CHAPTER III

PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIATION

I

In Haroun and the Sea of Stories, after Haroun’s mother left his father for another man, his attention span became limited to eleven minutes and he was unable to concentrate any further. Their neighbour Miss Sengupta explained this phenomenon as being:

“…located in his pussy-collar-jee (psychology).” (HSS 24)

Her explanation was based on the fact that his mother had left their home at eleven o’clock. This humorous and rather far-fetched psychic interposition is Rushdie’s rare resort to an overt display of his prolific use of psychology in all his novels, and this chapter examines the brilliant psychological treatment of the rage/fury of his characters. It will be seen that apart from the political, historical, allegorical/biographical nuances and implications of the novels, there is also a very lively psychological aspect of the works which adds a fresh and additional lustre to the already rich quantitative as well as qualitative melange. His characters are intensely interesting psychic case-studies and reveal their creator’s knowledge and mastery of human psychology. The brilliant psychological treatment of the rage found in the novels will constitute the heart of this study.

When Boonyi (Shalimar the Clown) came back to Pachigam from Delhi and Max Ophuls, she had been killed officially, and as a ‘dead’ person, was not allowed to live with the living. So her father Pandit Pyarelal Kaul made her live in the deserted hut of the dead Gujar prophetess Nazarebaddoor on the pine-forested hillside, where she had to be satisfied with the ghost of her dead mother Pamposh. Her father would visit her at regular intervals, supplying her essential needs and caring for her as she underwent withdrawal symptoms when she would shake convulsively, sweating and craving for the food and chemicals that
had enslaved her. The gradual derangement of Boonyi during this period started having an adverse effect on the optimistic streak in Pyarelal’s nature. Up on the hill beside his daughter, he would reminisce of how the whole village had defended the love of Boonyi and Shalimar, a Hindu and a Muslim. Seeing its dreadful ending, his thoughts wandered to wider issues like the conundrum of Hindus and Muslims co-existing peacefully as Kashmiris per se. He was receiving news from other Pandit organizations of “forced conventions, temple-smashing, iconoclasm, persecution and genocide” (SC 239) and suicides committed by despairing Brahmins. The villagers of Pachigam had so far made a huge attempt to live peacefully together as one big family and he began to wonder if all their attempts had just been wishful thinking, a façade that would not last, an illusion amidst all the communal violence elsewhere. It was sad to think that when it broke out, it was no longer a question of who had been family friends but to which community one belonged. This made him question:

“...the idea that human beings were essentially good, that if men could be helped to strip away imperfections their ideal selves would stand revealed, shining in the light, for all to see.” (SC 238-9)

This causes one to wonder if there could be such a thing as an “ideal” self, and what exactly constituted the “imperfections” in a human being that prevented him from being “good” and ideally exemplary.

II

Psychoanalysis makes an arbitrary division of the mind calling them the “Conscious” the “Pre-conscious”, and the “Unconscious”. In Psychoanalysis, The “Unconscious” is considered to be the main principle behind human motivation. In *Midnight’s Children*, Shiva continued hating the upper-ups and their power even after he amassed wealth for himself. He was the rightful son of the Sinais’ though the possibility of Methwold being the biological father is hinted. But having been swapped at birth by Mary Pareira, he became the son of
Wee Willie Winkle, the impoverished accordionist who had to sing for his living. As merely having lived in poverty cannot account for such a virulent life-long hatred of the rich, could it be possible that Shiva in his unconscious, saw them as usurpers and therefore was justified in continuing to resent them?

The Moor also makes an interesting comment while referring to the aggressive nature of his lover Uma Sarasvati who eventually ruined his life:

“There are those among us – not alien but insaan – who eat devastation; who, without a regular supply of mayhem, cannot thrive.” (MLS 322)

He talks about ‘Insaan’ – ordinary men and women of the streets, who possess a more than an acceptable amount of truculence, without which they do not seem able to exist.

In Grimus Flapping Eagle’s beloved elder sister ‘Bird-Dog’ had vanished with a man called Sispy, so in his search for her, he landed on Calf Island, a haven for immortals who found their life in the real world difficult. Virgil Jones and Dolores were the first people he met there and from them he learned that there was a town called K on Calf Mountain filled with reprobates, and they tried their best to dissuade him from continuing his search. He also learned that his sister and Mr Sispy were indeed on the mountain but could no longer get any information out of them regarding the mountain which instilled fear in them. Then Virgil Jones asked Flapping Eagle a very psychic question:

“Would you agree, Mr Eagle…that what the human race fears most is the working (italics mine) of its own mind?” (G 45)

The suggestion that the mind had a will of its own and could not be controlled by its owner is reiterated when an earthquake occurred at Calf Island, and Flapping Eagle was told that it was the ‘Grimus Effect’ which was slowly deteriorating the island. Virgil Jones said that the Grimus Effect and the monsters on the mountain were ‘Outer Dimensions’ and that there were ‘Inner Dimensions’ or universes lying locked inside one’s mind, over which the Grimus Effect could produce devastating results. He stated that the ‘Inner Dimension’ consisted of a
man’s:

“…own particular set of monsters. His own devils burning in his own inner fires. His own worms gnawing at his strength. These are the obstacles he must leap, if he can. Often, sadly, they are stronger than he is, and then he dies. Or lives on, a working body encasing a ruined mind.” (G 84)

After deliberating with himself for a long time, Virgil Jones finally decided to guide Flapping Eagle up Calf Mountain in spite of Dolores’ pleas not to leave her. As they made their way up the inhospitable mountain, they started hearing a high-pitch whine that dimmed their eyesight. Virgil informed Flapping Eagle that they were entering the zone of the Effect and they needed to talk about anything except the Effect, as keeping silent could prove to be fatal. Then Flapping Eagle became weak and developed fever, finding it increasingly difficult even to stand while the whining grew louder and louder. Virgil yelled at him, telling him to try to concentrate on his voice while he began to suffer from hallucinations. During the ordeal, he heard Virgil saying that he would take him to a clearing where the daylight would chase away the monsters inside him. He also heard him saying that Grimus could no longer control the Effect which was growing stronger and stronger and it would eventually destroy the island of the immortals. He said that the effect of the Grimus Effect on a person’s mind could be controlled by getting used to it through controlling one’s thoughts. Interestingly, he went on to say that the Inner Dimension were lonely places, each individual creating his or her own, thereby possessing a universe each. This knowledge frightened men to the extent of driving them insane, which was the calamity that had befallen the inhabitants of K who were frightened of their own minds. He spoke about a philosopher of K called I.Q. Gribb who stated that all human beings were dead, living in shells where different emotions entered in turns to occupy us for short periods of time, thereby causing mood swings. Gribb stated that the one thing that remained constant was one’s consciousness. He survived by ignoring the
dimensions, because even though an immortal, he died when he allowed himself to feel, and the Grimus Effect got to him. In short, the inhabitants of K refused to feel, which accounted for their debauched lives. Virgil Jones advised Flapping Eagle to develop his consciousness, which was the only way to defeat the Effect.

The ‘dimension’ of this quasi-science fiction is analogous of the psychoanalytic inner layers of the mind – the id, the ego and the super ego – metaphors that Freud gave to highly complex psychological processes. Just as this inner dimension of Grimus is something that one has either to fight and overcome to break free of its restraining chains or be forever a slave to it, Freud’s concern was with the ‘unconscious resistance’ and how to break through it. The ‘unconscious’ - active parts of the mind, unable to be detected on immediate inspection either by an onlooker or by the subject himself - was discovered by Freud through hypnosis. Hypnotized patients were told to do something at a given time after waking up and though they could not recall what had occurred or had been said during the hypnotic trance, they could carry out the task at the given moment, which was:

“…eventuated due to the activity of the unconscious.” (HFP 87)

This convinced Freud of the existence of the unconscious. According to Freud, this was the repository of all the basic drives (instincts) like hunger, thirst, anger, and sex, which he named Libido. Psychology says that psychological disturbances such as uncontrollable hatred and impulsiveness is the mark of inner conflict which Freud takes a step further by calling it “hidden conflicts” which are buried in the unconscious and gives rise to anxiety. He stated that in the depths of the mind are the hurtful memories, forbidden desires and other experiences that have been pushed out of the conscious and conflict and frustration with the Libido is the root of all abnormal behavior. Although the individual is unaware of such unconscious material, it continues to seek expression and may be reflected in fantasies and dreams. These unconscious impulses and conflicts, if not expressed directly or brought to
awareness through hypnosis or other psychical means, seek indirect release in all kinds of symptoms resulting in irrational and maladaptive behavior, eventually leading to mental death or in other words ‘abnormal’ behavior. Therapy helps to gain insight or conscious awareness of these unconscious desires/conflicts for the purpose of gaining emotional release that would eventually enable individuals to master their anxieties.

