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MIRA AND MAHAVIR

OR

Belief in God

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

N. V. THADANI

1941

HINDU COLLEGE
DELHI

PREFACE

I do not know if I need to apologize for writing this discourse on Belief in God in the form of a dialogue,—it can hardly be called a play. I thought it would be simpler to bring out the principal points of the argument in this way.

It would seem presumptuous on my part to attempt to “prove” the existence of God in the light of reason, as distinguished from faith. Many have tried it before, but no one appears to have succeeded ; and I do not know if I can hope for a better fate. But my only excuse is that my little study of the sacred books of the ancient Hindus has taught me that if there is anything in which they succeeded in their systems of Philosophy and Religion, it was in proving the existence of God in the light of *Pratyaksha Pramana* or evidence which we can accept according to our reason, common sense, or normal experience; and all that I have done is to put together in a connected form their different points of view as simply as I could.

Religion has always occupied a large place in the life of man, though its form, appeal, and point of view have differed from time to time. Like all human institutions, it has passed through many vicissitudes; and during the last century the march of Science has shaken

its foundations to the earth. Belief in God forms, as a general rule, the basis of religion; but Science, revealing the marvels of the forces of Nature, has questioned and almost overthrown this belief. The mystery of birth and death yet eludes its grasp, but it hopes to master that too. What place can we assign to God in a scientific scheme of life? What is he—a personal or an impersonal deity?—manifest or unmanifest? Can he create, apart from the forces of Nature?—or is he a mere spectator of its work? Is he governed by or above all law? Can he change the course of natural or human events by his intervention? In short, is he necessary to Man—except as a consolation or comfort in sorrow, sickness or death? Men and nations are asking these questions: many have discarded religion as a fraud or a dope; and it seems as if the very idea of God will be overthrown.

This applies as much to western as to eastern countries of the world, and India is no exception. Hinduism is the home of religion; but the educated young Hindu appears to have little place for it in his scheme of life. The case with an educated young Mussalman or a Christian is not very different. The institutions remain—the temple, the mosque, and the church; but the spirit appears to have fled. The older people, who still adhere to ancient forms, complain of loss of faith among the young; but the latter do not seem to care. Their appeal, they say, is to reason, to the laws of Science; and what place has Religion in this scheme of life? To this there has as yet been no reply.

It would be unfair to accuse the educated young man of lack of faith—if that alone is the basis of religion and belief in God. All his education is an emphasis on reason; he is taught to test all things in its light, and to distinguish between right and wrong, the true and the false by its means. Is Religion an exception—and on what grounds? If it is a mystery, if it is beyond the scope of human understanding,—what is its use to man? These are questions which the educated young man of today does not hesitate to ask, and still awaits an answer.

I believe the educated young man of today, however little he might believe in an orthodox system of religion, is not less religious than his elders. He is as earnest as ever, and is not less willing to learn—even to believe in God—if only some one could teach him. But he will not take things on trust, - and that is a sign of a growing and healthy mind; and perhaps he has his own ideas of religion in terms of the service of Man, more than the worship of an ideal Deity in temples, churches, and mosques.

It is a little less than a century ago that this tendency made its first appearance in this country. It was due to the impact of western thought on eastern life,—of Christian idealism on Hindu and Muslim culture at the time. The citadel of orthodoxy was attacked, and the ramparts gave way. Then, shaken and shocked, orthodoxy roused itself from slumber, put on its armour, and came out to meet the foe. Religion was reformed, and schools

and colleges were founded to impart religious instruction to the young. For a time the movement succeeded: colleges have grown into Universities, but the spirit of religion, in the usual sense of the term, has been on the decline; and today, in a Hindu College the young students do not hesitate to hold that "when Man lives God dies."

What is the remedy? The orthodox schools failed, not because the young men were indifferent, but because the Pandits could not convince. Is Religion really opposed to reason? and does it wholly depend on faith? Is faith an enemy to reason? and is it impossible to reconcile the two? These questions press for an answer and therein lies the solution of the problem.

Faith is generally regarded as belief in the existence of a person, idea or a thing, which we cannot, on strict grounds of known facts, easily explain. It is thus conceived to be more a matter of the heart than the head—of emotion more than the intellect. It would indeed be idle to discount the importance of emotion in life; and even so an element of faith must enter into *all* human action. No one can know or understand *all* the forces, manifest or unmanifest, past or present, which enter into a single action, however small; nor is it possible to forecast *all* the effects of a certain cause, however slight. We must take many things on trust—from the authority of a teacher or a book to the friendliness of a neighbour or the sanity of a cook. Indeed, all action must come to an end if we eliminate faith—conceived in its widest signi-

ficance—altogether. But this “faith” is not a negation, but only an extension of reason. We accept the authority of a teacher or a scientific theory because, if necessary, we can verify the fact for ourselves; even so we can test the friendliness of a neighbour or the sanity of a cook. But religious “faith” appears to be of a different kind, not merely of degree.

Religious faith usually implies belief in a person, idea, or a theory of life, regarded as beyond proof and independent of reason. It is said to be a matter of the soul, not of human thought or understanding. Indeed, even modern Science cannot altogether deny the existence of the soul; and Psychology tells us that there are problems of consciousness—apart from any reference to spiritualism—which take us far beyond the regions of thought or understanding. If there are different organs in the human frame, and the senses, mind, and understanding perform different, though correlated, functions, why may we not regard faith as one of the characteristics of human consciousness or the soul? If the mind can perceive, why not the soul?—and there are many instances of persons, whose veracity it would be difficult to doubt, who are said to have *seen* God. This is the basic idea of Mysticism or soul-experience of God—and it cannot easily be shaken on grounds of logic or scientific theory.

But a new difficulty arises at once. We see that normal human beings are generally alike in respect of the

functions of their senses or the mind; but no two persons seem to agree in regard to their soul-experience of God. How can we account for this difference in the different systems of religion in this connection ?

