

INTRODUCTION: While Gandhi was alive, he was often described as a Mahatma. Some hailed him as a prophet. But he was quite emphatic and even stern in declining to accept such descriptions. He laid no claims to Mahatmaship. He repeatedly declared that he was not a prophet; that he had no religion to found. When he was asked whether he intended to found a sect he declared with characteristic humour that his ambition was not so limited. He wanted to convert the whole of humanity to his view. Asked to define what he claimed to be, Gandhi's answer was that he was a Satyagrahi, he was a seeker after Truth. His ambition, his goal, was to be a true Satyagrahi. He defined Satyagraha as insistence on Truth and the force that is derived from such insistence. To him, Truth was God. On more than one occasion, he declared that he worshipped no God other than Truth. He explained how and why he had come to the conclusion that seeing and describing Truth as God was more accurate and more comprehensive than describing God as Truth. He did not believe in any personal God. The quest for Truth was the quest for God; and Truthrealization was God-realization or self- realization. Satyagraha was, therefore, the highest goal that a human being could pursue. In fact, human life was meaningless unless it was devoted to the pursuit of Truth as God and for the praxis or Sadhana that was essential for the triumph, and the regime of Truth in one, and around one. To Gandhi, therefore, Satyagraha was both the end, and the means to achieve the end. Since the force it depended upon was the force that is inherent in Truth, and since the realization of Truth or God is the essence of the spiritual effort, Satyagraha was a spiritual exercise, or Sadhana. Its base was spiritual; its nature was spiritual; and so its effect had to be spiritual if it was pursued with diligence, and in the true spirit. It was a method of purification — purification of oneself, and others including those who considered themselves adversaries — cleansing all concerned of untruth, violence and the seeds of injustice, and aggrandizement. The Spiritual basis of Satyagraha The force of Truth on which Satyagraha depends thus is a spiritual force. In fact Gandhi claimed that his goal in life was to demonstrate that even the mightiest material force could be made to bend before the force of the spirit. Both Truth and love — which Gandhi has described as two sides of same coin are manifestations of the force of the spirit. The source of the power of Satyagraha is, therefore, spiritual. All those who want to understand or practise Satyagraha have, therefore, to understand its spiritual base. This tract is an attempt to review the spiritual base, what Romain Rolland termed the crypt of Gandhi's beliefs. I know that the review presented in these pages is not as comprehensive or as lucid as it should be. I deeply regret that I myself could not do more to what I wrote. I hope readers will forgive me for any inadequacies or ambiguities they perceive. I do believe, however, that I have not been guilty of misrepresentation, and that is the reason I make bold to offer the tract to the readers. The Spiritual Basis of Satyagraha Gandhi has often been described as a 'man of God'. Some have called him a religious person. Some have preferred to call him a spiritual person. A spiritual person need not necessarily be a person who believes in God. The Buddha is an example of a person of undisputed spiritual eminence who was 'spiritual', and yet not a believer in God. On the other hand, a person who staunchly believes in a religion, and in God as understood by the religion, need not necessarily be a person of spiritual eminence. A person may become the head or leader of a religious community by ascending a hierarchy, or even through dynastic succession. That does not necessarily make him a spiritual person or spiritual leader. What is it then that entitles a person to be described as spiritual? Any person who believes in the primacy of the body and the pleasures of the body, and believes that there is nothing that has higher value than the material conditions that relate to these, who believes that everything related to one ends with death cannot be described as a spiritual person. Anyone who believes that there is something in the human being that survives death, and therefore perhaps precedes birth; that this something is higher than the body and the pleasures of the body; that this something has to be identified through the

