

Lucknow Pact, Home Rule League and August Declaration

Lucknow Pact

Many significant political events in India took place during the years of the First World War (1914–18) which led to the deepening of national sentiments in the country. Three such political events were the signing of the Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the Muslim League, the establishment of the Home Rule League Movement and the August Declaration.

Causes Leading to the Signing of the Lucknow Pact

International Events: The Sultan of Turkey was regarded as the 'Caliph' or the religious head of the Muslims. Most of the Muslim sacred places were situated within the Turkish Empire. In the First World War, Britain was fighting against Turkey. This led to a wave of indignation among the Indian Muslims. The latter thus supported the Congress against the British government in their efforts to gain self-government in India.

National Events: Many political activities which occurred within the country angered the Indian Muslims who took an anti-British stand. The annulment of the Partition of Bengal, release of Bal Gangadhar Tilak from jail, arrest of prominent Muslim leaders under the Seditious Meeting Act and the spread of nationalist ideas by Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali brought the Muslim League and the Congress closer to each other.

Changes in the Objective of the Muslim League: At the time its formation, the Muslim League had a pro-British attitude. However, later, the League demanded 'a system of self-government under the aegis of the British crown'. This led to renewed cooperation between the Muslim League and the Congress. Besides the above factors, Annie Besant and Tilak played a prominent role in bringing the two organisations together. This led to the signing of the historic **Lucknow Pact** in 1916.

Features of the Lucknow Pact

In 1916, both the League and the Congress held their sessions simultaneously at Lucknow. Both parties together signed and adopted the joint scheme of political reforms. This agreement came to be known as the Lucknow Pact. The main demands of the Congress and Muslim League were

- To abolish the India Council of the Secretary of State. The latter should be assisted by two under secretaries, one of whom should be an Indian.
- Four-fifths of the members of the Provincial Legislature were to be directly elected and one-fifth should be nominated. Muslims were to be elected through a separate electorate.
- Minorities should be given adequate representation in elected bodies.
- The Imperial Legislation of India should not control India's defence (including making war and signing treaties) and foreign affairs.
- Provinces should be given certain autonomy.
- Half of the members of the Viceroy's Executive Council should be Indians.
- The Judiciary should be separate from the Executive. For example, executive members should not be given any judicial powers.

Significance of the Lucknow Pact

- It led to Hindu-Muslim unity. While Congress accepted the scheme of separate electorates for the Muslims, the Muslim League accepted the principle of election and majority rule.
- The signing of the Lucknow Pact also reunited the Early and Assertive Nationalists (both wings of the Congress were split in the 1907 session at Surat).

- The unity between the Muslim League and the Congress strengthened the Indian National Movement. Till now, the government was repressing the national movement by following the policy of 'divide and rule'.
- The British government realised that during the war years of the First World War, it was necessary to pacify Indians to garner their support during the First World War. Thus, they announced the Declaration of 20 August, in which they promised to gradually develop self-government institutions in the country.

Limitations of the Lucknow Pact

- The Lucknow Pact did not involve the masses and was confined to only rich and educated Hindus and Muslims.
- Acceptance of the principle of separate electorate for Muslims by the Congress undermined the political unity of the country.
- The Pact provided Muslim representation in the Council more than their proportion in the total population.
- The Pact only acted as a temporary truce between the Congress and the League. Despite the efforts of the Congress, the League remained as a separate entity with a communal outlook.

Home Rule League Movement

The Home Rule Movement was started by Tilak and Annie Besant for demanding self-government within the British Empire. Factors which led to the beginning of the Home Rule Movement were

- The First World War led to inflation which increased the miseries of the poor in the country. Heavy taxes were levied on the people by the government to meet war expenditures.
- It was realised that the government would not give political concessions to the Indians until they are pressurised into doing so.
- The British and American governments publicised that they were fighting the war to make the world safe for democracy. However, the British government was denying liberty and democracy to Indians. The Indians thus realised that they have to snatch their freedom from the British.
- Assertive nationalists believed that Congress had become passive, and thus, it was not possible to launch mass agitations under it.

Because of the above factors, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant launched the Home Rule Movement as they believed that the government would not listen to their demands until they are pressurised into doing so.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

- Tilak urged the people to support the British government during the First World War in the hope that the latter would grant them self-government. However, the negative attitude of the British towards the Indian demands made him a staunch opponent of the British.
- He supported the Home Rule League Movement started by Annie Besant. He started this movement in Pune and extended it to all of Maharashtra and the central provinces. During this movement, he gave the slogan, 'Swaraj is my birthright and I will have it'.
- He published his ideas in several pamphlets which were published in various vernacular languages.
- He popularised the Home Rule League Movement by touring Maharashtra and by



Bal Gangadhar Tilak supported the Home Rule League Movement started by Annie Besant.

giving fiery nationalist speeches. He linked the concept of swaraj with the movement. He preached the movement through two newspapers—Kesari in Marathi and Mahratta in English.

