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GANDHI AS DISCIPLE AND MENTOR

Thomas Weber's book comprises a series of biographical reflections about people who influenced Gandhi, and those who were, in turn, influenced by him. Whilst the previous literature has tended to focus on Gandhi's political legacy, Weber's book explores the spiritual, social and philosophical resonances of these relationships, and it is with these aspects of the Mahatma's life in mind, that the author has selected his central protagonists. These include friends such as Henry Polak, Hermann Kallenbach, Maganlal Gandhi and Jarnalal Bajaj, who are not as well known as those who are usually cited, such as Ruskin and Tolstoy, but who left a deep impression nevertheless, and motivated some of Gandhi's major life changes, such as his move to Tolstoy Farm. Conversely, the work of luminaries, such as Arne Næss, Johan Galtung, E. F. Schumacher and Gene Sharp, reveal the Mahatma's influence in arenas which are not traditionally associated with his thinking. Weber's book offers new and intriguing insights into the life and thought of one of the best known and most significant figures of the twentieth century.

THOMAS WEBER teaches politics and peace studies at La Trobe University. He has been researching and writing on Gandhi's life, thought and legacy for over twenty years. His publications include *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders: A Recurrent Vision* (with Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan 2000) *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi* (1997), *Gandhi's Peace Army: The Shanti Sena and Unarmed Peacekeeping* (1996), *Conflict, Resolution and Gandhian Ethics* (1991) and *Hugging the Trees: The Story of the Chipko Movement* (1989).

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THOMAS WEBER
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NOTE: for Gandhi's own writings only the date and title of the relevant article is given rather than the standard of the date plus the volume and page reference in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. This is because there are now two versions of the *CWVG* and they do not correspond. The original 100 volumes included several volumes of supplementary material that was unearthed after the publication of the volume covering the dates of the new material. In the CD-ROM version of the *CWVG* this material has been integrated into the body of the work. The date and title should make a required item relatively easy to find in whichever version is used. Where no full date is available, the pages in the hard copy version of the *CWVG* are provided. The item can be located in the CD-ROM version through the word search facility.

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Preface

In a sense this whole project started when I was researching Gandhi's Salt March to Dandi in the early 1980s. I worked in the library of the Sabarmati Ashram for many weeks and walked the ashram grounds daily. While there, a significant question arose for me: how could Gandhi have left this utopia – or at least a place that must have been a rural utopia in 1930 rather than the small oasis surrounded by a very noisy and dirty urban sprawl it is now – vowing (in effect) never to return? Simplistic explanations of sacrificing his home on the altar of the national cause were not totally satisfying. I completed my Salt March work and went on to look at other aspects of Gandhi's nonviolence, but the question never really went away.

In 1996, when, for a short time, I was at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO), I had the good fortune of getting to know Arne Næss. I had long admired his Gandhi-related writings and we had lengthy talks on matters Gandhi. When he stayed with us in Australia the following year, I realised how deeply he was influenced by Gandhi. After reading some of his writings on deep ecology, although the issue was not often commented on, and certainly not in any detail, it became obvious to me how much that work also owed to the Mahatma. As a teacher of peace studies, I was aware of the Gandhian philosophical feel of Johan Galtung's brand of peace research, especially his views on the definitions of violence. The expanded definition that comes through his writings as structural and cultural violence clearly seemed to me to owe much to Gandhi. And I had the same feeling years before when I read E. F. Schumacher's classic book *Small is Beautiful*. In 1999, I spelled out these connections in an article on the Gandhian underpinnings of deep ecology, peace research and Buddhist economics by looking at Gandhi's influence on the three leading figures in the respective fields: Næss, Galtung and Schumacher.

Following discussions on the different approaches to nonviolence in my honours class on nonviolent activism over the years, I decided to spell out the similarities and differences between the approaches of the 'idealists',

represented by Gandhi, and the ‘pragmatists’, represented by Gene Sharp, the main contemporary nonviolence theoretician. Following the acceptance for publication of that article, I decided that my next task should be going back and finally looking seriously at Gandhi’s abandonment of the Sabarmati Ashram in 1930 and seeing if it might have had anything to do with his ‘nephew’ Maganlal Gandhi. As I started this work, it dawned on me that this was not another article but a chapter of a book on the influences on Gandhi, and about Gandhi’s influence on others. The paper on Næss, Galtung and Schumacher formed the core for three much lengthier sections looking at each in turn to add to the work on Sharp. This would make up the bulk of the Gandhi’s influence side of the ledger. The Maganlal Gandhi work was really just one of the studies that would make up the other, the influenced, side.

