

Gandhi urged a national strike after he returned to his country (from South Africa).

Unknown to the Indian nationals, however, a British military general in a northern city—Brigadier General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer—had earlier declared a ban on mass meetings.

As thousands of people gathered in an open space known as Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar, a city in India's Punjab region (now situated in Punjab State)—on April 13, 1919—Indian soldiers, directed by Dyer, fired their weapons at the gathered crowd.

The bullet barrage continued for ten minutes—until the soldiers ran out of ammunition. They killed 379 people, and injured more than a thousand, during an event known as the Amritsar Massacre (also called the Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre).

To teach the locals a lesson—that they could not defy the laws with impunity—the British general who'd ordered the massacre also issued another decree. Indian people would have to get on the ground and crawl like a worm.

Whoever refused to disgrace themselves, in such a fashion, would be flogged to death.

Winston Churchill, then serving as Minister of War and Air and Colonial Secretary under Prime Minister David Lloyd George, called Dyer's actions "monstrous." He was so angry with Dyer that he wanted the General disciplined.

Debating Dyer's fate, in the House of Commons—on July 8, 1920—Churchill used these words to describe the massacre

The crowd was unarmed, except with bludgeons. It was not attacking anybody or anything... When fire had been opened upon it to disperse it, it tried to run away. Pinned up in a narrow place considerably smaller than Trafalgar Square, with hardly any exits, and packed together so that one bullet would drive through three or four bodies, the people ran madly this way and the other.

*When the 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, the fire was then directed down on the ground. This was continued to 8 to 10 minutes, and it stopped only when the ammunition had reached the point of exhaustion. (See *Churchill Speaks: Winston S. Churchill in Peace and War: Collected Speeches, 1897-1963*, by Winston S. Churchill, edited by Robert Rhodes James, published—in 1980—by Chelsea House, at [page 396](#).)*

Members of Parliament voted 247 to 37 against Dyer (who, at least to some people, became known as "The Butcher of Amritsar." Instead of discipline against the General, however, Churchill had to be satisfied with Dyer's forced retirement.

Building on outrage which followed the massacre, Gandhi built a national movement. He argued that the British occupiers of his country were also captives—albeit of a corrupt, and divisive, system of government.

Urging Indians to become self-reliant, Gandhi set an example as he wore simple clothes made from self-spun cloth. People everywhere followed suit, burning their western-made clothes. While Indian leaders disagreed with Gandhi's approach, the people followed him.

He found that non-violent resistance gave him, and his followers, the moral high ground. Such a path could provide the way to great political achievements for all Indians (whatever their religious beliefs). It could also serve as a path to peace, for—as Gandhi once declared—a tit-for-tat approach is counterproductive:

An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.

At his own home, however, Gandhi faced rebellion. Away much of the time, he neglected his family. His oldest son became an alcoholic and a prostitute.

Personal concerns, however, did not deter him from his goal to free more than 300 million Indians from British rule.

Prevented from processing salt—a lucrative endeavor reserved for India's foreign occupiers—Indians were deprived of yet another source of revenue from the country's vast natural resources. Even worse, the population was required to pay a tax, to the British government, just to use salt.

In 1930, Gandhi decided to march to the Arabian Sea, to personally gather salt and process it there. After all, as he declared:

Next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life. It is the only condiment of the poor. Cattle cannot live without salt. Salt is a necessary article in many manufacturers.

Ridiculed by Indian leaders, and scoffed-at by the British government, Gandhi (61 years old at the time) began

his walk to the sea with seventy-nine people. By the time he reached his destination, twenty-four days later, Gandhi had attracted the attention of people (and media) far and wide.

When he reached the Arabian Sea, Gandhi picked up a handful of salt from the beach at Dandi. He declared:

With this salt I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire.

After the salt march, people everywhere defied the salt laws. Everywhere across the country, Indians were beaten and arrested for doing so. Gandhi, himself, was jailed.

He remained undeterred.

See, also:

[Gandhi - Early Life and South African Discrimination](#)

[Gandhi - Resisting South African Laws](#)

[Gandhi - Fast until Death](#)

[Gandhi - Assassination](#)

[Gandhi - Legacy of Mahatma](#)

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Clip from the documentary, *Mahatma - Pilgrim of Peace*, online courtesy Google Video.

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