

## The Politics of (In)sanity: Elif Shafak's *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*

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### Abstract

What is insanity? Is it only a psychological state or a discourse designed and established as something indubitable, unquestionable to serve the power? Elif Shafak's novels, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004) and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) question and re-envision the existing concepts of sanity and insanity. Perhaps insanity is not simply a mental illness disconnected from social and cultural realities and politics. These concepts of sanity and insanity are often hegemonically created and propagated by several dominant groups in different power relations so that the hierarchical unjust structure can function smoothly. Sometimes, the demarcation between sanity and insanity is merely the demarcation between the dominant and the dominated. Insanity can be the result of different kinds of oppression but very often it is only a label for those who are against the grain. Any kind of nonconformity or difference is seen as a potential threat to the existing power-paradigm. Questioning the naturalised conventions, holding different opinions from what are considered as normal/ truth and raising voice against the customary crimes are considered insanity in societies. Whether such actions and responses are insane or it is just the obsession for a uniformed society that tries to label any forms of deviance from the structure as insanity — is the vital question that this paper tries to explore in the light of Shafak's fiction.

**Keywords:** sanity/insanity, politics, hegemony, conformity, normal/abnormal, marginalisation, homogeneity, deviation, resistance.

The existing parochial notion of sanity and insanity does not allow perceiving insanity as an alternative form of sanity or to doubt the saneness of institutionalised sanity. The notion of insanity is not free from the (power) politics of the world. Sometimes, insanity is the product of the socio-economic exploitation and sometimes, a label for eliminating differences and alternatives to sustain the status quo. The focus of this paper is not mental illness rather insanity. According to Jane M. Ussher "[t]he term 'mental illness' is problematic, as it suggests an internal pathology that can be incontrovertibly categorised and cured by biomedicine; a disease state that occurs within the individual and is separate from culture, values and politics"<sup>1</sup> but insanity is connected with all these that are moderated by "power." Power and knowledge are inextricably connected according to Michel Foucault. Social forces regulate the thought and behaviour of individuals by defining and categorising everything and through this process "power" also doctors the definitions of normal and abnormal, sanity and insanity. Elif Shafak plays with the ideas of sanity and insanity with most of the important characters of her novels, *The Saint*<sup>2</sup> and *10 Minutes*<sup>3</sup>, who are quite insane when judged from a very conventional view-point.

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Shafak in these two novels portrays the age-long relation between women and insanity and thus raises the question that if women are not genetically prone to be insane, is this relation a creation of systematic patriarchal society? Debra Ellen Thompson in *The Saint* comments that "...so long women have been accused, attacked, targeted for being hysteric... Hysteria was yet another name of femaleness" (47).<sup>4</sup> Insanity is a historically appropriated tool for dominating and marginalising women. Debra in their feminist group tries to introduce "the strategy of DD-Deliberate Distortion to turn patriarchal linguistic codes upside down" (46). She says,

So if they call you a bitch, don't try to prove your chastity, don't ever try to be the virgin type. Every virgin is the cause of yet another whore on the streets. The latter is only a corollary of the former... use patriarchal compliments pejoratively. Make slut a compliment, maiden an insult! (47)

This radical resistance against gender politics which appears as insane is nothing but a kind of by-product of the deliberate discrimination of the long oppressive system. Ussher thinks that "women's madness is both a myth — a culturally constructed label for distress or deviance — and a real experience for many women, a reflection of deep discontent in response to the context of their lives."<sup>5</sup> Alegre's suffering from bulimia in *The Saint* is the result of such a deep discontent that in turn has become the cause of immense physical and psychological torment. Is it only an eating disorder or a horrible consequence of the disorder embedded in the society which sets standards for women? Susan Bordo considers these eating disorders as "complex crystallizations of culture."<sup>6</sup> The mother whom Alegre wants to make "proud" of her, is made "ashamed" (*The Saint* 217) instead when she gains weight in her teenage as her mother believes that for a suitable marriage prospect Alegre needs to be slim. Alegre's psychological agitation is reflected in these lines:

