

Madness and Colonialism: An Analysis of Anirudh Kala's *The Unsafe Asylum*

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Abstract

Madness as a literary theme conveys multiple ideas. In postcolonial literature, madness often acts as a site for witnessing and responding to colonialism. By analysing Anirudh Kala's *The Unsafe Asylum*, this article demonstrates how colonisation, and specifically colonial violence, affects the mental health of colonised people. The article argues that 'partition madness' as represented in the text is not a lapse into insanity but a dynamic form of representation of the aftermaths of colonial hegemony. The argument thus offers insights into reading madness with the postcolonial context.

Keywords: Colonialism, Culture, Ideology, Madness, Partition, Postcolonial.

Introduction

I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, 'extraordinary' possibilities wiped out... I am talking about millions of men [people] in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, to kneel, despair and behave like flunkys.¹

Madness has been a recurring theme in literature for centuries. Throughout history, writers have attempted to portray the innate desires, needs, and resentments of the human psyche using literary embellishments. There have been references to supernatural inflictions of madness in texts since time immemorial, including ancient fables, the Bible, the Homeric myths, Greek drama, and Shakespearean plays. However, the definitions of madness, its representations, and its perceptions have differed based on the socio-cultural context. In *History of Madness*, Michel Foucault states that madness is not necessarily a natural state, but is socially manufactured and perpetuated by

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¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, 'Review of Aimé Fernand David Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham, *New York University Monthly Review* (2001), p. 43.

repressive regimes that try to control, regulate, and monitor human behavior.² While some texts have portrayed the mentally ill with fear and aversion, others have examined their experiences with a fascination for the unknown. Nevertheless, major studies on the history of representations of madness depict that throughout most of history, madness was represented as intrinsically wrong or was attributed an inferior existence. This is extremely visible in the analysis of madness in the colonial era. Colonisers have always used the idea of exclusion or 'Othering' to rule the colonised. Amidst these numerous methods of Othering the colonised, mental institutionalisation and madness, in particular, tell us a story of exclusion in a larger context.

Seri Luangphinit in 'Tropical Fevers: "Madness" and Colonialism in Pacific Literature' states that colonialism, identity, power, and madness go hand in hand. He explains that

embedded within the extensive matrix of colonialism, power serves as the basis of our conventional views or definitions of madness. Both asylums and empires are constructed by pathologizing "dangerous" classes in society, wherein those in power master those who are not.³

Similarly, in his seminal work *Black Skins, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon argues that colonial oppression in its severest form leads to violent expression.⁴ Like Foucault, Fanon describes how political, economic, and social variables all play roles in the development and comprehension of madness, but greater emphasis is given to the interpretation of the effect of racism and colonial dominance on the human psyche. He not only exposes colonialism as the reason behind madness, but also emphasises the complexity of psychiatry in the colonial context. He explains how Western medicine has always cooperated with colonial authority to facilitate its rule, especially by using mental institutions as prominent symbols of their civilising mission, and how the rebellious voices "were diagnosed as epileptic, neurotic, or suffering from 'religious mania'."⁵ He further states that colonisation has produced psychological harm, existential dread, and a neurotic refusal of one's own identity within the colonised.

In India, the expansion of the mental health system paralleled British

² Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity* (London: Routledge, 2006).

³ Seri Inthava Kau'ikealaula Luangphinit, 'Tropical Fevers: "Madness" and Colonialism in Pacific Literature', *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 2004), p. 61.

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Grove Press, 2007).

⁵ Sloan Mahone, 'The Psychology of Rebellion: Colonial Medical Responses to Dissent in British East Africa', *Journal of African History*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2006), pp. 241-258.

colonial expansion. The state gradually assumed control of asylums that had first been formed as private businesses for sheltering the mad, as the English administrative presence developed in the early nineteenth century. This has often disrupted the traditional understanding of madness and its treatment. Waltraud Ernst (b. 1955), states that:

following the dictum established by the rhetoric of British colonial medicine itself, indigenous ways of healing were often conceptualized as the ‘Other’ to colonial medicine (or ‘Western’, ‘cosmopolitan’ or ‘biomedicine’). This tended to relegate indigenous ways of healing implicitly to a referential if not subordinate, or ‘subaltern’, position.⁶

