

The Religion
called
Pragmatism:

Memoirs of
Dr Veena Ratankumari Jacobs

Rishabh Dubey 'Kridious'



The Religion Called
Pragmatism

©Rishabh Dubey 'Kridious'

CHAPTER SIX: THE GODS MUST BE LAZY?

What was there before the Earth existed? What led to the creation of it? Why is it that all the idealistic universal, geographical, solar and celestial features got imbibed into this heavenly body, so much so that it created prime conditions for the creation and survival of all the beings that we know of and more? What is that spatial energy, that incomprehensible power, the improbable combination of scenarios that led to the existence of the one who can question it with utmost intelligence and doubt? Speaking on the historical and scientific side of it all, human beings came into being due to a chain of adaptation and evolution, all at the atomic level. The adaptation mechanism is completely dependent on observational learning and survival. The minute elements of cells and atoms seem to have the tendency to struggle to survive and become better with evolution.

They were all fragmented and scattered across all the elemental extremities of fire, water, earth, air and even vacuum; all so that over millennia, they can learn to adapt to them. Eventually, they all came together to amalgamate in diverse permutations so that the perfect cellular combination can be achieved, a hybrid cell which has adapted to all. The cycle, presumably, has ended with the creation of the self-learning perfect organism called homo sapiens. It is, in fact, the gravest presumption for those who consider themselves radicals. The truth, perhaps, is that the Universe is too large for us to comprehend, even with the prevalent majestic technologies. The more we know, the less we have. The domain of to-be-understood is increasing faster than we can understand. For those who belonged to the ancient and medieval ages, and even the early men, the Universe and even the Earth was much larger. There was a lot that they couldn't comprehend. Thus, they arrived at the ultimate branding mechanism, God. The celestial elements were too great for them to allocate to prevalent norms and beliefs.

Notwithstanding, even today we don't know nearly enough to refute the existence of a/the God(s). In legal terminology, being oblivious to some fact doesn't give one the right to ignore or rebuke it. Till the day we get to know as to how exactly and when the Universe came to be, other than the theory of a random explosion from nowhere and nothingness, we ought to believe that there was some incomprehensible energy responsible for it. Nevertheless, that energy (God) doesn't seem to be working on ideal lines all the time.

God, the so-presumed omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent being. In all faiths and belief systems, God is always at least these three things if not more. The doubting mechanism, containing the devil of fear, the one deterring the ability of humankind and compressing the acuteness of time, is very often subdued and defeated by the beings through blind speculation. It is easier to believe that God got angry due to the lack of some ritual offerings and caused that devastating earthquake than putting the scary effort needed to find the possible

scientific and geological reasons behind the same. It gives both social and psychological peace and security since we know we have some kind of leverage to gratify this seemingly uncontrollable force of nature. When you recite hymns and chants and burn small pieces of wood to *avert an earthquake*, it empowers you. It makes you feel capable of doing something you naturally cannot considering your technical or scientific prowess at that point in time. That power comes from Hope. The hope and belief that there is someone looking out for you and would be appeased by simplistic rituals, which *you can do*, it is what is the essence of the intelligence of mankind which helps them divert their attention and effort away from the domains where they are powerless. This representation of God needs a clearer and more meticulous understanding.

Gods, presumably, hold the power to create and destroy anything at the snap of their fingers. Whenever we are in need of power, protection, support or miracles, we approach them in some or the other way. But, why are there problems in the first place?

Shouldn't the perfect being create the perfect Universe? For justifying this, we have the prevalent demons and negative energies which we believe to be the source of the harm being caused to humankind. Our prayers, thus, take on a bigger role of not just seeking support, but offering some to God in the fight against our definition of evil. What emancipates us from the horrid inhibitions of flesh and blood is this ability of ours to help the celestial being. We take into our hands what we think lies within our capability, and for the rest, we rest on God. But why? Who is this God who has become more than the symbolism of Hope and Faith for mankind? Who is this God whom we art to offer our helpless help? Whoever they might be, they are definitely a hell lot of lazy.

