

Topic 16

THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCES 1930-1932

There had been a series of meetings in three sessions called by the British government to consider the future constitution of India in 1930 to 1932. The conference resulted from a review of the Government of India Act of 1919, undertaken in 1927 by the Simon Commission, whose report was published in 1929. The conferences were held in London.

The Indian political community received the Simon Commission Report with great resentment. Different political parties gave vent to their feelings in different ways.

The Congress started a Civil Disobedience Movement (salt March) under Gandhi's command. The Muslims reserved their opinion on the Simon Report declaring that the report was not final and the matters should be decided after consultations with the leaders representing all communities in India.

The Indian political situation seemed deadlocked. The British government refused to contemplate any form of self-government for the people of India. This caused frustration amongst the masses, who often expressed their anger in violent clashes.

The **Labor Government** returned to power in Britain, and a glimmer of hope ran through Indian hearts. Labor leaders had always been sympathetic to the Indian cause. The government decided to hold a Round Table Conference in London to consider new constitutional reforms. All Indian politicians; Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians were summoned to London for the conference.

First Round Table Conference

The first session of the conference opened in London on November 12, 1930. The Round Table Conference was opened officially by **King George V** and chaired by the British Prime Minister, **Ramsay MacDonald**. The three British political parties were represented by sixteen delegates. All parties from India were present except for the Congress, whose leaders were in jail due to the Civil Disobedience Movement. Congress leaders stated that they would have nothing to do with further constitutional discussion unless the Nehru Report was enforced in its entirety as the constitution of India. Almost **89** members attended the conference, out of which 58 were chosen from various communities and interests in British India, and the rest from princely states and other political parties. The prominent among the Muslim delegates invited by the British government were Sir Aga Khan, Quaid-i-Azam, Maulana Muhammad Ali Jouhar, Sir Muhammad Shafi and Maulvi Fazl-i-Haq. Sir Taj Bahadur Sapru, Mr. Jaikar and Dr. Moonje were outstanding amongst the Hindu leaders.

It was agreed that **federal system** of government shall be adopted in India, & responsible & representative governments will be set up in provinces. This was a great achievement because the congress had suggested 'Unitary Form' of

government in Nehru report. Full responsible & representative government in provinces was a good step forward for self-rule. (Secondly) the princely states also agreed to join the federation, several committees were formed to discuss different issues. The Muslims also demanded maintenance of weightage and **separate electorates**, the Hindus their abolition.

Eight subcommittees were set up to deal with the details. These committees dealt with the federal structure, provincial constitution, franchise, Sindh, the North West Frontier Province, defense services and minorities.

The conference broke up on **January 19, 1931**, and what emerged from it was a general agreement to write safeguards for minorities into the constitution and a desire to devise a **federal system** for the country. B. R. Ambedkar also demanded a separate electorate for the Untouchables.

Second Round Table Conference

The second RTC was held from *September to December 1931*. Mr. Gandhi attended as the only representative of the congress. Mr. Gandhi claimed that the Congress represented the whole of India & that there was no minority problem in the country. Muslim & other minority leaders didn't agree. Therefore, on account of Mr. Gandhi's stubborn & unfair attitude the conference couldn't achieve much but its success was that it was declared that Orissa, Sind & NWFP will be given full provincial status with governors. The minorities issue remained unresolved.

Gandhi also demanded the enforcement of **Nehru Report**, but all the minorities rejected it. During the Conference, Gandhi could not reach agreement with the Muslims on Muslim representation and safeguards. At the end of the conference Ramsay MacDonald undertook to produce a **Communal Award** for minority representation,.

Gandhi was not ready to give right of separate electorates to untouchables. He clashed with the Untouchable leader, B. R. Ambedkar, over this issue: the two eventually resolved the situation with the **Poona Pact of 1932**.

Third Round Table Conference

The third session began *on November 17, 1932*. It was short and unimportant. Only forty-six delegates attended since most of the main political figures of India were not present (included Jinnah). The Congress was once again absent, so was the Labor opposition in the British Parliament. Reports of the various committees were scrutinized. The conference ended on December 25, 1932.

The recommendations of the Round Table Conferences were included in a **White Paper**. It was published in March 1933, and debated in parliament directly afterwards, after the final reading and assent, the bill reached the Statute Book on July 24, 1935.

In this conference, **Chaudhary Rahmat Ali**, a college student, coined the name "**Pakistan**" (which means "land of pureness") as the name for the Muslim part of partitioned India. He took the "P" from Punjab, the "A" from the Afghan, the "KI"

from Kashmir, the "S" from Sindh and the "TAN" from Balochistan.

SALT MARCH:

The Salt March, which took place from March to April 1930 in India, was an act of civil disobedience led by Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) to protest British rule in India. During the march, thousands of Indians followed Gandhi from his religious retreat near Ahmedabad to the Arabian Sea coast, a distance of some 240 miles. The march resulted in the arrest of nearly 60,000 people, including Gandhi himself.

GANDHI-IRWIN PACT:

Gandhi-Irwin Pact was an agreement signed on March 5, 1931, between Gandhi, and Lord Irwin British viceroy (1926–31) of India. It marked the end of a period of civil disobedience (*satyagraha*) in India against British rule that Gandhi and his followers had initiated with the Salt March (March–April 1930). Gandhi's arrest and imprisonment at the end of the march, for illegally making salt, sparked one of his more effective civil disobedience movements. By the end of 1930, tens of thousands of Indians were in jail (including future Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru), the movement had generated worldwide publicity, and Irwin was looking for a way to end it. Gandhi was released from custody in January 1931, and the two men began negotiating the terms of the pact. In the end, Gandhi pledged to give up the **satyagraha** campaign, and Irwin agreed to release those who had been imprisoned during it and to allow Indians to make salt for domestic use. Later that year Gandhi attended the second session (September–December) of the Round Table Conference in London.

