



Lord Curzon

For Prelims: Curzon Gate, Bijay Chand Mahtab, Burdwan Estate, Bengal Partition.

For Mains: Curzon, his Foreign Policy and Reforms.

Why in News?

Recently, the West Bengal Government has decided to erect a **statue of Bardhaman's Maharaja Bijay Chand Mahatab** and his wife Radharani in **front of the Lord Curzon Gate**.

- Mahtab had built the gate in **1903 when Curzon visited the town**.
- Maharajadhiraja Bijay Chand Mahtab (1881 – 1941) was the ruler of Burdwan Estate, Bengal in British India from 1887 till his death in 1941.

Who Was Curzon?

- George Nathaniel Curzon (11th January, 1859- 20th 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.
 - He 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.

What were 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.
- **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.
- **Policy towards Persia:**
 - 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.
 - 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.

What were Reforms in Various Fields?

▪ **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.

▪ **Famine:**

- When Curzon arrived in India, it was in the grip of a 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.

▪ **Railways:**

- Curzon decided to **improve railway facilities in India** and also to make the Railway profitable to the government.
- 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.

▪ **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.

What was Curzon's Role in the Partition of Bengal?

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

What are the Consequences 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 Vande Mataram 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.
- 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.

What are the Impacts of the Protests?

- Curzon left for Britain in 1905, but the agitation continued for many years.
- King George V at his Coronation Durbar abrogated Bengal's partition in **1911**.
 - **Lord Hardinge** was the Viceroy of India in 1911.
- 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.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. With reference to Swadeshi Movement, consider the following statements: (2019)

1. It contributed to the revival of the indigenous artisan crafts and industries.
2. The National Council of Education was established as a part of Swadeshi Movement.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (c)

Q. The 'Swadeshi' and 'Boycott' were adopted as methods of struggle for the first time during the (2016)

- (a) agitation against the Partition of Bengal
- (b) Home Rule Movement
- (c) Non-Cooperation Movement
- (d) visit of the Simon Commission to India

Ans: (a)

Q. The Partition of Bengal made by Lord Curzon in 1905 lasted until (2014)

- (a) the First World War when Indian troops were needed by the British and the partition was ended
- (b) King George V abrogated Curzon's Act at the Royal Durbar in Delhi in 1911
- (c) Gandhiji launched his Civil Disobedience Movement
- (d) the Partition of India in 1947 when East Bengal became East Pakistan

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q. Evaluate the policies of Lord Curzon and their long term implications on the national movement. (2020)

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