Upon her parents' death she'd become extremely interested in sanity and health, in a system of thought entirely abysmal to others but dear and sensible to her. Calories, carbohydrates, dietary fiber, soluble fiber, insoluble fiber ... she knew them all. A pack of baby carrots contained only seventy calories. This she could eat, as much as ten, fifteen, twenty packs a day, and nothing else. (217)

Her psychological disorder is manufactured in a society where women like products are expected to be designed according to socio-cultural market demand. She occasionally devours like a giant "transcending impenetrable boundaries" (341). This kind of occasional outburst is actually a response against these valorised and romanticised boundaries of social standards that have crushed her psychological balance in such a way that her body and mind have become unbridled. Different media and discourses produce standards through representing homogenous images. Bordo opines that "these homogenized images normalize—that is, they function as models against which the self continually measures, judges, 'disciplines,' and 'corrects' itself."<sup>7</sup> Pecola's schizophrenia in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is the result of such romanticised standard of white-dominated myth of beauty. Often people "...erroneously assume that those with eating disorders are obsessed with food. But even if there is some sort of an obsession, more than the quality or the quantity of the food to consume, it's the keeping up with the order of eating that fails Alegre" (*The Saint* 338). It shows how consistent anxiety for

keeping oneself up with the order of the society suffocates an already disordered person. Alegre's disrupted psychology or what is seen as her insanity cannot be disentangled from the socio-cultural reality.

In *10 Minutes* Binnaz, Leila's real mother is considered as an insane woman. Of course, there are traces of mental illness in her personality but Shafak also reveals the source of that illness and therefore, urges the readers to ponder whether she is insane or made insane or her insanity is the only sane way of reacting for any human being. Binnaz gets married to Haroun at her teenage only for producing children which Haroun fails to get from his first marriage. In the very teenage her one biological role has been made her entire existence curtailing the growth of her other potentials. Even when after six traumatic miscarriages she gives birth to Leila, Haroun gives the child to his first wife and this incident shatters her, the person whose identity was earlier reduced only to a child-making machine. Binnaz "could not tell anyone, but it seemed to her that with each baby lost, another part of the rope bridge linking her to the world at large had snapped and fallen away, until only the flimsiest thread kept her connected to that world, kept her sane" (17).<sup>8</sup> Foucauldian concept of docile bodies, in *Discipline and Punish*, is very relevant in analysing the character of Binnaz. Docile bodies, that are, like "formless clay,"<sup>9</sup> perfect for being "manipulated, shaped, trained,"<sup>10</sup> can be produced through several disciplinary machineries which include all kinds of institutions, discourses and social relations. Binnaz is formulated and subjugated through these institutions and discourses but whenever she fails to accept them easily, the label of insanity is imposed on her that she embraces as a perfect docile subject. According to Ussher —

Unraveling women's madness also provides insights into the gendered nature of social and familial life, the consequences of inequality and discrimination for both women and men, and the gendered patterns in certain aspects of psychological processing which occur within a relational and cultural context. Equally, examining the construction and treatment of madness provides insights into the cultural construction of what it means to be 'woman' and 'man', as madness is often defined as deviation from archetypal gendered roles.<sup>11</sup>

It is Binnaz's voice that needs to be unheard, suppressed; it is the tremendous violence that needs to be unnoticed for perpetuating dominance and that is why she is labeled as insane. In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* the confined, mad Bertha Mason is not given any voice to defy her insanity. But her insanity may be a result of the oppression she has gone through both as a Caribbean and a woman or is only a label for exploiting her justifiably as we encounter a similar response in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. Binnaz's suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder is also considered as part of her insanity. As her life is controlled by others and she is unable to clean the oppressive traces from her life and mind, may be cleaning the household is the only alternative which she can do to keep herself busy and forgetful of the violence she is going through. Even this "insanity" of Binnaz is made unquestionable by calling it "[h]ereditary madness" (*10 Minutes* 34) that Binnaz has got from her mother. In a male-centric society seizing the child from a mother's lap who has gone through six miscarriages is not considered as insanity but her traumatised, incongruous mental condition is of course so. Unquestionable and unhesitant acceptance of the insane conventions that are established by the "power" is considered sane in the society. Our society fails to

understand that the concept of pure sanity or pure insanity is a myth that needs to be dismantled now. Leila realises that "...things were not always what they seemed. Just as the sour could hide beneath the sweet, or vice versa, within every sane mind there was a trace of insanity, and within the depths of madness glimmered a seed of lucidity" (44).

