

JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS WITH THE PERSPECTIVE OF INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The significance of Jallianwala Bagh lay not in the number of people killed, but in what came before and after. The Rowlatt Act, also known as the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919, went into effect a month before the slaughter in Jallianwala Bagh. It surprised most Indians, who had expected to be rewarded rather than punished for fighting alongside the British in World War I. The British government of India implemented a succession of oppressive emergency powers to fight subversive activity during World War I (1914–18). By the end of the war, the Indian people had high hopes that such restrictions would be relaxed and that India would be allowed more political autonomy. The crimes sparked great outrage and dissatisfaction among Indians, particularly in the Punjab region. Gandhi called for a one-day countrywide strike across the country in early April. The news that prominent Indian leaders had been arrested and expelled from the city sparked violent protests in Amritsar on April 10, during which soldiers opened fire on civilians, buildings were looted and burned, and enraged mobs killed several foreign nationals and severely beaten a Christian missionary. This article reconsiders the arguments over the shooting at Amritsar and the role of Brigadier-General Dyer, and questions the accepted view that the massacre was such a failure of minimum force. It argues that the circumstances surrounding the massacre must be understood before judging the incident and given these factors it is possible to see it within a minimum force framework. Always behind the use of force lay the imperial logic that justified it in the name of law and order, or at least order.

Keywords: *Jalliwala Bagh, Masscare of 1919, Amritsar, British Masscare.*

Introduction

It was a bright sunny morning of Baisakhi, a holi day in the Sikh religion, ninety-nine years ago on April 13th, 1919. In the midst of a stressful political environment, about 20,000 unarmed men, women, and children from various regions of Punjab peacefully congregated at "Jallianwala Bagh." They were scheduled to attend a public address concerning the highly contentious Rowlatt Act, often known as "the Black Act" at the time, which practically legalised the jailing of Indians based on any arbitrary or irrational assumption. Jallianwala Bagh became a focal point in the collective conscience of India and the world in twenty minutes and with 1650 rounds of ammunition. Jallianwala Bagh's fate as a commemorative space was almost tautological as a site of profound tragedy and immediate political significance. If you read about the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre in your high school textbook, you'll get chills knowing that this is the location where British troops led by Major General Dyer shot hundreds of unarmed protesters. There are plaques that show where the shooting was ordered, as well as a plaque next to the well that states that over 140 bodies were removed from the well, the majority of whom were people who jumped to escape the shooting, and that the well was full to the top. A glance at the bullet-pocked, five-foot wall of the garden, from which so many attempted to climb up and escape but were shot at... or a look into the martyrs' well, where hundreds jumped to escape the bullets but drowned, vividly recalls this chapter of Indian history. We've all heard or read about the atrocities at Jallianwala Bagh. However, bare specifics

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of a historical event do not succeed in transporting you back in time. It takes a trip to Ground Zero to truly understand and empathise with the victims of a tragedy. And to remember that they gave their lives for us, for our freedom, and for the comfortable lives we have now. A glance at the bullet-pocked, five-foot wall of the garden, from which so many attempted to climb up and escape but were shot at... or a look into the martyrs' well, where hundreds jumped to escape the bullets but drowned, vividly recalls this chapter of Indian history.

The British actions following the massacre bear witness to this. The tragedy's details were not made public in England until December 1919! According to Tim Coates' book *The Amritsar Massacre, 1919: General Dyer in the Punjab*, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab Michael Dwyer telegraphed General Dyer the following message: Your action is correct. The Lieutenant Governor gives his approval. Even after the slaughter, Dyer continued to terrorise Amritsar, issuing even harsher edicts. Dyer didn't think he required the wounded to be cared for. "Certainly not," he claimed astonishment. It was not my responsibility. They could have gone to any of the open hospitals. (Collett, 2006). Dyer was pulled off duty after the Commission did not take disciplinary action against him. But, rather than being known as the Butcher of Amritsar, he returned to Britain as a conquering hero. He was widely regarded as the man who averted a revolution. Conservative and pro-Imperialist A committee of women presented Dyer with a sword and a collection of 26,000 pounds for becoming the Saviour of the Punjab and the Man Who Saved India, according to the British daily *The Morning Post*. (Collett, 2006).