All these questions have been raised before, and it is not my intention to answer them here. I have referred to them to explain the difficulty of the problem. In my humble opinion religious faith, properly understood, is like all other forms of faith—but an extension of reason, a philosophy of life. Indeed, as I have observed, if there is any great achievement of the systems of Philosophy and Religion which had their birth in India in the ancient past, it is to “prove” the existence of God by means of *Pratyaksha Pramana* or evidence acceptable to our common sense and normal experience; and it is this that I have attempted in this little volume.

Here it might be asked—Has Religion any essential connection with God ? Of the great systems of religion existing in the world today, Christianity and Islam are fundamentally based on belief in God. But of the four great systems of religion that had their origin in India in the past—Vaishnavism, Saivism, Buddhism and Jainism—only the first two enjoin a definite belief in the Deity. The Digambara school of Jainism is frankly atheistic; the Svetambara school of Jainism and the Hinayana school of Buddhism are agnostic in character; and the Mahayana school of Buddhism gives a definite but, comparatively speaking, a small place to God in the

scheme of things. Indeed, some forms of Saivite faith are not far removed from the two schools of Buddhism; but Saivism, in its general character, enjoins belief in God; and that is even more true of Vaishnavism.

If we examine the different systems of Hindu Philosophy, we find the same character. The Sankhya has no place for God in its scheme of life. The Nyaya regards him as a mere spectator of things which act in accordance with a law, without interference from any one. The Vaiseshika gives him a larger place, but he cannot function without Nature or Prakriti. The Yoga conceives of him as the chief creator of the universe, with Nature still by his side. And, finally, Vedanta holds that there is nothing but God anywhere.

How can we account for what appear to be fundamental differences in the systems of Philosophy and Religion,—all of which claim to have the same origin, that is, the sacred books of the Hindus?

I do not think it is necessary for me to discuss the problem here at length. I have examined it elsewhere, and it is enough to point out that these systems of Philosophy and Religion are not independent of or unconnected with one another. They are rather like great links in a magnificent chain of life, and embrace all conceivable forms of thought and belief. All knowledge is from the known to the Unknown; and the known is Nature or the world of life, and the Unknown is God or the origin of things. And so the systems of Philosophy and Religion

constitute a great quest of truth from Nature to Nature's God.

All knowledge, again, is a search for Truth from denial and doubt to partial or complete certainty. Even so we begin with a denial of God in the Sankhya; pass on to a doubt in Nyaya; affirm his partial existence in conjunction with Nature in the Vaiseshika. give him the principal place in Yoga; and hold that there is nothing but God in Vedanta. The idea of the different systems of Religion is exactly the same. We rise from denial and doubt in Jainism and Buddhism to partial belief in Saivism; and Vaishnavism culminates in the pure monistic belief in God.

What then is the difference between Christianity and Islam on the one hand, and the systems of Hindu Religion,— specially the monistic school of Vaishnavism—on the other ? All these enjoin belief in God; but whereas belief in God is an article of faith, not reason, in Christianity and Islam, in Hinduism we slowly rise, by means of our reason, from pure denial to a conception of God as a Law, and then as an actor and creator of the world,—till in the end we hold that there is nothing but God in the universe. And so the systems of thought which are said to constitute Hinduism, are interconnected with one another, and comprehend the entire range of thought from atheism to agnosticism, thence to dualism, qualified monism, and pure monism of God. And it is for this reason that they are called *Darsanas* or points

of view in regard to the whole universe, ending ultimately in God.

But the question still remains—How can we prove the existence of God ? The answer is given in this little volume, and it contains the substance of my study of the sacred books of the Hindus, specially the Mahabharata, on the subject of God. This great Epic is not a wonderful romantic tale, as many imagine, but an account of all the systems of Hindu Philosophy and Religion in story-form, with Krishna as the most perfect embodiment of the idea of God in accordance with the qualified monistic school of Vaishnavism. The idea of the Ramayana is exactly the same. It is the same account, in a slightly different form, with Rama as an incarnation or embodiment of the idea of God in accordance with the Dualistic school of Vaishnavism. I hope I shall be forgiven for invoking Krishna to explain how we can rise from pure atheism to belief in God, and trust that the argument may appeal to those who believe in reason rather than faith.

*Hindu College, }
Delhi. }
June, 1941. }*

N. V. T.

MIRA AND MAHAVIR

SCENE I

Time : Night, 9 p. m.

— — —

(Mahavir and Mira are brother and sister. He is a tall, wiry, and keen-eyed young man of twenty-three, studying at College, while she is a sweet, modest and gentle young woman, two years younger. Mira is seated on a chair in a room, sparsely furnished with a couple of chairs and a small table, and is reading a book. Mahavir enters quietly, but with some excitement. She looks at him and smiles.)

MIRA—Where have you been so long ? Why are you excited ?

MAHAVIR—Can't you guess ? But no—you are but a girl.

MIRA—Why, you rouse my curiosity now. Tell me.

MAHAVIR—It would be such fun to disappoint you. But I cannot. I must tell you. I have won a prize in a debate.

MIRA—Indeed ! I thought you had solved a Cross-word puzzle and won the first prize.

MAHAVIR—This is infinitely more important. But you cannot guess. Do you know the nature of the

debate ? The subject was "When Man lives, God dies". A number of students and Professors took part, and I got the first prize.

MIRA—Did you succeed in slaying God—or he yet lives ?

MAHAVIR—You may laugh; but you know my views. How can I believe in God ? No sensible man does nowadays—not even the older people. They say they do, but they do not, and only try to keep up the show. In any case very few College students do, and no one cares.

MIRA—How interesting ! And so that is the latest fashion ?

MAHAVIR—Yes. Religion was the fashion fifty years ago. They still pretend to believe in it, specially in schools for children and girls. But a College is different. There we think for ourselves,—and speak.

MIRA—And how well you do it too ! I wish I had been at your debate, just to see how *you* could speak.

MAHAVIR—It was a public debate, and you could have come. They all agreed that I spoke best, and I convinced them too. Poor God ! he can now lie in peace, and Man has been given a chance !

