

## STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF SUJATA BHATT'S POEM, "SEARCH FOR MY TONGUE"

Mrs. K. REKHA<sup>1</sup>, Dr. A.S. MOHAMED RAFEE<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research scholar, Bharathiar University, Lecturer in English, Priyadarshini Polytechnic College, VNB

<sup>2</sup>Research Guide, Associate Professor in English, Mazharul Uloom College, Ambur

**Abstract** - Sujata Bhatt's poem, "Search for My Tongue" is around what it is like to reside in a foreign state, experiencing disconnection from your ethnic backdrop. The poet feels at the beginning she has lost her mother tongue because she is living abroad. The paper is additionally concerning the experience of colonialism and emigration. The shed dialect sometimes appears to be representative of the closing of the ethnic heritage, connected with ideals and options for contemplating. The truth that Bhatt is of South Asian origin may perhaps declare that she is speaking about how the English colonized area, impacting laws and regulations and dialect. The composition is exploratory, a form of thinking. Towards the end she changes her mind. She feels the mother tongue still continues to exist in the subconscious. The poem was decorated by using poetic devices such as Personification, Metaphor, Attitude, Repetition, Language, Identity and Visual Imagery. The present paper shows the usage of those techniques and their importance in the poem.

**Key words:** Colonialism, Emigration, Personification, Metaphor, Attitude.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*"I have always thought myself as an Indian, who is outside India..."*

*And that's the deepest layer of my identity"*

-Sujata Bhatt Sujata Bhatt (1956-2010) was born in Ahmedabad, India. She grew up in Pune and in United States. She received her MFA from the writer's workshop at the University of Iowa and now lives in Germany with her husband and daughter. She is the recipient of various awards, including the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia) and the Cholmondeley Award. Her long poem, "Search for My Tongue" was choreographed by Daksha Sheth and performed in nine cities in England and Scotland under the title "Tongues United" by the based South Asian Youth Company in 1994. "Search for My Tongue" was presented under the same title by the Daksha Sheth Dance Company at the Hong Kong Arts Festival in 1998.

She has published 6 collections of poems including "Monkey Shadows" (1991) and "Augatora" (2000).

\*\*\*

"**Colour of Solitude**" (2002) deals exclusively with the life and work of the German painter Paula Modersohn-Becker. Her latest collection, "Pure Lizard" was published in 2008 and was shortlisted for the 2008 **Forward Poetry Prize**.

She has translated Gujarati poetry into English for the Penguin Anthology of Contemporary Indian Women's poetry and has also translated poems by Gunter Grass and Gunter Kunert. Her translation from the German 'Mickle Makes Muckle' poems, Mini Plays and Short Prose by Michael Augustin was published in 2007.

Sujata Bhatt has been a Lansdowne visiting writer at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada and a visiting fellow at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania. More recently she was a poet in Residence at the Poetry Archive in London. Her work has been highly anthologized, broadcast on Radio and Television and has been translated into more than 20 languages. She is a frequent guest at Literary Festivals throughout the world.

In her poem "Search for My Tongue" (1988) Sujata Bhatt was afraid that she was losing her identity as a Gujarati speaking Indian. The poem comes from a time when she was studying English in America and feared she was being 'Americanized'. Feelings of the poet at the start she speaks as if the two languages are at war with each other and she is scared that the foreign language is winning and will result in her forgetting her Mother Tongue. However she ends the poem optimistically because she is assured that her mother tongue will grow back every time and she will maintain her Indian identity.

### 2. COLONIALISM

Colonialism can generally be defined as the systematic establishment of ruling power systems by external political-cultural authority; as Eavan Boland remarked, "Power has just as much to do with a poetic sphere of operation as any other...power has operated in the making of canons, the making of taste, the nominating of what poems should represent the age and so on".

