After more than sixty years of independence, the Indian Nation is still confronting some social problems, such as crisis of character, erosion of values, separatist movements, mass illiteracy, superstitions, casteism, religious fanaticism, secessionist tendencies and rampant corruption, etc., which have almost threatened the integrity of the nation. In this difficult period, it is necessary for every Indian to look back at different phases of India's freedom and try to determine how that wondrous thing happened. Freedom fighters valiantly defied the greatest of imperialistic powers, namely British rule in India. What was the moral basis? Who inspired them?

India is an ancient land and its cultural heritage is one of the most extensive and varied as compared to that of other countries. While evaluating the Indian cultural heritage, the sociologists aptly remarked that it has never been monolithic. There has always been a deep-rooted respect for the diverse cultural and religious identities. On the contrary, throughout the ages, many races and peoples, who have either temporarily come into contact with India or have permanently settled within her boundaries, joining the ranks of her children and helping to evolve a distinctive Indian culture. The key note of this culture is synthesis on the basis of eternal values. Take Hinduism, for example. This religion evolved in India over a period of four thousand years. It struck roots in a manner, which is unique in the history of religions. Despite its orthodox traditions, its priestly class and its scriptures, it did not grow into a set of rigid dogmas. Advaita and Dvaita, salvation through Jnan and Bhakti, and many other
conceptions of the nature of God and man's moral and social being developed and flourished side by side. Buddhism and Jainism not only brought in new messages of salvation, but also strengthened the traditions of religious tolerance. Thus, the foundation of two great ideals of India -- Synthesis of Cultures and Spiritual Regeneration of Man -- have been truly laid in those early phases on which the future structure of India's Culture has been raised.

The coming of Islam added to the richness of the culture of India. The process of integration and unification on the one hand, and that of diversification on the other, went on simultaneously. By the time, the Delhi Sultanate had collapsed, traditions of synthesis had continued under the local leadership. This period saw the growth of regional languages and literature and new styles of architecture in different parts of the country. This process of assimilation was best exemplified in the reign of Akbar. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Amir Khusrau expressed his unbounded love for the greatness of his country (India) in his poetry and other writings, and brought about a fusion of ancient Indian and Islamic traditions in music. The Mughal Court became a nucleus for a many-sided development in literature, music, painting and architecture -- expressing a grand cultural synthesis.

The Bhakti and Sufi movements had strengthened the same unifying process and spread the message of humanism to all parts of the country. The movements loosened the caste rigidly and hold of the religious dogmas, ushering in a new religion of love in place of lifeless rituals. Noted personalities of the movements were Alvar and Nayanar saints of the South, and of Muinuddin Chisti, Nizamuddin Auliya, Kabir, Nanak, Mirabai, Chaitanyadev, Tukaram and many others in different parts of the country.

It should be remembered that a great cultural revolution swept the whole of India before the Indians dream of freedom from the clutches of alien rule. The movements originated and extended to the realm of religion, social reforms, literature, fine arts and scientific endeavours. Many outstanding personalities had
appeared and pushed the movement to its culmination. Starting from Lord Buddha, then passing through the great lives of Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Chaitanya and Tulsidas, down to Rammohan, Dayananda and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, a great tradition of religious catholicity has been there. The days of Alvar and Nayanar saints of the South, and of Muinuddin Chisti, Nizamuddin Auliya, Nanak, Kabir, Mirabai, Ramananda, Ruhidas, Tukaram and others created a tremendous awareness for social reform in the middle age.

In the present age, had appeared reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Kesab Chunder Sen, M.G. Ranade, B.M. Malabari and others. The immortal epics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and classical literature of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti stood as background to the creations of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Subramanya Bharati, Suryakanta Tripathi (Nirala), Mahakabi Kumaran Asan, etc. In the Neo-Indian art movement, the names of Raja Ravi Varma, Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, etc., are to be reckoned with. In the world of science, India had Sir J.C. Bose, Sir P.C. Roy, Sir C.V. Raman and others.

However, with the establishment of the British rule, a totally new phase in the history of India began. The British came to India as traders and had founded an Empire in 1757 and ended in 1947. The entire period passed through two phases, first under the East India Company from 1757 to 1858 and for the remaining period under the direct control of the British Parliament or as it was known in India, ‘Home Government’. The latter term seems to be better, as the British Parliament ceased to take interest in Indian affairs after having brought the country under its control. But the constitutional development of India began in 1861, three years after the abrogation of the East India Company.

During the time, colonialism was a global phenomenon, a new system of exploitation in world history. The economics and resources of the rest of the world were subordinated to the interest of a few imperialist powers. This system
of exploitation continued till the rise of modern imperialism. India was termed as ‘Classical Colony’ and became one of the earliest victims of the aforesaid colonialism.