MIRA—And what a chance ! Do you really think Man can live ? and for how long ?

MAHAVIR—Men may die, but Man lives on. He has been there for thousands of years, and will continue to be for ever so long.

MIRA—Yes, but how? If men could live, so could Man, and then we could say good-bye to God. But a child is born, grows, and dies, -- and such is the lot of the race. If Man could live, God may be allowed to die; but it is Man who dies. And now will you allow God to live ?

MAHAVIR—I wish you had argued the case for God in our debate.

MIRA—So indeed I do. But young men think they are so strong and clever.

MAHAVIR—Do you really think you could prove the existence of God ? You know no one can. They say God lives by faith and not by reason. It is as you feel and not as you think or understand. Does not Mahatma Gandhi say so too ? In the College we are taught to live by reason and not faith. We should like to believe in God: it is so comforting; it takes away all your sense of responsibility; it is a dope, as they say. But how can we ? “Man is man, and master of his fate”—and so where can God be ?

MIRA—How can I argue with you ? You know I believe in God. Yes, it is comforting, and Man does need this comfort. If he could do what he willed, if there were no sorrow, sickness or death, we could perhaps dispense with God. But I am a weak woman and need him. You are a strong man, and do not appear to care—at least for the present. What will you do when you grow old ?

MAHAVIR—I do not care to think of it. Life is for the young, death for the old. It is enough for me if I have faith in myself and not God. You are a mere girl. Sometime ago I read the story of your namesake—Mira of old. It was very interesting, but no more. Girls may have dreams, even visions; but a man is different. You seem almost like her,—specially when you sing; and then I almost think I could believe like you—for the moment of course.

MIRA—How intellectual! You don't want me to argue, do you?

MAHAVIR—No, I only want you to sing—

I wander in quest of thee, O Lord,

I wander in quest of thee!

MIRA—That is from Mira's, you know. But it is late, and we must to bed. I had a dream last night, and wished to tell you. I had been reading the Mahabharata, you know. What a terrible story, and how tragic! And then I had a dream, and now I feel it is all so different. I wanted to tell you. It is not a story!

MAHAVIR—What, the Mahabharata?

MIRA—Yes, it is a Philosophy of Life.

MAHAVIR—You have been dreaming indeed!

Some secret truths, from learned pride concealed,
To Maids alone and Children are revealed!

MIRA—You can have your fun. But I saw you also in that dream—watching. How I wish you had that dream, and I were there to watch!

MAHAVIR—I wish indeed. I have read the story of the Mahabharata. It is interesting, but not edifying. How they call it a religious book, I cannot understand. And Krishna too. Do you think he *can* be God, or his incarnation, or whatever else they call him? It is these stories that turn away our minds from God, if ever we wish to believe in him.

MIRA—Have you read the Bhagavad Gita?

MAHAVIR—Yes, but it is so full of egoism. Do you think any man, however great, has a right to call himself God? And what has Krishna, as he is in the Epic, done to deserve that claim? The Gita is great, but not Krishna.

MIRA—But what if he were God indeed? I wish I could convince you. If only you could see that dream. It was so wonderful!

MAHAVIR—You almost make me curious. But I wish to think of some thing else:

“Dreams of the night, and deeds of the morn—
Dreams of the dawn, and deeds of the day.”

MIRA—“Are not our deeds but the days that are gone—
And our dreams where the hopes of the future we lay?”

MAHAVIR—Well, we are quits. If I dream tonight, I shall tell you; and I am quite willing to believe in anything you like—even God. And now good-night.

MIRA—Good-night, and sweet dreams.

SCENE II.

(Mahavir is lying in his bed, dreaming. The forms of Krishna and Arjuna slowly take shape, and appear. Mahavir sits up, and stares. He then calls Mira. She comes and sits down on a chair, with a smile.)

ARJUNA—This is the field where ages ago thou didst teach me the divine truth of life. How many years have rolled by! The world has changed, and men have forgotten thy word. But still its echoes linger in their hearts, and they sit up and stare when some one utters thy name with sincerity of soul. A great war is raging in the world, O Lord, and men have forgotten thee. They do not hesitate to deny thy very existence. Speak to them—let them awake and listen, and be at peace.

KRISHNA—Through unnumbered ages have you and I been in this world, O Arjuna. I know what is past, what is present, and what is to be; but these men, lost in the maze of their senses, know not me.

ARJUNA—Awake them, O Lord, and let them see and know. If it be thy will, the heart of Man would be at peace once more, and all this conflict cease. There was such a conflict in the ages past, and it reappears from time to time. What is the meaning of it all? I understood once, and my doubts were dispelled. But there are many like me today. Let them too see with thy divine light the truth that

never dies. Here are these children who, through denial and doubt and faith, are seeking thee. Speak to them, O Lord, and let them understand.

KRISHNA—This is an imperfect world, O Arjuna, and only those are born in its midst who have to struggle and strive. And therein lies the seed of their success. This is but a part of an illimitable scheme of things, and those who are born must die, and those who die are born again. This is Life—in different forms—not only on this earth, but also in the Sun and the Moon, the planets and the stars; and there is no end to its wonders. But I will teach these children and they will understand.

ARJUNA—Thou didst teach me once, and blessed me to see thy imperishable Form. I cannot forget what I saw and heard. How the world longs to know—how it yearns to understand and be at peace! And there is none beside thee to fill it with the music of thy Flute.

(Krishna approaches Mahavir, who looks at him half-afraid. But he soon regains his self-assurance, jumps out of his bed, and stands before him. Mira continues to sit and smile.)

KRISHNA—If Man lives, God dies !

MAHAVIR—Yes. Do you dispute that ? If you do, I am prepared to fight you.

KRISHNA—So many do nowadays. Never mind the fight or the argument. But, of course, *you* live: don't *you*?

MAHAVIR—Of course, of course. That is why God dies. I mean I don't believe in him. But who are you? and who is he by your side? You know I won a prize in a public debate, and you can see it. I do not, cannot believe in God, and do not know who, where, and why he is.

