

## 6. Remembering Jallianwala Bagh

**Prelims Syllabus:** History – Modern India

**Mains Syllabus:** GS-I The Freedom Struggle - its various stages and important contributors /contributions from different parts of the country.

### Why in News?

- The Prime Minister of India had paid tributes to the martyrs of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre on the day of commemorating 101 years of the incident.
- Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, also called Massacre of Amritsar was an incident on April 13, 1919, in which British troops fired on a large crowd of unarmed Indians in an open space known as the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in Punjab.

### Background Info:

- By the end of WW-II, expectations were high among the Indian populace that those measures would be eased and that India would be given more political autonomy.
- The Montagu-Chelmsford Report, presented to the British Parliament in 1918, did in fact recommend limited local self-government.
- But the British government of India enacted a series of repressive emergency powers that were intended to combat subversive activities.
- Further, the then government of India passed what became known as the Rowlatt Acts in early 1919, which essentially extended the repressive wartime measures.
- The acts were met by widespread anger and discontent among Indians, notably in the Punjab region. Gandhi in early April called for a one-day general strike (**Rowlatt Satyagraha**) throughout the country.
- In Amritsar the news that prominent Indian leaders (**Satya Pal and Saifuddin Kitchlew**) had been arrested and banished from that city sparked violent protests on April 10, in which soldiers fired upon civilians and angry mobs killed several foreign nationals. A force of several dozen troops commanded by Brig. Gen. Reginald Edward Harry Dyer was given the task of restoring order. Among the measures taken was a ban on public Gatherings.

### On the day of the Massacre:

- On the afternoon April 13, a crowd of at least 10,000 men, women, and children gathered in the Jallianwala Bagh, which was nearly completely enclosed by walls and had only one exit.

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- It is not clear how many people there were protesters who were defying the ban on public meetings and how many had come to the city from the surrounding region **to celebrate Baisakhi**, a spring festival.
  - Dyer and his soldiers arrived and sealed off the exit. Without warning, the troops opened fire on the crowd, reportedly shooting hundreds of rounds until they ran out of ammunition.
  - It killed several hundred people and wounded many hundreds more. It marked a turning point in India's modern history, in that it left a permanent scar on Indo-British relations and was the precursor to Mahatma Gandhi's full commitment to the cause of Indian nationalism and independence from Britain.

#### **Reaction of Indians:**

- Gandhi soon began organizing his first large-scale and sustained nonviolent protest (satyagraha) campaign, the Non Cooperation Movement (1920–22).
- The then government of India ordered an investigation of the incident (the Hunter Commission), which in 1920 censured Dyer for his actions and ordered him to resign from the military.
- The Bengali poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore renounced the knighthood that he had received in 1915.