CHAPTER 2
THE SELF/OTHER DICHOTOMY: REPRESENTATIONS OF RACISM

The dichotomy between the East and the West that has acquired such importance in postcolonial studies, plays a major role on Asif Currimbhoy’s plays. Along with such issues of contestation as the opposition between the East and the West, racial issues also have propped up as significant areas in postcolonial discourses. The colonial differentiation among human beings on the basis of skin colour assumes considerable importance in many discussions of postcolonialism. It is in this context that the issues regarding ethnicity, primarily concerning the colour of the skin, as dealt in Asif Currimbhoy’s plays are discussed here. It must be analysed how the distinction between the dark skinned and the white skinned operates in his plays.

In his distinctive study on the crucial issue, Edward Said contends that the Orient is treated as “intransigent and incomprehensible” (2001:8) by the Western countries including America. He further discovered that the Orient to them was “a playground for Western desires, repressions, investments, projections” (8) and that it was Europe’s “richest colonies” and one of its “recurring images of the Other”. The western representations of the Orient as powerless and uncivilized were the legitimisation of the colonial designs for
domination and exploitation of the colonies. India was one among the longest colonized countries and quite naturally it had been subjected to all the ramifications of Western hegemony.

2.1. White skin and the Black identity

It is observed how the whites who claimed themselves as superior, powerful, and as masters, owing to their distinctive colour of the skin, treated the so-called coloured people. They represent, according to Said, the oppressive class, rulers, religious authority, educators, aesthetically superior etc.

Citing Goa, a political play, as the socio-realistic presentation of the world, the Meserves, who have commented extensively on Asif Currimbhoy’s plays, assert that Currimbhoy has presented a realistic picture of Goa’s disintegration during the time of its liberation from Portuguese. They refer to the colonised Goa, and its urge for freedom which could be achieved by violent struggle. Their statement is notable:

There is, for example, the bitter anguish Currimbhoy feels for ‘Goa’, created by the union of Portuguese and Indian only to be destroyed by conflicts with that union. His socio-realistic plotting, however, expands into allegory in ‘Goa’, where rape the most violent personal abuse, symbolizes the final suffering and disintegration. (Preface to The Hungry Ones p.12-13)
Apart from the socio-realistic plotting, as observed by the Meserves, the play presents the theme of colour distinction which takes a significant place in discourses on postcolonialism. Senhora Miranda who belongs to the privileged class, represents the white Portuguese and in justification for her dislike of the coloured, she treats the dark skinned people derisively and says “They make me feel dirty” (37).

Her attitude seems not only to be a contemptuous one that the whites harbour towards the native black-skinned people but also as something that gives vent to their egocentric nature. Colour consciousness enhances one’s own complacent self-confidence. Being conscious of her skin colour she is confident that it would increase the possibilities of her privileged aristocratic life in Lisbon. She expresses her self-confidence with enthusiasm: “See how white my skin is?” (26).

It is illustrated how the skin colour of the black is perceived by an aristocratic white in the colonial context. Miranda’s derisive attitude to the dark-skinned and her consciousness about the skin colour seem to have given her more self-confidence creating a sense of inferiority in the colonised. Her scathing remarks might have accelerated the colonised’s internalisation of the coloniser’s notion about the colonised that they are inferior and underprivileged.
Miranda’s colour consciousness extends even to her daughter and due to this perceivable disdain of the coloured she does not allow anyone to approach her dark coloured daughter. She knows that “Only I am fair, and she’s dark” (37). Even the traditional maternal attitude is undermined by colour difference, which functions as a harsh irritant and reminder to Miranda of her daughter’s inferiority as exemplified in her statement thus: “They say it should give rise to love when it’s cut out from your own flesh. But the colour is different. A constant reminder” (37). What does this remind her of? Is it of an Indian parentage for Rose, as it is not evident who her father is? Though Miranda is conscious of the value of maternal love, she underplays its relevance in the face of her latent obsession with skin colour. Her notion of skin colour seems to be deeply rooted and it encapsulates her colonial elitist attitude even to her daughter whose dark colour is a constant reminder to her of something that she does not reveal.

Power is vested with the whites, based upon the same preconception of colour, and the coloured are treated as unusual and alien in colonized societies. In Portuguese-colonised Goa, Krishna, the black native is looked upon as a stranger and alien by the Portuguese. There is the repeated representation of the popular colonial equation that white is neat and black dirty, as expressed by Senhora Miranda in her reference to Krishna thus: “He is a stranger here. I can make it out. He is not like the others. Dark, yes, but not like the others” (43).
She looks upon dark Krishna as different from others and presents this viewpoint with the same confidence and firmness expressed earlier. Her judgement dwells upon the whites’ prejudiced notion about the black with her perception that coloured skin is an original sin and is “congenital” that passes from generation to generation. Her perception justifies the Westerners’ notion of the black as those who were born with blackness about them. The play presents this notion of the whites about the biological presence of darkness in the black skinned people in degrading them and achieving a relative upper hand in political affairs of the colonies as is seen below:

SENHORA MIRANDA. … I always thought Rose’s defect was congenital having been originally there, rather than by accident. …If something is inevitable, it becomes congenital rather than accidental… (64)

Miranda feels that it is inevitable rather than accidental in the case of the colonised to be dark skinned. Moreover, it is depicted in the play how a double colonisation has taken place in the case of Rose. On the one hand her dark skin is a strong reason for her confinement at home and on the other, her life itself is being controlled by her mother, who is very much conscious of her superiority owing to her white skin. However, Krishna tries to defend his black identity by arguing that the white is definitely hiding something black in his/her innate being. He compares the white-coloured people to albinos and tries to intelligently subvert the whites’ notion about the ‘coloured’ in his
statement thus: “You may have white skin, but so also have albinos. It doesn’t prove a thing” (60).

