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33.	गौधीयुगीन राष्ट्रवाद और मध्यप्रान्त की हिन्दी पत्रकारिता वर्ष 1921-22 के संदर्भ में डॉ. मधुबाला कुलश्रेष्ठ	149
34.	अंग्रेजों के अधीन प्रचलित भू-राजस्व प्रणालियों का आलोचनात्मक अध्ययन डॉ. शान्तिदेव सिन्हा	157
35.	1919 as a Threshold year for Mass Mobilization with Special Reference to Madhya Pradesh Dr. Sanjay Barolia	161
36.	Civil Disobedience Movement : Struggle Amidst Subjugation with Special Reference to Madhya Prant Dr. Naveen Gideon	165
37.	The Bundela Rebellion in British Rule Dr. Nilesh Sharma	171

1919 as a Threshold year for Mass Mobilization with Special Reference to Madhya Pradesh

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On November 11, 1918 the First World War in Europe came to an end. Even before this, the British rulers in India felt relieved and started paying more attention to the activities of the national leaders. Thinking that the Defence of India Act would lapse after the war, the government of India was already in search of some stringent measures to curb the activities of terrorists. The government appointed a Committee headed by a judge Sydney Rowlatt who ultimately drafted two separate bills known as Rowlatt bills. The provisions of these bills would curb the civil liberties of the Indian people who could be apprehended, kept in jail and sentenced even without the advice of jury.

These bills having obnoxious provisions were bound to arouse the countrywide nationalist sentiments. Gandhiji decided to oppose these and he made a declaration to this effect on February 9, 1919. Again on March 18, 1919 he issued a pledge that in the event of passage of the bill he would resort to non-violent Satyagraha at once. However, on March 21, 1919 the bills were passed. There was countrywide agitation against the passages of these bills. Gandhiji in consultation with a few other national leaders including sardar Vallabh bhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu and C. Rajagopalachari decided to launch agitation against the bills on April 6, 1919. However, in some parts of the country the agitation started even earlier for e. g. in Delhi it started on March 30, involving certain incidents of violence. But the satyagraha on April 6, 1919 was successfully launched. It was both assertive and useful.

The agitation against the Rowlatt bills had its impact in Madhya Pradesh region too. Having opposed vehemently the formation of Rowlatt Committee at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress (December 1917), Bal Gangadhar Tilak took an extensive tour of Madhya Pradesh. He was given a rousing welcome at Khandwa on February 6, 1918. Here he gave an impressive