



## Mother Tongue



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*Padma Sachdev*

I approached a stem  
 Swinging on a reed  
 And asked him  
 To give me a quill.  
 Irritated, he said  
 I gave you one only the other day  
 A new one, what have you done with it?  
 Are you some sort of an accountant  
 With some *Shah*  
 Writing account books  
 Where you need a new pen  
 Every other day he asked.  
 No, I don't work for a *Shah*  
 I said, but for a *Shahni*, very kind,  
 Very well off  
 And I am not the only one  
 Working for her  
 She has many servants  
 Ever ready to do her bidding  
 That *Shahni* is my mother tongue  
 Dogri  
 Give me, a quill, quickly  
 She must be looking for me  
 The reed cut off its hand  
 Gave it to me and said  
 Take it  
 I too am her servant.

**ABOUT THE POET**

Padma Sachdev (born 1940) writes in her mother tongue Dogri and in Hindi. She has received many awards for her poetry, including the Sahitya Academi Award she received at the age of thirty for her first collection of Dogri poems.



The above poem, translated from the original Dogri, bemoans the deprivation of Dogri of its native script Sharade, that evolved from the original Brahmi around the time Dogri developed. Once widely used by the people of all religions in the valley, Sharade, for various reasons, came to be replaced by the Persian script. Presently both Persian and Devanagri (Hindi and Urdu) scripts are used for Dogri, a language listed in Schedule VIII of the Constitution of India.

**UNDERSTANDING THE POEM**

1. The quill is the central element in the poem—what does it symbolise?
2. You notice a sense of urgency in the poet's request—what is the reason for this?
3. How has the poet brought out her emotional attachment to her mother tongue?
4. Personification is a figure of speech that attributes human qualities to inanimate things and abstract ideas. How has it been used in this poem?

**TRY THIS OUT**

1. Talk to five people from different spheres of society around you and ask them the number of languages they know and use for various purposes. Try to gather information about their attitude to the different languages they know and use.
2. Dogri is a language spoken in parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. Its earliest mention is in Amir Khusro's list of Indian languages. It does not have a script of its own. It is written in either the Devnagari or the Persian script. Find out about other Indian languages that are spoken but do not have a script of their own.

**SUGGESTED READING**

1. 'Hindi' by Raghuvir Sahay.

