

Between Two Tongues: Finding Myself in Hindi and English

Bright powders fly through the air, with red, blue, and yellow creating a splash of color all around. Laughter fills the air as I see my whole hallway take to the dances and sings to celebrate Holi. The scent of flowers mixes with the sweet smell of jalebi from the kitchen. From the thick stench of colors and noise, my mother's voice calls in Hindi, "Kya rang chahiye tumhe?" (What color do you want?). I smile, feeling the warmth of my culture wrap me like a familiar shawl of warmth that only Holi can bring. Yet, I often tune out familiar tales about Hindi's history, one story stands out to me which is when Hindi became an official language after India's independence in 1947 (Bhatia and Ritchie 45) and yet to this day I still want to hear that story due to its significance and importance to the Hindi language. Listening to these stories feels like holding a piece of living memory. Yet, even as I am surrounded by the colour and sound, another world waits outside- one where English shapes how I speak, think and sometimes feel distant from this very warmth.

Holi's joy flows into other festivals like Diwali, Lohri, and Maha Shivaratri, but none compares to Diwali. On a quiet evening, the flicker of oil lamps casts soft light across our faces as my grandmother says, "Deep jalane ka samay hai" (It is time to light the lamps). We share sweets and stories of good triumphing over evil. The stillness, light, and incense connect me to my heritage. These moments remind me that Hindi is more than words; it carries peace, pride, and memory. My parents often share how Hindi grew from ancient Indo-Aryan roots and evolved through Urdu and Panjabi. During family dinners, conversations flow in Hindi, grounding me in my culture. My grandfather's stories of learning Hindi from his grandmother,

rich with proverbs and folk tales, make me feel part of history. In those moments, I know Hindi lives through us a bond across time and generations.

Outside of celebrations, Hindi is the language of everyday life at home. It is how we express love, frustration, joy, and sorrow. When I speak Hindi with my family, the words flow easily while every sentence holds both emotion and shared history. Hindi is more than just a language it's a vessel carrying the culture, memories, and values that have shaped my family for generations. The sound of laughter, the melody of songs, and the comfort of familiar phrases that only those deeply rooted in this culture fully understand.

For many, switching between languages comes easily. For a bilingual student like me, though, it often feels like walking a tightrope across two worlds both familiar, yet very different. Some days I move between Hindi and English with pride, carrying the stories and warmth of my heritage into classrooms and building connections that bridge cultures. I think, "I'm doing this well," and for a moment, balance seems real. Then, after a long day at university, I step through my front door and pause, stuck between worlds. Inside, Hindi blends with laughter, and the scent of chai and spices wraps around me. The comfort is real, yet I freeze, unsure how to step back into my family's world.

The push of familiarity and the pull of distance weigh on me, bringing a sharp sense of loneliness. I question whether I am becoming a stranger in the place I call home. Then, in the stillness, my mother's soft voice breaks through: "Aaj ka din kaisa tha?" (How was your day?) as her voice cracks through the laughter of my friends. For a moment I stop and listen-not just to her question but what it means. In that soft voice I hear everything that I've been trying to balance: belonging and independence, heritage and change. It's then I realize that this is not a

struggle to choose between two worlds. It is an invitation to live in both. The tension that once felt heavy now feels like movement- like dance. While both languages shape who I am, each filling spaces the other cannot touch. This understanding brings peace. I accept that my home, my identity, exists in the space where these languages meet and mingle.

This constant balancing act between languages shapes my sense of self. My English carries an accent that stands apart from the local speech, an echo of my journey and heritage. This accent is like a unique fingerprint, telling a story without words. The blend of Hindi and English lets me weave sounds, expression, rhythm, and tone into a language of my own, where echoes of past experiences meet present moments. Language becomes a river flowing through me, carrying memories and dreams, shaping me with every twist and turn. The words dance to a rhythm that only I fully understand, a melody born from the mix of two worlds. In this blending, I find a home not just in my family but in a rich layer of culture that wraps around me like a well worn shawl. Here, I belong, connected across time and place, whole and ever growing.

Since to most of us language forms the backbone of every culture but does not fully define who we are. Yet often we let it do so. Switching between languages continues to feel like walking a tightrope. Sometimes I take pride in managing the balance well, but other times sadness creeps in, making me feel like I leave part of myself behind with every step. Hindi and English remind me of what George W. Bush called “brothers from different mothers.” They are close but distinct, and moving between them takes care and balance.

Hindi roots me deeply in family, culture, and stories that keep me grounded, while English connects me to a broader community with different rules and ways of thinking. At university, English calls for precision and formality. The warmth and expressiveness I easily

show in Hindi shift into careful, measured sentences that often lack emotion. I find myself editing thoughts before speaking, focusing more on clarity than feeling. Simple Hindi expressions often need long explanations in English, making me aware of how much language shapes ideas and emotions. Sometimes I worry that spending too much time in English might weaken my cultural roots. Yet I still appreciate how English lets me express new ideas, challenges me intellectually, and expands my world. It is through this interplay between languages that I keep learning identity is layered and evolving, enriched where languages meet.

This journey teaches me that while language carries culture's weight, it is the person behind the words who defines what those languages mean in life. My identity is not limited to one tongue or the others as it lives in the meeting space between them, where stories, ideas, and feelings flow across boundaries. Learning to navigate these worlds has shaped how I see myself not as divided, but as connected, growing, and whole.

MLA citation:

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