

The Religion
called
Pragmatism:

Memoirs of
Dr Veena Ratankumari Jacobs

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CHAPTER ONE: THE WOMAN'S PARADOX

Religion, a word summoning the widest wildest of mysteries. Those mysteries form controversies. Those controversies recessively fuel the plight of man for a need to survive and struggle. Every soul has questioned through its conscious, sub-conscious and definitely through its conscience, what is religion? The answers are mostly specific or too general. The most important part is, that you know what it is. The meaning, in your mind, is not shadowed in dormancy. It is rather a more prominent thing which everybody, every second, is aware of. But, for a very strange reason, we naturally choose to isolate that definition from anything related to the word 'religion'. All that appears in our minds is a dynamic amalgamation of extreme and ambiguous. Hence the diverse sects of radicals and the superstitious.

Religion, over time, has risen to become the most important issue across the world. The grasps of the curiosity to know the Gods has even reached further from our Planet. More so that if we ever encounter

an extraterrestrial life-form, the first talk would not be 'We come in peace', rather 'If you follow my religion, then I come in peace'. It is not the hour to debate ethics of religion, but to discuss and prepare the right questions to be asked, so that we can re-realize the very original purpose for religion. It is high time we understand that more important than 'what' is that 'why is religion?'

Dr. Veena Jacobs, a well-to-do history professor of Delhi, had spent the majority of her life escaping the interrogatives of and about religion. In Fact, the young academician had ever ignored phrases holding the word 'religion' itself. Hence, when a student called out to her for her personal statement as to 'Whom are you supporting?', she was speechless. The pretext of this query was the usual foolish feud of college religious politics and the context in respect to Dr. Veena was all the more paradoxical for her. 'Why' you must be thinking. The maze which Dr. Jacobs has been running from never left. That maze is the very answer to this question.

Veena Ratankumari Jacobs was born on 25th June 1975 within the backwaters of Alappuzha, Kerala. The seventh-month birth, demanding immediate caesarean, was indeed a national emergency for the

rural and isolated below-sea-level island of the city. Her father, Sharman Jacobs, was a dedicated catholic and secondarily a sea-bus driver. He was also a member of the island's commando-like Vallam Kali seasonal squad, or the famous snake boat race squad. The only dream of his life was to be the Captain of the squad, which was also dormant since long due to his temporary banishment from the community. His fault? He had married an Islamic maid, Noori Mirza.

Noori was the daughter of a fish merchant, living on the island in the Islamic colony. There was always a prevalent latent understanding between the Fish-Merchant Muslims and the Transporter Christians. The rivalry was not fresh but had initiated centuries ago. The original division was caste-wise between the 'Machuwaras' and 'Kewaths'. The residents switched faiths to shed untouchability, but the vicious grasps of division prompted them to adopt dissimilar faiths. And the rivalry continued thence. During the backwater floods, the Islamic island almost sunk and the people were dispersed across Alappuzha. Sharman came across the twin sisters Noori and Amara on another island when he was running his regular evening shift. He immediately fell in love with one of them, then saw the other and got confused as to whom he had fallen in love with. Nevertheless, seeing their

wretched state, he dropped them off at a Kochi Disaster Control Camp. Fatefully, Noori had to return to the boat as she had forgotten her bag of fish, the last one her father gave before they were separated. And thus, the introduction. It was Noori he was matched with and thus they talked and came to know about each other.

The regular meetings started and Sharman took time off his shifts to greet the sisters and ask about their condition. He came to know about their father, their island's revered Maulvi and Merchant who had now been located comatose in a hospital. One fine day, Sharman was shocked to hear that Noori's sister Amara, had been proposed by the camp's Sergeant, who was a Hindu, for marriage. And she had complied. This boosted his confidence and somewhat hers as well and thus they registered their marriage in a court with two witnesses in Amara and her fiancé. Noori Mirza Jacobs was brought back to Sharman's Alappuzha village, where he was shown black flags by Church, his colleagues and even his Vallam Kali mates. His Vice-Captain position was stripped immediately and he was boycotted from the society. His dream to be Captain had vanished then. But after the birth of his daughter, empathizers of society partially reinstated his position in the community.

This was not the end of it for Veena. When she was six years old, her father succumbed to injuries he had received during a snake race accident. Her pregnant and ailing mother also passed away a week later during the delivery of a stillborn second child. She was then adopted by her aunt, Amara Mirza Bhagwati.

Veena had a multi-lingual upbringing. But her liberal parenting had never made her religious enough for the world. She never sought God for her ailments and as per her conveniences, unlike a regular being. Her busy and ever constructive schedule could barely accommodate any divinity. Nevertheless, since she couldn't ever brand herself otherwise, she was a theist. She was latently trying to escape the paradox which was her religion. Hence, when asked about it, she was the most startled.

“Whom are you supporting?”, called out a student activist and leader during an all-party student meet of the Delhi University. The question was directed to Professor Veena. The revered history professor, her inclination could've meant a lot during the upcoming University elections. The student unions distressfully waited for her declaration, ready with

their circumstantial lauds and criticisms. The profundity of this scenario was far above what Veena had faced in the past when she could easily hide behind the various moody facades of the Indian Lady Professor. But just as they gazed at her, waiting for the very chance to chant away their slogans, she stepped down the stairwell and walked down the carpet to the exit. Her path was cleared away only to be blocked by one last student-worker, an innocent young girl. She reiterated the question at her professor. "Whom do you support? What is your religion anyway?"

Veena, the learned professor, gave the most educated answer anyone could give "I was a born Christian... But I support no specific religion."

The duplicitous innocent girl gave a huge cry "You betray the Hindu Religion... We raised you..." and took a bottle of ink and hurled it past Veena's face, leaving her face and attire black-stained. The chants had now begun. The throwing of shoes and the pushing and the pulling... all persuaded the spectating police to finally play their role. They unleashed the water cannons on to the enraged crowd, soon dispersing them all from the holy spot of learning. Veena and a few others stood in a corner after avoiding the stampede. The police arrested her on charges of instigating a riot.