true nature of the Physician, stripping away the façade of civility and respectability behind which the latter conceals his ideological function (Saedi, 1967, pp. 28–29, 47).

His careful observation of the neighborhood enables him to recognize the capabilities of its residents and to encourage them to employ their resources against the bandits. He repeatedly reminds them of the Physician's automobile, the mechanic's technical skills, and another resident's rifle, urging them to transform these resources into instruments of collective resistance. Yet the people's unwillingness to cooperate ultimately leaves him disillusioned, prompting him to withdraw into relative isolation.

Among a community preoccupied solely with personal comfort, the Man on the Balcony alone questions accepted assumptions and challenges collective complacency. This becomes especially apparent when a suspicious stranger driving a small truck offers to notify the authorities. While the residents immediately trust the stranger, the Man on the Balcony remains skeptical:

Driver: "All right, I know what to tell them." *(He nods, drives away, and exits the square. The residents relax and settle down.)*
Doctor: "Well, that's finally settled."
Man on the Balcony: "Yes, settled—for your own peace of mind."
Resident: "Now what?"
Man on the Balcony: "Who exactly was that man?"
Resident: "Just a passerby."
Man on the Balcony: "Where did he go?"
Resident: "How should I know? Probably home."
Man on the Balcony: "Home? Where? Are there any houses beyond this point? Was he out for a stroll at one-thirty in the morning?"
Mechanic: "Then where was he going?"
Man on the Balcony: "I don't know. Perhaps he was coming here."
Doctor: "For what purpose?"
Man on the Balcony: "That's exactly the point. Why didn't any of you become suspicious?"
School Caretaker: "Why should we?"
Man on the Balcony: "Why was he so eager to fetch the police? You're unbelievably gullible. He saw things were getting difficult, so he simply left" (Saedi, 1967, p. 34).

Whenever the community reaches unquestioned certainty, the Man on the Balcony deliberately unsettles that certainty, compelling people to question appearances and resist naïve acceptance.

4.2.5.4. Resistance and Revealing the Nature of Colonialism

The audience's understanding of colonialism throughout the play derives primarily from the testimonies of the older man and the Man on the Balcony. Owing to his elevated position overlooking the abandoned house, the Man on the Balcony possesses an even clearer understanding of the monster than the older man, who has witnessed only its shadowy form and terrifying appearance.

From his vantage point, he continually reports the monster's movements and activities to the community (Saedi, 1967, p. 40). Likewise, in *Ay Ba Kolah*, he is the first to observe the bandits and warn the residents of their actions.

Symbolically, the character represents socially and politically conscious intellectuals who, by virtue of their broader perspective, recognize colonial strategies before the general population. They understand when colonial power begins to infiltrate society, how it operates, and why it succeeds.

Significantly, the Man on the Balcony is the only character who advocates armed resistance. He persuades one resident to retrieve

his rifle and searches for someone willing to attack the abandoned house before the bandits can strike. Yet no one is prepared to act except the older man, whose physical weakness prevents him from carrying out such resistance (Saedi, 1967, p. 40).

In the second part of the play, he descends from the balcony and joins the people directly, struggling alongside them in an effort to organize resistance against the bandits. Ironically, the residents themselves force him back into his house. Having failed to persuade them, he ultimately confines himself to protecting his own home and, unlike the others, survives.

4.2.5.5. Emotional Sensitivity and Social Distance: The Intellectuals in the Ivory Tower

In the first part of the play, the Man on the Balcony addresses the residents from above, maintaining both a physical and symbolic distance from them. Although he offers advice and warnings, he remains detached from the community, a fact that does not escape the residents themselves:

Man on the Balcony: "You're asking what should be done?"
Resident: "Come down here so we can discuss it together."
Man on the Balcony: "I'm quite comfortable where I am. You carry on."
Mechanic: "Aren't you one of us?"
Man on the Balcony: "With your permission—yes."
Resident: "Then why have you withdrawn from us?"
Man on the Balcony: "Well, you were all about to leave anyway."
Resident: "The neighborhood is in danger. Shouldn't you help?"
Man on the Balcony: "I'm not afraid of any danger."
Resident: "What if the thieves break into your house?"
Man on the Balcony: "I sleep lightly..." (Saedi, 1967, p. 24).

