Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION

The Indian struggle for independence from the British rule lasted for numerous decades and finally after a long struggle freedom was achieved. The Indian independence movement has witnessed the contributions and sacrifices of many great leaders, who waged a war against the British rule and inspired the youth of the nation. The names of some of the famous leaders are Subhas Chandra Bose, Bipin Chandra Pal, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Ram Prasad Bismil, Jayaprakash Narayan, Chandrasekhar Azad, Baba Gurdit Singh, Sukhdev, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Jawaharlal Nehru and many more. However the list and contributions of these leaders is very long. All of them have been immortalized in the Indian history as the brave soldiers of India. But, two iconic leaders whose legacy as legendary figures still continue and are immensely popular even after their death are: Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagat Singh.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was an eminent leader of Indian nationalism in British-ruled India (Gandhi, 2006).¹ Employing non-violent civil disobedience, Gandhi led India to independence and inspired

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movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. Gandhi was 24 years old when he arrived in South Africa to work as a legal representative for the Muslim Indian Traders based in the city of Pretoria (Power, 1969, pp. 441-455).\(^2\) He first employed non-violent civil disobedience as an expatriate lawyer in South Africa, in the resident Indian community's struggle for civil rights. In South Africa, Gandhi faced the discrimination directed at all colored people. He was thrown off a train at Pietermaritzburg after refusing to move from the first-class. He protested and was allowed on first class the next day. Travelling farther on by stagecoach, he was beaten by a driver for refusing to move to make room for a European passenger. He suffered other hardships on the journey as well, including being barred from several hotels. In another incident, the magistrate of a Durban court ordered Gandhi to remove his turban, which he refused to do. These events were a turning point in Gandhi's life and shaped his social activism and awakened him to social injustice.

After witnessing racism, prejudice and injustice against Indians in South Africa, Gandhi began to question his place in society and his people's standing in the British Empire. Gandhi extended his original

period of stay in South Africa to assist Indians in opposing a bill to deny them the right to vote. In regard to this bill Gandhi sent out a memorial to Joseph Chamberlain, British Colonial Secretary, asking him to reconsider his position on this bill. Though unable to halt the bill's passage, his campaign was successful in drawing attention to the grievances of Indians in South Africa. He helped found the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 and through this organisation, he moulded the Indian community of South Africa into a unified political force.

In 1906, the Transvaal government promulgated a new Act compelling registration of the colony's Indian population. At a mass protest meeting held in Johannesburg on 11th September, 1906, Gandhi adopted his still evolving methodology of Satyagraha (devotion to the truth), or non-violent protest, for the first time. He urged Indians to defy the new law and to suffer the punishments for doing so. The community adopted this plan, and during the ensuing seven-year struggle, thousands of Indians were jailed, flogged, or shot for striking, refusing to register, for burning their registration cards or engaging in other forms of non-violent resistance. The government successfully repressed the Indian protesters, but the public outcry over the harsh treatment of peaceful Indian protesters by the South African government forced South African leader Jan Christiaan Smuts, himself a philosopher, to negotiate a
compromise with Gandhi. Gandhi's ideas took shape, and the concept of Satyagraha matured during this struggle. He spent 21 years in South Africa, where he developed his political views, ethics and political leadership skills (Rai, 2000).

After his return to India in 1915, he set about organising peasants, farmers, and urban labourers to protest against excessive land-tax and discrimination. Mr. Ramchander Guha argues that when he returned to India in 1915, he was proficient at public speaking, fund-raising, negotiations, media relations, and self-promotion. In 1915, Gandhi returned to India permanently. He brought an international reputation as a leading Indian nationalist, theorist and organiser. He joined the Indian National Congress and was introduced to Indian issues, politics and the Indian people primarily by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Gandhi took Gokhale's liberal approach based on British Whiggish traditions and transformed it to make it look wholly Indian (Prashad, 1966, pp. 412–431). During the latter part of World War I, Gandhi agreed to actively recruit Indians for the war effort. Perhaps he wanted to show his support for the Empire and help his case for India's independence. Gandhi's first major achievements came in 1918 with the Champaran and Kheda