Allusions to the Freudian ‘Superego’ are found in the novels. The superego is theorized to be one of the residents of the unconscious layer of the psyche, and is said to operate on the principle of perfection. It is the part of the mind that acts as a conscience reflecting social standards that have been learned and serves as the critical and moralizing function. It is shaped by moral standards of society as transmitted by parents and is concerned with right and wrong. It supplies the ego with standards and ideals of behavior and is developed in early childhood through parental teaching. In *Shalimar the Clown*, Pandit Pyarelal Kaul speaks of it:

“Man is ruined by the misfortune of possessing a moral sense, consider the superior luck of the animals…They neither know nor shape their own nature; rather, their nature knows and shapes them. There are no surprises in the animal kingdom. Only man’s character is suspect and shifting. Only man, knowing good, can do evil. Only man wears masks. Only man is a disappointment to himself.” (SC 91)

Poor Boonyi, living in exile up on the hill above the village, was aware that wild animals stalked around her hut at night, but she envied rather than feared them:

“These creatures were dangerous and maybe they were closing in on her to kill her but they could not be blamed because they were true to their natures.” (SC 229)

Man could not be ‘true’ to his nature, to give uninhibited outlet to the id, the animal craving within, due to the inhibiting superego.

And the question remains: what exactly causes hate, and what makes a person
hateful? Can it be attributed to a congenital defect in the brain structure? Psychology states that:

“There are no brain areas that simply control aggression by themselves. Instead, these areas work in conjunction with other brain areas and interact with non-neural factors to influence aggression. In other words, instead of being ‘centres’ for aggression, they constitute part of a system that governs aggressive behaviour.” (AIC 44)

With Boonyi Kaul, the ‘non-neural factors’ that influenced her rage were her many disillusionments with life, beginning back home in Kashmir and culminating with Max Ophuls in Delhi. However, abnormalities of the brain is a fact that cannot be ignored, as is to be seen in the following statement:

“…some people who have evidenced fits of rage or intense hatred have been found to have abnormalities of brain structures involving lesions on or near the hypothalamus and amygdala…Brain disorder is usually associated with sudden, uncontrollable rages rather than with the cold, calculated planning of the death of millions.” (PCM 483)

This implies without doubt that psychopaths and terrorists who carefully select their victims and plan their deaths do not fall into the ‘abnormal’ pattern, in sharp contradiction to the widely circulated view that psychopaths are to be considered ‘sick’ and therefore need therapy. Shalimar\(^1\), an associate of terrorist groups in *Shalimar the Clown* falls into this category. Besides executing mass killings on orders given by his superiors, he also meticulously planned the deaths of his victims Boonyi Kaul, Max Ophuls and India Ophuls.

\[^1\] Shalimar was the village headman’s son and he had given himself the name in honour of Pamposh, Boonyi’s mother who had died in giving birth to Boonyi in the Shalimar garden where he himself was also born. He is called “the clown” because he performed as the clown of the performing troupe of Pachigam where Boonyi danced the Anarkali dance. Boonyi’s betrayal of their love transformed him completely.
He was a cold, calculating spider and was weaving a web for his unfaithful wife, writing loving letters to her and telling her how much he missed her. He wrote that he understood that she was realizing her dream of becoming a great dancer and that he was happy that the “Amerikan” was able to assist her. He assured her that he would not believe the things that people said of her and would wait respectfully for her return. The gullible girl walked right into the trap and into his murderous reach. After butchering her he worked for militants and the last man he worked for, a big shot named Ustadz Abdurajak Janjalani cut a deal with him – his services for a year in exchange for access to ex-Ambassador Max Ophuls. During the course of the year, his Filipino spies located Max Ophuls’ address and ‘the Ustadz’ kept his part of the deal by rewarding his services with the necessary means to enter America. Shalimar went directly to Max Ophuls’ residence where he was naturally refused entry by alert security guards. His patience knew no bounds as he waited outside the high walls of ‘Mulholland Drive’, sleeping on the grass below the road’s rim to keep out of sight of cruising policemen. On the third day of his vigil, dogs that he could have strangled with ease were sent outside the walls to frighten him away, but he was determined to keep up a humble façade. It was not his intention to kill his enemy hurriedly or take drastic measures at once, for he had other plans up his crafty sleeve. When Max Ophuls’ Bentley finally drove out on the fourth day, Shalimar very humbly approached the car, ignoring the raised weapons of the guards and looking admirably “worshipful and sad” (SC 322). When Max Ophuls asked him who he was and why he kept coming there, he even had the nerve to reveal his identity and even disclosed the fact of Boonyi’s death, asking for employment for her sake. Shalimar knew that this was a man with no dearth of employees who would never employ him if he approached him any other way. His form of request was one that he knew Max Ophuls could not, as a gentleman, simply turn down either for sentimental reasons or for the sake of salving his conscience. On the other hand, on revealing his identity, he could even have been gunned down on the spot for his audacious daring, because he assures Max that he does not want any trouble, saying that what was done was done. In short, this coldly calculating killer was
willing to gamble on ice, for the stakes were high. On the fifth day the gates opened for him, and he was strangely given the appointment he must have been hoping for, that of Max Ophuls’ personal chauffeur. The amount of self-control that would have been inevitably involved in serving the man who had been mainly instrumental in ruining his life need not be accentuated. That he was willing to drive him around in his Bentley would have been hard enough, but he went a step further and also became his “valet, a body servant, the ambassador’s shadow-self” (SC 322). There was no limit of the extent of his willingness to serve and build intimate relations with the man he planned to kill, playing cat-and-mouse with him. It was as if he wanted him to trust him and rely on him as heavily as possible before terminating him, and Max Ophuls’ played into his hands exactly the way he wanted him to. Shalimar did not know that Boonyi had a daughter until he saw India Ophuls on her twenty-fourth birthday and saw his dead wife’s very image in her and heard her again in her voice, and he recalled his oath to Boonyi that he would murder any child she had by another man. He had to summon all his strength to suppress his anger:

“…his hands were bunched into fists and trembling…” (SC 11)

After slitting Max Ophuls’ throat with a single slash of the blade at his daughter’s doorstep, he hid out in the wilderness of Runyon Canyon and was caught by the Los Angeles Police while scavenging for food in a park. He spent a year and a half in jail as a ‘high-profile’ (SC 374) inmate, wearing ankle chains and receiving his food in his cell. At his trial, he was given the death penalty and was moved to the California state prison at San Quentin to wait out his sentence. But Shalimar was not waiting for death, for he had not finished what he had set out to accomplish. For three years, he refused to join the inmates in the yard, preferring to do push-ups, meditation and strange dance-like exercises in his cell, preparing himself for something. When he finally went out in the yard and did three hundred push-ups without sweating, a gang lord called ‘Blood King’, a three hundred pound inmate challenged him but got himself almost killed in the fight that ensued. No one bothered him for a year after which six men tried to beat him up and two of his ribs got fractured while he maimed four of them.
Five years passed after which he refused to appeal, and in this way another year passed by.
Then after six years on death row, there was a jailbreak and Shalimar scaled the prison wall and walked off it in the air where he continued walking as if on tightrope. He went straight for India Ophuls, got past security guards and dogs and entered her dark bedroom, intent on carrying out the final phase of his carefully laid out plans of revenge. Another example of people with psychopathic disorder possessing the clear thought processes of a cold, calculating killer is that of Uma Saraswati in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. The daughter of a Maharashtrian high-ranking police officer and a promising University student, she started fabricating convincing stories about herself and other people which eventually caused separations and divorces among married couples. Refusing to be medicated, her parents had no choice but to abandon her to her fate, and she had perforce to marry an old retired Deputy Commissioner of Police called Suresh Sarasvati, whose name she permanently adopted for her own. Shortly after the marriage, he suffered from stroke and became mute and paralyzed. Uma took off with all his wealth where in Bombay she continued playing her game of deception and seduction. She invented stories of her life by which she preyed on the sympathy of her victims. The Moor was the last one of her prey and to him she related the tale that her mother had hanged herself when she was twelve, as a result of which her grief stricken father followed suit by setting himself on fire. She said that she had been rescued from penury by her father’s work associate who expected sexual favors in return for giving her a home. So, although the moor says that:

“…these violent fictions were born out of their spurned daughter’s (pretty legitimate) rage.” (MLS 266)

the ‘violent fictions’ were what had caused her parents’ rejection of her in the first place. Therefore, the reason for her love of wrecking destruction around her was not as retaliation for parental rejection but rather for psychiatric reasons. Being thus addicted to brewing trouble, she succeeded in bringing discord between the Moor and his mother and ruining his
life. The Moor contradicts his former assessment of her when he says:

“…she (on this occasion) came among us – as a farmer of discontents, a fomentor of war, seeing in me (O fool! O thrice-assed dolt!) a fertile field for her pestilential seeds. Peace, serenity, joy were deserts to her – for if her noisome crops failed, she would starve. She ate our divisions, and grew strong upon our rows.” (MLS 320)

On the other hand, brain disorder with its concomitant “sudden uncontrollable” surges of rage is manifested in Professor Solanka of Fury. His friend Rhinehart told him that friends tried to avoid certain subjects to which he was sensitive while in his company as they were afraid that it would trigger him off, which they dubbed “Getting Solankered” (F 68). When he was overcome with rage he would mouth obscenities without being aware of it himself, and once he discovered to his dismay that he had during one of his rage spells, not only fired his housekeeper Mrs Wislawa but had also hurt her sentiments deeply. She expressed surprise that an educated man like him could swear so profusely, and it made him feel that he was on the verge of a psychological breakdown. This is in compliance with the following statement:

“…the episodes occur with rapid onset, out of proportion to their antecedents, and are followed by a rapid offset. For this reason, they sometimes have been referred to as ‘spells’...afterwards the patient may have amnesia for what occurred during the episode. If the patient is aware or is told of some violence that occurred, he or she usually expresses remorse.” (AIC 226)

So, a psychopathological factor - that of the clinical picture of mental disorder is being dealt with here. Another character Eliot in The harmony of the spheres:East West, states why we lose control of our minds thus:

“A simple biochemical imbalance…” (EW134)

This view is in keeping with what psychologists have to say on the matter, that temporal lobe patients exhibit aggression during the seizure, after which they exhibit amnesia for what occurred during it.
“Lorimer (1972) found evidence for the function of the frontal lobes in aggression … their aggressive behaviors, which included senseless, animalistic acts, were associated with sensory disturbances, gastro-intestinal upset, black-outs…” (AIC 70)

Yet another definition of it is:

“When an uncharacteristic increase of aggression occurs over a relatively short period of month or even a few years and no other apparent factor, such as hormonal or environmental causes, is evident, observers may suspect a brain lesion. This aggression may be characterized by sudden brief periods of intense rage, out of proportion to the initiating stimulus.” (AIC 72)

These definitions would provide some answers to some kinds of rage found in the Novels and Professor Solanka indeed serves as an excellent study on the topic of neurosis. On the slightest Provocation; he would feel a:

“…huge irritation rise up in his breast. He experienced a strong desire to screech at this fellow with the damn-fool alias, to call him names and perhaps actually smack him across the face with an open hand…where was all this anger coming from? Why was he being caught off guard, time and again, by surges of rage that almost overwhelmed his will? (F 36)

We are informed of his “…helpless rage” (F 38). He does not seem to have any control over the rage that overcomes and overwhelms him. Once when he was provoked by a young man, he had to force himself to walk quickly away, and on rounding a corner, he fell back against the wall, trembling with the force of his rage within. It was as if he had to summon all his strength to prevent himself from murdering the young man. This rage seemed to exercise complete control over him and it was not as if he was demented, for it was he himself who was most perplexed by its sudden unheralded emergences and its control over him:

“…what was bubbling inside him defied all explanations. There is within us, he
was being forced to concede, which is capricious and for which the language of explanation is inappropriate. …we fear this in ourselves, our boundary-breaking, rule-disproving, shape-shifting, transgressive, trespassing shadow-self, the true ghost in our machine. Not in the afterlife, or in any improbably immortal sphere, but here on earth the spirit escapes the chains of what we know ourselves to be. It may rise in wrath, inflamed by its captivity, and lay reason’s world to waste.” (F 128-29)

And he was perplexed not only with the vehemence of his anger but also with the blanks in his memory that made him completely oblivious of what occurred during his spells of rage. Once in a restaurant, something he read in the morning paper so exasperated him that he started mouthing invectives and the waitress had to ask him to leave. Being blissfully unaware of what had happened, he had to ask her what he had done to offend her. When this fury gripped him, he could hear “all manner of noise” (F 46) beating against his eardrums, during which he would speak and do unspeakable things of which he had no knowledge whatever, during the act or after, and this made him feel like a helpless hostage in the power of a “terrorist anger” (F 67). He had gone to America in search of peace (silence) but found that the noise that had threatened to destroy his sanity had not only followed him even there but was becoming even louder, as it “was inside him now” (F 47). It was dangerous fury, as he found out in the case of the murder of three beautiful girls, whom he thought he might have killed during the spells that overtook him, which he called: “…the goddamn fury that actually kills (F 70). However, there were three suspects in the grisly murders, the three boyfriends of the three victims, who seemed to be filled with another kind of madness:

“…the fury they could not articulate, born of what they, who had so much, had never been able to acquire: lessness, ordinariness. Real life.” (F 202)

Professor Solanka’s anxiety over if he was the murderer of the three girls is in keeping with “moral anxiety”, one of the three types of psychoanalytic anxiety, which is, anxiety arising
from action in conflict with the super ego and arousing feelings of guilt:

“...the person feels guilty about something he or she has done – either real or Imagined.” (PGB 36)

We also find this instance in The Moor’s Last Sigh in the Moor’s observation of his mother:

“It was one of my mother’s weaknesses that her grief and pain so often came out as anger; it was, in my view, a further weakness that once she had permitted herself the luxury of letting rip, she felt a huge rush of apologetic affection for the people she hurt. As if good feelings could only swell up in her in the aftermath of a ruinous flood of bile.” (MLS 177)

Another such rage is that of Cyrus Cama in The Ground Beneath Her Feet. Ten year old Cyrus hated his younger brother Ormus, and tried to smother him in his crib. As a punishment, he was sent to a strict boarding school and made to stay there all the year round as his parents were embarrassed with this show of apparent mental disturbance, which worsened with his banishment:

“During his early days at the Templars School he had given every sign of being a disturbed child, capable of violence towards his fellow students and also towards members of staff.” (GBF 134)

His mother made it clear to the school authorities that she wanted her son to be ruled with “an iron hand”, after which he was treated severely and punished regularly. He stopped being violent and started hiding behind a façade, charming everyone around him and excelling academically. During one vacation, at the age of fifteen, he smothered six boys in their beds and fled from the school. He then sent a boastful letter to the police, revealing his crime and boasting that he would never be caught by fools like them. He became a compulsive liar, spending a year drifting around, and charming people to their deaths after extracting huge amounts of money from them. As a grown-up, he was:
“…prone to exaggerated mood swings, however, plunging at times into a lightless, cavernous underworld of self loathing (and was) adjudged by the courts to be ‘profoundly disordered, utterly immoral and highly dangerous.’” (GBF 137)

While in one of these moods at the age of sixteen, he surrendered himself to the police after nineteen murders, claiming that he needed to rest, evidently from his killing spree.

We are given hints that some characters might need therapy, as in the case of Prof. Solanka, when Mila admonishes:

“Enough public screaming! Jesus, sometimes you’re scary. Mostly I think you wouldn’t hurt a fly and then suddenly you’re this Godzilla creature from the black lagoon who looks like he could rip the throat off a Tyrannosaurus Rex. You’ve got to bring that thing under control, Malik. Wherever it’s coming from, you need to send it away.” (F 175)

Another character that seems to need this is Jack Rhinehart, an American poet and war correspondent:

“…if woken by a ringing telephone would, to this day, usually smash the instrument to bits. He couldn’t help himself doing it, and was only half awake when it happened. Jack got through a lot of phones, but he accepted his fate. He was damaged, and thought himself lucky it wasn’t worse.” (F 38-39)

Some, like Vina in The Ground Beneath Her Feet, in an attempt to assuage herself of her anger at her father for not being there for her as a child, goes into self-therapy. She:

“…hung a giant pink piñata in the shape of a rabbit from the ceiling fan in her office and handed Vina a wooden stick. As Vina slugged the piñata she was encouraged to say whom she was really hitting out at, and why. She went for it at a vengeance, and Shetty (her father) accordingly heard many painful complaints about himself…the piñata gave way under the force of Vina’s assault and the usual children’s sweets and
fluffy toys tumbled out, all the gifts he had failed to give his daughter when she was a child.” (GBF 493)

Within the more ‘normal’ spectrum, Karen Horney states that people with aggressive personalities regard others as being hostile toward them and they have somehow convinced themselves that only the most competent and cunning survive. So they behave in a manner where they can maintain feelings of control and power over others and thus become hateful and hostile, heaping undue abuses and disparaging remarks on others. They are angry people and rage in whatever form, be it the mythological Fury or psychological aggression is:

“…a behavior that is directed by an organism toward a target, resulting in damage.” (AIC 6)

Thus, it is destructive behavior, but the damage may be either to others or self-inflicting.

