



# **Psychopathology in Indian Fantasy/Speculative Fiction: Gendered Constructions of Mental Illness Indra Das's "The Devourers" (2015), Amitav Ghosh's "The Calcutta Chromosomes" (1996), Tzvetan Todorov's "The Fantastic" (1975), Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar's "The Madwoman In The Attic" (1979)**

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**Abstract:** This dissertation examines the gendered dimensions of psychopathology in Indian fantasy and speculative fiction, with particular focus on Indra Das's *The Devourers* (2015) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995). Rather than treating mental illness as individual pathology, the study argues that these texts deploy psychological disturbance as a narrative and epistemological strategy, one that exposes the interlocking violence of colonial rationality, patriarchal containment, and biomedical authority.

The analysis draws on two primary theoretical frameworks: Tzvetan Todorov's structural theory of the fantastic, which locates genre in the hesitation between rational and supernatural explanation, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's feminist critique of literary madness in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Read together, these frameworks reveal how Indian speculative fiction inherits and radically transforms the Victorian madwoman archetype, displacing her from attic to jungle, from clinical case to epistemic insurgent.

Across both novels, madness is shown to be unevenly gendered, feminized as hysteria, silence, and bodily excess; masculinized as obsession and intellectual overreach. Yet neither is straightforwardly pathologised. Instead, the study traces how psychological instability becomes a site of resistance: Mangala's opacity subverts colonial science from within, while the shapeshifting *Devourers* embody a feral consciousness that dismantles humanist binaries of reason and instinct. Trauma, non-linear memory, and narrative fragmentation further complicate biomedical models of mental health, reframing fractured consciousness as a structural response to historical dispossession rather than cognitive failure.

Ultimately, the dissertation contends that Indian speculative fiction does not represent madness so much as weaponize it, forging from psychological wreckage a counter-epistemology that challenges who may speak, who may know, and whose perception of reality is permitted to endure.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the shadowed realms of Indian fantasy and speculative fiction, psychopathology appears not merely as a clinical affliction but as a gendered specter, haunting the narratives of colonial legacies, mythic rebirths, and existential unraveling. Authors like Indra Das in *The Devourers* (2015) and Amitav Ghosh in *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) wield mental illness as a narrative prosthesis, refracting it through the prisms of gender to interrogate the porous boundaries between human frailty, supernatural predation, and socio-cultural oppression. Das's shapeshifting were-jaguars embody a feral madness that devours patriarchal constraints, while Ghosh's elusive Urmila Roy channels schizophrenic visions as subversive epistemologies against imperial rationality. These texts, embedded in India's syncretic speculative traditions, challenge Western psychoanalytic hegemonies by gendering mental disorder in women as hysterical vessels of chaos, men as tormented architects of reality's fracture, thus extending Tzvetan Todorov's structural poetics in *The Fantastic* (1970), where hesitation between real and unreal mirrors the psychotic break. Drawing on Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), this dissertation unveils how Indian speculative fiction recodes the Victorian madwoman archetype for postcolonial contexts: no longer attic-bound, she prowls jungles and laboratories, her psychopathology a weaponized rebellion against gendered normativity. Todorov's framework illuminates the genre's liminal hesitations, where mental illness catalyzes the fantastic, neither allegory nor pure marvel, but a structural rupture exposing the psychopathology of empire and caste. In Das's devoured lovers and Ghosh's networked delusions, gender constructs mental illness as a site of resistance: female hysteria as clairvoyant insurgency, male delusion as imperial haunting.

This study dissects these dynamics across the selected corpus, probing how speculative form amplifies psychopathology's gendered encodings, madwomen as mythic devouresses, madmen as fragmented seekers, to critique India's intertwined histories of partition trauma, scientific colonialism, and neoliberal alienation. By bridging Todorov's formalism with Gilbert and Gubar's feminist poetics, it argues that Indian fantasy does not pathologize deviance but radicalizes it, forging from mental wreckage a speculative ethic of multiplicity and survival.

In the labyrinthine corridors of Indian fantasy and speculative fiction, psychopathology manifests as a gendered phantasmagoria, intertwining mental affliction with the supernatural to dismantle entrenched hierarchies of gender, empire, and rationality. Indra Das's *The Devourers* (2015) unleashes shapeshifting were-jaguars whose insatiable hunger symbolizes a primal madness that both liberates and consumes, particularly through the lens of female ferocity clashing against patriarchal fetters. Complementing this, Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) reimagines schizophrenia not as deficit but as networked prophecy, embodied in the enigmatic Urmila Roy, whose visions subvert colonial science and expose the gendered psychopathology of knowledge production. These narratives, pulsing with India's mythic undercurrents from Mughal-era devouring to post-independence bio-conspiracies extend Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* (1970), where the genre's defining hesitation between real and unreal parallels the psychotic threshold, rendering mental illness a structural fulcrum for speculative rupture.

