Bias and Prejudice towards History in Indian Struggle for Independence

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Abstract

The Indian national movement was undoubtedly one of the biggest mass movements modern society has ever seen. It was a movement which galvanized millions of people of all classes and ideologies into political action and brought to its knees a mighty colonial empire. The history of Indian freedom movement has been classified on the nature of the freedom fighters: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) and Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937), i.e. the pacifist, non-violent approach and the extremist, radical approach. This article questions relate to the present perception of both personalities and the bias related to their means considered by them in their struggle for freedom.

Keywords: History, Bias, Indian struggle, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose

Introduction

The Indian national movement was undoubtedly one of the biggest mass movements modern society has ever seen. It was a movement which galvanized millions of people of all classes and ideologies into political action and brought to its knees a mighty colonial empire. Consequently, along with the British, French, Russian, Chine, Cuban and Vietnam revolutions, it is

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of great relevance to those wishing to alter the existing political and social structure. Various aspects of the Indian national movement, especially Gandhian political strategy, are particularly relevant to these movements in societies that broadly function within the confines of the rule of law, and are characterized by a democratic and basically civil libertarian polity. But it is also relevant to other societies. We know for a fact that even Lech Walesa consciously tried to incorporate elements of Gandhian strategy in the Solidarity Movement in Poland. (Chandra, 1989)

We focus on two well-known freedom fighters that played a major role in the Indian struggle for freedom and independence: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) and Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937). Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi employed nonviolent civil disobedience while Jagadish Chandra Bose was a fervent critic of it, arguing that nonviolence and pacifism are an attempt to impose the morals of the bourgeoisie upon the proletariat.

This article questions relate to the present perception of both personalities and the bias related to their means considered by them in their struggle for freedom. I begin by briefly introducing their freedom struggle activities and their ideas.

1. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (2 October 1869-30 January 1948) was the preeminent leader of Indian independence movement in British-ruled India. Employing nonviolent civil disobedience, Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. The honorific Mahatma (Sanskrit: "high-souled", "venerable") (McGregor, 1993, p. 799) was attributed to him first in 1914 in South Africa, -is now used worldwide. Gandhi stood at the head of the freedom movement which was
based on tactics and strategy of mass action for negotiation with the British.

Gandhi was born in Western India, Gujarat, and became a lawyer at the Inner Temple, London. He moved to South Africa and joined the resident Indian community struggle for civil rights. He became known as the first to employ nonviolent disobedience. The programme developed by Gandhi to resist the white racial domination was Satyagraha, translated as ‘insistence of truth’, ‘truth force’, ‘soul force’ and designates a determined but nonviolent resistance to evil. Later, in the years following the First World War, this came to be used widely in Indian politics. We shall examine latter the various stages of this struggle in India, the various forms it took. However, certain features characteristic of the struggle of South African Indians are not to be dealt with here, because there were the features which appeared in different forms later on in the Gandhian method of struggle in India.

Gandhi’s satyagraha became a major tool in the Indian struggle against British imperialism and has since been adopted by protest groups in other countries. According to this philosophy, satyagrahis - practitioners of satyagraha - achieve correct insight into the real nature of an evil situation by observing a nonviolence of the mind, by seeking truth in a spirit of peace and love, and by undergoing a rigorous process of self-scrutiny. In so doing, the satyagrahi encounters truth in the absolute. By his refusal to submit to the wrong or to cooperate with it in any way, the satyagrahi asserts this truth. Throughout his confrontation with the evil, he must adhere to nonviolence, for to employ violence would be to lose correct insight. A satyagrahi always warns his opponents of his intentions; satyagraha forbids any tactic suggesting the use of secrecy to one’s advantage. Satyagraha includes more than civil disobedience; its full range of application extends from the details of correct daily living to the construction of alternative political and economic institutions. Satyagraha seeks to conquer through conversion; in
the end, there is neither defeat nor victory but rather a new harmony\(^1\).

