

Letter to Lord Chelmsford Rejecting Knighthood Summary

Writer: Rabindranath Tagore | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

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Expression of the Helplessness of Indians: Following the formal style of a letter, Tagore begins by expressing his respect and gratitude to Lord Chelmsford. Then he states that the brutality shown by the British Government in suppressing certain local disturbances has deeply pained him. These actions have revealed the helpless condition of Indians as British subjects. Tagore declares that, except for a few isolated cases in history, no civilized government has ever taken such disgraceful and inhuman measures.

Reference to the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre: Next, Rabindranath Tagore refers to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. He writes that unarmed and innocent people were mercilessly killed by British soldiers. He calls this act completely immoral and unjustifiable. Such cruelty, he asserts, cannot be defended under any political explanation.

Spread of Anti-British Sentiment: Tagore then says that the brutal killing of innocent people in Amritsar, Punjab, has created anger and hatred in the hearts of Indians throughout the country. The people are filled with grief and indignation. Yet, the ruling authorities have offered no explanation, no regret, and no justice. Perhaps they even imagine that their cruelty was a necessary or righteous act.

Criticism of the British Press: Tagore strongly criticizes several British newspapers of the time. These papers mocked the massacre and made light of the suffering of the Indian people. The government, he notes, remained silent about this. The Anglo-Indian press showed no sympathy or moral concern for the victims. Instead, they tried to silence every cry for justice and every voice raised against this barbarity.

Understanding the Attitude of British Rulers: Tagore writes that he has now understood the true attitude of the British rulers. The government has become blinded by vengeance and pride. Therefore, any appeal for justice is useless. The British authorities have shown neither compassion nor remorse for their actions.

Renunciation of the Knighthood: Since the government gave no response to the pain of Indians, Tagore decides to act on behalf of the silent millions who suffer in fear and humiliation. He believes that accepting honor from such a cruel and unjust government is not a matter of pride but of shame. Therefore, he asks to be relieved of the Knighthood title bestowed on him by the British Crown. Through this act, Tagore stands beside his suffering countrymen, transforming personal honor into a national moral protest.

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