

Britain, Colonial India and Gothic Fiction

Sources on the Amritsar Massacre

Source 1: General Dyer's account of the massacre

I fired and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed and I consider this is the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral, and widespread effect it was my duty to produce, if I was to justify my action. If more troops had been at hand the casualties would be greater in proportion. *It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd;* but one of producing a sufficient moral effect, from a military point of view, not only on those who were present but more specially throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity.

Q. I take it that your idea in taking that action was to strike terror?

A. Call it what you like. I was going to punish them. My idea from the military point of view was to make a wide impression.

Q. To strike terror not only in the city of Amritsar, but throughout the Punjab?

A. Yes, throughout the Punjab. I wanted to reduce their *morale*; the *morale* of the rebels.

From 'The Hunter Committee Report'

Source 2: A Cartoon from the Daily News (published in Britain)

Progress to Liberty-Amritsar style.



Reprinted from *The Daily News*,—Dec. 16th. 1919

This cartoon was published in December 1919 in The Star newspaper. It was drawn by David Low, a very famous cartoonist. He was generally opposed to the British ruling countries where people wanted them to leave. Low's title is 'Progress to Liberty - Amritsar style'. Here the cartoonist is suggesting that the British simply talk about Liberty and have no intention of granting it. The two figures in the cartoon are shown crawling because Low was drawing attention to a regulation introduced by General Dyer called the Crawling Order. He ordered that any Indians wishing to travel up a particular street in Amritsar had to crawl on all fours. Twelve Indians were arrested within hours of the order being put into operation.

Source 3: Eyewitness account of Ratan Devi

“I passed my whole night there. It is impossible for me to describe what I felt. Heaps of dead bodies lay there, some on their backs and some with their faces upturned. A number of them were poor innocent children. I was all alone the whole night... nothing but the barking of dogs, or the braying of donkeys was audible. Amidst hundreds of corpses, I passed my night, crying and watching. I cannot say more. What I experienced that night is known only to me and to God.”