**North-West Frontier Policy of Lord Curzon**

Lord Curzon's foreign policy was mainly concerned with the North West Frontier, Afghanistan, Persia and Tibet. Of all these problems the settlement of the Tribal country first claimed his attention.

**1. The North-West Frontier Problems-** From very ancient times the various Indian governments had to deal with these hardy, fanatical and freedom loving tribesmen inhabiting the North-West Frontier of India, represented by mountain tract lying between Afghanistan and the Indus. Because of the poverty and the infertility of the land these tribesmen were always forced to raid the inhabitants of their neighbouring plains and to loot caravans passing through their territory. After the annexation of Sind in 1843 A.D. and of the Punjab in 1849 the English Government had also to deal with these tribal people because now the British Empire began to touch their land. It was the policy of the British Government to protect the life and property of their subjects from the inroads of these tribal people and to keep the passage between India and Afghanistan quite safe. In the beginning, the British Government tried to pacify these tribesmen with the help of money but when this policy proved a failure they tried to suppress them with force. In 1897, during the viceroyalty of Lord Elgin II, the various tribes of these turbulent Afghans raised a standard of revolt and blocked the various passages leading from India to Afghanistan. Thus forced by circumstances the British had to use military force to curb them. They were no doubt defeated but they were not fully subdued.

**2. Lord Curzon's Frontier Policy**-While in England Lord Curzon had greatly supported the "Forward Policy" of Lord Elgin, in the House of Commons, but when he himself became the viceroy he realised that the forward policy would not pay. He, therefore, adopted the 'Middle Way".

When he arrived in India in January 1899, about 10,000 British troops were quartered in the tribal areas. After a good deal of thinking he followed a middle course between an extreme forward policy and policy of definite retreat. He was thus the founder of a new school of frontier policy which has been described as "one of withdrawal and concentration". He neither wanted to advance in the tribal area nor did he desire to allow the tribal people to remain. as a permanent source of danger to the British Empire. His policy was thus the *"withdrawal of British forces from advance positions, employment of tribal forces in the defence of tribal country, concentration of British forces in British territory behind them as a safeguard and a support; and improvement of communications in the area."*

In pursuance of this policy Lord Curzon took various important steps, introduced fundamental changes, the chief among them are, however, the following:

(1) Slowly and slowly the British troops were withdrawn from the frontier posts and in their place tribal soldiers trained and commanded by British Officers were raised. As a result of this measure the problem of livelihood of the various tribesmen was solved and they became more faithful to the English.

(2) British forces were increased and concentrated behind the tribal area so that turbulent Afghans dared not enter India.

(3) Behind the tribal area a ring of strong forts was built within the Indian lines and garrisoned by the British and Indian soldiers. These troops were always kept ready to march at a moment's notice to the relief of the tribal forces.

(4) Railway lines were constructed up to various strategic places in the tribal area such as Durgai, Jamrud, Thal, etc., so that British armies could be sent there if and when required.

(5) Again, the various cantonments and forts built within the British lines were linked with roads and railway lines so that in case of emergency, troops and other equipments could be called without the least delay.

(6) All kinds of import of arms into the tribal areas were limited and regulated.

(7) The tribal people were told that their freedom would not be interfered with but any attempt on their part to encroach on the Indian territory would be repulsed with vengeance.

(8) Another aspect of Lord Curzon's frontier policy appears in his granting of allowance at regular intervals to the important tribal chiefs of the frontier tribes for keeping open the roads and passes, for the maintenance of peace and tranquility and for the punishment of crime.

(9) Hitherto the north-west frontier districts had been subordinate to the Lt. Governor of the Punjab, and the Government of India had to get everything done by the Punjab Government. But now the frontier question and the relation with tribesmen had not remained a matter of local interest but had become a part of the imperial defence for which the Government of India was directly responsible. Consequently in 1901 the trans-Indus districts of the Punjab were separated and formed into a new province called the North-West Frontier Province. This province with an area of 40,000 sq. miles was put under the charge of a Chiet Commissioner who was made directly responsible to the Government of India. In this way the difficulties and the delay attached with the North-West Frontier problem were removed.

**Criticism-** There is no doubt that Lord Curzon's North-West Frontier policy failed as a final solution of the frontier problem because after his time there occurred several revolts of the tribal people. It is also right that different tribes inhabiting the tribal area could not be brought under full control but still it will have to be admitted that because of Lord Curzon's settlement of the issue, the British Government was saved of much of its worries and there was a great saving in the military expenditure. During Lord Curzon's seven years of viceroyalty the Government spent about 2½ lakh pound (or exact £2 ,48,000) on the frontier problem whereas during the five years (1894-99) preceding Lord Curzon, about 46 lakh pounds (or exact £ 45,48,000) were spent on the frontier warfare. Thus as a result of the settlement of the frontier problem the Indian Government was saved of lakhs of rupees. In 1901. Lord Curzon himself gave a graphic picture of his frontier policy in these words: *"If any person had any doubt about the success of the North-West Frontier plan by now, after the lapse of about ten years, that must have been removed. Now I hope that in future we shall not hear of any plan suggesting the advance of British forces in the tribal areas and their amalgamation in the Frontier Province and constructing new passages in the tribal area."*