The British conquest of India was not a sudden process, but a gradual shift from a **trading enterprise** to a **territorial and administrative power**. The East India Company, initially a commercial organization, eventually assumed political power, which was later taken over by the British Crown in 1858 after the Revolt of 1857. This transformation necessitated administrative reforms and structural changes both at the **central and provincial levels**.

I. Administration under the East India Company

1. Early Phase: Commercial to Political Transition

- The Company gained **Diwani rights in Bengal (1765)** after the Battle of Buxar.
- Initially, dual governance existed – Mughal officials handled administration while the Company collected revenue.
- This changed under **Warren Hastings**, who began centralizing authority.

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2. Evolution of Central Administration

A. REGULATING ACT, 1773

- First attempt by British Parliament to regulate Company affairs.
- Created the office of **Governor-General of Bengal** with control over Bombay and Madras presidencies.
- **Supreme Court established** in Calcutta to enforce the rule of law.

B. PITT'S INDIA ACT, 1784

- Introduced **dual control**: a Board of Control (Crown) and Court of Directors (Company).
- Strengthened the Governor-General's authority.
- Marked a clear shift from trade to **governance**.

C. CHARTER ACTS (1793–1853)

- Series of acts gradually restricted commercial functions and increased Crown's control.
- **Charter Act of 1833**:
  - Governor-General of Bengal became **Governor-General of India** (Lord William Bentinck first to hold the title).
  - Centralized administration further by removing legislative powers of provincial governments.
- **Charter Act of 1853**:
  - Introduced **Indian Legislative Council**.
  - Opened Indian Civil Services to all via competitive exam (in theory).

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3. Provincial Administration under the Company

- India divided into three presidencies: **Bengal, Bombay, and Madras**.
- Governors of Bombay and Madras had limited legislative powers; subject to Governor-General.
- Each province had its own army, revenue, and judiciary initially.

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4. Judicial and Civil Administration

- **Warren Hastings** initiated judicial reforms: separated revenue and civil justice.
- **Lord Cornwallis** introduced **Cornwallis Code (1793)**:
  - Codified civil and criminal law.
  - Created a structured **bureaucracy** dominated by Europeans.
- Indian Civil Services became the backbone of Company administration.

II. Administration under the British Crown (Post-1858)

1. Government of India Act, 1858

- Abolished Company rule; power transferred to **British Crown**.
- Office of **Secretary of State for India** created, based in London, advised by an **Indian Council**.
- Governor-General became **Viceroy of India**, representative of the Crown.

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2. Central Administration under the Crown

A. COUNCIL SYSTEM

- **Legislative Council expanded** under Indian Councils Acts (1861, 1892, 1909).

- Introduced **non-official Indian members** in a limited capacity.
- Viceroy retained **veto power** and **executive supremacy**.

B. POLICY OF ASSOCIATION

- Crown attempted to include Indian elites in governance to gain legitimacy.
- Gradual rise of **consultative and legislative participation** by Indians.

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3. Provincial Administration under the Crown

A. EVOLUTION OF PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY

- **Act of 1861**: Allowed provinces to make their own laws.
- **Act of 1919 (Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms)**:
  - Introduced **diarchy** in provinces (reserved vs transferred subjects).
- **Act of 1935**:
  - Provincial autonomy granted in true sense.
  - Provinces had their own legislatures and executive councils responsible to them.

B. CLASSIFICATION OF PROVINCES

- Provinces categorized as **Governor's provinces**, **Chief Commissioners' provinces**, and **princely states** (under indirect rule).

III. Features of the Company vs Crown Administration

Feature	Company Rule	Crown Rule
Nature	Commercial & Political	Direct Colonial Rule
Head	Governor-General	Viceroy of India
Control	Dual (Company & Parliament)	Unified under Secretary of State
Recruitment	Patronage-based ICS	Competitive ICS (but exclusionary in practice)
Provincial Autonomy	Limited	Gradual expansion post-1919

Conclusion

The administration of India evolved from the mercantile interests of the East India Company to the centralized bureaucratic governance of the British Crown. The transition marked a shift from **plunder and private interest** to a more formalized, albeit exploitative, **colonial state**. The structural evolution of central and provincial governance laid the foundation for the later development of **constitutional reforms**, eventually culminating in India’s independence.