“With anger and hostility, there is a tendency to destroy as well as attack – a tendency that may lead to socially disapproved and self-defeating behaviour.” (APM 121)

Boonyi had borne Max Ophuls’ child out of sheer spite but ended up falling in love with the baby. She named her child Kashmira Noman after her husband Shalimar Noman, planning to take her home with her. However, there was more heartbreak in store for her because Peggy Rhodes, Max Ophuls’ now estranged wife, had different plans for her. She named the baby India Ophuls and made the necessary arrangements to take Boonyi home to Pachigam, telling her that it would be unthinkable to take another man’s child home to her husband. So on the small plane that was taking her home, she had to suffer yet another kind of pain:

“…the emptiness in her arms began to feel like an intolerable burden. The weight of her missing child, the cradled void, was too much to bear. Yet it had to be borne.” (SC 217)

This “tendency to destroy as well as attack” leading to socially disapproved behavior abound in the novels. General Raza Hyder could never forget all the years of demeaning treatment which he had received at the hands of Pakistan Prime Minister Isky Harappa nor the day
when he had screamed in his face, splattering his cheeks with spittle. Being related (Isky’s wife Rani Harappa and Razi Hyder being cousins), he dared to reprove him by saying that they were not his servants, and had been slapped hard on his cheek. He warned him that the blush caused by the blow would not fade easily. Neither could he forget his daughter Arjumand Harappa’s stares of unconcealed hatred. So his revenge began when the army under him led a coup and as Chief Martial Law Administrator had Isky taken to the Bagheeragali rest house where he was denied his beloved cigars. Then he got hold of the information that Isky had arranged the murder of his cousin Little Mir Harappa, Minister for Public Works. This new turn of events caused Isky to be kept in solitary confinement in Lahore’s Kot Lakhpat Jail where his health started deteriorating. After a six-month trial at Lahore’s High Court, he along with Mir Harappa’s son and murderer Haroun Harappa were sentenced to be hung till dead. He was then moved into the death-cell at Kot Lakhpat Jail where he refused to lodge an appeal, saying that it would be futile to do so. After being held in captivity for a year and a half, his lawyers persuaded him to appeal and the upshot was that the Supreme Court upheld the death sentence by a split decision and a pardon seemed imminent. Six months later, he was visited in his death cell by Colonel Shuja who required him to sign out a full confession of his crimes for the purpose of a more favourable consideration of clemency. The foul-mouthed Isky was so enraged that he started swearing at the Colonel which stung the latter so much that he shot him through his heart. A fake hanging of the former Prime Minister was conducted at night in the courtyard of the District Jail in the presence of President Raza Hyder, after which the corpse was sent to his ancestral home at Mohenjo. As for Arjumaund Harappa, right after her father was arrested, she was sent to her mother at Mohenjo where for six years they were kept on house-arrest, two before Iskander Harappa’s execution and four after it. Raza Hyder’s destruction of the Harappas was indeed complete.
On the whole, psychology tells us that man is aggressive by nature and is capable of aggression, though all of us are not necessarily aggressive.

“...hate and aggression often seem to arise from a combination of forces. Most basically, there does seem to be an innate capacity for hate and aggression...And specific parts of the brain are central to rage. The evidence supports the idea that we have a capacity but not an inevitability for hate and aggression in our natures.” (PCM 494)

So, if some are more aggressive than others, what would be the other factors apart from pathological reasons underlying such behavior? John W. Renfrew in Aggression and its Causes – A Biopsychosocial Approach (1997) states that:

“Aggression is a behavior affected by multiple influences.” (AIC 4)

Accordingly, a very important cause for aggression is frustration, and the hypothesis called the frustration-aggression hypothesis by the psychologists Miller and Dollard (1941) states that:

“...aggression is a logical and expected consequence of frustration, its purpose being to remove or destroy the obstacle to need-gratification.” (APM 627)

A study on behavior psychology in Personality Classic Theories and Modern Research (2004) also supports this view thus:

“...aggression is always the result of blocking, or frustrating, an individual’s efforts to attain a goal.” (PCM 222)

Frustration is defined as “prevent (a plan or action) from progressing, succeeding, or being fulfilled, prevent (someone) from doing or achieving something, cause to feel dissatisfied or unfulfilled”. It has its origin in Latin frustrat-, frustrare ‘disappoint’, from frustra ‘in vain’. Frustrated individuals abound in the novels, and they end up with either having aggressive feelings or committing aggressive acts. In Midnight’s Children, Salim’s parents and
grandmother expected great things of him, but contrary to their expectations, he turned out to be mediocre. Frustrated, he felt that his parents were demanding of him a sort of repayment for their investment in him, which gave rise to:

‘…a blind, lunging fury...” (MC 457)

This tendency is stated thus:

“Frustrating conditions often elicit anger accompanied by a tendency to attack and remove the obstacle to one’s goals.” (APM 120)

Haroun was so frustrated when his mother left his father for another man that when he heard his father sounding pathetic over his loss of the art of story-telling, he lost his temper and cruelly demanded the necessity of telling stories that weren’t even true. Frustration can take on many forms as when the ‘Reverend Mother’ Naseem’s son Hanif committed suicide, and “disappointed fury” (MC 327) made her blame his wife Pia for it. Padma fell into an “outlandish” rage (MC 141) at Saleem’s written statement in his novel that she loved him:

“‘Love you?’ Our Padma piped scornfully, ‘What for, my God? What good are you, little Princeling,’ – and now came her attempted coup-de-grace – ‘as a lover?’” (MC 143)

This, because he was unable to satiate her sexually, which left her frustrated. She scornfully asked him for what reason she could possibly love him, implicitly stating that he was no good as a lover, having been castrated when the children of midnight were arrested during the Emergency. In Fury, Neela Mahindra left Prof Malik to join the revolution of her people because his wife and ex-lover had stampeded into their bedroom and she discovered that she was not the only woman in his life. Boonyi Kaul was frustrated with her husband Shalimar, for not trying to rescue her from the arms of her lover. So she railed against him to Max Ophuls, who not knowing that her anger was directed at Shalimar found it moving when she castigated Kashmir for being cowardly and remaining passive:

“…in the face of the horrible crimes committed against him.” (SC 197)
And when she returned home and discovered that she had been officially ‘killed’ by her family and her father taught her how to live her life as a dead person on the hill, negating her personal feelings, the frustration caused sudden rage to flare up in her. Frustration can be caused from a fall from authority as seen in the matriarch Epifania da Gama when her daughter-in-law Belle took over the reins of power in the household. Belle brought about changes in the family’s non-vegetarian diet which caused Epifania to rant and rave:

“Don’t think-o for two secs I will cut out chicken in this house because your little chickie, that little floozy-fantoozy, wants you to eat beggar-people’s food.” (MLS 24)

Hostile aggression resulting from pent-up frustration over unjust treatment is also rampant in the form of riots.

Failure, loss, personal limitations, lack of resources, guilt, loneliness and value conflicts constitute important causes of stress and multiple influences are responsible for aggressive behavior such as biological, psycho-social and socio-cultural conditions.

Ormus Cama blamed Persis Kalamanja for Vina’s departure from Bombay and not only hated her for his loss, but also despised her and treated her as if she did not exist.

Being slighted can fill a person with the kind of hatred that Felicitas informed the Moor about – the kind of hatred that “burns up the soul.” (MLS 400). When Flapping Eagle suffered ‘dimension fever’ for the first time, he was enraged for “having been kept in ignorance” (G 69).

That pride causes rage is clearly evident in Maulana Dawood, ‘the local divine’- who was accidentally garlanded the shoe garland meant for Omar Khayyam as he emerged from his home for the first time, which caused him to throw back his head and ‘roar’. Naveed Hyder looked down her nose at her elder sister Sufiys Zinobia, calling her “Thing” (S 136), and demanding to know who would be willing to marry her even if she had been endowed with brains. Epifania da Gama had been lording over her home and her rage when she learned of her husband’s will that made her dependent upon the goodwill of her sons was a wonder to behold, for she: “wept, tore her hair, pounded her tiny bosom, and ground her teeth” (MLS
Another proud mother, Lady Spenta, on hearing that her son had fallen for the penniless Vina: “flew into a pop-eyed rage” (GBF 143).

In “nostalgic rage” (MC 129) we have Doctor Aziz discovering that the perforated sheet through which he had examined his wife was moth eaten, and he fell in a rage at her for not having taken care towards its preservation. Rai on waking up after a dream of being with dead Vina was filled with a murderous rage, ready to rip out the heart of the person who was responsible for their present state.

Loss of faith can have frightening consequences as when Ilfredis Wing, who had lost her faith after her husband’s desertion reserved “her wrath only for god” (GBF 442).

