

Pitt's India Act 1784

[UPSC Notes]

Pitt's India Act 1784 is also recognized as the East India Company Act 1784. This act was introduced to the flaws of the Regulating Act of 1773, and also to increase the East India Company's accountability to the British Parliament. Pitt's India Act established a system where the British government and the British East India Company shared dual control of India. These transformations lasted until 1858.

The article below consists of a brief description of the provisions, features, importance, and impact of Pitt's India Act citing its importance in the context of UPSC. Get a complete overview of the Pitt's India Act of 1784 for the upcoming UPSC Exams. Prepare the topic well as it is important for both, Prelims and Mains.

What is Pitt's India Act 1784?

The Pitt's India Act of 1784 was named after the then Prime Minister of Britain William Pitt because the bill was introduced by the Prime Minister himself.

This bill is quite significant as it begins the process of the British government taking control over the territories occupied by the East India Company in India.

The Pitt's India act of 1784 was passed almost 11 years later than that of the Regulating Act of 1773. During this period the East India Company occupied a huge part of India and was making a huge amount of profits by exploiting Indian resources. This is the time when the British government felt the need to take control of the Indian subcontinent and restrict the company's monopoly over the trade. This became the prime reason for the introduction of Pitt's India Act of 1784.

History of Pitt's India Act 1784

Go through the developments that lead to the formation of the Pitt's India Act of 1784:

- The British were aware of the wealth of the Indian sub-continent and they had already witnessed the profits made by the East India Company. Therefore the British parliament had decided to take control of the East India Company slowly and steadily with an ambition to control the Indian territories.
- The loopholes of the Regulating Act of 1773 have caused certain administrative failures including corruption in the company, lack of accountability and responsibility, mismanagement in the company, clash of power, etc. Hence the British parliament had introduced the Pitt's Act of 1784, in order to upgrade the Regulating act of 1773 and remove the errors of the act.

- The occurrence of the First Anglo-Maratha war (1775-1782) was also one of the reasons that forced the British parliament to rethink the company's administrative and political powers. Pitt's India Act came into existence so that the company could realize the supremacy of the British Parliament.

Features of the Pitt's India Act

The salient features of Pitt's India Act of 1784 are as follows-

- The most significant feature of this act was that it established the supremacy of the British parliament over the East India company. The same was achieved by-
 - Differentiating the political and trading powers of the company.
 - Providing the trading powers of the company to the Court of Directors.
 - For the management of political affairs, a completely dedicated body was formed known as the Board of Control.
- It was also the foundation of double governance or dual government in India, as the separation of power was introduced for the first time.
- The Board of Control was handed over the complete authority to manage civil matters, revenue-related issues, and the military operations in British India.
- The Governor-General of India was still liable to be overridden by the Council appointed by the parliament. But since the number of the members of the council was reduced from 4 to 3, the Governor-General could easily predominate his decisions with the only help of one supporter from the council. Also, the Governor-General enjoyed the Casting Vote or Veto Power.
- The territories occupied by the East India Company were referred to as the British territories for the first time in any act.

Significance of Pitt's India Act of 1784

There were major two changes observed in the constitution of the company with the passage of the Pitt's India Act, they were-

- The councils of Madras and Bombay were modified on the model of the Bengal Council.
- The members of the Executive council were decreased to 3 while the Commander-in-chief of this executive council was the Governor-General himself.
- A separate department, known as the Board of Control, was being constituted in England in order to control the policies of the Court of Directors.
- Introduction of dual government that is by the company as well as by the Parliament. This system of government lasted till 1858.

Defects of Pitt's India Act

- The reduction of members of the executive council gave the Governor-General an extra edge. This is so because the Governor-General needed only one vote from the executive council for the implementation of his willful decisions.

- The clash of powers between the executive council and the Governor-General in case of any deadlock regarding voting on a certain decision making.
- The Governor-General was deprived of his military powers while he was the supreme commander of East India Company and the Parliament was situated in England. During the emergency situations, the sudden military decisions are to be taken but due to Pitt's Act of 1784, the Governor-General was left with no military powers.
- The powers of the Governor-General, the Board of Control, and the Court of Directors were not clearly described.