The influenced and influential Gandhi give us another valuable insight into the Mahatma and his philosophy. The most well-known recent biographies of Gandhi tend to be political biographies. He is the main player in India’s freedom struggle, the eventual ‘father of the nation’. His fight for the rights of Indians in South Africa and his three major political movements in India are generally the centre pieces of his story. The years between political campaigns – and the ones in India came at roughly ten-yearly intervals – spent on self-discovery or anti-untouchability and other social work, are often glossed over. But different biographies of Gandhi could be written. How about a spiritual or constructive work biography with the political campaigns being mere extensions to these more fundamental projects which are far more than periods of marking time? A different picture of Gandhi would emerge, and certainly not a less accurate picture. By examining the influences that went into making the Mahatma, we see Gandhi the spiritual seeker, the Gandhi who wanted to find the meaning of life through various ‘New Age’ experiments and philosophies and through service to others without which he could not find his true Self. If we examine Gandhi this way, his most important relationships are not necessarily the ones he has with the usually recorded political co-workers (such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel) but those with social work colleagues and fellow seekers and soulmates who tend to disappear from the record, especially the English-language record. In short, if we look at a different Gandhi to the one who is usually portrayed, different influences can be found and different relationships come to the fore.

The influential Gandhi shows us the parts of his quest and discovery that have been found useful by others, and thus gives us a picture of his legacy – and, as seen here, again it is not necessarily a political activist legacy. This

exploration of Gandhi is not presented in a strictly chronological way (although the order of the influences on him are given more or less in the sequence in which they occurred), rather it is presented through his relationships and through those who had relationships with him or his thought.

The first section sets the scene by looking at the phenomenon we call influence. I examine what is meant by it and how it differs from determinism, conversion and chance. This is followed by a discussion of whether the moments at which life-changing influences take hold can be pinpointed or whether influence tends to move more in an incremental fashion. Why was Gandhi so influential? He is examined in light of the literature on power and authority. Influence is inextricably tied in with relationships and of course it does not only flow in one direction – Gandhi was also influenced by his close friends, some of whom can best be described as soulmates, and even by those who owed their allegiance to him as disciples.

The next section of the book, about influences on Gandhi, contains six chapters. The first details the usually discussed examples of influences on the making of the Mahatma. Short case studies look at his relationships with a childhood friend, religious and New Age fellow travellers, the key books that Gandhi himself discusses as having a great impact on him, and his political guru. This is followed by four chapters that look at Gandhi's relationship with Henry Polak, Hermann Kallenbach, Maganlal Gandhi and Jamnalal Bajaj. All of these four relationships, even though Gandhi may have been the senior partner in them and at times the completely dominant one, had a great influence on Gandhi himself. I argue that it is not possible to understand why Gandhi set up Phoenix Settlement, why he moved to Tolstoy Farm, why he left Sabarmati Ashram, and why he ended up at Sevagram without understanding these relationships. Interestingly, in the English-language (mainly political) Gandhi biographies, these relationships, especially the ones concerning Maganlal and Bajaj, barely rate a mention even though I argue that they were crucial in Gandhi's life. The sixth chapter looks at Gandhi himself. Who was the person that grew out of these influences? What do his influencers tell us about him?

The final section, on Gandhi's influence, mirrors the previous section and it also consists of six chapters. It again details the people whose names generally come up in discussions of Gandhi's (again, generally political) influence. The case studies look at his relationships with his co-workers in India's freedom struggle and international figures from three continents who are famously known, and self-described, as Gandhians. The four following chapters look at Gandhi's influence on the philosophies of

the intellectuals and social activists Arne Næss, Johan Galtung, E. F. Schumacher and Gene Sharp. The final chapter examines the question of why he had the power to influence so many others. What do those he influenced tell us about the legacy of his philosophy?

For the chapters that conclude each of the two substantive sections of what follows, I have used the analogy of an hourglass. By way of personal history, most of us can be represented by a funnel – a utensil for concentrating liquids so that they can be fed into a small opening. In the analogy, a great many influences are captured by the cone of a funnel. They are combined as they flow through the narrowing outlet to give a blended output – the personality and behaviour traits of the individual who is the end product. This seems to be a fair representation of how most of us get to be who we are – and probably for many of us the funnel analogy is sufficient. However, some individuals also have more than a passing influence on others (beyond their children).

For those who strongly influence many others or whose influence is significant in shaping the world in an objectively discernible way, the analogy does not go far enough – the appropriate analogy may be the hourglass rather than the funnel. An hourglass is like a funnel standing on its apex on a mirror. Sand from the top compartment flows through a narrow opening to the bottom compartment. The influence that is concentrated at the narrows, the ‘waist’ between the two glass compartments representing the individual, spreads again to influence many others. Gandhi is such an individual. Countless influences, like sands in an hourglass, flowed into the making of the Mahatma. Some of them are identifiable as those of friends and notable thinkers who went before him. But influences also flowed from him (and many through him) to the bottom chamber, the broad spectrum of others who, either personally or by way of a system of thought or style of activism, in a recognisable way became who they did become at least partly as a result of his influence. The concluding chapter of the influenced section examines the ‘top of the hourglass’ while the concluding chapter of the influential section examines the ‘bottom of the hourglass’.

