

The Religion
called
Pragmatism:

Memoirs of
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Pragmatism

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CHAPTER TWO: THE RUM GOD

“Come out... Your bail bond has been paid...” said a polite female cop to Veena, who sat on the lonesome red chair in a room. Unlike common pictorial depiction, the jail had no adverse effects on her well-being or get-up. With her boy-cut and well-kept hair, her sports shoes and her formal attire, she looked the same as she did when she had entered the station a few hours ago. No dried-up tear-trails on her face. She was engulfed in thought. The cop had to repeat herself. This time, Veena heard her quite well. She got up and walked up to the door. Seeing the tall professor bend a bit to walk past the door, even the cop assumed an informal façade and exclaimed “You outstand most of those of your Gender... right?”

Veena nodded. But then she questioned “Don’t you mean women? You are one too right? Then why didn’t you say ‘women’?”

“Arre Madam, *Aap Bhi*, that was just small talk. But yes, point noted. Now let’s go. Your father awaits you outside,” the cop replied.

“He had to come himself? He is an ailing man. I told him not to leave without my permission,” Veena said worriedly.

The constant urge to be of aid amongst the cops of the station was an aftermath of the Veteran Police Commissioner. The octogenarian celebrated ex-cop, Sangram Bhagwati, had himself come to the rescue of his adopted daughter. Their bond was more than that of a regular father and child. After Amara’s demise, she was his sole caretaker too. The ailing old man had a stringent medicinal schedule. He was constantly battling Arthritis, Osteoporosis, Spondylitis, High Blood Pressure and Diabetes. Thus, he had to stick to his wheelchair for most of the day. Due to the dedicated care by Veena, his only son, Vidhyut Bhagwati, could lead his desired carefree life as a bar-owner in Las Vegas. The NRI Bohemian serving drinks to

other immigrant Bohemians in a faded corner of the concrete jungle... well he was living the Great Indian Dream. Veena, on the other hand, had never resorted to dreaming. For the woman of curriculum, dreaming was not a dire necessity and rather a distraction. Her eidetic memory testified against Charcot-Wilbrand syndrome. She willingly never dreamt... and if it so happened by mistake... she never fantasized over them.

She escorted her father back to his vehicle. They both sat together and had a little chit-chat over the ever-corrupt and sycophant state of police-affairs. Sangram sighed in relief, for Veena was the recipient of the latter. The chauffeur gently drifted ahead through the clique of media representatives. The dramatic intensity disturbed the silence with its soundlessness. Soon, the gravity was broken by the foremost remark "Why are you so worried about it? This is India... People would be stupid... always... nothing has changed since my time."

Veena was lost in wonder. It took her a while to realize the sentence and she gazed

back at her father to question him “What is my religion?”

The question had only and only touched Sangram’s eardrum, but it seemed as if the strangers outside, the non-living objects, the chauffeur and the lifeless sedan had all lent their uninterrupted attention to hear the answer.

“Why do you ask? That’s the first time you’ve ever asked it...” Sangram said presuming a philosophical façade.

“I don’t know... I just want to know. What is my religion?” Veena questioned again.

“Well... I am not sure how to answer that... Vikrant... take a turn towards Sharadji’s place. We’d be visiting the temple beside his house. Maybe if we ask Godmen the same question with your interesting backstory, they might answer. I mean... if they don’t get confused themselves...” Sangram exclaimed with the car then changing its route.

Within a few minutes, they had arrived at the temple. Sangram was made to sit on his wheelchair again. Veena rushed forward, leaving the other two a little behind. She then

suddenly turned around to question “Whose temple is this?”

The question was first intercepted by a vagabond.

“HaHaHa...Whose you ask? Then I think You’re in the wrong place...” He said.

“What do you mean?” Veena asked. The other two had now arrived at the scene.

“I need money... You give me money... I tell you stuff...” He said.

“Take this...” Veena said as she grabbed a two thousand rupee note from her bag and gave it to him.

“What are you doing *beta*?” asked Sangram.

“No *Papa* let him say...”

“It is yours... yours alone... when it’s not... it isn’t anyone’s... it is either everyone’s... when there is God... or it’s no one’s... when there’re just bricks.” The vagabond replied.

“He sounds drunk... He even smells of it... you shameful creature... why are you in a place of worship so drunk?” Sangram murmured angrily.

“Makes lose mind... for some... makes say the truth... for some... makes forget pain... for

some... poison for some and Elixir for some.... That's the beauty of Rum..." the vagabond added.

"What is your religion? You're not Islamic for sure..." Veena said.

"My religion you ask? It makes me lose my mind... yes it does... but I don't mind losing my mind... I am not Islamic... It makes me utter the truth like the Soma... to say my heart out... but I am not Hindu either... It makes me forget the physical and mental pain... as Jesus had wished for it too... but I am not even Christian... But whatever I am... I would accept only all I am... and none that I am not... Would believe all I know... and reject all I don't... " the Vagabond said in a dizzy voice.

"Then What IS IT?" Veena lost her cool.

"Go away... catch this... payment for stopping this nonsense" Sangram said, hurling his 9oz steel flask towards the Vagabond. He caught it and opened it to smell some liquor inside.

"Whoa.... My religion is Rum... and You're my God... YOU'RE MY GOD... YOU'RE MY

GOD...” the vagabond said and ran away jumping and falling at every other instance.

“Let’s go inside *Veenu*... The Godmen await us...” said Sangram as Veena helped him through to the edge of the stairs.

“Wait Sir... let me lift you...” said Vikrant.

“Why don’t they have a separate inclined for the specially-abled?” Veena asked.

“Well... I think medical science has reached such advances that they presume that handicapped might not get the right solution for their conspicuous queries to God...” said Sangram. “We would wait here... you go ahead *beta*” he continued.

Veena climbed the indefinitely long stairwell to reach the central spot of the temple. The huge queue waited to ring the bell hanging above and further pay the donation box to join hands in front of the idol, have a normal Q&A with the priest and receive the sacrament. The queue moved forward faster than an ATM queue. It was soon Veena’s turn.

She questioned “There are drunk maniacs roaming around the temple. Isn’t that blasphemous?”

“Vatsa drinking isn’t a crime till you commit a crime after drinking.” Said the Priest.

“Punditji then why is drinking considered bad?” Veena asked.

“Exactly... it is considered bad... just like abusing, smoking, overeating, everything is... But... a fine line between bad and wrong.” The priest replied. The people behind verbally mentioned their anguish for the *bhakt* was taking a lot of their time. It was usually a one-word scenario. But... Veena had questions. Though, before she could ask them, the priest gave her the Banana Leaf full of sweets and she was gently pushed away from the queue. She slowly came down. Her father awaited her and immediately asked “So what is it then?”

She clutched the banana leaf in wonder, almost crushing the sweets inside. But before she could throw it... there came an adolescent beggar. She dropped the food in his hands.

“Did you get your answers?” Sangram asked.

“No... Not at all....”