CHAPTER II
MYTHOLOGICAL PATTERN

I

This chapter deals with the mythological pattern of the Furies of Greek Mythology to which Rushdie alludes in all his major novels. There are different versions about the exact number and names of the Furies or the Erinnyes of Far-away Greece. According to the most prevalent one, they were three. They were Alecto (unceasing or she who is not mollified), Megaera (grudging or the spirit of hatred) and Tisiphone (avenger of murders), also called Furiae or Dirae by the Romans. The name Erinnys/Erinnyes, derived by the Greeks from erino or ereunao, means “I hunt up or persecute” or from the Arcadian word erinuo, meaning “I am angry”. They were also known as Eumenides and Semnai and in Fury Prof. Solanka states why they had other names:

“The ancient Greeks were so afraid of these, their most ferocious deities, that they didn’t even dare to speak their real name. To use that name, Erinnyes, Furies, might very well be to call down upon yourself those ladies’ lethal wrath. Therefore, and with deep irony, they called the enraged trinity, ‘the good tempered ones’ - Eumenides.”

However, he cautions:

“The euphemistic name did not, alas, result in much of an improvement in the goddesses’ permanent bad mood.” (F 123)

This change of name had been given them by Athene, daughter of Zeus after the acquittal of Orestes, son of King Agamemnon of Argos by the court of the Areiopagus in Athens. Agamemnon was preparing to fight Paris of Troy who had insulted his brother Menelaus by stealing his wife Helene away. The Achaeans did not want to go to war and the upshot was that Odysseus feigned madness and Achilles disguised himself. In the end, however, they all
set out on the journey that would take them ten long years to get back. However, Agamemnon happened to incur the wrath of Artemis, Goddess of the Hunt, and the winds stopped blowing. He was advised by the prophet Calchas to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to the Goddess to appease her, which he did. The winds came up from the west after the sacrifice and they were finally able to set sail, but his wife Clytemnestra never forgave him for his deed. During his absence, she took for her paramour his cousin Aegisthus, and when he came home, she made a show of welcome and murdered him as he sat at the edge of his bath, preparing to wash away the dust of his long journey. Her son Orestes’ nurse, Arsinoea, aware that she might also kill him in order to forestall his revenge, sent him away to Mount Parnassus, where he grew up in the court of King Strophius. In the temple of Delphi, Apollo pointed out to him that he should avenge his father or lead the life of an outcast forevermore. So he returned to his home in Argos, pretending to be a stranger, and after telling his mother that her son was dead, slew her and her lover. The Furies then began their relentless pursuit of him for they were especially alert on the murder of a parent. Rushdie briefly alludes to the Orestes myth in *Fury*:

“The *leirion*, or blue iris, sometimes placated the Furies, but Orestes wore no flowers in his hair. Even the bow of horn that the Pythoness, the Delphic Oracle, gave him to repel their assaults proved to be of little use…The Erinnyes hounded him for the rest of his life, denying him peace.” (F 251)

The wrath of the Erinnyes could be placated with the rite ritual purification and completion of some task assigned for atonement. The sacrifices which were offered to them consisted of honey mixed with water. Among the things considered to be sacred to them are turtledoves and the narcissus, but all Orestes’ sacrifices to them in the temple of Apollo were of no avail. So he appealed to Apollo himself who was responsible for the murder in the first place. Phoebus Apollo, oracle of Zeus, lulled the Furies to sleep in the temple, and Orestes was sent to Athens to supplicate the goddess Athene. The Furies followed him even there, but finally
agreed to abide by Athene’s judgment. Orestes was judged by twelve jurors, with Athene as presiding judge. Orestes stated that his father’s death had to be avenged as he had not died a hero’s death and wanted to know which crime was more heinous – the murder of a husband by a wife or that of a mother by a son. He asked if his mother should be honoured over his father, and with Athene on his side was acquitted. Another version is that Orestes was sent to Taurica to King Thoas to bring home the wooden statue of Diana along with Clytemnestra’s lost daughter Iphigeneia, which greatly appeased the Furies. Athene placated them by promising them a place of honour in her temple, and renamed them the Euminides, meaning “the soothed goddesses”, because their anger had been soothed. It was by a similar euphemism that at Athens they were called semnai theai, or the venerable goddesses.

