



Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

For Prelims: [Jallianwala Bagh Massacre](#), [Rowlatt Act 1919](#), [World War I \(1914-18\)](#), [Non Cooperation Movement \(1920-22\)](#), [Hunter Commission](#).

For Mains: Non Cooperation Movement (1920-22), History of India's struggle

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Why in News?

The **Prime Minister of India** paid tribute to the victims of the [Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919](#) and honored **Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair**, the nationalist jurist who fought a **landmark legal battle against a British official** responsible for the massacre.

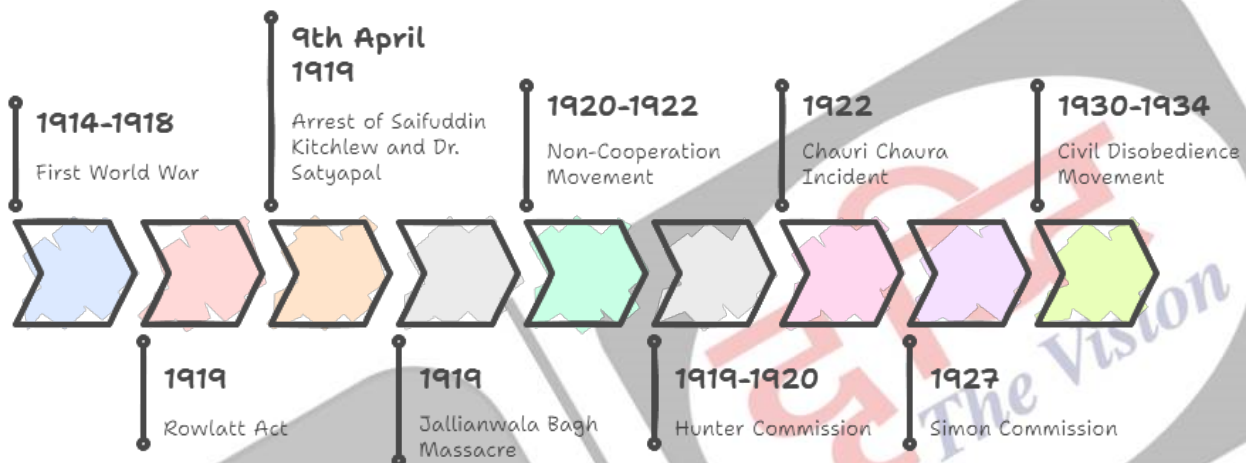
What was the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre?

- **About:** The **Jallianwala Bagh massacre** occurred on **13th April 1919**, when hundreds of innocent Indians were killed by troops of the **British Indian Army**, mostly Gurkhas, on orders of **Brigadier-General REH Dyer**.
 - The people had assembled peacefully to protest against the [Rowlatt Act of 1919](#).
 - Jallianwala Bagh is a historic garden and memorial near the **Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab**.
- **Background:** [Mahatma Gandhi](#) had called for a **non-violent satyagraha (first mass strike)**, against the Rowlatt Act starting with a **hartal on 6th April 1919**.
 - In Punjab, on **9th April**, nationalist leaders **Dr. Satyapal and Saifuddin Kitchlew** were arrested without reason and taken to an unknown place.
 - This led to widespread anger, and on **10th April**, thousands of Indians came out in protest. In response, the British imposed **martial law**, giving full authority to Brigadier-General Dyer.
- **Day of the Incident:** On **13th April**, which was **Baisakhi**, a large number of villagers unaware of the restrictions gathered at **Jallianwala Bagh**.
 - Dyer reached the spot with troops, blocked the only exit, and ordered firing on the unarmed crowd. Over **1,000 men, women, and children were killed**.
- **Aftermath:** The **Jallianwala Bagh Massacre** marked a turning point in India's freedom struggle, deeply shaking public faith in British rule.
 - It became a **key reason for Mahatma Gandhi to launch the [Non-Cooperation Movement \(NCM\) \(1920-22\)](#)**, along with other factors such as the **Khilafat issue**, the **growing demand for Swaraj**, and the hardships caused by **World War I**.
 - Gandhiji gave up the title of **Kaiser-i-Hind** and [Rabindranath Tagore](#) returned his **knighthood** in protest.
 - Gandhi, disturbed by the **widespread violence withdrew the movement on 18th April 1919**.
 - The British Government set up the [Hunter Commission \(1919\)](#) to investigate

the **Jallianwala Bagh massacre** and, in its **1920 report**, it unanimously condemned **General Dyer's actions**. However, it did not recommend any **penal or disciplinary action** against him.