COMMUNAL AWARD:

As a result of the Second Round Table Conference, in August 1932, the then Prime Minister of Britain Ramsay Macdonald gave his 'award' known as the Communal Award. According to it, **separate representation** was to be provided for the Lower Caste, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians. The Untouchables were assigned a number of seats to be filled by election from special constituencies in which voters belonging to the Untouchables only could vote.

The Award was highly controversial and opposed by Mahatma Gandhi, and fasted in protest against it. Communal Award was supported by many among the minority communities, most notably the Untouchable leader, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. After lengthy negotiations, Gandhi reached an agreement with Dr. Ambedkar to have a single Hindu electorate, with Untouchables having seats reserved within it. This is called the **Poona Pact**. Electorates for other religions like Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans remained separate.

Expected Questions & Answers

Question No. 1: why was the 2nd RTC of 1931 unsuccessful?
7 June 2000 Q.3 b

Question No. 2: The RTC of the 1930s achieved little. Give reasons why you might both agree & disagree with this statement.
14 Nov.2000 Q.3 c

Question No.3: why were the RTC held between 1930 & 1932?
7 Nov. 2001 Q.4 b

Question No. 4: how successful were the RTC of 1930-1932? Explain your answer
14 June 2005 Q.3 c

Question No. 5: the RTC of 1930 achieved more than those of 1931 & 1932. Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer.
14 June 2007 Q.3 c

Question No.6: was it necessary to hold three RTC (1930-32)?
7 June 2008 Q.3 b

Question No.7: why was the 2nd RTC of 1931 unsuccessful?
7 Nov 2009 Q.3 a

Question No.8: The First RTC of 1930 was the most successful one of all three. Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer.
14 June 2010 Q.3 c

Question No.9: Why were the three Round Table Conferences held between 1930 and 1932?
Nov. 2011 Q.3 b

Question No.10: Was anything achieved by the Round Table Conferences of 1930 to 1932? Explain your answer.
14 June 2013 Q. 3 c

Question No.11: Why were three Round Table Conferences held between 1930 and 1932?
7 June 2014 Q.3 b

Answer to question No.4 & 10:

The round table conferences were successful to some extent because the recommendations were ultimately included in the government of India act 1935. The RTCs were held in London. The purpose was to consider the report of Simon Commission & suggest such reforms to solve the constitutional problem of India which could satisfy all people in the country. These conferences were held in London in 1930, 1931 & 1932 & all important leaders of different political parties & princes of states were invited to attend the conferences. On the whole, the Conferences were not very successful because the constitutional problem of India was not resolved but only few recommendations were acknowledged.

The first RTC held in *November 1930*, was not attended by the Congress leaders because they had put strong conditions for participating in the conference & were in jail on account of launching non-cooperation movement. However, it was agreed that federal system of government shall be adopted in India, & responsible & representative governments will be set up in provinces. This was a great achievement because the congress had suggested 'Unitary Form' of government in Nehru report. Full responsible & representative government in provinces was a good step forward for self rule. (Secondly) the princely states also agreed to join the federation, several committees were formed to discuss different issues.

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whole of India & that there was no minority problem in the country. Muslim & other minority leaders didn't agree. Therefore, on account of Mr. Gandhi's stubborn & unfair attitude the conference couldn't achieve much but its success was that it was declared that Orissa, Sind & NWFP will be given full provincial status with governors. The minorities issue remained unresolved.

The third RTC was held in *November 1932*. It was again not attended by the Congress. Mr. Jinnah also did not attend. This conference proved to be a formality. It broke up without achieving or agreeing to any thing of substance.

The RTCs were not successful because they failed to solve the constitutional problem of India. Congress was not satisfied because the dominion status or self rule was not granted as was promised by the Viceroy in 1930. Problem of minorities was not resolved which left the Muslims dissatisfied. Low caste Hindus also demanded separate electorate & proper representation. The new government of Britain & the new Viceroy were not in favor of giving concession to India. By and large the conferences failed to achieve anything of importance. But the conferences were successful in the sense that some important decisions were taken .for example federal system of government for India, representative government in provinces, separation of Sind from Bombay & full provincial status for NWFP was agreed upon. These points were including in the government of India act 1935.

Answer to question No. 3 & 6:

Since the bitter experience in war of independence 1857, the British government had adopted the policy of winning the sympathies & confidence of Indians by introducing the constitutional reforms in India. With the growing political consciousness among the Indians, the need of such reforms had become as absolute necessity.

The demand of responsible government became a controversial issue between the government & the people of India. The British government sent for the said purpose a commission headed by sir john Simon in 1927. Its recommendations were rejected by congress & started civil dis obedience movement.

Nehru report in 1928 due to negation of Muslim demands failed to provide the basis of further constitutional reforms in India. Quaid's 14 points were also rejected by the Congress. Anyhow after the failure of British, Hindus & Muslims efforts to formulate such constitutional reforms, acceptable to all the elements of Indian politics, necessitated such concrete efforts which could determine the acceptable or practicable constitutional reforms in India. Besides that new labor party government was more determine to provide constitutional reforms to Indians. In pursuance of British Government policy, the viceroy enlisted the cooperation of Indian representation leaders & invited Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Jinnah, Pundit Moti Lal Nehru, Patel, Sir Tej Bahdur sapru. The congress leaders refused to participate in the meeting called by viceroy emphasizing the implementation off Nehru report before any further constitutional scheme to be discussed. However the leaders of other political parties showed great enthusiasm in the viceroy meeting. The proposed conference was held in London in three sessions, 1930, 1931 – 1932. In the following discussion we see the proceedings of London conferences known as RTC.