It is also important to note that medicine played a crucial role in creating colonial identities in India. For the British, legitimising and stabilising medicine was a pursuit of imperial supremacy and economic exploitation. The Westerners rooted madness in morality and unreason and excluded the charms of madness and the possibility of the lunatic prophet or philosopher. Richard Keller argues that “The asylum in any context functions as both hospital and prison, and psychiatry’s medical applications render the medical institution the ultimate correctional facility.”⁷ One should also note that colonial psychiatry frequently ignored the cultural differences amongst the natives and was governed by a system for categorising and subjecting people rather than treating the mentally ill. During colonisation, madness mainly was the product of cultural differences. The colonisers tried to attribute madness to the colonised to justify their civilising mission, maintain their superiority, and interpret practices beyond their understanding.

Nevertheless, literature has often tried to bring out these intricacies of madness and its colonial implications. Shoshana Felman claims that “throughout our cultural history, the madness that has been socially, politically and philosophically repressed has nonetheless made itself heard, has survived as a speaking subject only in and through literary texts.”⁸ By using fictitious as well as real-life instances of psychological disintegration, postcolonial writings have often given voice to the misrepresented and the misunderstood. Postcolonial texts that contain madness reflect the physical and psychological trauma as well as the cultural shock and bereavement of

⁶ Waltraud Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: The European Insane in British India, 1800-1858* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. xvi.

⁷ Richard Keller, ‘Madness and Colonization: Psychiatry in the British and French Empires, 1800-1962’, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2001), pp. 295–326.

⁸ Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 15.

colonial invasion. Here, madness acts as a site for witnessing and responding to colonisation. Thus, madness in the postcolonial texts should be read as not a lapse into insanity, but a dynamic form of representation of colonial hegemony as it broadens our understanding of the permeability of stereotypes, racial boundaries, and othering within the colonial context. A look into the representation of madness in literary texts will help in understanding how colonialism resulted in psychopathological imbalances within the colonised. This also offers greater insight into colonial historiography and the creation of societal norms. Anirudh Kala's *The Unsafe Asylum: Stories of Partition and Madness* shows how some colonial strategies had repercussions on the colonised psyche over generations and portrays the link between partition madness and colonialism akin to popular postcolonial texts.

Partition, Madness and Anirudh Kala's *The Unsafe Asylum*

Partition was one of the most disturbing and agonising events in Indian history. Over 17 million people lost everything overnight, including their homes and livelihoods. Aijaz Ahmad Ganie in 'The Plight of Common People in The Partition Literature of the Indian Subcontinent' quotes M. Asaduddin:

...the partition of India, a momentous event in Indian history, continues to tantalize historians, haunt the Indian psyche and cast its shadow on our social and political life. It is closely linked with the chronicle of our freedom struggle that made the actual liberation of the country from foreign yoke an experience of violence, slaughter and exile for many.⁹

However, history often offers a one-dimensional narration of partition and fails to "represent the enormity of the tragedy."¹⁰

History often neglects the despair of dislocation of people caused by the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Varsha T. Pillai quotes from Anandita Bajpai and Maria Framke's 'Revisiting Partition Seventy Years Later: Of Layered Echoes, Voices and Memories':

the long-lasting repercussions of Partition demand that the traumatic history of individual episodes, the often-expressed longing for, and

⁹ Aijaz Ahmad Ganie and M. S. Rathor, 'The Plight of Common People in The Partition Literature of Indian Subcontinent', *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 4, no. 36 (2017), p. 7050.

¹⁰ Varsha T. Pillai, 'Representation of Partition Trauma in Anirudh Kala's *The Unsafe Asylum: Stories of Partition and Madness*', *IJRAR*, vol. 7, no. 3, (2021), pp. 206-213.

impossibility of, closure and the remembrance of violence, which continues to impinge upon the present-day lives of survivors are not forgotten... these accounts though few in numbers, and although never quite capable of undoing the ongoing emotional/ psychological horrors of Partition, are equally important voices in writing more holistic histories.¹¹

Partition literature thus offers profound insights into the complex effects of displacement and its emotional and psychological consequences. A closer look into the background of these narratives also offers critical insights into the consequences of colonialism. Partitions were part of the colonial divide and rule policy and the colonial power dynamics. Shashi Taroor explains:

The creation and perpetuation of Hindu-Muslim antagonism was the most significant accomplishment of British imperial policy: the colonial project of “divide et impera” (divide and rule) fomented religious antagonisms to facilitate continued imperial rule and reached its tragic culmination in 1947.¹²

Thus, the psychological imbalances caused by partition represented in literature can also be read in connection with the colonial agenda.