Despite the massacre's unusual chronological singularity and the worldwide need to remember, Jallianwala Bagh's short life as a memorial and monumental venue (less than 90 years) is complex and conflicting. We come across challenging concerns about the portrayal of the past in the present when we carefully explore these complexity and contradictions. What does the Jallianwala Bagh Memorial purport to reflect, stand for, and represent? What are the current uses of the memorial, and how do they relate to the past?

Background

British India contributed men and resources to the British war effort during World War I. Around 1.25 million Indian soldiers and labourers served in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, with vast quantities of food, money, and weapons given by both the Indian state and the princes. Bengal and Punjab, on the other hand, remained hotbeds of anti-colonial activity. The regional authority was practically paralysed by revolutionary attacks in Bengal, which were increasingly linked to unrest in Punjab. (Gupta, 1997). The most prominent plot of the much larger Hindu-German Mutiny, formulated between 1914 and 1917 to initiate a Pan-Indian rebellion against the British Raj during World War I, was a pan-Indian mutiny in the British Indian Army, planned for February 1915. Indian nationalists in India, the United States, and Germany were among the revolutionaries, with assistance from Irish republicans and the German Foreign Office. The plot began with the Ghadar Party in the United States, the Berlin Committee in Germany, the Indian revolutionary underground in British India, and the German Foreign Office through the consulate in San Francisco at the outbreak of World War I. When British intelligence penetrated the Ghadarite movement and arrested key leaders, the planned February revolt was prevented. Within India, mutinies in smaller troops and garrisons were also quashed. High fatality rates, rising inflation exacerbated by excessive taxes, the deadly 1918 flu pandemic, and trade disruptions all contributed to increased human suffering in India during WWI. The long conflict had a high cost in terms of both money and manpower. Indians were restless for independence in India, the British Empire's "jewel in the crown" for so long. Over 43,000 Indian warriors had died in battle for the British. To combat British control, Indian soldiers smuggled weapons into the country. The pre-war Indian Nationalist sentiment was resurrected when the Indian National Congress (INC moderate)'s and extreme groups reconciled. The Congress was successful in forming the Lucknow Pact, a short-term alliance with the All-India Muslim League, in 1916. Since the 1857 Rebellion, British authorities in India have been wary about native plots and revolts; they have warned each other that the indigenous are most suspicious when they appear to be innocent on the surface. (Patterson, 2007). There were no conspiratorial links to the events in Amritsar, according to investigators at the time and historians since, but British fears fueled their responses - General Dyer believed that a violent thrashing would deter conspiracies - and he was later hailed in Britain for preventing a terrorist attack. Returning from Europe and Mesopotamia, British Indian Army men found India in a state of economic distress. (Sarkar, 1983). The British were still fearful about mutiny attempts in 1915, as well as the Lahore conspiracy trials. Rumours arose in army circles of young Mohajirs fighting for the Turkish Caliphate and afterwards joining the Red Army during the Russian Civil War. Indians had beginning to be influenced by the Russian Revolution. (Sarkar, 1983). Many army officers expected a revolution and were prepared for the worst. More than 15,000 people gathered at

Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. Michael O'Dwyer, the British Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, is claimed to have believed that these were the first and poorly camouflaged indicators of a plot to stage a planned uprising around May, when British troops would have retired to the hills for the summer. Rather than being an isolated act, the Amritsar massacre, as well as the measures that preceded and followed it, was the culmination of a systematic Punjab state response strategy to repress such a conspiracy. (Cell, 2002). The fear of a Ghadarite insurrection in the midst of an increasingly tense situation in Punjab, according to James Houssemayne Du Boulay, was linked to the British response, which resulted in the slaughter. (Brown, 1973).

