

The Government of India Act, 1919, popularly known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, introduced significant constitutional changes in British India's governance system. One of its key features was the system of **Dyarchy** in the provinces. Here's a detailed explanation of the dyarchy system and its implications:

Background

- The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were based on a report prepared by Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, and Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy of India.
- The primary objective was to gradually introduce self-governing institutions in India while retaining British control over key areas, reflecting the principle of "increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration."

Dyarchy in Provinces

- **Dyarchy** is a system of dual government, in which the subjects of provincial governance were divided into two categories: **"Transferred"** and **"Reserved"**.

1. Transferred Subjects

- These were subjects on which Indian ministers in the provincial legislative councils had the authority to make decisions.
- The transferred subjects generally dealt with local and relatively less critical areas of governance, such as:
 - Education
 - Public health
 - Local self-government
 - Agriculture
 - Public works (except major works like irrigation projects)
 - Forests
 - Fisheries
- The Indian ministers were responsible to the provincial legislature for the administration of these subjects, reflecting limited self-governance.

2. Reserved Subjects

- These subjects remained under the direct control of the Governor and his Executive Council, who were responsible to the British Government, not the Indian legislature.
- **Reserved subjects included:**
 - Law and order (police, justice)
 - Finance
 - Land revenue
 - Irrigation
 - Famine relief
- The Governor had overriding powers over these subjects, ensuring that critical areas of governance remained under British control.

Structure of Provincial Government

- **Governor:** The Governor was the head of the province and retained significant powers, especially over the reserved subjects. He could veto legislative bills and override ministerial decisions.
- **Executive Council:** The Governor's Executive Council comprised British officials who managed the reserved subjects.
- **Ministers:** Indian ministers were appointed to handle transferred subjects, but they lacked control over finances and were often dependent on the British-controlled administration for implementing policies.

Provincial Legislature

- The Act enlarged the provincial legislative councils, allowing for increased Indian representation through elections.
- However, the franchise was limited, based on property and education qualifications, meaning that only a small section of the population could vote.
- The legislative councils had limited powers and could not interfere with the reserved subjects.

Significance of Dyarchy

- **Introduction of Indian Ministers:** For the first time, Indians were allowed to hold significant executive positions, although their authority was limited to the transferred subjects.
- **Limited Self-Government:** Dyarchy was seen as an experiment in shared governance, but it fell short of providing full provincial autonomy, as critical areas like law and finance remained under British control.
- **Criticism:** The system of dyarchy faced criticism from both Indian leaders and British officials. Indian leaders, including the Indian National Congress, criticized it for being too limited and ineffective in granting real power to Indians. British officials found it challenging to manage the dual system efficiently.
- **Step Towards Federalism:** Despite its limitations, the dyarchy system laid the foundation for further constitutional reforms, including the eventual introduction of provincial autonomy in the Government of India Act, 1935.

Outcome

- The dyarchy experiment lasted until the Government of India Act, 1935, which replaced it with a system of full provincial autonomy, thereby abolishing dyarchy.
- Although dyarchy did not fulfill the aspirations of Indian leaders, it marked the beginning of a more significant Indian role in provincial governance and set the stage for future reforms that ultimately led to independence.

The Government of India Act, 1919's introduction of dyarchy in provinces was a critical but flawed step toward responsible self-government in India. While it expanded Indian participation



in governance, it also highlighted the limitations of British reforms and fueled the demand for greater autonomy and independence.

The Simon Commission and the Nehru Report (1928) were significant events in India's struggle for independence and constitutional reform. Both are connected to the larger context of India's demand for self-governance and the British response to it. Here's an overview of both:

Simon Commission (1927)

The Simon Commission was a British parliamentary committee formed to review the working of the Government of India Act, 1919, and suggest further reforms for India's governance.

Facts about the Simon Commission:

1. **Formation:** The Simon Commission was set up in 1927 by the British government and was led by Sir John Simon.
2. **No Indian Members:** The most controversial aspect of the Simon Commission was that it did not include any Indian members. The commission was made up entirely of British officials, which led to widespread anger and resentment in India.
3. **Purpose:** The commission was tasked with assessing the effectiveness of the constitutional reforms introduced by the Government of India Act, 1919 (Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms) and recommending new reforms for India.
4. **Indian Reaction:** The exclusion of Indians from the commission was seen as an insult and a rejection of Indian aspirations for self-governance. Both the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Muslim League, as well as other political parties, boycotted the commission.
5. **Protests:** When the Simon Commission arrived in India in 1928, it was met with mass protests, strikes, and demonstrations. The slogan "Simon Go Back" became a rallying cry for Indian nationalists.
6. **Violence:** The protests against the Simon Commission also led to violent incidents. One of the most notable was the police assault on Lala Lajpat Rai during a demonstration in Lahore, which eventually led to his death.

