

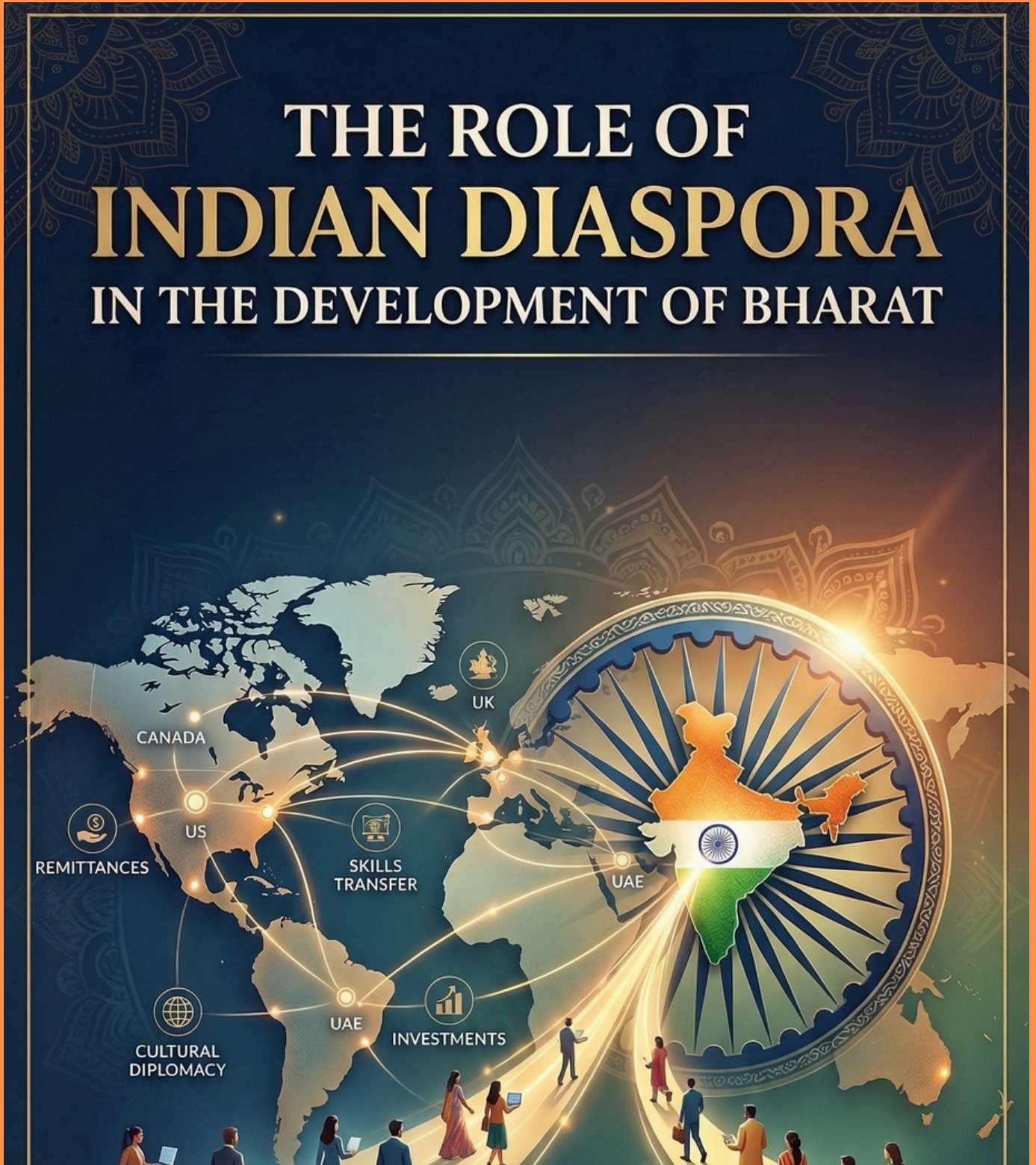
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Diasporic Interpretation of Sujata Bhatt's "Search for My Tongue"

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Abstract

Sujata Bhatt occupies an important place in the literature of Indian diaspora. She is an Indian-born poet who has lived in the United States for education and settled in Germany. Her life across these foreign cultures strongly influences her poetry, which reflects the experiences of migration. Bhatt's poem Search for My Tongue is about the struggle of immigrant individuals in adapting to foreign culture and language. This poem depicts the fear of losing the mother tongue and the burden of adopting a new language in a new place. This research paper offers a diasporic interpretation of this poem by examining themes such as language loss, identity crisis, memory and resistance. Using close textual analysis, this paper shows how Bhatt presents language as a living part of the self. Besides, this poem suggests that even when the mother tongue appears to be forgotten, it survives beneath the heart and returns with strength.