Satyagraha draws from the ancient Indian ideal of ahimsa (“noninjury”), which is pursued with particular rigour by Jains. In developing ahimsa into a modern concept with broad political consequences, as satyagraha, Gandhi also drew from the writings of Leo Tolstoy and Henry David Thoreau, from the Bible, and from the Bhagavadgita, the great Sanskrit epic. Gandhi first conceived satyagraha in 1906 in response to a law discriminating against Asians that was passed by the British colonial government of the Transvaal in South Africa. In 1917 the first satyagraha campaign in India was mounted in the indigo-growing district of Champaran. During the following years, fasting and economic boycotts were employed as methods of satyagraha, until the British left India in 1947.

Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement Satyagraha, that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase “passive resistance”, in connection with it, so much so that even in English writing we often avoided it and used instead the word “satyagraha” itself or some other equivalent English phrase\(^2\).

Critics of satyagraha, both in Gandhi’s time and subsequently, have argued that it is unrealistic and incapable of universal success, since it relies upon a high standard of ethical conduct in the opponent, the representative of “evil,” and demands an unrealistically strong level of commitment from those struggling for social amelioration. Nonetheless, satyagraha played a significant role in the civil rights movement led by

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Martin Luther King, Jr., in the United States and has spawned a continuing legacy in South Asia itself.

Principles for satyagrahis

Gandhi envisioned satyagraha as not only a tactic to be used in acute political struggle, but as a universal solvent for injustice and harm. He felt that it was equally applicable to large-scale political struggle and to one-on-one interpersonal conflicts and that it should be taught to everyone.3

He founded the Sabarmati Ashram to teach satyagraha. He asked satyagrahis to follow the following principles (Yamas described in Yoga Sutra)4:

- Nonviolence (ahimsa)
- Truth – this includes honesty, but goes beyond it to mean living fully in accord with and in devotion to that which is true
- Non-stealing
- Chastity (brahmacharya) – this includes sexual chastity, but also the subordination of other sensual desires to the primary devotion to truth
- Non-possession (not the same as poverty)
- Body-labor or bread-labor
- Control of the palate
- Fearlessness

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3 Gandhi, M.K. “The Theory and Practice of Satyagraha” Indian Opinion 1914
4 Sabarmati Ashram (also known as Gandhi Ashram, Harijan Ashram, or Satyagraha Ashram) is located in the Sabarmati suburb of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, adjoining the Ashram Road, on the banks of the River Sabarmati, four miles from the town hall. This was one of the residences of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, generally called Mahatma Gandhi, who lived there for about twelve years along with his wife, Kasturba Gandhi.
• Equal respect for all religions
• Economic strategy such as boycotts (swadeshi)
• Freedom from untouchability

On another occasion, he listed seven rules as “essential for every Satyagrahi in India”:

• must have a living faith in God
• must believe in truth and non-violence and have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature which he expects to evoke by suffering in the satyagraha effort
• must be leading a chaste life, and be willing to die or lose all his possessions
• must be a habitual khadi wearer and spinner
• must abstain from alcohol and other intoxicants
• must willingly carry out all the rules of discipline that are issued
• must obey the jail rules unless they are specially devised to hurt his self-respect

Rules for satyagraha campaigns

Gandhi proposed a series of rules for satyagrahis to follow in a resistance campaign:

• harbor no anger
• suffer the anger of the opponent
• never retaliate to assaults or punishment; but do not submit, out of fear of punishment or assault, to an order given in anger
• voluntarily submit to arrest or confiscation of your own property
• if you are a trustee of property, defend that property (non-violently) from confiscation with your life