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agitations of Bihar and Gujarat. The Champaran agitation pitted the local peasantry against their largely British landlords who were backed by the local administration. The peasantry was forced to grow Indigo, a cash crop whose demand had been declining over two decades, and were forced to sell their crops to the planters at a fixed price. Unhappy with this, the peasantry appealed to Gandhi at his ashram in Ahmedabad. Pursuing a strategy of non-violent protest, Gandhi took the administration by surprise and won concessions from the authorities (Hardiman, 2001, pp. 99-101).  

During the Khilafat movement, he attracted a strong base of Muslim support with local chapters in all Muslim centres in India. His success made him India's first national leader with a multicultural base and facilitated his rise to power within Congress, which had previously been unable to reach many Muslims. Gandhi took leadership of Congress in 1920 and began a steady escalation of demands. With Congress now behind him in 1920, Gandhi had the base to employ non-cooperation, non-violence and peaceful resistance as his "weapons" in the struggle against the British Raj. He led nationwide campaigns for easing poverty, expanding women's rights, building religious and ethnic amity, ending untouchability, but above all for achieving Swaraj or self-rule. Gandhi

expanded his non-violence platform to include the swadeshi policy-the boycott of foreign-made goods, especially British goods. In addition to boycotting British products, Gandhi urged the people to boycott British educational institutions and law courts, to resign from government employment, and to forsake British titles and honours. "Non-cooperation" enjoyed widespread appeal and success, increasing excitement and participation from all strata of Indian society. Yet, just as the movement reached its apex, it ended abruptly as a result of a violent clash in the town of Chauri-Chaura” (Hardiman, 2001, pp. 99-101).6

Gandhi pushed through a resolution at the Calcutta Congress in December 1928 calling on the British government to grant India dominion status or face a new campaign of non-cooperation with complete independence for the country as its goal. On 26 January 1930, the Indian National Congress declared the independence of India. The British did not recognise that and more negotiations ensued, with Congress taking a role in provincial government in the late 1930s. Gandhi and Congress withdrew their support of the Raj when the Viceroy declared war on Germany in September 1939 without consulting anyone. Tensions escalated until Gandhi demanded immediate independence in 1942 and the British responded by imprisoning him and tens of thousands

6. Ibid.
of Congress leaders for the duration. Gandhi famously led Indians in challenging the British-imposed salt tax with the 400 Km Dandi Salt March in 1930, and later in calling for the British to Quit India in 1942. He was imprisoned for many years, upon many occasions, in both South Africa and India. Eventually, in August 1947, Britain granted independence, but the British Indian Empire was partitioned into two dominions, a Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. In the months following, he undertook several fasts unto death to promote religious harmony. The last of these, undertaken on 12 January 1948 at age 78, also had the indirect goal of pressuring India to pay out some cash assets owed to Pakistan. Some Indians thought Gandhi was too accommodating (Brown, 1991). Among them was Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist, who assassinated Gandhi on 30 January 1948 by firing three bullets into his chest at point-blank range (Cush et al. 2008). Gandhi attempted to practice non-violence and truth in all situations, and advocated that others do the same. He lived modestly in a self-sufficient residential community and wore the traditional Indian dhoti and shawl, woven with yarn hand spun on a charkha. He ate simple vegetarian food, and also undertook long fasts as means of both self-purification and

social protest. India succeeded in gaining freedom under his leadership and he is affectionately known as Bapu.

Bhagat Singh is considered as one of the most influential revolutionaries of the Indian independence movement. He was born into a Sikh family which had been active in Indian independence movements against the British Raj. As a teenager Singh he studied European revolutionary movements and was attracted to anarchist and Marxist ideologies. He was influenced by a number of incidents during his childhood which instilled in him a deep sense of patriotism to eventually take up the struggle for India's independence. In 1919, at the age of 12, Bhagat Singh visited the site of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, where non-violent people gathered at a public meeting were fired upon without warning, killing hundreds (Singh & Hooja, 2007). As a young lad, Bhagat Singh was under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and actively took part in the non-cooperation movement. He earnestly believed that India would indeed gain freedom under Gandhi's leadership. But when Gandhi called off the movement following the Chauri Chaura riot in 1922, he became disenchanted with Gandhism and gradually veered towards the tenets of armed revolutionary struggle.

