Introduction:
Since the passing of the act of 1892, Indian Nationalism developed inspite of the repressive policy of the British Imperialists. The growth of the Swadeshi movement of Political terrorism compelled the British Government to adopt a prudent policy of granting more concession to the Indian people. As a result the Indian councils act of 1909 commonly known as the Minto-Morley Reform was passed.

The Minto – Morley Reforms, 1909, The Minto – Morely Reforms of 1909 were intended to win over the Moderates. The provided for the expansion of legislative councils and separate electorates for different communities, classes and interests. Under the act of 1909, Indians were for the first time, included in the highest levels of government where policies were discussed and framed. One seat in the viceroy's council was reserved to an Indian member and the practice of including Indians in the Provincial Councils was begun.

The number of additional members in the central legislative council was raised from 16 to 60. Of these, twenty seven were non officials who would be indirectly elected. The establishment of the system of communal electorates was a bad precedent and the continuance of such a system proved to be an impediment to the evolution of a multi-religious nationalism in India. By the Act of 1909, the number of additional members in the Madras legislative council in the Madras Presidency was reconstituted. By the Indian Councils Act of 1909 came into operation on 15 November 1909. In accordance with the provisions of the act, the membership of the provinces of Punjab, Burma, and Assam was fixed at 30 members.

The act paved the way for communal disharmony. Both the elected and nominated members of the legislative councils were concerned only with their personal interests and a result the act failed to serve its purpose. What the people demanded was responsible government, but the sacred heart of the reforms was benevolent despotism and hence it led to a lot of confusion. The reforms were in the nature of half-way house. Although non-official majority was given in the provincial council, it could not enforce its will. Further the act of 1909 introduced separate electorates for the Muslims. The evil did not end here. Subsequent legislations extended the principle of communal representation. For example the act of 1919 gave representation to the Sikhs and the act of 1935 gave the same to Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans and the Harijans. In fact the act of 1909 failed to create a responsible Government in India. Hence the disappointed Indian people continued their agitation for a more responsible government.

The dissatisfaction of the people coupled with the repressive politics of the government gave a new turn to the National Movement.

Salient Features, Government of India Act 1909
The Act contained the following provisions:
1. Separate Electorate was accepted for minorities.
2. The preparation of separate electoral rolls was ordered.
3. The Legislative Councils were expanded.
4. The authority of the Council was enhanced. The members were given more liberties. Members were allowed to present Resolutions, discuss Budget and put up questions.
5. The Viceroy's Council's membership was fixed at sixty members.
6. The membership of the provinces of Bengal, U.P., Bihar, Bombay, Madras and Orissa was fixed at 50 members whereas the membership of the provinces of Punjab, Burma, and Assam was fixed at 30 members.
7. The Indian were included in the Executive Council of the Viceroy and in the provincial Executive Councils.
8. The local bodies, trade unions and universities were allowed to elect their members.
9. Lt. Governors were appointed in Bengal, Bombay and Madras. These provinces were given right to form their own Councils.

The Act of 1909 and Madras Presidency
The Indian Councils Act of 1909 came into operation on 15th November 1909. In accordance with the provisions of the act, the legislative council in the Madras Presidency was reconstituted. By the Act of 1909, the number of additional members in the Madras Presidency was increased to 42 excluding the Advocate General. Of these 42 members, 19 non officials were elected as follows.

1. By the Corporation of Madras 1 member
2. By the University of Madras 1
3. By the Municipal Councils and District and Taluk Boards 8 members
4. By the Zaminars 2
5. By the Landholders other than Zaminars 2
6. By the Muhammadan Community 2
7. By the Madras Chamber of Commerce 1
8. By the Madras Trades Association 1
9. By the Planting Community 1

Keywords
Of the remaining 23 members nominated by His Excellency the Governor 16 were officials.

The Indian press criticized the loopholes in the Act. They considered the reforms as an apple of discard. In January 1910 the first general election was held to the imperial legislative Assembly and Provincial Legislative Councils. Emperor George V and his wife visited India in 1911 to inaugurate the councils. Despite the several defects, the act of 1909 instilled into the minds of the Indian people a feeling of confidence and made an impressive beginning in provincial self-government.

CAUSES FOR THE FAILURE OF MORLEY-MINTO REFORMS

1. The Act was no doubt an improvement upon the preceding Act but it fell far short of the national expectations. What disappointed the people most was the admixture of the two incompatible elements of constitutionalism and autocracy, of the nominative and elective principles. Supreme power continued to be vested in the Executive on the principle that the responsibility to rule over India had devolved exclusively on the British people. Indians were considered ill-fitted for higher posts in the administration. The local bodies continued to be officialised. The Councils established under the new Act remained ‘gilded shams’ and ‘magnified nonentities where constituency was the Government House’.

2. Another cause of the failure of Reforms was the introduction of indirect elections for returning the members to the Legislative Councils.

3. The system of communal representation also proved a thorn in the sides of the discerning leaders.

4. On proper analysis they found it nothing better than a political game of the Government to inflame communal passions and crack national solidarity. The public opinion also objected to the excessive importance that the Act gave to vested interests by giving them special representation. According to the Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms (1918), “it was opposed to the teaching of history. It perpetuated division by creeds and classes which meant the creation of political camps organized against each other and taught them to think as partisans and not citizens. It stereotyped existing relations and was a very serious hindrance to the development of the self-governing principle”.

5. The exclusion of Indian from senior posts and from public services also pin-pricked the educated unemployed youths of India. Indians continued to be treated like ‘pariah’ by the arrogant British. Even the Secretary of State during his visit to India was taken aback to learn that the doors of British clubs were closed for his Indian friends. The inadequacy of the reforms as such gave a filip to extremist movement in India.

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Conclusion

The importance and utility of Minto-Morley Reforms cannot be set aside because of some weaknesses in the scheme. It acceded the Muslims, their much cherished demand, the separate electorate in the provinces where legislative councils existed. The Muslim League performed in a commendable manner by achieving major demands of the Muslims after only two years of its inception. It scored an amazing political triumph within a short time of its political struggle. The separate electorate set the course of Muslim freedom movement which culminated in the shape of Pakistan after a forty years intense struggle. It also gave strength to the Two-Nation Theory which became the basis of Muslim freedom struggle.

References:

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