

Topic 13

The Montague Chelmsford Reforms (Indian Council Act 1919)

In World War I, the British claimed that they stood for the protection of **democracy** around the world. Thus the Indians, who fought for them in this war, demanded that democracy should also be introduced in their country. **Lord Montague, the Secretary of State** for Indian Affairs said that in order to satisfy the local demands, his government was interested in giving more representation to the natives in India. New reforms would be introduced in the country to meet this objective. Finally, in cooperation with the **Governor General Lord Chelmsford**, Montague presented a report on the constitutional reforms for India in 1918. The report was discussed and approved by the British Parliament and then became the Act of 1919. This Act is commonly known as Montague-Chelmsford Reforms.

The following were the main features of the Act of 1919:

- The **Central Legislature** was to consist of *two houses*, **Upper House** (Council of the State), and the **Lower House** (Legislative Assembly). Council of the State was to consist of 60 members. The Legislative Assembly was to consist of 144 members. The duration of the Upper House was five and of the Lower House was three years.
- **Powers** were divided between the center and the provinces.
- The system of '**Diarchy**' or a kind of double government in the Provinces was introduced.
- The Governor General had the power to nominate as many members to his Executive Council as he wanted.
- The franchise was limited.
- Both the houses had equal legislative powers. In case of a tie, the Governor General was to call a joint meeting where the matter was to be decided by majority vote.
- The Executive Council was not responsible to Legislature.
- Provincial Legislatures were supposed to be unicameral.
- Besides Muslims, other minorities including Sikhs, Anglo-Indians, Christians and Europeans were also given the right of separate electorate.
- New reforms were to be introduced after ten years.
- The **Council** of the Secretary of State was to comprise of eight to twelve people. Three of them should be Indian.

INDIANS RESPONSE:

Indian Constitutional Act of 1919 was passed to satisfy Indian people. On the contrary, Indian people opposed it because the Act went against Congress-League pact thus resulting in the Hindu opposition. Muslims partly accepted the Montague-Chelmsford reforms with certain reservations and demands regarding the safety of Muslim states. Gandhi categorically rejected this scheme and congress denounced it **as inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing**. Besides these problems, the events like Rowlatt act, the Jallianwal Bagh tragedy and Khilafat movement further aggravated the situation and doomed the reforms to failure.

DIARCHY:

Diarchy was introduced as a constitutional reform by Edwin Samuel Montagu (secretary of state for India, 1917–22) and Lord Chelmsford (viceroy of India, 1916–21).

According to Diarchy the various fields or subjects of administration were divided between the British councillors and the Indian ministers, being named **reserved** and **transferred** subjects, respectively. The reserved subjects came under the heading of law and order and included justice, police, land revenue, and irrigation. The transferred subjects (i.e., those under the control of Indian ministers) included local self-government, education, public health, public works, and agriculture, forests, and fisheries. The system ended with the introduction of provincial autonomy in 1935.

AMRITSAR MASSACRE 1919:

Massacre of Amritsar, (April 13, 1919), incident in which British troops fired on a crowd of unarmed Indian protesters, killing a large number. It left a permanent scar on Indo-British relations.

In 1919 the British government of India enacted the Rowlett Acts, extending its World War I emergency powers to combat revolutionary activities. At Amritsar in Punjab, about 10,000 demonstrators unlawfully protesting these measures confronted troops commanded by Gen. **Dyer** in an open space known as the **Jallianwalla Bagh**, which had only one exit. (The site is now a national monument.) The troops fired on the crowd, killing an estimated 379 and wounding about 1,200 according to one official report. The **Hunter Commission** condemned General Dyer in 1920, but the House of Lords praised his action, and a fund was raised in his honour.

Q.No.1: Towards the end of the First World War the British decided that firm action was needed to keep a grip on India, especially with the threat of renewed violence. During the war the British had the Defence of India Act to help keep order. Once this Act had expired the Rowlatt Act was introduced.

Describe the Rowlatt Act. 4
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Q.No.2: The Montague-Chelmsford reforms were more important than any other political developments between 1909 and 1919.' Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer. 14
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