A Divided Punjab and the British Terrorist Legacy

To kill 1,000 or more “niggers,” to borrow from the colorful, racist dictionary of Lloyd George, who was serving as British Prime Minister between 1916 and 1922, was never something that Western empires would feel ashamed of. For centuries, the British Kingdom was murdering merrily, all over Africa and the Middle East, as well as in the Punjab, Kerala, Gujarat, in fact all over the Sub-Continent. In London the acts of smashing unruly nations were considered as something “normal”, even praiseworthy. Commanders in charge of slaughtering thousands of people in the colonies were promoted, not demoted, and their statues have been decorating countless squares and government buildings.

Wherever I work on this planet, I see remnants of European colonial savagery.

This time I worked in the Indian state of Punjab. Here, an unrepentant bigot – General Dyer, killed 1579 people in 1919, in Amritsar, in just a few dreadful minutes.

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A narrow passage to Jallianwala Bagh Garden, inside the old city of Amritsar...

This is where, on April 13 1919, thousands of people gathered, demanding release of two of their detained leaders, Dr. Satyapal and Dr. Saifuddin. The protest was peaceful. It was right before the day of Baisakhi, the main Sikh festival; and the pilgrims were pouring to the city in multitudes, from all corners of Punjab and Sub-Continent.

Peaceful or not, British Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer would not tolerate any demonstrations, any dissent, in the areas controlled by his troops. He decided to act, in order to teach the locals a lesson. There was no warning and no negotiations. General Dyer brought fifty Gurkha riflemen to a raised bank, and then ordered them to shoot at the crowd.

Bipan Chandra, a renowned Indian historian, wrote in his iconic work, “India's Struggle for Independence”:

“On the orders of Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer, the army fired on the crowd for ten minutes, directing their bullets largely towards the few open gates through which people were trying to run out. The figures released by the British government were 370 dead and 1200 wounded. Other sources place the number dead at well over 1000.”

Jallianwala Bagh is now a monument, a testament, a warning. There are bullet holes clearly marked in white, penetrating the walls of surrounding buildings. There is a well, where bodies of countless victims had fallen. Some people had chosen to jump, to escape the bullets.

There is a museum, containing historic documents: statements of defiance and spite from the officials of British Raj, as well as declarations of several maverick Indian figures, including Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest writers of India, who threw his knighthood back in the face of the British oppressors, after he learned about the massacre.
There are old black and white photos of Punjabi people tied to the polls, their buttocks exposed, being flagged by shorts-wearing British soldiers, who were apparently enjoying their heinous acts.

There is also a statement of General Dyer himself. It is chilling, arrogant and unapologetic statement:

“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 have been 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 especially throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity.”

I approached Ms. Garima Sahata, a Punjabi student, who did not hide her feelings towards the British Empire and the West:

“I feel ager, thinking what they had done to our people. I think it is important for us to come here and to see the remnants of the massacre. I still feel angry towards the British people, even now... but in a different way... They are not killing us the same way, as they used to in the past, but they are killing us nevertheless.”

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The British Empire was actually based on enforcing full submission and obedience on its local subjects, in all corners of the world; it was based on fear and terror, on disinformation, propaganda, supremacist concepts, and on shameless collaboration of the local “elites”. “Law and order” was maintained by using torture and extra-judiciary executions, “divide and rule” strategies, and by building countless prisons and concentration camps.

The British Empire was above the law. All rights to punish “locals” were reserved. But British citizens were almost never punished for their horrendous crimes committed in foreign lands.

When the Nazis grabbed power in Germany, they immediately began enjoying a dedicating following from the elites in the United Kingdom. It is because British colonialism and German Nazism were in essence not too different from each other.

Today’s Western Empire is clearly following its predecessor. Not much has changed. Technology improved, that is about all.

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Standing at the monument of colonial carnage in Punjab, I recalled dozens of horrific crimes of the British Empire, committed all over the world:

I thought about those concentration camps in Africa, and about the stations where slaves who were first hunted down like animals were shackled and beaten, then put on boats and forced to undergo voyages to the “new world” that most of them never managed to survive. I thought about murder, torture, flogging, raping women and men, destruction of entire countries, tribes and families.

In Kenya, I was shown a British prison for resistance cadres, which was surrounded by wilderness and dangerous animals. This is where the leaders of local rebellions were jailed, tortured and exterminated.

In Uganda, I was told stories about how British colonizers used to humiliate local people and break their pride: in the villages, they would hunt down the tallest and the strongest man; they would shackled him, beat him up, and then the British officer would rape him, sodomize him in public, so there would be no doubts left of who was in charge.

In the Middle East, people still remember those savage chemical bombings of the “locals”, the extermination of entire tribes. Winston Churchill made it clear, on several occasions: “I do not understand the squeamishness about the use of gas,” he told the House of Commons during an address in the autumn of 1937. “I am strongly in favour of using poisonous gas against uncivilised tribes.”

In Malaya, as the Japanese were approaching, British soldiers were chaining locals to the cannons, forcing them to
Wherever the British Empire, or any other European empire, grabbed control over the territory – in Africa, Caribbean, the Middle East, Asia, in Sub-Continent, Oceania – horror and brutality reigned.

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Now, Punjab is divided, because that old “divide and rule” scheme was applied here meticulously, as it was almost everywhere at the Sub-Continent. 

The British never really left: they live in the minds of Indian elites. 

Punjab suffered terribly during the Partition, and later, too, from brutality of the Indian state. In fact, almost entire India is now suffering, unable to shake off those racist, religious and social prejudices. 

Delhi behaves like a colonialist master in Kashmir (where it is committing one of the most brutal genocides on earth), the Northeast and in several other areas. Indian elites are as ruthless and barbaric as were the British colonizers; the power system remained almost intact.

The Brits triggered countless famines all over India, killing dozens of millions. To them, Indian people were not humans. When Churchill was begged to send food to Bengal that was ravished by famine in 1943, he replied that it was their own fault for “breeding like rabbits” and that the plague was “merrily” culling the population. At least 3 million died.

It goes without saying that the Indian elites, disciples and admirers of British Raj, are treating its people with similar spite.

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Only 30 kilometers from Amritsar, one of the most grotesque events on earth takes place: “Lowering of the Flag” on the Indian/Pakistani border. Here, what is often described as the perfectly choreographed expression of hate, takes place in front of thousands of visitors from both countries.

Wagah Border has even tribunes built to accommodate aggressive spectators. It is everyday:

“Death to Pakistan! ⚡Long Live India!”

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“Hindustaaaaaaaaa Zindabad!!!!!!” They shout here, “Long Live India”, and those endless spasms are immediately followed by barks glorifying India and insulting Pakistan.

Border guards, male and female, are then performing short marches, at a tremendously aggressive and fast pace, towards the border gate. The public, sick from the murderous heat and the fascist, nationalist idiocy, speeches and shouts, is roaring.

The seeds sown by the British Raj have been inherited by several successive states of the Sub-Continent. They are now growing into a tremendous toxic and murderous insanity. Instead of turning against the murderous elites, the poor majority is yelling nationalist slogans.

Everything here is deeply connected: the colonial torture, the post-colonial genocides, the prostitution of the local elites, who are selling themselves to the rulers of the world, the over-militarization, the institutionalized spite for the poor and for the lower castes and classes.

Confusion is omnipresent. Words and terminology have lost their meanings. Dust, injustice, pain and insecurity are everywhere.

Anyone who claims that colonialism is dead is either a liar or a madman.

And if this – the direct result of colonialism - is “democracy”, then we should all, immediately, take a bus in the opposite direction!

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