This dissertation mobilizes Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) to decode how Indian authors repurpose the Victorian madwoman trope for postcolonial exigencies: no longer sequestered, she appears as devouring beast or delirious oracle, her "hysteria" an insurrectionary discourse against gendered normativity. In Das's text, female psychopathology devours hetero-normative bonds, birthing queer ecologies of pain and ecstasy; in Ghosh's, it unravels masculine scientific hubris, birthing diasporic truths from delusion. Todorov's poetics sharpens this analysis, framing the fantastic as a hesitation that mirrors gendered mental fractures of women's chaos as uncanny irruption, men's torment as rational collapse while Gilbert and Gubar's framework unveils the attic's evolution into jungle and lab. Through close readings of these texts, supplemented by comparative forays into broader Indian speculative canons (e.g., Sami Ahmad Khan's bio-horrors or Tarun K. Saint's partition phantoms), this study contends that gendered constructions of mental illness in Indian fantasy serve not to stigmatize but to radicalize: psychopathology becomes a speculative prosthesis for envisioning post human solidarities amid caste, gender, and colonial hauntings. By synthesizing structuralism and feminist critique, it illuminates how these fictions weaponize madness against epistemic violence, positing the madwoman not as victim but as devouring architect of

alternate realities.

## II. PSYCHOPATHOLOGY AS A NARRATIVE STRATEGY IN SPECULATIVE FICTION

Psychopathology in speculative fiction is rarely a neutral representation of illness; rather, it functions as a deliberate narrative strategy that destabilizes dominant modes of knowledge, challenges fixed identities, and exposes the violence embedded within normative structures of gender, science, and history. In the context of Indian fantasy and speculative fiction, psychopathology becomes especially significant because it runs at the intersection of colonial epistemologies, mythic imaginaries, and gendered constructions of subjectivity. Texts such as Indra Das's *The Devourers* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* employ mental disturbance, fragmented consciousness, and epistemic instability not merely as character traits but as structural devices that interrogate what is considered rational, real, and authoritative. When read through the theoretical frameworks offered by Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, these narratives reveal how psychopathology becomes a means of resisting hegemonic narratives that seek to discipline both minds and bodies.

Todorov's conception of the fantastic is crucial in understanding how psychopathology works in fiction. For Todorov, the fantastic emerges in the moment of hesitation when readers and characters are unable to decide whether an event has a rational explanation or belongs to the supernatural realm. This uncertainty mirrors the experiential dimensions of psychological disturbance, where perception becomes unstable and reality itself appears fractured. In speculative fiction, therefore, madness often manifests not as a medically diagnosable condition but as a narrative state of ambiguity. Characters may appear delusional, haunted, or unstable, yet the text resists confirming whether their experiences are pathological or revelatory. This unreliability is not accidental; it mirrors historical conditions in which indigenous knowledge systems, non-normative identities, and gendered subjectivities have been systematically dismissed as irrational or pathological. Madness thus becomes a narrative language through which suppressed realities surface, unsettling dominant epistemologies without offering neat resolutions.

In *The Devourers*, psychopathology is inseparable from questions of identity, embodiment, and desire. The novel's lycanthropic figures, capable of consuming others and absorbing their memories, exist in a state of perpetual psychological and corporeal flux. This instability resists the notion of a coherent, unified self, a concept deeply rooted in Western humanist and patriarchal traditions. The narrator's engagement with fragmented manuscripts and testimonies further complicates narrative authority, as truth emerges through discontinuity rather than linear coherence. These narrative strategies evoke psychological disturbance not as individual pathology but as a mode of existence that exceeds humanist norms. The experience of being "unsettled" is not confined to characters; it is structurally imposed upon the reader, who must navigate a narrative landscape where sanity and monstrosity, memory and hallucination, history and myth constantly bleed into one another.

This destabilization acquires a distinctly gendered dimension when read alongside *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Gilbert and Gubar argue that madness in literature has historically functioned as a metaphor for female resistance to patriarchal confinement, with women's interior lives rendered excessive, dangerous, or pathological when they exceed prescribed roles. In *The Devourers*, bodies that refuse fixed gender categories whether through shapeshifting, queer desire, or refusal of reproductive futurity are often framed through altered psychological states. Yet the novel does not pathologize these figures in the conventional sense; instead, it exposes how the very language of pathology is a tool used to discipline non-normative bodies. Madness here becomes a space of subversion, a refusal to submit to binaries of male/female, human/animal, sane/insane.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* employs psychopathology in a more epistemological register, situating mental instability within the politics of colonial science. The novel dismantles the myth of scientific objectivity by revealing how colonial medical discourse constructs alternative knowledge systems as irrational or insane. Characters who operate outside institutional science particularly those aligned with indigenous or occult practices are marked as unstable, secretive, or mentally suspect. This labelling, however, is exposed as a mechanism of epistemic control rather than an objective diagnosis. The fragmented narrative structure,

shifting temporalities, and unreliable perspectives mirror the psychological disorientation experienced by characters who exist at the margins of colonial rationality.

