

On the 18th of March 1919, The Rowlatt Act was passed. This allowed police to be able to arrest any person they wanted without needing to have any type of reason for it. Because of this, Gandhi called for a hartal of having every person close their shops and businesses and spend the day fasting and praying instead. This hartal was scheduled to take place on the 6th of April and every single person in India was invited to participate. But the citizens in Delhi got the date wrong and ended up starting a week before the planned time. Some areas were successful and others were not. Gandhi had insisted on non-violence during the hartal, but unfortunately, the police still fired at large crowds in Delhi. On the 8th of April Gandhi was arrested while travelling to Delhi, though the British had hesitated to go through with his arrest as they were afraid that it would make him a martyr (a person who sacrifices something of great value for the sake of principle). But Gandhi's arrest caused protesting, as well as violent outbursts towards the police by the citizens.

On April 13th, about 5000 women, men and children had gathered in the enclosed space known as Jallianwala Bagh. Celebrating the Sikh festival of Vaisakhi, But also to protest against the Rowlatt act and the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and nationalist leaders Dr Saifuddin kitchew and Dr Satyapal. And not long later the only exit of Jallianwala bagh was blocked by military soldiers on command of General Dyer. And he ordered his soldiers to take rapid fire at the 5000 people in Jallianwala Bagh. They kept firing until they could no longer, resulting in 379 deaths and 1137 wounded. Now also known as the Amritsar Massacre.

Perspective 1:

Mahatma Gandhi was an Indian lawyer as well as an anti colonial nationalist and political ethicist. He inspired many non violent protests and actions across the world, and also Civil rights and freedom movements. He was a religious man and believed in Hinduism. Two of the rules of Hinduism were truth (satya) and non-violence (ahimsa). But Gandhi also believed that these two were at the heart of every religion. Because of his religious beliefs he deeply valued non-violence and peace, and believed that no good came from violence. "My bent is not political but religious and I take part in politics because I feel that there is no department of life which can be divorced from religion and because politics touch the vital being of India almost at every point". After World War I ended in 1918, Indians had expected more political freedoms because more than one million Indian soldiers had fought for the British war effort. However, instead of granting freedoms, the Montagu–Chelmsford Report (1918) suggested only limited self-government, and instead of easing restrictions, Britain imposed the Rowlatt Acts (1919), which extended wartime emergency powers into peacetime. Gandhi strongly opposed the Rowletts Act because he saw it as denying freedoms that every person deserved, such as the right to a fair trial, freedom of expression, and protection from wrongful imprisonment. The Act allowed the British to jail Indians without trial for up to two years, continue secret trials, and censor the press. It was summed up by the Indian population as "No Dalil, No Vakil, No Appeal!" (No argument, No lawyer, No appeal)" Gandhi believed this was deeply unjust, especially because the war had already ended and therefore these "wartime" measures were no longer justifiable. This felt like a loosely disguised attempt at further colonial oppression. This only strengthened the resolve among many, including

Gandhi that independence was needed. His reaction to the Rowlatt Act led to the first major nationwide Satyagraha, based on peaceful resistance. This was a significant moment in the evolution of Gandhi's political philosophy. He believed political injustice had to be resisted morally—through truth and nonviolence, not armed rebellion. The Rowlatt Act provided the moral trigger for him to launch his first national movement.

Gandhi thought that what happened at Jallianwala was an absolute travesty and that there was no reason for general Dyer to kill and wound so many innocent people. He took notice of the angry mobs and ordered them to go home and called off his hartal. "If satyagraha could not be carried out without violence, it would not be carried out at all ". In the wake of the massacre, Gandhi wrote that the British system itself—not just General Dyer—was responsible. This deepened his belief that the colonial structure was unjust. As a result, he concluded that only total non-cooperation with the British government would make them realise the injustice of their rule. He outlined this programme in print soon after the massacre, and by 1920 it became a full national movement. He called Indians to boycott British goods, institutions and told the citizens to resign if they worked government employed jobs. He told them to boycott government schools and courts. The reasons for this action is the desire for systemic change. He famously said "“We do not want to punish Dyer. We have no desire for revenge. We want to change the system that produced Dyer.” Gandhi also lead a silent march in protest of

