

Reading Together, Reading Apart: Identity, Belonging, and South Asian American Community, by Tamara Bhalla (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016, pp. 224. ISBN 978-0252040481).

Tamara Bhalla is the author of *Reading Together, Reading Apart: Identity, Belonging, and South Asian American Community* (2016) which unravels the practice of reading as a community and how this can determine identity formation. Bhalla studies the sense of identity and belonging of the South Asian diaspora in the United States and describes the needs of the South Asian American community to align with a constructed idea of otherness that is authentic. For this, the author uses the NetSAP book club as an example of a reading group that shares class and race patterns and uses the body of literature to forge and discuss South Asian American identity.

The members of this book club belong to the American middle class and as Bhalla clearly explains, show a strong sense of kinship with hegemonic ideologies of authenticity of Indian cultural tradition, ethnic homogeneity, masculinity, Hinduism, class and caste taboos. At the same time, they show a disidentification with images of affluence in transnational South Asian literary culture which demonstrates a concern on how cosmopolitan privilege affects South Asian narratives and its effects when they become globally popular and accessible. They manifest a longing to be part of a community and identify with each other discussing about the different versions of South Asian identity among fellow South Asians' experiences. They use the book club to debate which versions of South Asian identity are truly authentic, and which versions are not. This, says Bhalla, can be considered an effect of neoliberal multiculturalist ideology within this coethnic group.

In her second chapter, Bhalla explores how NetSAP's reading practice shows neoliberal multiculturalism among South Asian Americans which is manifested in their ambivalence towards the model minority paradigm, what some South Asian Americans consider a myth based in stereotypical concepts of accommodation, obedience, and sacrifice of their community. This model does not only concern NetSAP's members and their community but also other racial minorities, as South Asians in America become an unrealistic and distant example to follow. In addition to this, NetSAP book club members emphasize the need to portray other models of South Asian identity, attributed to lower classes, which seem almost invisible by the upper class that NetSAP readers belong to. They show great interest in narratives that are far from the dominant, cosmopolitan construction of South Asian culture.

Bhalla also discusses members of the community's opinions on what the model minority represents to them and whether it portrays their own vision or how white Americans really see them as a minority. Raj explains that the model minority status can only be achieved through assimilation to norms of whiteness, especially after 9/11 and thus making reference to the stigmatization of Muslim South Asian Americans.

The author cleverly draws the reader closer to understanding ethnic identity formation using an insightful first person perspective and discussing the opinions of members of the community who are able to reflect on the matter and in doing so, she shows the complexity of reading and writing as a collective activity that is still mostly catered by and for the elite.

María Cristina REVILLA EXPÓSITO
Universidad de La Laguna

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