The Gods today are seemingly hungry for support more than the Humans are. Every second day we hear some sect rising in revolt and rebellion to protect their Culture, Faith and God. Culture is preserved by practising it, Faith is saved by believing in it, and Gods, the original ones, don't exactly need any protection. The new ones, on the other hand,

seem to be in a lot of mess due to their lethargy. They hardly answer prayers, they are always unsafe, they are offended by abuses, they get disturbed by evolution and adaption, they never revert back, and they are turning a completely deaf ear towards the snobbish acts of humankind creating primitive barriers for their selves. These are not Gods. Especially not the ones mankind had originally identified as the symbolism of hope, the conqueror of fear, the fuel of humankind's exploration, the wisdom for the wise and unwise alike and the knowledge for what is unknown for those who wished to know it. It wasn't a restrictive route, religion. It was always a directive one. Nevertheless, eventually, through the deprecating sands of time, we have limited our urge to know more with the horrific parentheses of what we already do know, thus eliminating the dire chance to know more. God, originally, symbolised the prowess and might of what we don't know and cannot comprehend. History testifies that it is majorly governed by the power of the unknown. Thus, we bowed down to it. But now, we seem to have

understood everything there is about the Universe. We have, therefore, eliminated the possibility of the unknown and hence are either following the radical *compulsions* of religion or are not following anything altogether. Well, seemingly, at some point of time in history, Gods decided they had jotted down the ultimate truths and solutions for humankind to recognize and implement. So, they took an endless sabbatical. And ever since, we have been trying to read between those lines and comprehend what they required of us. We have been debating, fighting wars, killing people, destroying civilisations, and so many more frightful deeds just because our God is too lazy to help us evolve. Or maybe, it is the other way around.

Veena and Amar had arrived in Mumbai for their journey of exploration and self-actualisation. Both for different reasons altogether. They had checked into a two-room suite in the prestigious Taj Hotel facing

the heritage of old Contemporary India. Veena had inadvertently chosen the hotel because of the silent lurking virtual shadows of the events which had taken place there. She wanted to experience and recall the trauma of all those who had been mercilessly tormented in the name of religion. It was always in the name of religion, wasn't it? From the Crusades to the Zionists, from the Jihad to the Beef-Lynchings, all major extremist revolutions, wars, battles and radicalisation movements were always in the name of religion. So was the partition of India, which resulted in the course of events which subsequently led to the condemnable 26/11 attacks. This apparent might of religion to predominate over logic, intelligence and most importantly humanity, had troubled Veena for a long time. Amar sat at the dining table reading "The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F**k", a book which he required to give a thorough read. Veena sat beside the huge windows, glancing across the land to the limitless seas. She saw a flight of pigeons beautifully gliding over the shimmering waters. To get a better sight, she slid open the

windows. In the strange geometry of the formations, Veena was finding her momentary solace; but, then she paused for a second. She was hearing a light sound of *Azaan* from close by. She immediately grabbed the intercom beside her on the desk. "Hello! Yes this is room number 803, I am hearing a sound of an *Azaan* from some nearby place (interrupted)"

"Yes Ma'am, I whole-heartedly apologise for it... I would request you to close your window glasses. If it is still inconvenient we can shift you to a different room."

"No, No, No... it is no trouble at all... It is a prayer call, how can it trouble anyone? I just wished to enquire as to where is it coming from?" Veena asked.

"Oh! There is the famous *Haji Ali Dargah* nearby."

"Oh Okay! Thank You So much", Veena said and hung up.

"Amar... Amar..." Veena called out.

Amar came running from the washroom "Yes Didi".

"Get ready... We are going to *Haji Ali*..."

Veena and Amar had arrived at the famed spot in Worli where everyone had to stand in the endless queue to enter the holy shrine. They were surrounded by many Islamic devotees in their traditional skull caps and burkhas. Amar seemed reluctant to enter the place because he was feeling a little out of place. He turned around and questioned- “Do we have to go inside? It seems like we are the odd ones out here.”

Veena, who was oblivious to their conspicuous oddities, didn't address Amar's childish query; but, a tall man, wearing a *pathan kurta*, standing behind them, seemed quite moved by Amar's question. He politely approached them- “Do not worry... all are welcome here. This is not a place of Islamic worship... it is a place of learning and peace.” He had grabbed Veena's attention. She asked him- “What kind of learning? Everything there is to know about Islam as well as the saint is all available online... why do we still need to go here?”

“It is nothing to do with learning anything about the outside world. It is about self-learning... Knowing yourself better.”

“And how do you do that?” Veena questioned.

Rhythmic music started sounding from the Dargah diverting Veena’s attention.

“Oh! It is time. You would know everything once you enter” the man replied.