In the meanwhile, Krishna’s comparison of the white to that of albinos is presented as a paradigm of protest of the black-skinned against white discrimination. This protest against Miranda is not only for his own sake but for the sake of Rose also with the primary observation that the whites are not at all different from the blacks and that they have blackness inside them. Moreover, his metaphor has another connotation that like the albinos the ‘whites’ lack colour, which may mean that they lack the pigment that they essentially require for their life suggesting not just the absence of pigment but the absence of the self itself. Essentially, it must be the consciousness of the “other” about the “self” that lacks in the necessary presence of the other. Thus he raises some questions about the identity of Senhora Miranda and people like her with a reminder of the inherent black in them: “You’ve got shades of black within you, Maria. See it right and you won’t be conscious of it anymore”(61).

In this instance Rose represents the internal dark side of Senhora Miranda whose unconscious black identity has come out with Rose’s birth. Krishna has internalised his feeling of being black and is questioning the authenticity of subjecting the coloured to discrimination by the whites. Thus
his protest is also an inversion of the logic of the whites, as a measure of resistance.

It is worth noting that the names of the characters suit this dichotomy and the names themselves represent their colour difference. While the name Krishna stands for the black, the names Alphonso and Senhora Miranda represent the Portuguese whites. Thus the play tries to subvert the ideology of colour difference by inverting the hierarchy implicit in it. Moreover, by employing a name familiar to the Orient, the play is presenting a parallel of the entire ideology. Parallelism is employed as a technique to examine the difference between the two concepts and highlights how ‘black’ is treated as hard while the ‘white’ always as its opposite in a colonial situation. As a testimony to this Senhora Miranda says: “You are not soft Krishna, you’re hard. You don’t have love Krishna, you have hate” (61).

Senhora Miranda talks about white as soft and loving, purely on the basis of their skin colour attributing hardness and hatred to the dark skinned with the same parameters. It seems to be a type of colonial strategy of the westerners to construct a commonly acceptable image about the Orient. Ultimately, through his exposure of Senhora Miranda’s identity, Krishna exposes the real identity of the whites. He engages in a discourse in which Senhora Miranda also participates and he proves to her that she belongs to a category of the whites with black spots in them. Thus he comes out with the
argument that the blacks are no longer destined to be inferior to the whites on
the basis of colour. Miranda’s internal colonisation of her dark skinned
daughter is reflected in the political colonisation of the enclave of Goa with
her justification that the dark colour is congenital and therefore must be
subservient to the white.

The distinction between the black and white is explained on a different
dimension in The Hungry Ones. The play highlights the way in which the
American black is viewed by the Indian black and vice versa. The two
Americans Sam and Al, namely, represent the white and black in the play
where the black American narrates about his identity to the college kids from
Calcutta city in the following lines:

. . . A big white that sucked my black blood. It grew thinner,
poisoned and emaciated, till one day, it disappeared… then I
learnt… the Black creed that makes all brothers alike… I had
learnt a new faith, shared by so many of you, and I found I had
nothing more to share, till… till… something happened
yesterday, that made me want to belong more desperately than I
had wanted anything else in all my life. (35)

The black American is so satirical about the white man that he does not
hide away the impression created by whites about the blacks he tries to bring
up new notions of the black identity by affirming the representation of
American white against the black. The American white calls the black a
“bug” and ironically, he refers to the black as a parasite with the perception
that his red blood was sucked up by the black parasite. He says thus: “So I squashed him under my foot. He bursts into a bucketful of red blood. And I said to myself: “My God, that’s my blood!” (34).

The statement indicates how the American white is trying to achieve an upper hand over the university students of Calcutta and how he succeeds in the first attempt itself. His advice was the first thing they asked for. He also tries to establish his superiority over the blacks, and he asserts publicly: “I… will… still… break…their…reserve…their secrecy…if only to prove my superiority” (35). It is also exposes how the white American is adored and admired in the streets of Calcutta. The admiration and popularity that the white American gained in the streets of Calcutta give him a chance to observe the poverty-stricken streets and establish supremacy over the ordinary people. The play presents the various techniques of the Americans to coax the men and women of Calcutta to their side which has worked well with them. At first they try to give food to the beggars, then display some comic games in the form of pantomimes and later disguise themselves as beggars to arson food from the rich. Their strategies are supposed to be ultimately directed at subordinating the Indians. The Meserves analyse The Hungry ones in the following lines:

The Hungry Ones is a relentless and fast moving play in which symbols dominate - in character, scenery, action, even in the title. Although some revelations by the Americans are perhaps
too self-conscious, their search is treated sympathetically. Their frustration only underlines the bitter compassion Currimbhoy feels for India with its deep conflicts both religious and social, incapable of resolution through the existing and contradictory voices, still hungry, . . . (Preface 11-12)

It is revealed that through pantomimes the whites are manipulating even those strategies of postcolonial resistance by determining the identities of the black, both American and Indian. In Bhabha’s opinion parody and mimicry are some of the strategies of the natives to undermine the notions created by the coloniser about them. However, the same technique is adopted by the American to prove his supremacy over Indians. His intention is to gain superiority over the black let it be an Orient-born or an American black. The play might also be anachronically referring to the instance of the American help to India to redress its poverty in the seventies. This must be viewed as an instance of exporting capitalism effectively to a third world country through the strategy of political compassion and help. That is why it could be assumed that contrary to what the Meserves have observed, a deliberate behind-the-curtain goal is perceptible in the expression of the white’s “superior” compassion to the ‘hungry ones’. “That imaginative distinction that differentiates between ‘man’ (self) with ‘black man’ (other), is an important, devastating part of the armoury of colonial domination, one that imprisons the mind as securely as chains imprison the body”, says John McLeod (21). It is quite comprehensible that in the current political scenario, through capitalism,
America has started to spread its eagle hands on the world by engaging themselves as warriors, saviours and compassionate friends, etc. They are now acting the role of sympathisers and protectors in the third world countries, reminding one of the early enterprises of the missionaries who did the bidding of imperial masters in countries like India.