He is also remarkably sensitive to criticism. After arguing with the residents, he turns his back on them and silently begins smoking (Saedi, 1967, pp. 37–38). Only after repeated appeals does he agree to face them again. Yet his continuing sarcasm further weakens his already fragile relationship with the community, eventually causing the residents to disregard even his truthful warnings.

In this respect, he resembles the stereotypical ivory-tower intellectuals —someone who remains emotionally detached from ordinary people and perceives himself as fundamentally different from them. His critical attitude, coupled with his harsh manner of speaking, prevents genuine communication with the public. Consequently, when he finally descends from his symbolic "ivory tower" and joins the people in *Ay Ba Kolah*, they no longer trust him. Their rejection of the very individual capable of leading them marks the beginning of the community's ultimate catastrophe.

4.2.5.6. Skepticism

Although the Man on the Balcony frequently expresses himself through humor, he is fundamentally skeptical. His profound understanding of the psychological condition of the community, his distrust of opportunistic pseudo- intellectuals such as the Physician—who employs scientific rhetoric and persuasive language to lull society into complacency—and his lack of confidence in ineffective legal institutions all demonstrate a critical awareness of social and political realities. His continuous conflict with the Physician (Saedi, 1967, p. 35) reflects a deeper ideological struggle between genuine critical consciousness and intellectuals' complicity.

Ultimately, his skepticism proves justified. The fears he repeatedly expresses are unrealized when the bandits succeed in overpowering the community, confirming the accuracy of his assessment of both colonial strategy and the people's vulnerability.

4.2.5.7. Critiquing the Nation

Like the older man, the Man on the Balcony openly criticizes the people, and many of the audience's insights into both the social environment and the other characters derive from his observations. When a resident refuses to use his rifle because of his personal responsibilities, the Man on the Balcony responds with a powerful critique:

"I knew from the beginning. I know your people very well—better than you can imagine. I came from among you. I've shared your lives, your streets, your homes, your disputes. Every one of you hides behind responsibilities—your wife, your children, your parents, your job, your house, your social obligations. Of course, all these become excuses. The only moment when anything can be done is now. You believe everything I tell you, yet you deliberately pretend otherwise. Why? Because you're afraid. Fear flows through your veins every hour of the day. And what do you do? You keep shrinking into yourselves until you're completely paralyzed and incapable of movement" (Saedi, 1967, pp. 40–41).

This speech offers one of the play's most penetrating psychological analyses of a society immobilized by fear and self-preservation. Through it, Saedi reveals not only the emotional condition of the community but also the internal psychological mechanisms that allow colonial domination to succeed.

The Man on the Balcony later rejects the Physician's proposal to rename the neighborhood after himself ("Dr. Sabati") and instead sarcastically suggests calling it "The Ruffians' Quarter" (Saedi, 1967, p. 49). This ironic proposal reflects his understanding of the residents as a community perpetually inclined toward aggression, disorder, and irrational behaviour, while simultaneously expressing his deeply critical assessment of the society in which he lives.

4.2.6. Symbolic Analysis of the Physician's Physical and Personal Characteristics

A reading of the play through the lens of neo-colonial and late colonial criticism suggests that the Physician, through his compromising and hypocritical conduct, is implicitly aligned with the bandits and is therefore protected from their violence. He embodies the self-centered temperament of political authorities who, in periods of social and political crisis, care only for their own survival. His character reflects the complexity of the governmental systems of colonised societies: systems marked by contradiction, arrogance, and a hollow claim to restoring order.

From the perspective of late colonial criticism, the Physician may be read as a local agent of colonial power. His actions appear deliberate and calculated. Like the other characters, he wears sleeping clothes; however, he also invites others to sleep and, in the end, gives them sleeping pills. The bandits can enter precisely because the people have been rendered unconscious, and the Physician is the principal figure responsible for producing this condition of collective passivity.