In this work, I have been helped by many. They include Robin Jeffrey, who (as often seems to be the case) was part of the process of formulating the idea for this book; James D. Hunt and Surendra Bhana, who assisted me with my investigations into Gandhi’s days in South Africa and helped me track down important sources; Shahed Power, who shared his manuscript about Gandhi’s influence on Arne Næss with me; Peter Lawler who kindly gave me copies of Galtung’s unpublished papers on Gandhi; Johan Galtung, Ralph Summy, Brian Martin, Graham Dunkley and Arne Næss who read

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sections of the manuscript and gave me valuable advice; Delene Hutchins who read the entire manuscript, too often pointing out poor punctuation or grammatical indelicacies; and the librarians at La Trobe University's Borchart Library, who so efficiently managed to procure obscure documents for me. In India, I would like to thank Amrutbhai Modi of the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad for guiding me in my search for Maganlal Gandhi and for making my stay at the ashram as pleasant as it was, Rambhauji Mhaskar, Kanakmal Gandhi and Hirabhai at Sevagram for organising my programme there, and Tulsidas Somaiya for bookending my 2003 India visit at the Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal. Jyotibhai Desai, Michael and Anand Mazgaonkar assisted me with translations of Gujarati material concerning Maganlal Gandhi. I would also like to thank Narayan Desai, who helped me clarify my thinking about seeing Gandhi in a more holistic way than he so often comes across in English-language biographies. And, of course, thanks to Marja and Hanna for being there.

Glossary

<i>Ahimsa</i>	Nonviolence
<i>Ashram</i>	Religious community; hermitage; centre for social service
<i>Beti</i>	Daughter
<i>Bhai</i>	Brother; as a suffix to a proper name it connotes respect
<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>	Sacred Hindu book containing Krishna's dialogues before battle
<i>Bhoodan</i>	Land gift. Vinoba Bhave's movement aimed at securing land for the landless by asking the wealthy to donate it voluntarily
<i>Brahmacharya</i>	Celibacy; control of the senses as a spiritual discipline
<i>Charkha</i>	Spinning wheel
<i>Charotar</i>	A fertile, dark soiled area of the Kaira District of Gujarat, which is the stronghold of the Patidar (Patel) caste
<i>Chhotabhai</i>	Younger brother
<i>Chipko</i>	To hug. The name of the world-renowned Himalayan conservation movement
<i>Dacoits</i>	Bandits
<i>Darshan</i>	View of auspicious object or person from which the viewer gains merit
<i>Dhoti</i>	Long cloth, tied at the waist and wrapped around the legs. A common north Indian male garment
<i>Gramdan</i>	Village gift. Vinoba Bhave's plan for villagers to pledge to run their village on a cooperative and communal basis
<i>Gram Swaraj</i>	Village self-government

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<i>Harijans</i>	Literally ‘Children of God’. Gandhi’s term for dalits, known in his time as ‘untouchables’
<i>Hanuman</i>	The monkey god. A popular Hindu deity and a hero of the epic tale, the <i>Ramayana</i>
<i>Karmayogi</i>	One practising the yoga of selfless action as a path to union with God
<i>Khilafat</i>	Hindu-supported Muslim movement in 1919–20 against the harsh terms imposed on Turkey by Britain following the Great War in which the Turkish Sultan, who was also the Caliph of Islam, was to be deposed
<i>Khadi</i>	Hand-spun, hand-woven cloth
<i>Krishna</i>	Most popular incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu
<i>Kurta</i>	Long, long-sleeved collarless Indian shirt
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	The Lower House in the Indian parliament
<i>Mahatma</i>	Literally ‘great soul’. A title of great respect
<i>Mahila</i>	Women
<i>Malguzar</i>	Important landowner
<i>Mandal</i>	Association or conference
<i>Moksha</i>	Liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Unity with the Supreme
<i>Purdah</i>	The custom of keeping women in seclusion or under the veil
<i>Sangh</i>	Association or congregation
<i>Sangha</i>	The Buddhist monastic order
<i>Sannyasa</i>	Renunciation of normal life in a religious quest
<i>Sannyasi</i>	One who has taken <i>sannyasa</i>
<i>Sardar</i>	Chief. An honorific title
<i>Sarva Seva Sangh</i>	Association for the service of all. An umbrella grouping of most of the major Gandhian organisations
<i>Sarvodaya</i>	Literally the ‘welfare of all’. Gandhi’s social philosophy
<i>Sati</i>	The ritual self-immolation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband
<i>Satyagraha</i>	‘Truth Force’ or ‘Soul Force’. Gandhi’s term for nonviolent resistance
<i>Saurashtra</i>	Literally land of a hundred states. Peninsular Gujarat.

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<i>Seth</i>	Merchant; wealthy man
<i>Seva</i>	Service
<i>Sastra</i>	An authoritative text, usually religious
<i>Shanti Sena</i>	Peace brigade
<i>Swadeshi</i>	Made in one's own country, local production. Self-sufficiency
<i>Swaraj</i>	Self-rule; independence
<i>Upanishads</i>	A collection of holy Hindu treatises
<i>Yajna</i>	Religious sacrifice
<i>Yatra</i>	Journey, pilgrimage
<i>Zamindar</i>	Important landowner