Significance of the Simon Commission:

- The Simon Commission's exclusion of Indians and its perceived disregard for Indian opinion intensified the demand for complete self-rule.
- The protests against the Simon Commission were a key moment in the Indian independence movement, showcasing unity across political groups against British imperialism.
- It highlighted the disconnect between British attempts to reform Indian governance and Indian demands for real autonomy.

Nehru Report (1928)

In response to the Simon Commission, Indian leaders decided to take charge of their constitutional future. This led to the drafting of the **Nehru Report** in 1928.

Background:

- The **All Parties Conference** was held in 1928 to deliberate on India's constitutional future. In response to the Simon Commission, Indian leaders from various political backgrounds convened to draft a constitution that reflected Indian aspirations.
- The **Nehru Report** was drafted by **Motilal Nehru**, with contributions from other leaders such as Subhas Chandra Bose and Tej Bahadur Sapru.

Proposals of the Nehru Report:

1. **Dominion Status:** The Nehru Report demanded **dominion status** for India within the British Commonwealth, similar to the status enjoyed by countries like Canada and Australia at that time.
2. **Fundamental Rights:** It proposed a Bill of Rights that included fundamental civil liberties such as freedom of speech, equality before the law, and protection of life and property.
3. **Secularism:** The report advocated for a secular state with no official religion and equal rights for all citizens, regardless of religion or caste.
4. **Joint Electorates:** It recommended joint electorates for all communities, rejecting the idea of separate electorates, which had been introduced by the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909. This was a significant point of contention, particularly with Muslim leaders who supported separate electorates.
5. **Parliamentary System:** The report proposed a parliamentary system of government at both the central and provincial levels, with a bicameral legislature at the center.
6. **Unitary Constitution:** It suggested a strong central government, with provinces having limited autonomy, reflecting concerns over the unity and integrity of India.

Reaction to the Nehru Report:

- **Congress Support:** The Indian National Congress endorsed the Nehru Report and used it as a basis to demand constitutional reforms from the British government.
- **Opposition from Muslim League:** The Muslim League, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, opposed several provisions of the Nehru Report, particularly the rejection of separate electorates. Jinnah proposed his famous **Fourteen Points** in response, which demanded safeguards for Muslims in a future Indian constitution.
- **No British Response:** The British government did not accept the Nehru Report's proposals, which led to further disillusionment among Indian leaders and strengthened the call for complete independence rather than dominion status.

Significance of the Nehru Report:

- The Nehru Report was the first major Indian attempt to draft a constitutional framework for the country, reflecting Indian aspirations for self-rule.



- It marked a shift from moderate demands for reform to a more assertive stance on self-governance.
- The failure of the British government to engage with the Nehru Report's proposals fueled the growing demand for complete independence, leading to the adoption of **Purna Swaraj** (complete independence) as the goal of the Congress at the Lahore session in 1929.

The Simon Commission and the Nehru Report were pivotal moments in India's constitutional and political history. The Simon Commission highlighted the British reluctance to fully involve Indians in their own governance, while the Nehru Report represented a unified Indian effort to shape their constitutional future. These events set the stage for the escalating demands for independence that culminated in the formation of a sovereign India in 1947.

The Government of India Act, 1935, was a significant piece of legislation introduced by the British government, which had far-reaching implications for India's governance structure. It was the longest and most detailed act passed by the British Parliament for governing India and laid the foundation for India's current Constitution. Two key aspects of the act were **Provincial Autonomy** and the proposed but unimplemented **Federation of India**.

1. Provincial Autonomy

The Government of India Act, 1935, provided for greater autonomy to Indian provinces, marking a shift from dyarchy (introduced by the Government of India Act, 1919) to full provincial autonomy.

