

Essay on indian history the amritsar massacre the indo- pak partition

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



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India is a country that has fast gained economic strength over the past few decades and has emerged as a power to reckon with in a global context. With a population of over 1 billion people, the Indian Diaspora influences policies in several countries around the world. The Indian culture and heritage has hence gained tremendous value. Indians are proud of their rich heritage and history. There are several events in India's history, dotted with thousands of years of being governed by foreign rulers, that have left a lasting impact on Indian mindsets. These are historical events that, over a century after they occurred, still strike a raw nerve in almost every Indian, regardless of their age. Two such events are the Amritsar Massacre of 1919 and the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Both these events did not happen on a whim but were gradual built up to and had severe and long lasting influences that can be felt even today.

The Amritsar Massacre of 1919

The year 1919 was one that saw several uprisings against the British rule in India. It began with the Rowlatt Act, passed in March 1919, which gave British authorities the right to imprison for up to two years without trial

anyone who was suspected of conspiring against the British rule or the Raj. These 'black acts' as they came to be called, were peacetime extensions of the wartime emergency measures passed in 1915 and had been rammed through the Supreme Legislative Council over the unanimous opposition of its Indian members, several of whom, including Jinnah, resigned in protest. Jinnah wrote to the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford that the enactment of such autocratic legislation, following the victorious conclusion of a war in which India had so loyally supported Britain, was an unwarranted uprooting of the "fundamental principles of justice" and a gross violation of the "constitutional rights of the people" [CITATION Ple11 p 283 l 1033]. Following this act, several revolutionaries were imprisoned at random as the British administration struggled to curb the rising number of mutinies and protests.

On April 13 1919, over ten thousand men, women and children gathered at Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh or Jallianwala Garden. Most of the crowd was unarmed and had arrived in the city from rural areas to celebrate Baisakhi, a major Sikh festival. However, a part of the crowd was a group that was there to peacefully protest. This gathering was despite a ban on public assembly, although most of the crowd may not have been aware of the situation. The news of the gathering reached Brigadier-General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer who marched to the location with 50 men armed with rifles and two machine guns mounted on armored vehicles. It was possible to enter Jallianwala Bagh only from one main gate and this is where General Dyer positioned his troops. He then, without any warning or order to disperse being given to the crowd, ordered his troops to begin shooting at the densest

portions of the crowd. The troops continued to fire for 10 to 15 minutes and had exhausted 1650 rounds before General ordered them to stop firing. The General and his troops left the scene without counting the dead or providing any aid to the hundreds that lay injured. As there was a curfew in place, the wounded remained unattended till the next morning when the authorities arrived to clear the bodies.

It is impossible to know the exact number of deaths and casualties resulting from the massacre. The first attempt by the government to arrive at a figure was taken up in June, over 2 months after the massacre. V. N. Tivraj concluded finally that 530 had died. J. P. Thompson recorded a guess of 800 to 1800 dead made by a colleague in the Punjab ICS, a Mr. Bayley, who visited Amritsar on 20 April 1919 [CITATION Col07 p 263 l 1033]. Dyer showed no signs of remorse of having killed hundreds of unarmed civilians and, in fact, seemed proud of the act. " 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.

The massacre of Amritsar turned millions of moderate Indians from patient and loyal supports of the British Raj to nationalists who would never again place trust in British ' Fair Play'. It thus marks the turning point for a majority of the Congress' supporters from moderate cooperation with the raj and its promised reforms to revolutionary non-cooperation. Liberal Anglophile leaders, such as Jinnah, were soon to be displaced by the followers of Gandhi, who would launch, a year after that dreadful massacre, his first

nationwide ‘ Satyagraha’ or ‘ Devotion to truth’ campaign as India’s revolutionary response [CITATION Ple11 p 285 l 1033]. It was the Jallianwala Bagh massacre that convinced Gandhi that the British could no longer rule India and independence became an imperative. It spurred several violent protests too. Udham Singh murdered Michael Dwyer, believed to be the main schemer of the massacre. He, along with Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Sukhdev and Rajguru were the face of the young Indian revolutionaries that sought justice for the massacre over 20 years later. The Amritsar Massacre was a major catalyst of the independence movement in India. Years later in 1984, when late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered military action to arrest Punjab separatists bunked up in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, it struck a raw nerve and the Sikhs compared it to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguard in retaliation to this act, reminding the nation of Udham Singh’s assassination of Dwyer.