However, in some cases it is presented how colour prejudice becomes part not only of Occidental/Oriental relationship, but also within the Oriental community itself. In this case it may be argued that it is an extension of the colonialist attitude, being put into practice in terms of the upper and lower classes in the Orient. Therefore the upper class in the colonial Indian context corresponds to the western notion of the white and naturally the lower class corresponds to the black.

*Thorns On A Canvas* deals with the distinction between the white and the black considering the above as a parameter. In this play though the dividing line between the upper class elites and the lower class is very apparent, it is observed as fading out gradually. The play displays how the elites look down upon the creativity of the poor black, marginalising them as virtual strangers. Their artistic talents have no value in the world of the elites as is evidenced in the following conversation:

NELA. There’s something about them that…that … doesn’t fit into this place.
MALTI. …(softly)...for he is a very strange man, a very strange man. (19)

The ‘strangeness’ of the lower class is presented in the appearance of Yakub and Nafesa, two poor unnoticed artists in the play. This statement is similar to Miranda’s dialogue in *Goa*. Malti and Nela, who represent the elite artists, ridicule the inconsistency of the wretched Nafesa who ironically has few dialogues in the play. Her characterization as an ugly woman has more to do with the shame and humiliation she suffers in the hands of upper class artists, similar to the suffering of the blacks in the West. The play illustrates the intense cruelty with which they malign the wretched through the images created by upper class people as revealed in the following:

As the frenzy reaches a climax, Nafesa rolls in innocently crunching on a carrot. There is a ridiculous inconsistency in her presence with the solemnity of the gathering… Nafesa feels awkward and self-conscious, and attempts to slip away,… she looks around stupidly, uttering only moronic guttural sounds.

Nela, the dancer (Malti’s friend), exposes to all the caricature of Nafesa painted by Malti.

The caricature is like a turnip…globular with wisps of hair ugly, moulds, exaggerating Nafesa’s ungainly looks and form. Everyone recoils at the viciousness with which the painting was done. Then someone laughs…more laughs…general laughter. (32-33)
The “viciousness” of the painting itself is a cruel pastime of Malti who was later on questioned by Yakub. Nafesa’s silent protest is incorporated with Yakub’s open protest in which the issue of representation is also dealt with. The “shock effect” Yakub later gives to Malti was intended as an act of strong resistance on the part of the poor and the wretched against upper class elitism. Yakub takes revenge upon Malti for insulting Nafesa, by inviting her to come to his bedroom without knocking on the door “at the crack of dawn”. Malti sees Nafesa lying naked on the bed with Yakub. This scene is exaggerated in a way similar to the exaggeration of Nafesa’s figure in Malti’s painting. By showing the ugliness and disproportionate parts of Nafesa’s body, Malti painted a clumsy picture. Yakub makes the same intensity of visual representation of the ugliness by exposing Nafesa lying naked with him, as a deliberate parody of Malti’s painting. This is an act of intended resistance from lower class people against elitism.

A different paradigm of protest against racial dichotomy is addressed in the same play in which during an Exhibition at the Art Gallery, the elite artists and patrons meet “the idle poor in a brave display of mutual camaraderie” (34). There is a parallelism in dialogues and the play presents “a sense of surrealism” in the scene (34). The Elites, the father and daughter on one side, address the lower class members of the group, i.e., Yakub and Nafesa on the other and vice versa. The parallel dialogues between the two parties grow in intensity towards the end of the scene and all, except Yakub
and Nafesa utter “Ars Gratia Artis”. However, Yakub voices his protest “with anger and frustration” saying “Art for the sake of collectivised tyranny” ending the scene by smashing the masterpiece painted by Malti (46). By doing so, Yakub is giving expression to his strong resistance against the ugliness of the Elites of art medium. And the strategy adopted to such protest is symptomatic of the ideological protest against elitism in the post-colonial scenario.

The issue of representation is observed in the plays discussed in this section, in relation to the racial “us” and “other” dichotomy as manifested in the Indian context. In Thorns on a Canvas, the representation of the lower class (marginalized) is a contesting issue. Nafesa’s humiliation is questioned by Yakub who is on an equal footing with her and therefore his resistance and revenge upon Malti and Nela pinpoints a new paradigm of self-representation. Yakub realises that the upper class artists maltreat him and Nafesa not only for their marginalized state but also on the basis of colour. The Empire Writes Back looks at the issue of representation thus:

Race raises the issue of representation which has always been central to the postcolonial studies: the representation of the colonial other by imperial discourse and the contesting self representation by colonial subjects. (207)

The self-representation of the lower classes is in the form of a constant reminder of what the Elites have done against the lower class people. In all
discourses of the postcolonial representation, this reminder works as an axial force as can be observed here:

YAKUB. Have you forgotten? Have you forgotten so soon, Malti? It wasn’t so long ago that Nafesa sobbed as you do now. It wasn’t so long ago that I told you . . . you shouldn’t have done that. Remember . . . my words . . . saying . . . “you should not have done that.”(60)

When Malti’s masterpiece was smashed by Yakub, he reminds her of the ugly portrayal of Nafesa earlier. He points out that Malti’s sobs have the same meaning and scope as Nafesa’s sobs when she was insulted. Thus the self-representation is made possible as a reminder through Yakub’s open protest against the upper class insult of Nafesa, though, she is silent almost all the time. Here, the play projects the lower class self-representation as a strong protest against the elitism of the upper class.

