

The battle on my tongue

- Sumayyah Koli

South African colours painted my childhood,
the small town nurtured me till I became a woman.
When I speak the local tongue, I speak as smooth as satin.
When Ma and Pa greet me on the front doorstep,
I fumble with my words, I'm red in the face.
Their language sits uncomfortable on my tongue,
like a beggar in a ballroom waiting to run;
only a fool who knows nothing,
will dance with bruised feet among the elite.
"This isn't fair!" I scream in the dark.

Indian spices tingle my Ma's kitchen,
I taste and lick, but the words always stumble.
I fist my hands in my hair, tugging till I remember:
at home I am Indian...in town, I am South African.
Motherland's language battles with local words,
every day is a day to learn new numbers.

Oh! How blissful this journey would be!
to speak satin-like in the native and the local,
to be one person and not two,
to belong to a nation and to belong at home.
But an immigrant's child is fortunate to be two in one,

if only there were no swords in my mouth,
every time I speak.