

Background:

- The British government followed the policy “**Carrot and Stick**” in India. On one hand, they took constitutional reforms to appease Indians and on the other hand, they severely repressed those who demanded more autonomy/independence.
- They introduced the **Montagu Chelmsford Reforms** in 1919 to appease the moderate nationalists and others who believed in constitutional forms of struggle.
- It increased the representation of Indians in the Provincial and Central Legislative Councils and extended separate electorate to Sikhs and Europeans.
- To quell any violence against this constitutional development, the British introduced the **Rowlatt Act**.
- The act had provisions for detention without trial before a court of law, thereby effectively suspending the right of “*habeas corpus*” which form the bulwark of civil liberties.

Rowlatt Satyagraha:

- Gandhiji considered this as an opportune to start a national movement against the repressive rowlatt act. He believed that the masses were ready for a national level struggle against the colonial rulers which were till then largely confined to a few sections of the society.
- The movement was planned to be a complete non-violent struggle involving civil disobedience of certain laws, mass public hartals, etc.
- However, the importance of the principle of nonviolence was not completely understood by the masses and there were violent incidents in many pockets of the country.
- The situation was tense, particularly in Punjab, where the British conducted forcible recruitment to serve World War 1 and imposed martial law in many places.

Jallianwala Bagh massacre:

- On April 13, 1919, the day of Baisakhi festival, many peaceful protesters gathered in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, to protest against the arrest of two leaders- Saifuddin Kitchlew and Satyapal.
- General Reginald Dyer closed the only entrance to the park and ordered his troops to fire on unarmed protesters. More than 1000 people lost their lives in the tragic incident.
- This was followed by ripples around the world. Rabindranath Tagore renounced his *Knighthood* in protest of the incident. Gandhiji called off the Rowlatt satyagraha following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.
- This year, the country observed the centenary year of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the Rowlatt satyagraha.