



100 Years of Rowlatt Satyagraha

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April 2019 marks the **100 years anniversary of Rowlatt Satyagraha** which was started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1919.

Rowlatt Satyagraha was in response to the **British government enacting the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919, popularly known as the Rowlatt Act**. Gandhiji called for a countrywide campaign against the Rowlatt Act.

Rowlatt Act

- This act was passed on the **recommendations of Sedition Committee chaired by Sir Sidney Rowlatt**.
- This act had been **hurriedly passed** in the Imperial Legislative Council **despite the united opposition of the Indian members**.
- It gave the government **enormous powers to repress political activities** and allowed **detention of political prisoners without trial for two years**.

Impact Of World War I On India

Response to Gandhi's Call

- Mahatma Gandhi **wanted non-violent civil disobedience against such unjust laws**, which would start with a **hartal on 6 April 1919**.
- But before it could be launched, **there were large-scale violent, anti-British demonstrations in Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Ahmedabad, etc.** '
- Especially **in Punjab, the situation became explosive due to wartime repression, forcible recruitments, and ravages of disease**.
- In towns across North and West India, life came to a standstill, as shops shut down and schools closed in response to the bandh call.
- **During the intense anti-British demonstrations, Punjab also witnessed the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre.**

Jallianwala Bagh Massacre



- **On April 9, 1919, two nationalist leaders, Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal, were arrested by the British officials** without any provocation except that they had addressed protest meetings, and taken to some unknown destination.
- **This caused resentment among the Indian protestors** who came out in thousands on April 10 to show their solidarity with their leaders.
- Soon the protests turned violent because the police resorted to firing in which some of the protestors were killed. **To curb any future protest government put martial law in place and law and order in Punjab was handed over to Brigadier-General Dyer.**
- **On 13th April, Baisakhi day, a large crowd of people mostly from neighboring villages, unaware of the prohibitory orders in the Amritsar gathered in the Jallianwala Bagh.**
- **Brigadier- General Dyer arrived on the scene with his men. The troops**

surrounded the gathering under orders from General Dyer and blocked the only exit point and opened fire on the unarmed crowd killing more than 1000 unarmed men, women, and children.

Hunter Commission

- The government formed a committee of inquiry to investigate the Jallianwala Bagh shootings.
- **On October 14, 1919**, the Government of India announced the formation of the **Disorders Inquiry Committee**.
- The committee was **commonly known as Hunter Commission** after the name of chairman, Lord William Hunter. It also had Indian members.
- In the final report submitted in March 1920, **the committee unanimously condemned Dyer's actions**.
- **However, the Hunter Committee did not impose any penal or disciplinary action against General Dyer.**

Nationalist Response

- **Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest.**
- **Mahatma Gandhi gave up the title of Kaiser-i-Hind**, bestowed by the British for his work during the **Boer War**.
- **Gandhi was overwhelmed by the atmosphere of total violence and withdrew the movement on April 18, 1919.**
- The Indian National Congress appointed its own non-official committee that included Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Abbas Tyabji, M.R. Jayakar, and Gandhi to look into the shootings.

Congress put forward its own view. This view criticized Dyer's act as inhuman and also said that there was no justification in the introduction of the martial law in Punjab.