the Amritsar massacre and urged the British government to grant India's independence. But because of Gandhi's strong religious beliefs, he forgave general Dyer for his actions, "Who could be more cruel or bloodthirsty than the late general Dyer? Yet the Jallianwala bagh congress inquiry committee on my advice, had refused to ask for his prosecution. I had no trace of ill will against him in my heart. I would have also liked to meet him personally and reach his heart, but that was to remain a mere aspiration." Gandhi's strong Hindu beliefs always had a great impact on his actions such as forgiving general Dyer, but he also knew that it would be wrong of him to simply forget what general Dyer did. "We may forgive Dyer a nd O'Dwyer for the jallianwala bagh massacre, but we cannot afford to forget it.

Reginald Dyer was an officer of the Bengal army and was later made part of the British Indian army, and made a General. General Dyer was a man who believed in imposing law and order to any extent, and he would do anything to make sure that laws were obeyed. Especially if they were part of the Indian or Muslim race. This is likely a hangover from the violent uprising of 1857 that left a deep psychological impact on British colonial authorities. With growing Indian nationalism, many British officers feared a repeat rebellion and believed that only harsh, decisive force could prevent another uprising. This attitude persisted into the early 20th century and heavily shaped Dyer's worldview. Authorities such as Dyer were increasingly fearful of mass political mobilisation, a fear that had been fueled by growing support for movements such as the Indian National Congress (1885) and the All India Muslim League (1906).

Added to this was the result of the Rowlatt Committee that was set up in December 1917, led by Justice Sidney Rowlatt. The aim of the committee was to conduct a report on anti-colonial revolutionary groups. The committee submitted its report in April 1918. One of its key recommendations was that wartime emergency powers be continued through new, harsher laws. This formed the basis of the Rowlett Act in 1919. Dyer's actions show he supported the

spirit of the Rowlett Act as he often spoke of those opposing the British rule and authority as “Rebels” who needed harsh controls and strong measures.

Because of the unrest, Punjab had been placed under martial law in early April 1919. Dyer believed that the gathering at Jallianwala Bagh on April 13 was a deliberate defiance of his orders prohibiting assemblies. On April 13th 1919, when Dyer arrived at Jallianwala Bagh he saw a man addressing at least what looked like to him, 5000 people. He ordered his soldiers to block the only exit of Jallianwala Bagh, and within ten seconds, he ordered his soldiers to rapid fire until he said stop. It didn't occur to him that many people in the big crowd would not have known of the proclamation happening, or that there were innocent people. He made the order to fire at the crowd because he had felt that the martial law had not been obeyed and that he thought it was his responsibility to disperse the crowd by any means necessary. His actions resulted in 379 murdered, and 1137 wounded. But General Dyer knew that there would've been other ways to disperse the crowd without using their guns. “I think it is quite possible I could have dispersed the crowd without firing, but they would have come back again and laughed, and I should have made what I considered to be a fool of myself. I looked upon the crowd as rebels, and I considered it my duty to fire, and fire well”. His reasons for the actions, as he himself declares in the Hunter Committee inquiries was to produce “sufficient moral effect” and to “teach a lesson” to the population so that they would not protest again. Another reason Dyer likely took this action as he feared the way in which Indians were increasingly working together. This was a trend that displeased the British.

After the massacre, there were many people who praised general Dyer for his actions mostly by people back in England, but also many who were not on Dyer's side. The praise would have resulted in General Dyer truly believing that he was in the right for imposing martial law on the Indians at Jallianwala Bagh. And he had no shame in his actions as shown in the quote above that he said after the incident. His actions were very much impacted by his racial bias towards Indians, which wasn't unusual for the British back then.