Twitter Thread by Lila Krishna



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Okay I'm extremely sleep deprived, so why not start some Twitter drama on this fine Monday morning.

Hot take: Vinay Sitapati is a deracinated, colonized fella who shouldn't be writing about the topics he writes about.

I will elaborate.

So mind, I haven't read his books. I want to read Jugalbandi but it isn't yet available on the Kindle store in the US. It seems like he's researched the crap out of his topics. I'm not going to dispute his research chops. BUT

The lens he looks at things with. It's the most colonized lens I've seen in a long time. It is maddeningly colonized.

This is based on all the videos of him promoting his books that I've watched.

In several talks/interviews about his PVN Rao book, he says 'Rao was going to quit politics and become a "Hindu Priest"'.

That's the kind of language you would use if you were so far removed from India that Hinduism was just one big monolithic blob to you.

Someone even marginally immersed in the culture would probably say "poojari" or specified that he was going to serve at Kutralam peetham. But no, he sticks to the incredibly sterile "Hindu Priest".

I don't even understand why. He's not writing for an international audience. He's writing for Indians. Why not talk like an Indian person?

And then in all the conversations about his latest book, Jugalbandi, he keeps on going on about "we Indians have a huge ego" or "we Indians are incredibly hierarchical".

Way to generalize one-sixth of humanity.

Every other culture in the world lacks ego, has flat organizations, and don't promote their kith and kin. Oh us unique Indians.

It strikes me as the kind of shallow shit you'd say when you live in New Jersey in a very NRI neighborhood and try acting multicultural.

And whenever he talks about the RSS, he says "Hindu nationalism".

You can just say nationalism, you know.

Wonder if he goes to an Indian restaurant and eats Indian food in India.

It's especially fucky because a huge number of RSS members are not sanatani. And he says several times that the RSS portrays non-hindus as The Other.

How in all your research do you not meet up with members of the Muslim Rashtriya Manch, I don't know.

And when he talks about how some members of the BJP can't stand each other but still work together, he compares it to a bickering family. Then he says while Advani and Modi can't stand each other, Modi still wished Advani on his birthday.

Oh the horror and the hypocrisy.

He proves with that line that he understands neither the BJP nor families.

If you are in a cadre based organization, you'll argue, compete, cooperate and collude with people very different from you. That's basically a given. I don't know why that seems so weird to Mr Sitapati.

And also I assume Advani and Modi disagree on stuff, and don't actively loathe each other. It's not "play-acting" as he puts it for them to be friendly.

Mr. Sitapati has a very black and white view of relationships. I assume he doesn't have in-laws.

How do you immerse yourself in all this research and still not get the vibe of an Indian organization? Sure, the culture might be a little distinct from others, but definitely not in the ways Mr Sitapati thinks. How does he not get it?

If he was raised by wolves, it's most likely not wolfmom Raksha from Jungle Book, bc it feels like even a colonist like Rudyard Kipling understood Indian families.

Heck, Prof Walter Andersen who wrote books on the RSS has a much better intuitive understanding of the Sangh.

The thing that bothers me the most is, how is someone who presumably has been raised in India in an Indian family not get these nuances. How does one get this deracinated over a few years at princeton?

Idk. This is just a sample. It probably gets worse. It's just weird and jarring hearing an Indian person think about Indian topics from an incredibly western lens.

I won't even get into some of the factual inaccuracies of his that are tangential to his work.

He really doesn't get it. Maybe he needs to spend some time with Diana Eck, Melissa Kapoor and heck, maybe even that likely CIA agent, Jonathan Shainin.