Across both texts, psychopathology functions as a narrative strategy that refuses closure. It sustains ambiguity, resists categorization, and disrupts linear historiography. Rather than presenting mental illness as a deficit to be corrected, these novels reframe it as a lens through which alternative truths become visible. This reconfiguration aligns with Todorov's insistence that the fantastic thrives on irresolution, and with Gilbert and Gubar's feminist critique of madness as a gendered response to systemic oppression. In Indian speculative fiction, this strategy acquires additional political urgency, as it interrogates the legacy of colonialism, the policing of gendered bodies, and the epistemic violence of rationalist modernity.

### III. TODOROV'S FANTASTIC AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF UNCERTAINTY

Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic, grounded in the experience of hesitation between rational and supernatural explanations, offers a productive framework for examining psychological disturbance in Indian fantasy and speculative fiction. When read in conjunction with *The Devourers* by Indra Das and *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh, the fantastic emerges not merely as a structural or generic mode but as a narrative articulation of epistemic instability that closely resembles states of mental disturbance. Hesitation, ambiguity, and unresolved perception function as central markers through which psychological fracture is represented, while also exposing the cultural, gendered, and colonial conditions that shape definitions of sanity. Rather than resolving uncertainty, both novels sustain it, resisting explanatory closure and destabilizing biomedical and rationalist paradigms of mental health.

Todorov locates the fantastic in the moment when a subject confronted with an inexplicable event cannot determine whether its cause is natural or supernatural. This moment of undecidability is crucial, for it situates the subject in a condition of epistemic crisis where perception, memory, and interpretation lose their authority. Such instability closely parallels psychological states characterized by dissociation, paranoia, and cognitive fragmentation, in which reality cannot be stabilized within a coherent framework. In speculative fiction, this instability is not pathologised through diagnosis but is embedded within narrative form itself. The fantastic thus becomes a psychological condition sustained through narrative hesitation, mirroring the lived experience of mental disturbance as an ongoing negotiation rather than a discrete event.

In *The Devourers*, epistemic instability is inscribed through fragmented temporality, unstable narration, and porous boundaries between human and non-human identities. The novel refuses to offer definitive explanations for the existence of the Devourers, positioning them at the threshold between myth, memory, and embodied reality. This refusal sustains a continuous hesitation that destabilizes both character and reader, producing a psychic environment in which identity and perception remain unresolved. The Devourers' hybridity disrupts enlightenment binaries of reason and instinct, civilization and savagery, normalcy and monstrosity, suggesting that psychological coherence depends upon the maintenance of these divisions.

Gender intensifies this disturbance. Female and feminized figures in *The Devourers* are repeatedly associated with excess, desire, and transgression, aligning with feminist critiques of madness articulated by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. The monstrous feminine emerges not as an inherent pathology but as a narrative effect produced by epistemic denial and patriarchal containment. Women's experiences are mediated through male narration, mythic distortion, and fragmented memory, ensuring that their psychological realities remain perpetually ambiguous.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, epistemic instability is foregrounded through the systematic destabilization of scientific rationality. The novel undermines the authority of biomedical knowledge by presenting alternative epistemologies that operate through secrecy, silence, and non-linear transmission. Obsession, paranoia, and cognitive disintegration emerge not as individual pathologies but as consequences of confronting knowledge that resists empirical verification. The fantastic here is not marked by supernatural spectacle but by the collapse of explanatory certainty.

Colonial epistemology plays a central role in shaping this instability. Indigenous systems of knowledge are rendered unintelligible within Western scientific paradigms, producing a narrative environment where alternative ways of knowing are dismissed as irrational or mystical. Mangala's near-silence and narrative

opacity function as a refusal of interpretability, sustaining the fantastic by denying closure. This refusal exposes the violence inherent in epistemic systems that equate intelligibility with sanity.

Across both texts, Todorov's hesitation functions not as a transitional narrative moment but as a sustained psychological condition. By holding characters and readers within unresolved epistemic spaces, these novels challenge biomedical and colonial models of psychopathology that rely on categorization, diagnosis, and narrative resolution. Through the sustained operation of the fantastic, *The Devourers* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* reframe psychological disturbance as an epistemological and political condition, revealing how uncertainty itself becomes a mode of resistance against dominant constructions of sanity.

#### IV. MADNESS, KNOWLEDGE, AND POWER

Indian fantasy and speculative fiction repeatedly position madness not as a failure of cognition but as a contested mode of knowledge production, one that exposes the power structures governing who is authorized to define reality. Within this framework, mental illness operates as an alternative epistemology, an unstable yet generative site from which dominant regimes of meaning are challenged. In *The Devourers* by Indra Das and *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh, psychological disturbance is inseparable from questions of authority, gender, and epistemic control. Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic and feminist critiques of madness articulated in *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar reveal how the label of madness functions less as a medical diagnosis and more as a political mechanism that disciplines deviant knowledge systems, particularly those associated with women, the colonized, and the non-human.