Annie Besant

- Annie Besant was an Irish by birth who was impressed with Indian culture and philosophy. She was the President of the Theosophical Society in Chennai.
- She was dissatisfied by the methods used by the Early Nationalists. When she visited England between 1908 and 1913, she was impressed by the Home Rule Movement in Ireland.
- After joining the Congress in 1914, she began to spread her ideas through her writings in dailies such as Commonweal and New India.
- In September 1916, she started the Home Rule League Movement at Gokhale Hall in Chennai. She set up about 200 branches of her League all over India. The objective of the Movement was demanding self-government which was to be achieved through promoting political education and holding discussions.
- She circulated pamphlets, newsletters and collected funds for the movement.



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The objective of the Home Rule Movement was to attain self-government within the British Empire through constitutional means. The leaders of the movement followed legal and constitutional methods to propagate the ideals of the movement.

Decline of the Movement

- The British government during the war years appeased the early Nationalists by the Declaration of August 1917 in which it promised to gradually give the people self-governance. The movement thus died down.
- The Early reformers were pacified with the promise of reforms.
- The scheme of reforms announced by the government in July 1917 divided the nationalists. While some were in favour of supporting it, others wanted to reject these demands.
- By the end of 1917, Tilak went to England, and in his absence, Annie Besant was not able to provide the revolt with a firm leadership. As a result, the movement declined.

Impact of the Home Rule League Movement

- As the Congress became weak, the Home Rule Movement infused the spirit of nationalism among the masses.
- It transformed the national movement into a people's movement.
- It provided training to many people who later became the architects of the Indian National Movement.
- It pressurised the government to give self-government to the country. It was due to the wide appeal of the movement that the government announced the gradual development of self-governing institutions in India.

August Declaration

Because of the pressure exerted by the Home Rule League Movement, the Secretary of State Edwin Montague drafted the Resolution of August 1917 to appease Indians. He declared that in the long run, self-government would be granted to Indians within the British Empire.

The reactions of the people towards the Declaration were

- The Declaration was heralded as the 'Magna Carta' of India by the early Nationalists as it was supposed to be the first step towards democracy in the country.

- The Assertive Nationalists criticised the Declaration as they believed that granting of self-government at a slow pace will not help India politically.
- The Congress and the league feared that separate electorates might be demanded by the people of different races in various states.
- The leaders of the depressed classes demanded separate electorates for their classes to get fair representation in the councils.
- The Sikhs wanted one-third of seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly because they believed that they constituted the main strength of the British army in India. They also owned vast proportion of land in Punjab and paid some 40% of the land revenue.

Montague–Chelmsford Reforms or the Government of India Act, 1919

On the recommendations of Edwin Montague and Lord Chelmsford (the Viceroy of India), the Government of India Act, 1919, was passed. Its main provisions were

Central Government was made responsible to the British Parliament

- The Secretary of State for India was to control affairs related to the Government of India.
- The central legislature was to consist of two chambers—the Council of States and the Indian Legislative Assembly. The latter was given the power to vote.
- The central legislature could make laws on any matter for the whole of India. It also had power over finance except over certain items of expenditure.
- The Governor General could summon, prorogue and dissolve the chambers.
- The control of the Secretary of State over Indian affairs was reduced.
- The number of Indians in the Council of the Viceroy was raised to three.
- For the first time in India, provision was made to establish a Public Service Commission.

Provincial Legislative Councils

- A Legislative Council was to be established consisting of elected and nominated members.
- The term of the Council was to be of three years.

Dual Government or Dyarchy

- The principle of dyarchy was introduced in the provinces. The subjects to be dealt by the provinces were now divided into two parts—reserved subjects and transferrable subjects.
- Reserved subjects such as finance, law and order, irrigation etc. were to be looked after by the Governor with the help of his Executive Council.
- Transferable subjects such as public health, education and agriculture were to be looked after by the Governor with the help of the Council of Ministers chosen by him. These members were to be responsible both to the Governor and the Legislature. The Governor could overrule his ministers and had complete control over finances.

Elections

- The system of indirect election was replaced with direct election.
- Communal franchise and separate electorates were introduced for Sikhs, Europeans and Anglo Indians.

Limitations of the Act

- The subjects were divided irrationally under the system of dyarchy. For example, while agriculture was a transferable subject, land revenue and irrigation were made reserved subjects.
- The loyalties of ministers and councillors were divided. While one was loyal to the Government, the other was responsible to the Indian electorate.
- The ministers did not have vast powers. They were not given complete control over any subject. The Governor was the supreme authority.
- Ministers did not have adequate funds to carry out their functions. They had to depend on the Finance Minister. The latter did not have sympathy with the people of India as he represented the vested interests of the British government.

The Congress declared reforms as inadequate and disappointing. However, it accepted the reforms to establish a responsible government in India.