The India – Pakistan Partition of 1947

The policy of Divide and Rule has been effectively followed by the British Empire during its reign over several regions. The history of British rule in India offers many examples of this strategy of ‘ Divide and Rule,’ This advocacy is strengthened by no less an authority than Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay, who wrote in his minute of 14th May 1859: “ Divide et impera was the old Roman motto; and it should be ours.’ The English rulers decided to put themselves between Hindus and Muslims so as to create a communal triangle of which they would remain the base [CITATION Rao04 p

6 | 1033]. Mohammed Ali Jinnah had long strived to acquire a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. Astonishingly, Jinnah started his political career as a promoter of peace and harmony between the Hindus and Muslims of India. However, as the Indian National Congress gained popularity and Gandhi's revolutionary thoughts won the hearts of Indians, Jinnah began to increasingly believe that such a unity could not exist post independence. Jinnah believed that the policies of the INC were predominantly Hindu oriented and so Muslims would simply be rescued from a British rule and be handed over to a Hindu raj. Between 1940 and 1947, Jinnah rallied hard to win supporters for his cause and he was eventually victorious in convincing both the British administration as well as the INC to agree to a partition of India.

However, once it was decided that the partition would take place, the challenge arose on how the new borders would be allocated. Sir Cyril Radcliffe was appointed as the head of the boundary commission. Radcliffe was expected to be impartial as he knew almost nothing about India and had never visited the sub-continent before. However, it was clear from the start that the geography would be decided based on the density of Muslim population in various parts of India. These parts would essentially be handed over to Pakistan while the rest would remain a part of India. Pakistan would, therefore consist of two wings, East and West, separated by over 1, 400 kilometers (over 860 miles) of Indian territory between them. [CITATION Sch95 p 37 | 1033]. However, the biggest problem in deciding the Indo-Pak border lay in deciding how to divide regions like Punjab that did not have any

clear religious majority and where communal riots has been raging for several months prior to the partition. Radcliffe chose to divide Punjab as well and awarded 62% of the area and 55% of the population to Pakistan.

This decision proved to be brutal to over 15 millions Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who crossed borders in a span of two months. While Hindus and Muslims had a fairly easier choice to make on where they wished to stay, the Sikhs were divided as they would not be a majority in either of the nations. Regardless of this fact, thousands of families had to abandon their homes and businesses to move to a new city where they were expected to start life all over again. Many families were divided, with no certainty of ever seeing their loved ones again. This forced migration resulted in tremendous anger among the people who turned to grotesque and brutal acts of violence against their countrymen. The border was patrolled by a police force of only 50, 000 men - insufficient to protect the refugees from the terror and inhumanity they inflicted on one another. As a result, an estimated one million people were killed in communal clashes in the wake of Partition [CITATION Sch95 p 37 | 1033].

A tragedy of such proportions is bound to leave a long lasting effect. When millions of people lost their lives with even more losing their livelihood and families being torn apart, a deep rooted resentment has been sown in Indo-Pak relations that is evident even today. The countries have been on the verge of war ever since. East Pakistan eventually witnessed a revolution of its own and, with Indian help, gained independence and formed what we know today as Bangladesh. The state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Northern

most part of India, has been suffering for long as separatists call for the state to be given independence while others are calling for it to be merged with Pakistan. Violence escalated in the region since the last quarter of 2010 and thousands lost their lives.

The partition also added fuel to an already raging communal fire. There have been riots between Hindus and Muslims in both, India as well as Pakistan, as the anger and resentment from the days of the partition has been passed on from generation to generation has gotten engrained in the culture of the two nations. The partition has also given extremists a reason to take up terrorist activities in their neighbor countries. One of the terrorists who was part of the 26 November 2008 attacks in Mumbai is reported to have said to hostages at the Oberoi Hotel that they saw their act as retaliation for the treatment meted out to Muslims in India since 1947 [CITATION Dai09 I 1033].

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