

CULTURAL DIVERSITY, LANGUAGE AND MORAL DILEMMA: DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN ‘SEARCH FOR MY TONGUE’

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines Sujata Bhatt's poem "Search for my Tongue" (1988) through the lens of W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness (1903). By analyzing the key themes of the poem such as cultural dislocation, linguistic loss and search for identity, the study encompasses the internal conflict and fragmented self, experienced by the speaker in the poem, thereby suggesting the identity crisis suffered by individuals with multiple linguistic and cultural contexts. The study investigates the complexities of these competing identities and examines the significance of Du Bois's concept to understand Bhatt's distinctive approach of dealing with the phenomenon. By a critical reading of the poem through the lens of double consciousness, the study contributes to a profound comprehension of the interconnected web of culture, language and identity.

Keywords: Du Bois, double consciousness, Sujata Bhatt, identity, biculturalism.

1. Introduction

Bhatt's "Search for my Tongue" is a poignant depiction of the intense impact of cultural dislocation and the struggle to retain a sense of self in the middle of conflicting linguistic and cultural influences. As an Indian born English, Bhatt's personal life experiences reflect the poem's themes like hybridity of cultures and quest for identity. Growing up in a predominantly white environment, she experienced firsthand the marginalization and alienation that can arise from a clash between cultural expectations and personal identity. These competing experiences in two distinctly different cultures make way to her poetry, grappling with issues of displacement, belonging and complexities of coming to terms with multiple cultural backgrounds.

At the heart of this study lies Du Bois's seminal concept of double consciousness, a term he coined in his groundbreaking work *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois, a prominent sociologist and civil rights activist, described double consciousness as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring oneself by the scale of a world that makes you an alien, this sense of always turning with the others, discovering the world looking on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3). This concept, originally developed to describe the experiences of African Americans in a racially segregated society, has proven remarkably adaptable and insightful in understanding the experiences of other marginalized groups, including immigrants, ethnic minorities, and individuals navigating multiple cultural identities.

While numerous scholars have analyzed Bhatt's poetry through various critical lenses, including postcolonial theory, feminist criticism, and diaspora studies, there remains a gap in the existing scholarship regarding a systematic application of Du Bois's theory of double consciousness to her work. While some studies may allude to the concept of divided self or the experience of

otherness in Bhatt's poetry, they rarely explicitly engage with Du Bois's framework and its specific tones. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of "Search for My Tongue" through the lens of double consciousness, exploring how the poem exemplifies the internal conflict and fragmented identity experienced by individuals confronting multiple cultural and linguistic contexts.

Existing scholarship on Bhatt's poetry offers valuable insights into her work. For example, Singh (2010) argues that Bhatt's poetry challenges traditional notions of national identity and explores the complexities of belonging in a globalized world. Spivak (1988) examines the ways in which Bhatt's poetry gives voice to the experiences of marginalized women and challenges patriarchal norms. Karmakar (2020) analyzes how Bhatt's poetry reflects the experiences of diasporic communities and the challenges of maintaining cultural identity in a foreign land.

This study will build upon this existing scholarship by offering a new perspective on Bhatt's work, specifically by applying Du Bois's theory of double consciousness to analyze the poem's exploration of linguistic and cultural identity. By examining how Bhatt's poem reflects the internal conflict and fragmented identity experienced by individuals navigating multiple cultural and linguistic contexts, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of identity, culture, and language.

1.1. Research Statement

This research investigates how Sujata Bhatt's poem "Search for My Tongue" embodies W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. By conducting a thematic analysis of the poem, focusing on themes such as cultural displacement, linguistic loss, and the search for identity, this study aims to explore how the poem reflects the internal conflict and fragmented identity experienced by individuals navigating multiple cultural and linguistic contexts. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of identity, culture, and language in the contemporary world.

1.2. Research Objectives

- 1) To identify and analyze specific instances in "Search for My Tongue" that demonstrate the characteristics of double consciousness as defined by Du Bois.
- 2) To examine how the poem utilizes literary techniques to convey the internal struggle and sense of fragmentation experienced by the speaker, aligning with the core tenets of double consciousness.
- 3) To investigate how the poem portrays the challenges of balancing and integrating conflicting cultural values, linguistic norms, and social expectations within the framework of double consciousness.
- 4) To analyze how the poem's portrayal of the speaker's experiences resonates with the broader social and historical contexts of cultural displacement and identity formation.

