

The Amritsar Massacre

Background

After the **Rowlatt Act of 1919**, which allowed arrest without trial, Indians were furious. They protested peacefully against this injustice. Punjab became a major centre of unrest. Two popular leaders, **Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew** and **Dr. Satyapal**, were arrested, which led to public anger. The British imposed **martial law** in Punjab, banning public gatherings. On **13 April 1919**, many people gathered at **Jallianwala Bagh** in Amritsar — unaware that such meetings were prohibited.

The Tragic Event:

That day, thousands of men, women, and children gathered peacefully to protest. The park was enclosed by high walls with narrow exits, so people could not escape. **General Reginald Dyer** entered the area with his soldiers and, without warning, ordered them to **open fire** on the unarmed crowd.

The firing continued for about **ten minutes**, killing hundreds and wounding more than a thousand. The event became known as the **Amritsar Massacre** or **Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy** — a shocking act of cruelty by the colonial government.

Immediate British Response:

Instead of expressing regret, the British government **justified the violence**. They imposed even **harsher martial law** in Punjab. People were **flogged, humiliated, and punished** publicly. The **Hunter Commission** was later formed to investigate. While it found Dyer guilty of excessive force, he was only **mildly punished** — he was dismissed but faced no real penalty. Some British officials even **praised him**, which deeply insulted Indian public opinion.

Indian Reaction and National Impact:

The massacre created **a wave of grief and anger** across India.

Gandhi, Tagore, and Nehru condemned the act strongly. **Rabindranath Tagore** even **returned his knighthood** as a protest against British cruelty. Gandhi realized that the British could not be trusted, so he decided to start a **nationwide movement** for complete independence.

The tragedy also **united Indians**, ending the divide between moderates and radicals. All communities came together in the fight against colonial injustice.

Long-term Consequences:

The Amritsar Massacre was a **turning point** in India's struggle for freedom.

It **exposed the brutality and hypocrisy** of British rule, which claimed to bring “civilization.”

Indians understood that **freedom could not be achieved through cooperation** — only through resistance.

The massacre inspired the **Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22)** and transformed the

freedom struggle into a **mass movement**. Internationally, it **damaged Britain's image** as a just ruler.

To this day, **Jallianwala Bagh** stands as a **symbol of sacrifice, unity, and courage** in the face of oppression.