In conventional sense insanity is not a disordered mental state only rather anything that is not *normal*. Bio-power, a concept introduced by Foucault, refers to "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations."<sup>12</sup> Foucault argues that different institutions act "as factors of segregation and social hierarchization ...guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony."<sup>13</sup> Categorising population on various bases is one of the central techniques that produce the desired conformist society. So, "[a] normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life."<sup>14</sup> Subjects who are against the norms of the society are categorised as abnormal through bio-power. Insanity, abnormality, unnaturalness are most of the time considered synonymous, the definitions of which are appropriated because discourses have power to manipulate and exert control over the society:

[Foucault's] outrage is directed, rather, against a perception of madness that admits no meaningful alternatives to our standards of normality and puts all belief and behaviour that seriously deviate from these standards outside the pale. On Foucault's view, madness as a general phenomenon should be seen as a creditable challenge to normality, even though there are insane horrors to which normality would be a welcome relief.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Saint* Abed says that Gail is "the weirdest woman" (8). She is weird simply because she does not fit into the naturalised concept of a woman. Alegre's family is also considered as a "crazy family" (159) perhaps only because their concern, anxiety and their behaviour seem different from that of any "normal" family. Being Hispanics in the US they always suffer from existential crisis. They remain in constant anxiety for not appearing different from the native and simultaneously, not losing their connection with the past. The reason behind their anxiety and the consequent effects in their lives is that they are never completely accepted with their different ethnicity. Again, anxiety of Ömer for the lost dots of his name in America may also seem abnormal but those small dots are parts of his very identity. Through the Western lens, those dots are not even *natural* and so eliminating those Turkish dots they westernise/ naturalise his name. But interestingly abnormality can be traced in the very system of naturalisation:

His dots were excluded for him to be better included. After all, Americans, just like everyone else, relished familiarity — in names they could pronounce, sounds they could resonate... Yet, few nations could perhaps be as self-assured as the Americans in reprocessing the names and surnames of foreigners. When a Turk, for instance, realizes he has just mispronounced the name of an American in Turkey, he will be embarrassed and in all likelihood consider this his own mistake, or in any case, as something to do with himself. When an American realizes he has just mispronounced the name of a Turk in the United States, however, in all likelihood, it won't be him but rather the name itself that will be held responsible for that mistake. (5)

*10 Minutes* also showcases the violence of the power-defined demarcation between normality and abnormality that functions through social norms, codes and moral ethics. The only sanity is the normality/ conventionality in this system. Leila's father arranges her

marriage with her abuser's (uncle) son because her family wants their lives to be "normal" (*10 Minutes* 108) again. Ironically, such brutal oppression is normal in our society but raising voice against it is something abnormal. Leila's voice against her uncle is suppressed by her family in such a way as if it is her sheer insanity. Her father says that she "shouldn't make things up"; her mind is playing "tricks" (106) on her. Later, Leila discourages D/Ali about his coming to the brothel by saying that they are "not normal... nothing here is natural" (143). Exclusion of the prostitutes from the definition of normal human being is so naturalised that even the prostitutes do not ask why they are not normal but the system in which and by which they are produced is normal. But D/Ali's reply to Leila's remark is interesting when he says that he does not know "who's *normal* in a system so crooked" and "anyone who studied nature closely would think twice before using the word 'natural'" (143). It is the insanity of the amnesiac system that does not acknowledge the consequences of its own malfunction. In one of her interviews referring back to the Armenian genocide, Shafak talks about national amnesia which she thinks is a cause of the failure of the nation to be apologetic for its own wrongs and to rethink its attitude for better future.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, when insanity is considered, the society often fails to recollect the causes behind it. Another character, Zaynab<sup>122</sup> is also positioned on the verge of the society for being a dwarf. Her aspiration of being independent, of recreating herself appear "as pure madness" (*10 Minutes* 130) to her siblings only because a dwarf is not accepted as a normal human being who can have emotions and feelings, and who is capable of thinking and doing something and has rights like any other individual. Her physical height does not make her any less human but her desire is seen as madness since through asserting her rights to dream and to be independent, she is actually going against the society that dehumanises her.

