

Mother Tongue

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I speak three languages
read in two and write in one.
The third –
the one I can't read or write
I quietly cuddle and
hold her close.

She's my mother.
Her name is Malayalam.
She resides in my home
with my kith and kin.
She only speaks behind closed doors
and I don't always understand her.
Yet I look out for her in public spaces -
smiling at strangers
when I hear that they know her.

When I turned six
Tamil breezed into my life.
They said she was my *Amma*.
They said I belonged to her.
She was truly easy to love
and was always there –
in signboards and forms
sitting side by side three others.
Amma still whispers sweet nothings
into my ears in my dreams.

Then there is English -
the language of my thoughts.

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She was strict and unpredictable
but the one I wanted to please the most.
She coldly rules my head with an iron fist.
Yet I am lost without her.
It was, after all, she
who cradled me in her arms
and held my hand patiently
for several months
when I first learnt to write.