

anti-centre militancy, notably by Naga groups almost immediately following Independence, the formation of ULFA cannot be blamed entirely on the colonial period.

But these moves, along with the communalization of communities on the basis, at times, of dubious cultural markers, each took place in the colonial era and this work plays an important role in explaining how the creation of difference has negative legacies that still resonate today. And in a post-colonial country in which benefits are frequently provided on the basis of social identification, un-doing this focus on difference, rather than generating notions of unity, has proved challenging.

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HIP HOP DESIS: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness. By *Nitasha Tamar Sharma*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010. xiv, 351 pp. (Illus.) US\$23.95, paper. ISBN 978-0-8223-4760-6.

This book is an important contribution towards understanding the landscape of diasporic cultural politics. Nitasha Tamar Sharma provides a rich and textured introduction to the world of South Asian artists in hip hop culture. Integrating quick-paced descriptive writing with insightful theoretical engagements, Sharma's fieldwork provides a window into a much broader discussion about transnational identifications, racial politics and cultural citizenship. Sharma captures the lives and aspirations of young *desi* performers in vivid detail and in the process, manages to leverage the descriptions towards some very productive intellectual and political interventions.

Sharma has responded to the challenge of documenting the complex narratives of racial identity and the contested paths of minoritization. The study of groups as self-contained units is no longer tenable in the contemporary transnational context of flows. The contested terrain of race and ethnicity has to be situated within the structures of the neoliberal consumerist economy and the powerful reach of the culture industries. The culture of hip hop and its presence in the lives of young South Asian Americans is a challenging site to study. Both deep contextualization and multi-sited methodological moves are necessary in order to capture the racial politics, contested ethnicities and transnational imaginaries that frame the creativity of *desi* hip hop artists. This is a vast and dynamic terrain that deserves nuanced attention. Sharma has succeeded admirably in unraveling the layers of a complex narrative in this compelling book.

The book stands out for the way it complicates the binary logics of understanding race. Sharma introduces us to characters who through their performative and social networks express a global race consciousness. Through the stories of the rappers and DJs, Sharma shows how race becomes

“a matter of critical understanding—of ways of thinking about and being in the world” (2). The youth, Sharma portrays, negotiate their own racial identity through immersion in Black popular culture which, in turn, enables a reimagining of their connections to South Asian ethnicity or *desiness*. Sharma’s ethnography manages to take the reader into the creative and complicated worlds of these young artists. While their individual aspirations are outlined in detail, the ethnography deftly establishes how artistic identities and creative pursuits are deeply implicated within the structures of transnational histories, the music industry and the global economy.

Sharma tracks how the artists experience race and disrupt conventional understandings of cultural belonging and ethnic identity. She asks how and why do South Asian hip hop artists negotiate their identity and model minority status through forging alliances with Blacks and Black popular culture. The various stories of Vivek, D’Lo and Che Malabar and others together reveal the complexity and challenge of understanding race beyond the black/white binary. What makes this book distinctive is Sharma’s ability to zoom in and out between scales of analysis and speak to the limits and insularity of received categories. With the ethnographic details about the lives and the artistic creations of these performers, Sharma makes a strong case for how the artists define their identity modeled on Blackness and at the same infuse “traditionally United States-bound and Black-centered themes in hip hop with a diasporic sensibility and a global lens” (4).

An understanding of blackness is incorporated in the racial outlook of young hyphenated Americans for whom hip hop serves as a site that encourages the building of cross-racial alliances. Sharma argues that through hip hop, South Asian artists reinstate a racial awareness that was elided by the earlier generation of south Asian immigrants who remained deeply entrenched in the myth of the model minority. One of the rappers tells Sharma that when it came to race and associating with Black friends, “there was always tension. Always, always” (97). The older generation and their anti-Black sentiment repeatedly surface as the chief factor that drives these artists to adopt and work within new racial paradigms. This leaves the reader wanting to hear more about these tensions. Filling in this looming spectral presence and discourse between the generations would have been a bonus in this ethnography.

Overall, Sharma’s lucid exploration of the politics of sampling is particularly impressive for its ability to contextualize with both historical and ethnographic detail. Sharma calls her project “an ode to the music and culture that became the poetics and politics of *the desi* hip hop artists and shaped my own craft and worldview” (36). This is indeed a well-crafted book and its engagement with a diasporic sonic landscape will be read and valued across disciplines.