Todorov's concept of the fantastic hinges on hesitation, the sustained inability to determine whether an event belongs to the realm of rational explanation or the supernatural. This hesitation destabilizes epistemic certainty and, in doing so, undermines the authority of dominant rationalist frameworks. When transposed onto questions of psychopathology, the fantastic becomes a narrative space in which mental illness is not resolved into pathology but preserved as epistemic ambiguity. The "mad" subject, therefore, may occupy a privileged position, perceiving truths inaccessible to conventional consciousness. Speculative fiction repeatedly mobilizes this possibility, suggesting that madness can function as insight rather than deficit.

In *The Devourers*, the boundary between sanity and madness is destabilized through hybrid bodies, inherited memories, and mythic consciousness. *The Devourers* themselves inhabit an epistemic position that resists human rationality, operating through embodied memory, affect, and instinct rather than empirical logic. Characters who engage with this mode of knowing are rendered psychologically unstable within normative frameworks, yet the narrative refuses to delegitimize their experiences. What appears monstrous or irrational from the outside often contains forms of truth that modern categories cannot process. Madness, here, is the price of perceiving beyond the limits of the human.

Gender plays a critical role in this epistemic struggle. Female bodies and desires in *The Devourers* are repeatedly associated with excess, transformation, and threat, echoing Gilbert and Gubar's insight that women's madness in literature often signals resistance to patriarchal containment. Women who possess knowledge that cannot be easily translated into rational discourse are positioned as irrational, monstrous, or mentally disturbed. Yet the novel simultaneously grants them narrative potency, allowing madness to become a language of embodied rebellion.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* radicalizes this logic by situating madness within the terrain of colonial science. The novel dismantles biomedical authority by presenting knowledge systems that operate through silence, secrecy, and collective transmission rather than documentation and proof. Mangala's work exists outside the archive of Western science, rendering it unintelligible to colonial rationality. This unintelligibility is repeatedly misread as irrationality, mysticism, or madness. The category of madness thus functions as a colonial instrument used to invalidate what cannot be assimilated.

Murugan's psychological unraveling exemplifies this epistemic violence. His obsessive need to uncover and explain Mangala's work reflects the colonial compulsion to translate all knowledge into legible forms. His paranoia and eventual disappearance are not symptoms of inherent madness but consequences of epistemic overreach. The more intensely he seeks mastery, the more unstable his own cognition becomes.

Across both texts, mental illness operates not as a deficit but as an alternative way of knowing that challenges

hegemonic epistemologies. The Fantastic, as theorized by Todorov, provides the structural conditions for this challenge by suspending resolution and destabilizing meaning. Within this suspended space, madness exposes the politics of knowledge production, revealing how gender, colonial power, and narrative authority shape definitions of sanity.

## V. GENDERED CONSTRUCTIONS OF MADNESS

Gendered constructions of madness in Indian fantasy and speculative fiction reveal how mental illness is culturally coded through asymmetrical regimes of knowledge, power, and legitimacy. In *The Devourers* by Indra Das and *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh, madness is not a neutral psychological category but a deeply gendered narrative position, shaped by patriarchal, colonial, and epistemic hierarchies. When read alongside Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's feminist critique in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, these texts demonstrate how feminized hysteria and masculinized obsession function as divergent yet interconnected modes through which mental disturbance is represented, regulated, and narrativized. The fantastic, as a genre predicated on hesitation and epistemic uncertainty, becomes a crucial site for exposing how gender determines whose instability is pathologized and whose is re-coded as intellectual pursuit or visionary excess.

Within dominant literary and psychiatric traditions, hysteria has historically been feminized, associated with emotional excess, bodily unpredictability, and irrationality, while obsession has been masculinized, framed as intensity, intellectual fixation, or even genius. Gilbert and Gubar trace this asymmetry to the ways in which women's psychological disturbances are produced by confinement, silencing, and the denial of authorial agency. Madness, in this framework, becomes a social inscription rather than a biological fact. Indian speculative fiction reworks this inherited binary by exposing the instability of both categories.

In *The Devourers*, feminized madness is closely aligned with bodily transformation, desire, and narrative opacity. Female and feminized figures are frequently positioned as excessive or unknowable, their psychological states filtered through fragmented memory, mythic retellings, and male narration. This mediation reproduces the cultural logic of hysteria, in which women's experiences are perceived as incoherent precisely because they resist rational containment. Yet the novel also grants such figures a disruptive agency: their excess becomes a force that unsettles normative gender and sexual structures.

By contrast, masculinized madness in *The Devourers* is framed through endurance, obsession with history, and the pursuit of knowledge across time. Male characters' psychological instability is often rendered legible as existential struggle or intellectual burden rather than disorder. This reflects a broader tendency to aestheticize male obsession while delegitimizing female emotionality. The novel critiques this asymmetry by revealing that both forms of disturbance are products of social and historical violence.

A similar gendered logic operates in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, where Murugan's obsessive pursuit of a hidden counter-history gradually destabilizes his mental state, yet his paranoia is framed as intellectual fixation rather than hysteria. Even as his cognition deteriorates, his madness remains narratively protected within a framework of inquiry and ambition. He is permitted seriousness because he occupies the masculine role of the seeker.

