



## EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PRIVY COUNCIL

Dr. R. M. Dave

HOD, Department of Human Rights &amp; I.H.L., Saurashtra University – Rajkot

## KEYWORDS :

If we overview the history of Indian Legal System, it clearly reveals that the Indian Legal System is more or less based on the English Legal System. In fact, the systematic development of Indian judicial institutions, judicial principles, laws etc. has occurred during British regime itself. Besides this, the British regime in India has also developed a hierarchical judicial system in India. Accordingly, the highest judicial authority was conferred on a body of jurists, popularly called as 'Privy Council'. It has played a significant role in shaping the present legal system in India. The same is discussed as under.

**Appeals from Courts in India to the Privy Council:**

This can be discussed under following sub-headings.

**I. Charters of 1726 and 1753:**

In the Indian Legal History, the Charter of 1726 granted the right to appeal from the Courts in India to Privy Council. The said Charter established three Mayor's Courts at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. The provision was made as to first appeal from the decisions of Mayor's Court to the Governor-in-Council in respective provinces and the second appeal from to the Privy Council in England. Whereas the Charter of 1757, which re-established the Mayor's Courts reaffirmed the said provisions of Appeal to Privy Council from Mayor's Courts.

**II. The Regulating Act, 1773:**

This Act empowered the Crown to issue a Charter for establishment of Supreme Court at Calcutta. Thus the Charter of 1774 was issued by the Crown to establish a Supreme Court at Calcutta and it abolished the respective Mayor's Court. Section 30 of this Charter granted a right to appeal from the judgments of Supreme Court to Privy Council in Civil matters if following two conditions were followed;

- i) Where the amount involved exceed 1000 pagodas
- ii) Where the appeal is filled within six month from the date of decision.

In the same way, the Act of 1797 replaced the Mayor's Court at Madras and Bombay with the Recorders Court and provided for direct appeals from these Courts to the Privy Council. Thus the right to appeal from King's Court to Privy Council was well recognized. Besides this, there were Company's Court i.e. Sadar Diwani Adalat and Sadar Nizamat Adalat. They also recognized the right to appeal to the Privy Council from their decisions. Accordingly the Act of Settlements, 1781 provided for right to appeal from Sadar Diwani Adalat at Calcutta in Civil matters.

**III. Appeals to Privy Council from High Courts:**

Under the Indian High Courts Act, 1861 the high Courts were established at three Provinces. It was the amalgamation of King's Courts and Company's Courts. This Act provided for the right to appeal from High Courts to Privy Council from all of its judgments except in Criminal matters. In addition to this, there was a provision of Special leave to Appeal in certain cases to be so certified by the High Courts.

**IV. Appeals from Federal Court in India to Privy Council:**

The Government of India Act, 1935 provided for the establishment of Federal Court in India. The Federal Court was given exclusive original jurisdiction to decide disputes between the Center and constituent Units. The provision was made for filing of appeals from High Courts to the Federal Court and from Federal Court to the Privy Council. The Federal Court also had jurisdiction to grant Special Leave to Appeal and for such appeals a certificate of the High Court was essential.

**V. Abolition of jurisdiction of Privy Council:**

In 1933, a white paper was issued by the British Government for establishment of the Supreme Court in India so as to here appeal from Indian high Courts. It was the first step in avoiding the jurisdiction of

Privy Council. After Indian independence, the Federal Court Enlargement of Jurisdiction Act, 1948 was passed. This Act enlarged the appellate jurisdiction of Federal Court and also abolished the appellate jurisdiction of Federal Court and also abolished the old system of filing direct appeals from the High Court to the Privy Council with or without Special Leave. Finally in 1949, the Abolition of Privy Council Jurisdiction Act was passed by the Indian Government. This Act accordingly abolished the jurisdiction of Privy Council to entertain new appeals and petitions as well as to dispose of any pending appeals and petitions. It also provided for transfer of all cases filed before Privy Council to the Federal Court in India. All powers of the Privy Council regarding appeals from the High Court were conferred to the Federal Court.

Thereafter with the commencement of the Constitution of India in 1950, the Supreme Court has been established and is serving as the Apex Court for all purposes in India. It hears appeals from all the High Courts and Subordinate Courts. With this the appellate jurisdiction of the Privy Council finally came to an end.

**Role of Privy Council:**

The Privy Council has contributed a lot in development of Indian Legal System. It served a cause of justice for more than two hundred years for Indian Courts before independence. As far as the judicial institution is concerned, the Privy Council was a unique and unparallel among all the Courts round the world. It set the task of ascertaining the law, formulating legal principles, molding and shaping the substantive laws in India. It also helped in introduction of the concept of 'Rule of Law', on which we have setup the whole philosophy of our 'Democratic Constitution'. Besides the Privy Council also lead to the introduction of Common Law in India, which forms the basis almost all present Indian laws.

The contribution of Privy Council in personal laws like Hindu Law and Muslim Law is also noteworthy. It acted as a channel, through which English legal concepts came to be assimilated with the body and fabric of the Indian law. It always insisted on the maintenance of the highest standards of just and judicial procedure, especially in the field of criminal justice. In this way; the decisions of Privy Council have enriched the Indian jurisprudence in many respects. Its contribution to the statute law, personal laws, and commercial laws is of great importance. Thus during the period of 1726-1949 and specifically after 1833 and onwards, the Privy Council has played a magnificent role in making a unique contribution to Indian laws and the Indian Legal System. The fundamental principles of laws as laid down by the Privy Council are considered as path finder for the Indian Courts still today.

**Drawbacks of Privy Council:**

In spite this contribution of Privy Council, it suffered from following drawbacks:

1. For long, it was staffed by Englishmen only, having no knowledge of Indian laws.
2. The location of the Privy Council was in England far away for common man in India making it disadvantageous.
3. The subjection to the jurisdiction to foreign judicial institution i.e. the Privy Council was considered as a symbol of slavery.
4. All this put the poor man in India in difficult situations for seeking justice.

**CONCLUSION:**

From the above discussion, it reveals that the Privy Council has rendered a meritorious contribution in the development of Indian legal system and judicial institutions. It introduced many fundamental legal principles in Indian legal system. It shaped the judicial institutions in India. As a whole its role is very significant in developing the legal system in India as it exists presently.

**REFERENCES**

1. Piers Brendon *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781–1997* (Vintage Books, London, 2008) at 81.
2. Niall Ferguson *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Penguin Books, London, 2004) at 112.
3. Viscount Haldane "The Work for the Empire of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council" (1921) 1 CLJ 143 at 148.
4. Enid Campbell "The Decline of the Jurisdiction of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council" (1959) 33 ALJ 196 at 209
5. JP Eddy "India and the Privy Council: The Last Appeal", above n 16, at 213.
6. Mitch Fraas, 'The First Fifty Appeals from East India Company Territories to the Privy Council 1679-1774'.
7. Mithi Mukherjee, *India in the shadows of empire: a legal and political history, 1774-1950* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010)
8. Barbara Metcalf and Thomas Metcalf, *A concise history of modern India* (Cambridge, 2006), Chapters 2 & 3 (for a general overview of the context)
9. Lauren Benton, 'Colonial law and cultural difference: jurisdictional politics and the formation of the colonial state', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Jul., 1999), pp. 563-588
10. Stanley De Smith & Rodney Brazier, *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, 1994, p161
11. Patrick O'Connor, *The Constitutional Role of the Privy Council and the Prerogative*, Justice Report, 2009
12. Stanley & Brazier, *Constitutional and Administrative Law*