While most narratives of partition focus on the physical violence and displacement, *The Unsafe Asylum: Stories of Partition and Madness* discusses the impact of partition on the mental health of people in India and Pakistan, as well as how the personal and collective psychological effects of division are passed down through generations. The stories deal with the partition of India and Pakistan, conflict over the Azad Kashmir, the India-Bangladesh partition, the Hindu-Muslim riots that persist even today, and the Sikh riots seeking a free nation. Anirudh Kala, being a Ludhiana-based psychiatrist and a member of a family displaced due to the partition, renders a convincing image of the impacts of the partition. Reflections of the memories of his parents, his visits to mental institutions in Pakistan, his cross-border exchanges between mental-health practitioners of the two countries, and his experience with the mentally ill aid him to tell the stories.

The context of the partition also sets itself within Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and *Time of Madness*, offering a broader context and various other socio-historical factors surrounding partition. However, *The Unsafe Asylum* can be read in closer connection with Saadat Hasan Manto’s

¹¹ Pillai, ‘Representation of Partition Trauma in Anirudh Kala’s *The Unsafe Asylum: Stories of Partition and Madness*’, p. 211.

¹² Shashi Tharoor, ‘The Partition: The British game of “divide and rule”’, *Al-Jazeera*, 10 August (2017). At: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/8/10/the-partition-the-british-game-of-divide-and-rule>. Accessed 15/06/2022.

short story 'Toba Tek Singh'. Mental illness is a recurring subject in both novels, which tell the story of partition from the perspective of a mental institution. Both the works basically portray the sheer contrast between the inmates of the asylum and the people outside who act irrationally in the name of religion and ethnicity and question the definition of madness.

The Unsafe Asylum is structured as a collection of thirteen interlinked short stories that revolve around mental institutions in Lahore, Amritsar, and Ranji. It uses first-person and third-person narrations and shares the experiences of partition from different perspectives. The work conveys the violent ambiguities of communal conflicts and their traumatic after-effects over generations. Anirudh Kala brings out subtle details of colonial ideologies through his portrayal of madness. The madness of the asylum inmates symbolises and mirrors the madness of partition and violence surrounding them. They also represent the psychic turmoil of the thousands who were displaced during the partition and their painful identity struggle.

Madness and its Colonial Implications in *The Unsafe Asylum*

Anirudh Kala employs in his text the motif of madness in four different aspects: the madness of communal violence; the madness of the inmates; psychological damage of partition as madness; and the madness of people who are shackled by their pasts. By portraying these aspects of madness, he subtly criticises the act of partition enacted by the colonial regime. The text begins with the description of madness as communal violence. During partition, as the politics of the region became more and more intense, mob violence began to be equated with insanity. This is seen especially in the first story titled 'No Forgiveness Necessary'. This deals with the lives of Dr Iqbal, Fattu and Rudla at the asylum. It portrays incidents in a mental institution in Lahore in June 1947, followed by incidents in the Punjab in December 1979. Although the short story begins with an eerie description of the mental asylum with "twelve hundred seriously disturbed mentally ill patients,"¹³ what makes the readers and Dr Iqbal, a junior doctor at Lahore mental asylum, distressed is the 'bedlam' Iqbal witnesses that evening on his way to the asylum. Against the backdrop of partition riots that were taking place throughout the city, an old man was attacked by a frantic mob. Iqbal had witnessed the whole event and seen "the headless body of the old carpenter

¹³ Anirudh Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum: Stories of Partition and Madness* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publishing Pty. Ltd, 2018), p. 1.

