INTRODUCTION

The present research covers the most momentous period of freedom struggle which is synonymous with Gandhian era and how it went on in Kanpur city. Like most other cities of north India, Kanpur too witnessed mass upheavals, there were firebrand and committed leaders associated with the Indian National Congress- Narayan Prasad Arora, Maulana Hasrat Mohani, Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi who kept the momentum going and it is around these and some other lesser known freedom fighters and Congress that my thesis revolves.

Kanpur founded as an army encampment in the mid eighteenth century by the British was initially used as a buffer city between the Nawab of Avadh and the sweeping activities of the Marathas. The British had stationed their forces in this place to act as a bulwark for the Nawab against the onslaught of the Marathas. In the Treaty of Allahabad (1801), the Company and the Nawab had undertaken to defend each other against the mutual enemy, and Company kept themselves informed when the Nawab’s troops began to gather at Kanpur. If the place was to be used effectively as a buffer between Avadh and the Marathas, the encampment had to be fortified and it was Captain Robert Brooke who undertook this work at Nawab’s request. Kanpur was declared a district on 24 March 1803.
British merchant families found the place attractive, located near the banks of the Ganges and secure because of the presence of military and they started settling here and became forerunners of its industrial and commercial development, setting up numerous mills like Cooper Allen, Cawnpore Woollen Mill (also known as Lalimli), Muir, Elgin, New Victoria and others. These mills were to later add the epithet of ‘Manchester of North India’ to Kanpur. Indian merchants too started to set up their firms and pioneer was Jhuggilal Kamlapat or JK Group.

The introduction of liberal laws and a modern educational system by the Government in mid nineteenth century was viewed with suspicion by the natives in north India. Ruthless annexations of Indian states by the government during the Governor-Generalship of Lord Dalhousie (by his ‘Doctrine of Lapse’) were deeply resented by natives and sepoys (Indian soldiers of British army) alike. The culmination of resentment reached its apex with the annexation of Avadh (1856) and a feeling of discontent and disquiet began to be felt throughout northern India, from Delhi to the plains of Bihar and it unleashed the great Revolt of 1857.

This revolt affected the city tremendously and was in fact the site of some of the most brutal and violent conflicts between the rebels and the British Government. If the rebels carried the worst
massacre of English women and children at Bibi Ghar near the banks of Ganges, the English forces led by Col. James Neill resorted to most severe form of brutality and torture and these ghastly acts were to be embellished in the hearts and minds of the people of the city. Nana Saheb the Peshwa, Azeemullah his chief adviser and a master strategist and Azeezan Randi, the famous prostitute (whose house the rebels often used to frequent) were the major figures of the city to have been associated with the revolt. Nationalist historians have glorified the great revolt and it can be said as city’s first brush with nationalism or patriotism as a feeling of hatred for the British was a unifying factor for rebels across north India.

The foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and emergence of an enlightened nationalist leadership brought a kind of revolution in the country and people started becoming conscious of their political and economic rights, a feeling of self-respect and self-esteem implied that they should take up cudgels against the foreign rule and the seeds of modern Indian nationalism in broad contours were laid. A branch of Congress was established in Kanpur in the year 1888 at the time of its fourth session at Allahabad.

Congress which began as a nascent organization evolved a mass character in 1905 under the influence of Bal Gangadhar Tilak but its penetration into the far flung areas of the country and a clear
cut ideology based economic and political programme crystallized only with the arrival of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (later hailed as ‘Mahatma’ or Great Soul) on the political firmament and the first major movement launched under his aegis (with the crucial support from Ali Brothers- Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali) in the year 1920 i.e. Non Cooperation and Khilafat movement. Kanpur’s participation was significant as it had a substantial Muslim population and anti-British sentiment amongst the Muslims was on the rise since the infamous Kanpur Machchli bazaar Mosque riot of 1913.¹

Boycott of foreign cloth acquired much success in Kanpur. The city’s two premier pro-Congress newspapers Pratap (founded by Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi) and Vartman (founded by Ram Shankar Awasthi) fervently covered the nationalist activities going around in the city plus were also acquainting the public with the policies being shaped at the national level. Students belonging to colleges like Christ Church, D.A.V. College and Marwari College played a very significant role and helped in making the movement a mass based one.