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5 Gandhi, M.K. “Qualifications for Satyagraha” Young India 8 August 1929
• do not curse or swear
• do not insult the opponent
• neither salute nor insult the flag of your opponent or your opponent's leaders
• if anyone attempts to insult or assault your opponent, defend your opponent (non-violently) with your life
• as a prisoner, behave courteously and obey prison regulations (except any that are contrary to self-respect)
• as a prisoner, do not ask for special favorable treatment
• as a prisoner, do not fast in an attempt to gain conveniences whose deprivation does not involve any injury to your self-respect
• joyfully obey the orders of the leaders of the civil disobedience action
• do not pick and choose amongst the orders you obey; if you find the action as a whole improper or immoral, sever your connection with the action entirely
• do not make your participation conditional on your comrades taking care of your dependents while you are engaging in the campaign or are in prison; do not expect them to provide such support
• do not become a cause of communal quarrels
• do not take sides in such quarrels, but assist only that party which is demonstrably in the right; in the case of inter-religious conflict, give your life to protect (non-violently) those in danger on either side
• avoid occasions that may give rise to communal quarrels
• do not take part in processions that would wound the religious sensibilities of any community
Satyagraha

Mahatma Gandhi developed his revolutionary method of nonviolent noncooperation during his years in South Africa, naming it satyagraha (hold fast to the truth). That “truth” (sat), ancient Rig Vedic Sanskrit for “the real,” was a force in the realm of the “Shining Ones” (Devas), Rig Vedic gods whose magic powers could move the world. Gandhi equated sat to God and also to nonviolence, or love, as he defined ahimsa. Thus reaching back more than three thousand years to the roots of Indian civilization and his own Hindu faith, Mahatma (“Great Soul”) Gandhi offered millions of his unarmed followers the symbols of divine strength and his own passionate yogic powers, launching a mass national revolution against the mightiest “satanic empire” of the modern world, the British Raj. Though rooted in the past, and drawing upon Hindu religious mantras, Gandhi developed satyagrahaas a practical technique or method of “action” against social evil, believing it should be universally effective in its power to combat cruel and violent forces of every kind. Tapasya (self-suffering) armed Gandhi with yogic strength to endure the most intense physical pain, including food and sleep deprivation, without flinching or fear. His personal struggle throughout life was to achieve perfect ahimsa in thought and deed, to “see God” through the truth, or sat, of all he did, freeing his “soul” (a¯tman) of all fruits of selfish action (karma) that led to rebirth, thus achieving his Hindu ideal goal of “liberation” (moksha). Every satyagrahathat Gandhi launched began with prayers of self-purification. He often fasted as well, and he always reminded his followers that in cleansing their own hearts, bodies, and souls, they must pray for those against whom satyagraha was launched. He never hated any Boer or Englishman, nor thought of anyone as his enemy, feeling only sorrow and pity for those who lived in deluded realms of violence and falsehood. Before launching his most famous Salt March satyagrahain 1930, Gandhi wrote to Viceroy Lord