In contrast, Mangala's radical epistemic authority is rendered through silence, opacity, and refusal of interpretability. Her marginal position aligns her with feminized madness, as her knowledge operates outside sanctioned structures of Western science. Yet the text subtly inverts the logic of madness by displacing instability onto those who attempt to decode or control her. What appears irrational is not Mangala's knowledge but the patriarchal and colonial need to dominate it.

Across both texts, mental illness functions as a site where power determines meaning. Feminized hysteria is produced through exclusion and silencing, while masculinized obsession is sustained through access to discourse and interpretation. Indian speculative fiction challenges the stability of such distinctions while simultaneously revealing their persistence.

Ultimately, *The Devourers* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* demonstrate that gendered constructions of madness are integral to the politics of the fantastic. By foregrounding ambiguity and epistemic instability, these texts refuse to resolve madness into pathology, instead exposing it as a cultural artefact shaped by power,

gender, and knowledge.

## VI. COLONIAL MEDICINE AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Colonial medicine in Indian speculative fiction functions not merely as a scientific enterprise but as an apparatus of surveillance, classification, and psychological control, producing madness as a category through which power regulates bodies and knowledge. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Amitav Ghosh exposes psychiatry and biomedical rationality as deeply implicated in colonial governance, where the management of disease becomes inseparable from the management of populations and minds. Mental illness in this context is not an objective diagnosis but a politically charged designation, assigned to subjects who resist, evade, or exceed colonial epistemologies. Colonial medical discourse relied on the assumption that Western scientific rationality represented universal truth, while indigenous practices were framed as superstition, irrationality, or insanity.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, this hierarchy is systematically undermined through the novel's refusal to privilege empirical explanation. Ronald Ross's historical malaria research, celebrated within colonial scientific narratives, is recontextualized as partial and ultimately peripheral. The true locus of knowledge resides in figures like Mangala, whose work operates outside institutional medicine and resists documentation. Her methods are collective, embodied, and secretive, qualities that colonial science cannot recognize as legitimate because they exceed its protocols of visibility and authorship.

Psychiatry under colonial regimes functioned as a tool of control by rendering deviance legible and manageable. The classification of certain behaviors as pathological enabled the state to intervene, isolate, and discipline subjects whose bodies or beliefs threatened colonial order. Ghosh's narrative reflects this mechanism through its depiction of obsessive surveillance, data collection, and epistemic paranoia. Archives, laboratories, and bureaucratic systems seek to capture what remains elusive.

Murugan's descent into psychological instability mirrors the contradictions of colonial medicine itself: the more obsessively he seeks rational coherence, the more fragmented his cognition becomes. Madness, in this sense, is displaced from the colonized subject onto the colonial epistemological framework, revealing psychiatry's role in producing the instability it claims to diagnose. His paranoia is less a private disorder than a symptom of a system unable to comprehend what lies beyond its categories.

Todorov's concept of the fantastic is crucial to understanding this destabilization. The sustained hesitation between rational and irrational explanations prevents the narrative from collapsing into medical realism or supernatural certainty. Colonial medicine depends on definitive categorization of healthy or diseased, sane or insane, yet the fantastic suspends these binaries. It opens a space where institutional knowledge cannot secure authority.

Gender intensifies this critique. As Gilbert and Gubar argue, madness has historically functioned as a gendered designation, applied disproportionately to women whose autonomy or knowledge threatens patriarchal authority. Mangala's silence and refusal to be interpreted render her epistemically inaccessible. Rather than pathologizing her directly, the novel reveals how institutions experience female opacity as disorder. Psychiatry's failure to classify Mangala becomes a failure of power.

Across these texts, colonial psychiatry emerges as a technology of governance that produces madness through surveillance, interpretation, and exclusion. The speculative mode enables a reimagining of mental illness not as individual pathology but as an alternative epistemological position, one that challenges who is permitted to know, who defines reality, and who controls meaning.

## VII. THE BODY AS A SITE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HORROR

In Indian fantasy and speculative fiction, the body often emerges as the primary site through which psychological horror is articulated, transforming mental disturbance into a visceral, material experience. Rather than locating psychopathology solely within the mind, texts such as Indra Das's *The Devourers* displace psychological instability onto the body itself, rendering illness, transformation, and excess as narrative expressions of fractured subjectivity. This corporealisation of mental disturbance aligns closely with Tzvetan Todorov's conception of the fantastic, wherein hesitation and ambiguity destabilize the boundaries

between the natural and the supernatural. In *The Devourers*, however, this destabilization is inscribed onto flesh, desire, hunger, and metamorphosis, producing a form of psychological horror inseparable from bodily experience.

The body becomes the terrain upon which madness, identity, and power are negotiated, particularly in relation to gendered and marginalized subjects. Shapeshifting destabilizes the integrity of the human form and, by extension, the coherence of the self. The Devourers' ability to move between human and animal states disrupts notions of a stable, bounded body, suggesting instead that the body is porous, excessive, and fundamentally unstable. This instability evokes anxieties commonly associated with psychopathology: loss of control, identity fragmentation, and alienation from one's own physical being.

