

UNIT 23 – UPSC - Jallianwalla Baug Massacre

India's History : Modern India : Rowlatt Act evokes protests, Jalianwalla Bagh massacre : 1919

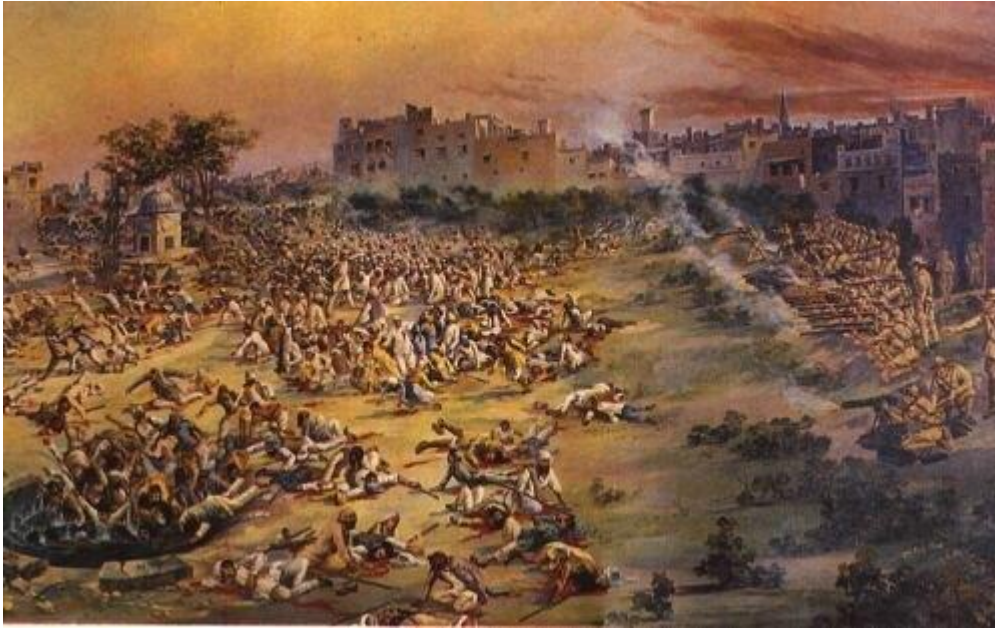
The Protest

As the Defence of India Act was to expire six months after the conclusion of the war, a new set of emergency measures for the detention and containment of 'terrorists' to meet what was termed the 'continuing threat' were planned by the Government of India. These measures were incorporated within the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, known to Indians as the Rowlatt Act after the name of the chairman of the committee that recommended the institution of this legislation. The government could not have known that the Rowlatt Act would become the occasion for the most widespread movement of opposition to British rule since the Rebellion of 1857-58 and indeed the springboard from which the movement for independence would be launched until India was to become irretrievably lost to the British. The Rowlatt Act provided for the trial of seditious crime by benches of three judges; the accused were not to have the benefit of either preliminary commitment proceedings or the right of appeal, and the rules under which evidence could be obtained and used were relaxed. Other preventive measures included detention without the levying of charges and searches without warrants. As the Rowlatt committee noted in its report, "punishment or acquittal should be speedy both in order to secure the moral effect which punishment should produce and also to prevent the prolongation of the excitement which the proceedings may set up."

The history of anti-terrorist legislation in colonial India by no means ends with the Rowlatt Act, but such of it as is here narrated suggests that much in the present legislation had already been anticipated.



Jallianwala Bagh Massacre



Jallianwala Bagh massacre of April 13, 1919 was one of the most inhuman acts of the British rulers in India. The people of Punjab have gathered on the auspicious day of Baisakhi at Jallianwala Bagh, adjacent to Golden Temple (Amritsar), to lodge their protest peacefully against persecution by the British Indian Government. General Dwyer appeared suddenly with his armed police force and fired indiscriminately at innocent empty handed people leaving hundreds of people dead, including women and children. General Dwyer, the butcher of Jallianwala Bagh, was later murdered by Udham Singh to avenge this barbaric act.