According to one account, they issued from a primordial level – from ‘Nyx’, or night. But the more prevalent account is that they were primeval beings born of the blood of the mutilated Uranus. Ge/Gaia/Gaea (Earth), daughter of Chaos and primal goddess, mother of all things was also mother and wife of both Uranus (the sky) and Pontus (the sea). She was the mother of the Cyclopes and the Titans by Uranus, and was distressed by the loss of her children Hekatonkheires and Kyklopes into Tartaros. So she persuaded her children the Titans to attack their father Uranus/Ouranos giving Cronus/Kronos, the youngest Titan, and father of the gods Zeus, Poseidon, Demeter, Hera, Hades and Hestia, a long sickle with jagged teeth made of adamant. The myth goes that all of them except Okeanos ambushed their father as he was descending to lie with their mother and Kronos with his sickle castrated him, throwing his genitals into the sea. The bloody drops that gushed from the wound fell on Ge/Gaia (Earth), impregnating her and giving birth to the dreaded Erinnyes. As they were more ancient divinities than the Olympian gods, they were therefore not under the rule of Zeus, though they honoured and esteemed him, so they compelled him to avenge the crime by deposing Kronos and casting him into the Tartarean pit. Thus the Furies were the embodiment of the curses of Ouranos against Kronos.
The Erinnyes were avengers of blood crime, especially crime against the ties of kinship, those: “who escaped or defied public justice” (TAF 18). In Fury, Prof. Solanka in a drunken rage one night found himself standing by his sleeping wife and three year old child, knife in hand. Not trusting to be with them anymore, he fled London for an apartment on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, where he still found himself filled with wrath. He had done the unforgivable crime of abandoning his family even though he had done it in order to protect them from his scary wrath. In New York, he discovered that he was being pursued: “The Furies pursue us...” (F 31). Among those pursued by them were those guilty of fratricide. The slain brother or sister was avenged by them if the curse was cast upon the guilty child by his grieving parents. The fact that it was unintentional did not count as when Penthesileia accidentally slew her sister Hippolyte while hunting. She was forced into exile and came to King Priamos of Troy seeking to appease the Erinnyes. Filial betrayal is also a crime that calls for punishment. The Erinnyes even sided with Zeus as the eldest son in support of his right to rule the family of the gods and Poseidon was warned not to challenge him, as the Erinnyes always sided with the elder son and would punish his betrayal. Rage born out of filial betrayal in its most extreme form is also seen in the drama enacted by the Shakil sisters who hated their son Omar Khayyam for having betrayed his younger dead brother Babur’s memory by marrying the daughter of the man who was responsible for his death though he remained in ignorant bliss till his mothers told him about it. The younger Shakil, Babur, had been asphyxiated by his mothers’ worship of his elder brother and had joined guerilla warfare where he was shot dead on orders given by Raza Hyder, whose daughter Shakil married shortly later. Then much later on, when the newspapers published the news that President Hyder’s daughter was a madwoman whom he had allowed to roam freely, he summoned his three Generals and ordered them to arrest the journalists. General Raddi was bold enough to object to his demands which made it clear to the President that a coup was in progress and
house arrest would soon follow. Raddi then caused hints to be spread linking Hyder’s
daughter to the murders spreading like wildfire in the country which caused an angry mob to
surround his house. Shakil along with the Hyders donned Burqas and barely made it out of
the city to Shakil’s ancestral home, right into the delighted hands of his mothers. He was
puzzled at the elation his mothers felt when they knew who their guests were and realized
only too late that they were weaving a web for the Hyders by appearing to be hospitable in
order to give them a false sense of security. He went to sleep horrified with the thought that
his mothers were going to force him to kill the Hyders. The next morning however, he
realized that they had not excluded him in their scheme of revenge as he woke up and found
himself in the grip of a fierce fever. All three of them had been poisoned with germ poison
contained in the dried cake that had been offered them by the Shakil sisters the night before.
He suffered from hallucinations and one moment he heard Bilquis shouting about judgments
and the next moment his old teacher Rodrigues was at his bedside with a dead baby in his
arms. He called out for medicines, thought pills were popped into his mouth, heard a
commotion on the streets as if a fire had broken out, felt ash filling up his room, and heard
himself saying “This motor will not run anymore” (S 274). Then he thought he saw his
mothers seated on their swing beside his bed, and they were telling him that the house was
shrinking in size. Then he felt that he got up and wandered out of the room, entered an
operating room at the Mount Hira Hospital where they were beckoning him to help them. He
turned away and found himself in the President’s office at a wedding banquet where the bride
was Good News Hyder with a noose around her neck. Then he found himself again in bed
and heard the voice of his mothers’ dead maid Hashmat Bibi, after which he heard Bilquis
relating how they had been poisoned by his mothers. Then he saw Hyder with Maulana
Dawood as a monkey on his right shoulder and Iskander Harappa on the other, and had
visions of Arjumand and Haroun coming to power and Rani Harappa remaining a prisoner in
her house. Then he regained consciousness and this time his mothers were really by his bedside, telling him the story of his great-grandfather Hafeezullah and his brother Rumi Shakil. Both had disapproved of each other’s spouse and Hafeez spread word that his sister in law was a whore, who in turn told her husband that he had tried to seduce her. Rumi retaliated by writing to Hafeez that his wife was having an affair with a famous sitarist which turned out to be true. Hafeez was so heartbroken that he died with the words “This motor will not run anymore” on his lips, the very words that Shakil had unconsciously uttered himself. The son that had survived him was Old Shakil, his grandfather who had died a foul-mouthed death. His mothers concluded that theirs was a family where brothers had treated each other shamefully just as he had treated the memory of his brother “like mud” (S 278). It was then that the truth finally dawned on him that his mothers hated him and no longer cared what happened to him. The Furies had possessed them and they left their mansion for the first time in their lives, leaving the great door of the house open for whoever wanted to enter the house. He hallucinated for some more time after which he recovered at night and saw people in his room, the townspeople who had entered the house out of curiosity. Then screams were heard and he heard Sufiya the Beast, coming up the steps and roaring, and watched her heading straight at him while he waited patiently for her hands to close around his throat. The Beast who had trailed him finished off what his mothers had started, and he was made to pay a heavy price for the betrayal of his brother. Mila Milo was exactly another type of person that the Erinnyes would love to hunt down, because she was guilty of filial betrayal. She was like Myrrha who had fallen in love with her father Kinyras and had conspired to sleep with him. Her father cursed her for it when he learned the truth, and as Cupid (Eros) denied having shot her with his arrows to cause her to fall for her own father, the Erinnyes blasted her with snake venom and firebrands of Stygia, for:

“…to hate one’s father is a crime; this love (sexual desire) a greater crime than hate”
When Mila’s relationship with Prof. Solanka turned sour, she in her spurned fury retaliated by hitting him on his Achilles heel but:

“...the screaming of the Furies momentarily drowned her voice. The hungry goddesses were beating around both their heads, feeding on their rage.” (F 174)

For Prof. Solanka, fury that had “stood above him like a cresting Hokusai wave” (F 100) over his anger with his doll, was still there even in New York, alive and kicking. Family betrayal in any form was considered a heinous crime by the Erinnyes and when King Aeetes happened to falsely accuse his grandsons, the sons of Phrixos, of plotting against him and banishing them from Kolkhis, they brought them back with the Argonauts to avenge the betrayal of their own kin. Family betrayal could take many forms, and refusal to help one’s sibling could also incur the wrath of the enraged trinity as when Khalkiope entreated her sister Medea to help her and her sons from her cruel husband, threatening her that if she refused to help her she would return with the Eyrinyes after her death to haunt her. Mocking one’s parent could have horrific repercussions as seen in the Oidipous myth. When he discovered that he had slain his father and had married his mother, he tore out his own eyes in grief. His sons Polyneikes and Eteokles seized his throne and mocked him in his misery, so he called down the curse of the Erinnyes upon them for their mistreatment of him. The punishment was set in motion when Eteokles who had sworn to share the throne with his brother Polyneikes broke the covenant and exiled him, thereby further incurring the wrath of the Erinnyes, who caused his brother to return with an Argive army. It had all started with their father’s curse.

A victim seeking justice could call down the curse of the Erinnyes upon the criminal. The Erinnyes are said to inhabit Erebos or the deep darkness of Tartarus, dreaded by gods and men, guarding the Tartarean dungeon of the damned, overseers of the tortures inflicted upon the criminals until some curse pronounced on a criminal calls them to life and activity. Awoken from their subterranean home:

(Ovid, Metamorphoses 10.313).
“The cruel goddess (Tisiphone) turned her grim visage to hearken (the call of the curse)…Straightway, faster than fire of Jove (Zeus) or falling stars she leapt up from the gloomy bank: the crowd of phantoms gives way before her, fearing to meet their queen; then, journeying through the shadows and fields dark with trooping ghosts…(she enters the world above)…Then the Furia (Fury), swooping headlong upon the Cadmean towers, straightway cast upon the house (or person) its wonted gloom (as a curse upon the house or person).” (Statius, Thebaid 1. 46 ff (trans. Moxley) (Roman epic CIst A.D.)

Prof. Solanka’s cry after the death of Neela seems to have been emitted from this abyss:

“ The noise that emerged from him was awful and immense, a roar from the Inferno, the cry of the tormented and the lost.” (F 259)

The most powerful of curse was that of the parent upon the child – for they were born of just such a crime. When Oeneus, king of Calydon, omitted to render his sacrifice to Artemis, Goddess of the Hunt, she caused a great boar to come out of the forests of Arachynthus who ravaged all the land. His son Meleager, with a band of heroes pursued the boar, and Atalanta, with whom he was in love, was the first to overtake the boar and wound it. In honour of her prowess, Meleager gave her the head of the boar, which his uncles resented and tried to take it away from her. Whereupon, Meleager, “maddened past all bearing” (ML 98) killed them in his fury and his mother Althaea, not knowing that it was her son who had slain her brothers, called down the curse of the Erinnyes upon the murderer thus:

“O Daughters of destruction, foul wingless Furies… I bid you track his footsteps night and day.” (ML 100)

As a result:

“…faster than the whirlwind the Furies flew from the realms of endless night… loathsome shapes of darkness and horror.” (ML 101)

Althaea, to her utter horror, came to know that the murderer was no other than her own son,
and it was upon him that she had called the wrath of the Furies. However, there was nothing that could be done about it anymore, for:

“…the Furies, once aroused, sleep never, night nor day.” (ML 100)

Meleager then prepared to leave Calydon, knowing that the Erinnyes would haunt him for the rest of his life. Curses that were leveled against a family member as punishment for an act of betrayal were always taken up by the Furies. Knowing this, Telemakhos feared that if he forced his mother Penelope to marry one of her suitors, she would call down her Erinyes upon him. Those who did not heed it had to face the consequences of their actions like Phoinix who was rendered childless because his father Amyntor called the Erinyes upon him as punishment for sleeping with his mistress, though he had done it at his mother’s bidding in order to punish her wayward husband. So, as curses had a way of making their way to the Furies, the Moor says that they:

“…should not be lightly uttered, especially before witnesses. Flory’s curse flew into the air like a startled chicken and hovered there for a long while, as if uncertain of its intended destination. Her grandson Moraes Zogoiby would not be born for eighteen years, at which time the chicken came home to roost.” (MLS 72)

This was the curse of Flory Zogoiby, the Moor’s paternal grandmother. She was quarrelling with her son Abraham over his having fallen in love with Aurora, as she did not like the idea of her Jewish son getting married to a Christian girl. During their argument, he started questioning her about ‘hidden matters’ and she started cursing all Moors and their spouses in the hope of making her son stop questioning her about things she didn’t want to talk about. The chicken did come to roost, and his only son Moraes Zogoiby, called the Moor, from birth suffered a genetic defect. He spent an abnormal four and a half month in the womb and emerged with a right fist shaped like a club. After that, he started growing twice his age, and at thirty looked sixty, a young man trapped inside an old body. His wife Aurora da Gama too, had watched her grandmother Epifania die without lifting a finger to help her, and had also
been cursed by her, that her house be forever partitioned and her children rise up against her. Aurora eventually started having a strange feeling that she was being followed, and when her eldest daughter died and misfortunes began to befall her family, it unnerved her and she took recourse to becoming filled with rage herself. The most terrible of family curses were those inflicted for the crimes of patricide or matricide and the ghost of the dead parent would return from the Underworld with avenging Erinnys to haunt and drive mad the criminal child and only through severe atonement could the wrath be abated.

The Erinnys possessed their victims, and Prof. Solanka’s spells of mad rage is a similar state of being possessed, as:

“A low, shimmering, disconnected anger continued to seep and flow within him, threatening to rise up without warning in a mighty volcanic burst; as if it were its own master, as if he were merely the receptacle, the host, and it, the fury, were the sentient, controlling being.” (F 128)

Once possessed by the Erinnys, the victims had no choice but to carry out the whims of the sisters. When Jason and Medea were fleeing Kolkhis and King Aeetes with the Golden Fleece, Medea slew and dismembered her own brother Apsyrtos to slow down the pursuing Kolkhians. Her aunt Kirke purified her of the stain of murder and appeased her brother’s Eyrinnys, though her tragic end with Jason is still blamed on them. She had to appease her brother’s Eyrinys with the blood of her own two sons. Jason had sworn to be ever loyal to her, so when he betrayed her, she was possessed by the Erinnys and said:

“…my grief grows again and my hate burns hot; Erinys, as of old, claims my unwilling hand (italics mine). O wrath, where thou dost lead I follow…”

(Seneca, Medea 948)

Note how unwilling she is to do what she feels she is driven to, in the way that Prof. Solanka has lost control over the rage within him, compelling him to flee the comforts of family and home. He even started sleepwalking, walking the streets for long stretches, and waking up in
the morning with his street clothes, having no remembrance whatsoever of where he had gone or what he had done. His only consolation was that the Furies left him when he spent time with Mila, but even then, they seemed to be hovering above him, poisoning his newfound happiness. He felt that the women of his life were possessed by the Furies. The Professor slowly discovered that he had only been standing in for Mila’s dead father, the poet Milo, when by an intentional slip of tongue, she called him ‘papi’ while caressing him. This drove him to the sudden conjecture that she might after all be no other than one of the Furies, feeding on the fury within him:

“At that moment of revelation Solanka could easily have believed that this beautiful, accursed girl … might actually be the very incarnation of a Fury, one of the three deadly sisters, the scourges of mankind. Fury was their divine nature and boiling human wrath their favourite food. He could have persuaded himself that behind her low whispers, beneath her unfailingly even tempered tones, he could hear the Erinnyes’ shrieks.” (F 134)

