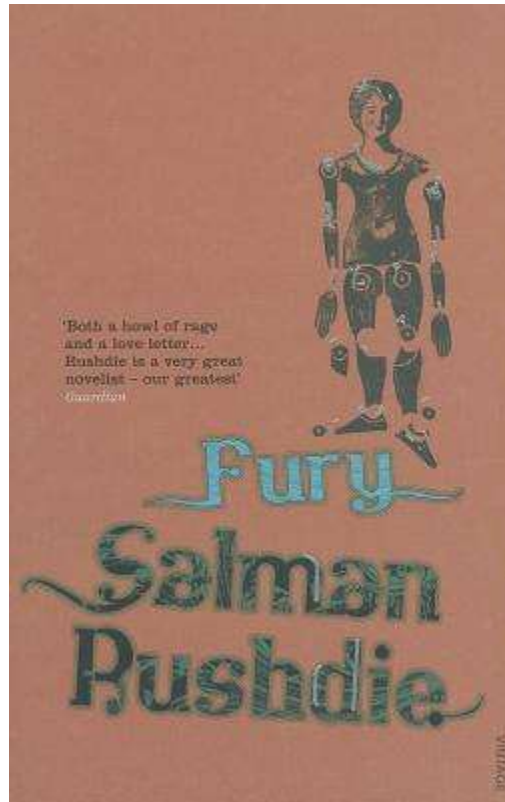


Seized by “Furies”: A Study of Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*

Dr. R. Chakkaravarthy

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 13:7 July 2013



Abstract

Salman Rushdie’s postmodern characters in *Fury* are in the grips of “furies”. The unknown anger that wells up within ruins them. Rushdie exposes the inner turmoil of the major characters that spell ruin around. This paper explores the ways in which fury works and spells havoc.

Key words: violence, terrorism, American society, academics, suicide, murder, racism, commercialism, fury, peace

End to Violence and Terrorism?

What causes so much of misery and destruction in the world? Can there be an end to violence and terrorism? What could an individual do to make the world tolerant and

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:7 July 2013

Dr. R. Chakkaravarthy

Seized by “Furies”: A Study of Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*

better? This paper aims to explore and find out answers for these questions as envisaged by Salman Rushdie in his “American” novel *Fury*. The novel is anchored in the “furies”* of classical mythology.

Furies in the Ancient Classics

“Furies” were the daughters of Earth (Gaea) and sprang from the blood of her mutilated spouse Uranus. They are three in number- Alecto (unceasing in anger), Tisiphone (avenger of murder), and Megaera (jealous). They lived in the underworld and ascended to Earth to pursue the wicked. They were personified as pangs of conscience with a power to kill a man who had broken a taboo. They hound the culprits relentlessly, without rest or pause, from city to city and from country to country.

Crumbling of Society

Rushdie seems to move from particular to general in *Fury*. By making a study of a few individual, representative characters, he aims to capture the situation in the postmodern American society in particular and in the world at large. The prediction of W.B. Yeats, “Things fall apart/ The centre cannot hold” has been vindicated. The society is disintegrating as individuals have a tendency to disunite and as a result, the unified society crumbles.

The Protagonist Malik Solanka

A study of Malik Solanka, the protagonist of *Fury*, would make a fine start. The midlife crisis in a man’s or woman’s life seems to be the basis of all problems. This leads to broken marriages that upset the individuals. Adjustability becomes a question and the lack of it leads to disintegration of the family which in turn would unsettle the society and bring in chaos.

Professor Solanka is not happy with academic life. He, in the late 1980’s, despaired of the academic life due to its narrowness, infighting and ultimate provincialism, resigns his tenurial position at King’s College, Cambridge. He turned to show business doing philosophical dolls for Television shows. His speaking doll “Little

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:7 July 2013

Dr. R. Chakkaravarthy

Seized by “Furies”: A Study of Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*

Brain” turns out to be a big hit with the media and its inventor Solanka also becomes popular. Solanka’s first wife Sara is seized by the “furies” as Solanka is loved by several other women and because he is obsessed with dolls to the extent that he relegates Sara to the secondary position. This makes Sara ditch him giving an impression that she is not sexually satisfied:

