



## MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN: 1919 - JALLIANWALLA BAG INCIDENT

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### Abstract:

*The year 1919 is a watershed in the history of India. On 18th March 1919 the Rowlett Act, which gave the colonial administration unlimited powers of detention and repression was passed. This gave Mahatma Gandhi a chance to introduce the new weapon of hartal. 7th April 1919 was the day fixed for his hartal. It resulted in riots and repressions especially in Amritsar. On 13th April 1919 the massacre of Jallianwalla Bag took place.*

### KEYWORDS:

Midnight's , historical , colonial administration , wounding.

### .INTRODUCTION

This tragic event is also of crucial importance in 'Midnight's Children. Rushdie uses Gandhi's hartal to detain the newly married Adam Aziz and his wife Naseem at Amritsar. The halt proves crucial in their personal relationship thus setting the tone for their married life, which progresses side by side with the independence movement. Thus Rushdie juxtaposes a historical event with the personal life of the individuals, showing how it alters their lives.

The momentous Jallianwalla incident is also used to turn Dr. Adam Aziz into an Indian. He is critical of the Rowlett Act passed by the British. On his own accord the ministers to the wounded in the riots. On the crucial 13th April 1919, Dr. Aziz himself is shown as caught up in the crowd trapped by Brigadier R.E. Dyer, the so called butcher of Jallianwalla Bag. His timely sneeze saves him. A mere sneeze is used as a device to save Adam Aziz during such a tragic moment, thus reducing the horror of the moment and adding an ironic touch. Later Dr. Aziz admits that this is the moment which turned him into an Indian in mind and soul.

Thus Jallianwalla Bag is the end of Adam Aziz's Kashmiri identity. The forces of history gathering greater momentum from now on would also cause Kashmir to lose its independent identity. In 1947 when the Indian subcontinent was partitioned into two independent nations, both laid claim to Kashmir. In the novel Tai the boatman is identified with Kashmir and its separate identity. Thus he is shown as being hostile to Adam Aziz after he returns from Germany with a medical degree, although both of them were on the best of terms earlier. In 1947 invaders from Pakistan occupied part of Kashmir. The Indian army moved in to secure the rest of Kashmir after Maharaja Hari Singh acceded his state to the Indian Union. In the novel, Tai is made to die in 1947. He is shown as haranguing the opposing forces at war in the battlefield and as a result getting shot. Tai's death symbolizes the end of an independent Kashmiri Identity as well. Thus Tai's personal predicament reflects the historical development in Kashmir.

An interesting feature about the Jallianwalla incident as described by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* is its close similarity with the account given in *Freedom at Midnight* written by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapeer.

While the passage in *Freedom at Midni*

ght reads as follows:

There was only one entrance to the compound down a narrow alley between two buildings. Through it, just after the meeting had begun, marched Amritsar's Martial Law Commander, Brigadier R.E. Dyer, at the head of fifty, soldiers. He stationed his men on either side of the entry and, without warning, opened fire with machine guns on the defenseless Indians. .... They fires 1650 rounds. Their bullets killed or wounded 1516 people. Convinced he'd done a jolly good thing' Dyer marched his men back out of the Bagh.

**Rushdie's version goes thus:**

To get into it, you must walk down a very narrow alleyway between two buildings.... Aziz penetrates the heart of the crowd as Brigadier R.E. Dyer arrives at the entrance to the alleyway, followed by fifty while troops. He is the Martial Law Commander of Amritsar .... The fifty one men enter the compound and take up positions, twenty-five to dyer's right and twenty-five to his left... they have fired a total of one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the unarmed crowd. Of these, one thousand five hundred and sixteen have found their mark, killing or wounding some person. 'Good shooting' dyer tells his men, we have done a jolly good thing'.

The almost identical passages show that, for details of historical events Rushdie depends upon such sources and changes are made either for some literary effect or to relate the event to the personal life or the individuals. Rushdie is not scrupulous about historical veracity. He sometimes distorts facts to heighten the dramatic effect. For example, he makes the troops under the command of Dyer white, although they were actually either Gurkhas or Baluchis. He makes the alleyway 'very narrow. He says the soldiers took up their positions to the right and to the left of dyer, making the positioning more dramatic. He speaks of the Bullets as 'finding their mark' instead of just 'killing' or 'wounding' as found in Freedom At Midnight. Further, with trenchant irony, he makes Dyer exclaim: 'Good Shooting''

**REFERENCE:**

- i.Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, 'Freedom at Midnight'(New Delhi: Vikas, 1975), pp.46-47
- ii.Salman Rushdie, "Midnight's Children" (New York : Alfred A. Knoof, 1981), pp. 34-37. Hereafter cited as MC.
- iii.MC, P.37
- iv.MC, P. 40
- v.Durga Das, India, from Curzon to Nehru and after (London : Collins, 1969), p. 270
- vi.MC, P. 28-29
- vii.MC, P. 37
- viii.Collins and Lapierre, "Freedom at Midnight", p.47
- ix.MC, P.36