As an outcome of the term ‘Classical Colony’, India, for the first time was subjugated by a foreign power and was ruled in the interest of another country. There had been foreign invasions before and foreign invaders had become the rulers. But these rulers and their successors did not rule in the interest of their original homeland. In fact, few of them had any contact with their ancestral lands. But, under the British rule, India became a subject country of a far away foreign land. And it was not just political subjugation. It shattered the existing political, economic and social structure of the country and disrupted its natural historical development. It completely subordinated the country to the interests of the new economic system of colonialism that was developing in Britain.

The British also made use of the differences in Indian society and created disunity so that they could perpetuate their rule. Consciously and deliberately, they followed a policy of divide and rule. “Divide et impera was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours” – said Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay in 1858. Charles Wood, the Secretary of State, expressed his fear in 1802 that “if all India was to unite against us, how long could we maintain ourselves?” The British were determined to see that the Hindus and Muslims were disunited. They felt that when the Hindus and Muslims were disunited there would be an administrative problem. But, to them, political problem was worse than an administrative problem. The British divided the Indian people on the basis of religion, introducing communal electorates and thus promoting communalism. A British Secretary of State wrote, “I have placed my highest and most permanent hopes in the eternity of the communal situation”.

It was against this imperialist rule of Britain that India’s struggle for freedom began. The story of India’s struggle is a long march and in every step the British faced resistance. Initially, the resistance was though sporadic, but was
lacking vision. Nonetheless, there was never any time when the British were not confronted by a revolt in one part of the country or the other. The resistance reached the culmination in the Great Rebellion of 1857, which is now widely recognized as the 'first Indian freedom struggle'. The rebellion was suppressed but its memories continued to haunt the rulers for decades. The freedom movement ends in 1947 with the political independence of the truncated India, now called the 'Republic of India'.

Historians, when in search of the root of this subjugation, and in consequence humiliation, find that the Indians had neither felt that their strength lies in the spread of national feeling through all strata of society, nor kept contact with the progress of the outside world. Their regeneration began when the humiliation of defeat brought about an enhanced national consciousness and the foreign rulers introduced modern education and science. So, when the national awakening brought back national self-respect, India again became free. Thus, it can be said that Indian awakening in the nineteenth century was a historical truth and it was Bengal, which was the epicenter of this awakening. The impact of Western education and simultaneous inspiration from India's own classical literature and ancient heritage were behind this inspiration. This 'impact' was primarily political; its agents were imbued with the spirit of modernism, in contrast to the mediaeval attitudes prevalent in India. The Indians were 'treated politics in the architectonic sense, which pervades and directs all activities of society'. Thus, the British impact on Indian life was both wide and penetrating. It had both positive and negative effects.

As a consequence of that 'impact', the movements of social and religious reform, of intellectual assimilation and literary expression, of economic and political change, were all manifestations of the transformation, which was taking place as a result of the ideological and practical thrust of modernism. During the first half of the nineteenth century, when the dawn of modernism had just appeared in the scene, India and its age-old culture, economy, polity and religion had faced a stunning challenge. Facing that challenge, a new India was taking
shape with a concrete structure of national unity. The enlightened Indians then
strengthened its cultural harmony and thus had created a 'permanent and organic
political integration'. Historians aptly remarked that it was the transformation of
a civilization into nationality. Similarly, it was the fulfillment of nationality
through the establishment of national sovereignty. In essence, it was an 'ethical
struggle'.

But after the nineteenth century, constant humiliation by the British
forced India to make a critical examination of its traditions – values, ideas and
customs. In this formative period of the evolution of Indian nationalism, Indians
rejected and remoulded those things, which had appeared before them as
unreasonable or unwholesome. They thought that in order to rediscover its lost
ethos and to build a new India, political independence was a precondition. Thus,
slowly but steadily, nationalist movements began to grow, which ultimately
became a mass movement for freedom. It may be recalled here that the great
Indian heritage, which is a heroic saga, fought all the time against invasions and
revolted against oppressors. At the same time, India preached love and fraternity
through non-violent means. Both these two trends were active during the
struggle against the British.