### 3. IMPORTANT ELEMENTS

Sujata Bhatt's language seems to be synonymous with the tongue, the physical act of speaking. The poet's Gujarati roots and Indian childhood are two important elements which seem to compromise the deep layers of her

identity. English has become her primary language and the language she writes in. she discovers a cause of unity which is denied to humans (except for the very young) in the non- verbal world of animals and plants

#### 4. THEME OF THE POEM

Sujata Bhatt's poem is about what it is like to live in a foreign country feeling disconnected from the cultural background. The poet feels at the beginning of the poem that she has lost her original language now that she is living abroad. The poet feels that she has lost an important part of herself that she needs to recover to feel herself again.

The poem is also about **Colonialism and Emigration**. The lost language can be seen as representative of the loss of a cultural heritage of values and ways of thinking. The fact that Bhatt is Asian may suggest that she is referring to how the colonized India imposing laws and language.

The poem is explanatory; it is a form of thinking. By the end of the poem, the poet has changed her mind. In dreams in the subconscious mind, the original language still lives. The imagery of **"Your mother tongue would rot"** in the first stanza is reversed in the last stanzas the **'bud'** of the mother tongue re-opens.

#### 5. SUBJECT

The poem can either be simply read as being about one person's experience of moving to a foreign country and speaking two languages or it can be seen as using language to represent the struggle of colonial experience. By trying to control the thoughts, feelings, values and ideas of the people they colonized. The poem shows how the native culture survives at a deep level and is able to overthrow in the end the invading nature.

#### 6. ATTITUDE

The attitude of the poet is difficult to read in this poem. Clearly there is a sense of wonder about the re-flowering of the native language and the imagery of rotting suggests some of the pain of losing access to your mother tongue. The poem however is quietly, subtly rebellious. It celebrates the overthrowing of a foreign language or power and the resurgence of native language or culture.

#### 7. STYLE

Bhatt uses a mixture of language in her poem. There is the conversational of the opening, the extended metaphor of language being like a plant and there is also the use of Gujarati. This is a word that my computer doesn't even provide a spell-check for. The language works by concentrating attention on the metaphor and by making us hear but not understand the Gujarati.

#### 8. POETIC DEVICES

The poem portrays the sense of belonging to culture and communication through the text, her belongs to the culture shows much clearer in the text by using poetic devices such as Personification, Symbolism, Metaphor, Attitude, Repetition, Language, Identity and Visual Imagery. The use of such devices makes the readers to feel a real sense of disconnection which the poet faces in her life. It also helps the readers to understand the poet's personal ideas on languages. The poetic devices are as follows:

#### 9. PERSONIFICATION

Sujata Bhatt uses personification to compare the mother tongue to human, develops the sense of belonging and depicts the fact more realistic to readers. The personification is the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human or the representation of an abstract quality in human form used again later in the text; it pushes the other tongue aside. It represents the fact of speaking foreign language seems as a barriers to prevent her from her mother tongue but it actually can't. It explores the idea of belonging of her hometown culture.

#### 10. SYMBOLISM

Symbolism is an artistic and poetic movement or style using symbolic images and indirect suggestion to express mystical ideas, emotions and states of mind. It originated in late 19<sup>th</sup> century France and Belgium with important figures including Mallarme, Maeterlinck, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Redon. Sujata Bhatt uses symbolism in the end of this poem, **"It blossoms out of my mouth"** by using the symbolism of **'Blossoming Flower'**, author conveys the beauty of the culture and it expresses her love towards her culture as she used such a graceful word. It emphasizes Sujata belongs to her mother tongue to culture identity. It also tells that culture can never be forgotten though how hard we try but it's always there. This poem portrays a sense of belonging of culture and identity very closely.

#### 11. METAPHORS AND IMAGERY

**'Rot'** describes the intensity of how disgustingly she is being ripped away from her mother tongue. Personal pronouns show how this has affected her personally by tearing her away from her Indian heritage.

She dreams in her mother tongue, which is a play on words for two things. She not only expresses her desire to speak in her initial form of communication but also can only access these emotions and feelings through the imaginary in a dream.