KRISHNA—This is very interesting. You, of course, know who, whence, or why *you* are.

MAHAVIR—Yes, no—in a sort of way. But what has that to do with God?

KRISHNA—Only to show how limited is your own knowledge about your own self. Is it any wonder that you do not know who, whence, or why God is?

MAHAVIR—Wait a bit. You cannot beat me that way. My ignorance is no argument in proof of God.

KRISHNA—No, indeed! Nor if I were to ask you who created you or this universe?

MAHAVIR—Nature is self-created. It is unborn and cannot die. It can only change. It has created all forms of life, and *it* is all forms of life. But if it needs a creator, may I ask who created this creator?—whoever it be. Can you answer that?

KRISHNA—You are a clever young man. No atheist can be converted to theism by arguments based on the existence of God!

MAHAVIR—There you are. That is how I bore down all opponents in the debate. Have you anything more to say ?

KRISHNA—You are so wise—and perhaps you will tell me a few things. Do you believe in the existence of a human soul ? and what do you say about those—believed to be prophets, sages and saints—who claim that they have seen God ?

MAHAVIR—That is mysticism, you know. I do not know if I have a soul or not. But I believe in consciousness, and each one has his own consciousness. As for the statements of your prophets, sages and saints, who can believe in them ? If they had seen the same God, their statements would have been the same. But they are so different. These men require a doctor—a psycho-analyst. They suffer from hallucinations. Now you understand !

KRISHNA—Yes. So you deny God and all authority in support of his belief, and believe only in Nature. Then why not say that Nature is your God ?

MAHAVIR—You cannot catch me that way. Nature is physical force, mass, energy. I suppose God is believed to be different,—something moral and spiritual and all that. If you agree that God is a mere physical force, I do not mind a name,—and, after all, what is there in a name ? You see, I have learnt the art of argument. If you do not believe in

a thing, deny it, and throw the onus of proof on your opponent. That is how I won the prize.

KRISHNA—I see, I see. This is all very interesting. You talk by the book. But surely, you do not deny everything. You believe in yourself, don't you? You may not know whence or why you are. But you are sure that you exist, you think, you act and, may be, also achieve.

MAHAVIR—Of course, of course. That is what I mean when I say that when Man lives, God dies. The more we think and act and achieve, the more we believe in ourselves and less in God, till at last the delusion of God dies away.

KRISHNA—But what about life itself? Can you live for ever?

MAHAVIR—Men may die, but Man lives on for ever!

KRISHNA—Are you so sure? What does your Science say about it?

MAHAVIR—Yes, I know. There was a time when there was no man on earth—but he has evolved through an interminable process of evolution. I cannot tell you everything.

KRISHNA—Of course not. But, as he has evolved, even so he might die. And, then, what would you say about God? Man having died, I suppose God would come to life again!

MAHAVIR—I know that argument. But it means nothing to me. What does it matter who lives when Man dies? Who would be there to think at all—at least in the way men do? And so can God live if there is no one to think of him? A thing exists for us only when we can think of it. Now tell me, why do we think of God at all? Can you deny that we think of him only in our sorrow and sickness, disappointment and death? If we could overcome these, if we could know what we desire, achieve what we aim, we would not think of God. God is born of weakness, of frustration, of despair. When we sin, we call upon him to save us. When we break a law of Nature or of man, we pray to him to intervene, to avert the consequence of our actions, the effect of our cause. The rich invoke his assistance to preserve their wealth, while the poor cry in vain, and starve and die. The heartless tyrant raises an altar to his name to celebrate the conquest of a brave but helpless people whom he has despoiled and enslaved. That is your God of individuals, the God of nations—a convenience and a fraud, a comfort and a dope. Can you deny this?

KRISHNA—But if you wish for life, beauty, knowledge, and strength, you may idealize these, and call that image of perfection God. That surely is not physical.

MAHAVIR—If that is your idea of God, I am sorry for you. I see all these things in Nature. Look at its

great forces, from the Sun downwards. They live for ever; they are so beautiful and strong; and there is no knowledge beside them. I thought God was believed to be a moral and spiritual Being, and I deny that altogether.

KRISHNA—You deny a God that seems so cruel, and you deny one that may be good—or at least different. And so between the two you deny him altogether.

MAHAVIR—You have it now. Didn't I tell you that is the way to argue? Won't you sit down? But who are you, and who is he by your side? I think I have seen you both somewhere.

KRISHNA—This is my friend; his name is Arjuna. But let us pursue the point. It is so interesting. You say you believe in yourself. Now tell me something about yourself. Are you happy?

MAHAVIR—(*After a little pause*) How can you ask? How can I be? I suppose no one is. The more I learn and the more I think, the less I seem to know. I lost my father. My mother lives, but she is old and helpless, and I feel so sad to think of her. This is my sister Mira. She believes in God, I do not; but we love each other. I have few prospects in life, and feel so lonely. "Tis thinking doth make cowards of us all". Well, I must not grumble, or I may have to stumble on God after all.

KRISHNA—So you are not happy: no one is in this world. Yet all wish and strive to be so, in one form or another. Don't they ?

MAHAVIR—Yes, in one form or another. We all seek some satisfaction—success or pleasure. That is the object of all our actions.

KRISHNA—Yes, some satisfaction—success or pleasure—and to avoid some dissatisfaction, failure, or pain. That is the object of all human action—at the time it is undertaken. The next moment the pleasure may turn to pain, success to defeat; but the following action again is intended to secure a new satisfaction, a new pleasure, or a new success. The object of all action, for the individual, himself, is, therefore, always something positive. It serves a purpose which, for the moment, is regarded by the actor himself as something pleasurable and good.

MAHAVIR—Yes, I agree. But what of that ? What has that to do with God ?

KRISHNA—If that is the object of each individual human action, it follows that the object of all collective human action, at a particular moment of time, is the same.

MAHAVIR—Yes, perhaps. But one man's meat may be another man's poison.