Veena and Amar slowly proceeded along the line to enter the premises of the Dargah. Symphonic sounds reverberated through the pillars and walls of the holy place. They soon arrived inside the Sanctum Sanctorum, where an old Maulvi was offering his blessings to all those who had entered there, regardless of their religion, age, gender, Etcetera. Veena and Amar were overwhelmed by the peaceful and rather serene aura of the place. She approached the senior priest, something which a very brave few ever do. The tunes of the music were slowly fading as the time for the *qawwali* was coming to an end. Veena proceeded to ask her question to the Maulvi- “Sir... I have to ask you something... Can I do so?”

The men waving the brooms halted and started gazing at Veena.

“Didi... is it necessary?” Amar prompted.

The man who had accompanied them also stood behind Veena, amazed at her bravado and curiosity.

“*Mohatarma*, please go ahead... We sit here all day long awaiting seekers... it is completely fine son. Ask me anything...” the senior priest said.

“I wanted to know... What is the purpose of religion? Or specifically, what is the purpose of Islam as a religion? Why was this Dargah built?”

“That seems like an extremely inquisitive query. Very Well then. I shall answer you myself. Religion you ask. Well... I am not very well-versed in all religions but I know for a fact that religion, in its original meaning, just represents a direction for the directionless. As in, if a person is lost, he or she has various paths to walk on. Back in the dark days, the only educational institutions imparting knowledge of self-righteousness, righteousness and also of spirituality were those of religion. The intellectuals had a

belief system to have an idealistic and worry-free life and they imparted them in different faiths, geographies and timelines in different ways under different religions. For us, the ultimate happiness and salvation is under the path of Allah, which represents the ultimate form of humanity. When our *paigambar*s travelled across the world, they only sought those who had strayed away from the path of humanity so that they could preach and teach them our path of Allah, which is a tried and tested method to live a civilised and happy life. Allah is our only and ultimate God and belief. For us, only he is right and rest everything is wrong. Some criticise this statement. Well, this statement wasn't intended to signify exclusion. It meant that whatever is right is the path of Allah... and hence whatever is wrong isn't. Corollary, if someone was walking the path of Allah, they were mandatorily walking the path of righteousness, and those who were walking the path of righteousness, be it under his guidance or not, were unintentionally walking the path of Allah. The message of peace was to provide direction to those who

didn't have it... those who were sinning. The path of Allah wasn't intended to be compulsory or exclusive... it reflected our devotion to what is right. Even this Dargah, the one made in remembrance of the *Pir Haji Ali*, was the centre of preaching and teaching alone. The purpose of any religion, thus, is to show the way to the lost, and to give hope in the form of faith to those who are giving.”

“Then why Sir, in the name of your very own religion, do people sometimes terrorize? Like the attacks of 26/11.” Veena dropped her succeeding question which startled everyone around her. The Maulvi smiled humbly. He then continued his answer-

“The paradigms of religion are diluted over time rather than evolved as it was originally intended. The religious dispute, which led to the partition of India, even 61 years later, is indirectly creating havoc in either of the two nations. In the vicinity of the holy sanctorum of Haji Ali, self-proclaimed radicalised proprietors of extremist Islam were terrorizing people. Yes, it happened. Our capability lies in only helping those affected

by it, physically and psychologically. We can but condemn them... more so for defiling the path of our Holy Almighty Allah. We cannot ever dodge the shame and defame it is getting us... All these acts of branding our sacred religion as Unholy. This Dargah, this institution, has been there in this place for a very long time. It has not just been a place of worship but has been a sanctuary for all those who seek protection. Due to certain natural phenomena, we cannot keep this place open the entire day round the year. But, whenever we do... this place is a haven for all. And I am sure, so are many other religious institutes of Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslims and more. The only thing I am asking you to accept is that I, or consider the macro-level, Islam in general or any knowledgeable Islamic cleric can impart only the teachings which he or she has learned, which are those of Islam alone. A true Islamic wouldn't stop you from seeking... but when you approach him, he shall show you the path which he has learned... which is that of Islam.”

“Okay... then why are there religious divides then?” Veena continued her query.

“There is no such thing *Mohatarma*. Okay then... It is time to clean the shrine. More questions tomorrow then.” The Maulvi got up and left along with his aides.

Veena still stood wondering about what all he had talked about and still sought many an answer. The man standing behind her then said to her- “Well... *Madamji*, I have the answer to the last question. Come with me...”