lay with his tools and lunch box scattered around him.”¹⁴ Although he had ignored the comments on violence lingering around him, this event took him aback. The insanity of filling the streets with blood and killing people in the name of religion makes even the inmates of the asylum contemplate on the idea of madness. Rudla, an inmate of the asylum, asks his companion Fattu, “Have the outsiders gone mad?” Fattu very wisely answers,

Yes they have.... we are predictably unpredictable. Outsiders are unpredictably unpredictable. They should be inside and us outside...They are killing people faster than killing mosquitoes. They need electric shocks...You know the big sign over the gate which reads Mental Hospital, Lahore? We should take it down and put it up inside, so that everybody is clear which side of the gate is the actual mental hospital.¹⁵

This extremely thoughtful conversation between Fattu and Rudla, who are considered insane by society, ironically questions the definition and perception of madness, and points out how communal violence leads people to lose their minds. As the story proceeds one could also see the ferocity of madness of the world outside, as authorities begin to divide even the inmates of the mental asylum in terms of their religion and consequently deport the Sikh and Hindu inmates to India. This growing madness of communal intolerance and Hindu-Muslim agitation as stated earlier can be seen as a product of the colonial ‘divide and rule’ policy.

The madness of communal violence throughout the text is portrayed in contrast with the madness of the asylum inmates. By portraying the madness of the inmates ironically, Kala has been able to accentuate the focus on the madness of communal violence, and throw light on the colonial norms that used the medical system as a tool to get rid of the deviants in society. Throughout the stories, the inmates of the asylums are depicted as saner than the people outside. Fattu is portrayed as a philosophical person who has a clear idea about what is happening. He views everything around him critically, unlike the mob, who are blinded in the name of partition. In the short story ‘The Mad Prophet,’ Fattu is also portrayed as someone who has the ability to predict the future. He is considered to have chosen to stay in the asylum and it is said that people including politicians used to come to visit him and seek advice. Similarly, in the third story ‘Partitioning Madness’ Rudla can be seen to give a vivid description of the events of transferring the Hindu and Muslim inmates to asylums in India and Pakistan respectively.

¹⁴ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 17.

Even though the stories of the transfer of people with mental illness from mental hospitals in Lahore and Punjab might seem unrealistic, an article by Sanjeev Jain and Alok Sarin named 'Partition and the Mentally Ill' states that an exchange of psychiatric patients between India and Pakistan, in fact, took place after the partition in 1950. The Amristar mental hospital was built to accommodate the 450 non-Muslim patients transferred from Lahore. Some of them were sent to Ranchi and various other Indian hospitals.¹⁶

He narrates the painful and mentally and physically draining experience of this transfer three years after the partition adding details he had heard from the staff in the asylum.

Other examples of 'sane' asylum inmates, like Nicole Forester (an inmate of the European asylum in Ranchi) and the person called Panditji (an inmate of the Indian asylum in Ranchi), appear in the short story 'The Diary of a Mental Hospital Intern.' This story shares the experiences of Prakash Kohli, a psychiatrist, during his internship at Ranchi mental asylum. While Nicole Forester is portrayed as a person completely aware of her mental condition, Panditji offers Prakash insights into negligence on the part of the authorities during the separation of the inmates. According to the story, the inmates were transferred based on vague available data. Panditji says, "Many of them did not understand Pakistan or India or freedom and the only Jinah they probably knew was the occupational therapist."¹⁷ This statement offers sharp criticism of the decision of the colonial government to separate people, including the inmates of mental asylums, in terms of religion. Such criticism of the British in enacting the partition also resonates in 'No Forgiveness Necessary.' The story mentions how Radcliffe, someone who was unaware of India's diverse culture and history, was given the charge of deciding the arbitrary borders and dividing the country. Rashida, Iqbal's wife, tells Iqbal, "Do you know that man Radcliffe, who is already in Delhi drawing the boundary line, came to India for the first time last week? And do you know what his profession is? ... He is a lawyer."¹⁸ Similarly, there are also nuances in the text where both psychiatrists and asylum inmates comment that the separation was done all of a sudden and without necessary planning and precautions from the side of the colonial regime.

The third aspect of madness discussed in the short stories is the

¹⁶ Sanjeev Jain, and Alok Sarin, 'Partition and the Mentally Ill', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 47, no. 29 (2012), p. 4.