Loss of trust is an important factor in causing aggressive acts. Aurora Zogoiby punished her husband for having promised his mother their firstborn son in exchange for her treasure chest that he needed to rebuild their spice business. On discovering this secret pact, she bolted herself in their bedroom, sleeping alone for four years while waiting out the death of his mother Flory Zogoiby.

Hatred can also germinate from a dying marital love, as seen in the fight between Ameer Merchant and her husband, who at dawn, still walked in circles in her living room, getting angrier by the minute:

“…stirring up the most poisonous of all rages, the wrath churned in the body by the thrashings of dying love.” (GBF 166)

It was indeed poisonous, as it drove away Vina Apsara forever from them.

There is also the increasing anger of “father-fixated Mila” (F 225) who might have been sexually exploited by him, albeit willingly, and as a result, seeks out father-figures for lovers.

Jealousy, envy and possessiveness are all closely related and can lead to rage and aggressive acts. When Lady Man Bai learned that her fiancé still craved physically for her former slave Mohini, she was so angry that: “an ugly suppurating boil” (TEF 201) was
formed on her psyche. She “raged with jealousy” (TEF 63) which caused her to be expelled from the household. When a young man attempted to compliment Neela Mahindra on her beauty as she walked by Prof. Solanka’s side: “a great roaring” (F 147) rose inside him and he almost killed the young man. Akbar’s concubines’ were jealous of his imaginary wife Jodhabai and resented her because they felt that:

“The emperor had put her together, they fumed, by stealing bits of them all…They hated her for her theft of their histories. If they could have murdered her they would have done so, but until the emperor tired of her, or died himself, she was immortal.”

(TEF 46)

They hated her to the extent of wanting to murder her, but since it was impossible to murder a non-existent person, they spent their days fuming over it. Umeed Merchant a.k.a. Rai raged at having to play second-fiddle¹ to Ormus Cama who was married to Vina Apsara, the love of his life:

“My rising anger informed me of a truth I had thoroughly suppressed: viz., that I still entertained hopes of having her all to myself.” (GBF 430)

Jealousy can also take filial forms as when Crown Prince Salim loathed Vespucci for having won the favour of not only his father the Emperor Akbar but of the public as well. Prince Amlethus at a tender age of seven hated Ophelia, the court jester Yorick’s wife, in part because she had replaced him in Yorick’s affections. Haroun on confronting the Cultmaster, in whom he saw Mr Sengupta, the man who had lured away his mother shook with “anger and other emotions…” (HSS 155)

Among other factors of aggression is the use of alcohol which:

“results in a loss of inhibitions…producing abnormally lower frequencies and sometimes episodes of behavioral dyscontrol.” (AIC 94)

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¹ Rai and Vina continued being lovers even after she married Ormus.
Professor Solanka’s nightmarish drunken stupors continued when after a drinking session, he drove his friends home during a heavy downpour. He was driving on the wrong side of the road, and was corrected by his friend Jack Rhinehart which so incensed him that he stopped the car and made him walk home in the rain. The next morning he had no remembrance of what had happened.

Aggression can also be hereditary as seen in Ameer Merchant who was married to a mild-tempered man but found that the gentlest of reproofs from him would unleash in her the most destructive of tantrums “not at all unlike her dead father’s rage” (GBF 81). Her father died of anger at the age of forty-three and she had inherited his rage. Fromm on the other hand advocates non biological determinants of hate though he accepts the fact that the capacity for violence can be a biological heritage. And though he also accepts the view that a person can suffer lifelong problems if childhood drives are not channeled properly, he blames as the cause of aggression an empty society where it has become difficult for an individual to find meaning. This is clearly demonstrated in the life of Boonyi Kaul in Shalimar the Clown. She railed at Ophuls, accusing him of turning her beauty into the mass of fat that she had become, her anger born of the defeat of her dreams. She had taken after her dead mother Pamposh Kaul, who had been born way ahead of the times she was living in, who loved to talk about forbidden topics like sex and women emancipation. Her dead mother visited her in her dreams and taught her that a woman should make her own choices without caring for others’ opinion and should live to please herself and not her husband. So she was not content with dancing the Anarkali dance for the dance troupe of Panchigam and the bargain that she struck with Max Ophuls was her body in exchange for a famous teacher to teach her dancing, a good education as well as a respectable house to live in. In short, she had traded her body for a widening of her horizons. But things did not turn out the way she planned and the dancing teacher of the Odissi dance form after a few lessons refused to teach her any further on grounds that she did not possess potential. Moreover, he despised her for being a kept
woman and resented the money he received from her lover, refusing to be bribed any further. The dance master’s deprecatory remarks about her in turn caused Max Ophuls’ attention to wander and his interest in her started waning, his visits becoming less frequent. Trapped thus in her own captivity for two years and filled with self-loathing, she took recourse to gluttony and addiction of all sorts, becoming obese and losing not only her beauty but also her lover’s rare visits altogether. Her rage, though targeted at Max Ophuls, turned out to be more self-destructive and it took her a long time to be cured of her withdrawal symptoms. Even after she regained something of her former self, backaches, varicose veins, loose skin, discolored teeth, and occasional spells of arrhythmia remained with her for the rest of her short and tragically terminated life.

Besides the influence of family and peer-group models, the modern socio-cultural environment also play a large role in influencing aggression. Classic and operant and social learning theories of hate state that an individual acquires aggressive behavior through the same mechanisms as all other forms of behavior. They advocate that a person growing up in a hateful environment becomes hateful and vice versa. If a boy was beaten regularly by bigger boys, he would grow up hating people who were larger than him and would be more easily provoked by them than by men his own size or those smaller than him. This is called:

“…a conditioned stimulus for aggression.” (AIC 126)

Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, belonging to the Humanistic School who appreciate the spiritual dimension of a person explain hate as not being a basic part of people’s personalities. They insist that it is a result of:

“…experiencing a deficient environment. In a world without child abuse, poverty, divorce, and discrimination, the incidence of children growing into hating adults presumably would plummet.” (PCM 489)

Behavior psychologist Watson’s statement that a child is a blank state and can be moulded in any way one wants, which espouses the view that environment is key to a person’s
personality and which proclamation also automatically challenges Freud’s notions of the
sexual basis of personality runs thus:

“Give me a dozen healthy infants, and my own specific world to bring them up in and
I’ll guarantee to take anyone at random and train him... to be anything, from a doctor
or lawyer to a beggar or thief, regardless of his talents, color, inclinations, or
whatever.” (APM 208)

B.F. Skinner, another eminent behaviorist claimed that his adult personality was shaped by his
childhood reinforcements.

An important influence today is the mass media where young people are exposed to
all manner of aggressive behavior in the television and films, and violence is the standard fare
in reading materials. John W. Renfrew adds:

“Social psychologists usually recognize the role of stressful environmental events
as contributors to aggression.” (AIC 108)

Religious sentiments play a prominent role in the ‘stressful environmental events’ that cause
aggression. Gopinath Razdan a Brahmin, spied on Shalimar’s and Boonyi’s love-making and
reported the matter to the Panchayat, in anticipation of a punishment for forbidden love
between a Muslim boy and a Hindu girl. Six months later, he was found murdered in a
meadow with his head blown off by a home-made bomb and his head severed from his torso.
Religious rage resulted in the bombing of Mahmoud the Woman’s picture theatre where he
was blasted to shreds, because he made the fatal mistake of booking a double bill to show
what he thought of the partition – cowboys feasting on steaks and a hero liberating cows. As
regards the author of the bombing:

“Don’t ask who planted the bomb; in those days there were many such planters,
many gardeners of violence. Perhaps it was even a one-godly bomb...” (S 63)

All over India and Pakistan temples were being “smashed up” (MLS 365) and Piloo
Doodhwalla shrieked at his wife, Golmatol over the disrespect shown to cows: “a person
should not squeeze the titties of a goddess...” (GBF 115). Zainab Ainam’s anger at Max
Ophuls was hinted as being the immediate cause of his murder because she had reported the matter to his murderer Shalimar the Clown. In a talk show he had spoken on the fall of paradise in the form of Kashmir and had vehemently criticized both Hindus and Muslims for it. But in the heavily truncated message that he later watched with Zainab Ainam in his room, his message had become biased towards Hindus, causing “the rage of religion” (SC 29) to swell up in her. She had quivered with rage and their relationship had been rendered irreparable.

Rage in all its form being rampant, ‘political rage’ also had its fair share in the rage market. Indira Gandhi “endowed Sanjay with a lifetime’s supply of rage” (GBF 282). India was angry (MC 491), and America was “raging” (GBF 379). This political rage was “group fury, born of long injustice” (F 193). Yet another kind of fury was ‘Sexual fury’ - (F 202) which led to the murder of ‘Sky, the vampire queen’. There was still yet a “work rage” as when “Malik Solanka lost himself in the ecstasy, the furia of the work” (F 226).