The prevalent discourse of sanity is one of the salient tools of legitimising any kind of insane aggression and exploitation against the people who are marginalised and also those who uphold different or deviated thoughts. In *10 Minutes*, the rich businessman's hiring a prostitute for his unwilling gay son just before his forced marriage is insanity — insanity for maintaining the status quo. This extreme conservativeness and "this wedding seem[s] insane" (*10 Minutes* 177) to the sensitive individuals. Leila's friend Nostalgia Nalan's identity as a trans woman and a sex worker renders her the lens through which she can perceive the ruthless insanity of the "clean-up operations" (239). During international conferences or occasions people like her are arrested and tortured inhumanly to retain the image of *sane* society. Prostitutes like Leila are placed so far from the concerns of *democratic* society that media do not even think of mentioning Leila's name in the news coverage of her murder. Her identity as a prostitute is enough for the society to forget her other identities. After Leila's death, regarding the serial murders a newspaper states that "normal female citizens" (217) are safe since only prostitutes are being targeted. What kind of *sanity* can justify the marginalisation and victimisation through this type of representation of *normal*? Insanity is there in the thought of turning "whores into angels" (228) by murdering them — the thought that lies behind Leila's death. Insanity is in the attitude that disdains prostitutes but not the people or the system that make them so. Leila does not get a place in the common graveyard as she is a prostitute. She is buried in the Cemetery of the Companionless

where a number is the only identity for the marginal people like her. People are turned into mere numbers without a (hi)story. Leila's friends' reckless attempt of stealing/ rescuing her dead body keeping everything at stake to give her a fair burial appears as utter insanity to conventional perception but the attempt to give an individual identity, importance and respect to Leila as a final token of love by her comrades with similar social standing, is perhaps, the only sane gesture in the insane system they inhabit. Ussher suggests that "...*madness* may be a reasonable response to an untenable situation; the result of living in an *insane* world."<sup>17</sup>

In the very title of the book, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* Shafak establishes a relation between the ideas of insanity and sainthood. Saints are different from the general people and that is why often in their lifetime they are treated as insane but probably they are just too sane to be understood by their age. Human history shows that saints are often excluded, executed and sacrificed in the name of sanity but definitions of sanity and insanity are merely established discourse profitable for contemporary power-paradigm and so, with time and change in power relation and power politics, these discourses may also be changed and modified. In this novel Shafak introduces such form of insanity that is the product of our compartmentalised society where nonconformity and insanity are synonymous. Social and economic power try to create a uniform society with specific categories that are shaped and conditioned by them to sustain the oppressing and extracting structure and so, any kind of disparities, therefore, are conceived as threats and labeled as insanities.

