

## **Textual Analysis: An Emerging Woman in Boman Desai's *A Woman Madly in Love***

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### **Abstract:**

Diaspora refers not only physical displacement but also a state of mind in which nostalgia, alienation, and sometimes cynical celebrations are deeply engrossed. India is a 'diasporic laboratory' where all sorts of diasporic experiences can be fruitfully studied. Boman Desai's all novels deal with, in some way or another, the Parsi community at large. The evocation of both the characters and the community are done in time detail, both beautifully painted and poignantly fleshed out. Boman Desai's third novel *A Woman Madly in Love* is a novel projecting feminine consciousness, like women problems, patriarchy restriction, immigrant challenges, cheats, etc, and finally the protagonist emerged from all struggles.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, women's problems, restrictions, deconstruction, and emerge.

### **Introduction**

The history of mankind reveals that humans as nomads, hunters, traders, cultural carriers, soldiers, exiles, professionals, and conquerors have been moving from place to place to find new pastures for their better livelihood. This movement caused diversified diasporic experiences. "Diaspora" is a Greek term, which was used initially to mean "dispersal of jews when they were forced into exile to Babylonia." (Kavita, *Theorizing*, xi) But etymologically 'Dia' means 'through' and 'sperio' means 'to scatter.' However, the term now means dispersal of a sizable community to particular nation or region out of its own country. The word is currently used loosely as an inclusive term suggesting "metaphoric designation" for all displaced people such as expatriates, immigrants, exiles, refugees, and other ethnic minorities.

Therefore, in a sense, “diaspora” refers not only physical displacement but also a state of mind in which nostalgia, alienation, and sometimes cynical celebrations are deeply engrossed. Every country has its own diasporic experiences. India is a laboratory where diasporic experiences can be diagnosed and prognosticated to a larger extent. India has a structure of pluralistic society. Indian diaspora forms a group, which is internally differentiated and also heterogeneous. They are divided along the lines of their religions as Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs and on the basis of their languages and regions. Indians have records of migration from the dawn of history and even from the pre-historic period.

India is a ‘diasporic laboratory’ where all sorts of diasporic experiences can be fruitfully studied. Indian diaspora is so wide that it spans across the globe and stretches across all the oceans and continents. In current state of the world where boundaries become fluid, the Indian diasporic experience can provide models of mobilization, acceptance, assimilation which are the basis for the ‘out of India diaspora’ and ‘into India diaspora.’

The mythical and fictional references provide evidence on people moved out of India after the great *Mahabharatha* war. There were historic evidences that Indians had spread all over Asia, Middle East, South Africa, and places as far as Rome. During the British period Indians had been taken as indentured labourers and now they are being taken as cyber labourers to countries such as USA, U.K., and Canada.

It is a historical fact that India has been receiving migrants from various parts of the world and has absorbed them instinctively with its culture, language, economic and social status. This has equipped Indians to easily interact with cultures and ethnicities abroad. Indians have carried this very rich legacy of adaptability with them to their host countries. This very unique feature of Indian diaspora is the most important factor in the success of the evolution of the Indian diaspora across the one hundred and ten countries of the globe.

Boman Desai is the author of *The Memory of Elephants*, *Asylum, U.S.A.*, *A Woman Madly in Love*, and *Servant, Master, Mistress*. Boman Desai has been published widely in the U.S., U.K. and India in such periodicals as another Chicago Magazine, Stand Magazine, Gay Chicago Magazine, Sonata Review, The Atlantic Literary Review, Fezana Journal, The Times India, and The Chicago Tribune. He has also published a nonfiction novel in two volumes, *Trio* and *Trio 2* based on the lives of the Schumann's and Brahms. He has taught at Truman College and Roosevelt University, won awards for short fiction and had a poem and novels short listed

for the War Poetry, Dana, and Noemi awards. Boman Desai's all novels deal with, in some way or another, the Parsi community at large. The evocation of both the characters and the community are done in time detail, both beautifully highlighted and poignantly fleshed out.

Much of Boman Desai's fiction deals with memory and with the re-enactment of his past experiences mapped on a shifted superimposed fictive topography. One of his debut novel *The Memory of Elephants* is a good tautological case in point. It is shuttling back and forth between Anglo and Indian worlds, neither dangerous nor admiring, but undoubtedly giving credence to the efficacy of both experiences. *The Memory of Elephants* is a story of feeling from mind and chiefly concerned with memory, collective, personal, and perceived.

His second novel *Asylum, USA* is thin and of a rather ephemeral nature. The protagonist is a twenty-three-year-old, engineering student, struggling to make both ends meet in Chicago and Barbara. *Asylum, USA* is a realistic portrayal of the ethos obtaining in America in the Sixties. Boman Desai's another novel *A Woman Madly in Love* expresses a similar terrain that includes at its core a relationship between an older woman and a younger man, after the treachery of her husband. The story shuttles between Chicago and Mumbai, this story is spanning between the World War II to the Eighties.

