



Racial Bias in Jallianwala Bagh Massacre Compensation

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Why in News?

The [Jallianwala Bagh massacre on 13th April 1919](#), remains one of the darkest chapters in India's colonial history. New research sheds light on the grossly racialised legal structure employed by the **British government in compensating those affected by the tragedy.**

What are the Key Highlights of the Research?

- **Racial Bias in Compensation:**
 - **The British government's compensation favoured Europeans over Indians.**
 - Europeans received payments valued at **600 times more than Indians.**
 - The British government placed a significantly higher value on European claims, allocating over **Rs. 523,000 in compensation to Europeans**, with individual payments ranging from Rs. 300,000 to Rs. 30,000.
 - Discriminatory compensation reflects **racial prejudice and lack of value for Indian lives.**
- **Legal Proceedings:**
 - **Punjab Disturbances Committee** divided along racial lines, justifying violence by British officers.
 - The committee's European members justified the violent tactics used by British officers in Punjab, while the Indian members disagreed.
 - Indian legislators demanded equal compensation and faced resistance from British officials.
- **Unfairness of Colonialism:**
 - Research strengthens demands for a formal apology from the British government. Calls for decolonisation of historical wrongs and recognition of imperial legacies.

What is the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre?

- **Prelude to the Massacre:**
 - The **Indian National Congress** expected self-governance after [World War I](#) but faced resistance from the Imperial bureaucracy.
 - The [Rowlatt Act, passed in 1919](#), authorised the government to arrest individuals associated with [seditious activities without trial](#), leading to nationwide unrest.
 - Arrests of nationalist leaders **Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal** on 9th April 1919, sparked widespread protests in Punjab.
- **The Massacre:** The Jallianwala Bagh massacre unfolded amid heightened tensions caused by the **oppressive Rowlatt Act** and widespread protests in Punjab.
 - Fearing a rebellion similar to the [1857 revolt](#), the British administration responded with severe repression.
 - **Brigadier-General Dyer's** actions (troops opened fire indiscriminately, killing innocent people and injuring many) on 13th April 1919, escalated the situation, resulting in the massacre during a peaceful protest against the **Rowlatt Act, 1919**

resulting in the deaths of hundreds of innocent protestors.

- Dyer, however, issued a proclamation on 13th April (which was also Baisakhi), forbidding people from leaving the city without a pass and from organising demonstrations.

- **Hunter Commission:** The Hunter Commission, officially known as the "**Punjab Disturbances Inquiry Committee**," was appointed by the British government in response to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.
 - The commission's report criticised Dyer's decision to open fire on unarmed civilians and highlighted the disproportionate use of force.
 - The findings of the Hunter Commission contributed to the condemnation of **Dyer's actions in India**.
 - Before the Committee began its proceedings, the **government had passed an Indemnity Act for the protection of its officers**.
 - The commission's report led to **Dyer's removal from his command** and his subsequent retirement from the military.
- **Aftermath and Significance:** The Jallianwala Bagh massacre became a pivotal moment in India's struggle for independence, catalysing **Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22)**.
 - **Rabindranath Tagore** renounced his **knighthood** in protest against the incident.
 - In 1940, at Caxton Hall in London, Indian freedom fighter **Udham Singh** assassinated **Michael O'Dwyer**, who had approved of Dyer's actions.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. During the Indian Freedom Struggle, why did Rowlatt Act arouse popular indignation? (2009)

- (a) It curtailed the freedom of religion
- (b) It suppressed the Indian traditional education
- (c) It authorized the government to imprison people without trial
- (d) It curbed the trade union activities

Ans: (c)