KRISHNA—Even so in the case of individual action. A medicine may be bitter to the taste, but a man takes it, for he believes that it would do the

whole system good. You may amputate a limb to save a life. Can you conceive of any human action, which is without this positive object—satisfaction, pleasure or success—or good, as we might call it, to the actor himself? If that is the end of each individual action, and if you can conceive of collective human action, it must have the same end too. And what is true of humanity as a whole cannot fail to be true of Life as a whole, for you cannot conceive of any action without a positive object, and what you cannot think of, cannot exist for you. You say that you believe in Nature, and it is Nature that acts through all forms of life. Will you now agree that the actions of this Nature have for their object something positive, something good?

MAHAVIR—Yes,—no—not exactly. I am not sure if your argument is sound. Nature is not a person, like you or me. If it were, I might agree. But it is not. It is a physical force, a physical form; and I cannot conceive of its having an object in view. Action is its end, I agree; but it is blind and purposeless.

KRISHNA—You say that Nature is not a person, and cannot have an object or end in view. And yet it creates innumerable persons like yourself, who have this object every moment of their life. How do you explain this? You believe in the laws of Nature; and can there be a law without its application, or

purpose ? But I will not force the issue. You have three options before you, and can choose. You may agree that Nature, because it creates persons like you, is like a Person itself, and its actions are meant to be good. In that case you will have identified Nature with God; for you will have associated Nature with a moral and spiritual aim, and that is nothing but God. Or you may say that because Nature creates not only persons but also other forms of life, it is partly like a Person and partly something else; and it is only to the extent to which you conceive of it as a Person, with a good object in view in all its actions, that you will think in terms of God. In both these cases you cannot deny God, and must believe in him. But you have a third option too, and may still adhere to your view that Nature, in spite of the fact that it creates human beings, all whose individual actions are directed to something good, is blind and purposeless, and the creation of Man is due to mere chance. If you do not believe in God, that is the only course open to you.

MAHAVIR—You argue fairly. I do not believe in God, either in whole or part. Nature to me is blind and purposeless. If its object were good, why do we, who live in its midst, suffer so much sorrow and pain ? You do not suggest that there is no sorrow or pain in the world, and all that we see of it is an illusion ? I have heard this argument, but am not convinced, for I have myself experienced this sorrow and pain.

You agree that there is dissatisfaction, failure, pain and death in the world: don't you ?

KRISHNA—I do not deny the reality of sorrow and pain. Indeed, all action is undertaken to escape them. Only man succeeds in the attempt but for a moment—and that is the cause of action without end. Satisfaction, success, pleasure, life—do not last, and soon change to their opposites. That is the character of Nature and all that is in it. Didn't you say that all Nature is subject to the law of Change ?

MAHAVIR—Yes. Then how is it that all human action is meant to secure pleasure or success for the individual ?

KRISHNA—All human action has *this object in view*; but it is frustrated by forces outside—that is, Nature, which is subject to the law of Change.

MAHAVIR—Do you imply that all individual human action is intended to be good, but is frustrated by Nature ? That means a good humanity, and a wicked Nature or a wicked world.

KRISHNA—Did you not say that Nature is purposeless and blind ?

MAHAVIR—I understand. But what is the point of your argument ?

KRISHNA—Now if all individual human action has for its object something good, and if that good soon changes to something different, what is the cause of it all ?

MAHAVIR—Didn't you say the forces of Nature, which are subject to the law of Change ?

KRISHNA—Exactly. Nature and all that is in it, including Man, is subject to this law of Change. If there were no change, his first action, moved by something good, would be his last, and he would be happy. But all things change. Now you believe that it is Nature that creates all forms of life; but, as it changes from moment to moment, nothing that is in it can be permanently happy. But man wants to be permanently happy, for each action of his is intended to secure something good. If Nature is the beginning and end of everything, this happiness can never belong to man. But, so far as pleasure or pain refer to his state of life and consciousness, he can put an end to pain by death or by putting an end to his life. Therefore the only logical thing a real atheist can do is to commit suicide, and the sooner the better.

MAHAVIR—Wait a bit. I don't think I should like to do so. I wish to live and do something in the world.

KRISHNA—I have no doubt. Nature can give you many things—strength, beauty, knowledge,—even life, if you please. But one thing it cannot give,—and that is permanent Happiness. And yet it is this that man strives to attain through all his actions. If Nature, blind and purposeless, is the sole creator of the universe, Man can get this happiness only beyond the realms of Nature,—that is, through death. Then

whatever may happen to him after death, he does not know, and may not care.

MAHAVIR—Yes, it has occurred to me that all this life is fruitless and full of pain. Just think of the great war that is raging in the world. In my own little sphere of life, I sometimes grow weary of the struggle and strife, specially when I think of my future, and wish to die. But the mood soon passes, and I wish to live and do something in the world.

KRISHNA—That is right. But you cannot deny that Nature, subject as it is to the law of Change, may give you everything else you desire but permanent Happiness, and it is this permanent Happiness that you seek in life above everything else.

MAHAVIR—I agree. But what has that to do with God ?

KRISHNA—If you seek permanent Happiness or something Good in all your actions, that is the ideal of your perfection, the goal of your life, the highest thing in the world you can conceive; and so you should be able to picture to yourself the image of this permanent Happiness or Good, according to your own conception; that is to say, a perfectly happy Being, after whose pattern, however imperfectly, you yourself would seek to strive. That is your own idea of God and it is a real thing and exists for you. But, as this Happiness or Good, so far as we have discussed the matter, is not possible in the midst of Nature, this God lives beyond the forces of Nature,

beyond Time, and is not subject to change. He is not born, he cannot die, and is supremely happy.

MAHAVIR—But can we conceive of such a Being? All human thought is conditioned by Time, Space, and Causality, as they say. We all live in the midst of Nature. Is it possible to conceive of anything beyond it?