Boman Desai's third novel *A Woman Madly in Love* is a novel projecting feminine consciousness. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century society becomes increasingly more open, the woman question has come to occupy a central place in cultural discourse. At the same time, there seems to be a growing perception in a broad section of society that the issue of woman's emancipation has already gone too far. This suggests a prevalent patriarchalism, which is also reflected in the fact that there is little or no effort to regard gender as a distinct element in culture. But, in fact, it is necessary to speak of both male and female cultures.

Historically, despite the active role of women, apart from that of a child bearer, in the development of civilization, our culture developed a lopsided patriarchal approach. Despite the extension of woman's roles in society and of legally actualised woman's rights, the culture remains patriarchal in its institutions, its ideology and in its distribution of power. The draining consequences for women in a patriarchal culture can be overcome only by recognizing the reality and validity of feminine culture and by effecting a gender balance, a hierarchical cultural. Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn suggest:

Literature's conventions encode social conventions and are ideologically complicit literature does more than transmit ideology, it actually creates it. It is a mediating, moulding force in society that structures our sense of the world. (178)

Proposes of this paper to draw the attention on An Emerging Woman in Boman Desai's *A Woman Madly in Love*, it advocates this perception of Farida Cooper, the protagonist of the novel to ensue as "An Emerging Woman" in the end. The novel is significant because it unveils the experiences of a fifty-year-old woman whose feelings except in a series of disastrous choices but she overcomes it to search her "self". The argument of the self has long been notable in the feminist philosophy for it is central to questions about personhood, identity, the body and agency that feminism must address.

In some respects, Simone de Beauvoir's trenchant observation, "He is the subject, he is the Absolute. She is the Other" sums up why the self is such an important issue of for feminism. To be the Other is to be the non-subject, the non-person, the non-agent-in short, mere body. Women's selfhood has been systematically subordinated or even absolutely denied by laws, regular practices, and cultural stereotypes. Throughout history the women have been identified either as inferior versions of men or as their direct opposite, characterized through their perceived differences from men; in both cases, women have been derogated on these observations.

Farida Cooper is a rich, beautiful, intelligent and talented, assertive and outspoken Parsee heiress of an elite and privileged Mumbai family, the Coopers. At 22, she falls in love and marries her English professor named Horace Finksh, he is a twice her age and a divorcee in Chicago. The marriage ends disastrously when she is thirty-five and is expectant after a series of miscarriages. She is heart-broken when Horace cheats her by keeping clandestine relations with his first wife who had deserted him for somebody and has a girl by him. Farida's marriage with Horace runs in to rough weather because he is a deconstructionist. He applies the same penetrating analysis to his marriage and when Farida understands the full meaning of his interpretations. She is humiliated and horrified enough to run from their house.

Deconstruction form of philosophical and literary analysis, derived mainly from work begun in the 1960s by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, that questions the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or "oppositions," in Western philosophy through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophical and literary texts. In the 1970s the term

was applied to work by Derrida, Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, and Barbara Johnson, among other scholars. In the 1980s it designated more loosely a range of radical theoretical enterprises in diverse areas of the humanities and social sciences, including in addition to philosophy and literature, law, psychoanalysis, architecture, anthropology, theology, feminism, gay and lesbian studies, political theory, historiography, and film theory. In polemical discussions about intellectual trends of the late 20th-century, *deconstruction* was sometimes used pejoratively to suggest nihilism and frivolous skepticism. In popular usage the term has come to mean a critical dismantling of tradition and traditional modes of thought.

However, Farida knows that her primary responsibility is to bear children but suffers four miscarriages and to safeguard her fifth pregnancy she quits her job and all other hectic assignments thinking for her pregnancy. But the betrayal of Horace terribly upset her which caused another miscarriage to Farida. Farida's marital life with Horace comes to a painful end with her fifth miscarriage. After miscarriage and her father's death, Farida decides that return to Mumbai:

She was comfortable, even happy with her decision, and confident enough soon to make another momentous decision. Soon she wanted no alimony from Horace – in fact, she wanted nothing but she had not wanted the father of Ginger's daughter to be the father of her child ... father's death. She had already decided to return to Bombay for an extended stay, distance herself from her problems, give herself time to put some plans into action, do something useful, teach what she knew – and in particular, open an art gallery. (343)

After reaching Mumbai, Farida immediately commits her second big mistake of getting into a romantic affair with a seventeen-year-old boy called Darius Katrak. The teenager is awed, flattered and finally seduced by Farida in a wild romance. The affair was difficult to survive due to social pressures. Farida has to break away from Darius due to a sudden accidental death of Darius's twin sister Yasmeen in a car-crash for which Farida blames herself. Aghast by the behaviour of the Katraks, she decides to leave for Chicago, of course, a painful decision.