This shows that in fact she has not forgotten it and her Indian identity has not been lost. This also conveys the idea that in dream in the subconscious mind, the mother tongue still lives and cannot be forgotten. The image in the first

stanza, **"Your mother tongue would rot"** it is then inverted in the last stanza; the **'Bud'** of the mother tongue re-opens. The metaphor comparing mother tongue to some kind of plant implies that the foreign language is some kind of weed or parasite. Her reference **'To spitting it out'** can also be a metaphor for the idea of exiling this foreign language.

Bhatt uses a metaphor, comparing the mother tongue to some kind of plant and by implication the foreign language to some kind of weed or parasite. This imagery taken from nature is picked up in the final stanza where there often stump of the mother tongue is imagined to grow again into a flower.

## 12. LANGUAGE

The language of the poem is ordinary and conversational, **'you ask me', 'I ask you'**- until line 12. The language in the middle of the poem is Gujarati. It is given equal status to the English, as it is not translated. We can hear what it sounds like but unless we speak some Gujarati we cannot know what it means.

Like a polite person would do, the poet starts off by answering the question. Apparently the question that has been put to her is "Just what in the wide world of sports are you talking about when you say 'I lost my tongue?'" trickily, our poet answers this question with a question of her own. That question essentially is "What would you do if you had two tongues in your head and then you lost one of them?" The lost tongue is the 'Mother tongue' and the one our poet has left is the 'Foreign tongue'. And then she continues, "Let's say that you couldn't really know that foreign tongue and that you couldn't use them both at the same time- even if you thought that way (both in your native and adopted language). If you had to live somewhere where you could only speak with the foreign tongue, then your mother tongue would **"rot and die in your mouth"**."

At least this is what our poet thought happened to her until she had a dream. We move from the middle of this thought into a section of Gujarati writing (Gujarati is a state in Northwest India). After each line, we get a helpful line in parenthesis of how to pronounce those Gujarati words.

Then, after this section concludes, we get the English translation of the Gujarati section. It picks up right where the last line in English left off, explaining that the speaker dreams. She describes the new tongue like a plant choking off the foreign tongue and then starting to bud in the poet's mouth.

This sounds pretty unnerving but the speaker doesn't seem to mind. She tells us that every time she thinks she's forgotten her mouth and with that our poet is done speaking.

*"And lost the first one, The  
mother tongue,*

*And could not really know the other"*

The original language is associated with being nurturing, protecting, loving. The second language is seen to be alien. The poet feels it is not possible to fully understand or become completely part of another culture.

*"It ties the other tongue in knots"*

The two languages are imagined as being with the invader being defeated. Clearly this can be seen to refer to colonial powers and independence.

*"Everytime I think I've forgotten,*

*I think I've lost the mother tongue,*

*It blossoms out of my*

*Mouth*

The first language or culture is shown to be lasting

and in the flower imagery is thought of here as something natural, beautiful and eternal.

## **"The almost fortifying touch her initial language has troubles of losing her mother tongue"**

Bhatt implies that she has part of her heritage, simply by forgetting her mother tongue. She believes that she can no longer communicate properly with her traditional heritage, thus showing the struggle of being forced to learn in a foreign language.

The poet talks about how she is forgetting how to speak her mother tongue **"losing her tongue"**. However as she sleeps and dreams in Gujarati, her mother tongue **"grows"** again. She dreams or writes in her own language for a while and then translates it.

## 13. IDENTITY

The Gujarati that has been added into this poem plays an enormous role in her heritage and origin. It is an uncommon case that one would see two languages being used in one poem and most people would not be able to name a poet that has done this.

This therefore makes the poem more memorable and impressionable from the reader's perspective as well as helping Bhatt convey her struggles between her foreign language and mother tongue more effectively.

The poem is exploratory. It is her way of thinking. Bhatt enhances the overall theme of a new language being alien to her with the use of the words **'Could not really know the other'**. This shows how Bhatt believes you can never fully adapt to a new culture and our original one will always be

part of us no matter where we live. It is almost guarding us in the sense that it never leaves.

