

The Government of India Act 1919-Montagu Chelmsford Reforms
(07 December, 2021)

***The Government of India Act 1919 or Montagu Chelmsford Reforms 1919 or
Montford Reforms***

Background

1. Barely 7 years after the Act of 1909, by 1916 all parties in India awa British began to think of some changes in the structure of the Govt.
2. This was largely coz of the **Outbreak of WW1 in Aug 1914**.
 1. There was, however, no immediate threat to India but being a part of the British Empire, it automatically got involved.
 2. Plus, India supplied manpower, money, and material.
 3. Plus, Govt of India **was asked to make a contribution of 1 million pounds to the War Fund**.
 4. Plus, Woodrow Wilson's statement was that the war was being fought to make the world safe for democracy.
 5. Thus, this increased the expectation of reward in Indians. They wanted recognition of their ability to rule themselves - road to self-govt.
3. Since the **Govt of India needed financial resources** for its own coz of the financial crunch caused by WW1, there were some efforts by the British to assuage public opinion
 1. A **tariff duty** was imposed **on Imports especially on Cotton**. This step had a **purely financial and selfish motive**.
 2. But it provided protection to the cotton industry, which was the long-standing demand of the Moderates.
4. The **moderates were being side-lined by the radicals** and thus the demands of the moderates had to be conceded to save them (which was in £ interests) and to create divisions in the INM.
5. Also **Muslim - British gap** was **widening** coz of various factors -
 1. In 1911, the Partition of Bengal was annulled. Muslim elites disappointed.
 2. In the Italian and Balkan Wars (1911-1913), Britain had refused to help Turkey.

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3. In 1912, Harding rejected the proposal with respect to (wrt) establishment of the University of Aligarh.
4. In 1913, there were riots in Kanpur when a platform adjoining the mosque was demolished.
5. Gradually under Muhammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Hasrat Mohani, and Fazlul Haq, the Muslim League accepted the goal of self govt for India suited to its conditions.
6. Around the same time, Annie Besant started a **Home Rule League, 1914** added by Pune HRL by Tilak after he was released from Jail in 1914.
7. Now, Indians themselves formulated a number of schemes - the most successful was the **Lucknow Pact, Dec 1916**.
 1. It was essentially a Moderates' draft. It demanded constitutional reforms like
 1. the expansion of popular elements in central and provincial legislatures,
 2. inclusion of Indians into the Viceroy's and Provincial Governors' executive council.
 2. The executive councils would have at least half the members as Indians who would be elected by the corresponding legislature. Once elected they can't be removed by the legislature.
 3. **Congress (reluctantly) accepted communal electorates and fixed the proportion** of Muslims in central and provincial legislatures.
 4. Congress agreed to it reluctantly to bring Muslims into the INM fold. But after the 1919 reforms when it realized that it could have power without the support of Muslims, it went back on the pact.
8. The '**British Round Table**' discussed the question of structure for Govt.
 1. They opined that extension of elected majorities without any executive responsibility would only create permanent opposition in Legislative bodies.
 2. Hence, they came forward with the idea of **Dyarchy in the Provinces**.
9. Plus, the **Russian Revolution of 1917** had an impact on India - even acknowledged in Montague-Chelmsford telegrams.
10. It was also decided that **It is high time the British made a statement about its eventual goal in India**. Piece-meal and evolutionary schemes now no longer acceptable to Indians. **Only by seizing the initiative could the British control the situation**. The devolution of increased political power and responsibility was simply a response to political pressure in India and a device to buy the support of Indians.
11. It was in these circumstances that on **20 Aug 1917 SoS Lord Montagu made a declaration (The August Declaration of 1917)**. He declared his intention of
 1. Increasing the association of Indians in every branch of administration.
 2. The gradual development of self-governing institutions
 3. With a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.