The ambiguity surrounding the Physician's fate mirrors the ambiguous position of self-serving political elites in colonised societies. It is unlikely that he actually takes the sleeping pills himself; therefore, he may well survive the bandits' attack, just as certain political figures in vulnerable societies secure their own safety and gain by surrendering their country to colonial interests. The Physician is thus one of Saedi's most compelling dramatic creations and lends itself to multiple political and sociological interpretations.

4.2.6.1. Scientism and a Rational, Diagnostic Attitude

Like many physicians, the Doctor approaches surrounding events through a strongly scientific and diagnostic lens. His dialogue frequently takes the form of questions, and he constantly seeks apparent causes:

Doctor: Excuse me, how much did you eat for dinner?
Older man: Dinner? [to his daughter] Daughter, how much did I eat?
Daughter: The same as every night.
Doctor: Did you watch television before dinner?" (Saedi, 1967, p. 16)

He rejects most claims simply because they do not conform to his idea of rational explanation. Yet his scientific and logical attitude does not lead the people toward genuine insight. Instead of helping them identify the deeper roots of colonial threat and respond to the crisis, he encourages them to sleep and remain indifferent.

4.2.6.2. Inviting the People to Sleep and Inaction

The Physician is one of the most important figures responsible for the people's passivity. By repeatedly urging them to leave the scene, creating division between the Man on the Balcony and the public, forcing the warning older man to sleep, and finally giving sleeping pills to everyone, he effectively serves the interests of the enemy (Saedi, 1967, p. 85). It is significant that he himself does not appear to take the pills. Although he is reminded to do so and hastily picks up a few tablets, the play only shows the people taking them.

Throughout the narrative, he also prevents the residents from using his car to inform the police, thereby delaying any possible action. He represents alienated pseudo- intellectuals who become instruments of colonial domination, surrendering their homeland cheaply to foreign powers while exploiting the psychological and social weaknesses of the people to sedate them more effectively.

4.2.6.3. Legalism

The Physician strongly presents himself as a defender of the law and insists that all problems must be resolved through legal channels (Saedi, 1967, p. 50). Yet the question remains: what kind of law? The legal order itself is weak and ineffective, to the point that it is not even clear whether the neighborhood falls under the jurisdiction of the police station or the gendarmerie.

His appeal to a powerless legal system functions merely as a delaying tactic. On the one hand, it gives the people the illusion of security; on the other, it allows the bandits, as symbolic colonisers, enough time to establish themselves in the neighborhood, or metaphorically, in the country. Many colonised societies face a similar condition: weakness in the ruling system makes them vulnerable to colonial powers, while public trust in such a fragile system intensifies the crisis.

4.2.6.4. Creating Conflict between the People and the Intellectuals Class

From the beginning, the Physician is hostile to the older man and, even more strongly, to the Man on the Balcony. He repeatedly attempts to discredit the Man on the Balcony in the eyes of the residents and to destroy their trust in him. He urges the people to ignore him and, through repeated accusations, presents his ideas as shallow and unreliable (Saedi, 1967, p. 42).

This separation between the people and the intellectual class, together with the distrust and conflict that follow, becomes one of the central causes of the approaching catastrophe.

4.2.6.5. Using the Force of the Ignorant to Advance His Interests and Preserve Caution

When the older man refuses to take the sleeping pills, the Physician relies on the physical force of the less aware residents to make him swallow them. These figures often function as the Physician's instruments; with a single gesture from him, they act violently and fulfill his demands through force (Saedi, 1967, p. 86).

In the history of many societies, such groups repeatedly appear on behalf of, or against, political and intellectual movements, changing the direction of events through coercion. Despite his grand claims, the Physician is deeply cautious in practice. He fears being publicly identified as a force of resistance. His reluctance to lend his car to the mechanic so that the police can be notified may be read in this light (Saedi, 1967, p. 49).

4.2.6.6. Politeness and Verbal Refinement

The Physician is extremely polite and constantly uses respectful, elegant forms of address. He maintains this courteous language even during arguments (Saedi, 1967, p. 41). As a result, the people are drawn to his pleasant speech and regard him as benevolent and trustworthy.