#### 14. REPETITION

Repetition of '**Mother tongue**' shows her longing and desperation of wanting her mother tongue back

*"It grows back, a stump of a shoot Grows longer, grows moist, grows Strong veins, It ties the other tongue in The bud opens, the bud opens in My mouth"*

The repetition of '**grow**' and '**bud opens**' shows the intensity and power of the mother tongue as it forms again, therefore implying how quickly Bhatt remembers it.

*"It ties the other tongue in knots"*

It implies how much stronger and dominant the mother tongue is. The word '**Blossoms**' has connotations of new life and rebirth in this context. She is remembering her mother tongue. Bhatt uses her mother tongue to show off her Indian heritage almost as if she is proud of it. She is proving to the audience and herself that she has not lost her mother tongue. She transcribes it phonetically to break down the barrier of communication that is coupled with a foreign language again showing her pride in Gujarati. The fact that she translates it for us means that she wants English speaking readers to understand what she is saying showing that at the end of the poem she is more confident with the foreign language and knows that she will not lose her mother tongue.

#### 15. ERRORS

The poem, "**Search for My Tongue**" has three sections, although it is only split into two stanzas. There are two parts of English, with a foreign language sandwiched in between. There is no rhyme scheme in the poem and no deliberate rhythm. It is written just like somebody speaking and indeed when it starts with, "**You ask me what I mean?**" it seems as though it is just carrying on from a previous conversation. The language is very simple, possibly because the English bits are meant to be the bits that are foreign to the author. "**Search for My Tongue**" is a poem about speaking a foreign language and living in a foreign country for a long period of time. It talks about losing the "**mother tongue**" and this being a bad thing. There are many ways of expressing this. In the first stanza, there is a lot of mention of the '**mother tongue**' and the '**foreign tongue**'. This shows a very sharp contrast between the two languages the person speaks.

#### 16. CONCLUSION

Bhatt structures her poem to show the contrast between her mother tongue and the foreign language. However for Bhatt, her mother tongue is Gujarati and

her English is her foreign language. For the readers perspective this structure shows that even though the English is replaced by another language, it still returns. This is the case with Bhatt, where she thought she had lost her mother tongue, but it returns to her once more. It also says that,

*"Every time I think I've forgotten,*

*I think I've lost the mother tongue, It blossoms out of my mouth"*

This also shows that it is very strong because it refuses to be forgotten and continually reminds you of your own language and country. There is a lot of imagery from nature and spring, which gives the idea of a new beginning or a rebirth for the inborn tongue. It also shows that the native tongue is the best one, because it is compared to a blossoming plant and the language is very positive, where as at the end of stanza one, where it was being forgotten, the language was very negative and the comparison to nature was more to a weed than a beautiful growing flower in spring or summer. The message of this poem is trying to communicate is that no matter how well learnt a language is, you will always be from another country, who speaks a different language naturally and that no matter how long you spend in the other country, you will never be allowed to forget that you were not born there.

#### REFERENCE

- [1] Walsh William, **Indian Literature in English**, London and New York: Longman, 1990, print
- [2] Sarang, Vilas. Ed. **Indian English Poetry since 1950: an anthology**, 1990. Hyderabad: Disha Books, 2007, print
- [3] Brunizem (Manchester: Carcanet: 1988) New Delhi: Penguin Books India 1993, print
- [4] "**Search for My Tongue**", Brunizem 63-66, print
- [5] **Collected Poems**, Carcanet Press, 2013, EBook
- [6] Arvind K. Mehrotra, "**The Anxiety of being Sujata**", The Hindu, March 18, 2001
- [7] Bruce King, "**Women's Voice**" in Modern Indian Poetry (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987) p.151
- [8] Rahman, Anisur and Ansari, Ameena Kazi, ed. **Indian English Women Poets**, New Delhi: Creative Books, 2009
- [9] "**In her own voice: Sujata Bhatt and the Aesthetic Articulation of the Diaspora Condition**", Journal of commonwealth Literature 35.1 (2000): 99-120, print
- [10] Cecile Sandten, "**India, America and Germany: Inter historical and inter textual process in the poetry of Sujata Bhatt**" in W. Kloos (ed.) Across the lines (ASNEL papers 3) Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998: 51-63, print.