



# Reforms and Administration under Lord Curzon

## About Lord Curzon

- George Nathaniel Curzon (11 January, 1859- 20 March, 1925) born in Kedleston Hall, England was a **British statesman and foreign secretary** who during his terms in office **played a major role in British policy making**.
  - Lord Curzon succeeded Lord Elgin and **served as India's Viceroy between 1899 and 1905**.
    - He became the **youngest Viceroy of India** at the age of 39.
    - He was one of the most controversial and consequential holders of that post.
  - Before assuming office as governor general and viceroy, **Curzon had visited India (four times)** Ceylon, Afghanistan, China, Persia, Turkestan, Japan, and Korea.
    - No other governor general of India had such vast experience and ideas about the countries of the East as Lord Curzon.
  - **Curzon's Views Regarding India:**
    - Lord Curzon was deeply a racist, and **convinced of Britain's "civilising mission"** in India.
    - He described Indians as having "extraordinary inferiority in character, honesty and capacity".

## Curzon's Foreign Policies

- **North-West Frontier Policy:** Curzon, unlike his predecessors, **pursued a policy of consolidation, strength and security of the British occupied territories** in the north-west.
  - He kept Chitral under British control and constructed a road connecting Peshawar and Chitral thereby arranging for the security of Chitral.
  - The Khyber Pass, Khur Valley, Waziristan were places where small British troops were stationed by his predecessors. Lord Curzon withdrew them thereby removing the irritant to the tribal people.
  - Curzon's north-western frontier policy while bringing peace in the north-west, reduced a huge cost.
- **Afghan Policy:** Lord Curzon's Afghan policy was conditioned by the political and economic interests, fear of Russian expansion in Central Asia and Persian Gulf area.
  - From the very start there was an estrangement of relations between Afghans and the British.
  - An **agreement was signed between Abdur Rahman (the then Afghan Amir) and the British** under which the latter had been committed to render financial help to Afghanistan, thus securing itself from any Afghan tensions.
- **Policy towards Persia:** It was imperative for the British interest to maintain British influence in Persian Gulf area as Russia, France, Turkey were also trying to extend their influence in the region.

- In order to secure British influence in that region Lord Curzon personally went to the Persian Gulf area in 1903 and took firm measures to protect the British interests there.
- **Relation with Tibet:** Lord Curzon's Tibet policy was also influenced by fear of Russian dominance in the region.
  - The Tibetans had signed a trade agreement with the British in 1890 but by the time Lord Curzon had come as the Viceroy, the trade relations between Tibet and British India had completely ceased.
  - It was **Lord Curzon's efforts that revived the trade relations between the two** under which Tibet agreed to pay a huge indemnity to the British.

## Reforms in Various Fields

- Curzon **believed in a strong centralized government** and powerful bureaucracy.
- **Calcutta Corporation Act, 1899:** The act reduced the number of elected legislatures and increased the number of nominated officials to deprive Indians from self-governance.
  - 28 members of the Corporation resigned in protest and it, therefore, became a government department with the English and the Anglo-Indians as the majority in it.
- **Economic:** In 1899, the **British currency was declared legal tender in India** and a pound was declared equivalent to rupees fifteen.
  - The **rate of salt-tax was reduced** by Curzon, from two-and-a-half rupees per maund (1 maund is equal to approximately 37 kg) to one-and-a-third rupees per maund.
  - People with annual income of more than Rs. 500 paid the tax. Moreover, income-tax payers also received relaxation.
  - The yearly savings of the provinces were taken over by the Central Government which left no inducement to the provinces for saving.
    - **Curzon supported the policy of financial decentralization** and abolished this practice.
- **Famine:** When Curzon arrived in India, it was in a grip of terrible famine which affected the extensive territories in south, central and western India. Curzon provided all possible relief to the affected people.
  - People were provided work on payment basis and the cultivators were exempted from the payment of revenue.
  - By 1900, when the famine was over, Curzon appointed a Commission to probe into the causes of the famine and suggest preventive measures which were later brought into consideration.
- **Agriculture:** In 1904, the **Co-operative Credit Societies Act** was passed to induce the people to form societies for the purpose of deposits and loans, mainly to save peasants from the clutches of the money-lenders who usually charged an exorbitant rate of interest.
  - In 1900, the **Punjab Land Alienation Act** was passed which **restricted the transfer of lands of the peasants to money-lenders** in cases of failure of payment of their debts.
  - Curzon attempted to bring about improvement in revenue administration for which he fixed three principles regarding it.
    - First, the revenue was to be increased only gradually.
    - Second, every care was to be taken not to harm the agriculture while collecting the revenue.
    - Third, in case of drought or any other difficult situation, the peasants were to be helped immediately.
- **Railways:** Curzon decided to improve railway facilities in India and also to make the Railway profitable to the government.
  - He appointed a **Railway Commission** under the chairmanship of Mr. Robertson in 1901. The Commission submitted its report after two years and the recommendations were

accepted by Curzon.