This kind of reminder as a form of representation and resistance can be observed in An Experiment with Truth too. Gandhi’s passive resistance against the colonial rulers is coupled with his protest against racial discrimination of the upper class. The protest starts from his house in the instance of his insistence that his wife Kasturba should accept the glass of milk from the hands of an untouchable servant. Gandhi deliberately breaks the routine of Kasturba bringing milk from the kitchen. Instead Gopal, the
untouchable, is asked to bring it and hand it over to Kasturba who had no other choice but take it from Gopal’s hand and give it to Gandhi:

GANDHI. …Gopal, please bring me some milk. It’s in Kasturba’s kitchen. (Gopal freezes)

KASTURBA. (trying to conceal her agitation) I’ll go…

GANDHI. (stopping her) No. (softly) No, Ba… I wish to talk to you. Gopal, bring it, please. (Gopal leaves. A few seconds later, he returns with the glass. Drops of milk are over his fingers. Kasturba’s eyes remain fixed on his hand).

. . . ah . . . thank you Gopal. Give it to Ba, please. . . (Kasturba remains frozen. Gandhi continues as though nothing happened.)

Remember Ba, whenever I broke my fast, it was always from the glass . . . in your hand. It gave me life. My life depended on it . . . these little things that mean so much to me . . . (with considerable strain Kasturba raises her hand to take the glass of milk from Gopal’s fingers.) (27-28)

On another level it could be seen that Currimbhoy’s plays present a new notion of racial disparity and its representation in some particular contexts. His male characters seem to be more conscious about the racial prejudice than the women characters. That means the resistance is offered by men characters in all such plays where “ethnicity” is a significant theme. In The Tourist Mecca, for instance, Lady Topin and Lady Janet, her daughter, treat Kesav as a black man who makes his protest against the elitist tendencies of the foreigners as they consider themselves as white and superior. Lady
Topin has fears about the whites’ idea of social equality and expresses this with a strong assertion of her white identity and her feelings of superiority in the following:

... but I do think that our innocent gesture of social equality can be misunderstood. Why you only have to notice the way they stare at a white woman to know what it means.  (29-30)

In her opinion the black or the Oriental is someone to be treated as strange and hostile. Her aversion to the people from the East makes her feel that the Orient lacks in positive traits and it is with this notion that she thinks even Keshav is a hypocrite. This attitude seems to be based more on the colour consciousness of the westerners who make no distinctions among the citizens of the East. As a tourist, she warns her daughter not to engage in personal conversation with Keshav: “You will find dozens like him around the corner... They look smart only because half their faces are covered by their messy beards.”  (30)

Lady Janet is also not very different from Lady Topin in her opinion that the people in the Orient are strangers. In her personal behaviour, she has the same superior attitude towards Keshav, though they were in love. The play presents how the westerners try to insult the natives even in the post-colonial situation highlighting how the so-called ignorance of the Orient gets derisively remarked about by the westerners. In Lady Janet’s opinion the
Orient always has a crude and unpolished culture and she criticises the natives for not being conscious about their ingenuity in the following dialogue:

Oh, I can see that he wrote the word “slept”.
These natives can never use English euphemistically.
He should have used the words “made love” instead of “slept”.

Lady Janet is hinting at the linguistic inferiority of the Indian natives with a comment that being inferior to the English, the natives use crude linguistic gestures. This can be taken as an example of her untoward attitude towards the natives, on the basis of the prejudice she inherited from her mother.

In brief it is the issue of binary opposition between the ‘white’ and ‘black’ as a paradigm of the “self” and “other” dichotomy that is analysed in the plays. It is revealed that skin colour plays a discursive role in constructing images of inferiority and superiority. The whites feel superior and powerful in their approach to the black on the basis of their skin colour. Moreover, skin colour corresponds to the opposition between the white as neat and black as dirty as is obviously illustrated in Goa. The image of the colonized Indians belonging to the marginalized group, is presented as pathetic and different when observed from outside. The Hungry Ones explains this instance in which the pathetic life of the street dwellers has been observed and assessed by the two Americans. The play points out that their observation is intended
on projecting American supremacy as justified by the white American character in the play.

The distinction between the black and white illustrated in these plays is similar to the viewpoint advanced by Franz Fanon who “looked at the cost to the individual who lives in a world where due to the colour of his her skin, he or she is rendered peculiar, an object of derision, an aberration” (John McLeod 21). In short, the poor and ugly in the Orient are looked upon as strange and alien while the division of upper class and lower class in India is a paradigm parallel to that of the white and the black in the West. The representation of those who were marginalized on the basis of colour is also a main concern of these plays. It is also clear that the separating line between the black and white is sometimes a little faded or narrowed in certain cases like the Thorns on a Canvas.