Gail of *The Saint* is a girl who does not think of and perceive the world in the conventional way. According to Abed, Gail is "[n]ormal the antonym" (*The Saint* 151). Everything that is conventional is not necessarily normal and natural but they are so naturalised that any kind of deviation is seen as insanity. This naturalisation is the cause of traumatic psychological experience of alienation for people like Gail. Being different from other girls of the college is a cause of agony for Gail (Zarpandit). Most of the girls of her college "...were so quick to draw conclusions, and then so sure of the conclusions they had just drawn, Zarpandit felt embarrassed by her incessant uncertainties. It was these girls, and the agony of observing them so obviously succeed where she so obviously failed, that upset her inner balance..." (39). The society is always anxious to put individuals like Gail into any established category but failing to do so it places her into the special category for the dissenting minds for accepting her in a peculiar way. It is made sure by her feminist group members that she visits a psychiatrist as they believe that she "could be changed and liberated into an independent woman, and that they would be the achievers of this radical transformation" (54) and when the college comes to know about it "[h]er 'deviance' [is]...finally acknowledged and astoundingly appreciated, [and she can]... keep on the same track and enjoy the autonomy" (59). This kind of categorisation can be perceived through Foucault's lens regarding Samuel Tuke's treatment as there is not much difference between the modern perception about the dissenters and Tuke's therapy that freeing the mad from chains formed a "gigantic moral imprisonment"<sup>18</sup> for them. Moral confinement encapsulates social, religious and institutional codes and Tuke's therapy attempted to make the madman "feel morally responsible for everything in him that may

disturb morality and society, and must hold no one but himself responsible....”<sup>19</sup> Even in this era people with alternative or different thoughts and imagination are treated in somewhat similar way in our societies. Foucault thinks that “...the madman is obliged to objectify himself in the eyes of reason as the perfect stranger, that is, the man whose strangeness does not reveal itself. The city of reason welcomes him only with this qualification and at the price of this surrender to anonymity.”<sup>20</sup>

In such reason-obsessed society, Gail can identify herself with the weird/insane seeming, homeless lady, *Jesustoldmeyouhadasparedollar* because perhaps both of them are outsiders in a structured society where people like them are “systematically ignored” (*The Saint* 167). Gail thinks that both of them are suffering from a “specific malady that did not impede them from living in society, not even from being successfully a part of it, but still at the same time, even at the peak of their accomplishments, kept them on the verge of tergiversation, excommunication, and derangement”(168). Though they are part of the society, they are psychologically excommunicated. Again, unlike the other “normal” girls, Gail wears a real spoon in her hair. Actually, she is fascinated by a story of alphabet soup in the “Bowl of Eden” (37) where all the letters can mix freely and can be arranged and rearranged in multiple different ways with every stir. The spoon in her hair constantly reminds her that “whatever name she found herself attached to, could be erased and replaced with the letters of another name” (70). Gail’s difference or deviance can be called “moral insanity,” a term introduced by Victorian psychiatric theory that “redefined madness, not as a loss of reason, but as deviance from socially accepted behavior.”<sup>21</sup> Gail changes her name and identity frequently as she is reluctant to limit herself, categorise herself and accept the identity-restricted perception of the world. Her “insanity” is only a response to the violence caused by the fanatic fascination for “imagined singularity”<sup>22</sup> of identities as if identity is a matter of “discovery”, “a purely natural phenomenon.”<sup>23</sup> Though her unusual behaviour is considered abnormal, the globalised stereotype of inflexibility of identities is represented as completely natural. Ömer is another victim of the rigidity worshipped in our society who overreacts with his attempt to impose his perception of time with a kind of flexibility. Ömer is so exhausted by the hyper-speed of time that instead of keeping any watch he tries to measure time with the length of the music that unlike “linear time” can be “rewound, forwarded, paused and replayed” (*The Saint* 77). It may seem to be an insane attitude as keeping up to time is of course very important but in modern mechanical world, time seems to rush with exhausted people behind it. Running after this materialised concept of time, humane qualities and emotions are being ignored, probably, from a different perspective that cannot be seen as sane.

In this modern world, individuals are incarcerated in social norms and stereotypes and whoever wants to transgress it is either criminalised or labeled as insane. *The Saint* focuses on those things that appear as insanities to the conventional gaze. Sometimes, they are not attacked directly but censored through silent gaze which is enough for making people psychologically marginalised. Sometimes, extreme responses against these conceptual confinements are found among dissenting minds. Gail’s suicidal tendency cannot be of course justified as sanity but the system that fails to