1.3. Research Questions

- 1) How does Sujata Bhatt's poem "Search for My Tongue" exemplify Du Bois's concept of double consciousness?
- 2) In what ways does the poem's linguistic choices, imagery, and narrative structure reflect the internal conflict and fragmented identity associated with double consciousness?

- 3) How does "Search for My Tongue" depict the complexities of reconciling multiple cultural and linguistic identities, as understood through the lens of double consciousness?

2. Literature Review

Bhatt's "Search for My Tongue" has garnered significant scholarly attention within postcolonial studies, diaspora literature, and feminist criticism. Scholars have analyzed the poem through various lenses, examining its exploration of themes such as cultural hybridity, linguistic displacement, and the complexities of identity formation in a globalized world.

Bhatt's work resonates deeply with postcolonial theorists who have extensively explored the impact of colonialism on language, culture, and identity. Spivak (1988), in her seminal work *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, examines how colonial discourse marginalizes and silences marginalized voices, including those of women and people from the Global South. Bhatt's poem, through its exploration of the silencing of the "mother tongue," echoes Spivak's concerns about the suppression of subaltern voices within colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Furthermore, Bhatt's work aligns with the scholarship on diaspora studies, which examines the experiences of communities living outside their ancestral homelands. Scholars like Said (1993) have explored the cultural and psychological impact of displacement and the ongoing negotiation of identity within diasporic communities. Bhatt's poem reflects these concerns, highlighting the challenges of maintaining cultural identity while navigating the demands of a new cultural environment.

Feminist scholars have also engaged with Bhatt's poetry, examining its exploration of gender and power dynamics within a multicultural context. Narayan (1997) argues that women in diasporic communities often face unique challenges, navigating the demands of both their ancestral cultures and the dominant culture of their host country. Bhatt's poem, through its exploration of the speaker's internal conflict and the pressures of cultural assimilation, resonates with Narayan's analysis of the complex experiences of women in diaspora. Scholars like Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) in their influential work *The Empire Writes Back* have explored the concept of hybridity and the emergence of new cultural forms in postcolonial contexts. Bhatt's poem exemplifies this concept, showcasing the blending and clashing of languages and cultures within the speaker's identity.

Furthermore, scholars like Bhabha (1994) have examined the concept of "the third space," a liminal space where cultural boundaries are blurred and new identities emerge. Bhatt's poem can be seen as an exploration of this "third space," where the speaker navigates the complexities of belonging to two cultures simultaneously. Scholars like Hall (1990) have explored the concept of "identity" as a fluid and dynamic process, shaped by a multitude of factors including race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Bhatt's poem reflects this understanding of identity, depicting it as a constantly evolving and negotiated construct.

While scholars have extensively analyzed Bhatt's poetry through these critical lenses, there remains a gap in the existing scholarship regarding a systematic application of Du Bois's concept of double consciousness to her work. While some studies may allude to the concept of divided self or the experience of otherness in Bhatt's poetry, they rarely explicitly engage with Du Bois's framework and its specific nuances. This study aims to fill this gap by providing an in depth analysis of "Search for My Tongue" through the lens of double consciousness. By examining how Bhatt's poem reflects the internal conflict and fragmented identity experienced by

individuals navigating multiple cultural and linguistic contexts, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of identity, culture, and language in the contemporary world.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data collection and analysis

This research employs a qualitative approach, specifically textual analysis, to investigate how Sujata Bhatt's poem "Search for My Tongue" embodies Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. Adopting an interpretivist epistemology and ontology, the study recognizes that knowledge is socially constructed and that multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon may exist. Data collection will involve a meticulous close reading of the poem, paying close attention to its linguistic features, imagery, and narrative structure. Data analysis will involve thematic analysis, identifying and categorizing key themes such as cultural displacement, linguistic loss, and the search for identity, and analyzing how these themes reflect the internal conflict and fragmented identity associated with double consciousness. By carefully examining the poem's text and considering the researcher's own interpretations within the broader context of cultural and social influences, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of identity, culture, and language.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in Du Bois's theory of double consciousness, a foundational concept in critical race theory. Coined in his seminal work *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois describes double consciousness as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring oneself by the scale of a world that makes you an alien, this sense of always turning with the others, discovering the world looking on in amused contempt and pity." This theory posits that African Americans in a racially segregated society experience a divided self, constantly navigating the conflicting demands of being both American and Black, experiencing both belonging and alienation within their own society. While initially formulated to understand the experiences of African Americans, the concept of double consciousness has proven remarkably adaptable and insightful in understanding the experiences of other marginalized groups, including immigrants and individuals with multiple cultural identities. The study is fueled by the following assumptions formulated from the theory:

- Social structures and power dynamics significantly influence individual identity.
- The experience of otherness leads to internal conflict and psychological tension.
- Identity is a fluid and dynamic construct shaped by social, cultural, and historical forces.