2. 2. The Elitist and the Underprivileged

In Thorns on A Canvas, which depicts the relationship between an upper class father and some artists who belong to the lower strata of the society, the distinction between the racial “us” and “other” has been perceptible in the paradigm of elitist and underprivileged relationship. Malti’s father is the representative of the elitist class and Yakub and Nafesa are presented as the representatives of the downtrodden class. The father is a
patron of arts and Yakub and Nafesa are beggar-like artists who are treated as ugly and downtrodden. In the stage direction itself it is presented thus:

> Now the old man has recognized him, for he lets out a hoarse laugh, and simultaneously removes a copper coin from his pocket which he flings towards the gutter. The young man hears the sound alertly like some trained dog, and though he does not give the impression of being a beggar, he quickly scurries on all fours to pick up the coin. The old man laughs again, victorious for having broken the strange spell, and reassuringly continues to conduct his daughter forward. (10)

While the master figure is an elite patron, who conducts his daughter with reassurance, the underprivileged is destined to live in the gutters. The play portrays that high class women are treated as beautiful while the low class ones as ugly and belonging to the gutters. Therefore, an element of protest to the elites arises in the minds of the underprivileged as a response to this unjust treatment. The elites possess everything that belongs to the world of art and creativity, and are prosperous and fortunate in wealth as Malti says, “... a studio to myself... galleries and exhibitions... like irresistible fruits easily within reach...” (17)

The play here presents how the elite’s pride of being artistically rich makes them look derisively at the so called ugly and pathetic life of the marginalised. It is this distinction of class that makes the elites intellectually and materially superior and the downtrodden, underprivileged. Yakub and
Nafesa do not have entry to the world of art owned by the rich and upper class people as their ugliness is looked upon as very unusual and awkward, arousing laughter on the faces of the elites, who insult Nafesa and Yakub thus:

Nela stops dancing. She sees Nafesa rolling in, slowly as ever, munching on pear. Nela immediately runs over to Malti, whispers something, nudges her and points, and both burst out in peals of laughter. Nafesa sees the finger pointing at her and looks back stupidly. Hearing another surge of laughter, she grins back sheepishly, uncomprehendingly. Then she lumbers over to Yakub, and sits down next to without a word. (18)

It is quite obvious that the underprivileged are always conscious about their pathetic and inferior status which gradually necessitates their resistance against elitism in art. Nafesa goes to Yakub’s side because she equates her marginalised situation to that of Yakub, whose medium of resistance against discrimination is art itself when he paints the nude picture of Malti without her knowledge as a reaction against her humiliation of Nafesa. Malti is shocked by the full nude particulars of her body and expresses it with fear thus:

MALTI. I . . . I . . . No! . . . I . . . My God! . . . it’s unmistakable. . . down, down to. . . to. . . the last detail. (she unconsciously draws her sari more tightly around herself) No, it’s not true. I must have been . . . drugged, hypnotized, seduced, rav. . .
MALTI. (looking at again) The impertinence! It’s . . . it’s. . . foul. Blasphemous. I must tear it up. . . burn it. . . (23)

The resistance made by the underprivileged is taken as an act of blasphemy by the elite due to the fact that it comes from an underdog and the elites justify their right to vulgarise the marginalised. The nude picture of Malti portrayed by Yakub forms a direct retort to her portrayal of Nafesa through the same medium. However, it is interesting to note that the underprivileged Nafesa’s response on the annoying picturisation by Malti finds no space in the play, reiterating the observation that the underprivileged is dehumanised in every field.

On another level, Yakub is always obedient and subservient to the master just for the sake of making money out of his work though his personality is given an inferior status as stated below:

FATHER. Hah! Did you see him buckle and go down to his knees… all…all… (laughing hysterically) … for the sound of… that! The dog… (then shouting in anger) … the filthy dirty dog! . . . (26)

Thus it seems that the elite’s derogative treatment of the underprivileged is intended to get them an aristocratic impression in society where they enjoy their power and privilege at the expense of people like Yakub and Nafesa. Yakub is presented in the garb of another character named Bukay, as secretary to the Patron apart from his real characterisation.
bukaY, working hard for the Patron, is the reflection of Yakub, and the name itself is his true mirror image. The play delineates how in Yakub, the marginalised artist and in bukaY the hard working secretary, the slave-like figures are controlled by the patriarch for his selfish benefit. Though the patron is slightly similar to the boss in *The Clock*, the patron resorts to eulogy as a weapon to make the secretary work like a slave, unlike the boss, as revealed under:


In both identities of Yakub, the patron perceives an underdog whose image of being an inferior outside and inside his house, is essential for the valorisation of the aristocratic status of a powerful elitist. The master knows that without someone to order about, his objectives cannot be achieved, thinking about himself that he has a clean image. However, freedom has its own comprehensible meaning for him and he is conscious of the underprivileged’s desire for freedom thus:

FATHER. . . . But we’re forgiving too. We tolerate mistakes of . . . a kind. We adopt . . . self correction techniques. Little by
little. Drop by drop. No evidence of cruelty, I assure you . . . can ever be proved. After all, freedom, by definition . . . (he smiles benignly) . . . is the will to be free. So don’t think . . . we don’t understand. (30)

The self-evaluation of the patron of arts brings to the fore an indomitable image of the elitist among the aristocrats and the socially inferior alike in the postcolonial environment. The inferiority feeling the slaves keep about themselves is attributed to be the main reason for the bad treatment they are often subject to in the postcolonial era. The master always wants to keep them in low status, so there is a call for their unification lest they should be overturned by the slaves. Therefore it may be interpreted that the master-slave discourse is a conscious attempt in which the master tries to perpetrate the subjugation of the slave with the prescience that the slave himself is responsible for his low status:

FATHER. . . . for slaves more responsible for their perpetuation than the master, and masters are but symbols of Authority, held together by promotions and elimination, by the outcast, by me and you, who must hold hands together. . . for precious survival . . . (31)

The inversion of fight for survival by the master is the conscious marginalisation of the discussions on the inferior status of the underdog and an attempt to emphasise the symbols of authority by the elitists. The master looks for ways to ensure his own survival inverting the commonly accepted
notion that the slave rebels against the master. Ultimately, he knows that he will come victorious in the constant struggle between both. The play also looks at how a master tries to counter the resisting force of the underprivileged rebel by adopting a patronizing attitude towards him. The elite adopts this attitude due to his awareness that if the resisting hand is cut off, stronger resistance will be followed. In order to keep the rebel silent, the master always resorts to the strategy of allowing freedom to a certain extent by patronizing him. The play thus portrays how the elite always tried to cleverly dissipate the rebellious attitude of the underprivileged. He knows that it is not possible to maintain his status without a greater show of pretence and realises that patronizing is another form of education:

FATHER. . . . Remember, there can be no opposition . . . without resistance. Let anger shout itself hoarse in the barren sands of . . . isolation. Don’t ever cut the head off a rebel . . . or a thousand headed hydrae will take his place. Tutoring . . . comes from the gentle art of . . . Patronage. (31)

This kind of patronisation takes place mainly to survive the possible rebellion from the inferior and it is therefore the elitist regards it congenial for him to resort to this strategy with a pretext to tutoring them. However, when the underprivileged is denied the rights and is humiliated by the elite, the inevitable resistance against this takes birth. Nafesa is insulted in two ways: At first her ugliness is painted by Malti with exaggeration and in the second
instance she is collectively encircled and humiliated by the so called elites including Malti. The strong resistance against this is expressed by Yakub though Nafesa is full of pain:

(SD. . . . Others are hilarious. She finds herself obliged to laugh more, at herself, but the pain sears across her face like a branded iron till the tears show . . . tears of raw humility and shame. At this point Yakub enters. His face is livid with anger and ferociousness.)

YAKUB. (in a voice bursting with a frightening rage) Stop it! STOP IT! (33)

It is not just questioning of a minor incident that Yakub does but also exposing his strength and will to fight against the upper class authority. The play also recognises the fact that the inferiority feeling of the downtrodden is enhanced by the elite’s misrepresentation of the creative talents. The elites take pride as the real connoisseurs of art and treat the underprivileged as aliens by deliberately denying even their rights to live like them. Therefore they prefer the status of the underprivileged to remain unchanged forever and they pretend not to see them. The artists from the high class society engage in a discourse about the downtrodden:

ARTIST 1. But . . . who’re they?
ARTIST 2. Aliens.
ARTIST 3. From another planet?
ARTIST 4. They seem to have ears and noses like us.
ARTIST 2. They have no right to look like us.

. . . . . . . . . .

ARTISTS 2 to 4. (like three monkeys). We see them not.

We see them not.

ARTIST 1. I . . . I . . . I feel afraid of them.
ARTIST 3. Me too.
ARTIST 2. They have no right to look more perfect than us.
ARTIST 4. Imagine what would become of us if they . . .

were to recognize that fact. (40-41)

The caution expressed in the dialogue of Artist 4 implies the awareness
of the downtrodden about their ill-treatment in the hands of the elites. The
slave seems to always point a finger at the master to express his/her resistance
to the exploitation. The clean image of the master is contrasted with the
negative images of Nafesa and Yakub created by the elites who are fearfully
conscious of the slave’s ability to challenge them sooner or later. They are
aware that with this intention the slave always keeps a burning hatred in
his/her mind recognising the true identity of the master and his exploitative
strategies as revealed by Yakub thus: “. . . You I hated most of all . . . you
filthy rich bastard. Oh I know your nails are clean but that’s because you’ve
licked them clean after feasting me” (42). It also implies a protest with strong
undercurrents of resentment and vengeance against the elites. It must be
admitted that the playwright has given the freedom to the characters to
develop freely without any restriction on his part.
The slave uses the same language of the elite as a strategy of protest by bringing in a parallelism between their attitudes enhancing the intensity of their standpoints. Two aspects of this reality are presented in the play where the patrons of arts and the creative artists praise the artistic talents of the elites while the underprivileged show their protest at least in words. He also observes how the fetishism of elites is brought to light in choosing the State Patron as head priest:

“Ars Gratia Artis”
“Ars Gratia Artis”
(The two actions merge into one. Both parties are coming to the end of the line. The words “Ars Gratia Arts” are muttered in low tones like a prayer to the empty canvas white-all except Yakub-bend their heads low. The father is like a head-priest who has subdued the four, like the artists in the previous scene.) (46)

Yakub recognises that art has been transformed into the elites’ medium of colonisation and he protests this as well as the masterly attitude of the upper class. His deliberate reluctance to lower his head like others symbolises his attitude of resistance against the colonial tendency of the head patron and others. The play identifies that the downtrodden is also knowledgeable and capable of strong resistance at appropriate situation and brings out the fact that there is a strong sense of awareness on the part of the master about the slave’s standpoint at the end of the climax. The slave’s protest turns violent like that of Henry in *The Clock* as might have been expected by the master:
YAKUB. . . . (louder and more uncontrollable as he approaches the Father who looks at him incredulously)

Art for the sake of social security
Art for the sake of posthumous fame
Art for the sake of collectivized tyranny
Art for the sake of grandiose uniformity.

