



★ **The Subtweet**

Vivek Shraya

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Vivek Shraya's *The Subtweet* is a sharp, encompassing story about a creative friendship that's promoted, and later imploded, by the kinetic energy of Twitter. Contrasting emotional vulnerability and connective need with desires for "likes" and retweets, the story explores private and public motivations that are intensified by the often shallow, shape-shifting nature of the music industry.

Set in Toronto, *The Subtweet* concerns two multidisciplinary musicians, Neela and Rukmini. Trying to avoid ethnic marginalization, these self-described "brown women" first cross paths at a panel on race and music. Neela notes that Rukmini amplifies her heritage, wearing Bollywood-style "gold earrings, bangles and rings;" while Rukmini laments not having musical role models who were people of color, Neela ponders the dearth of "POC art that isn't just a response to a lack of representation or oppression."

When Rukmini uploads a cover version of one of Neela's songs, her social media followers embrace the work with enthusiasm. Rukmini and Neela become close friends, but their relationship has an element of existing for public consumption, due to Rukmini's penchant for life-documenting selfies and tweets. When Rukmini is invited to join the tour of a white, appropriate pop star, her fame broadens beyond Canada.

Beyond the constant buzz of social media, Neela's own artistic process stays organic and personal. Not wanting to "vomit" out hasty efforts, she strives to put forth original music of quality. When her album receives minimal response, she begins to feel as if everything she does is shadowed by Rukmini. Though she tries to rise above her insecurities, Neela is troubled by frustrations and doubts. Her eventual protest—in the form of a subtweet regarding racial authenticity—changes the course of both artists' careers.

A piercing satire played out against diverse creative energies, *The Subtweet* is affecting, unnerving, empowering, and often truly LOL.

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