This verbal refinement helps him promote his ideas and persuade the public to act in accordance with his wishes. Symbolically, he recalls those social groups that impose their will through eloquence, superficial courtesy, and the performance of civility. This may also point to the attractive and deceptive appearance of neo-colonial power, which gradually penetrates society under a polished and reassuring surface.

4.2.6.7. Representative of the Governing Order that Prevents Social Upheaval against Colonialism

As suggested by his surname, Sabati, the Physician represents the desire to preserve "stability" and keep society motionless. In practice, he achieves this by pushing the people toward passivity, removing them from the scene, separating them from resistant intellectuals, and finally spreading the illusion of security and calm. In doing so, he facilitates colonial domination and effectively hands the land over to the invaders.

From the perspective of late colonial criticism, the Physician can therefore be read as the representative of a treacherous political order that calmly and painlessly delivers the country to colonial powers. His character remains mysterious and difficult to judge. On one level, he may be seen as an ignorant friend who, through lack of insight, hands the neighborhood over to the bandits. On another level, he appears as a deeply dangerous enemy who, under the cover of legitimacy, consciously and strategically cooperates with them. This ambiguity reflects Saedi's insight into political authorities who, either through ignorance or deliberate betrayal, allow their country to be plundered while the motives behind their actions remain unresolved.

4.2.6.8. Egocentrism

When the journalist points out that the neighborhood has no name, the Physician proposes that it be named after him: "Dr. Sabati." This reveals his egocentrism and false self-confidence. He justifies his proposal as follows:

"I, for my part, am prepared to use the reputation I have earned in medicine for the sake of my dear fellow human beings and have the neighborhood named Dr. Sabati. Please make sure this last point is printed in bold letters in your newspaper" (Saedi, 1967, p. 48).

He is so self-centered that he even exploits the people and the language of humanitarian concern to advance his own foolish desire. In this respect, he resembles self-interested and power-seeking statesmen who care only for their own position and recognition, while their capacity for genuine leadership remains deeply questionable.

4.2.6.9. Superficial Reformism and Shallow Nationalism

Although the most urgent problem facing the residents is security, the Physician identifies the neighborhood's needs in superficial terms:

"In my opinion, the needs and problems of this place can be summarised in a few points. First, the absence of protective officers and the need to define the area within police jurisdiction. Second, the paving and repair of the road, which has created difficulties for traffic. Telephone and electricity are also among the needs of the area. Most importantly, I wish to draw the attention of the authorities to the need for a suitable name and title for this place, because on national holidays and historical occasions, when you want to reflect the deep feelings of the residents in the newspapers, the necessity of having an appropriate name becomes quite clear." (Saedi, 1967, p. 48).

This dialogue can be compared to the condition of many societies vulnerable to colonial domination. From a postcolonial perspective, it reveals superficial reform, neglect of urgent realities, shallow nationalism expressed through ceremonies and public occasions, and the desire for recognition in public and international discourse under the name of a ruler or statesman. Even his proposal regarding police jurisdiction is unsuitable for the immediate crisis, since it concerns a future administrative arrangement rather than a practical response to the present danger.

4.2.7. Symbolic Analysis of the Bandits as the Narrative Antagonists

The Bandits are one-dimensional characters who represent a specific socio-political reality in the history of global politics. They embody an entirely negative force and therefore serve as antagonists in the narrative. As villainous figures, they are systematically associated with destruction, violence, and domination.

The Bandits' point of departure is their discovery that the residents are susceptible to colonisation. Indeed, one may argue that they themselves initiate the movement of the narrative, since their penetration into the neighborhood creates the central disturbance that forces all other characters into action. Through their arrival, the inner nature of each character, together with their strengths and weaknesses, becomes visible.

Having recognised the colonisable condition of the neighborhood, the Bandits use all available means to achieve their aim, and by the end of the play they succeed. Nevertheless, their success is not due solely to their own power. The weakness, passivity, and division of the people, especially the rupture between the public and the intellectual class, play a decisive role in enabling the Bandits/colonisers to reach their objective. This reflects Saedi's profound realism and his sophisticated understanding of political and social events. Without exaggeration, moral absolutism, or simplistic binaries, he presents colonial domination as the result of both external aggression and internal vulnerability.