KRISHNA—You have conceived of permanent Happiness or Good as lying beyond the bounds of Nature, and it is this that is your goal. You cannot see it; you cannot understand it; you can only faintly imagine and conceive. And so this Ideal of Happiness or Good, that is God, is beyond thought, beyond Space, beyond Time, beyond Causality. He is unborn, immortal, unmanifest, unknowable, infinite. This is called Nirguna Purusha, God beyond all attributes, all modifications or changes which are associated with Nature.

MAHAVIR—This is very fascinating. But I think you are going too fast, and I don't think you have proved anything. I have read that Gunas or changes are born of Nature or Prakriti. And if your God is beyond Gunas or Nature, of what use is he to us, even if he is a symbol of supreme Happiness or Good? We live in this world, in the midst of Nature; and if he has nothing to do with Nature, if contact with life contaminates him, we can easily do without him. We must act from moment to

moment, whereas he seems to have acted once and will act no more, and so is happy. Didn't you say that if there were no change, our first action would be our last, and we should be happy? This God of yours is of that sort. If he has created this universe, he has nothing to do with it after the first act of his; he is a mere spectator of what it does, and it seems to go on merrily without him. Do you call this God? I do not think I can have much use for him, or any one else. I wish to be happy while I live, and in the midst of Nature. Happiness or Good beyond the range of Nature has no meaning for me. I can hardly imagine anything to exist beyond Nature, which comprehends the entire universe. And what I can hardly think of or imagine can hardly exist for me. I admit, however, the force of your logic, that there is no permanent Happiness or Good in Nature, and it is this that we seek. Hence it only follows that it is the lot of man to suffer and die, and from this there is no escape. Whatever lies beyond Nature, even if it is supremely Happy and Good, has no concern with us. Give me a God who lives in the midst of Nature and is happy, acts and is not affected, and I will believe in him: but not this God of yours, who has nothing to do with us or the universe, of whom we can hardly think or conceive.

KRISHNA—You are a clever young man, and I must try again. You say that you want to be happy while

you live in the world, and want a God after this pattern. You agree that the primary motive of all individual action is something good, and it is change, caused by the forces of Nature, which of course includes, Man himself, that brings about unhappiness. Now can you conceive of any action within or without you, which, in spite of this change, does not appear to cause inconvenience, dissatisfaction or unhappiness ?

MAHAVIR—I don't know. Perhaps I can think of something. I breathe, and do not feel any discomfort in a state of health, of course.

KRISHNA—Yes. Your body is undergoing constant change from moment to moment, and, in a state of health, it does not disturb or make you unhappy; and health and not disease is the law of life. You breathe, you sleep and awake, you wink and move your limbs, and do not feel unhappy.

MAHAVIR—Yes I agree. I might say that when my body acts in accordance with the laws of its existence, I do not feel any change, and so do not feel its effect, namely, unhappiness. I am in fact not even conscious of what happens.

KRISHNA—Exactly. Now if *all* your actions were of this character, you would not be unhappy, whatever happened. Indeed, you would be happy. Hence, your ideal of a happy Being is one who, living in the midst of Nature, acts in accordance with the laws of his life.

This is a further character of God: He exists in the world and acts and creates in accordance with a universal Law, and is supremely happy.

MAHAVIR—I cannot deny this—if you put it that way. You are cleverer than I had thought, but you cannot beat me yet. Do you really think you have proved anything? Is not your God the same as Nature, which, I say, acts in accordance with its own laws; and whatever happens to its creatures, is indifferent itself, or if you please, happy? You seem to forget that the change which leaves me unaffected relates to action which is almost unconscious. But my actions are only partly unconscious. Most of them are conscious and deliberate,—the result of my own free will. I want to be happy while I act consciously, deliberately, and with a will; and the Being who can act in this way and still be happy is my Ideal, my God, if there be one.

KRISHNA—Very good, very good. Now suppose you have undertaken an action consciously, deliberately, and with a will: your motive, personally, so far as it concerns you, is undoubtedly good, and you succeed in your aim. Do you feel satisfied or happy?

MAHAVIR—Of course. How can you ask that?

KRISHNA—And if you fail or only partially succeed?

MAHAVIR—It is natural to feel disappointment—in proportion to the measure of failure. If I am personally interested, if I have put forth my best, can you wonder if I feel sorry when I fail?

KRISHNA—Not at all. But suppose you had no personal interest whatever in the affair and yet had put forth your best, would you still feel sorry if you failed ?

MAHAVIR—(*After a pause*) Perhaps not. But is an action, without any self-interest whatever, possible ? If it is conscious, deliberate and with a will, if its motive is something good, you cannot exclude the self: can you ?

KRISHNA—By self-interest I mean interest peculiar to your own self only, to the exclusion of everyone else. If you have done something which is meant for the benefit of others too—say of all, including yourself—but no more than others—and if somehow that action fails, would you still be unhappy ?

MAHAVIR—Not particularly, I think. I should feel the same as others, for they are equally interested or not interested in the result. But I do not know if such an action, entirely without self-interest, is possible. It is at least not human, and I cannot think of it.

KRISHNA—Suppose it were possible ? You have read Mathematics: Can you think of zero absolutely ?

MAHAVIR—No indeed. It is, correctly speaking, an idea, —only approximately, not absolutely, possible.

KRISHNA—And yet you build your mathematical theories on it: don't you ? You can imagine persons with more or with less self-interest: can't you ? Now imagine a Being who has reduced his self-interest to zero; who

acts deliberately, consciously and with a will; and whose actions are meant for the benefit of all, without exception. Such a Being is your ideal, he is God who lives, acts, and creates in the midst of Nature, and is supremely happy. This is said to be Sa-guna Purusha or God with Gunas or attributes and modifications, who, living, acting, and creating in the midst of Nature, acts in accordance with a law, consciously, deliberately and with a will, impartially, without self-interest, and for the benefit of all; and acting, is not affected by the result, and is supremely happy.