- The **Railway lines were increased**, the **Railway department was abolished** and the **management of the Railways was taken away from the hands of the Public Works Department and handed over to a Railway Board** consisting of three members.
- The **Department of Railway was organised on a commercial basis**, profit being its primary motive.
- **Education:** In 1901, Curzon called an **education conference at Shimla** following which the **University Commission was appointed in 1902**.
  - The **Indian Universities Act was passed in 1904** upon the recommendations of the commission.
  - Gurudas Banerjee, Calcutta HC judge and a member of the commission, had given his dissent-note in the report and the Indian public despised the Act but all in vain.
  - The aim of the act was to bring the Universities under the supervision of the government and it served its purpose.
- **Army:** In 1902, **Lord Kitchener came to India as the Commander-in-Chief** and carried out much needed reforms in the army.
  - The Indian Army was divided into two commands, the **Northern Command** and the **Southern Command**.
    - There were three brigades in every division of the army, two of the Indian battalions and one of the English battalions.
  - The **factories were established in India to produce guns, gunpowder and rifles** and the army was **equipped with the latest weapons**.
  - To increase the efficiency of the soldiers, every battalion was subjected to a severe test called **'the Kitchener Test'**.
- **Judiciary:** Under the judiciary reforms, the number of judges of the Calcutta High Court was increased, the salaries of the judges of the High Courts and subordinate courts were enhanced and the Indian Code of Civil Procedure was revised.
- **Monument Act, 1904:** The Act **established an Archaeological Department** under a director.
  - It was assigned the **responsibility of repair, restoration and protection of historical monuments**.
  - Lord Curzon asked the native rulers to take similar measures in their respective states and urged the provincial governments to open museums for the safe preservation of rare objects.

## Partition of Bengal

- The partition of the undivided Bengal Presidency in 1905 was **one of Curzon's most criticised moves**, which triggered widespread opposition not only in Bengal but across India, and gave impetus to the freedom movement.

### Curzon's Role in the Partition of Bengal:

- Bengal was the **most populous province of India**, with around 8 crore people.
- It comprised the present-day states of **West Bengal, Bihar, parts of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Assam and present day Bangladesh**.
- In July 1905, Curzon announced the partition of the undivided Bengal Presidency.
  - A new province of **East Bengal and Assam** was announced, with a population of 3.1 crore with a **Muslim-Hindu ratio of 3:2**.
  - The **western Bengal province was overwhelmingly Hindu**.
- Although the British claimed the partition was to make the administration of the large region easier, it was clear to the Bengal Congress and patriotic Indians that Curzon's **actual motive was to crush the increasingly loud political voices** of the literate class in the province, and to **provoke religious strife and opposition** against them.

- However, the protests against the partition did not remain confined to this class alone.

### Impact of the Partition:

- The partition **provoked great resentment and hostility all over India**. All sections of the Congress, the Moderates and the Radicals, opposed it.
- The struggle that unfolded in the response, came to be known as the **Swadeshi movement**, was the strongest in Bengal but with echoes elsewhere too; in deltaic Andhra for instance, it was known as the **Vandemataram Movement**.
  - The protest was to boycott British goods, especially textiles, and promote swadeshi goods.
  - There were marches and demonstrations with the protesters singing **Vande Mataram** to underline their patriotism and challenge the colonialists.
- Samitis emerged throughout Bengal, with several thousand volunteers.
- **Rabindranath Tagore led the marches at many places**, and composed many patriotic songs, most famously **'Amar Sonar Bangla'** (My Golden Bengal), which is now the **national anthem of Bangladesh**.
  - The message of patriotism and Bengali nationalism was showcased in **Jatras**, or popular theatre.

### Impact of the Protests:

- **Curzon left for Britain in 1905**, but the agitation continued for many years.
  - **Partition was finally reversed in 1911 by Lord Hardinge** in the face of unrelenting opposition.
- The Swadeshi movement, which had grown significantly during the agitation, later **reached nationwide proportions**.
  - The partition of Bengal and the highhanded behaviour of Curzon fired the national movement and the Congress.

### Conclusion

- In the book 'Lion and the Tiger' by Denis Judd, in "The Rise and Fall of the British Raj, 1600-1947", he wrote:
  - **"Curzon had hoped to bind India permanently to the British Raj. Ironically, his partition of Bengal, and the bitter controversy that followed, did much to revitalize Congress.**
  - **Curzon, who addressed Congress in the 1900s as 'tottering to its fall', ultimately left India with Congress more active and effective than at any time in its history".**
- Being an autocrat, Curzon's courses of actions had caused a great amount of resentment among the Indians, yet considered from the point of view of efficiency, enterprise and initiative, he was one of the best governor generals of British India.