In this way, at the turn of the century, the story of the movement for
freedom entered a new stage. Meanwhile, socio-economic developments of the
twentieth century forced the Indians to fulfil its long cherished desire of
independence and its final stage. During the period, the consciousness of unity
developed into the political awareness of a common destiny. The British rulers
were alarmed at this development. Their imperial interests rejected India's claim
to nationhood. Reacting this, two schools of thoughts had arisen in India. One
advocated the use of force to get rid of the foreign rulers – revivalists,
revolutionaries, terrorists and others. The other school believed in methods of
peaceful agitation, of exercising political pressure, or organizational opposition.
These schools had occupied the stage till the end of the World War I.
From the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885 to independence in 1947, the liberation movement of India had many facets – Constitutional Agitation, Passive Resistance, Boycott, Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience, etc. Along with these non-violent means, there had been armed struggle, secret and open. Moderates, nationalists, non-violinists, extremists and revolutionaries – all joined together and contributed in their own way to the desired end. A host of great personalities gave content and shape to the aforesaid facts. At this critical stage, moderate leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Badruddin Tayabji, Surendra Nath Banerjea, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and others had performed constitutional agitation. Then, Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal represented the Extremist line, and Rashbehari Bose, Jatindranath Mukherjee (Bagha Jatin), Bhagat Singh, Surya Sen, Hemchandra Ghose and others, the Revolutionary Line, which reached its peak in the life and activities of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi adopted the non-violent method in the freedom movement, a wonder in the eyes of the world. The voiceless millions of the Indian land found in him their friend and representative who with his non-violent means brought the enemies to their knees. To Gandhiji, non-violence was a creed. Generally, the people followed it, even though not always as a creed but for its efficacy. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the people lost the fear of the conqueror. He told the British that 'the fight that was commenced in 1920 is a fight to the finish'.

The struggle for freedom brought the people of India together on the basis of a new unity based on the conception of Indian nationhood. It battled against forces that divided the people, the forces that were fostered by and allied with imperialism. The chief among these was communalism, the unholy alliance of religion and politics, which expressed itself through various communal organizations. There could be no freedom without national unity. The concept of unity that the struggle for freedom was aimed at and which formed the basis of Indian nationhood was not a unity based on a language, religion or monolithic
culture, but one based on the acceptance of diversity, of a multiplicity of religions, languages, customs and beliefs – a composite culture. The inseparable nature of national unity and freedom was best expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru when he hoisted the National Flag at Lahore Congress, which adopted the attainment of Purna Swaraj as the objective, on 29 December 1929. He said, “I have just unfurled the national flag of Hindustan. What is the meaning of this flag? It is a symbol of India’s unity... This flag under which you stand today and which you have just now saluted does not belong to any community. It is the flag of the country... All those who stand today under this flag are Indians, not Hindus, not Muslims, but Indians... Remember once again, now that this flag is unfurled, it must not be lowered so long as a single Indian – man, woman, or child lives in India.”

India’s struggle for independence also represented the awakening of its people into the modern world. It was deeply influenced by all the historical forces that had created the modern world. The Declaration of Independence by the American Colonists; the great French Revolution, which proclaimed the ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality, and the sovereignty of the people; ideas of socialism and the Bolshevik Revolution – all these made deep influence on Indians and broadened the vision of new India. Here, it should be remembered that Indian struggle was not aimed only for political freedom but also for laying the foundation of a new India. Thus, the struggle against social evils, the awakening of the oppressed castes, the rise of peasants and workers against social oppression and inequalities, the demand for industrialization of India and the introduction of modern science and technology – became an integral part of Indian liberation movement. This awareness increasingly led to the acceptance of socialism as ‘the only key to the solution of the world’s problems and of India’s problems’.

India’s struggle for freedom is also characterized by its world-outlook which was unique. The movement offered its full cooperation to the progressive forces of the world, ‘to those who stand for human freedom and breaking of
political and social bonds' in their struggle against imperialism and fascist reaction. At the Congress of Oppressed Nations in Brussels in 1927, Indian voice described India's freedom as a world necessity; for her freedom was linked with the freedom of other countries and it marked the beginning of the collapse of imperialism on a world-scale.

Patriots, who lived in pre-1947 India, had a very high degree of moral strength. But, after 1947, there was a steady erosion of moral values, which exercised long-standing effect on the new generation. The generations that grew up in India after independence would not normally be able to comprehend the tragedy and agony of those days. Not would they appreciate the kind of leadership that was necessary to enable the country to march forward against all kinds of adversity. Thus, to give the new generation a feel of this tumultuous chapter of India's history, when momentous struggle-events were taking place, the researcher felt the need for a new kind of thesis, which would convey the ups and downs of the liberation movement. The importance of the topic in the present time, after so many years, lies in the portraying of the period for the younger generation, who may not be fully aware of the different facets of the struggle - how the land of India was colonized and ruled by the most powerful imperial force of modern times, and how their ancestors came together to fight the hated colonial rule. The new generation must know the challenges emerging nation faced at each step of the long march to freedom. Their story, through this thesis, will inspire in them the love of freedom; will develop in them a concern for the unity and integrity of the nation.

