

9 (a) Write an account of Russia in the early 1900's. (15)

In the early 1900s, Russia was a vast but deeply troubled empire. It was ruled as an absolute monarchy under Tsar Nicholas II and faced growing social, political, and economic problems. While the country was rich in natural resources and had a large population, it was also marked by inequality, unrest, and outdated systems that could not keep up with modern Europe.

Russia was ruled by the Romanov dynasty, with Tsar Nicholas II as its head. The Tsar had total power over the government, the military, and the Orthodox Church. He believed in divine right: the idea that God had chosen him to rule. There was no real parliament with power, and political opposition was often suppressed by the secret police (the Okhrana).

Russian society was divided between a very large poor majority and a small wealthy minority. Peasants made up about 80% of the population and lived in poverty. Most worked on land owned by nobles and struggled with high taxes and poor living conditions. The nobility and aristocracy were very wealthy and owned most of the land, living in luxury. The working class in the cities was small but growing. Industrial workers faced long hours, low pay, and dangerous conditions. The middle class (professionals, merchants, teachers) was also growing but had little political influence. These divisions led to frustration and growing demands for change.

Russia was also a multi-ethnic empire with many non-Russian groups (such as Poles, Ukrainians, Finns, and Jews) who were often treated harshly. The Tsar's government promoted Russification, a policy forcing minorities to adopt Russian language and culture, which led to further resentment and unrest. The empire was vast, but communication was difficult because the rivers in the Arctic Circle were frozen for large parts of the year, and the Trans-Siberian railway was only half completed by 1900.

With regard to the Russian industry, at the start of the 20th century, Russia was only beginning to industrialize, especially in cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg. However, this process created new problems. Urban workers faced harsh conditions, and rapid growth led to overcrowded cities and poor public services. At the same time, the rural economy remained backward, relying on outdated farming techniques. Famine and lack of land were common issues, especially among peasants.

In the early 1900's there were many groups that opposed the Tsarist regime: Liberals wanted a constitutional monarchy and reforms. Socialists aimed to overthrow the monarchy entirely and create a society based on equality. The Socialist Revolutionaries focused on peasant support, while the Social Democrats supported the ideas of Karl Marx. These groups were often forced to operate in secret or in exile.

Tensions in Russia exploded in 1905 after a peaceful protest in St. Petersburg was fired on by the Tsar's troops; a day known as Bloody Sunday. This sparked strikes, protests, and uprisings across the empire. Although the Tsar remained in power, he was forced to make concessions, including the creation of a parliament called the Duma. However, the Duma had little real power, and repression soon returned.

So, by the early 1900s, Russia was a country on the edge. The combination of autocratic rule, economic hardship, growing unrest, and political opposition created a situation ripe for revolution. These tensions would continue to build, eventually leading to the collapse of the Tsarist regime and the rise of the Bolsheviks in 1917.