Illness in *The Devourers* operates less as a biomedical condition than as a metaphor for psychic excess. Hunger, desire, and consumption recur as bodily imperatives that exceed rational control, collapsing distinctions between need and compulsion. Psychological disturbance is thus rendered as an embodied condition, where the body's refusal to obey social and moral regulation is read as monstrous or insane. The self becomes terrifying precisely because it cannot be separated from instinct, appetite, and transformation.

This becomes especially significant when read through Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of the madwoman as a figure produced by patriarchal containment. The association between bodily excess and psychological instability disproportionately attaches itself to female and feminized figures, whose bodies become sites of desire, transformation, and narrative distortion. Women who exceed passive ideals are rendered threatening; their bodily autonomy translated into signs of madness.

The psychological horror of bodily transformation is intensified by the novel's refusal to stabilize the meaning of metamorphosis itself. Shapeshifting is neither fully curse nor gift, neither illness nor empowerment. This indeterminacy sustains Todorov's fantastic by preventing interpretive closure. The body becomes unreadable, and this unreadability generates anxiety.

While *The Calcutta Chromosome* operates through a different aesthetic register, it similarly positions the body as a site where psychological instability intersects with epistemic violence. The erasure, manipulation, and disappearance of bodies reflect the marginalization of certain forms of knowledge under colonial science. Bodies become data, specimens, or absences rather than autonomous selves.

Across these narratives, psychological horror emerges from the tension between bodily experience and interpretive authority. Madness is produced at the intersection of bodily difference and epistemic refusal. By situating psychological disturbance within the body, Indian speculative fiction challenges Cartesian separations of mind and flesh, revealing how mental illness is culturally constructed through narratives of bodily control.

### **VIII. MONSTROSITY, LYCANTHROPY, AND THE PATHOLOGIZED SELF**

Within Indian fantasy and speculative fiction, monstrosity frequently operates as a metaphor through which psychological disturbance, repressed desire, and trauma are rendered legible. In *The Devourers* by Indra Das and *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh, the figure of the monster does not function as an external antagonist but as an internalized condition of the self, shaped by dissociation, historical violence, and epistemic exclusion. When read through Tzvetan Todorov's theorization of the fantastic, monstrosity emerges not as a resolved supernatural category but as a site of sustained ambiguity, where the boundaries between human and non-human, sanity and madness, desire and pathology remain unstable.

Lycanthropy in *The Devourers* exemplifies this condition. The transformation between human and animal is not framed as a curse to be cured but as a recurring oscillation that resists stable identity. This oscillation reflects dissociative psychological states in which the self is experienced as multiple, excessive, or discontinuous. The werewolf figure becomes a metaphor for psychic fracture, where the subject cannot be contained within singular social categories.

The Devourers' bodies become sites of psychological inscription. Their hybridity destabilizes binaries that underpin biomedical notions of mental health, including the separation of instinct from reason and body from mind. The werewolf figure operates as a metaphor for repressed desire such as sexual, violent, and emotional that cannot be assimilated into socially sanctioned forms of subjectivity. What society names monstrous may

simply be what it cannot regulate.

Gender plays a decisive role in the construction of this pathologized monstrosity. Drawing upon Gilbert and Gubar, the monstrous body, particularly when feminized, functions as an extension of the madwoman trope, wherein women's psychological excess is rendered threatening because it resists patriarchal containment. Female monstrosity becomes the visual and narrative language through which non-compliance is punished.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, monstrosity is less corporeal but no less psychological. The novel displaces the monstrous from the body onto systems of knowledge, secrecy, and invisibility. Mangala's refusal of intelligibility positions her outside rational scientific discourse, rendering her knowledge monstrous within colonial epistemologies. She is feared not because she is violent, but because she cannot be classified.

Characters who attempt to impose rational coherence, most notably Murugan experience cognitive unraveling, paranoia, and obsessive fixation. Their disturbance emerges not from contact with the supernatural but from confrontation with knowledge that resists empirical verification. The monstrous thus resides in the collapse of certainty itself.

Across both texts, monstrosity becomes a language for articulating trauma that exceeds narrative and psychological containment. Lycanthropy, hybridity, silence, and invisibility operate as metaphors for repressed histories and desires that resurface through the fantastic. These figures return what official discourse tries to erase.

Ultimately, Indian fantasy and speculative fiction reconfigure monstrosity as a psychological and political condition rather than a moral failing. The monster is not external to the self but emerges from fractures produced by trauma, repression, and epistemic exclusion.

## **IX. FEMALE MADNESS AND NARRATIVE SILENCING**

Female madness in Indian fantasy and speculative fiction is rarely articulated through overt expressions of psychological disorder; instead, it emerges through silence, narrative marginality, and epistemic absence. In *The Devourers* by Indra Das and *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh, women's mental states are not rendered legible through confession or interiority but through gaps, distortions, and withheld knowledge. When read alongside Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, these absences can be understood not as narrative deficiencies but as structural strategies that encode repression. Female madness, in this context, is produced not through excess speech or visible hysteria but through enforced invisibility, where women are denied narrative authority and relegated to the peripheries of meaning-making. The fantastic, as theorized by Tzvetan Todorov, becomes the formal mechanism through which this silencing operates, sustaining hesitation and ambiguity in ways that displace women's psychological realities into the realm of the unknowable.