Rowlatt Commission

Before the First World War, the Indian Nationalist movement, as represented by the INC, was split between "extremists," who sought independence through violent means, and "moderates," who advocated "constitutional" methods of progress toward becoming a self-governing colony. At the same time, a schism had emerged between the INC and the Muslim community's leadership, which advocated for separate electorates and a quota of public positions over a general electorate and free competition between individuals. However, in 1916, a new agreement between the INC and the Muslim League, which committed cooperation toward common aims, mended these divisions. The promise of the secretary of state for India, Edwin Montagu, in 1917 that His Majesty's Government and the Government of India were committed to "the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire" heightened their expectations. (Coupland, 1944). Montagu said on August 20, 1917, that the British government intended the gradual growth of self-governing institutions with the goal of achieving the realisation of responsible governance in India as a member of the British Empire. 10 The majority of Indians viewed this as a recognition and recompense for their country's contributions of time, money, and soldiers to the British war effort. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were issued in the summer of 1918. These much-anticipated moves turned out to be a huge disappointment. The Rowlatt Committee's findings were released about the same time. The first bill proposed by this committee was signed into law on March 21, 1919. It gave judges the right to hear political matters without juries in certain circumstances and gave provincial governments detention powers. Despite the fact that the First World War had ended, the British felt it necessary to impose these harsh restrictions. After the loyalty they had showed Britain during the war, many Indians were incensed by the Rowlatt Bills, which they saw as an insult. As a result, anti-Rowlatt agitations began to emerge, and Mahatma Gandhi stepped in to head the cause.

The Rowlatt Committee was a Sedition Committee appointed by the British Indian Government in 1918, and its president was Mr Justice S.A. T. Rowlatt, an English judge. Sir Basil Sooty, Chief Justice of Bombay, Dewan Bahadur C.V. Kumarswami Sastri, judge of the Madras High Court, Sir Verney Lovett, member of the United Province Board of Revenue, and Pravesh Chandra Mitter, vakil of the High Court Calcutta were also members of the Committee. (Datta, 1969). The committee's mission was to assess political terrorism in India, particularly in Bengal and Punjab, as well as its influence and linkages to the German government and the Bolsheviks in Russia. (Tinker, 1968). Supporting and sponsoring Indian seditious organisations in Germany and the United States, as well as destabilising the political situation in Afghanistan following a diplomatic mission that attempted to mobilise the Amir of Afghanistan against British India, were among these. Following the mission, the Provisional Government of India founded in Afghanistan attempted to make contact with the Bolsheviks. Another cause for the committee's formation was the emergence of civil and labour unrest in India during the postwar recession, such as the Bombay mill worker strikes and unrests in Punjab, as well as the 1918 influenza pandemic, which killed over 13 million people in the country. (Chandler, 2001). Gandhi's appeal for rallies against the Rowlatt Act sparked tremendous rioting and demonstrations. The situation was rapidly deteriorating, particularly in Punjab, with rail, telegraph, and communication networks being disrupted. Many army officers expected a revolution and were prepared for the worst. More than 15,000 people gathered at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. Michael O'Dwyer, the British Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, is claimed to have suspected that these were early and ill-masked signals of a plot to stage a concerted insurrection in May, when British troops would have retired to the hills for the summer. Rather than being an isolated act, the Amritsar massacre, as well as the measures that preceded and followed it, was the culmination of a systematic Punjab state response strategy to repress such a conspiracy. (Cell, 2002). Because of its religious variety, which included significant numbers of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, the Punjab was an important region in British India. Because the province bordered Afghanistan, it had to be a strategic stronghold. Discontent has developed dramatically in the Punjab during the war. Some attribute this to Lieutenant

Governor of Punjab Sir Michael O' Dwyer's strong leadership. He violently destroyed the Ghadr movement, which was started by Sikhs in North America, and he severely limited the Indian press. In 1919, there were many grounds for discontent and conflict in the Punjab, but most crucially, a fundamental shift in Indian politics had happened. "The British Raj was not challenged by a concerted movement for self-government on the side of the Indian political class until the second decade of the twentieth century," Helen Fein writes. (Fein, 1977).