Your trouble is... that you’re really only in love with those fucking dolls. The world in inanimate miniature is just about all you can handle. The world you can make, unmake and manipulate, filled with women who don’t answer back, women you don’t have to fuck. Or are you making them with cunts now, wooden cunts, rubber cunts, fucking inflatable cunts that squeak like balloons as you slide in and out... (p.30)

End of Marriage and Beginning of New Relation

So the marriage ends and Sara walks out. Then, through an academic phone call response, Solanka gets to know Eleanor. They rush to bed and get married. They get a lovely son Asmaan. As the midlife crisis brings “furies” closer to him, Solanka finds himself in a sort of “Othello Crisis”. Othello at least had a reason, though a misconceived one, and succumbs to it. He kills his Desdemona, realises his folly and ends himself. But Solanka, seized by fury, finds himself hovering over his wife with a knife in hand at the middle of the night. He fails to rationalize his murderous instinct.

He had money and what most people thought of as an ideal family. Both his wife and child were exceptional. Yet he had sat in the kitchen in the middle of the night with a murder on the brain; actual murder, not the metaphorical kind. He’d even brought a carving knife upstairs and stood for a terrible, dumb minute over the body of his sleeping wife. (p.39)

Solanka seeks a topological remedy for his problem and so flees to America. He feels that he had to put at least an ocean, between himself and what he had done.

Seeking Refuge from Furies

And so at the age of fifty five, Solanka, the retired historian of ideas and an irascible doll maker, reaches New York “where the future was a casino, and everyone gambling and everyone expected to win” (p.4). There is an all pervading affluence and life pullulated in all active forms. He is happy that he has selected the right place and gets sucked into the vortex of the New York life. He finds the New York society an ideal haven to seek refuge from the hounding furies.

Solanka’s only purpose at this stage is to lose himself and as “everyone here was to lose themselves”, (p.7) he seems to have no problem.

But soon Solanka realises the truth. Material prosperity and the anonymity the indifferent society affords cannot sooth his aching heart. “The state couldn’t make you happy... it couldn’t make you good or heal a broken heart” (p.23) .

Fugitive from Place to Place

Solanka, without understanding that peace is within, flees from place to place in search of it. “He had shed more skins than a snake. Country, family and not one wife but two had been left in his wake” (p. 52). This fleeing and changing of wives could not help to quell the furies raging within. He wanders aimlessly all through the night. He feels restless and out of place even in his own posh outlet.

Transmutation and Fixing People through Therapy

At this juncture, Mila Milo walks into his life. She is one of the whiz kids of “The Vampire Stoop Troop” that helps people realign themselves. Hounded by the furies, she also has suffered lot in life. But she, unlike Solanka, accepts that “transmutation is all” (p.197). Mila Milo’s specialty is “the collection and repair of damaged people” (p.117-18). She admits, “I fix people up. Some people do up houses. I renovate people.”(p.118)

Milo knows, understands and has experienced what furies could do. She empathises with Solanka and walks into his solitary life. She gets him dress, accompanies him on walks and launches her “physiotherapy” sitting on his lap astride but of course with a cushion on Solanka’s lap since Solanka has sworn to lie with no woman. This

therapy soothes Solanka's raging heart to a great extent. What the New York society could not offer, the individual Mila Milo is able to. She gets him back to active, creative life and he creates Akasz Kronos, the cyber king, to replace "Little Brain". Little brain is "smart, sassy, unafraid, and genuinely interested in the deep information" (p.17). So this time travelling doll has grown out of its creator's control aided by the undue attention it has gained in the media that is driven by commercialization.

