



The period from **1909 to 1935** witnessed significant developments in India's constitutional framework and the growth of **local self-government institutions** under British rule. These changes were largely a response to rising Indian nationalism, administrative needs, and British attempts to placate Indian demands while maintaining colonial control.

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# I. Growth of Local Self-Government (1909–1935)

## 1. Background and Early Developments

- Introduced by **Lord Ripon (1882)** as a measure to promote administrative efficiency and educate Indians in self-governance.
  - Early institutions were **municipal boards and district boards**, largely **dominated by British officials**.
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## 2. Reforms under Indian Councils Act, 1909 (Morley-Minto Reforms)

- Focused on legislative councils rather than local bodies, but indirectly affected local self-governance by:
  - Allowing **Indians to enter councils** through **indirect elections**.
  - Introduced **communal electorates** (first time), dividing Indian political unity.



- However, **local bodies remained weak**, dominated by nominated or official members.
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### 3. Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and the Government of India Act, 1919

- Marked a **significant step** in the evolution of local self-government.

#### KEY PROVISIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE:

- Introduced **diarchy** in provinces:
  - **Transferred subjects** included local self-government, public health, education, etc.
  - These were administered by Indian ministers responsible to elected provincial legislatures.
- Local bodies got greater autonomy and funds but still lacked real power due to:
  - **Limited finances**
  - **Dominance of bureaucracy**
  - **Official veto powers**

#### IMPACT:

- **Increased Indian participation** in local administration.
  - Helped develop a **political consciousness** among the educated Indian middle class.
  - Laid the groundwork for more **democratic decentralization**.
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## 4. Simon Commission (1927-30)

- Appointed to assess constitutional progress but **boycotted** by Indians as it had **no Indian members**.
  - However, it acknowledged the importance of strengthening **local self-governance** and provincial autonomy.
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## 5. Government of India Act, 1935

### KEY CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY

- **Diarchy at the Centre**, but abolished in provinces.
- Provinces became **autonomous units**, responsible for all subjects including local self-government.

### LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT UNDER 1935 ACT:

- **Provincial governments** could now freely legislate on local matters.
- **Elected Indian ministers** responsible for local bodies.
- **Greater administrative and financial devolution** to municipalities and district boards.

### LIMITATIONS:

- **Franchise still restricted** based on property, tax, and education—excluded most of the population.
- **Rural local bodies** remained under control of landed elites or zamindars.



- **No constitutional status** or uniformity to local self-government.
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## II. Constitutional Changes (1909-1935)

### 1. Indian Councils Act, 1909

- Expanded **legislative councils** at both central and provincial levels.
  - Introduced **indirect elections**.
  - Legalized **separate electorates for Muslims**—sowing seeds of communal division.
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### 2. Government of India Act, 1919

- Implemented Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.
  - Introduced **diarchy** in provinces.
  - Established a **bicameral legislature** at the Centre (Council of State & Legislative Assembly).
  - Extended franchise to about 10% of the adult male population.
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### 3. Government of India Act, 1935

- Most significant and far-reaching pre-independence constitutional reform.



## KEY FEATURES:

- **All-India Federation** (never materialized due to princely states' non-participation).
  - **Provincial autonomy** introduced.
  - **Federal court** established.
  - **Bicameral legislatures** in some provinces.
  - **Reserved and separate electorates** extended to more communities (women, Sikhs, Christians, Anglo-Indians).
  - **Franchise expanded**—but still not universal.
  - **Safeguards and special responsibilities** for British governors diluted real autonomy.
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## Conclusion

Between 1909 and 1935, constitutional reforms gradually expanded Indian participation in governance and sowed the seeds of representative institutions. While **local self-government** was increasingly transferred to Indian hands, it remained constrained by colonial controls, financial dependence, and limited political power. Nonetheless, these reforms created a politically aware middle class and laid the **institutional foundation for democratic governance** in independent India.

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