Irwin, notifying him of his intention to break the “unjust” British monopoly on the sale of exorbitantly taxed salt by picking up free salt from the seashore. Gandhi saluted the viceroy, who would soon arrest him, as “Dear Friend.” Nearer the end of his life, from his prison cell, he addressed Winston Churchill the same way. Gandhi always gave clear notice of his specific demands or reasons for launching satyagraha. He offered those against whom his action would be launched ample opportunity to remove or rectify the offensive that triggered his action. The “cause” might be a “Black Act” of inherently harsh, or evil legislation, such as the poll tax demanded of every Indian in South Africa, or the cruel extension of martial “law” in India after the end of World War I, or inadequate wages for cotton mill workers in Ahmedabad, or for indigo farmers in Bihar, or exorbitant land revenue demands made in a year of failed rains and famine in Gujarat’s Kheda District. There were times when Gandhi led mass national satyagrahamovements, as he did in 1920 against the Rowlatt Acts, and in 1930 against the salt tax. At other times, satyagrahamovements were “individual,” as in 1940, when Gandhi sent his devoted disciple, VinobaBhave, out to be arrested upon his announced intention to break a British “gag order” against “any antiwar speech.” Or Gandhi could turn the fiery powers of satyagraha against his own body, launching a fast “unto death” or fasting for a “limited period” that he announced before he stopped eating. His last “fast unto death,” shortly before he was assassinated at the end of January 1948, was aimed at his two most powerful disciples, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who were reluctant to release British Raj funds owed to Pakistan in keeping with their promises prior to the 1947 partition. Gandhi also used that most passionate weapon of fasting in the personal satyagraha launched against J. Ramsay MacDonald’s “Communal Award” at the end of his London Round Table Conferences, in which Mac-Donald promised to reserve a special number of separate seats
for India’s “untouchables” on every expanded Council of British India under the new 1935 Constitution. Gandhi viewed that proposal as a lethal attack upon Hinduism and as Britain’s meanest attempt to divide upper caste from lower caste Hindus in order more easily to rule over both. So he vowed to starve himself to death rather than quietly accept so nefarious an act. His fast melted the hearts of all who opposed him, or fought one another. Gandhi viewed that as proof positive of the blessed powers of *ahimsa*, its irresistible force. But such thaws rarely lasted much longer than it took Gandhi to leave his fasting bed and resume his regular routine. Martin Luther King Jr. greatly admired Gandhi’s *satyagraha* method, writing that “the Christian doctrine of love, operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence, is one of the most potent weapons available to an oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.” Despite Gandhi’s singular successes in waging many passionate *satyagrahas* against tyranny and racism, he himself was the first to admit frankly that his lifelong “experiments with truth” had ultimately failed. It was less his “revolution,” Gandhi well knew, that convinced the British to “quit India” half a decade after he had coined that mantra for his last mass *satyagraha* in August 1942, than their own depressed economy and post-World War II fatigue. No matter how hard he tried, moreover, he could not stop the slaughter of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh refugees that left a million innocents dead following partition in mid-August 1947. Nor could he persuade his own former disciples, who ruled independent India, to stop fighting over Kashmir. “Today mine is a cry in the wilderness,” Mahatma Gandhi cried on the eve of his assassination. “I yearn for heart friendship between Hindus, Sikh and Muslims. . . . Today it is nonexistent.” For many years he had labored to teach his followers pure “*ahimsa* of the strong,” rejecting arms and war entirely, but as soon as India used its armed power against Pakistan in the war over Kashmir, he saw he was wrong. Sadly, Gandhi wrote that “Today we have a larger army. . . .
It is a tragedy and a shame. For so long we fought through the charkha (spinning wheel) and the moment we have power in our hands we forget it. Today we look up to the army” (Wolpert).

