

with most of his book, it is not altogether clear what he means by this.

M.L. (Tony) Miranda
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth. *A Part Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). 320 pp., \$59.95 cloth. \$22.95 paper.

In their introduction to this stimulating collection of Asian American voices, editors Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth describe "A Part Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America," as an "exploration" of the ways in which South Asian Americans from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, do or do not "fit" into the popular, academic, and activist consciousness associated with the Asian American Identity which has traditionally embraced immigrants from countries hugging the Pacific rim - China, Taiwan, the Koreas, Japan, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Philippines. The essays in the book debate what constitutes the gap, who perceives the gap, and how the gap can be closed.

The gap is seen, as Rajiv Shankar puts it in his forward to the book, in the relative dominance of the East and South East Asians in the Asian American platform, in the non-Asian-American consciousness where Asian American is associated, primarily and often exclusively, with East and South East Asia, in the racialization of the Asian American identity as "oriental"—all of which marginalizes South Asians and makes them "feel as if they are merely a crypto group".

The strength of the book primarily lies in what it considers to be legitimate, realistic, progressive, and proven strategies for bridging this gap. In moving away from advocating alliances based on ambiguous and ephemeral notions of self, identity, nationality, and race, many of the essays in the book provide sophisticated and dynamic options based on class and political activism. The most forceful and effective essays are

those which discuss the innate futility of haphazardly forming coalitions by consolidating a false sense of homogeneity. In Deepika Bahri's essay the limits and problems of the South Asian name and identity itself is impressively demonstrated, further strengthening the argument that when complex, multi-dimensional identities are simplified and homogenized for the sake of identitarian coalitions, the alliances thus forged are ultimately impotent and reactionary.

In bemoaning the loss of class politics in the zeal to advance identity politics, Vijay Prasad, in his essay, celebrates class as a welcoming and unifying force for all people. In recounting the story of Pakhar Singh, Min Song provides historical evidence of the role class played in how the events surrounding a murder trial played out in 1920s California. In Sumantra Tito Sinha's article political and electoral activism along with community outreach and advocacy surrounding the needs of South Asians and non-South Asians of the larger Asian American community of New York City becomes a heartening way of "drawing together the South Asian American and other Asian American communities," otherwise divided by regional, national, language and cultural differences.

The essays emphasize, however, that crafting solidarities around class and politics need not weaken other forms of "fellowship" based on religion, nationality, language, culture or sexual orientation, all of which enable "us to live complex and rich lives."

In assessing the evidence on the gap and chances of coalition building between the South Asian and the Asian American communities and also between the various constituents of the South Asian "family," the book displays a balance worth recognizing in both acknowledging the allure yet ultimate futility of identity-based politics and emphasizing the urgency of seeking more enduring grounds for forging effective partnerships.

Kasturi DasGupta
Georgian Court College