Veena and Amar had accompanied the person back to his residence. Walking through the narrow streets marked by the glaring dust and endless mud of infinite memories, Veena had arrived in the famous slum-dwelling of ‘Dharavi’. It seemed like an endless maze and the only hope of not being lost in the streets was the tall man leading their way. They still hadn’t reached his place and had passed through various types of localities. Some scarcely populated, clean and organised, some overcrowded and disorganized, some

clean and managed, some unmanageable, overall, a visual enigma. Veena was trying to guess their religions based on their appearances. She was anything but successful. There were groups of kids wandering the streets, running to and fro without a tinge of care in life. Women were gossiping just like in the Urban Parties. Men and women were leaving small *kaccha* houses completely groomed and dressed up, making it seem rather impossible to Veena that anyone outside could guess the conditions they are coming from. It all seemed like an activated, indefinitely running and powered-up community, so much so that the lack of vanity and the strange odours seemed inconspicuous to the two visitors. It seemed like everybody knew everybody. They knew what others needed and what they did not need. They knew each other's yesterdays like they had lived it themselves. Amar was rather more amazed than Veena since he had read a lot about such dwellings and the so-called 'pitiful' conditions of the dwellers. He had a knack for working in socio-political empowerment of the underprivileged, but

seeing them all, it felt to him as if they were all much more empowered than anyone he has ever seen or heard of. The tall man wearing the *Pathan Kurta* was continuously socialising with every second person he saw left or right. Conversing about the routine, the mundane and sometimes an event or two. The streets started becoming narrower.

“This is my *Gully* madam,” the man said. A kid came running and pushed Veena sideways. The man caught the kid and lifted him “You again bunked yesterday... I will make sure you get a beating from your *Didi*. Come today evening Billu, okay?” He reached inside his pocket and brought out a small chocolate candy. “There is more where this comes from.” He let the kid go. Veena questioned him “Bunked? Are you a teacher?”

“*Arre* Madam... I barely could pass my 5th standard and that too in a small village near Nashik. My younger sister, she takes tuitions of such young brats. Of course not for free... not because we want their money or anything. Simply because anything that comes for free is not evaluated properly by

the receiver. Thus, we charge Rupees Fifty per month.”

“Oh! That is... just... What do you do for a living then?” Veena asked while Amar stood still appalled.

“I’m a potter... Let me show you...” the man said as he led Veena and Amar to the small entrance in a corner of the street. There was a small courtyard with huge mounds of wet clay and multiple potter’s wheels. There were a huge number of finished pots or *Matkas* on one side of the courtyard, some drying up, some finished and some decorated with various drawings and paintings. Amar went and lifted one of the finished ones “How much does one sell for?”

The man replied “Here, we sell it for rupees twenty-five per pot... But in the flee markets they go for variable prices, starting sixty rupees and going up to even a thousand.”

A young lady came out from inside the house. The man greeted her “Shakuntala, we have guests here from Delhi.”

“She is my champion sister I told you about.” The man said to Veena and Amar.

Veena shook Shakuntala's hand "Very pleased to meet you. What inspired you to teach those kids?"

There was a brief pause of silence, post which the man said "Can you please make us some fresh tea Shakku..."

Shakuntala smiled and went inside.

"Follow me," the man said. Veena and Amar were led by him to the small house across the narrow street. After passing through a small dark corridor, they both arrived in an apparent storeroom. They gazed around to see numerous clay idols of Hindu Deities.

"Kaka... I brought your medicines..." the man said as he took out a small packet full of allopathic tablets.

An old man with a protruding hunchback came from the adjoining room.

"Beta... is it evening already?"

"I've brought guests Kaka... this is Dr. Jacobs and this is her brother Amar... this is Daanish Kaka... he is a world-famous sculptor of this small locality." He said.

"Doctor? Oh, you brought the doctor home... I told you my arthritis is better..." Daanish said.

“No No... I am not a medical doctor. I am a professor.” Veena said.

“Very nice. A noble teacher. What brings you to me sordid den?” Daanish asked. Veena went and grabbed one of the finished ‘Ganesha’ idols.

“You make these? They are very well-designed and beautiful.” She said.

“Thank You, madam... yes, these old hands have now lost the touch they had long ago, but still I manage somehow.”

“But aren’t you Muslim?” Amar asked.

“Don’t say that... he didn’t mean it like that,” Veena interjected.