The doctrine of self-determination, the future of the Ottoman Empire's remnants, the new Government of India Act, and other topics stoked political sentiment and expectation of significant change, while other war-related effects, such as rising living costs and wartime restrictions, stoked discontent. The environment was conducive to unrest. The British Indian government implemented two crucial pieces of law in attempt to quell the rebellion across the country. The 1915 wartime Defence of India Act was enacted on the statutes in reaction to German and Turkish subversion attempts, giving civil and security authorities greater powers in dealing with insurgency and terrorism. The British Indian Government believed that something more needed to be done in Bengal due to growing violence, notably killings, bombings, and increased burglary. The Rowlatt Act of 1919 extended these wartime powers to peacetime, much to the chagrin of Indian nationalists. In response to the Act, Gandhi began his 'Satyagraha,' or civil disobedience movement, which resulted in considerable unrest. The British reaction to the Rowlatt agitation demonstrates that they were oblivious of the shifting political climate. Their use of force and persecution generated even greater drive in the new political elite and provided all Indians a reason to band together against the British Raj. In the broader context of India's rising instability, the city of Amritsar was renowned as a hotbed of dissatisfaction. Since 1917, Amritsar has been at the forefront of civil disobedience against British authority, with an All Indian Congress Committee. In December 1919, it was also chosen as the place for the All India Congress. In March 1919, Mohandas 'Mahatma' Gandhi, the self-declared leader of the Indian Independence movement, called for the people of India to embark on a 'Hartal,' a form of general workers' strike. The first took place on March 30, 1919, and was followed by a second on April 6, 1919. The Hartals at Amritsar, arranged by Doctor Saifudin Kitchlew and Doctor Satyapal on April 10, 1919, were extremely effective. The public was outraged by their arrest and disappearance.

The news of Gandhi's arrest and the expulsion of Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal swiftly travelled to other cities and satellite towns and villages along the railway line's western and northern circuits. (Fein, 1977). Hartals against the Rowlatt Act had taken place in both large cities and about half of the towns and villages. A local Congress Committee, the Arya Samaj, or a group of local attorneys were usually in charge of organising these hartals. Hartals were renewed or established in communities where they had previously failed or had not been initiated after word got out. Students were said to be particularly active in spontaneous store closing attempts. Miss Marcella Sherwood, an English missionary, was on her way to close the schools and send the roughly 600 Indian children home on April 11th, fearful for their safety. (Singh, 2003). She was seized by a mob while riding through the Kucha Kurrichhan, dragged to the ground by her hair, beaten, kicked, and left for dead. Some local Indians, including the father of one of her students, rescued her and concealed her from the crowd before smuggling her to the safety of Gobindgarh fort. (Ferguson, 2003). General Dyer, the Raj's local commander, issued an order requiring any Indian man using the street to crawl its length on his hands and knees after visiting Sherwood on April 19th. (Singh, Banerjee, Sikata, Muscular Nationalism: Gender, Violence, and Empire in India and Ireland, 1914-2004., 2012). "Some Indians crawl face downwards in front of their gods," General Dyer subsequently explained to a British inspector. I wanted them to understand that a British woman is as holy as a Hindu god, so they must crawl in front of her as well. (Talbot, 2004). Because a race riot was not a recognised event, General Dyer and others interpreted the Amritsar riot of 10 April as part of a revolt. It instilled among the colonial class a terrifying fear that anyone could be slain because of their nationality or ethnicity, invoking the mutiny syndrome of hatred and dread. There had never been another assassination or revolutionary conspiracy like it. They understood that anyone may become a target because of their involvement, but in this case, the crowd appeared to have chosen their victims at random. Because of the attack on Miss Sherwood, the symbolic assault was more severe. Despite the lack of evidence, a British journalist in India who was socially acquainted with the colonial class reported that Miss Sherwood's rape was being discussed in 1930. (H. L. Singh, 1963).

