

# The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (1919)

Minto-Morley reforms, introduced in 1909, proved unsatisfactory for Indian people. Resultantly, Indians demanded more representation and called for greater self-government. This could not be achieved without a formal rapprochement between Congress and Muslim League. The Lucknow Pact of 1916 removed the sole hurdle in the attainment of self-rule by which both, Congress and Muslim League set aside their mutual differences and showed considerable accommodation to each other's claims.

Meanwhile, the World War I had started and Indians despite their grievances and discontentment with the British joined the war with over one million soldiers with the hope that after the war British would be obliged to concede to self-rule in recognition of their loyal services. However, as the war dragged on, Indians became disillusioned as the British did not make any promises regarding self-government. Thus, Indians pressed for immediate reforms and it was felt that a civil disobedience movement might be launched jointly by congress and Muslim league to compel the British to accelerate the reforms.

In view of these circumstances the British felt that something must be done to pacify the Indians. At that time, Edwin Montague was the Secretary of State for India. In his famous August Declaration presented before the House of Commons on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1917, Montague said that in order to satisfy the local demands, his government was interested in giving more representation to the natives in India. Lord Chelmsford was sent to India as the new Governor General. He stayed for six months and held numerous meetings with different government and non-governmental people. Edwin Montague in collaboration with Lord Chelmsford collected data and made a report about constitutional reforms in 1918. The report was discussed in the House of Common and later it was approved by the parliament. The Bill was introduced in India in 1919 and became Act of 1919. This Act, commonly known as Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, introduced the following reforms:

- The Council of the Secretary of State was to comprise of eight to twelve people. Three of them should be Indian, and at least half of them should have spent at least ten years in India.
- 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, out of them 35 members would be elected and rest of them would be nominated by the Governor General. The Legislative Assembly was to consist of 144 members, out of them 103 were to be elected and 41 to be nominated by the Governor General. 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 important subjects were vested with the center and unimportant remained with provinces. The important central subjects were defense, foreign affairs, custom, and relations with Indian states, currency and railway. On the contrary, unworthy provincial subjects were local self-government, public health, education etc.
- The salary of the Secretary of State for Indian Affairs should be paid from British exchequer; previously, his salary was paid by Indian treasury.
- The system of 'Diarchy' or a kind of double government in the Provinces was introduced. Provincial subjects were divided into two categories "Transferred and Reserved." Transferred subjects which were public health, education, local self-government, and agriculture were under the control of Minister; likewise all transferred subjects were unimportant. Reserved subjects included administration, police, land revenue etc. which were under the control of Governor with the help of his secretaries. It was indirect control over transferred department by reserved department. Hence, Governor was the head of transferred and reserved subjects.

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. Thus, there erupted violent communal riots and anti-British agitations become frequent creating a disdain for British rule and Montague Chelmsford also failed as the two vanguard parties rejected its reforms and considered them to be unsatisfactory. The only point of the reforms appreciated by the Indian was that after ten years, a commission was to assess the reforms and to bring further improvement in them.

### **Delhi Proposals (1927)**

In order to break the ice and to bridge the gulf between the Muslims League and Congress so that they could present common demands before the British for the legislation of the new Act, a group of prominent Muslims, mostly members of the two chambers of the central met at Delhi on March 20, 1927. M.A. Jinnah presided over the session. The proceedings were held in camera and lasted for almost seven hours. They knew that the greatest constitutional contention between Muslim League and Congress was the matter of electorate. Congress propagated joint electorates as to them separate electorates would have weakened the foundations of the Indian nationalism. Whereas Muslim League out of their insecurity of undermined representation were not ready to let go of their demand for separate electorate. Jinnah and team realized that they could only convince the Congress to accept a common agenda if they withdrew the League's demand of Separate electorate. They discussed and tried to chalk out the conditions following which the system of Joint Electorates could be accepted. After a prolonged discussion it was unanimously resolved that League should accept a settlement with the Congress on the basis of certain proposals; the concluded agreement came to be known as Delhi Proposals. Jinnah and company declared that they would withdraw the demand of Separate Electorates provided the following demands will be accepted by the Congress:

1. Sind should be separated from Bombay and should be constituted into an independent province.
2. Reforms should be introduced in the North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan on the same footing as in any other province of India.