4.2.7.1. The Interpretive Function of the Name "Bandits"

The term "bandits" is highly suggestive when applied to colonial power. It corresponds closely to the behaviour of colonial forces: plundering the labour and resources of colonised peoples, lying in wait, exploiting the negligence of both ordinary people and political authorities, and taking advantage of social weakness. All these features align the Bandits with the historical character of colonial domination.

4.2.7.2. Physical Appearance and Bodily Characteristics of the Bandits

The first defining feature of the Bandits is their strange and terrifying appearance. In *Ay Bi Kolah*, they appear to the older man in the form of a frightening monster. The older man describes the creature as follows:

"I had never seen anything like it in my life. It was as though two people had been sewn together … as if it had been split down the middle into two halves. It had two heads: one head moved forward, and the other followed behind … It had a shadow too, a broad,

heavy shadow, as though it were dragging a huge truck behind it … I swear it walked as if it had no feet, as if there were wheels under it. It did not take steps; it moved straight ahead in one continuous motion …" (Saedi, 1967, pp. 16–23).

The Man on the Balcony also exaggerates the monster's appearance, claiming that it is either picking its teeth with a rifle or eating the rifle itself (Saedi, 1967, p. 17). Although his comic exaggerations cannot be taken literally, it is clear that the monster is enormous. Its association with the rifle and with the violence produced by weaponry symbolically connects it to colonial expansion, militarism, and the devouring appetite of imperial power.

Although the older man has actually seen Naneh Ali's large puppet, the physical features of this puppet remain symbolically significant. Its most important feature is its enormous size, which corresponds to the global appetite and universal ambitions of colonialism. Colonial power grows through plunder and exploitation, feeding on the resources of colonised societies like a blood-sucking parasite.

The shadow of the monster is equally important. In symbolic interpretation, the shadow often represents the negative dimension of the psyche (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2008, p. 512). The older man emphasises that the monster had a broad and heavy shadow. This vast shadow symbolises the dark and destructive dimension of colonialism, which is far more terrifying than its attractive slogans and deceptive appearance. Even the literal meaning of "colonialism", with its claim to development and improvement, initially deceives colonised societies; yet once it penetrates society, its destructive nature becomes visible.

The monster's manner of movement is also meaningful. It does not appear to walk on the ground but moves silently and continuously, as if on wheels. This feature corresponds to the quiet and gradual infiltration of Neo-colonialism into colonised societies. Unlike classical colonialism, which opened the gates of countries through cannons and military force, Neo-colonialism enters societies slowly, intelligently, and silently before establishing itself within them.

Another significant feature of the monster is its divided body. The number two symbolises conflict, contradiction, reflection, balance, or hidden threat (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2008, p. 257). The monster itself is a hidden danger and an unrealised threat. The conflict between the monster/Bandits and the people remains concealed in *Ay Bi Kolah*, but in *Ay Ba Kolah* it emerges openly.

In Iranian symbolism, the number two may also signify an increase of power to an almost unlimited degree (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2008, p. 260). This is precisely what occurs in the play: the two-part puppet, whose power is initially concealed and merely frightening, is replaced in the second part by its countless Bandits, whose destructive power suddenly appears on a massive scale. Saedi's emphasis on their countless number represents the terrifying expansion of colonial force.

The monster's two heads also deserve attention. The head is generally a symbol of active power, including the power to govern, command, and explain (ibid., p. 262). The two-headedness of the monster therefore gives it doubled authority. It may also symbolise control over "front and back, past and future" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2008, p. 564). In this interpretation, colonialism possesses such power that neither geography nor history remains outside its control.

The two heads, one facing forward and the other backward, may also symbolise hypocrisy. This doubleness reflects the contradiction between the appearance and reality of colonial powers. Their slogans often speak of peace, progress, and development, while their true purpose is plunder, exploitation, and domination. This contradiction lies at the Center of postcolonial critique.

