

"The incident in Jallian Wala Bagh was 'an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation'...Winston Churchill

It started a few months after the end of the first world war when an Englishwoman, a missionary, reported that she had been molested on a street in the Punjab city of Amritsar. The Raj's local commander, Brigadier General Reginald Dyer, issued an order requiring all Indians using that street to crawl its length on their hands and knees. He also authorized the indiscriminate, public whipping of natives who came within lathi length of British policemen.

On April 13, 1919, a multitude of Punjabis gathered in Amritsar's Jallian wala Bagh as part of the Sikh Festival "Baisakhi fair" and to protest at these extraordinary measures. The throng, penned in a narrow space smaller than Trafalgar Square, had been peacefully listening to the testimony of victims when Dyer appeared at the head of a contingent of British troops. Giving no word of warning, he ordered 50 soldiers to fire into the gathering, and for 10 to 15 minutes 1,650 rounds of ammunition were unloaded into the screaming, terrified crowd, some of whom were trampled by those desperately trying to escape.

### **Amritsar Massacre**

"The Indians were 'packed together so that one bullet would drive through three or four bodies'; the people 'ran madly this way and the other. When fire was directed upon the centre, they ran to the sides. The fire was then directed to the sides. Many threw themselves down on the ground, and the fire was then directed on the ground. This was continued for eight or ten minutes, and it stopped only when the ammunition had reached the point of exhaustion'.....Winston Churchill

Dyer then marched away, leaving 379 dead and over 1,500 wounded.

Back in his headquarters, he reported to his superiors that he had been 'confronted by a revolutionary army,' and had been obliged 'to teach a moral lesson to the Punjab.' In the storm of outrage which followed, the brigadier was promoted to major general, retired, and placed on the inactive list.

"I think it quite possible that I could have dispersed the crowd without firing but they would have come back again and laughed, and I would have made, what I consider, a fool of myself." .....Dyer's response to the Hunter Commission Enquiry

General Dyer said he would have used his machine guns if he could have got them into the enclosure, but these were mounted on armoured cars. He said he did not stop firing when the crowd began to disperse because he thought it was his duty to keep firing until the crowd dispersed, and that a little firing would do no good.

He confessed he did not take any steps to attend to the wounded after the firing. "Certainly not. It was not my job. Hospitals were open and they could have gone there," came his pathetic

response.

However, the misery suffered by the people was reflected in Rattan Devi's account. She was forced to keep a nightlong vigil, armed with a bamboo stick to protect her husband's body from jackals and vultures. Curfew with shoot-at-sight orders had been imposed from 2000 hours that night.

Rattan Devi stated, "I saw three men writhing in great pain and a boy of about 12. I could not leave the place. The boy asked me for water but there was no water in that place. At 2 am, a Jat who was lying entangled on the wall asked me to raise his leg. I went up to him and took hold of his clothes drenched in blood and raised him up. Heaps of bodies lay there, a number of them innocent children. I shall never forget the sight. I spent the night crying and watching..."

General Dyer admitted before the commission that he came to know about the meeting at Jallianwala Bagh at 1240 hours that day, but took no steps to prevent it. He also admitted in his deposition that the gathering at the Bagh was not a concentration only of rebels, but people who had covered long distances to participate in the Baisakhi fair.

This incredibly, made him a martyr to millions of Englishmen. Senior British officers applauded his suppression of 'another Indian Mutiny.' The Guardians of the Golden Temple enrolled him in the Brotherhood of Sikhs. The House of Lords passed a measure commending him. The Conservatives presented him with a jewelled sword inscribed "Saviour of the Punjab."

A young Sikh teenager who was being raised at Khalsa Orphanage named Udham Singh (aka Mohammad Singh Azad) saw the happening with his own eyes. He vowed to avenge the Amritsar massacre.

On 13 March 1940 at 4.30 p.m. in the Caxton Hall, London, where a meeting of the East India Association was being held in conjunction with the Royal Central Asian Society, Udham Singh fired five to six shots from his pistol at Sir Michael O'Dwyer, who was governor of the Punjab when the Amritsar Massacre had taken place, to avenge the massacre.

On the 31st July, 1940, Udham Singh was hanged at Pentonville jail, London

**"He was the real culprit. He deserved it. He wanted to crush the spirit of my people, so I [had to] crush him." Udham Singh, telling the trial court why he killed Michael O'Dwyer.**