¹⁷ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 74.

¹⁸ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 10.

psychological damage caused by partition. Throughout the stories one could see the trauma of partition passed on to the generations. One of the most prominent stories in the text which uses the idea of shared psychosis is 'Folie a Deux.' It narrates the story of a couple who migrates to Ludhiana because of communal conflict. It conveys the delusional frenzy of the female partner who begins to have delusions of 'Mussulmans' threatening her after the partition. As narrated by her daughter, "She had become fearful and swore that she had heard whisperings of a mob, growing louder and shriller, threatening to carve her to pieces. She also vividly 'saw' bearded 'Mussulmans' wearing clothes drenched in blood, threatening to amputate her breasts."¹⁹ Even though the lady's daughter takes her to the hospital for care, it is in vain. As per the narration, the lady becomes delusional, and she finally commits suicide. The delusions afflict the next generation. Both her son and daughters fall into the delusion, and the fearful memories that haunted their mother become nightmares for them as well. First, her brother Om begins hearing voices like his mother and later it is passed on to her sister, Chitra Kala, who says, "The delusion of Muslim men baying for blood and honour was passed down to the family like a cursed heirloom."²⁰

As the stories proceed, more instances of riots and communal conflicts like the Sikh riot and the separation of East Pakistan reappear in different forms. This signifies the idea that a partition is never an event of the past, but its repercussions continue until the deeply imprinted ideologies of power and stratification disappear. The psychological turbulence throughout the stories also hints at the wounds caused by memories that remain even after healing physical injuries. These further indicate patterns of madness like delusions, trauma, and depression due to separation. Such disturbing images of psychopathologies caused by colonial negligence becomes explicit in the case of Ramneek Singh, who was never able to sleep peacefully once he had killed Iqbal during the riots.

Additionally, in the short story 'Refugees,' Kala depicts the trauma of separation and how riots at various moments of history affect Prakash and his family. The story begins with his mother asking him, "Is it Partition time again?"²¹ It depicts the plight of the family who are forced to flee from regions as the madness of communal violence grows around them in different forms. First, Prakash's father and mother had to escape from the communal

¹⁹ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 105.

²⁰ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 105.

²¹ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 210.

violence in Pakistan and flee to India. However, Ved, Prakash's father, is killed in a protest during the Emergency. Even after that, the Sikh riot for free Sikh nation forces Prakash to leave the country and go to London. He narrates the feeling of being rootless and the trauma of separation which had to pass through three generations.

The text also discusses the aspect of madness in terms of people's inability to reconcile with the past and fit into the present. The second story, 'Belly Button,' gives insights into how people who were separated due to partition were not able to reconcile with their pasts. The story narrates how Prakash, a psychiatrist, his father Ved and his mother had to flee from Gurangwala in Pakistan because of the riots and how he goes back to his birthplace after a long time. It offers nuances, with Prakash reflecting on how he was not able to find any difference between the places and the people across the boundaries, and describes how people across the borders were looking forward to news and memories of their loved ones who were separated due to the partition. One could also see visitors bragging about their past in Pakistan and curious natives wanting to know about their loved ones in India. Prakash states that, "They attempted to fill the gaps in their heads about friends and neighbours they had left behind."²² Similarly, the fourth story, 'Sita's Bus,' is a taunting narrative that explains how people were mentally drained as they were not able to fit into the life after partition. It describes the story of a woman named Harpreet Cheema who was first Hindu and married but had become a Muslim and married again as her family left her in Pakistan. She had to return to India once the relatives left behind were sent back to their native places. However, she goes through an emotional crisis as she returns as she carries the child from her second marriage. On her way back she had undergone an abortion without her consent, as the husbands in both countries did not want their wife to be pregnant by another man. Before Harpreet enters the bus to Dilli, she is found to flush down all the religious amulets she had collected over the years from both religions. She boldly answers to the conductor who asks her name "Harpreet...Agge pichhe kuchh nahi."²³ This represents the inability of people to fit into a land undergoing huge transition and has changed both in essence, philosophy, politics, etc. and how the colonial ideology of separating the country into two affected the colonial psyche.