(Shouting) Art for who’s sake? Not Art’s! Not Art’s at all! (so saying he smashes the “masterpiece” while all look aghast)


Two kinds of revelations are presented in the play: one, on the part of the slave about his ill-treatment by the elites and; second, on the part of the master about the slave’s awareness of the same. The knowledge of the master about the final protest gives rise to the wisdom that the slave is no longer “squint-eyed” but capable of recognising truth and reality. He cannot remain idle but to call the slave “guru” (master) exposing the real irony behind such a title. In short, the master’s methods of subjugating the so called “other” are extreme but reminiscent of retribution. The slave’s knowledge about the “self” creates in him/her the strategy of protest that s/he adopts at the summit of his suffering. However, it must be pointed that the play presents both aspects of these with the same linguistic tools and styles.

Monsoon discusses the transformation of a foreigner into an uncivilized savage who falls into the spell cast by Monsoon, a native woman.
It is quite amazing to note that a coloniser is presented here as a stranger in a colony. The play presents Andrew’s transformation into an extraordinary one in contrast to the notion about the Orient, who is treated as a stranger by the westerner. Andrew is a negative character who conquered a woman and colonised her, creating the image of a saviour. Gradually, superstitions conquer and start to control him. So, he does not pay attention to the warnings and resistance of Monsoon. His ravings demonstrate him as a “white” molester:

ANDREW. He hurt you. Didn’t he? He hurt you. And now you remember. And now you think that I am he, Monsoon. That reincarnated, this time the white demon come to molest you. Look again, child, look again . . . (102)

After conceiving Monsoon, Andrew sometimes loses his sense and shows symptoms of psychic disorder. The Orient’s notion about the westerners is that they do not indulge in superstitions like black magic which is quite opposite to their so-called identity as civilized people. Nooroo, a native woman, comments thus when he visits her to quench his physical desires: “A white man . . . should not indulge . . . in Black magic . . . .” (129).

The white molester’s cruel treatment of the native woman as a tool for his physical satisfaction portrays the westerner’s colonial standpoint. It is not only physical, but also mental colonisation of the Orient that is presented in the play. When Andrew is suffering from fever he behaves strangely in which
the depth of his superstition is evident. He does not hide his fear in the imagination that Monsoon is going to take revenge upon him for impregnating her as explained under:

ANDREW. . . . In other words, my friend, she’s out to destroy me. She knows now that her conception has not broken the spell and she is now watching and waiting for the right moment to take her revenge upon me . . . .

(soften still) So there’s only one thing left now that connects us . . . the child within her, my child, which fights for me, which protects me, like some potent superstitious charm, which is greater than her . . . . (108)

Andrew believes that the superstitious charm of the child can save him from any potential harm from the colonised. Here, the westerner’s fear about the Orient is expected to be eliminated by the Orient himself. Another fact about the colonialist tendency is brought about by Andrew’s strange behaviour that proves that it was the ignorance of the Orient that made them afraid of the West. Now the white colonisers display an element of strangeness about them which they had actually spoken about the Orientals. However, this tendency has had a counterproductive effect when the Orient raises concern about the significance of black magic as a protest against the white coloniser. The white and the Orient engage in a discourse on the influence of black magic and coloniser’s fear about the colonised:
DR. JUAN. Andrew’s point is that . . . a person is always afraid . . . of something that he doesn’t understand.
(Monsoon doesn’t reply)
Your Grandmother was afraid of the black book because she did not understand it . . . .
You are afraid of magic spells because you do not understand it . . .
And we come to Andrew’s point again that there’s nothing to understand about magic spells… therefore … there’s nothing that one ought to feel afraid about…
MONSOON. (quietly) Then… why… is… Tuan… Andrew… afraid? (silence) (112-13)

Monsoon questions the impression that the white men had kept about black magic in response to their argument that there is nothing to fear about it. As a colonised woman she carries out her own strategy of protest realizing the truth that the coloniser is internally fearful of the colonised. It is observed that though the white men had a civilizing mission behind the colonisation of the East, a counter teaching effect could also take place. This has “unpredictable effects” on white men and for the Orient “instinct is stronger than his (white man’s) learning”. The white colonisers usually blame the Orient for being ruled more by instinct than emotion but the play projects how the instinct of the Orient is used as a method of native resistance against the whites.

The techniques of parallelism and contrast are employed to emphasize how an improvement in one’s attitude takes place while it is a regression in
the case of another. Daisy grows out of her promiscuous life in the past and becomes the wife of a Frenchman. She looks at her past actions as “games” and is reluctant to repeat them in future thus proving to herself as more mature and civilized than Andrew. When he grows in age, he is not ready to “forget” the past actions as mere “games” and he claims that he “had planned them out in logical sequences” (119). While “instinct” worked for the sensible decisions of Daisy (being a native), Andrew’s learning took him to some insidious interests. His earlier disguise as a saviour and, even the colonial legacy of the white in general, has been undermined with his transformation into an uncivilized one. Monsoon had realised long before that her daughter was brought up by Andrew for his sake that ultimately urges her to employ instincts to resist his evil intentions. She boldly declares, “You are the white demon! You’re evil!” (143) Her comparison of white men to evil reflects the belief of the Africans in the past that they were “too white like a devil” (Leon E. Clark 124). When she realises the fact that their house is completely occupied and controlled by Andrew and that he would destroy her daughter, Monsoon’s instincts has come to the fore and she challenges him bravely by killing the child to save her from the possible atrocity by Andrew.

