

All Those Tears We Can't See

Gita Audhya

Austin Macauley Publishers (Oct 31, 2018)

Softcover \$13.95 (229pp)

978-1-64182-193-3

All Those Tears We Can't See is a dramatic, cross-cultural coming-of-age novel set between two very different worlds.

In Gita Audhya's passionate multigenerational drama *All Those Tears We Can't See*, a young woman navigates the space between her Bengali family values and her personal desires.

Monica is a first-generation Indian American, raised in the United States by Bengali parents. She feels American and grows up speaking English, but is sometimes an odd fit with the culture around her.

Navigating life in the US while honoring her family's values can be challenging, but as Monica gains confidence, she learns to push the envelope. She falls in love with Brandon—who is white, Christian, and American. He wants to get married, but Monica wonders if Brandon's family's fascination with her Indian culture is genuine.

To answer her own questions, Monica travels to Kolkata. She falls in love with India, where everything that feels out of place about her in the United States makes her feel welcome. The two generations of Monica's family come together late in the book in moving scenes that show former misunderstandings being mended as characters find common ground.

Scene settings blossom as Monica does. Early chapters are set in California, but a boilerplate version of the state, featuring BMWs, palm trees, and swimming pools. In dry progression, Monica goes through rites of passage familiar to first-generation immigrants who face intercultural pressures to conform. The portions of the story that are set in India are more luscious—packed with details about colors, clothes, sounds, and scents: “the pungent sweet smell of Gopal brand *zarda* that she consumed with *paan* and broken betel nuts.”

Monica's relationship with India is the most important in the book. It changes her in indelible ways and helps her find her true self. India ends up being the character drawn in the most detail, described with candor and care. Other characters, including Monica, her parents, and her love interest, are flat by comparison.

Although Monica's internal dialogue and observations include insights about cultural dichotomies, her actions do not reflect this tumult. Her conversations with others are dull and often seem unnecessary.

Meaningful emotional connections are initially hard to come by, but the story finds its groove once Monica leaves home. A frightening rape scene comes as a late climactic shift that forces Monica in new directions, reconfiguring who she wants to be. These scenes could be a novel in themselves, but the conflict is resolved in a rush.

All Those Tears We Can't See is a dramatic, cross-cultural coming-of-age novel that challenges Indian and American cultural expectations for women.

CLAIRE FOSTER (April 14, 2019)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive

review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.