2. Subhash Chandra Bose

SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE, (1897–1945), was a Bengali political leader. Hailed as Netaji (Leader) of the Indian National Army he founded, with Japanese support, during World War II, Bose is considered by many to be India’s greatest Bengali leader. Born in Cuttack, Orissa, brilliant Bose entered Calcutta’s Presidency College at the age of sixteen, launching his revolutionary career by leading a student protest against a racist English teacher. Bose was suspended as a result, but he was able to complete his education a year later in Bengal’s Scottish Churches College. In 1919 his successful father sent young Bose off to London, where he learned enough Latin to pass the Indian Civil Service examinations, shortly before Mahatma Gandhi launched his first satyagraha (nonviolent resistance) movement against the British Raj. Bose decided then to abandon his ambition of joining the British Service, sailing home instead to join Gandhi’s revolutionary opposition to British rule. He met with Gandhi in Bombay, but found him too nebulous about the goals of his movement, and too worried about avoiding all violence in the national protest he led in 1921. Bose returned to Calcutta, where he organized a student boycott against the Prince of Wales in 1921, and worked under Bengal’s great “nation-unifier,” Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das, who became his political guru. When Das was elected as Calcutta’s mayor, he appointed Bose to serve as his chief executive officer, and together they began work to clean up the slum districts of that “City of Dreadful Night,” as Rudyard Kipling called it. Bose, however, was accused of “aiding terrorists” by the British and was shipped
off to Mandalay prison for three years. After 1927, he returned to Calcutta a popular hero, elected to preside over Bengal's Provincial Congress Committee. A decade later, Bose was elected president of the Indian National Congress, which met in 1938 in the village of Haripura. Mahatma Gandhi, along with a majority of more conservative members of the Congress Working Committee, had expected Bose to step down after his presidential year ended, but fiery Bose wanted another year in office, urged by many of his devoted Bengali supporters to contest the National Congress elections held in Tripura in 1939. It was the first contested election since the Congress was created in 1885, and Bose won, despite Gandhi's silent disfavor and the open opposition of his Working Committee, which immediately resigned. Bose was then obliged to step down, his health failing him in the aftermath of that exhausting struggle. Bose had lived for several years in Western Europe during the early 1930s, and was attracted to the ideals of socialism and communism. He later preferred fascism and Nazism, which he thought he could humanize with an admixture of Indian philosophy, then introduce to India as a potent form of national Indian socialism, first forcing the British out, then eliminating poverty and the inequities of caste and class. His Forward Bloc Party, which he started with his brother Sarat Bose after leaving the Congress, was very popular in Bengal, but when World War II started, the Bose brothers were placed under house arrest in Calcutta. Subhash escaped, however, moving by night across North India to Afghanistan. He managed to fly to Berlin, met Adolf Hitler, and adopted as his title Netaji, “Leader,” hoping someday to become India’s “Führer.” He broadcast daily appeals to India in Bengali and Hindi, urging those who heard him to rebel against “British tyranny,” insisting that the Axis powers were winning the war and that the Allies would soon be routed. After Singapore fell to the Japanese, the British Indian army of some 60,000 troops surrendering without a fight early in 1942, the
Nazis decided that Bose would be much more useful to them there than he was in Germany. He was sent by submarine in the spring of 1943 from Hamburg, around the Cape of Good Hope, to Singapore, and when he arrived was given command by the Japanese of all Indian troops willing to join his Indian National Army (INA). In October 1943, Netaji inaugurated his Provisional Government of Azad (Free) India, leading his army on its epic march up the Malay Peninsula and Burma to Rangoon, where they began their advance toward eastern India, his battle cry taken from the 1857 Sepoy Mutineers: “Chalo Delhi!” (Let’s Go to Delhi!). Bose and his INA reached the outskirts of Manipur’s capital, Imphal, in May 1944. Had heavy monsoon rains not bogged them down long enough for British and American planes to fly in troops and arms, forcing them back, Bose might have reached Bengal, where Netaji would have been welcomed as his nation’s savior. Instead he marched back to Saigon, flying off to Taiwan (Formosa) on the last, overloaded plane to escape the Allied army that recaptured Burma and Malaya and routed the INA in May 1945. His plane crash-landed and burned, and Bose died in a Taiwan hospital. His ashes were taken to Japan. So many Bengalis and ardent Indian patriots believed, however, in the myth of Subhash Chandra Bose’s “immortality,” refusing to think of him as dead, that as late as 1957 the government of India sent a special deputation of members of Parliament to Japan to examine his ashes, reporting that they were in fact those of Netaji Bose.

3. Bias and Prejudice

Was Subhash Chandra Bose a freedom fighter or a fascist? Bose was accused of collaborating with the Axis, after he fled to Germany in 1941 and offered Hitler an alliance. He criticized the British during World War II, saying that while Britain was fighting for the freedom of the European
nations under Nazi control, it would not grant independence to its own colonies, including India. It may be observed that along with Nehru, Bose had organized and led protest marches against the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and of China itself in 1938, when he was Congress president. In 1937 he published an article attacking Japanese imperialism in the Far East, although he betrayed some admiration for other aspects of the Japanese regime (Bose, Bose, & Bose, 1997).

Despite the fact that many people have the exact same information at their disposal concerning these questions, there is a great deal of disagreement about the answers. Why is it that different people respond to the identical objects or events in such divergent ways? Social psychology provides two answers to this question. First, and most obviously, different people have different preferences. For example, one person might strongly favor the Hindus while another favors the Muslims, and these preferences might lead them to regard a person like Bose in very different terms. The possibility that people have different attitudes and their attitudes drive judgment and behavior has received enormous empirical support (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 1995, 1998), and is consistent with commonsense understanding as well.