Keywords: Diaspora, Mother Tongue, Language, Identity.

Introduction

Human migration is an important and common experience in today's world. People travel and settle from one place to another for economic reasons, education and search for a better life. This movement has become a significant part of modern human existence. When people move to a new place, they often have to use a new language and adapt to a new culture and new way of life in order to adjust and survive. Meanwhile, their original culture, traditions, and language become less visible in their everyday lives. Diaspora writers give voice to these experiences. They record the emotional struggles of living between two cultures. They mostly write about identity issue, memory of homeland, belonging and language. Furthermore, language becomes a central theme of majority of such writing because it shapes how people think, feel and express themselves. Sujata Bhatt is an important and globally acknowledged diaspora poet. She was born in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, grew up in Pune, Maharashtra and later lived in the United States. During her career as a writer she travelled across India, North America and Europe. This reflects in her poetry, which is largely based on her diasporic life experiences across cultures. Bhatt's poetry centers on themes such as dilemma of the mother tongue and the foreign language, home and exile and cultural conflict. She shows deep concern for the survival of the mother tongue. *Search for My Tongue* is one of her most well-known poems. In this poem, Bhatt expresses the fear of losing her mother tongue i.e. Gujarati, while living in an English speaking world. This poem mirrors the psychological conflict of a diasporic speaker who feels divided between two cultures & languages. This paper offers an interpretation of this poem through a diasporic lens. It focuses on loss of the native language, identity crisis and resistance through recollecting memories. The very word diaspora describes the movement of people away from their native land. Such people living in the diaspora oscillate between two cultures. They share ties with both cultures, yet often feel that they do not fully belong to either one. This results into a sense of confusion and loss. Mother tongue is a key of self-identity in the lives of people who are living in other places. The mother tongue is learned at familial setup that is home.



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It carries everything like connections, roots and culture. It is linked to childhood and owns root. The foreign language on the other hand, is often linked to education and survival. Scholar Homi K. Bhabha explains that diasporic identity is formed in an “in-between” space where cultures meet and interact (55). In this space (foreign land), language becomes a site of struggle. Migrant people may feel pressure to abandon their mother tongue to fit into the new place. Sujata Bhatt’s poem reflects this struggle clearly. The poem *Search for My Tongue* shows how loss of language affects identity at a deeper level.

Analysis of the Poem

Written in the free verse, *Search for My Tongue* is a poem about fear of losing mother tongue while living away from homeland. Poet expresses her fear of losing her mother tongue, Gujarati, while living in an English-speaking world. She uses the word “tongue” in the poem with two meanings one is language and another as identity. The poem begins with fear to ends with hope. It also uses English and Gujarati languages, this between clearly indicates the inner conflict of an immigrant speaker. The poem begins with the speaker saying,

“You ask me what I mean

by saying I have lost my tongue” (Bhatt, lines 1–2).

The speaker directly calls the reader and creates a sense of closeness and seriousness. The use of word “lost” suggests emotional pain and confusion in the mind of speaker. Also it shows her fear of losing her linguistic identity that is her mother tongue. Further, she explains what she means by the word “tongue.” She writes,

“I ask you, what would you do

if you had two tongues in your mouth” (Bhatt, lines 3–4).

This clearly shows the problem of living with two languages. One language is mother tongue Gujarati belongs to her past and home, while the other is English belongs to her current life in a foreign land. Also the poet fears that the English become the stronger and it might be replace Gujarati. She writes,

“The new tongue grows faster

swallowing the old one” (Bhatt, lines 7–8).