Here comes the necessity of the liberation movement museums. The museums, under study, tell the story of liberation movement, providing an authentic and comprehensive account of almost all the major phases, aspects and events, taking the visitors on a journey in time. Below is a brief account of Museum, the 'cultural memory bank of the age' - its journey from ancient to modern, its changing concept, perception, globalization and last but not the least its accountability to society.
It is stated earlier that India is a land with five thousand years old civilization, tradition and cultural heritage. The concept of preservation of India’s heritage is also of an ancient origin. Even in the prehistoric period, we can trace the hunting scenes and other pictures, drawn on the walls of caves and rock shelters by the Stone Age people. It may be taken as a kind of documentation of the past. In the historical period, we find that to enumerate the stories of kings, royal persons and above all the previous lives of Lord Buddha, the artists have chosen the rock cut shrines. Again, to commemorate Lord Buddha by preserving his earthly remains his disciples and followers erected stupas in different places. Ancient and medieval literatures also refer to Bithi, Chitrashala, Alekhyagriha, etc. where portraits of kings, paintings and sculptures were preserved. Temples were also the store houses of votive items. The inscriptions and copper plate grants of the medieval period bear the story of patronization of royal personage. Even in the Mughal era, a number of birds and animals were portrayed by the artists after keen observation. Thus, in short, it can be said that the practice of preserving heritage has a long tradition in our country.

However, the material sources of heritage started to be preserved judiciously by the end of the eighteenth century. It was just after forty years of the inception of the British Museum in London, when in 1796, the first museum collection in India was founded. This genesis and development of museums in India was initiated by the British Indologists. A band of dedicated members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784) started collecting objects of curiosity of Indian origin with a scope of “the illustration of Oriental manner and history, and to elucidate the peculiarities of art and nature in the East”. When the collection grew sufficiently, it was decided that the accumulated items should be suitably housed in Calcutta. Thus, with the collection, the first museum of India – the Indian Museum (1814) was established in Calcutta.
The necessity of preservation of heritage of India was earnestly felt by the Europeans. The same awareness Indian people had from the ancient time, but they could not materialize it as the British enjoyed the administrative power and they were educated in Occidental manner. Thus, it was easy to them to find out a proper means of heritage preservation, which took shape in museums established in many places of the country. But the Sepoy Mutiny, its prelude and repercussions somewhat hindered preservation of heritage. For this reason, by 1857, there were only twelve museums in India.

When normalcy restored, museum work started again. It is interesting to note that the then political situation always affected the museum affairs. And it can be noticed that before 1900, eleven Jubilee Museums were established on the occasion of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

The later half of the nineteenth century witnessed a revival of Hinduism. Political turn out and new consciousness of self-dependence took a definite Hindu form. The result was the Jatiya Mela (later Hindu Mela), started from 1867, where the Bengalee middle class people arranged an exhibition of Indian art, craft and natural products. The next sessions of the Mela notably prospered and the exhibitions of Indian art and crafts came to be of particular importance. The Mela had produced in the country a great impetus for national museums and art galleries in eastern region. It certainly created a nationalistic outlook and a sense for preserving the heritage of India.

However, the number of archeological museums rapidly increased with the new century. It was Lord Curzon, who took initiative in developing the Archeological Survey of India under Sir John Marshall. The Survey established many site museums to preserve in situ the archeological remains of the country. But it was the same Curzon, who was responsible for Partition of Bengal. With this incident, India lost two important museums under its geographical jurisdiction.
The two World Wars transiently affected growth of collection in museums. In the period between the two wars, the national movement of India brought together a large number of people, who wanted to rejuvenate the glory of their motherland by collecting, preserving and exhibiting relics. A fresh zeal to constructing museums by scholarly associations emerged.

During the stormy days of the freedom struggle, Indian museum movement was basically controlled by nationalism. The influence and control of the British was no longer effective in museum affairs. Independence came, but India lost more or less fifteen museums of which thirteen remained in new born West Pakistan.

After independence, activities in museum field started with a new vigour. Side by side the archeological activities, promptly after independence, the remnants of the British Raj were considered to be preserved accordingly. National Museum was established also. And a unique trait was discernible in museum affairs, i.e. the rapid expansion of memorial and personalia museums in different parts of the country.