The text also throws light on other colonial practices such as the

²² Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 25.

²³ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 47.

practice of racial segregation with mental asylums. As Ernst argues that racial segregation was consequently sustained inter-institutionally and separate lunatic asylums for Indians and lower-class Eurasians were to be found from the beginning of the nineteenth century in the major districts: Benares, Bareilly, Patna, Dacca and near Calcutta, and, towards the middle of the century, in Delhi.²⁴

In the fifth story, “The Diary of a Mental Hospital Intern,” Panditji tells Prakash that the “British didn’t want their countrymen to mingle with Indians in so vulnerable condition as mental illness.”²⁵ While the European asylum is described as a ‘half-way home’ where residents wear their own clothes, not uniforms, and are free to go out, the Indian asylum was flooded with people and was ‘noisy, cramped and dirty.’ He adds that the Indian mental asylum had a comparatively huge number of inmates, which makes him think that “there is a huge factory out there, producing madness.”²⁶ There is also reference to Iqbal being a junior doctor in rank, although he was experienced and managed the asylum well. This hints towards how British medicalised psychiatry and how it helped in maintaining their racial superiority.

The text also tries to provide a paradoxical image of the mental asylum as a safe house. The story narrates that Fattu and Rudla, who are inmates in the asylum, had to remain in the facility even though the doctor had discharged them. According to them, no-one came to collect them as “the two families have had more compelling issues of life, death, home and hearth”²⁷ because of partition. Iqbal, one of the Deputy Medical Superintendents, contemplates that “[Fattu’s and Rudla’s families] might have speculated amongst themselves that a mental hospital was a safer place than the world outside in that summer.”²⁸ One could also see a Sikh and a Hindu family with five children taking shelter in the mental asylum. The collection also concludes with the idea that the only place where you can be safe is in the mental hospital. In the final story, ‘Rudla’s Discharge,’ one could see that Rudla is finally discharged from the mental hospital and is claimed by his nephew’s family. Nevertheless, he finally decides to take shelter in a mental hospital as he is horrified by the riots that were taking place. The country again witnesses the next series of riots as communal

²⁴ Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: The European Insane in British India, 1800-1858*, p. xvi.

²⁵ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 75.

²⁶ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 78.

²⁷ Pillai, ‘Representation of Partition Trauma in Anirudh Kala’s *The Unsafe Asylum: Stories of Partition and Madness*’, p. 211.

²⁸ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 3.

animosity grips the country after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's death, and the Sikhs being massacred. While escaping from the rioting crowd, he gets into a taxi and asks, "Is there a mental hospital in this city?"²⁹ He considers the asylum as his last resort and tries to escape the madness of the crowd.

Thus, madness in the stories can be read as the chaos that resulted from the rule of the colonisers and the psychological impact that is still present within the colonised. The continued influence of the colonisers' ideology is visible in the continued urge to be divided among Indians who formerly believed in an all-inclusive culture. However, *The Unsafe Asylum* solicits empathy towards the disabled characters by juxtaposing them to a callous and abusive environment so that their symptoms seem harmless compared to the psychological damage rendered upon them.

Conclusion

Madness represented in Indian English fiction opens a new perspective. People often describe the mentally unwell using the existing knowledge system and the known text schemata. Even today, people have little knowledge about mental illness beyond the stereotyped scripts and folk myths. Many are in the dark about how our ancestors perceived madness, and how society reacted to it. People barely question the origins of concepts such as normal and abnormal. Madness for the colonisers was one of the efficient strategies to confine those who spoke against them. *The Unsafe Asylum* deals with the trauma of partition that is often read as a consequence of the divide and rule system that the colonisers used. The plot of the novel proceeds through various stories about how partition affected mental asylums and the people within. It presents how partition continues to affect the psyche of people and portrays that partition was not an event of the past but continues to shed its shadow in different forms over people. The description of madness and the plight of people after the partition can be seen to throw light on the impact of colonialism and the violence and confusion that colonialism left behind. Anirudh Kala throws light on the multiple facets of madness ironically and juxtaposes the notion of partition madness. He implicitly points to the socio-cultural factors that result in such madness and thus questions the ideas of madness within the present Indian context.

²⁹ Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*, p. 245.