- **Congress formed a non-official committee**, comprising Motilal Nehru, Gandhi, and others, to investigate the incident, **condemning Dyer's actions as inhuman and criticizing the imposition of martial law** in Punjab as unjustifiable.
- **Udham Singh**, originally **Ram Mohammad Singh Azad**, **assassinated Michael O'Dwyer**, the Lieutenant Governor responsible for the **1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre**.
 - He was **hanged in 1940**, and his ashes were returned to India in 1974.

Key Events in India's Struggle for Independence (1914-1930)



What was the Rowlatt Act 1919?

- The **Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, 1919 (also known as Rowlatt Act of 1919)** was a **repressive legislation** enacted by the British government of India during **World War I (1914-1918)** to **curb anti-colonial activities**.
 - The Act was introduced based on the recommendations of the **Sedition Committee**, chaired by **Sir Sidney Rowlatt**.
- It effectively **replaced the Defence of India Act (1915)** enacted during the **First World War** with a permanent law, re-imposing **restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly** in India.
- It allowed **strict control over the press** and granted the government **extensive powers to suppress political dissent** and enabled the **detention of individuals without trial for up to 2 years**.
 - It enabled the **arrest of individuals on mere suspicion of 'treason,'** with trials conducted in secrecy and without legal assistance.
 - A special **panel of 3 high court judges** was designated to try such suspects, with **no higher court of appeal**.
 - This panel could **accept evidence not admissible under the Indian Evidence Act**, and the law of **habeas corpus** was **suspended**, undermining civil liberties.
 - This legislation **further intensified the colonial repression in India** and played a significant role in fueling the national movement for independence.

Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair

- **About:** He was a prominent **Indian nationalist, lawyer, and social reformer** born in **1857** in **Kerala**.
- **Career & Contribution:**
 - He served as a **judge in the Madras High Court** and became the **youngest President of the Indian National Congress in 1897**.
 - As a progressive jurist, **he delivered landmark judgments** like ***Budasna v. Fatima (1914)***, upholding **inter-caste and inter-faith marriages** and **opposing caste-based discrimination**.
 - He was appointed to the **Viceroy's Executive Council** and contributed to the **Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919)**, which allowed more Indian participation in governance.
- **Role in Jallianwala Bagh Case:** Nair strongly **opposed the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (1919)** and **resigned from the Viceroy's Executive Council** in protest.
 - In his book ***Gandhi and Anarchy (1922)***, he held **Michael O'Dwyer responsible for the massacre**, leading to a **defamation suit in a London court**.
 - Though the **jury ruled 11-1 in O'Dwyer's favour**, **Nair's refusal to apologise** made the **trial a symbol of British bias and injustice**, highlighting colonial repression and **strengthening nationalist sentiments**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the role of Mahatma Gandhi in India's freedom movement. How did his principles and strategies transform the nature and direction of the struggle for independence?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

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)

Q 2. Who among the following is associated with 'Songs from Prison', a translation of ancient Indian religious lyrics in English? (2021)

- (a) Bal Gangadhar Tilak
- (b) Jawaharlal Nehru
- (c) Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
- (d) Sarojini Naidu

Ans: (c)

Q3. With reference to the British colonial rule in India, consider the following statements: (2019)

1. Mahatma Gandhi was instrumental in the abolition of the system of 'indentured labour'.
2. In Lord Chelmsford's 'War Conference', Mahatma Gandhi did not support the resolution on recruiting Indians for World War.
3. Consequent upon the breaking of Salt Law by Indian people, the Indian National Congress was declared illegal by the colonial rulers.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q1. Bring out the constructive programmes of Mahatma Gandhi during Non-Cooperation Movement and Civil Disobedience Movement. (2021)

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