Gilbert and Gubar's central intervention lies in identifying madness as a symbolic consequence of patriarchal confinement. Women in literary texts are rendered mad not because of intrinsic instability but because their voices threaten narrative and ideological order. In both *The Devourers* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, female figures are associated with secrecy, opacity, and withdrawal from speech. Their marginality is not accidental but structurally necessary, ensuring that their knowledge remains inaccessible and therefore easily pathologised.

In *The Devourers*, female figures occupy liminal narrative positions, appearing through memory, myth, or mediated recollection rather than direct presence. Their desires, fears, and mental states are filtered through male narration, producing a structural distance that mirrors repression. What cannot be spoken by women returns through monstrous embodiment, sensual excess, or narrative rupture. Silence becomes both symptom and resistance.

Similarly, *The Calcutta Chromosome* constructs female madness through absence rather than expression. Mangala's near-complete withdrawal from speech positions her as both central and marginal, powerful yet unreadable. Her silence becomes the site upon which male characters project irrationality, mysticism, or madness. Because she cannot be fully interpreted, she is treated as epistemically suspect.

The repression of female voices in these texts also reflects broader cultural associations between femininity and irrationality. By situating women at the threshold of the fantastic, these narratives reproduce a long-

standing literary tradition in which women are aligned with the unknown and the uncontrollable. Yet they also destabilize this tradition by making opacity a source of power rather than deficiency.

The fantastic intensifies this process by refusing closure. Because the narrative never fully resolves ambiguity, women remain suspended in a state of interpretive uncertainty. Mental illness, therefore, is not located within the female psyche but within the narrative structures that deny women the ability to signify themselves.

Female madness emerges as a narrative strategy that sustains ambiguity and power hierarchies, revealing how control over storytelling determines who is heard, who is silenced, and who is ultimately deemed mad.

## **X. MASCULINE OBSESSION AND SCIENTIFIC PARANOIA**

Masculine obsession and scientific paranoia in Indian speculative fiction reveal how rationality, when aligned with patriarchal authority and colonial epistemology, collapses into psychological disturbance rather than securing knowledge. In the figure of Murugan exemplifies this collapse: his faith in rational inquiry, data accumulation, and explanatory mastery gradually mutates into obsession, paranoia, and epistemic instability. What initially appears as scientific rigor becomes a compulsive need to uncover a hidden truth that refuses visibility.

This trajectory resonates strongly with Tzvetan Todorov's formulation of the fantastic, where hesitation and unresolved ambiguity destabilize the subject's relation to reality. However, in Ghosh's novel, the hesitation is not neutral; it is gendered. Masculine rationality, historically positioned as the arbiter of meaning, is exposed as fragile when confronted with epistemologies that cannot be assimilated into scientific discourse. Scientific paranoia emerges precisely at the point where masculine authority encounters epistemic refusal. Mangala's knowledge system, which operates through silence, secrecy, and non-transmission, destabilises Enlightenment models of progress, visibility, and authorship.

Murugan's obsession is driven by his inability to accept knowledge that cannot be traced, verified, or owned. As his pursuit intensifies, rational inquiry collapses into compulsive pattern-making, conspiracy, and cognitive disintegration. The more he seeks certainty, the less coherent the world becomes. His madness reflects the violence of a mindset that equates truth with possession.

Read alongside Gilbert and Gubar's feminist critique, the novel inverts traditional literary logic. While women are often pathologized for emotional excess or irrationality, *The Calcutta Chromosome* locates disturbance within the male scientific subject. Murugan's breakdown contrasts sharply with Mangala's composure and authority, suggesting that madness is not inherent to opacity or silence, but produced by the violent demand to extract meaning.

Masculine obsession functions as a disciplinary impulse that seeks to colonize knowledge, bodies, and histories; when this impulse fails, it turns inward as paranoia. The desire to master what is unknowable generates the very instability it fears.

A similar dynamic can be traced in *The Devourers*, where masculine desire for coherence confronts hybrid bodies and non-linear histories. Male narrators attempt to rationalize the existence of the Devourers through myth, memory, and anthropology, yet these frameworks repeatedly collapse. Their need to classify and explain is unsettled by forms of being that exceed language.

Across both texts, obsession emerges as a gendered psychological response to epistemic threat, while ambiguity functions not as disorder but as an alternative mode of knowledge. Rationality itself becomes unstable when treated as absolute authority.

Taken together, these works suggest that psychopathology in Indian speculative fiction is represented not simply through irrationality, but through the implosion of dominant rational systems. Masculine scientific obsession becomes a site where power, paranoia, and psychological instability converge.

