

Events Under Lord Minto: Revision Notes for UPSC Indian History

There were important events that happened during the time when Lord Minto and Lord Hardinge were Viceroy of India. The article will outline the quick summary of events that happened during their tenure as Viceroy. The resulting notes will be helpful for aspirants appearing for the IAS Prelims exam this 2020.

Lord Minto (1905-1910)

Gilbert Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, 4th Earl of Minto was the 17th Viceroy of India. He also served as the 8th Governor-General of Canada before becoming viceroy. It was during his tenure that some of the important legislations in the history of British India were passed other Important events under Lord Minto include:

- 1906: Establishment of Muslim League
- 1907: Surat split of INC
- 1909: Grant of separate electorates to Muslims
- Thus the dreams visualized by Lord Curzon were brought into practice under Lord Minto.

Establishment of Muslim League (1906)

1. When the partition of Bengal was carried out in the name of giving a separate administrative district for the Muslims, likewise the establishment of Muslim league was an effort by the British to identify Muslims as a separate political entity.
2. In 1906, Lord Minto invited all the Muslim leaders to Shimla and proposed the establishment of the Muslim league. **Nawab Salimullah** who played a very important role in the partition of Bengal, also played an important role in the establishment of Muslim league.
3. The Muslim League, as it was projected, was a politico-cultural organization. Initially, there was no contradiction between the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Muslim League. It was agreed that anyone who was a member of the INC, can simultaneously become a member of the Muslim League, and vice versa.
4. **Aga Khan** was the first President of the Muslim League. This idea did not get much support from the Muslims also.

Demands of the Muslim League

1. The main demand of the Muslim league was that of grant of separate electorates to the Muslims. The grant of separate electorates by the British would infuse the seeds of communalism in Indian society.

2. According to this, Muslims would be represented by Muslim leaders, i.e. there was a separate electoral college for the representation of the Indian Muslims.
3. Morley was the Secretary of State for India who reported directly to Viceroy Minto. In a discussion between Morley and Minto, and Morley had made the remark, **“Please remember, in granting separate electorates we are showing the dragons’ teeth and harvest will be bitter.”**
4. The climax of the Morley Minto reforms created the seeds for the demand of a separate state, called Pakistan.

Surat Split (1907)

The dream of a ‘Surat Split’ was already conceived by Curzon when he made the statement ‘Congress was tottering to its fall and one of the biggest ambitions in my life is to give it a peaceful demise’.

1. The Surat split was a big jolt to the Indian National Congress. In fact, the difference between the moderates and the extremists presented an opportunity to the British.
2. The moderates were quite reluctant to pass the motion on the demand for Swaraj. The Arya-samaj notion of Swaraj and Swadeshi was the hallmark of the programme of the extremists.
3. In the initial days, there were many Congress leaders who opposed the notion of Swaraj, the demand for Swaraj, and extremist politics, but at the beginning of the 20th Century, some of the veteran Congress leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, and G.K. Gokhale had the word, ‘Swaraj’ in their minds.

For Example, In 1905 (Banaras Session of the INC): Gokhale was the President and for the first time, he had a discussion over ‘Swaraj’.

In 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji (who was the President of the INC session at Calcutta), and in his Presidential address, used the word Swaraj.

Thus, the word, ‘Swaraj’ wasn’t untouchable to them, but they were reluctant to pass the resolution over ‘Swaraj’.

In 1907, Surat Session: The two main objectives placed by the extremists were that:

- 1) Demand for the resolution of Swaraj
- 2) Lala Lajpat Rai to be made the President of the INC

These two demands were not acceptable to the moderates. Thus, instead of Lala Lajpat Rai, the moderates supported the idea of Rash Behari Ghosh as the President. This was the first time that there was to be an election in the INC for Presidentship. In between the election,

the extremists were expelled from the INC, and the moderates had complete command over the affairs of the INC. Rash Behari Ghosh became the President of the Surat session.

The Surat split was a victory of the British policy of Divide and Rule, and after a long time, the British believed that they were in control of the affairs of the moderates over the INC.

Grant of separate electorates to Muslims: Separate electorates were granted to the Muslims during a time when the Congress was at its lowest ebb. The most critical and vocal elements were not a part of the INC. Thus the British had taken absolute advantage over the INC to grant these separate electorates.

However, there are **some reservations** over the split of the INC at Surat:

- This was because the extremists **did not form a separate organization** at first. They were merely indifferent from the activities of the Congress. And when they were expelled from the INC, the British Government was looking for an opportunity to settle scores with the extremists.
- **Thus Bal Gangadhar Tilak was imprisoned for 6 years** (on the pretext that it was an 'offence to preach nationalism'). Lala Lajpat Rai was expelled from Punjab, and Bipin Chandra Pal had overnight turned 'moderate'. Thus the extremist view no longer remained active in the field of Indian politics. This again encouraged the British to pursue the aggressive policy of Divide and Rule. Thus the 'Surat split' need not be called a 'split', as the extremists merely remained indifferent to the INC, and did not form a separate organization. In 1916, they reunited with the Congress in the Lucknow session, thus there was only an ideological difference between the extremists and the moderates and not a division as such. The extremists only remained outside the fold of the INC and did not participate in its activities.

Conclusion

In his five year tenure as the Viceroy of India, Lord Minto saw and participated in many events that would forever change the trajectory of the subcontinent. Although a nominal gesture at first, the act of granting separate electorates changed the power dynamics of the Indian Independence struggle. Although further events would shape the course of the subcontinent, the stage was already set for a chain of events that would ultimately culminate into one of the most catastrophic divisions of the century - the Partition of India.