Exit Milo

Mia also gets annoyed with Solanka and walks out of his life. She gratifies her desires in Solanka's bed but with Eddie. She quits Solanka with the following comment:

What we did wasn't wrong... I thought you understood that. I thought you might be that impossible creature, a sexually wise man who could give me a safe place, a place to be free and set you free, too, a place where we could release all the built-up poison and anger and hurt, just let it go and be free of it, but it turns out, professor, you're just another fool. (p.173)

Enter Neela; Death Brings More Furies

After Mila, Neela Mahendra gets into Solanka's life. Neela has been the girl of Jack Reinhart, a journalist. After Jack's suicide, Neela, in search of comfort, comes to Solanka. In Neela's arms, Solanka experiences transformation. "Love conquers fury". (p.219) They share precious moments. But even this does not last long. Neela gets caught up in Liliput-Blefuscu politics and civil war and loses her life. This orphans Solanka again, for the fourth time. Neela's final words are sprinkled with optimism. "The earth moves. The earth moves around the sun" (p.255). But for those in the clutches of fury, the earth does not move but comes to a grinding halt as there is no love.

Furies Finally Succeed

After Neela, Solanka gets back to London but only too late to reunite with his family. His wife Eleanor and his son Asmaan are leading a happy life with Morgen Franz. He, once again, feels betrayed by the world. In a frantic attempt to draw the attention of his son, he climbs to the top of the stairs of a bouncy ledge and shouts at the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:7 July 2013

Dr. R. Chakkaravarthy

Seized by "Furies": A Study of Salman Rushdie's *Fury*

top of his voice. “Look at me! Asmaan! I am bouncing very well; I am bouncing higher and higher! (p.259). Still seized by the furies, he jumps off from the ledge, from life itself. Furies have registered their conquest at last.

Others in the Grip of Furies

Besides Solanka, there are two more characters in the novel who are in the grips of fury and hence fail to gather peace and live. Krystof Waterford Wajda, popularly known as Dubdub, is a friend of Solanka and a fellow Etonian. He is supposed to be a hit as an academician and a bit of a film star. After surviving three attempts, he dies finally cutting his wrist. He was very depressed as there was none to care for him and share love. Furies seized him as well as he has been relegated to emptiness by the all consuming society.

Jack Reinehart, a popular journalist fell a victim to racism, a form of fury. Well known for his work, he believed that he had crossed the boundaries of racism. He believed that no one looked at him as different from the white Americans because he had made up his mark in his profession. He believed that he can afford to forget his colour. But the others have not forgotten it. The others trap him into a sinful deed and also kill him. He is made to shoulder the responsibility of the serial killings committed by the members of the S&M (Single&Male) gang that comprise of Marsalis, Andriessen and Medford. They murder the three young girls Saskia, Lauren and Belinda. They scalp these girls and see them as their trophies. A racist suicide note is left at the site of death says that Reinehart murdered the girls because they would not fuck him as he is black. Such “cult murders” continue.

Furies have ever so many ways and forms of enacting their roles and wrecking vengeance.

Seek Peace Within

The novel makes it clear that the furies have the individuals and the society in their grips and cause all such tragedies. There is need for more tolerance and understanding. Rushdie spells in clear terms that our hopes are founded upon respect for

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:7 July 2013

Dr. R. Chakkaravarthy

Seized by “Furies”: A Study of Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*

human rights and a desire to see good prevail. As the inevitable conclusion, Rushdie suggests that Solanka and his likes are to seek “peace within” since the media and the postmodern society only tend to rob it. Only love can conquer fury. The following lines serve as a fitting epilogue:

Violent action is unclear to most of those who get caught up in it.
Experience is fragmentary; cause and effect, why and how, are torn apart.
Only sequence exists. First this, then that. And afterward, for those who survive, a life time of trying to understand (p.252).

References

- Battacharya, Anuradha. “Masks in *Fury*: A study of Indian Author’s destination”. *Indian Literature*, 213 (Jan-Feb2003): 151-160.
- Chauhan, P.S. “A Review of *Fury*: A Novel by Salman Rushdie”. *South Asian Review*, 22 (Dec.2001): 164-66.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Fury*. New York: The Modern Library, 2002.
- Wallhead, Celia M. “A Myth for Anger, Migration and Creativity in Salman Rushdie’s *Fury*.” *The Atlantic Review*, 2.4 (Oct-Dec.2001): 202-216.

Dr. R. Chakkaravarthy
Associate Professor of English
G.T.N. Arts College
Dindigul-624005
Tamil Nadu
India
ajaychakra@rediffmail.com