



Comparative Cultures

Parallel Lives

By Kinjal Dagli Shah

There's something uncanny about watching yourself grow up.

When my brother and sister-in-law had a baby girl last year, many of our family members and friends commented on how closely she resembled me. While my personal opinion is that she is far cuter (and I was a really cute baby, even if I say so myself), I was happy to be ranked up there with a baby who has such a high cuteness quotient. After all, perhaps I deserve some recognition for travelling across the seas just to see the little bundle of joy and for giving her such a beautiful name - Jioni.

And even though we have a long-distance aunt-niece relationship, she recognizes me when I make an appearance through the webcam, giggles when I make funny faces at her on the monitor, and responds with a high-and-mighty nod when I call her my little princess. And somehow, even through her baby babble, I get a sense of how alike our dispositions might be, heaven help her!

Of course, I don't remember my first year as a baby, but my parents - and my niece's doting grandparents - do, and they regale us with tales of how she loves being the centre of attention, or is starting to be as stubborn as I was.

Perhaps because she is a girl, and the

first baby in our family after I graced the last generation, she gets compared more to me than my brother. And my parents are reliving my childhood far more than I am, because no amount of technology can compare to living with someone and watching every little step taken, or every word spoken.

Nonetheless, through the connectivity afforded by technology, my niece and I make the most of our relationship. When my mum switches on her laptop, I can hear Jioni waddle her way through her mass of toys and spring up in front of the webcam. And of late, if a technical snag results in a blank screen instead of my pretty face, she turns to my sister-in-law with a very

questioning look, demanding where her *Fiya* (aunt) is.

I love the fact that Jioni is growing up in the same house that I did, in the same neighbourhood. I love that she is playing at the same parks, and will perhaps go to one of the schools that I grew up being so familiar with. I like to think I had a blessed childhood, showered with a lot of love and attention.

In a strangely satisfying way, it makes up for me living so far away from home, knowing that her little feet are filling in for me.

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