4. Analysis & Discussion

Bhatt's "Search for My Tongue" is not merely a lament for a lost language; it is a profound exploration of the multifaceted nature of identity in a globalized world. The poem masterfully captures the internal conflict and fragmented self experienced by individuals suffering cultural and linguistic realities, resonating deeply with Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness."

Du Bois, in his seminal work *Souls of Black Folk*, describes the unique experience of African Americans in a racially segregated society. He argues that the constant awareness of being perceived through the lens of white society creates a divided self, a sense of "two-ness," an "American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3). This "double consciousness" manifests as a perpetual

struggle to reconcile one's authentic self with the expectations and prejudices of the dominant society.

While Du Bois's framework primarily addresses the experiences of African Americans, its core principles – the internal conflict, the sense of otherness, and the struggle for self-definition within a dominant cultural framework – offer valuable insights into the experiences of other marginalized groups, including immigrants and individuals faced with multiple cultural identities.

Bhatt's poem powerfully illustrates this "two-ness" through the lens of linguistic displacement. The speaker, torn between the demands of the "foreign tongue" and the enduring pull of their "mother tongue," experiences a constant internal struggle. The line, "You could not use them both together / even if you thought that way," poignantly captures the inherent incompatibility of these two linguistic realities. The speaker contends with the impossibility of seamlessly integrating two distinct cultural frameworks, experiencing a constant sense of "otherness" within both linguistic and cultural spheres.

The poem's exploration of linguistic decay resonates deeply with Du Bois's concept of "the veil," a metaphorical barrier that separates the self from the world. For the speaker, the loss of the mother tongue creates a veil that obscures her connection to her cultural heritage, her past, and her sense of self. This linguistic "veil" not only separates her from her community of origin but also hinders her ability to fully participate in the dominant culture.

However, Bhatt's poem transcends a simple application of Du Bois's theory. While Du Bois primarily focuses on the internal conflict arising from racial oppression, Bhatt highlights the complexities of navigating multiple cultural identities in a globalized world. The loss of the mother tongue is not simply a matter of individual identity; it is a loss of cultural heritage, history, and connection to a specific community. It is a loss that extends beyond the individual to encompass the collective memory and cultural traditions of an entire community.

Furthermore, the poem offers a unique perspective that challenges the notion of double consciousness as inherently negative. While Du Bois emphasizes the internal conflict and fragmentation associated with this condition, Bhatt's poem suggests that multiple identities can coexist and even enrich one another. The mother tongue, far from being a relic of the past, continues to exert a profound influence on the speaker's present and future. It resurfaces in dreams, a testament to its enduring presence within the subconscious.

Bhatt's "Search for My Tongue" resonates with contemporary debates on identity, globalization, and the complexities of belonging in an interconnected world. The poem challenges us to consider the multifaceted nature of identity and the enduring power of cultural heritage in shaping our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. It serves as a powerful reminder that the loss of a language is not merely a linguistic loss but a profound cultural and emotional experience.

By weaving together personal experience, poetic imagery, and philosophical insights, Bhatt's poem offers a profound meditation on the enduring power of language and the complexities of belonging in a world increasingly characterized by cultural diversity and displacement.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how Sujata Bhatt's poem "Search for My Tongue" powerfully embodies W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. The poem's exploration of the loss of the "mother tongue" and the struggle to reconcile conflicting cultural demands mirrors Du

Bois's description of the "two-ness" experienced by African Americans in a racially segregated society. The analysis revealed how the poem's use of multiple languages, its vivid imagery of a decaying and regenerating tongue, and its exploration of the speaker's internal struggles all reflect the core tenets of double consciousness: the internal conflict, the sense of otherness, and the struggle for self-definition within a dominant cultural framework.

Furthermore, the study highlights the broader implications of Du Bois's theory. While initially developed to understand the experiences of African Americans, the concept of double consciousness proves to be a valuable framework for understanding the experiences of other marginalized groups, including immigrants, individuals struck with cultural hybridity, and those struggling with the complexities of identity in a globalized world.

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