In conclusion, it can be observed that many instances in support of the aspects of postcolonialism are presented in Monsoon where it is illustrated that a contrastingly postcolonialist transformation, which ultimately turns them into savages, takes place in the life of the white colonisers. It also is
evident how the instincts of the native work as tool for resistance against the western coloniser. Further, it explains how the white coloniser is depicted as ignorant and strange as an inversion of the western notion that the Orient is ignorant and strange.

2.3. The Leader and the Untouchable

The relationship based on racial distinction is revealed in another perspective in An Experiment with Truth where it is presented in two different perceptions. Firstly, in Gandhi’s attitude to and attachment with “the untouchables” he is presented as a master who controls and orders about every one around even though he supports and argues for the untouchables in India. Secondly, the play presents the paradigm of master-slave relationship between a State representative and an “untouchable” subject who is used as an instrument of torture in order to terrify an upper class criminal. In the first instance, the play examines how the champion of Indian freedom fighters gets transformed to the level of a powerful master. Gandhi’s non-violent war against the British rule is parallel to his protest against the treatment of human beings as “untouchables” even in his house. These parallel protests seem to be contradicted with his treatment of the “untouchable” at his ashrama as inferior. In the feet massaging scene of the play, Gopal massages Gandhi’s legs without complete consent on his part. Gopal’s silent protest against Gandhi’s domineering nature is presented thus:
GOPAL. You look tired, Bapu.
GANDHI. Yes. (massaging his legs)
GOPAL. Here...let me... (Gopal washes his hands from a basin and begins to massage Gandhi’s legs.)

.............

GOPAL. Does it relax? You want to rest now, Bapu?
GANDHI. Yes. (The untouchable goes to the basin, washes his hands again, then raises them before his eyes. He leaves. Whispering, looking at his hands in the same manner as an untouchable.) (43)

Gopal’s gesture as an untouchable is a strong sign of his antagonistic attitude against the superior’s masterly platform. His whisper and symbolic look at his hands like an untouchable is perceived as a strong and absolute protest against the unjust treatment of the so-called inferior race by a character like Gandhi. However, the play does not highlight the significance of this protest to a reasonable extent.

2.4. The Untouchable as an Apparatus

In the second situation, the play illustrates how the State, represented by Patel, in the aftermath of colonialism, treats the “untouchable” as a tool for torture. Patel is interrogating the culprit of the assassination attempt on Gandhi and in order to make him tell the truth, Patel brings in an “untouchable” and orders her to physically assault the upper class Brahmin in the most humiliating manner. This scene depicts how an untouchable is used
as a “thing” by the oppressive State, where a democratic government is in power:

[... The prisoner is still bound, but instead of being suspended by his hands, he is now spread-eagled in a lying position with his face up. An untouchable’s jharu is lying on the floor. A dark complexioned young woman partially nude is putting on her sari. Both the prisoner and Patel are looking at her.]

PATEL. (picking up the jharu and touching the fibre strands.) A touch... that inflames desire. No ordinary man can resist her. Madan Lal. Not unless he is bound, like you... (Prisoner struggles)

Still don’t want to talk? What did it feel like to have her lying by your side, Madanlal? To feel her caress... without being able to respond... (his baleful stare). She is pure, Madanlal, I assure you of that. Untouched... literally. I made her wash her hands before coming to you. (goes up to him calmly, then in sudden fury spits on him)... you pig! Full of thousands of years Brahmin purity, are you? You pig. (45-46)

This scene not only reveals how the untouchable is considered as an instrument but also gives the impression that women from the inferior strata of society are treated as insignificant as the untouchables. The second Act ends with a strange interrogation scene in which an untouchable man is used as an instrument to sexually assault the prisoner. Patel ironically says that it is a physical assault similar to the one Gandhi had suffered in South Africa. The untouchable becomes a “thing” in the hands of the State justifying Said’s
observation about the treatment of the people of the Orient by the Europeans as “human material”:

PATEL. . . . And yet, and yet, my friend, fear should be in he nature of . . . of a self-discovery, a deeper want. (Patel unconsciously picks up the jharu, touching strands.) No, I’m not going to beat you, Madanlal. We were going to try it Gandhiji’s way, don’t you remember? A weak spot. A personal shame . . . an assault into privacy: the only violence that can shake the mind as it does the body- . . . (suddenly calling out) Govind! Govind! Come here!

(The prisoner rolls his eyes in fear for the first time. An untouchable comes, wearing loincloth, with jharu in hand. He is a large powerfully built dark Sudra.) Govind . . . tie him up the right way . . . (Govind turns him over and ties him, so that he is spread eagled this time with his face down. . .)

Madanlal, I haven’t washed him clean. You won’t mind it, will you? You’ve picked up enough scum on the way . . . (Madanlal opens his mouth to scream or talk but Patel calms it with his hand) Not ready to talk clearly, are you? What’s the hurry? The journey’s not over yet. (stuffing a handkerchief in his mouth) Later . . . later . . . we’ll give you another chance to talk. (Govind begins at first to massage the prisoner’s legs . . . and starts to remove his pants.) It won’t hurt Madanlal. Why don’t you try a bit of self-control? Relax. Detach your mind . . . beyond pain, fear, desire. It’s only an experiment after all. (Patel laughs at the prisoner’s terror.) (48-49)
These instances point out how a post-colonial nation state treats its citizens as belonging to superior and inferior races on the basis of ethnicity and makes a socially inferior citizen as an instrument of torture which justify Said’s observation of Europeans treating the Orient as human material. Govind is used as an apparatus by a Home minister of the post-independent and democratically elected government. The fact that Govind is presented as a voiceless untouchable indicates the neo-colonialist tendency of the postcolonial world where the significance of civil society is determined by the State itself.