Features of Provincial Autonomy:

1. **End of Dyarchy:** The dyarchical system that divided subjects into "transferred" and "reserved" (where British-controlled subjects were in the reserved category) was abolished. Provinces now had complete control over their administration.
2. **Independent Executive:** The provinces were granted autonomy, with their own legislative assemblies and executive councils. The executive (provincial ministries) was responsible to the provincial legislatures.
3. **Governor's Role:** While the act gave provinces autonomy, the Governor retained significant powers. The Governor could:
 - Overrule the provincial ministry in certain situations.
 - Reserve certain bills for the consideration of the British Viceroy.
 - Dismiss provincial governments if necessary.
4. **Elected Ministries:** For the first time, provincial ministries were formed based on elections. The political party that secured a majority in the provincial elections would form the government in that province.
5. **Powers:** Provinces had control over subjects like education, public health, agriculture, local government, and public works. Some areas, such as defense, foreign affairs, and railways, remained under central control.

Impact of Provincial Autonomy:

- **Indian National Congress Rule:** The provincial elections of 1937, held under this act, saw the Indian National Congress forming governments in several provinces. This allowed Indian leaders to gain administrative experience and provided a platform for asserting Indian aspirations.
- **Limitations:** Despite provincial autonomy, the Governor's overriding powers meant that British control persisted in critical areas. The autonomy granted was therefore seen as limited and insufficient by many Indian leaders.

2. Federation of India

The Government of India Act, 1935, also proposed the creation of an **All-India Federation**, which would include both British Indian provinces and the princely states. However, this federation never came into existence due to the reluctance of the princely states to join.

Features of the Proposed Federation:

1. **Federal Structure:** The act proposed a federal structure that would consist of two tiers:
 - **Federal Government:** At the center, with powers over subjects like defense, foreign affairs, and communications.
 - **Provinces and Princely States:** The provinces and princely states would have autonomy over certain subjects, as outlined by the act.
2. **Bicameral Legislature:** The act proposed a bicameral federal legislature, consisting of:
 - **Council of State (Upper House):** With representatives from both provinces and princely states.
 - **Federal Assembly (Lower House):** Directly elected representatives from British Indian provinces and indirectly elected or nominated members from princely states.
3. **Division of Powers:** The act provided for a threefold division of powers between the center and the provinces:
 - **Federal List:** Subjects over which the central government had exclusive authority (e.g., defense, external affairs).
 - **Provincial List:** Subjects over which the provincial governments had authority (e.g., police, education).
 - **Concurrent List:** Subjects where both the center and provinces had jurisdiction (e.g., criminal law, marriage).
4. **Princely States' Participation:** The princely states were expected to join the federation voluntarily. However, they were apprehensive about losing their autonomy and privileges, and as a result, most of them refused to join.
5. **Special Powers of the Governor-General:** The Governor-General retained wide-ranging powers, including control over federal subjects, the power to veto legislation, and the ability to summon, prorogue, and dissolve the federal legislature.

Failure of the Federation:

- **Princely States' Reluctance:** The princely states' refusal to join the federation meant that the federal structure proposed by the act never came into existence.



- **British Control:** Even if the federation had been implemented, significant powers would have remained in the hands of the British authorities through the office of the Governor-General and the central government.
- **World War II:** The onset of World War II and the changing political dynamics in India led to the shelving of the federation plan.

Significance of the Government of India Act, 1935:

- **Foundation for the Indian Constitution:** Many provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935, served as a blueprint for the Constitution of India, adopted in 1950. The division of powers between the center and the states, the federal structure, and the bicameral legislature were all carried forward in independent India.
- **Increased Indian Participation:** The act allowed Indians to participate more actively in governance, particularly at the provincial level, which played a crucial role in the Indian independence movement.
- **Prelude to Independence:** While the act did not satisfy the demands for complete independence, it marked a step towards greater Indian control over domestic affairs. The experiences gained by Indian leaders under the 1935 Act, especially in the provinces, were instrumental in their eventual negotiations with the British for full independence.

The Government of India Act, 1935, was a significant milestone in India's constitutional history. It expanded provincial autonomy, albeit with limitations, and proposed a federal structure that laid the groundwork for India's future governance. However, it also underscored the continued British reluctance to fully transfer power, contributing to the growing momentum for complete independence.

The Round Table Conferences and the Communal Award were crucial events in the early 1930s that shaped the trajectory of India's struggle for independence. These developments were closely related to the British government's efforts to negotiate a constitutional framework for India amidst growing demands for self-rule and the challenges posed by communal divisions.