3. Reservation of seats according to the population for different communities in the Punjab and Bengal.
4. Muslims should be given 1/3rd representation in the Central Legislature.

The relinquishment of the right to separate electorate was an unprecedented concession by the Muslims and it was a major achievement of Jinnah to have convinced his colleagues to concede this. It was the first time that the Muslim League had agreed to joint electorates and would not do so ever again. The Muslim League was, however, divided because of these proposals and prominent Muslim League leaders, mainly from the Punjab, under the leadership of Sir Muhammad Shafi, decided to part away for the Jinnah Group.

### **Nehru Report (1928)**

Under the Act of 1919, new reforms were to be introduced in India by the British Government after every 10 years. For this purpose, Simon Commission was sent to India in 1927. Most of the Indian political parties decided to boycott the Commission on the plea that it lacked Indian representation. The British decided to throw the ball in the court of Indian Politicians. Lord Birkenhead, Secretary of State for Indian Affairs, challenged the Indians, “If they have any political capability and competence then they should form a unanimous constitution and present it to us and we will implement it.”

Indian political parties accepted the challenge and called an All Parties Conference at Delhi in January 1928. The conference was attended by around hundred delegates from all the important parties including Indian National Congress, All India Muslim League, National Liberal Federation, Hindu Mahasabha, Central Sikh League etc. The conference failed to reach a conclusion on the

issue of the rights of minorities. The second round of the All Parties Conference was held in March the same year. Two sub-committees were formed but the end result was not different from the first session. It was during the third session of the All Parties Conference held at Bombay in May 1928 that a seven members committee under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru to determine the basic features of the future constitution of India.

Despite many hurdles, the Nehru Committee completed its task and its report, commonly known as Nehru Report was presented in the fourth session of the All Parties Conference held in August 1928. The Committee declared that it was useless to ask anything less than complete Swaraj and presented the following demands:

1. India should be given Dominion Status with the Parliamentary form of Government.
2. There should be a bi-cameral legislature consisting of senate and House of Representatives.
3. The senate will comprise of two hundred members elected for seven years, while the House of Representatives should consist of five hundred members elected for five years.
4. Governor-General will act on the advice of executive council. It was to be collectively responsible to the parliament.
5. There should be Federal form of Government in India with Residuary powers to be vested in Centre.
6. There will be no separate electorate for minorities. It claimed “since separate electorate awakens communal sentiments therefore it should be scrapped and joint electorate should be introduced”.
7. System of weightage should not be adopted for any province.
8. There will be no reserved seats for communities in Punjab and Bengal. However, reservation of Muslim seats could be possible in the provinces where Muslim population should be at least ten percent.
9. Judiciary should be independent from the Executive.
10. There should be 1/4th Muslim Representation at Centre.
11. Sind should be separated from Bombay provided it proves to be financially self-sufficient.
12. Reforms should be introduced in NWFP

The report was not acceptable to Muslims and both the Muslim members of the Committee did not sign it. Syed Ali Imam, due to bad health could not attend the meetings of the Committee while Shoaib Qureshi refused to sign the report. In the fourth session of the All Parties Conference convened in December to review the Nehru Report, Jinnah representing the Muslim League presented following four amendments in the report:

1. There should be no less than one-third Muslim representation in the Central Legislature.  
In event of the adult suffrage not being established, Punjab and Bengal should have seats reserved for the Muslims on population basis.
2. The form of the constitution should be Federal with residuary powers vested in the provinces.
3. Sind should immediately be made a separate province and the reforms should also be introduced in NWFP and Baluchistan at the earliest.

Jinnah's proposals were rejected when put to vote in All Parties Conference. The Congress managed to get the majority vote in favour of the Report. They asked the Government to make a constitution till December 31 according to the recommendations of Nehru Report and threatened that otherwise the party would start a mass movement for the attainment of Swaraj. It was also decided that January 26 would be celebrated as the Independence Day. Jinnah considered it as the "parting of the ways" and once the "Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity" was now convinced that the Hindu mindset in India was bent upon pushing the Muslim minority to the wall.