There is also the rage of being born different, and Fanon talks about subject/object – the identity of the ‘other’, and states that colonialism can be destroyed only when this way of thinking about identity is successfully challenged. In Midnight’s Children, it is seen that resentment of this self-identification has far-reaching consequences. Shiva had led a life of poverty, and his hatred was born of a sense of not belonging, of identifying himself as the ‘other’ of the elite society in which he moves later on in life, who secretly despises him for his lack of table manners. He feels “an old violence being renewed in him, a hatred for these high ups and their power…” (MC 489). In the same way, Aadam Aziz, on his return from Germany to Kashmir, keenly felt the barbs of the boatman Tai’s hostility and resentment at his foreign medical degree and German bag. All of a sudden, he felt ‘enclosed’ – a feeling of suffocation, for he had inadvertently become ‘the other’ in his native land. Added to this was how the attitude opened up his eyes to the ‘narrowness’ of the reception that awaited him,
which saddened him, and ‘home’ stopped feeling quite like home. It was rather like an alien
and hostile environment, which created an emptiness inside him, to be later on “...clogged up
with hate” (MC 5). Being on the other side of the fence, Piloo Doodhwala hated Umeed
Merchant and his family for belonging to the upper strata of society, and Joseph D’Costa
nursed a lifelong “virulent hatred of the rich” (MC 121). The Shakil sisters were so unlike
other women that their son Omar Khayyam Shakil despised them for it, hating them:

“…for their closeness, for the way they sat with arms entwined on their swinging,
creaking seat, for their tendency to lapse giggling into the private languages of their
childhood, for their way of hugging each other, of putting their three heads together
and whispering about whoknowswhat, or finishing one another’s sentences.” (S 35)

Omar Khayyam himself was considered unholy, so when he asked for Sufiya’s hand in
marriage, Maulana Dawood “let out a scream that made Raza Hyder look around for
demons” (S 159).

Being born ‘the wrong sex’ or giving birth to it in a patriarchal society can also ignite
rage. Bilquis hated her daughter, Sufiya Zinobia, because she had promised a son to her
husband and the baby girl had turned out to be a miracle-gone-wrong, which greatly
infuriated her husband. The failure to give birth to a male heir was a matter of ‘shame’ and
when Sufiya was reported to have contracted a fever at the age of two which damaged her
brain, it is subtly stated that the ‘fever’ could have been “a lie, a fragment of Bilquis Hyder’s
imagination, intended to cover up the damage done by repeated blows to the head: hate can
turn a miracle-gone-wrong into a basket case” (S 116). Arjumand Harappa, despising her sex,
tried her best to hide her attractive figure behind men’s clothing and had at the tender age of
thirteen, developed “a gift for loathing” (S 126). She idolized her father and hated Shakil,
holding him responsible for his debauched way of life. She also hated her mother, Rani
Harappa, for leading a defeated life in their ancestral home, embroidering shawls depicting
her husband’s activities.

In a study conducted on American children Eron et al. (1974) found that parents were important determinants in whether their children grew up to be aggressive or not. A parent who always punished his child physically was bound to produce a hostile, disobedient, and destructive child, because he had himself in the first place served as a model for the child, showing him that it was the best way to deal with any situation that cropped up. And it was found that such types of children shared a similar pattern of family setting where they found themselves rejected and were treated harshly. In some cases the children were found to be living with a step-parent and even if that was not the case, the fault lay in that their parents were in some way incapacitated in giving them the love and care they needed for developing a healthy psyche. Haroun Harrappa’s lifelong feelings of hatred for his father began when his father committed the mistake of giving him a parcelled-up long-haired collie puppy for his tenth birthday. Being an only child and having been raised without a mother, he became an introvert and loved solitude. So his surly manner of receiving the gift vexed his stern authoritarian father, and when after a few days it became clear that Haroun had no intention of looking after the dog, it irritated him even further. He mulishly gave orders to the servants not to feed or bathe the dog and ordered his son to take care of it. Haroun paid no heed to the order and the poor dog had to forage for its own food, contracting disease and eventually death. Even after this, Mir ordered his son to bury the dead dog upon which the boy immediately walked away from it, leaving it to decompose as it pleased. From that moment on, Haroun never stopped associating the stench of the rotting dog with his father and all his later attempts for reconciliation failed as miserably as his attempt to make him love the dog. All his deeds were attempts to hurt and harm his detested father and he finally murdered him with the help of his uncle Iskander Harappa. During the first few months of Iskander’s reign, Mir was found disemboweled and hung above the very spot where the dog had been allowed to decompose. Freud theorized that all future behavior is the result of childhood experiences and Karen Horney also states that a person’s experiences in childhood determine whether or
not that individual grows up hateful. She strongly argues that in order to avoid becoming an aggressive adult, children should feel safe during childhood. She states that a child’s security is undermined if his parents repeatedly embarrass or shame him and dole out undue punishment over an extended period of time. This causes him to be deprived of feelings of safety and he grows up to be a neurotic adult:

“Repressed anxiety becomes basic anxiety, and neurosis.” (PCM 485)

Horney states that the child thus reared would resort to self-protective measures. He would adopt a superior stance over others as a means of achieving power and establishing his much craved-for superiority, an effective mechanism of counteracting feelings of inferiority or impotence. The personality characteristics that thus evolved were named ‘neurotic trends’ by Horney and the hostile trend that evolved among others came to be specified as an aggressive personality. Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin who became ruthless in his dealings of others had as a child suffered savage thrashings at the hands of his drunken father (PCM 486).

“Neo-analysts see hate as arising from improper channeling of drives and from failures to resolve the conflicts of childhood.” (PCM 487)

Children like Haroun Harappa who are exposed to trauma, especially repeated ones, are likely to grow up as disturbed individuals due to a disruption in personality development. It is said to be so harmful that such detrimental effects are never really obliterated even if they continue their lives in a completely different scenario. Traumas experienced late in life are said to have a lesser impact for the simple reason that in adults critical evaluation, reflection, and self-defenses have been fully developed. So no amount of subsequent experiences can really heal the psychological wounds inflicted by early psychic traumas. This would explain why a particular individual finds a particular situation stressful, and he himself could be unaware of why a particular situation triggered off or reactivated negative responses in him.

In Virgil’s diary was an account of how Grimus had built Calf Island. Virgil, a gravedigger, had unearthed a geometric rose of stone, about the height of a man. When he touched it, his head swirled and he had strange visions, after which he fainted. He fled from the scene and
told his friend Deggle about it who also experienced the same strange sensations for himself. Scared, the two friends got ready to leave the cemetery when a man carrying a dead bird approached them. Seeing their fright, he asked them what was wrong and he immediately became interested in what they had to tell him. He, however, did not suffer from the fainting spells as the others did and he invited them to his home for further discussions on the strange thing which had been unearthed. Shortly later, he reappeared at the cemetery with a coffin into which the three of them placed the Stone Rose and took it to his home. It turned out that he was fascinated by mythical birds and he seemed to have been widely-travelled and very knowledgeable. His own name ‘Grimus’ had been derived from a mythical bird: the Simurg. Wanting to know the power of the ‘Rose’, he grasped it and cried out in pain, after which he vanished into thin air. When he reappeared, he was delighted, and made his two friends try out the same feat. They found that the rose had the power to transport them to another planet which contained higher forms of life. On one such of their “Conceptual Travels” (G 210), Grimus emerged with two potions – a yellow potion for eternal life, and a blue one for eternal death. He suggested to the others that they grant themselves eternal life and choose recipients for it, such as those who were talented and loved life. Then they would build a place where they could retire after being tired of the real world. When Deggle objected to playing god, Grimus became angry and demanded to know if Deggle preferred to hand over the Rose to the authorities. His voice was:

“… filled with a bitterness and hatred for authority that must spring from some awful experience in his past, before he became Grimus the birdman.” (G 211)

Freud would heartily agree with the statement “some awful experience in his past” because he:

“…stressed the importance of early childhood experiences on adult personality. This assumption has been almost completely accepted in scientific circles as well as
popular culture. There are few who now doubt that neglectful or abusive treatment of young children – especially sexual abuse – can produce devastating impacts throughout their lives. Freud also argued that the essence of personality was formed by age five.” (PCM 95)

Added to this is the support of later phases of psychology:

“It is held that the significance of any given mental process is not completely known unless the full genesis of it is also known…The most advanced school of clinical psychology, following Freud, carries this genetic principle to its logical conclusion and maintains that all our later reactions in life are really elaborations of simpler ones acquired in the nursery.” (PMPH 117-18)

So, according to this theory, Grimus as a child must have been beaten, punished and driven to despair by his parents or teachers, and thus his aversion to authority. In the same way, in Midnight’s Children, Salim’s sister nicknamed ‘The Brass Monkey’:

“…was never so furious as when anyone spoke to her in words of love.” (MC 179)

And:

“…the soft words of lovers roused in her an almost animal rage.” (MC 219)

Throughout her childhood, she had had to live in her younger brother’s shadow, the boy born at Midnight, who had received the Prime Minister’s letter of congratulation at having succeeded in entering the world at the precise moment when the clock joined its hands together to herald the birth of a new Nation. She, on the other hand, had been compelled to take the back seat and watch her brother coddled and worshipped, and had neither received her parents’ attention nor that of anyone who really mattered. In The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Vina’s rage is also attributed to have been caused by a traumatic childhood:

“If we are to understand Vina’s rage, which drove her art and damaged her life, we must try to imagine what she would not tell us, the myriad petty cruelties of the unjust relations, the absence of fairy godmothers and glass slippers, the impossibility
Her name was Nissa Shetty, and she was the middle of three sisters. Her mother Helen was a Greek-American and her father was an Indian lawyer who was imprisoned for malpractice, where he happened to fall in love with another male. Her mother started drinking and taking pills, finding it impossible to hold a job and drowning in debt. She was rescued from the gutter by a builder called Joe Poe with four children of his own who took them all to his home which was a small shack in a cornfield in Virginia. Thus, three year old Nissa became Nissy Poe and she grew up hating goats. The family reared goats and they drank goat milk, ate goat meat and listened to goat jokes told by John Poe. Nissy was a problem child at school and bit her friends for which she had to be belted by her step-father. The other children called her “Blackfoot Indian” (GBF 105) or “goatgirl” and because as an Indian she was allowed to ride on the school bus for whites, three Spanish speaking black boys jeered at her calling her family “cabritos” and herself the child of a “cabronito”. When she found out that “cabritos” meant a kid goat and “cabronito” a small homosexual, she beat them all up in the presence of their father. The teasing at school continued and she fought back as best as she could, while her mother forever pleaded with the authorities to allow her to stay on. When she was ten, her mother took her to a wooded hollow called Jefferson Lick and advised her to have a dream and hold on to it in spite of everything else. From that moment onwards, Nissy started spending all her leisure hours there where she would sing her heart out. One day, she fell asleep after singing and woke up in the darkness. When she reached home, she found all her siblings, John Poe as well as the goats dead and her mother hanging in the shed and the murder weapon, a large kitchen knife, on the ground just below her dangling corpse. She then lived with her mother’s relatives, the Egiphtuses in western New York and they renamed her Diana Egiphtus. Her aunt Mrs Marion Egiphtus did not treat her well and her cousins tried to have sex with her and so her delinquency continued. When finally her aunt refused to have her anymore, her father Butcher Shetty took charge and sent her to live with his rich relatives the Doodhwallas of Bombay. Even here she was mistreated and often had to
go hungry, and when at the age of twelve, Piloo Doodhwalla found out that she was in love with Ormus Cama, he showed her no mercy and drove her out in the rain. She then stayed with other relatives - the Merchants, and finally found a mother in Ameer Merchant who had no daughter of her own. It was during this period that she named herself Vina Apsara. Ameer had wanted her to preserve her virginity till she was properly married which rule Vina broke on her sixteenth birthday and it enraged Ameer so much that she said things which drove Vina to leave India. Ironically, the ill treatment that Vina received from the Egiptuses and Doodhwallas meant little to her and did not leave any lasting impression on her. It was rather the pain she received in the form of harsh words from the only person whom she had grown to love as a mother that hurt her most and from which she never recovered. It was this rage that not only ‘drove her art’ and made her a great singer but also damaged her life for good. Omar Khayyam Shakil in *Shame* also:

“… developed pronounced misogynist tendencies at an early age. – That all his subsequent dealings with women were acts of revenge against the memory of his mothers.” (S 40)

He was considered an abomination and a freak by the outside world, for being the offspring of a British sahib (identity not known thereafter) and three weird mothers who all professed as well as appeared to have borne and given birth to him, all three of them even being able to breastfeed him¹. Sequestered in his three mothers’ palatial but crumbling stone house, with nothing but rats and spiders for playmates in the better part of his childhood, he grew up hating them as well as their their walled-up house called ‘Nishapur’. As a young man, he became unable neither to have a lasting nor an emotional relationship with the women who came his way and ended up with never having a wife in the real sense of the term. Those he bedded, he wouldn’t consider marrying, and the one he finally did wed, he couldn’t think of

¹ An example of Rushdie’s magic realist device.
sleeping with, at first, because her maid Shahbanou wouldn’t allow it, and later, because she had turned into a beast. His ‘wife’ Sufiya Zinobia, more of a nut case, also had her psychological reasons for becoming what she became – a beast. As the idiot daughter of General Raza Hyder, she was the ‘shame’ of her mother Bilquis and the recipient of her verbal abuses. So when at the age of twelve, she sleep-walked and ripped off the heads of 218 turkeys, drawing out their intestines through their throats with her bare hands, the author defends her thus:

“…what happened happened because twelve years of unloved humiliation take their toll, even on an idiot, and there is always a point at which something breaks, even though the last straw cannot be identified with any certainty.” (S 138)

As she grew older, her medications proved to become ineffective and the beast or ‘Inner Dimension’ in her threatened to take over:

“In the depths of the ocean the sea-Beast stirs. Swelling slowly, feeding on inadequacy, guilt, shame, bloating towards the surface.” (S 218)

In *Fury*, Neela Mahindra divined the cause of the fury within Prof. Malik Solanka:

“No interest. Why? The answer must be: more scars. Malik, I think you’ve been in more accidents than me, and maybe you were even more badly hurt somewhere along the line.” (F 160)

She had, unwittingly, nailed his problem, because “somewhere along the line” was when he was a child and his pervert stepfather had insisted on dressing him up as a girl and he had had to play with dolls. His weak mother had been cajoled by her husband to take long walks, telling her that it would be good for her wheezes and coughs, during which the boy was sexually abused. The pushes would come on top of his head, as a result of which he was never able to bear a woman’s hand on top of his head. He himself was afraid of what he might not do to a woman if she happened to touch him on his head, and asked himself:

What if Neela made him angry? What if in a moment of passion she touched the top
of his head? (F 181)

In psychology, displacement activity is described as “an irrelevant activity that is engaged upon when a conflict between antagonistic urges cannot be resolved (e.g. head-scratching when confused)”. So, another cause of aggression is displaced rage, which is also being engaged in an irrelevant activity of targeting one’s anger at someone in the absence of the real cause of one’s anger. Vina Apsara raves at Umeed Merchant a.k.a Rai, letting fly ‘vindictive remarks’ (GBF 344), thereby releasing the pain and anger she feels at his mother Ameer who drove her away from their home and India with her cruel remarks. In turn, Rai who identified Vina Apsara with his dead mother could not remain angry with her because she reminded him of his unresolved quarrel with his mother, his unjust accusations that added to her misery. In the same breath, he rants at her the way he would at his mother. Bilquis Hyder was well aware that her second pregnancy was showing much earlier than it was supposed to, having conceived during one of her husband’s long military campaigns. So when during a house party at Mohenjo, Omar Khayyam Shakil’s tongue had been loosened by too much drink and he was in the midst of trying to impress a young starlet named Zehra, he talked loudly about how Isky Harappa had done Bilquis a favour by winning over Pinkie Aurangzeb from her husband Raza Hyder or else she would have had to be content with babies in her otherwise empty bed. So, her act of flying into a rage where she completely forgot herself and shrieked out her husband’s name in the presence of others could have been an attempt to:

“…transfer her own guilt onto the shoulders of a husband whose probity was now also the subject of gossip?” (S 109)

Guilt as a causal factor of rage is also demonstrated when Saleem needed a blood transfusion, and it was detected that he could not be the biological child of his parents due to the rhesus factor. His father had ascribed this to his wife’s infidelity and their marital relations became strained. But when Mary finally revealed that she had switched tags at Saleem’s birth, guilt
for having doubted his wife enveloped him in a peculiar manner and he was “seized by an indescribable rage” and “ranted at her for hours within the shocked hearing of her family” (MC 340) which led to their estrangement.