Revolutionary movement or activities present another side of independence struggle and city was a hotbed of these activities blessed as it was by numerous men of such motivation. Bhagat Singh

¹ For details see Chapter 1, pp. 35-38.
had sharpened his revolutionary credentials here only, Ram Dulare Trivedi was a mentor to a generation of revolutionaries, Batukeshwar Dutt, associate of Bhagat Singh in the Lahore conspiracy Case too hailed from Kanpur and Chandrashekhar Azad carried and guided much of the programme of Hindustan Socialist Revolutionary Association (HSRA) from here only.

Hindu-Muslim amity witnessed in 1920 was not to be repeated afterwards as the scourge of communalism steadily began to spread its tentacles and the hiatus had already been provided earlier with the starting of *shuddhi* and *tanzeem* movements in the city. Often some of the tallest Congress leaders also declared their affinity with such organizations there by making the nationalist struggle often devoid of an all encompassing multifarious look. Riots broke out frequently the most horrendous one being of 1931 in which Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi lost his life.

In spite of such handicaps the nationalist movement kept on going and with the passage of time it became more stronger and a sense of commitment was displayed both by natives and their leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru frequently used to visit the city and his speeches had an electrifying effect on the people. Gandhi too had his sojourn here and inaugurated the famous Tilak Hall, which was to become the centre of Congress activities.
Almost all the major nationalist movements and agitations against the obnoxious policies of the British Government since 1919 like Rowlatt Act etc. were carried in full swing in Kanpur and the landmark was Indian National Congress’ 40th session held in the city in December 1925 where for the first time an Indian woman presided over that body (Sarojini Naidu) and it become memorable in many respects.

Although the nationalist movement was not without its shortcomings yet it can be fairly said that the driving force or rather motivating force for the people was fiery nationalist zeal that was present in Kanpur in its full being carried out both by the nationalists and revolutionaries and it has left behind a rich legacy to cherish.

The major primary sources I’ve consulted are files preserved in the National Archives and Uttar Pradesh State Archives (UPSA) Lucknow pertaining to different departments like Home Political, General Administration (GAD), Education, Criminal Investigation (CID), Criminal and others. Understandably the State Archives has more material to offer on the subject. Equally significant is the reporting from newspapers published from the city like Pratap and Vartman and National Herald (published from Lucknow), files of all these are preserved in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
Another paper called *Citizen* which was published from Kanpur carried news regarding civic matters and was then being edited by Suraj Prakash Mehra who passed away recently at the grand age of 101. Its files are preserved at Mr Mehra’s bungalow ‘Subhachha’ in city’s Swaroop Nagar area. Ramdev Morolia and Balkrishna Maheshwari’s *Kanpur ka Itihaas* published in 1940 was also a prized source as it had carefully covered the nationalist agitation of the period and most profusely that of 1930’s. Oral interviews though I tried a lot but only two people could I find Uma Dixit ji, daughter of firebrand poet-freedom fighter Chhail Bihari Dixit ‘Kantak’ and Shamsul Hasan Mohani saab, nephew of Maulana Hasrat Mohani.

Amongst the secondary sources, for introduction and all Gazetteers were helpful. H.R. Nevill’s Gazetteer of Cawnpore has long been considered as immensely beneficial though a later one of Kailash Narayan Pande has also covered the things remarkably and covers much of the contemporary period. Zoe Yalland’s *Traders and Nawabs* is a book which has very lucidly and comprehensively covered the growth of Kanpur from 1765-1857 and how it became a town of considerable commercial importance for the British. Chitra Joshi’s *Lost Worlds* is a premier work on city’s labour class which also provides us some useful information on the growth of communal
consciousness and the uneasy relationship between Congress and the working class as party was trying to do a balancing act between the mill owners and workers.

Local vernacular literature is available though there are not many books on the national movement going in the city. Arvind Arora’s Kanpur ka Itihaas (Vol.III) and Beesween Sadi Kanpur ke Prassidh Purush avem Mahilayen are two books which do tell us about the independence struggle. However books on revolutionary movement are certainly there in helpful numbers, prominent ones being Shiv Kumar Mishra’s Kranti ka Agrdoot Kanpur and Bharat ki Krantikari Partiyan. He was himself a revolutionary who later joined the Communist Party of India.

In any case there are not many books dealing exclusively with Kanpur or covering the national movement so information has been corroborated by going through other known books on the national movement and India’s political history of the period.