Now you will understand. You cannot live without this God, for he is the ideal of your own Happiness and Good, which you are seeking each moment of your life in all your actions. He exists for you as a reality, because consciously you think of him, and unconsciously you are drawn towards him, in all your actions. He comprehends all that you can think of or conceive. He lives both within and without Nature. As Nir-guna Purusha, he is unborn, eternal beyond change, beyond Time, beyond death, beyond thought, beyond imagination. As Sa-guna Purusha, you think of him as a Being who lives and creates in the midst of Nature, in accordance with a universal law, is immeasurably good, has no self-interest in anything, and all his actions are deliberate, conscious, and performed with a will. This is God spoken of as Sat-chit-ananda: He who is and is good (Sat); he

who acts consciously and deliberately (Chit); and is supremely happy (Ananda).

MAHAVIR—This seems to be all right. It did not occur to me. But I am somewhat confused. And have you really proved the existence of God ? Is not this God an imaginary Being, the creation of my own mind, meant to satisfy me ? Has he any existence apart from my mind ?

KRISHNA—He satisfies a need common to all men. Existence is not merely physical; the mind is more than matter, and ideas more real than anything else you can feel with your senses; and it is they that shape the course of human life. Such is this idea of God. It is necessary for Man's own happiness, and satisfies an innate urge within him. Without it he cannot live. If he believes in Nature alone, Nature conceived as something purely physical, purposeless and blind, he must put an end to his own life. And so this idea of God, this belief in his existence is a reality; it satisfies his mind, reason and innate consciousness even more than the objects you perceive with your senses.

MAHAVIR—But can we conceive of this God as a person, as they say ?

KRISHNA—You can conceive of God both in his personal and impersonal forms. When you think of him as Nir-guna Purusha, beyond Nature, beyond attributes beyond Time, and beyond thought, you think of him

as an impersonal Being. But when you think of him as Sa-guna Purusha, as living and acting in the midst of Nature and partaking of its attributes, and yet supremely happy, you conceive of him as a personal Being. Such is the idea of God as an Avatara or a Son of God. A person is not only one with a physical body; it is also one who can be conceived of as such, with all the rights and duties of persons. It is in this sense that not only men but institutions and even states and nations may be conceived of as persons. God is such a Person, embracing the whole universe, and all that you can possibly imagine as lying beyond it.

MAHAVIR—Is this God anything apart from Nature? You seem to have mixed up the two. I feel so lost; yet you argue well and I can see no flaw in your reasoning.

KRISHNA—I told you a little while ago that you had three options before you. You may agree that Nature, because it creates persons like you, is a Person itself and its actions are meant to be good: in that case you identify Nature with God by associating it with a moral and spiritual aim. Again, you may hold that because Nature creates not only men but other forms of life as well, it is partly like a Person and partly something else; and it is only to the extent to which you conceive of it as a Person with a good object in view in all its actions, that you think in terms of

God. But if you maintain that it is something purely physical, you deny God; and you have seen that if you adhere to this view, life itself becomes impossible. If you wish to live, you must, for your own sake, regard Nature as possessing the same moral and spiritual qualities that you have; nay more - the moral and spiritual qualities that you can in any circumstances imagine or conceive. And thus you rise from Nature to God. In your quest of God-knowledge you may begin by denying his existence completely; and that is pure atheism. But when you realize that by doing so you have destroyed the basis of your own existence, you conceive of him as beyond the range of Nature, as something unknowable and unknown; and this may be called agnosticism. You may also think of him as a mere spectator of life or in terms of a universal Law, but still as something apart from Nature or life. The next stage is when you think of him as a conscious, deliberate and intelligent Being, creating Man and other forms of life, but associated with Nature, which is still something apart, something independent, something physical; and then you conceive of him as a Dualist. From this you may rise slowly to a more universal conception of God, as creating all forms of life without end, including Nature itself, and this is a pure monistic conception of the Deity.

I have shown you that the idea of God is closely associated with Nature, and he cannot be

conceived as anything apart from Nature. When you believe that the great forces of Nature—the Sun and the Moon, the planets and stars, and the great elements—Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth,—act blindly, without purpose, without law, with evil intent, and that their end is death—you do not, cannot, believe in God. But if you agree that there is a conscious purpose and a deliberate will acting through these great forces of Nature, that they act in accordance with a universal Law, intelligently and for universal good,—and that their end is life for evermore renewed—you believe in God.

MAHAVIR—Then, how is it that even those who believe in God are found so often to change ?

KRISHNA—There are moments in the life of a man, when he becomes weary or weak, when he grows sick of life, when he loses faith in Goodness or Happiness, and forgets his God. But when he tries to think and understand, he comes to believe in God again. There is no one who believes in Goodness, Intelligence, or Happiness, and can refuse to believe in God as I have explained to you. This is the ancient idea of Sacrifice,—an action which is conscious, deliberate, and self-controlled, which is devoid of self-interest, and meant for the benefit of all,—making for universal Happiness. And when the idea of Sacrifice is associated with Nature, it transforms it into God. There is God when an act

of Sacrifice is performed; and he ceases to exist when man denies Goodness or Sacrifice in the world.

MAHAVIR—Do you imply that, if there is God, there is no evil, no sorrow, no suffering in the world ?

KRISHNA—I have explained to you that the whole universe, including Man, is moved to action by a force which, for the moment, is essentially good. But the whole universe is subject to the Law of Change, and that alters it to something different,—something less good than before, necessitating a new action to set it right. It is this that is called evil. All persons are not at the same stage of evolution; and when individual good conflicts wholly with the good of society or the race, it is called evil; when it does so only in part, it is partly good and partly evil; and when it is in harmony with all, it is called, unreservedly good. The relation between Good and Evil corresponds to that between Light and Darkness in the world. There is nothing like a total absence of light, and darkness is but a form of light itself. Even so are Good and Evil in the world. And when what is good changes to evil, there arises the necessity of action to change it to good again. That is the basis of belief in the divinity of Man and the existence of God.

MAHAVIR—All this is so strange. I seem to remember something:

Day, and the sun; night, and the moon and stars;
Clouds, and the flash of lightning, and it rains;
Death, and the end of many petty wars;
Peace, and the world a newer life obtains.