use of all the unique powers of the human being; and who therefore believes that the true purpose or use of life is to identify this principle and engage in achieving the fullest development of its powers, can be described as a spiritual person. If this distinction can be accepted, Gandhi can certainly be described as a spiritual person. It is true that Gandhi was actively engaged in dealing with problems that related to the material conditions of life. But he has spared no effort to explain that his activities in the mundane or material fields of life were only meant to serve his spiritual goals, and to prove that even problems that one faced in one's day to day life could be solved only with means that were consistent with the principles and methods that ruled in the realm of spiritual endeavour. Infact he claimed that whatever competence or power he had acquired to deal with material conditions and problems had come to him from his spiritual practices.¹ Gandhi spoke of God, religion and the spiritual path. But since these terms have different flavours, he did not want to leave anyone in doubt about his understanding of these words. Gandhi's faith in God was total and unshakeable. But to him, God was not a person.² Truth, and truth alone, was his God.³ He believed in religion, but to him true religion was not exclusive. It was not a set of catechisms and rituals. It was not a hermetically sealed house. He believed that true religion transcended denominations.⁴ He believed that those who wanted to tread the spiritual path could not ignore or shun fields of mundane activity. Thus, there was something unique about Gandhi's perceptions of God, religion and the spiritual path. Perhaps the uniqueness of his perceptions of religion and the spiritual path, arose from his perception of God. One way of looking at the spiritual element in Gandhi's personality may be to begin by looking at his perception of God. Another may be to start by enquiring into the spiritual element in the impact that Gandhi had on individuals and masses of people. Let us begin by looking at the impact that he had on others. First let us look at the instances of a few persons who came in close contact with him, and examine their testimony. We will look at a few instances from among Gandhi's friends and admirers, and a few from those who may be described as belonging to the other side. We begin with the Rev. Doke (an Englishman) who was one of Gandhi's close colleagues in his early days in South Africa: 1. "Our Indian friend lives on a higher plane than most men do. But those who know him well are ashamed of themselves in his presence. He is one of those outstanding characters with whom to talk is a liberal education, whom to know is to love. 2. "I can tell you that a purer, a nobler, a braver and a more exalted spirit has never moved on this earth. He has in him the marvellous spiritual power to turn ordinary men around him into heroes and martyrs. In my life I have known only two men who have affected me spiritually in the manner that Mr. Gandhi does our great patriarch Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji, and my late master Mr. Ranade men before whom, not only are we ashamed of doing anything unworthy, but in whose presence our very minds are afraid of thinking anything that is unworthy." (Speech by Shri G. K. Gokhale in December 1912. Quoted by Tendulkar, in *Gandhiji As We Knew Him*. pp. 14-17) 3. "But this man comes naked and unafraid, protected only with the 'shield of faith', armed only with 'the sword of the spirit'. How can such a man be beaten? Panoplied in cosmic law (author's emphasis), how can he be overthrown?" (Rev. J. H. Holmes) 4. "You cannot say this is he, that is he. All that you can say with certainty is that he is here, he is there. Everywhere his influence reigns, his authority rules, his elusive personality pervades; and this must be so, for it is true of all great men that they are incalculable, beyond definition." (H.S.L. Polak, colleague who worked with Gandhi in South Africa.) 5. "Neither the natural correctness of conduct nor the consciousness of prestige could keep off the creeping nervousness from him." (the English Judge who presided over the trial of Gandhi at Ahmedabad.) For once in his official life a Civil and District Sessions Judge nodded respectful salutations to a native in the dock before he himself took his seat on the bench. For once were the judicial words of a prison sentence belied by the tributary words of human admiration: "Would I not

rather sit at your feet and learn a little of your nobility than send you to jail for six years. "It would be impossible to ignore that in the eyes of millions of your countrymen you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble, and of even saintly life.

7. "It was my fate to be the antagonist of a man for whom even then I had the highest respect. His activities at that time were very trying to me. For him everything went according to plan. For me, the defender of law and order, there was the usual trying situation, the odium of carrying out a law which had not strong public support, and finally the discomfiture when the law had to be repealed. For him it was a successful coup. Nor was the personal touch wanting. In jail he had prepared for me a pair of sandals which he presented to me when he was set free. I have worn these sandals for many a summer since then, even though I may feel that I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man." (General Smuts of South Africa) 8. "Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a man as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." (Prof. Albert Einstein) One could cite the oft-quoted observations of Romain Rolland, Will Durrant, Fenner Brockway, General McArthur and many others. In every case, in the presence of Gandhi, the person concerned experienced elevation to a 'higher' plane, above ego-centrism and all the compulsions or consequences of ego-centrism, including untruth, suspicion, deceitfulness, designs in defence of self-interest, and so on. The experience could perhaps be described as one that elevated the person to the higher realm of transparency and egolessness. The effect that Gandhi had on the Indian masses, or his followers in South Africa, was similar. He was able to wean them from pursuing self-interest at the cost of human dignity. By arousing in them the readiness to undergo physical suffering for an ideal, (outside of their 'self') or for Truth or human dignity, he raised them from a mental state of body-centrism, to idealcentrism. The method that Gandhi placed before the masses was one which empowered them, or enabled them to discover the power that lay dormant in them