Rage, in whatever form, has one thing in common, which is that they all cry for revenge. Umeed Merchant in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* sums it up thus:

“I’ve been reading a book about anger. It says that anger is evidence of our idealism. Something has gone wrong, but we ‘know’ in our rage, that things could be different. It shouldn’t be this way. Anger is an inarticulate theory of justice, which when you act it out, is called revenge.” (GBF 344)

The love-starved young prince Amlethus who waited in his parents’ bedroom to receive a goodnight kiss from his mother, hid when his parents entered the room and thinking that his father King Horwendilllus was bent on murdering his mother when he saw him atop her sobbing and flailing self interrupted the act and received a hearty thrashing which was, “…A curious sort of thrashing, for it beats something into the prince’s hide, - whereas the nature of most punishment is to beat an evil out. What’s beaten in? Why, hatred: and dark dreams of revenge” (Yorick:EW 76). And so he formulated a plan to use the jester as his tool for revenge. Boonyi’s act of vengeance on Ophuls was to bear his child by pretending to swallow the birth pills that were given her, her purpose being to let his seed grow inside her bloated body as punishment for having destroyed her beauty. India Ophuls had spent her whole life without a mother because both her father and Peggy Rhodes told her that she was dead. Then when her father died, Peggy paid her a visit and gave her Boonyi’s photograph, telling her that she didn’t die as they had stated. India immediately went to Delhi and was not to be put off when people warned her that going to Kashmir with a documentary film crew would be dangerous as there was “fury in the air, she exploded with rage herself” (SC 356). There she discovered that her mother had continued to live for a long time as a recluse in the hills to be out of sight of the people whom she had dishonoured by becoming her father’s mistress, and
that it was her ex-husband Shalimar who had ended her life. She visited Boonyi’s hut and passed out. Back home, her desire for revenge rendered her, in her own words, “not fit for human company” (SC 380) and “She no longer lived in America because she now lived in a combat zone” (SC 382). All her attempts to pick up the threads of life before her father’s murder proved utterly futile. She found it impossible to continue her work on the documentary that she was trying to produce, and when her friends forced her to have dinner with a nice young model, she agreed but fled from the scene before it was over. Leaving her apartment, she started living in her father’s house ‘Mulholland Drive’, where she was heavily guarded day in and out. For months she kept to herself, her only obsession being keeping herself fit for the showdown with Shalimar which she knew was ahead of her. She swam, exercised, worked out, and played tennis within the premises, only leaving it for her boxing, archery and shooting classes. Haroun Harappa harboured a “profound and undying hatred” (S148) for his father, a hatred born out of his father’s rash and thoughtless treatment of him as a boy. In order to take revenge on his detested father, he became habitually intoxicated and castigated Army rule in the hope of jeopardizing his father’s political position even though he secretly despised his own words. He spoke and wrote:

“…with all the enthusiastic garrulity of one who despises every word he is saying, but hopes that it will wound his even more detested parent.” (S 149)

Miss Jaya He the maid was also a: “…woman so deeply angry at her lot in life that she had become capable of the most bizarre revenges” (MLS 197). Antoinette Corinth, the wife of Mull Standish had such an air of vindictiveness about her that even though Ormus had done nothing to merit her anger, he felt “physically endangered” (GBF 284). When she drugged her sons’ drink which caused a fatal accident, her shocked husband told her that he had thought it beyond her to do such a thing. He told her that he found it difficult to imagine the proportion and length of the hatred she must have felt for him so as to culminate in the
murdering of their children in order to spite him: “It’s like something out of a book” (GBF 311) and rightly said because it resembled Prokne who murdered their son Itylos and served him to her husband Tereus at a banquet as revenge for having raped and cut off her sister Philomele’s tongue. Mohini the Skeleton, who had once been Lady Man Bai’s favourite slave, hated her former mistress for driving her away from the palace and vowed that if fate ever brought her into her power, she would “smear her with a paste so powerful that even the jackals will come to fuck her…” (TEF 63). Peggy Rhodes’ was so angry at her philandering husband that she vowed to have her revenge on him and bided her time, which came sooner than expected during his ambassadorship in India when his Kashmiri mistress became pregnant. In the scandal that followed, her husband had to leave hurriedly and she lagged behind, waiting for the birth of the child and adopting it as her own. She then left him, keeping the child to herself, and forcing him to relinquish all parental rights. She had her revenge on both father and child by making the girl grow wild, content with putting her in the care of many short-lived nannies. At the age of seven she turned into a problem child which ended in juvenile delinquency at the age of fifteen, when her father finally decided to intervene and took her to live with him. Abraham Zogoiby’s rage at his wife Aurora’s infidelity: “still twisted in his gut” (MLS 362) and his son the Moor later had to ask himself whether his father, in his “jealous rage” (MLS 418) had killed her himself and had twisted his son’s mind and driven him to kill her ex-lover. When he heard that his mother was having an affair, he felt that maybe it was also her way of getting revenge on her husband’s infidelity. After the birth of three daughters, Aurora found out in her husband Abraham’s sleep-babblings that he was sampling the ‘goods he was importing from down south’ (MLS 222) – his so called “temple girls”. So she moved out of his bedroom and they slept in separate rooms. Then when he almost died from stroke, they made a last reconciliatory attempt and Aurora conceived their last child, the Moor. However, the deformed club-like right fist of their only son as well as the super fast speed of his growth seemed to symbolize their stunted
love and they drifted apart again. Not wanting to voice the hurt she felt over his infidelities, she took recourse to bedding other men, even coarse ones. The Duchess of Florence, Filiberta hated Qara Koz for having her husband’s attention, even though it was unwanted on the latter’s part, and in her helpless rage smashed the invaluable magic mirror with a silver-backed hairbrush, which was of value only to herself. Arjumand Harappa’s only love was her cousin Haroun Harappa, because he resembled her father as a young man, but because she never let it out, he set his sights on her cousin ‘Good News’ Naveed Hyder, and: “her rage in the days after his betrothal was awful to behold” (S 157). She spent her days looking at her reflection in a mirror and mouthing curses, and could not forgive Naveed even after the engagement broke off and she was married to someone else. So although the union never occurred, she took revenge on her cousin by keeping:

“…herself informed of her enemy’s decline.” (S 207)

Oliver D’Aeth, had his revenge on Aurora by leading her uncle Aires da Gama and his wife Carmen to where she was spending the night with Zogoiby after their secret nuptial. Mila Milo took revenge on Professor Solanka for breaking off their relationship by revealing what they used to do during their afternoon sessions in his room to her boy-friend Eddie Ford. Eddie then stole her keys to the Professor’s apartment and barged in one night with a knife in hand, intent on murder. Eddie Ford, pacing back and forth at the foot of his bed told him that he had to pay for having fooled around with something that didn’t belong to him. He even based it on the Scriptures, seeing himself as an avenging angel:

“…the way I see it the fuckin’ wrong-doer shall be punished. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.” (F 230)

Saleem as a young boy fought the infidelity of his perfidious mother as well as that of his aunt Pia. He hated his mother for her secret meetings with her ex-husband Nadir Khan and also resented Homi Catrack the film magnate who had exploited his starlet aunt, the wife of his uncle. When he left her for another woman who was yet another man’s wife, the amount
of infidelity he saw around him filled him with so much anger that it drove him to do:

“…the worst thing I ever did.” (MC 301)

The other woman in Homi Catrack’s life was Lila Sabarmati, wife of the naval commander Sabarmati. Saleem put his plan in action by playing hide-and-seek with the two Sabarmati children in their house, during which he slipped an anonymous note into the Commander’s spare uniform inside pocket which was hanging inside a cupboard. The note asked him why his wife always visited Colaba Causeway on Sunday mornings. It had the desired effect, and the Commander hired a spy to find out the answer to it, and after it was confirmed that his wife was cuckolding him, went to the apartment where the two lovers were spending time together and shot them both. Homi Catrack who was shot in the genitals, heart and right eye died on the spot but Lila Sabarmati who was shot twice in her stomach survived. In all childish innocence, it had been Saleem’s intention to scare and teach a lesson to all unfaithful wives including his own mother, and he was shocked at the end result. He felt naturally responsible for the murder of Homi Catrack and so he considered it the worst deed he ever committed in his life. However, the scandal thus caused did succeed in frightening his mother and she stopped receiving phone calls from her former husband and desisted from any further secret meetings with him in dimly lighted cafes.

Alfred Adler believes that aggression is:

“…a reaction to perceived helplessness or inferiority – a lashing out against the inability to achieve or master something.” (PCM 128)

Karen Horney terms it as being:

“… hypothesized to settle into one primary mode of adapting to the world…those who believe in fighting to get by adopt the aggressive style.” (PCM 135)

This chapter contradicts Indira Bhatt’s statement that Rushdie caused almost all his characters to be neurotic to bring home the truth that everyone should feel the shame felt by Sufiya but remained indifferent to it. It is seen that Rushdie made use of highly complex psychological processes in sketching his characters and even his seemingly
‘neurotic’ characters like Sufiya Zinobia, Haroun Harappa and Prof. Solanka are driven by childhood factors like dearth of love and improper channelling of childhood drives. Characters like Shalimar, Uma Saraswati and Cyrus Cama also display their creator’s keen psychological insight and all of them are driven by multiple influences such as biological, psycho-social and socio-cultural conditions.
WORKS CITED