KRISHNA—Yes, even so.

MAHAVIR—I remember something more. It is so strange, but let me tell you:

When righteousness decays, and in the world
Unrighteousness prevails, do I arise.

Who said this, and where? But who art thou? and
who is he by thy side? I have seen you both
somewhere, haven't I?

As wonderful doth some one see it all;—
As wonderful doth some one of it speak;
And some one hears of it as wonderful;
Yet hearing still doth no understand.

KRISHNA—Do you understand? Do you now believe
in God?

MAHAVIR—Yes, Master. But who art thou? What is it
that rises within me?—

Thou sire of all that move or do not move,—
Worthy of worship, greater than the great!
Thou hast no equal in the threefold world,—
Who can excel thee, O thou matchless one!

(Falling at his feet)—

My body thus before thee I prostrate,
And crave forgiveness, O thou Lord supreme !
As father with a son, as friend with friend,—
As a lover with his love, so bear with me.

MIRA—*(Rising from her seat and clasping his feet)* Thou art he indeed ! I have wandered in quest of thee, O Lord, I have wandered in quest of thee. I often dream of thee—thy Flute and peacock-feathered crown.

MAHAVIR—Art thou indeed he ? I have so much to ask, so much to know.

KRISHNA—Peace, no more—at least for the present. Now sleep again. Sweet rest and dreamless sleep!

(Mahavir and Mira rise from their knees. Mahavir lies down in his bed, closes his eyes, and falls asleep. Mira slowly goes out to her room. Krishna and Arjuna gently withdraw, a smile playing on their lips. Soft music fills the room.)

SCENE III.

Time : Next Morning.

(*Mira and Mahavir are sitting opposite each other. Mira is quiet and thoughtful, Mahavir a little excited.*)

MAHAVIR—How did you sleep last night? I had a strange dream.

MIRA—So had I.

MAHAVIR—I do not believe in dreams; but this was a most wonderful thing. I can hardly explain. You have so often told me of Krishna, but I have not cared; but last night I saw something which I can never forget. It was really Krishna—with his flute and peacock-feathered crown, his garlands and amber-coloured dress—his eyes so soft and tender and so deep; his voice so thrilling and so sweet.

If the splendour of a thousand suns

At once should rise up in the sky—

That would indeed be like the light

And glory of that mighty One.

This was not a dream. It was something most strange and wonderful. I have written down what I saw and heard, and you can see it. Did I say I did not believe in the existence of God? I am a very different person now. Nature can give you beauty, strength—even knowledge and life, if you please; but not goodness, and permanent happiness; and it is these that we seek through all our actions,

in the world. God is the principle of goodness, intelligence, and happiness in the world; and if we do not believe in him, we destroy the basis of our own existence; and, if we are sincere, must put an end to 'our life as soon as possible. If we wish to live, we must believe in him both as within and without the universe, both as a spectator and an actor, as law and love. He is unborn, eternal, beyond thought; and yet he lives and creates in the midst of Nature, is immeasurably good, has no self-interest in anything, and is supremely happy. He is Sat-chit-ananda - a Person, a Truth, a Reality, without whom Man cannot live. When we think of him in relation to Nature, we transform Nature itself into God by associating with it the idea of Sacrifice. There is God when a man performs an act of Sacrifice: and God ceases to exist when Man denies Goodness or Sacrifice in the world.

MIRA—Who taught you this? I have heard it somewhere before. Was it in that dream? How wonderful! You were there too. Do you remember those lines?

I wander in quest of thee, O Lord,

I wander in quest of thee!

I repeated them before I went to sleep, and then I saw something, and was lost in the wonder of his eyes. They were soft and deep like the throbbing noon-day sky, when it is unruffled by the wind. They had the glory of the sun and the gentleness of

the moon; and I thought of our father and mother at the same time. He looked so like them both.

MAHAVIR—I thought so too. There was a person by his side, and he seemed so like yourself and myself both. It is all so strange. Did I say that when Man lives God dies? I must return the prize I have won. Man can live only when God lives, and dies when God dies in his heart. Did you say the Mahabharata is not a story but a Philosophy of Life? I suppose that also is true.

I have seen that I had not seen before—
My heart is glad, but trembles all in fear.

I think the Bhagavad Gita is deeper than I had understood. It has a new meaning for me now. It is all so wonderful, so wonderful.

As wonderful we see or speak or hear,
Yet no one knows or understands!

MIRA—I have but faith; and when I feel, I think I know.

MAHAVIR—Honour the master, learn by faith,
By question and by service know—

Thus says the Gita. Mere faith is not enough. We must inquire and know; and when we have understood, we must put our knowledge to the test by acts of service; and when service is selfless, it is called Sacrifice; and there is God in each act of Sacrifice; and it is Sacrifice that transforms Nature itself into God.

MIRA—I leave these things to you. You had your doubts, and now you have knowledge. I never had any, and am content. Mine is but an offering—a leaf, a flower, a fruit—at the lotus-feet of the Lord. But I cannot forget the deep, divine eyes that I saw.

MAHAVIR—Nor I, indeed. And I cannot forget your beautiful lines too—

I wander in quest of thee, O Lord,—
I wander in quest of thee.

MIRA— And now I wait for thee, O Lord,
Till thou come home to me.

MAHAVIR—I could go on like this for ever. There is a strange urge within me—what it is, I know not. My heart throbs; I hear a voice; and I see those strange, deep, mysterious eyes looking into me. (*Rising in excitement*) I shall do thy bidding, O Lord! I shall do thy bidding.

MIRA—Sit down, sit down. We must all do the bidding of the Lord in little acts of service, which are the beginning of Sacrifice. When we have faith, when we think of Him, when we are unselfish and do a good deed out of simple kindness of heart—there is God; and when Nature smiles, flowers bloom, fruits ripen, and Life grows and multiplies—there is God.

MAHAVIR—Yes, yes, yes. How sweet it is to surrender our will and obey. Be you my guide: I follow. (*Sits down and smiles*).

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