One night in his apartment during some tense moments with Neela Mahindra, they heard piercing shrieks accompanied by a shattering sound on the street. A short while later, a bitter quarrel broke out between them and he was convinced that the shrieks they had heard had been that of the Erinnyes. On another occasion, he was confronted by Mila, his ex-girlfriend and Eleanor, his ex-wife who barged into his room while sleeping with his present lover Neela. All three women were furious at him for different reasons and seemed to him to be:

“…the three Furies, the ‘good-tempered ones’ themselves, in full possession of the physical bodies of the women to whom his life was most profoundly joined. Their external forms were all too familiar, but the fire pouring out of these metamorphosed creatures’ eyes proved that they were no longer the women he had known but rather vessels for the descent into the Upper West Side of the malevolent Divine.” (F 233)

And when Neela broke off with him and straightaway joined the revolution of her people, he
strongly felt that it was because of the fury that had possessed her there. So he thenceforth referred to that night as: ‘the Night of the Furies’ (F 235). Even when he went to see Neela during the war in Mildendo, he professed to hear the wild screeching of “the dog-headed Three” (F 252) along with the leathery sound of their bat-wings above the din and clatter of soldiers preparing for battle. In *Midnight’s Children*, after having seduced Farah Zoroaster through hypnotism, Saleem was said to be possessed by a demon. He would start shaking while eating breakfast and would become fevered at night and cold during the day. He even used to cry out nonsensical words while walking in the street for no plausible reason. In *Shame*, when Sufiya Zinobia had almost ripped off the head of her sister’s fiancé, her eyes acquired the glaze of a somnambulist. Her skin reddened as if her whole body was ablaze and outdid the rouge on her cheeks and the nail-polish on her fingers and toes. Omar Khayyam Shakil who immediately knew that she was about to become violent shouted out a warning but was too late. The demon that seemed to possess her had already hurled her across the room at her sister’s groom Captain Talvar Ulhaq, whose head she started twisting with superhuman strength. And so there was a beast lurking inside her, who, seeming to feed on “certain emotions” got stronger and stronger, possessing her whenever it did so. The thing that possessed her resembled the Mr Hyde that got stronger than Dr Jekyll, eventually becoming the permanent identity, because this incident was a sign that she was also losing control over the beast residing inside her. When she started roaming the streets at night, allowing herself to be raped by whoever was out on the streets and wanted to, after which she slaughtered them, her husband-cum-physician Omar Khayyam Shakil and her father drugged, chained and locked her up for two years. However, it was something like shutting up the cage without putting the monster inside to sleep, because during the course of two years it became stronger than the drugs administered to the girl and finally took over. Like Mr Hyde, it no longer needed an emotion or a potion to trigger it off, because it had become the girl, just as
Mr Hyde had become Dr Jekyll. So one day, Sufiya’s room was found empty, the restraining chains broken, and there was a large hole in the wall. Pandora’s box had been opened and its contents had possessed Pandora herself. In the same way, Raza Hyder had once before been shocked at the hatred he had seen in Arjumand Harappa’s eyes which made him feel that she would be capable of doing anything, another sign of the possessed. In The Enchantress of Florence, Princess Qara Koz informed Argalia that there was another side to her which was a bad side, and when it took over, she could no longer be responsible for her actions. She fearfully stated that in that state, she might do anything at all. In The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Rai, a mild tempered man morosely said that he was beginning to get involved in quarrels and even fights. He attributed this to the fact that the violence that he was seeing around him had somehow ignited some violence inside him. It would account for:

“The fires at my center ascending through faults in my personality to pour out through the volcanoes of my eyes, my lips…” (GBF 420)

In Fury, Prof Solanka had been in an “internal exile” out of which he had been helped out by Mila “who rescued him from his demons” (F 122). He was reluctant to return to his son because he did not trust himself and the fury that was sealed inside him. There was no telling what it might make of him, as he knew of the power that it still had over him. When the Moor learned from Uma that his mother Aurora was no goddess but a common whore, sleeping with men like Raman Fielding whom he liked to call a ‘gutter-creature’, he was shocked and tried to defend her. But secretly he felt that the “pawings and thrustings” of Fielding would have the power to arouse her, and unleash the wildness inside her. When India Ophuls’ beloved father was murdered by Shalimar, she went into a state of shock and refused to move into her father’s home as advised. She remained in her apartment, sitting on her chair and staring into space, paying no attention to her lover - the young man who was banging on her door. Nothing and no one interested her anymore except for:
“…avenging angels, angels of death and damnation, to come to her aid. Blood called out for blood and she wanted the ancient Furies to descend shrieking from the sky and give her father’s unquiet spirit peace.” (SC 331)