accommodate her with her differences is also not sane. In every aspect of her life she shows iconoclastic attitude but acceptance and rejection should be based on critical scrutiny. Suicide cannot be a solution nor be a mode of challenging the conventional concept of reason, sanity and insanity. She is “eroding her desire to live bit by bit, like blood oozing from a wound inside, except that there was no apparent wound, and, therefore, no apparent reason why” (*The Saint* 346). That her wound is the result of her constantly injured nonconformist existence cannot be discerned by the established reason of the world. Gail commits suicide throwing herself from the middle of the Bosphorus Bridge, the juncture of East and West, the juncture of spirit and reason. On a metaphorical level this showcases her psychology that is so traumatised by the classificatory system that she chooses “A Bridge in Between” (344). She knows with “certainty that this inbetweenness [is] the right place” (347) to die. If system can only accommodate her as insane, it should not be surprised seeing more insanity in her extreme response that is ready to shatter all conventionalities and status quos. In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy is also not celebrating the incestuous relationship at the end, rather trying to showcase an extreme and violent reaction to the oppressively restricting system that even determines whom to love, how to love and to what extent. Gail does not feel any belonging to anywhere. She is as “stranger” in her own land as a foreigner. When American Gail commits suicide in Turkey the thought that crosses Ömer’s mind is that “[p]eople do not commit suicide on other people’s soil, and this is not her homeland. But did she ever have one?” (350). Nationalism is given such a sanctified status that Gail’s suicide in a foreign land seems sheer insanity as she defies not only the boundary of nationality but also the boundary created by the concept of “nationalism.” The romanticised concept of nationalism rather produces insanity. Benedict Anderson writes —

[Nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.<sup>24</sup>

Though her committing suicide cannot be sane, her committing suicide in a foreign land is of course not insanity.

The enormous notable change in Gail’s character is considered very mysterious as Debra recalls that “[s]he was so shy, she couldn’t even move when a stranger asked her something. And then in some mysterious way, she turns into this other person. Furious, fierce, fuming...” (*The Saint* 129). It is mysterious as no evident reason is noticeable behind this change. Gail is the very embodiment of unreason, illogicality and absurdity. Her changing name frequently, her suicidal tendency, her depending on sign for every decision, her lack of belongingness — nothing is rational in the parametre of society. Again, everything cannot be “rational” and should not be judged by “rationality.” Any unreasonable change is also perceived as a kind of insanity since reason and sanity are deemed inextricable. An alternative view of this notion is found in Shakespeare where “Reason in madness”<sup>25</sup> can be traced in King Lear and in Hamlet “[t]hough this be

madness, yet there is method in't."<sup>26</sup> According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of unreason is "the absence of reason or sanity." But what is reasonable today can be considered absurd in future and what is unreasonable in present can be proved very logical in future. The concept of reason and unreason does not only vary with time but also with place and culture and even with individuals. Anything that appears unreasonable may actually be an alternative or transcendental truth. Even the lesbian relationship, that Debra and Gail were in, was not considered to be sane or normal even a couple of decades ago which is now so well accepted in Western society. Again, perhaps Gail's radical change appears as a sort of insanity because the "subservient" Gail in her relation with Debra turns into a "tumultuous young woman." Mystery is connected with Gail's change because she has shown unexpected revolt that makes her "the dream of the suppressed" (*The Saint* 234). A threatened power-relation does not hesitate to call the change insane. The narrator narrates, "[p]owerful and privileged might the dominant be over the dominated, but is equally dependent on the latter. Losing *a Gail in need of her* had made Debra Ellen Thompson more and more in need of Gail" (233).

