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Shunya

Anita Nahal

I

“What are you drawing, Naina?”

“Circles, dadi.”

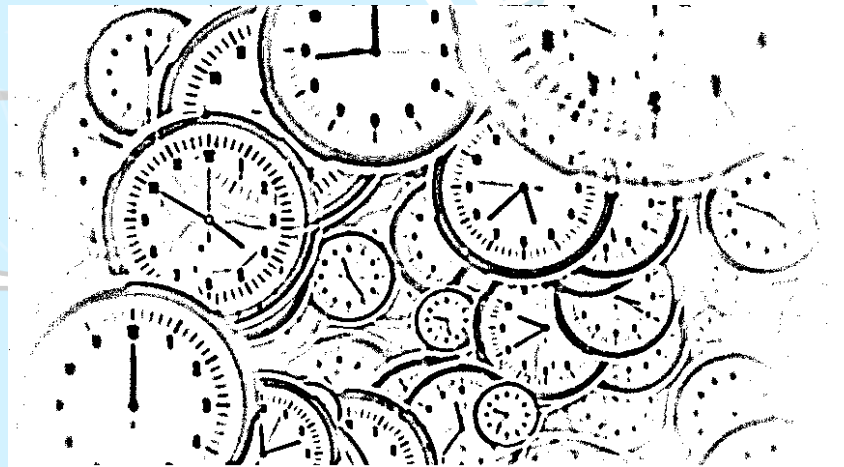
“Circles? And of different sizes? Is this some game?”

“Well actually, dadi, these are more like zeros.”

“Zeros? Like in the mathematics zero?”

“Yes, dadi. Don’t you remember dadi you used to tell me that life is like many circles...some small, some big and some in between?”

“Yes...I remember...and I still say the same. To achieve anything in life we have to get the circles moving. One moves, the next one will move, and so forth. It’s a cycle. And the movement will have a domino effect. Ultimately, the change



you wish, the desires you want, the dreams you visualize, will come to fruition. Sometimes when you wish for a very big change, and all the circles start moving, the motion can’t be stopped. You can add some new circles, or remove some, or change the size...but the motion can’t be stopped. Consequently, whatever changes that come along, good and not so good, expected and some unexpected, one has to acknowledge and endure.” In her imagination, Priya thought the circles looked like tires, or like watches of different sizes.

“Yes, dadi, but I am saying the circles are like zeros.”

“Why do you say that, Naina?”

“Well, there’s nothing in the circles...empty...like zeros, like donuts in the middle.”

“You know the Sanskrit word for zero is shunya which means void, emptiness.” Naina looked confused and sad. “Or, or, hahaha, like a bunt cake!!”

Naina let out a quiet smile. That’s how she was. She and Priya often had deep conversations about life. She seemed to have a wise old soul in her like her father, Priya’s son, Avijeet.

Priya often thought of the circles she had set into motion when she and Avijeet left India, 32 years ago. So many circles, some even unknown to her at the time, had started moving. Effects of some were felt many, many years later. She looked at the six circles Naina had etched with her fingertips on the misted glass. It had been raining for many days and they were in the thick of Fall. The blurry images of bottle and lime green bushes and plants were standing strong outside though.

Naina had made the circles for her parents, for herself and her two siblings, and one at the top for Priya. “You are the oldest, dadi, so I placed your circle on the top.” Naina did not say anything, just took a picture. “Are you going to put it on Facebook, dadi?” “Hahaha, why do you say that?” “You often put up images and write some interesting sentences to go with the image. Sometimes I don’t fully understand what you write.”

Priya became thoughtful and quiet. “No, beta, this I am not going to put up.” Next day she went to the local CVS and printed the image, putting its date on the back, and that Naina had made these circles with the top one being for Priya. She framed the picture and kept it in her walk-in closet, near the other special pictures she had, of her son, parents, grandparents, and grandkids, all placed behind a collection of Ganeshas she had brought from her different trips to New Delhi. There were never enough Ganeshas for her to gather!

II

Naina walked into her dadi's walk-in closet the day after she passed. She had never really ventured in, only peeking when the door was ajar. 'Go, go in and have a look at my closet, Naina,' her dadi used to say. She would shake her head as if that was a sacred place Naina did not wish to intrude. "When you are a bit older, I will give you my sarees, shawls and jewellery to wear. "Oh, that would be so nice, dadi!!"

Today, Naina gingerly tip toed in. There, right in the middle, on top of the glass and wooden drawer that held dadi's numerous shawls, stood the framed picture of the circles she had drawn on the misty window the year before. The top circle seemed faded. Naina hugged it and cried, just as Avijeet walked in. He too was crying. His mom had been the closest friend he had, even though his wife was the love of his life. As Avijeet and Naina hugged the image, the circle on the top glowed and the frame came unhinged from the back. A paper fell through. It was a poem Priya had written for them.

Dearest Avijeet and Naina

When I am no more

Remember my tears, my smiles

For in them you will see me

Just as I always have been

And your love that I've carried

In my heart and soul

Will now carry you through

Till you reach the end of your circle end

From the circles we emerge

Into the circles we descend

Shunya is an abstract

Where love in infinite

Mummy and dadi (Priya kapahi)

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*PS: Naina, you can wear any and all of my clothes and jewellery whenever you wish.
They are yours ☺*



BIO-NOTE

Anita Nahal is originally from New Delhi, India and currently resides in the US. She is a poet, flash fictionist and children's books author. Apart from full time writing, Anita is an Adjunct Professor at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology and has previously served in the capacity of Assistant Provost for International Affairs at Howard University, Washington DC, and Associate Professor of History at Sri Venkateswara College, New Delhi. Nahal's interests are Diversity & Inclusion, U.S. History, African American Women's History, South Asian Women's History, International Relations, and Modern India. She has been a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence, SUNY, Binghamton, NY, a visiting scholar of Gender, University of California, Berkeley, and a National Endowment for the Humanities summer teacher seminar awardee. Nahal's creative work has appeared in Aberration Labyrinth, Better Than Starbucks, Confluence, Aaduna, River Poets Journal, and Colere. Authorspress, New Delhi has just released two books by her, a collection of poems and a collection of flash fictions.

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