Massacre in Jallianwala Bagh (Or the Amritsar Massacre)

Thousands of unarmed Indians, mostly Sikhs, gathered peacefully in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, on April 13, 1919, to hear several prominent local leaders speak out against British colonial rule in India and the arrest and deportation of Dr. Satya Pal, Dr. Saif-ud-Din Kitchlew, and a few others under

the unpopular Rowlatt Act. Water was being served to the throng by Udham Singh and his orphanage mates. O'Dwyer had declared martial law, but it had not been made public. He most likely made some announcements about it beforehand in particular parts of the city, but the general public was unaware. After the Amritsar tragedy, he found it difficult to stay in Punjab for much longer due to political uncertainty. "I arrived in India in November of 1885 and was assigned to Lahore, the Punjab's metropolis," he adds. In May of 1919, I left Lahore and the Punjab for good. (O'Dwyer, 1925). On the same day, General Dyer received word that a large meeting would be held at Jallianwala Bagh. After 2 p.m., people began flooding into the Bagh. He received confirmation from Rehill (Superintendent of Police) around 4 p.m. that a mob of 1,000 people had gathered at Bagh. Following then, Mr. Lewis, Manager of Crown Cinema, confirmed the news. (The Tribune, 1966). It seemed to Dyer like a threat to his authority. Dyer immediately ordered his strike force to surrender. He was accompanied by two armoured cars armed with machine guns. Dyer led a company of fifty riflemen, forty Gurkhas armed with their Dyer was surprised by the diversity of the throng as he stood on an elevated platform inside the entrance. Dyer did not believe it was necessary to issue any sort of warning to the public. Dyer positioned his soldiers on the left with 25 Gurkha riflemen and the right with 25 Baluchis riflemen. All of this occurred in less than thirty seconds. The soldiers were standing on ground that was higher than the rest of the region. The General then issued an immediate order for them to commence fire, traditional weapons, and the Kukris, along with his favourite officers Briggs and Anderson. (Datta, 1969). The crowd erupted in applause, but authority stated that there was no need to be concerned because the military were firing blanks. However, as people began to crumple and fall, they swiftly lost their illusions. The firing lasted ten minutes, and 1650 rounds of 303 markings, VI ammunition were shot at that time, equating to 33 rounds per rifle per man. (Draper, 1981). Nobody was willing to offer them water. The individuals had no access to medical care. Even Amritsar citizens whose relatives had come to Bagh did not dare to enter the Bagh to look for them for a long period. As a result, the Bagh resembled a miniature battleground, complete with countless corpses and wounded people. General Dyer and his force left the Bagh, leaving behind a scene that looked like hell on earth. "I saw hundreds of people slain on the spot," said Giridhari Lal, who was present at the time. The worst part of it all was that the gunfire was focused at the exit gates where people were fleeing. There were four or five small outlets, and bullets rained down on the people at all of them....many were trampled under the feet of rushing crowds and thus died....blood flowed freely.....even those who lay flat on the ground were shot.....some had their heads cut open, others had their eyes shot and nose, chest, arms, and legs shattered..... (Spear, 1965).

The rationale of the state's violent activities becomes evident once one understands the state's view of this "true" need for martial law: not the punishment of the guilty, not the end of individual offences, but the restoration of a general situation. Furthermore, it is critical to emphasise that this general state cannot be limited to conceptions of public peace and order. In reality, there is a will to generality in every explanation for an officer's action — a command whose execution will teach the subject about universal laws. General Dyer's justification for his conduct, as well as the official response to it, are rife with ambiguity about specifics. We have an uncanny reflection of the relationship between performative violence and a return to legality in General Dyer's statement, as well as the separation between such violence and mechanistic concepts of force and the preservation of order.

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