Like museums in other countries, Indian museums are now trying to materialize favorable changes and their appreciation by the people to bring about the much needed improvement in the field of museum communication. Those are searching new thematic relationships with objects and specimens. As an educational institution, Indian museums are enmeshed in social, cultural, political and economic contexts, rather than remaining static and frozen in time. Museums have become sites of performances and interactivity and through display they are also generative and formative in terms of social and power relations. Those are becoming enchanting tourist spots also. Thus, as repository of historical and cultural properties of the ages, Indian museums have now become important institutions signifying history of civilization and pointing to future progress.
However, the Indian freedom struggle is the most important episode in the modern history of India. Much have been studied, analyzed and published in scholarly manner. But less effort is employed on highlighting this most glorious event for the common people. The Indians should have every right to know their past on which their future will be based. In this respect, museums are the only means to narrate the freedom struggle lucidly but picturesquely.

In Kolkata and its surroundings there are limited museums, which have possessed freedom struggle exhibits in their collection. And it is a hard reality that in this metropolis there is no single example of any museum, which is bearing the name of 'Indian Liberation Movement Museum'. Here, under-study museums have served their purpose with the name of history museum, historic house museum, period house museum, personalia museum and biographical museum. No doubt, through these endeavours, the city of Kolkata have been envisaged and visualized the wide spectrum of Indian political organizations, philosophies, movements and rebellions between 1857 and emergence of India as a nation-state on August 15, 1947. Furthermore, these museums are the safe keepers and interpreters of history of Indian nation, where one can explore how its freedom struggle served as a major catalyst for similar movements in other parts of the world. As India’s struggle for freedom is characterized by many unique and historic efforts, including the world's first and largest mass, non-violent and civil resistance movement, this thesis will focus this point, with special emphasis on the role of Bengal regarding this.

Without museological studies, proper evaluation of concerned exhibits in museums is not possible. Some museums of the thrust area of this thesis have been organized their collections in a systematic way so as to give the visitors a description of its own. Sometimes, exhibits, which present a part or a facet of the struggle with a brief description is accompanied by a corresponding page of important documents relating to it. In the presentation of visual materials, the basic principles of collage-making have been followed. Different, sometimes disparate sets of ‘space-time parameters’ in the form of visuals and documents
have been integrated within separate frames. Since the text is fused with the visuals, the reading of the text is immediately informed by the corresponding pictures, which are complementary to each other. In the process, appearance of numerous struggle events and personalities conveyed the pulsation of the time to the visitors.

For preparing this thesis data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The methodology for collecting primary data has been done in the form of field-survey of ten museums in and around Kolkata. The secondary sources were collected from libraries, archives and some personal collections. The researcher has studied photographs, newspaper clippings, books, manuscripts, letters, selections from major resolutions and statements, proceedings of the trials, writings of participants in the struggle, archival records, maps, used articles, voice records, arms and armours, secret revolutionary papers, Government records and other materials. Along with those, history of growth of the under-study museums, detail study of exhibits and different museological aspects adopted by the museums, surveys on literature – published and unpublished on those museums are taken into account. The thesis prepared a catalogue of objects preserved in museums, which would serve for further study.

The thesis also tried to find out the problems prevalent in those museums. It is a well known fact that the education through museums is considered an indicator of academic betterment and visual interpretation is a great factor in the sphere of education, which museums can provide for. But in a third-world country like India majority of the population is composed of rural folk where no detail survey and research have been undertaken to know what the general Indians want from a museum. But it is true that museum is still not a favourite place to the common men of India. Thus, in most of the surveyed museums of this thesis it is found that from the displayed items visitors cannot understand the history underlying these. In such cases, the printed mode of communication like labels or published materials is remained fruitless.
Indefinite and unstructured educational mission on the part of these museums are also a problem. Meanwhile, owing to the effect of globalization some under-study museums have presented themselves as public institutions, yet their communication objectives is not conveyed to all the people. Similarly, ‘Guide Tour’ in those museums does not count the visitors’ feedback. Sometimes, unconventional education is imposed on visitors without considering their likes or dislikes.

Like communication, importance of proper documentation of the freedom struggle based exhibits is beyond doubt, which the museums must adhere to. Owing to lack of professionalism the irreplaceable items are in some cases uncared for and the reserve collections are maintained in such a way that these create inconvenience in detail study.

The thesis provides a practical backdrop in historical background and suggested to form an ‘Ideal Future Museum of Indian Liberation Movement with Updated Communication Process’, which primarily embedded upon museological explanation of its position and its effective service in society.

In fine, it can be said that the heritage of the Indian struggle for freedom is the common heritage of all Indians and this thesis is a humble effort to develop knowledge and appreciation of that heritage and to awaken a deep feeling for national identity, which will be resulting in national integration among visitors of the country to the freedom struggle museums.