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He joined the Young Revolutionary Movement and began to advocate for the violent overthrow of the British in India. He founded the Indian nationalist youth organization Naujawan Bharat Sabha in March 1926 (Nayar, 2000). He also joined the Hindustan Republican Association, which had prominent leaders, such as Ram Prasad Bismil, Chandrashekhar Azad and Ashfaqulla Khan. The name of the organisation was changed to Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA) at Singh's insistence (Singh, 2011). Police became concerned with Singh's influence on youths and in May 1927 they arrested him on the pretext of having been involved in a bombing that had taken place at Lahore in October of the previous year. He was released on a surety of Rs. 60,000 five weeks after his arrest. He wrote for and edited Urdu and Punjabi newspapers, published from Amritsar, as well as briefly for the Veer Arjun newspaper published in Delhi. He also contributed to Kirti, the journal of the Kirti Kisan Party ("Workers and Peasants Party"), and in September 1928, that party organised an all-India meeting of

revolutionaries in Delhi with Singh as its secretary. He later rose to become this association's leader (Singh, 2012).  

Following Lala Lajpat Rai’s death during a non-violent protest against the Simon Commission’s visit, he vowed to take revenge, and joined other revolutionaries, Shivaram Rajguru, Sukhdev Thapar and Chandrashekhar Azad, in a plot to kill Scott. However, in a case of mistaken identity, Singh received a signal to shoot on the appearance of John P. Saunders, an Assistant Superintendent of Police. He was shot by Rajguru and Singh while leaving the District Police Headquarters in Lahore on 17 December 1928. Although the murder of Saunders was condemned as a retrograde action by Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress leader, others were more understanding of the motivation. Within a few months, he achieved amazing popularity. He eluded efforts by the police to capture him. Together with Batukeshwar Dutt, he undertook a successful effort to throw two bombs and leaflets inside the Central Legislative Assembly while shouting slogans of revolution. Subsequently they volunteered to surrender and be arrested. Singh and Dutt were sentenced to 14 years life imprisonment (Nayar, 2000).

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On 15 April 1929, the Lahore bomb factory was discovered by the police, leading to the arrest of other members of HSRA, out of which seven turned informants, helping the police to connect Singh with the murder of Saunders. Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev were charged with the murder of Saunders. Singh decided to use the court as a tool to publicise his cause - the independence of India. Singh was re-arrested for murdering Saunders and his life sentence in the Assembly Bomb case was deferred till the Saunders' case was decided (Regarding the LCC, 2011). He was sent to the Mianwali jail from the Delhi jail, where he witnessed discrimination between European and Indian prisoners, and led other prisoners in a hunger strike to protest this. They demanded equality in standards of food, clothing, toiletries and other hygienic necessities, as well as availability of books and a daily newspaper for the political prisoners (Nayar, 2000), whom they demanded should not be forced to do manual labour or any undignified work in the jail. Since the activities of the hunger strikers had gained popularity and attention amongst the people nationwide, the government decided to advance the start of the Saunders murder trial, which was henceforth called the Lahore Conspiracy Case. He underwent a 116 day fast in jail and his popularity


During this time, sufficient evidence was brought against him for a conviction in the Saunders case, after trial by a Special Tribunal. Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were convicted and subsequently sentenced to death in the Lahore conspiracy case and ordered to be hanged on 24 March, 1931. In Punjab, a defence committee drew up a plan to appeal to the Privy Council. Singh was initially against the appeal, but later agreed to it in the hope that the appeal would popularise the HSRA in Britain. However the appeal was dismissed. Singh was hanged on 23 March, 1931 at 7:30 pm in Lahore jail with his comrades Rajguru and Sukhdev. Singh's death had the effect that he desired and he inspired thousands of youths to assist the remainder of the Indian independence movement. After his hanging, youths in regions around northern India rioted in protest against the British Raj and Gandhi (Singh, 2008).  