Through the body of the monster, Saedi successfully stages many characteristics of colonialism and invites the reader to decode its terrifying form. Similarly, the Bandits in *Ay Ba Kolah* are described in ways that allow their symbolic identity to be recognised through their appearance. For instance, they carry keys and daggers at their waists. The dagger clearly symbolises violence, coercion, and the use of force for penetrating colonised societies, while the key symbolises authority and possession (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2008, p. 937). The power of the dagger enables these forces to gain authority over the people; once the Physician has put the public to sleep, the Bandits can easily use their keys to enter people's homes and seize everything.

Many of the Bandits' characteristics can therefore be understood through their physical appearance. Since these figures are largely absent from the stage, their remaining qualities must be reconstructed from the accounts provided by the older man and the Man on the Balcony, who are the most reliable sources of knowledge about them.

4.2.7.3. Opportunism and Exploiting Public Negligence

The central conflict between the protagonists and the people concerns sleep, negligence, and passivity. The residents are unwilling to sacrifice their comfortable sleep for security or for the prevention of a possible danger. The loud voices of the older man and the Man on the Balcony function as calls to awakening (Saedi, 1967, p. 20). Yet the people remain asleep and unaware, and this very condition causes them to fall into the Bandits' trap.

In the history of nations, ignorance, negligence, and passivity have often enabled the penetration of neo-colonial domination. As the Man on the Balcony suggests, if the monster realises that the people are awake, it will not attack them. He even claims that the truck driver may have been one of the monster's agents who, seeing the people awake and present in the square, lost courage and left (Saedi, 1967, p. 37).

As soon as the people fall asleep, the Bandits seize the neighborhood. In this process, only the awakened character remains safe from plunder.

4.2.7.4. Anonymity and Unrecognisability

One of the most important characteristics of the Bandits is their anonymity. In *Ay Ba Kolah*, when the Man on the Balcony warns the people, he describes them as "a group of unknown men" (Saedi, 1967, p. 63). He even regards the truck driver, who is a stranger to the local residents, with suspicion.

This feature reflects the obscure and unknown nature of colonialism for societies vulnerable to domination. Unrecognisability prevents colonised peoples from understanding their situation correctly and leaves them confused when faced with a new threat. This confusion becomes even more dangerous when the people are already passive and unaware, while colonial power is able to study the weaknesses and strengths of the colonised society more effectively. The association of colonialism with supernatural beings in *Ay Bi Kolah* also points to this same unfamiliarity.

4.2.7.5. Possession of the People's Lives, Property, Honour, and Thought

While reporting the danger to the driver, the older man claims that the Bandits intend to seize the people's lives, property, and honour (Saedi, 1967, p. 33). This feature is also visible in the history of colonialism, which is filled with bitter examples of exploitation, violence, and violation committed by colonial powers against colonised societies.

At the end of *Ay Ba Kolah*, the Bandits enter the stage with knives at one side of their waists and keys at the other, and they seize the houses of the neighborhood. Since the house has been interpreted as a symbol of thought (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2008, pp. 63–66), this action can also be read as the colonisation of people's minds. This is especially characteristic of Neo-colonialism. Classical colonialism achieved its aims through military power and direct coercion, whereas Neo-colonialism penetrates the intellectuals and ideological foundations of colonised societies.

By combining the knife and the key, Saedi symbolically reveals both classical and neo-colonial forms of domination. The knife represents force, while the key represents authority and possession. Together, they show that modern colonialism is rooted in earlier forms of colonial violence, even when it appears in new and more subtle forms.

