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Juneja's mix of poetry and politics

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in Toronto

He's called the 'South Asian avatar' of Hip-Hop.

Foremost Canadian literary scholar Daniel Richler describes him as a 'hip-hop activist.'

Raoul Juneja, 24, is the winner of the Kesri Award, instituted by Indo-Canadian student organizations to recognize the outstanding achievements of promising South Asians.

Other winners of this award were Rasul Somji, known as the 'first and funniest Muslim to ever hit the stage,' and Mo-D, who Juneja says "is the only Indo-Canadian talk show host on mainstream North American television" whose Ishtyle television program "is Canada's 'Tonight Show' for the ethnic/urban entertainment world."

The award ceremony was held at the Payal banquet Hall in suburban Mississauga.

Indian and South Asian youngsters are arguably the largest supporters of hip-hop music/culture after Africans, said Juneja.

Not only are England's Panjabi MC and Asia's DJ Honda two of the top rap producers in the American-funded rap industry, but Canadian hip-hop club DJ Mastermind happens to be of South Asian Punjabi-Sikh heritage.

Juneja, called 'Deejay Ra' for short, produced/hosted the 'Comedy meet hip-hop' radio series on University of Western Ontario's CHRW 94.7 FM and he continues to work on the top college radio stations in Canada and Southern California through cultural/political awareness campaigns launched by his Toronto company Lyrical Knockout Entertainment.

He describes hip-hop as a "mix of poetry and politics."

"What a lot of people don't realize is that in its purest form, the essence of hip-hop is poetical words with a political edge," Juneja said.

"I think the biggest mistake someone can make is to judge an entire art form society on the 'pop' style that the mainstream presents -- I mean, would you base your whole opinion of female opinion on Britney over Sade?"

Known for his bold expressions during interviews and his writings in a number of newspapers (including a column in the *Globe and Mail*), Juneja has been interviewed on a number of television networks and radio stations.

Filmink, Australia's top movie magazine, recently dubbed Juneja as 'one of the entertainment industry's most vocal and effective campaigners' and in its recent issue carried an article and photo of Juneja and Indian-American film star Purva Bedi in the premier section, next to a story on George Lucas.

UK bhangra star Panjabi MC recently did an hour-long special with Juneja for PMC's first North American interview and concert which was broadcast on the Asian Television network and in clips on Rogers Community television.

Besides his love for hip-hop, Juneja is active in what he described as the "political edge."



■ Raoul Juneja (right) with Rasul Somji (center) and Mo-D with their Kesri awards

He supports the Black Panthers movement, talks of racism in the United States and in that context quotes Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela.

While Juneja writes about Gandhi and Martin Luther King, he unabashedly supports the militant Black Panthers.

Juneja, who has spoken with *India Abroad* on several occasions, believes the "Black Panthers legacy is set for rediscovery."

He recently met David Hillard, former Black Panthers chief of staff and now executive director of Dr Huey P Newton Foundation in Oakland, California, and forged an alliance "aimed at empowering a new generation of multi-cultural Canadians growing increasingly suspicious of their past American censored education."

Their first collaboration, Juneja said, was 'a tribute' to hip-hop's 'second-generation Black Panther' (the late musician Tupac Amaru Shakur).

It was aired across Canadian community radio stations through Juneja's Lyrical Knockout Entertainment company.

Shakur is comparable to the ideology of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, asserts Juneja.

Publishers Simon & Schuster, Harper Collins and Xenon Pictures and Hillard's Black Panther Records freely distributed the book/DVD/CD in their campaign across North America.

Three years ago, Juneja was a four-year media honors student at the University of

western Ontario in London.

He was then hosting the university radio show CHRW 94.7 FM/TV Western, the show with which he continues to be affiliated even though he left university after three years without finishing his four-year studies owing to "opportunities in Toronto."

On CHRW his 'Comedy Meets Hip-Hop' series premiere featured Russell Peters, a well known Indo-Canadian stand-up comedian, and the finale featured the Comedy of Network's Mista Mo and Gavin Stephens (from the Gemini-award winning 'BUZZ' series) and Phunny Nations' Somji.

Juneja was also on the arts and entertainment staff of London's *Gazette* newspaper for which he wrote articles on Canadian rap groups like Ghetto Concept and Baby Blue and rap musicians Maestro and Choclair.

He says he has appeared as a taxi driver in Al Pacino's *The Recruit*, a street hoodlum in Danny DeVito's *Death to Smoochy* and a rap fan in Eddie Griffin's *Undercover Brother*.

His company's latest 'hip-hop literacy' campaign was launched with the help of novelist Elmore Leonard and focuses on youth literacy.

Juneja says it encourages students uninterested in reading to start with books written by rap musicians (or rappers' favorite books like those of Leonard) in the hope they would eventually progress to Shakespeare.

Fond of his black leather jacket and a large silver pendant around his neck, Juneja is also known for his shaved head.