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In his last letter, Bhagat Singh wrote, “I have been arrested while waging a war. For me there can be no gallows. Put me into the mouth of cannon and blow me off." (Singh, 2011)\textsuperscript{18}

Jawaharlal Nehru acknowledged that the popularity of Bhagat Singh was leading to a new national awakening, saying:

“He was a clean fighter who faced his enemy in the open field ... he was like a spark that became a flame in a short time and spread from one end of the country to the other dispelling the prevailing darkness everywhere.”(Singh, 2007, pp. 297–326)\textsuperscript{19}

Four years after Singh's hanging, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Sir Horace Williamson, wrote: His photograph was on sale in every city and township and for a time rivalled in popularity even that of Mr. Gandhi himself (Singh, 2007, pp. 297–326).\textsuperscript{20} Singh’s legacy prompted youth in India to begin fighting for Indian independence and he continues to be a youth idol in modern India.

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagat Singh are two titans of Indian freedom movement. Both were committed towards the goal of India's freedom from British rule. Mahatma Gandhi spearheaded a civil


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
disobedience movement founded on the principles of non-violence and Satyagraha. While Bhagat Singh waged a revolutionary armed struggle laced with violence towards the British regime. Both contributed immensely towards the Indian freedom. However, the means they adopted were distinctly different. So, for the present study, ideologies and principles of both the leaders were compared and analyzed. Efforts were done to explore the causes of convergence and diversion between Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagat Singh? Freedom movements and strategic methods employed by Gandhi and Bhagat Singh to achieve freedom were studied and analysis was carried out to find out the difference. Efforts were done to investigate whether it is actually correct to say that Bhagat Singh was a total contrast to Mahatma Gandhi?

Gandhi is affectionately known as Bapu while Bhagat Singh is remembered as Shaheed-E-Azam. The youth of India still draw tremendous amount of inspiration from Singh (Sharma, 2011).\(^{21}\) He was voted the "Greatest Indian" in a poll by the Indian magazine India Today in 2008, ahead of Bose and Gandhi. But it is also becoming evident that the ideologies and vision of both the leaders have been shunted aside in the modern India. Their ideologies proved fruitful during freedom struggle but the same ideologies are looked down upon in modern India.

All these observations point towards the urgent need to investigate the facts like whether actually modern Indians have rejected Gandhi and Bhagat Singh’s ideologies? So through this doctoral work, a survey was conducted amongst different strata of modern Indian society so as to investigate the existence of elements of Gandhian and Bhagat Singh’s ideologies. Investigations were done to assess the public perceptions of Gandhism and Bhagat Singh’s ideology. Analysis was done to find out whether modern Indians prefer Bhagat Singh’s ideology over Gandhism or both the leaders’ ideologies are losing charm with the public.

Though Bhagat Singh was also quite popular and hailed as a national hero yet history has witnessed the prominence of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian freedom movement who became popular and famous. The pre-eminence of Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagat Singh in Indian freedom movement and their distinctly different approaches have spawned many controversies and even conspiracy theories. Most of these stem from Gandhi and the 'Indian National Congress's alleged failure to prevent Bhagat Singh's execution despite enjoying substantial clout with the British government. In fact, a number of recent Bollywood movies like 'Shaheed Bhagat Singh' are replete with subtle insinuations that Gandhi indeed could have done more to save Bhagat Singh's life. Due to these misconceptions, people’s discontentment over Gandhi’s role in
Bhagat Singh’s trial is rising. Thus efforts were done to explore the reasons for people’s disenchantment and based on these causes remedial suggestions were provided for the further fructification of both leaders’ rich legacy and vision. Furthermore, analysis was done to explore the relevance of the ideologies of both the leaders in contemporary society by observing and analyzing current social or national events.