This is very disturbing. It clearly highlights English language of foreign land taking place of the mother tongue, Gujarati. At the first part of the poem English dominates, while Gujarati appears at the end. This symbolizes suppression of Mother tongue at first and recovery towards the end.

Loss of mother tongue i.e. language of homeland is the main theme of this poem. Poet presents it as a painful and frightening process. The speaker imagines a situation where the mother tongue is completely erased. She asks,

“What would you do

if you had two tongues in your mouth” (Bhatt, lines 3–4).

This shows the state of confusion and anxiety. The image of the foreign language overpowering the native one appears again when Poet writes,

“The new tongue grows faster

swallowing the old one” (Bhatt, lines 7–8).

The word “swallowing” indicate, who forcefully, violently English is overpowering the Gujarati language and shows its helplessness. The poet has no control over this process. This created a deep identity crisis through the perspective of diaspora. Mother tongue as a language is connected to home, memory and selfhood. Poet fears when her mother weakens, her identity and selfhood also weaken. She suggests that the foreign language begins to shape her thoughts and expressions. This experience is common among migrants. This poem raises this question of silent struggle of immigrants. The poet uses her personal fear as a shared diasporic experience through this poem.

Poet makes a strong connection between language and the human body. She describes language loss as physical pain. One of the most powerful lines of the poem is:

“If you cut my tongue,

I’d talk in my mother tongue” (Bhatt, lines 25–26).

This shocking image suggests that the mother tongue is inseparable from the self. Even physical violence cannot remove it. The body remembers what the mind may try to forget. Bhatt continues this idea when she describes the buried tongue. She writes that the mother tongue lies “buried in the ground” (Bhatt, line 28). This suggests suppression not death. Something buried can grow again. From a diasporic point of view, this metaphor shows resistance. The body of migrated person carries with it cultural memory from his homeland. Even in foreign land, the mother tongue survives beneath the surface in the heart.

At the end of the poem poet used Gujarati lines intentionally, shows the return of the mother tongue. This use of language shift from English to Gujarati without explanation, which poet calls the “true tongue.” suggests that the mother tongue lives deep inside, never dies and speaks when given space. The use of Gujarati breaks the dominance of English in the poem. This very act of using Gujarati in the poem becomes cultural assertion. Poet refuses to translate these lines fully. She allows her native language to exist on its own terms. This use of Gujarati challenges readers who only understand English. It reminds them that English is not the only language of expression but marginalized languages can be used the same.



The poem ends with one of the most hopeful images in diasporic poetry. Bhatt compares the mother tongue to a plant that grows back. She writes,

“it grows back, a stump of a shoot
grows longer, grows moist” (Bhatt, lines 31–32).

This image shows life and renewal. The language that seemed lost begins to return slowly. The final lines strengthen this hope. Poet writes,

“the bud opens,
the bud opens in my mouth” (Bhatt, lines 35–36).

These repeated lines create a strong sense of confidence and hope. They suggest that the mother tongue comes back to life, it will reborn. This ending suggests that identity can heal. Cultural roots may be damaged or weakened, but they are not completely destroyed. Language finds a way to survive.

Moreover, this poem suggests that living with two languages is difficult but also enriching. The speaker does not completely reject English. Instead, she struggles to balance both languages. This reflects the reality of many individuals who migrated and settled in other places. Bilingualism becomes a part of identity of such people who are living away from their homeland. It creates tension but also offers creative possibilities. Bhatt’s poem shows that identity can be layered. A person does not have to choose between cultures. Both can exist together.

To sum up, *Search for My Tongue* is a powerful poem that explores diasporic issues such as language, identity, and survival. Sujata Bhatt presents the fear of losing the mother tongue in a foreign land. Along with this, she offers hope through memories of homeland. The poem shows that language is more than medium of communication. It is a part of the self-identity. Losing it creates emotional pain. Recovering it brings strength. From a diasporic perspective, the poem reflects the inner conflict of migrants who live between cultures. It also celebrates the cultural roots. Sujata Bhatt’s poem appeals universally, reminding readers that even in a foreign land, our own language and culture find a way to return and reassert themselves.

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