## **XI. TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND FRAGMENTED CONSCIOUSNESS**

Trauma, memory, and fragmented consciousness are central narrative concerns in Indian fantasy and speculative fiction, where psychological disturbance often emerges not through clinical diagnosis but through broken temporality, unstable identity, and recursive remembrance. In *The Devourers* by Indra Das and *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh, trauma is represented as an experience that resists linear narration,

returning instead through myth, bodily memory, secrecy, and discontinuous consciousness. These texts challenge biomedical understandings of psychopathology by presenting mental disturbance as historically produced rather than individually contained. Through the lens of Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic and feminist critiques such as Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, trauma can be read as a condition that fractures perception while simultaneously exposing buried structures of violence.

Trauma disrupts chronology. Rather than remaining in the past, it intrudes upon the present through repetition, hallucination, compulsive return, and identity disturbance. In speculative fiction, this disruption often takes supernatural or uncanny forms, allowing authors to materialize psychic injury through narrative form. What cannot be consciously processed reappears through symbols, hauntings, and fractured timelines.

*The Devourers* exemplifies this process through inherited memory and bodily transmission. Characters consume and absorb the experiences of others, collapsing distinctions between self and other, present and past. Memory becomes invasive rather than voluntary, creating a consciousness composed of multiple lives and unresolved wounds. The body carries histories the mind cannot neatly contain.

This fragmented consciousness mirrors traumatic experience, in which the subject cannot fully contain or narrate what has occurred. The self becomes porous, unstable, and divided. The fantastic sustains this instability by refusing to determine whether these memories are literal transmissions, symbolic hauntings, or psychological projections.

Gender shapes this fragmentation. Female suffering and desire often circulate through mediated memory rather than direct speech, suggesting how patriarchal structures displace women's trauma into symbolic or monstrous forms. Silence becomes both repression and survival.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, trauma is tied to colonial history and epistemic erasure. Lost archives, missing persons, interrupted narratives, and obscured genealogies produce a consciousness shaped by absence. Characters attempt to reconstruct hidden histories but encounter gaps that cannot be fully repaired. What is missing becomes psychologically present.

Murugan's obsessive investigation can be read as a response to historical fragmentation. His mind strains to create continuity from scattered traces, yet the more he seeks mastery, the more unstable perception becomes. Here trauma manifests as informational excess and cognitive disorientation.

*Mangala*, by contrast, inhabits a mode of memory transmitted through embodied practice rather than written record. This challenges colonial archives that privilege documentation over lived continuity. What appears fragmented from the outside may in fact be a different logic of remembrance.

Across both novels, memory is never neutral recollection; it is contested terrain shaped by violence, power, and exclusion. Fragmented consciousness becomes the psychological form through which buried histories persist.

Ultimately, Indian speculative fiction reimagines trauma as collective, historical, and structurally produced. By linking memory to the fantastic, these texts show that what appears as madness may be the mind's attempt to survive histories that official narratives refuse to acknowledge.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

This dissertation has examined how psychopathology functions as a gendered and political narrative strategy within Indian fantasy and speculative fiction, with particular focus on Indra Das's *The Devourers* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Rather than presenting mental illness as a purely clinical condition, these texts mobilize madness, obsession, fragmentation, and uncertainty to interrogate systems of power that determine who is considered rational, sane, human, or authoritative.

Through Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic, it becomes clear that psychological disturbance in these novels is structurally linked to hesitation, ambiguity, and unresolved perception. The fantastic suspends certainty and resists explanatory closure, creating narrative spaces in which colonial science, patriarchal logic, and biomedical authority lose their dominance.

Read alongside Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, these texts also reveal the gendered politics of madness. Female figures are frequently silenced, mythologized, or rendered opaque, while masculine instability is often narrated through obsession, inquiry, and intellectual crisis. Madness is

shown to be less a medical reality than a cultural label shaped by access to narrative and institutional power. At the same time, both novels challenge these inherited structures. Women's silence becomes resistance rather than absence. Hybrid bodies become sites of agency rather than pathology. Marginalized knowledge systems destabilize official histories and scientific certainties. What dominant frameworks dismiss as irrational often emerges as transformative.

The Devourers reconfigures monstrosity, bodily transformation, and inherited memory as expressions of trauma and non-normative identity. The Calcutta Chromosome exposes colonial medicine and scientific rationality as mechanisms of exclusion that produce the very madness they claim to diagnose. Both texts reveal that systems of control generate the instabilities they seek to suppress.

Across both texts, psychopathology becomes an alternative epistemology, a way of knowing produced at the margins of sanctioned discourse. What dominant systems call irrational may instead contain suppressed histories, embodied knowledge, or resistant forms of subjectivity.

Indian speculative fiction therefore does not merely represent madness; it rethinks it. By situating mental disturbance within histories of empire, gender regulation, caste, bodily control, and epistemic violence, these novels transform psychopathology into a critical language through which social realities are contested.

Ultimately, this study argues that madness in Indian fantasy is not simply stigma or suffering. It is also ambiguity, survival, memory, refusal, and imagination. In these narratives, the fractured mind becomes a site from which alternate futures and hidden truths can emerge.