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4. This was to be made by successive stages decided by British Parliament.
5. From now onwards, the **demand by nationalists for self-government or home rule could not be termed as seditious** since the attainment of self-government for Indians now became a government policy.
6. Also in **the use of the term 'responsible government'** was implied the condition that the **rulers were to be answerable to the elected representatives, and not only to the imperial government in London.**
7. However, it was **equally clear that the British had no intention of handing over power to predominantly elected legislatures with an Indian majority.** So, in order that the executive is made responsible in some measure to the elected assemblies, whose size and the proportion of elected members in which was going to be increased in any case, the **concept of 'dyarchy' was to be evolved.**
8. **Indian Objections**
 1. **No specific time frame was given.**
 2. The government alone was to decide the nature and the timing of advance towards a responsible government, and the Indians were resentful that the British would decide what was good and what was bad for Indians.
12. In Nov 1917, Montagu visited India, published the report in July 1918.
 1. Some Moderates are happy. Rest not. Annie Besant denounced its provision relating to the gradual transfer of power as 'unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India.'
 2. **In Aug 1918** in the **Bombay (Special) Session**, INC considered this report and deemed it as 'inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing.'
13. Montford Reforms was the Carrot and Rowlatt Act was the stick.

Preamble - 1st time

1. The Preamble of the Government of India Act 1919 was **based on the August 1917 Declaration.**
2. **British India** to remain an **integral part** of the British **Empire.** The sovereignty **of the British Parliament** over India was **reasserted.**
3. Responsible govt India was to be the objective of declared policy to be achieved through progressive realization only.
4. To achieve Responsible govt 2 things were necessary:
 1. Increasing association of Indians in every branch of the organization.
 2. The gradual development of self-governing institutions.

Provisions of Montagu Chelmsford Reforms 1919

1. Home Government:

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1. The **powers & functions of Secretary of State curtailed & was carried out by a new 'High Commissioner', appointed by Govt of India.**
2. **Secretary of State (SoS) to be paid from British exchequer.**
3. **Holding simultaneous exams in India and England.**

2. The Executive

1. **No Responsible govt at the Center. 3 out of 8 members of GG's executive council will be Indians, but appointed ones.**
2. **GG is responsible to British Parliament through SoS and not to the Indian Legislature.**
3. **3 out of 6 members of GG's Executive Council would be Indians.**

3. Center-state Relations:

1. Under the Montford scheme, **partial responsible government was introduced in the provinces.**
 1. **Because of this, the demarcation between the spheres of Central and Provincial governments became necessary.**
 2. **Hence, Subjects were divided into 2 Lists: Central & Provincial.**
 3. **The residual powers were vested in the Governor-General in Council.**
2. Hence the **sources of revenue** were completely **divided** into central and provincial
 1. It was felt that **even partial transfer of power** to Indians could be **meaningful only if the provinces were not dependent on the Indian government** for the means of provincial development.
 2. This was done so that the provinces could run their administration based on the revenue they generated.
 3. **Thus the budgets for provinces also came** into place.
 4. But this was **not federalism**, rather an **act of benevolence**. The **center could still legislate on any subject.**

4. The Imperial/ Central Legislature - No responsible govt

1. **Now** it was made **Bicameral** Legislature at Center into Council of States (60 members) and Central Legislative Assembly (145). It legislated for the whole of British India.
2. Tenure of **3 years** could be extended by **Governor-General**. He also got the **power of certification** of the Bill.
3. **The non-official majority in the Lower House** was raised to 70% and **in the Upper House** to they had a majority.
4. **Communal Electorates for Sikhs** also. Seats were distributed not acc to their population but their so-called importance.
5. Later the demand of the Justice Party for **reservation of seats for non-**

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- Brahmans was accepted.**
- 6. Separate electorates** were also provided for **Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, and Europeans.**
 - 7. Depressed classes** were given **nominated seats in legislatures at all levels.**
 8. Members could ask Questions + supplementary Questions.
 - 9. Only certain items of budget are subject to a vote** of LA. **75%** of the budget is **still unavoidable.**
 - 10. Women were also given the right to vote** or to stand in elections. **In Britain, women got the right to vote only in 1918.**