4. Methodology and analysis

As we could understand so far from the approaches of Gandhi and Bose to the freedom movement, the history of Indian freedom movement has been classified on the nature of the freedom fighters. Gandhi followed a peaceful, moderated, plea, prayer and petition way. Bose did not want to waste time waiting and characteristic of his younger age and radical young blood, he preferred the extremists approach to freedom. Thus two main currents are characteristic of the Indian freedom movement as defined by
the nature of the freedom leaders, the peaceful and the radical.

In understanding history, as we look back on the events that happened in those times, one might also be influenced by one’s personality. A peaceful/moderated personality reader might side with the method proposed by Gandhi, a more radical personality would side with Bose. Both sides might display an inherited bias or prejudice. The idea is that the approach of Indian freedom fighters has been biased by the leaders’ personality and the observers of those events might also be biased in judging them by their own personality.

Biases are problematic as being negative, inaccurate and unfair in providing the real picture of the events. Personality and individual differences of the freedom fighters leaders have decided on the character of the freedom struggle movement as well. The purpose of this research was to analyze the influence of impulsive behavior as a factor towards bias and prejudice and to understand how present observers perceive and understand certain events of the Indian struggle movement. Two cultural groups, Indian and Thai, have been used in the study, students of the History departments of University of Calcutta and Burapha University.

In our hypothesis, high ranking scores in impulsiveness (HI) was predicted to support and side with the method adopted by Bose in the freedom fighting movement. On the other hand, low ranking scores in impulsiveness (LI) was predicted to support and side with the method adopted by Gandhi in the freedom fighting movement.

Cross-cultural research suffers from a methodological insufficiency as well as from a certain status of the concept of ‘culture’ which does not lead to comparable data (Mesquita, Frijda, & Scherer, 1997). Even though there are certain differences, impulsive behavior exist in every culture, regardless of whether or not the culture provides an universally accepted
linguistic term (Russell, 1991). Cross-cultural studies show that irrespective of differences, emotional events elicit emotional responses, impulsive expressions, physiological changes, hedonic experiences and behavioral reactions to them. The similarities appear when the emotional phenomena are described at a very abstract level because when the emphasis is put on concrete features then the differences start appearing.

5. Conclusions

A great amount of research has been published about the individual difference variables that predict prejudice. Stangor (2009) points out that this interest has come in large part out of Allport’s and others’ claims about the “prejudiced personality,” and has continued to expand with new measures virtually every year. Individual difference variables that are known to predict prejudice include social dominance orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001), the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1981, 1988; Bäckström & Björklund, 2007), need for closure or structure (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Schaller, Boyd, Yohannes, & O’Brien, 1995; Shah, Kruglanski, & Thompson, 1998), internal and external motivations to control prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998), humanism and the Protestant work ethic (Katz & Hass, 1988), egalitarianism (Moskowitz, Gollwitzer, Wasel, & Schaal, 1999), implicit attributional theories (Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997; Plaks, Stroessner, Dweck, & Sherman, 2001), and religious fundamentalism (Rowatt, LaBouff, Johnson, Froese, & Tsang, 2009).

To these already established variables, we proposed to analyze the influence of impulsiveness towards bias and prejudice (Barratt, 1983; Barratt, Monahan, & Steadman, 1994; Blair & Cipolotti, 2000; Patton & Stanford, 1995; Stanford et al., 2009). This article’s questions relate to the
present perception of both personalities and the bias related to their means considered by them in their struggle for freedom as a result of the differences in impulsiveness scale ratings. In this context, the Barratt Impulsiveness scale was used for grouping the participants to the test into low impulsive and height impulsive. According to our hypothesis, high ranking scores in impulsiveness (HI) was predicted to support and side with the radical and extremist method adopted by Bose in the freedom fighting movement. On the other hand, low ranking scores in impulsiveness (LI) was predicted to support and side with the pacifist method adopted by Gandhi in the freedom fighting movement.

Overall, the results of the study show that among LI respondents between cultural variables are more likely to support and side with the non-violent method adopted by Gandhi while HI respondents are more likely to support and side with radical methods of Bose. Both among LI and HI respondents those who belonged to the Thai and Indian cultural groups were equally likely to have selected the appropriate response regarding non-violent or the radical method.
References


