

An apology—Amritsar massacre.

Conference, in this speech, I will be talking about the British Empire, The Massacre and the apology that never came.

Amritsar is home to The Golden Temple and is one of the main cities in the state of Punjab in India.

Next year, on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2019, will mark the 100th anniversary of the massacre of Amritsar—

It is also known as Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

On this fateful day on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> April 1919, the British General, Reginald Dyer ordered his men to open fire on a crowd of some 20,000.

An unarmed crowd, made up of men, women and children who had gathered on a Sunday afternoon in a park.

The park is known as Jallianwala Bagh.

They were fired upon without any warning with devastating consequences.

Within 10 minutes 379 people were killed and some 1250 were wounded—

These are the subsequent official enquiry figures by the British—

-However, all historians agreed that death toll was much higher—

As much as 1000 dead.

The shooting only stopped when the soldiers ran out of ammunition.

In some places, after the shooting, piles of bodies were 10 to 12 feet high.

It is said that after the massacre the surrounding streets and alleyways, were soaked in blood with wounded walking everywhere crying for help.

A scene no Hollywood film maker could even imagine of humanity in pain.

And where was General Dyer while people were bleeding to death--  
He returned to his H.Q. and had a drink.

Nick Lloyd in his book, "The Massacre of Amritsar—the Untold Story Of One Fateful Day", wrote that this was, "the single most infamous incident in the entire history of British rule in India---a brutal massacre.

Another Historian Derek Sayer wrote, "No previous use of military force, in the United Kingdom or colonies, against an unarmed and peaceable crowd had resulted in a remotely comparable loss of life".

According to the British Army Regulations, General Dyer's action were illegal on three accounts.

1--he open fire without warning.

2—he did so upon a crowd that was non-violent and was not threatening him.

3—he continued to fire for longer than was strictly necessary to disperse the crowd.

All those around General Dyer after the shooting at his H.Q. said, that he was visible shaken and was deeply remorseful and distraught at what he had done—

If that was the case, then why did he not return to the scene of the crime to offer help to the wounded, instead of going around other

parts of the city with his soldiers, in the evening, to ensure there was no further trouble or gatherings in the city.

And after the massacre, a local curfew was imposed in the city --- if anyone was seen on the street after 8pm, that person was liable to be shot dead and no one was allowed to leave the city without a pass.

So the effect on the city and the surrounding area was one of deadly disbelief and utter frightfulness—humanity frozen in mortal fear.

And what of the wounded and dying after the massacre--

They were left where they were shot to fend for themselves.—

Crying for help and water.

When in the subsequent enquire, General Dyer was asked, what provision had he made for the wounded, his reply was-----“it’s not my job to tend to the wounded –hospitals were open and they could have gone there “.

Winston Churchill called it, “a monstrous act—the crowd was unarmed –it was not attacking anybody”.

Asquith, the former Prime Minister in 1920, called it, “one of the worst outrage in the whole of our history “.

General Dyer later said that he did it,” to strike terror throughout Punjab—he went there NOT to disperse the crowd but to punish the Indians for disobedience”.

After the massacre General Dyer became the darling of the conservative establishment—

The House of Lords presented him a sword with the inscription, “saviour of Punjab “.

Right wing newspapers of the day collected over £27,000 for him--- which was a great deal of money in those days.

A reward for his for his deadly deeds indeed.

So, conference, here I am today to tell you, indeed remind many of you, of the shameful atrocities committed upon innocent individuals under British rule in India.

No British Prime Minister since the massacre has ever stood on the dispatch box in the House of Commons and offered an apology to the victims and their families.

Dyer was censured in Parliament in 1920 but there was no apology.

David Cameron on his visit to Amritsar in 2013 had called it —“A deeply shameful event in British History “.

Jack Straw the former Foreign Secretary had said, “It was a terrible occasion in which so many innocent were slaughtered for which I feel ashamed and full of sorrow “.

Conference, times may change –values may change, but the murder of the innocent remains the murder—

Some say it was a hundred years ago, let’s forget all about it and move on—and that there have been so many massacres and human rights violations in the British Empire over the years – let’s not dwell on this particular one.

But conference, this was a wide eyed, day time, deliberate –face to face taking of life by the authority –

General Dyer did it because he knew he can do it with impunity. And he knew that no body or any authority can touch him for his actions which was the norm of the British Raj in India.

The authority even at that time tried to hush it all up—it took some six months before the news of this calculated brutality reached London.

A mass murder by the state which has gone down in history alone with other brutal massacres like those of Sharpeville, My Lai, Peterloo, Bloody Sunday and Tiananmen Square.

But conference, when I close my eyes and think about it, I can almost feel and touch 1919 –

it only seems like yesterday in the first world war, when my grandfather and his two brothers were fighting in the European trenches for the British—it only seems like yesterday in the 1960s when I was a little boy that I was talking to my grandfather in India—

This is not an incident from long past or the middle ages or any other age, —

We are talking about the twentieth century—

Bloody Sunday happened 45 years ago in Northern Ireland when 13 people were killed and 13 were wounded, yet David Cameron believed it right to explicitly apologise for that incident in the House of Commons by saying that this incident was **not justified nor justifiable**.

Canadian Prime Minister Justine Trudeau apologised in his Parliament IN 2016 for an incident that took place in **1915**, when a ship called KOMAGATA MERU, s passengers, who were all Indian, were mistreated with extreme prejudice by the Canadian Government.

Britain has a large Sikh, Hindu and Muslim population –all three faith groups were the victims of this massacre **EQUALLY** –and they all feel very strongly that on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this massacre there should be an apology in the House of Common from our Prime Minister.

For various reasons, this massacre, like the others I have mentioned above, have not gone into the British social and cultural psychic and time has come that it did because Britain is now a truly multicultural and multi-faith society.

There is no shame nor dishonour in acknowledging the mistakes of the past and apologising for it—

It is the epitome of the civilised society and the rectitude of high office.

All I am asking for is that , who so ever is our Prime Minister next April to make this gracious gesture of apology , in order to heal **this 100 year old bleeding wound** and move on.

Thank you.