Round Table Conferences (1930-1932)

The Round Table Conferences were a series of three conferences organized by the British government in London to discuss constitutional reforms in India. These conferences were an outcome of the Simon Commission's recommendations and were meant to deliberate on the future governance of India.

First Round Table Conference (November 1930 - January 1931)

- **Participants:** The conference included representatives from British India, princely states, and British officials. However, the Indian National Congress (INC), the main political party representing Indian aspirations, boycotted the conference as they were demanding full independence.
- **Agenda:** The conference aimed to discuss the Simon Commission's report and the future constitutional framework for India.

- **Outcome:** Without the participation of the INC, the conference made little progress. However, it highlighted the need for a federal structure in India that included the princely states.

Second Round Table Conference (September - December 1931)

- **Participants:** This time, Mahatma Gandhi, representing the INC, attended the conference as the sole representative of the Congress after the **Gandhi-Irwin Pact** of March 1931. Other participants included various Indian leaders from different communities and interest groups.
- **Debates:** The major issue debated was the question of representation and safeguards for minorities (Muslims, Sikhs, Dalits, etc.). Gandhi strongly opposed separate electorates for Dalits (referred to as "Depressed Classes"), arguing that it would divide the Hindu community.
- **Outcome:** Despite Gandhi's participation, no substantial agreement was reached. The British government emphasized communal representation, while Gandhi and the Congress were more focused on achieving dominion status and avoiding further communal divisions.

Third Round Table Conference (November - December 1932)

- **Participants:** The third conference saw even less participation. The INC again boycotted it, and only a few Indian representatives attended.
- **Outcome:** With minimal participation, the third conference was largely inconsequential. However, it laid the groundwork for the Government of India Act, 1935.

Communal Award (1932)

The Communal Award was a controversial decision made by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in August 1932. It was intended to address the issue of minority representation in Indian legislative bodies, particularly in light of the disagreements at the Round Table Conferences.

Key Features of the Communal Award:

1. **Separate Electorates:** The Communal Award extended the system of separate electorates to various religious and social communities, including:
 - Muslims
 - Sikhs
 - Indian Christians
 - Anglo-Indians
 - Europeans
 - Dalits (referred to as the "Depressed Classes")
2. **Representation for Dalits:** The most controversial aspect of the award was the provision of separate electorates for Dalits. This meant that Dalits would vote separately from the rest of the Hindu community, electing their representatives independently.

3. Reaction of Indian Leaders:

- **Mahatma Gandhi:** Gandhi strongly opposed the idea of separate electorates for Dalits. He believed it would further divide the Hindu community and weaken the social fabric of India. In protest, Gandhi went on a fast unto death while imprisoned in the Yerwada Jail in Pune.
- **B. R. Ambedkar:** Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Dalits, supported the award as a means of securing political representation and safeguards for the marginalized Dalit community. He believed separate electorates would empower Dalits in a caste-ridden society.

The Poona Pact (1932):

- The **Poona Pact** was a compromise reached between Gandhi and Ambedkar to resolve the deadlock over the Communal Award.
- **Terms of the Poona Pact:**
 - The system of separate electorates for Dalits was abandoned.
 - Instead, a system of **reserved seats** for Dalits was agreed upon within the general electorate. This meant that Dalits would vote with the rest of the Hindu community, but certain seats in the legislature would be reserved for Dalit candidates.
 - The number of reserved seats for Dalits was significantly increased compared to what was proposed under the Communal Award.
- **Significance:** The Poona Pact was a crucial moment in the history of India's social and political development. While it prevented the division of the Hindu community, it also highlighted the deep divisions between various groups in Indian society.

Significance of the Round Table Conferences and the Communal Award:

1. **Path to the Government of India Act, 1935:** The discussions and disagreements at the Round Table Conferences influenced the drafting of the Government of India Act, 1935, which introduced provincial autonomy and the proposed federation of India.
2. **Communal Politics:** The Communal Award and the resulting Poona Pact underscored the growing communal divisions in India, which would later play a significant role in the Partition of India in 1947.
3. **Impact on Dalit Politics:** The debates around the Communal Award and the Poona Pact brought the issue of Dalit rights to the forefront of Indian politics. Ambedkar emerged as a key leader advocating for the rights of the marginalized communities in India.

The Round Table Conferences and the Communal Award were pivotal in shaping the constitutional framework and communal dynamics of pre-independence India. They revealed the complexities of balancing diverse interests and laid the groundwork for the reforms that would eventually lead to Indian independence.