We live in a world that is failing to accommodate heterogeneity which could have been the beauty of it. The desperate quest of the authority for homogeneity is really insane. In *10 Minutes* D/Ali's decision of marrying Leila, a prostitute, is obviously not seen as sane in the society. Not only his family but also his comrades who are struggling for a revolutionary world fail to appreciate this revolution done by D/Ali. Prostitutes are blamed for their profession though the truth is that they are the product of the society and even if they want to come back to the normal life, this society will never accept them. Like D/Ali, Sabotage Sinan also befriends prostitutes, transvestites, dwarfs and for this he has to lead "a life of pretences" (*10 Minutes* 273) because he knows that to have such friends will not be seen as sanity by the society. Disclosure of this friendship robs him of "his job, his marriage, his house" (234). It is considered insanity of D/Ali and Sinan since going against the stereotype of the society they have given these marginalised people respect and treated them as equal human beings. Such perspective of society is the outcome of the hidden anxiety of retaining the hierarchical structure. In fact, D/Ali and Sinan show such a kind of sanity that threatens established insanity of the system. When a client throws acid to Leila that leaves a burnt scar on her back she becomes "more popular than before, in greater demand. She [is] a prostitute with a story, and men seem[ed] to like that" (124). Should not this world be deemed strange or insane by such prostitutes who do not get sympathy even after such traumatic violence; rather they become an object of interest and entertainment because of their trauma?

The name of the novel, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* is also reflective of the politics around the concept of insanity. It suggests the strangeness of the world rather than of the oppressed and marginalised people who are labeled as insane or strange by the system. It is a world from the point of view of an outcast, and from her view, this world is as strange or insane as the authority wants them to be seen. The so called sanity of the society — that deprives a child from her mother's identity, that abuses a child sexually and mentally, that protects a rapist (an abuser of a person's sanity) and alleges the victim as guilty, that disowns their daughters in the name of

honour, that denies the prostitutes, transvestites, dwarfs as part of the society and even unwilling to allot them with dignified resting places in their death — appears very insane from this alternative point of view that is consciously ignored and eliminated for consolidating the hierarchical system.

Both *10 Minutes* and *The Saint* are cauldrons full of diverse insanities. Perhaps Shafak has intentionally pluralised insanity in the title of the novel, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* because in this structured/ hierarchised world any kind of deviation is categorised as insanity and there are diverse deviations. Insanity is not only the result of the oppression but also a means of identifying any probable resistance so that the manipulation and exploitation can continue. And of course there are insanities that are not only unquestioned but also unhesitatingly celebrated as the very form of sanity. In a sense it seems that Shafak is celebrating the “conventional insanities” to highlight the real insane face of the so called “sane” system in the formation of a society in which exploitation and marginalisation are very elementary.

### Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> Jane M. Ussher, *The Madness of Woman: Myth and Experience*, New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2011, p. 4.
- <sup>2</sup> From now on this shortened title, *The Saint*, has been used for *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* throughout the article.
- <sup>3</sup> Throughout the article this shortened title, *10 Minutes*, has been used for *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*.
- <sup>4</sup> Elif Shafak, *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004. All references of this text are to this edition, and cited hereafter only by page numbers within parenthesis. Shortened title is added with page number if intervened by other references.
- <sup>5</sup> Ussher, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>6</sup> Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, London: University of California Press, 1993, p. 35.
- <sup>7</sup> Bordo, p. 25.
- <sup>8</sup> Elif Shafak, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, UK: Viking, 2019. All references of this text are to this edition, and cited hereafter only by page numbers within parenthesis. Shortened title is added with page number if intervened by other references.
- <sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books, 1977, p.135.
- <sup>10</sup> Foucault, p. 136.
- <sup>11</sup> Ussher, p. 13.
- <sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol.1, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 140.
- <sup>13</sup> Foucault, p. 141.
- <sup>14</sup> Foucault, p. 144.
- <sup>15</sup> Gary Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 71.
- <sup>16</sup> “Sense and Sensibility - A Conversation Beyond Borders (Viviane Reding & Elif Shafak).” *YouTube*, uploaded by DLDconference, 22 Jul. 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXpIJ5jYug>.
- <sup>17</sup> Ussher, p. 6; italics mine.
- <sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Vintage Books, 1988, p. 278.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, p. 246.

<sup>20</sup> Foucault, pp. 249-50.

<sup>21</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*, New York: Penguin Books, 1985, p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, London and New York: Penguin Books, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Sen, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York: Verso, 2006, p.7.

<sup>25</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 157.

<sup>26</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Cyrus Hoy, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London and New York: Norton, 1992, p. 34.