Fifteen years later, at the age of Fifty, while living in a small cell called the artist's studio, Farida meets Parcy Faber, head of a tele-survey company, when she is interviewed by them for a job. At the end of the novel, after a few in-between anonymous affairs frequently falling in and

out of love, Farida finally finds happiness with someone of a "fuller maturity", a sixty plus man, Percy Faber.

Ashamed of her past, Farida finally chooses a genuine independence, refusing help from both Horace and her family. The going is difficult in Chicago considering the luxury to which she has been accustomed, moving from mansion to the cramped quarters of a studio apartment, but she does not complain. She makes up her mind to work as a market analyst and also enrolls herself in a Master's programme with a view to becoming professor. By now, Farida has also renounced her share of the family fortune. As a result, she is forced to read in the bathroom as the light there is better than the one in the living room.

Immigrant dilemma also portrayed in *A Woman Madly in Love* is Farida's inability to accept and adapt to Mumbai life. Back to Mumbai, Farida meets the question from almost everyone that if she found Mumbai changed. Farida answers with practical case that Mumbai is not much changed but she has changed herself living in Chicago.

Ironically, Desai has not focused on the community's fuss over Farida's first marriage with an American. The community strongly disapproves a Parsee girl's interfaith marriage. Farida senses the current social disapproval the second time due to the age-bar, though the boy is a Parsee. One might assume that the American society, a different one from the Indian, may be more liberal and forward in the matter of love and marriage. It is, but it is still not very accommodative of the cultural and religious differences and also the differences in colour and gender.

Farida hates the American president Ronald Reagan who represents the mindset and attitude of any American. Farida blames the politically powerful people like him who makes no attempt to bring change but to stop the discrimination and discrepancy and injustice against immigrants. When Percy raises a point that Farida might be getting some favour as a woman as people could not help seeing her as a woman, Farida disagrees and criticizes their hypocritical way of looking at women.

As an immigrant, Farida has faced many problems and disappointments in U.S. She could not publish her novels. She had faced nothing but rejections for all of her works from all the publishers she tried in America. She is very much dejected and depressed about these constant disappointments and baffled about the reasons for the constant rejections of even her

better novels. When, Percy asks what upsets her, she explains her bewilderment about the American attitude.

If our paths crossed, he wouldn't even see me – or if he saw me he'd look right through me. I'm not the right gender. These things make a difference to people like him. (154-58)

Farida had distanced herself not only from the community of Parsees and the Indians in America but from all the institutions that provided stability, family, religion and country. Farida had long accepted the pinch of being a woman and a minority. Boman Desai himself had undergone a long struggle before getting recognition as a writer trying his hand at various kinds of roles from a bar-tender to a dish-washer to earn his livelihood in America.

Ultimately, her novels are selected for publication. The world is not totally hopeless for Farida. The new avenues are opening up. She also would be enrolled once again to complete her master's Degree in Creative Writing. Every dark cloud has a silver lining. Her bad time is going to be over soon and her dream to earn recognition on her own would very soon come true. Also, at the end she meets the man with fuller maturity and a greater understanding in Percy. Farida's acculturation has made her into a more tolerant person. But still she loves India and has not forgotten anything.

The immigrants are always faced with two kinds of problems namely their 'acceptance' of the adopted country and the 'roots' of their mother country. Jasbir Jain in his article "Memory, History and Homeland: The Indian Diasporic Experience" in Kavita A – Sharma's book *Theorizing and Critiquity. Indian Diaspora* states that:

Creativity in order to be significant needs to be about engagement not merely with one's "self" but also with the "other". It may have its traumas, its anguish and challenges, but finally it is not about enclosures but open spaces it is about intermingling and interruptions. This is how newness enters the world. (79)

Farida's travel from Horace to Darius and then to Percy should be understood in proper perspective. The point is to maximize the meaning to understand the matter as fully as possible.

## **Conclusion**

Boman Desai's *A Woman Madly in Love* ends on an optimistic note of personhood giving a neutral approach for oneself. Freedom to women will only be fruitful if they are able to

feel, what John Stuart Mill has said, the same “genuine unselfishness” that men did in providing for their families. This unselfishness, Mill advocated is the one that motivates people to take into account the good of the society as well as the good of the individual person or small family unit.

Boman Desai thus has widened the horizon as far as the notion of the person is concerned. Desai guarantees that the full truth about the person will be acknowledged and displayed only if one neutralizes one's thinking. Boman Desai is an upholder of values. He counts on the concept that morality requires a rule of reason originating not from natural instinct but from freedom. The aim of morality is not to realize an end different from happiness but an end consisting of universal happiness. In this universal happiness, the achievement of individual desire is permitted only if desire is compatible with the long-term happiness of the individual and of the larger group.

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