5. The Provinces: Executive

1. Under the Montford scheme, **partial responsible government was introduced in the provinces.**
- 2. Dyarchy was intro in Provinces:**
 - 1. Subjects** are divided into 2 halves: **Reserved and Transferred.**
 - 2. Reserved subjects:** were kept **only for Governor (with his Executive council of 4 members).** GG and his Executive Council were **jointly responsible to the Governor-General and Secretary of State (SoS).**
 - 3. Transferred subjects:** kept for **Governor** on the **advice of Council of Ministers (CoM).** Only 4 subjects = Local self govt, Health, Education and partly Agriculture. CoM were appointed by Governor.
3. It **sought to introduce an element of responsible govt without impairing Governor's powers.**

6. The Provincial Legislature:

- 1. The non-official majority** was raised to 70% of total strength. **Electorates were communal.**
2. They could now move resolutions on Budget and levy taxes. But a provincial bill could become an act only when it received the consent of GG as well. His consent was needed to introduce some bills.
7. It mandated the *creation of a Royal commission 10 years hence to review the working of the Act.* Hence **Simon Commission.**

Significance of Montagu Chelmsford Reforms, 1919

1. Significant in the evolution of Parliamentary democracy in India.
2. Since the Govt declared the aim of constitutional changes. Now, it cannot go back on that promise. Hence, further concessions were inevitable. **Self Govt was talked about for the 1st time.**
3. For the **1st time** in the history of British rule, it **provided for the transfer of**

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- power, albeit halting and extremely limited.
4. **Though Diarchy was criticized**, it would be wrong to say that it brought no constitutional progress. **It was the best transition mechanism that appeared after a long period.**
 5. The Government of India Act 1919 was the **1st Act containing Preamble.**
 6. **Introduced direct elections for the 1st time.**
 7. This Act created **elected Legislative bodies at the center and in the provinces.**
 1. Here, Indian Opinion was articulately expressed.
 2. Further weakened the hegemony of the British Raj and intensified Indian Nationalism.
 8. *Legislative Councils in India had no real power until 1920.*
 9. It **introduced Bicameralism in Center.**

Limitations of Montagu Chelmsford Reforms 1919

1. The whole **Conception of Dyarchy was based on a faulty principle**
 1. Coz it is very difficult to divide functions of the State into water-tight compartments.
 2. Hence, illogically divided. Agri was a Transferred subject and LR and Irrigation were Reserved subjects.
 3. The **functions of Minister (interest of the countrymen)** and Executive Council (or Civil Services - British interests) were **in conflict** with each other.
 1. Ministers had no control over civil servants even in the 'transferred' departments.
 2. Further, the **minister had to serve two masters.** He was appointed or dismissed by the **Governor.** But he was accountable to the **legislature.**
 3. **CoM** was not collectively responsible to the council, but **individually responsible to the governor.**
 4. Above all, the **so-called nation-building departments** were **entrusted to ministers** who could show *results only if money was available.* And Gov had all financial powers.
 4. The main instruments of administration, namely, the Indian Civil Service and Indian Police, were under the control of the Governor were responsible to him and not to the ministers. Thus, an ICS officer in the rank of Secretary or the Commissioner, being backed by the Governor, could practically veto a decision of the minister, which resulted in a considerable diminution in the authority of the latter.
2. **Center-state Relations:**
 1. **The administration** still remained **rigidly centralized.**
 2. **Absence of even partial resp govt @ d center.**
 3. The system suffered from financial constraints.
 4. The powers of GG & SoS were left virtually untouched.
 5. Montagu-Chelmsford concluded that Separate Electorates were a very

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serious hindrance to the development of the self-governing principle. Still, they did not recommend that these should be given up. They extended these to the Sikhs in Punjab.

6. No time frame was indicated for the realization of self-govt. The real power, however, rested w the British govt.
7. **Narrow franchise.** **Property qualifications** restricted it to < 5% of the adult population.

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