

Archbishop of Canterbury's Gesture at Jallianwala Bagh

Why in news?

Archbishop of Canterbury apologized personally for the Jallianwala bagh massacre.

Who is Archbishop of Canterbury?

- Archbishop of Canterbury is the head of the Anglican Church of the world, commands a worldwide status.
- He also has a special place in Britain, a post granted by the Queen.
- He crowns the British monarch and holds a significant position in the hierarchy of the British state.
- Recently he visited Jallianwala Bagh, for the 100th year remembrance of the massacre.

What is Archbishop's gesture at Jallianwala Bagh?

- Archbishop of Canterbury lay down flat to pray in front of the memorial and said he was "personally very sorry".
- The Archbishop further added, "I have no status to apologize on behalf of the UK, its government or its history, But I am personally very sorry for this terrible atrocity."
- He said, "Coming here arouses a sense of profound shame at what happened in this place.
- In his statement on the Amritsar massacre, he said he was not speaking for his country, but the Anglican Church.
- As the senior most churchman in a Christian country, his words do matter.

What is UK's stand on its own imperial past and violence?

- It unresolved and controversial historical issue of colonial injustice and apology.
- So far the Queen of UK did not apologize, Prince Philip did not.
- Former British Prime Minister David Cameron on a visit to India in 2013 did not.
- The current British High Commissioner in 2019 did not, the list goes on and each time a British dignitary comes to Amritsar, it feels like scratching a scab on the wound.

- The shrieks of the victims of the massacre continue to hound the legacy of the British empire.
- They echo as haunting cries of a victimized generation of a community whose trauma has not been fully addressed.

What is impact of Jallianwala Bagh massacre on India?

- The Jallianwala Bagh massacre is one of the most horrific acts of violence in modern history.
- The impact of General Dyer's cold-blooded, rational shooting of hundreds of innocent lives, on April 13, 1919, with 1,650 gunshots continues to torment.
- It is not just confined to Punjab, the pain of the carnage forms the collective agony of entire India.
- Dyer's brutality was justified in the racial climate of those times, he was celebrated as a hero in certain British circles.

What lies ahead?

- In the light of the descendants of the victims appealing for an apology from the Archbishop to assuage their "hurt feelings against the British atrocities", the Archbishop's repentant gesture seeks to lend a healing touch to the echoes of the dead.
- The Archbishop did more than what anybody in his position could possibly do.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury's compassionate gesture is certainly a symbolic sign of reconciliation and empathy.
- The people of India demand that the British government takes the "historic step" towards tendering an apology.
- Is it not time for Britain to acknowledge the inconvenient truth and trauma of colonial and racial violence? Perhaps, the Archbishop's initiative marks a new beginning.

Source: The Hindu