“No No, Madam. It’s fine. People who tour this place or come from outside often have this question. Why is a Muslim making Hindu idols, especially Ganpati idols... They often ask, why and what are they to me? Well, I am Islamic... a devout one. There have been very few days in my life when I haven’t observed Namaaz at least once. I am not allowed to pray to idols. I don’t. But, we can idolize someone or some entity, can’t we? For me, this is first my bread and butter. To make them as beautiful as possible, to make

Ganpati look the king he is, to make them flawlessly, it is my job. Ganpati has been very close to my heart and I am also sure the hearts of all people in the place called Dharavi, regardless of our faiths. There is nothing about faith here. He is an idol of unity, of celebration. His grace and charm have helped me feed my family and myself since I can ever remember.”

There was a shrill of joy running down Veena’s spine. She asked him “So do all members of your family do sculpting?”

The tall man intervened “The tea must be ready back home and Kaka also must rest for a while. Let’s have some *Chai* and *Bhajiya* our Mumbai style.”

They all came back to the first house. Shakuntala came out with a tray holding three cups of tea and some Indian snacks.

“Why did you stop me from asking him about his family?”

“He doesn’t have one... they were all killed in the infamous riots...” he replied.

“WHATTTT?” Veena uttered in a shocked tone.

“Yes.” The man said as Shakuntala served them their snacks and tea. She then went inside.

“But... I thought this place had no division...” Amar said.

“No... it didn’t... hasn’t ever... will never...” the man said.

“Then why was this place affected by riots?” Veena questioned.

“*Madamji*, the storm which hit here was graver and larger than the ones you have read about regarding the rest of Mumbai... To attack them in their protected and secured environments of their humungous societies, well, it seemed quite tedious for them. Here, we live openly and freely. We never had any protection be it monetarily, socially or politically. They barged in... Hindus, Muslims, we don’t know. It was like a desperate businessman trying to get the numbers before the year’s end. They were trying to match their targets... ‘How many Hindus did you kill? ‘How many Muslims?’... where easier than this place to find an abundance of easy targets? We were not even close to being ready for it... Don’t know

whether some Mafia sent them, some politician or some Media head... whoever did was very much successful in producing the numbers. They killed thousands... including that poor man's wife, two daughters, one son, one daughter-in-law and two granddaughters. Daanish Kaka was saved by a few members of our 'Ganpati Visarjan' band. See that man's weird take from it. Rather than finding hate in the act of the people who killed his family, he found love in the act of those who saved him. He thus reveres *Bappa* more than anything in his life. I was, fortunately, a born vagabond, an orphan without a family... I had no one to lose and I ran and hid and saved myself. I was hardly a teenager. I happened to come to this house where I was hidden away by Shakuntala's father, a well-known potter and Hindu cleric. She was a small child back then. She lost her mother, who was raped and then burnt alive... Yes... as horrid as it sounds, that's the reality. She ran inside because she knew I was going to tell you all this... She is still young... but I have grown to learn there is nothing to be afraid of the past... to let it

anchor you. Rajat *Sahab* raised me as her brother and made me take an oath to be there for her forever. But he soon started ailing with cancer owing to the endless *Chillams* he used to smoke. I had to take over his work and I gave in all my energy and will to be able to do everything for them. I worked hard so that Shakuntala could study in an English Medium school, unlike us. I wanted her to have a royal life like the outside world, like yours. But when the time came, she refused to take up any jobs. For her, there is nothing to escape from in this place. I never could be away from here. Here, most of us are uneducated in the sense of the word which you know. But, we are skilled in some or the other way and manage our lives accordingly. For Shakuntala, Education didn't mean she had the right to be away from this reality. People here are good *Veenaji*. They might not be rich, good-looking, privileged, Etcetera... but we live United... we worry when even our distant neighbour breaks a nail, we collect money to help the needy amongst us, and we never turn a blind eye towards any evil that befalls anyone amongst us, and doing all of

this, the last thing we ever ask is someone's religion.”

Veena and Amar were moved by the man's words.

“Oh! Why the silence madam? There is no need to worry. We are all fine now. Now the situation is such that if we get a hint of someone from outside trying to cause some polarization or stir in our lives, we immediately unite and apprehend them, be it a politician or a leader. And even in this case, the last thing we ask them is their religion...” he said.

Veena and Amar simultaneously sipped up their teas.

“It is very nice... Shakuntala won't have tea?” Veena asked.

“She doesn't drink tea... But she loves making it and especially the compliments she gets when others drink it. She is an excellent cook... better than me of course.”

“One last question... what's your name?” Veena asked.

“Abbas Khan Bhilare... pleased to meet you...”