She had her heart’s desire when her mother’s Erinnyes possessed her, giving her superhuman courage. When Shalimar broke into her home, intent on finishing his mission in killing off his unfaithful wife’s husband and offspring, her common sense told her that she should lock herself safely in and call the police for assistance. But the thing that had entered her at her mother’s grave was telling her not to. It seemed to be controlling her and it made her forget fear. She decided not to argue with it and taking an arrow from her quiver waited for him calmly, for she:

“…felt like Clytemnestra, cold, patient, capable of anything.” (SC 332)

On the other side of the coin, Shalimar, the cuckolded husband-turned-terrorist, who also had been grievously wronged, could not sleep at night, and:

“The devil inside him was aroused by the memory of his faithless wife, and murder again filled all his thoughts.” (SC 256)

When a prison guard clutched his testicles and taunted him on his approaching execution, the thing that possessed him chose that moment to break out and he attacked him by bringing up his knee and hammering down with his bare hands till he had to be knocked out with wooden bullets by two other prison guards. Another prisoner, Blood King was awe struck:

“You got some devil in you, terrorist” (SC 390)

Even before he left Kashmir to go on his revenge spree to America, his mother was worried about him and told her husband that an “evil demon” had possessed him because he had become blood-thirsty. She voiced her suspicion that a “djinni” might have entered him or it

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*Rushdie’s intentional spelling error.*
might have been inside him all the time, waiting to be released.

The “djinni” or the Erinnyes also punished covenant-breakers. Paris broke the covenant of hospitality when he abducted the wife of his host Menelaus in Greece. Max Ophuls broke the covenant of hospitality when he set his sights on Boonyi and lured her away from her home and husband. So according to the law of the Erinnyes, he had to be punished too.

There are two views regarding the appearance of the Furies. The prevalent view is that: “their whole appearance was terrifying and appalling” (TAF 18). Their heads were said to be wreathed with venomous hissing serpents, their sunken eyes glowed with iron hue and dripped blood, their skin distended and swelled with corruption, and fiery vapour issued from their mouths with the power to cause unquenchable thirst, sickness, famine and death. They had the wings of a bat or bird and the body of a dog, and wearing stark and grisly black cloaks, carried funeral torches and snaky whips in hands shaking with wrath. Prof. Solanka in *Fury* also describes them as being:

“Serpent-haired, dog-headed, bat winged…” (F 251)

Another view is that they were beautiful:

“In Athens the Furies were thought to be Aphrodite’s sisters. Beauty and vengeful wrath, as Homer knew, sprang from the self same source.” (F 251)

So there are two very conflicting views regarding the physical appearance of the Furies. The view that beauty and vengeful wrath springs from the same source is repeated in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* when Umeed Merchant says of the beautiful singer Vina Apsara:

“Dionysiac Vina has risen up in wrath, goddess of pleasure and destruction. Go, she orders, and miserably I obey.” (GBF 460)

Dionysus, the young son of Zeus and the Theban princess Semele toured the world, declaring himself a god, but was rejected at Thebes by Agave, his mother’s sister and the mother of the
king of Thebes, Pentheus. So Dionysus made the women mad and they started worshipping him on a mountain which made Pentheus angry who then tried to imprison him. But Pentheus himself was induced by the power of Dionysus to spy on the women, and was discovered and torn to pieces. The maddened Agave in her frenzy, not knowing that he was her son, bore his head triumphantly back to Thebes. Dionysus then proclaimed their doom and the royal household had to go in exile.

The Furies had the power to madden their victims:

“Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.” (F 184)

Inflicting tormenting madness upon a victim was the most severe manifestation of their wrath. Murderers might suffer illness or disease; and a nation harbouring such a criminal could suffer dearth, hunger and disease. Tisiphone possessed magical poisons:

“…lip-froth of Cerberus, the Echidna’s venom, wild deliriums, blindnesses of the brain, and crime and tears, and maddened lust for murder; all ground up, mixed with fresh blood, boiled in a pan of bronze, and stirred with a green hemlock stick” called “the broth of madness.” (Ovid, Metamorphoses 4.451 ff’(trans. Melville) (Roman Epic CIst B.C to CIst AD)

Though the form of punishment usually maddened the victims, sometimes a direct maddening curse was summoned:

“Let accursed fear ravish his maddened heart.” (Valerius Flaccus, Argonautica1,730)

This was the curse of Aeson, father of the Argonaut Jason, who was forced to commit suicide by his half-brother King Pelias. An interesting fact in the maddening process is seen in the maddening of King Athamas. Themisto, his second wife killed his daughter by his first wife Helle, and her mother Nephele sent the Eyrinyes after her, as a result of which she became mad. She then tried to murder her other two stepchildren but accidentally slew her own two children. The ghosts of these two children inflicted the Erinnyes upon Athamas for continuing to marry their murderer and he became tormented with the maddening lash of the
Erinnyes. He would have sudden visions of them and would leap up, scared at the spectre, spitting foam and with bloodshot eyes try to fight them with his sword, for:

“Euminides had carried away the troubles of mortal life, and his tongue was laden with the cries of madness.” (Nonnus, Dionysiaca 10.1)

It culminated in his murdering his two other children. Alkmaion was also plagued by the Erinnyes and driven mad because he killed his mother Eriphyle even though he had done it to avenge his father Amphiarus. His father had hidden himself because as an augur he knew that if he went to attack Thebes he would not return. However, Adrastus, organizer of the campaign bribed his wife Eriphyle with a gold necklace for which she betrayed her husband and had him killed in battle.

But out of this frenzy could be born both devastation as well as greatness. The success of the rock band VTO is ascribed to this frenzy:

“The singer uses the frenzy of the gods… divine fury.” (GBF 392)

He also says:

“Such bacchic fury is one part of the temper of the times.” (GBF 393)

Bacchus is the Latin version of the Greek god of wine and feasts Dionysus, and Bacchic fury would stand for the mad excess of the Dionysiac religion also known as Bacchanalia, defined as:

“…orgies of Dionysus or Bacchus…. spread in Italy early in the 2nd BC., which led to excesses and had to be suppressed in 186 BC.” (OCCL 68)

And such excess was “one part of the temper of the times” which was between the 1950s-1990s of the growth of rock music.

II

It is interesting to note that Rushdie personifies this anger as a “thing’, thereby alluding to the enraged sisters. For instance, Saleem’s sister, nicknamed ‘The Monkey’, being
an animal lover, had made up her mind to beat up Evie for killing stray cats, and there was:

“…the thing sitting (italics mine) tensely in the monkey’s eyes.” (MC 270)

When Saleem called his family together and professed to hear voices, revealing to him whatever he wanted to know, his father Ahmed Sinai, thinking that he was fabricating it, was so enraged that “the wild anger sitting (italics mine) on his forehead” (MC 194) caused him to box him in his ear, rendering him deaf in his left ear for the rest of his life. In The Moor’s Last Sigh, when Aurora was deep in shock, with her daughter Mynah recently dead, Uma Sarasvati is referred to as “the creature” who:

“…seized its (italics mine) moment, disguising her errand of hate as a pilgrimage of Love.” (MLS 321)

She had recorded the Moor’s deprecatory remarks of his mother which he had done to please her during their love-makings, and had played it out to his parents, causing the breach that would never be healed during his mother’s lifetime. The Moor comments:

“…there is a thing which bursts out of us at times, a thing which lives in us, eating our food, breathing our air, looking out through our eyes, and when it comes out to play nobody is immune; possessed, we turn murderously one upon another, thing-darkness in our eyes and real weapon in our hands, neighbour against thing-ridden neighbour, thing-driven against cousin, brother-thing against brother-thing, thing-child again thing-child.” (MLS 36)

Persis Kalamanja, angry at being jilted by Ormus Cama, thrashed out at Rai, which he describes as:

“…the thing that had burst out of her depths and attacked me for the crime of not being another man; of living in his home and not being he.” (GBF 220)

The young Boonyi Kaul’s angry outburst at her father’s choice of the cooking profession over the more respectable one of teaching is also spoken of as:
“…her wildness talking, the impulsive uncontrolled thing that Shalimar the clown had begun to fear.” (SC 104)

And when Boonyi saw Shalimar’s anger at Gopinath Razdan the spy, it had a scary effect on her because it was the first time that she was seeing: “a murderous darkness on his brow” (SC 110) which she found very unattractive. After her death, her daughter India Ophuls:

“…knelt at her mother’s graveside and felt the thing enter her, rapidly, decisively, as if it had been waiting below ground for her, knowing she would come. The thing had no name but it had a force and it made her capable of anything.” (SC 366)

On her way to the airport at the police checkpoint in Kashmir:

“…the thing inside her came out and stared at the men outside and what they saw in her eyes made them back away and remove the roadblocks…” (SC 369)

When her arch enemy, Shalimar the clown, murderer of her parents, was finally arrested:

“There was a thing inside her that had wanted to hunt him down herself.” (SC 372)

The ‘thing’ inside her wanted her to write to him, letting him know that he belonged to her and that she was waiting for him. So she wrote letters of ‘arrows of hate’ (SC 374) to Shalimar in his prison cell, intending to torment him with them before she could hunt him down. Even the prison officials and his attorney warned him of their “tone of exceptional anger and hostility.” (SC 376)

III

The Furies as Nemesis play a dominant role in some of the novels. The Protagonist in The Ground Beneath Her Feet disclaims this belief:

“I do not believe in hubris, the crime of thumbing your nose at the gods, and therefore I also do not believe in the coming of Nemesis.” (GBF 458)
By contrast, in *Fury*, Prof Solanka is pursued by:

“…his nemesis, the doll…” (F 107)

In *Shame*, Raza Hyder felt that the transformation of his idiot daughter Sufiya Zinobia into a beast was like a nemesis that had been stalking him, allowing him to rise to the position of the President of Pakistan so that his fall would be all the greater. If word got around that the ‘white panther’ that was murdering people and animals all over the country was his daughter, he was finished. There was nothing he could do about it, because it was:

“…his own flesh turned against him, and no man has a defence against such a Treason.” (S 257)

He had betrayed his wife by worshipping another woman Pinkie Aurangzeb, and the Erinnyes had possessed his own daughter as retribution. In *Shalimar The Clown*, Shalimar in prison finally understood that the daughter of Boonyi:

“…had set herself up as his nemesis, and whatever the judgement of a Californian court might be, she would be his real judge; she, and not twelve Americans in a jury box.” (SC 376)

In *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Moraes Zogoiby also decided that it was not a matter for any jury or judge but himself to let his mother’s soul rest in peace. When relations between him and his mother became strained and he was arrested for trumped up charges, it was Raman Fielding who got him off and so he was obliged to be in his employ for six years. Then he was reconciled to his father Abraham Zogoiby - Bombay’s biggest ‘dada’, who told him that he was beginning to see Aurora’s ghost in the garden of his Cashondeliveri Tower. He felt that her spirit was unquiet, and suggested that she might attain peace if her numerous works could be given a resting place. So father and son assiduously collected her paintings and opened their private Art Gallery which they named “The Zogoiby Bequest” exactly three years after her death. Then Abraham told his son what Sammy Hazare had revealed to his hired detective Minto - that Aurora had not died accidentally as they had all thought but had been shot with a
small hypodermic dart in her neck which was what had caused her to fall to her death on the rocks below. Fielding whom she had discarded like an old shoe after a brief relationship had employed his blow-pipe expert Chhaggan to do the dirty work during the Ganpati festival. It was then that the Moor knew what had to be done, and another incident occurred which added fuel to the fire already raging in his mind. During a burglary at the Zogoiby Bequest, four major paintings were stolen and Fielding appeared on Doordarshan, deriding them as “alien artefacts” (MLS 364), stating that as such, the loss need not be mourned. Fielding’s derisive remarks of his mother helped the Moor carry out his mission on him all the more easier and he paid him a nocturnal visit, smashing up his face with the telephone on his desk.

The Erinnyes persecuted and haunted all those who upset the order of things by performing deeds which are generally unacceptable, regardless of the motivation. Though they were particularly concerned with patricide, matricide, betrayal of parents and family, unfilial conduct, crimes against the gods and perjury, they also punished those who broke oaths. The Trojans earned their enmity when they broke their oaths that they would return Helene upon the Greek’s first landing at Troy. The crimes which they punished also included disobedience towards parents, violation of the respect due to old age, violation of the law of hospitality and improper conduct towards suppliants, including homicide as in the case of Melampos who was exiled from Pylos by King Neleus as punishment for the manslaughter of some man. The suffering he endured during that time and the cruel imprisonment at the hands of King Phylakos was blamed on the wrath of an avenging Erinnyes. They could carry out their punishments even in the absence of human witnesses as seen in the case of Ibykos, a historical poet who was murdered by robbers and sympathetic cranes who witnessed his murder called upon the Erinnyes to exact revenge on the perpetrators. The nature of the rage that engulfs everyone is thus:

“Medusan wrath, that can turn yoric flesh to deadly granite.” (Yorick: EW 77)

How the ‘Medusan wrath’ of ancient Greece found their way to New York, India, Pakistan, Spain and all around the Globe is summed up in the following lines by Prof. Solanka:
“These days the goddesses, less regarded, were hungrier, wilder, casting their nets more widely. As the bonds of family weakened, so the Furies began to intervene in all of human life. From New York to Lilliput-Blefuscu there was no escape from the beating of their wings.” (F 251)

They have chosen to get involved even in Gang warfare, for the Moor asks:

“What avenging demon bestrode the horizon, raining fire upon our heads?”

(MLS 372)

As Rushdie himself alluded so often to the Furies of Greek mythology, a study of the classical concept of fury is absolutely vital in dealing with the fury in the novels. For like Medea, Rushdie, on seeing boiling wrath, seems to ask:

“Whither hastes that headlong horde of Furiae? Whom seek they? Against whom are they preparing their flaming blows? Whom does the hellish host threaten with its bloody brands?” (Seneca, Medea 948)