Table 3. Analysis of Characters based on Postcolonial Criticism and Meta-colonialism

Character	Identity and Role in the play	Position within Postcolonial Theory	Relation to Neo-colonialism	Relation to Meta-colonialism
older man	An informed, cautionary, and experienced individual	The colonized yet aware subject becomes a symbol of resistance.	The subject perceives the threat directly and warns about the gradual infiltration of colonialism	Victim of soft operations: fabricated media (the doll) constructs and legitimizes narratives;
The Man on the Balcony	An isolated intellectual, an observer of society.	A Third World intellectual —aware, yet lacking support.	He critically analyzes colonialism and calls upon the masses to awaken.	An example of the aware yet silent subaltern whose voice in Spivak's theory
Dr. Sabati	An internal agent of colonialism who serves as a warning voice to the people.	A self-alienated intellectual belonging to a dependent class.	By encouraging the people to remain passive and complacent, he facilitates the pathway for the infiltration of neo-colonial influence.	A paradigmatic embodiment of transnational (advanced) colonialism; shaped by the system of domination, functioning as a divisive force and an instrument for controlling the populace.
Residents of one of the neighbors	A passive mass, gripped by fear and marked by a profound lack of trust.	A colonized nation gripped by fear and mired in passivity.	Through inaction, they facilitate the conditions for the infiltration of neo-colonial influence	A victim of soft policies: media-induced collective slumber, functioning as an instrument of advanced (transnational) colonial domination.
Brigands	An unidentified yet organized invading force.	A colonizer, an external invading power.	Gradual and silent infiltration, carried out without direct warfare.	Pervasive control: key (consent) and dagger (force); control of homes, control of minds.
Naneh Ali Doll	A tool of deception: fabricated media.	A fabricated representation of reality—an image construction of colonialism.	It distorts the real threat and discredits the older man.	The construction of a fabricated reality, the distortion of threat, and the silencing of critical voices.

5. Conclusion

In *Ay Bi Kolah and Ay Ba Kolah*, Gholamhossein Saedi examines the slow yet destructive penetration of colonialism into other lands through symbolic language, dramatic expression, stage design, and narrative events. In doing so, he analyses both the reactions of colonised societies and the colonial strategies employed by invading powers.

The findings of this study show that Saedi's play addresses a number of central concerns of postcolonial theory, including:

1. the fear and distrust of the coloniser toward the colonised;
2. the coloniser's need to be accepted within colonised societies;
3. the semi-compliant and semi-resistant response of colonised peoples to colonial power;
4. the mentality and unconscious of colonised societies;
5. the expansionist ambitions of colonisers who seek to universalise their politics and culture;
6. the soft domination of colonisers over colonised societies; and
7. cultural penetration and the transformation of the intellectuals' orientation of colonised peoples.

Beyond these postcolonial concerns, the play also engages with issues that belong more specifically to the critique of late colonialism and require analysis within the broader fields of politics, history, sociology, and anthropology. These include:

1. the pathology of colonised societies and the role played by the colonised themselves, their statesmen, and their intellectuals in shaping their own dark fate;
2. the ignorance and unfamiliarity of colonised peoples and governments with colonial strategies;

3. the military weakness and lack of knowledge and awareness in colonised societies;
4. the Prioritization of internal relations over international relations, which results in political inexperience and vulnerability to experienced and opportunistic colonial powers;
5. the impact of the distance between state and nation, as well as between committed intellectuals, conscious individuals, and the general public, which allows colonial powers to exploit such divisions;
6. the effects of colonialism on colonised societies, including the emergence of dictatorial puppet regimes and the plundering of material and cultural resources.

A close examination of the major theorists of postcolonialism and late colonialism shows that few have offered such a detailed pathology of the culture of colonised societies under domination. Most theorists in this field have primarily focused on criticising and condemning the superior and dominating policies of colonial powers.

In this play, not only the construction of the characters but also the degree of their presence, voice, and action within the narrative correspond to Saedi's central idea: the dominance of a colonial, superior gaze over subordinated colonised societies. The Bandits and the monster, as symbols of colonialism, are defined by voice, action, and movement, and their speech and actions determine the ending of the narrative. By contrast, the older man and the Man on the Balcony, who represent the concerned intellectuals and the awakened collective conscience of the colonised society, remain relatively powerless and limited in action. The Physician, as a self-alienated pseudo-intellectual and betrayer of his own people, is active, persuasive, and deceptive.

Ultimately, the Bandits, who symbolise modern colonialism, plunder the land—the neighborhood and its houses—with the deliberate or unconscious assistance of the Physician. In this way, the ordinary people fall into the hands of colonial power and move gradually toward decline and destruction.

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