

**World History (Part-IV)**  
**Subpart-II: The First Crisis of Capitalism (First World War)**

**Bolshevik Revolution in Russia**

■ **The Crisis of Capitalism:**

- Despite of all the efforts taken by Marx proletarian revolution didn't take place anywhere. But when capitalism faced a crisis, the Marxists saw a ray of hope. Lenin saw the First World War as the first crisis of capitalism. He believed that communist forces should take advantage of this situation. He himself used the opportunity and organised a revolution in Russia which is known as the Bolshevik Revolution or Russian Revolution.

■ **Russian Revolution:**

- Russian Revolution was unique in the sense that having been inspired by years' long discontentment and leadership that emerged in course of the revolution almost all the earlier revolutions occurred suddenly. But the Bolshevik revolution in Russia was organized through well-defined planning and program. So, it was known as a '**Textbook Revolution**' as well.
- Russian revolution was a next major step after French Revolution. It tried to answer some of those questions that had remained unanswered during the French revolution, i.e. the relationship between the bourgeoisie class and the proletariat class. This revolution influenced the course of history so deeply that some scholars believed it to be the most important event in 20th century.
- Russian revolution involved two revolutions i.e. March revolution and November revolution. It is always a matter of controversy that whether this revolution was an amalgamation of two revolutions or it was the two stages of a single revolution. On a deep observation, we find that it was the two stages of a single revolution, the bourgeoisie stage

and the proletariat stage.

- In fact, the significance of the Russian revolution lay in the second stage. If it would have stopped at the first stage, hardly it could go beyond the French revolution.

■ **Causes for the March Revolution or Bourgeoisie Stage:**

1. **Absolutist nature of Russian government:-**

In 1917, Russian monarchy was autocratic and it ruled without the support of any representative organisation. In fact, in 1917, the behaviour of the Russian monarchy was even worse than the French monarchy in 1789. As Russian monarch was more autocratic even than French monarch.

2. The **social division** that existed in France at the time of French revolution was visible in Russia as well. During mid of the 19th century, Russian society was divided between aristocracy and slaves. There was no middle class. The condition of agricultural slaves was worse. Russian monarch Tsar Alexander II started the process of reforms including abolition of slavery system in 1861. But as land redistribution was not carried on so the condition of slaves didn't improve.

3. **Russian Industrialisation-** The land reforms carried out under a financial expert, Stolpin, favoured rich farmers and not the poor ones. Apart from that, Finance Minister Sergei Witte started the process of economic reforms and promoted industrialization during the reign of Tsar Alexander II. But as industrialisation took place under the leadership of the state, so the middle class didn't play any important role in it. In fact industrialisation under state leadership could not give birth to a

powerful middle class. Even the industrialization of Russia was having a unique character. Russia was not widely industrialized. In the words of some critics, Industries in Russia was an island in the vast sea. Most of the industries were concentrated in a particular region. So, there was a concentration of workers in a specific region. This phenomenon led to growing proletarianization among Russian workers. So, there was the formation of some workers' parties, like Social Democratic Party which later divided between Bolshevik Party and Menshevik Party. On the other hand, there was a peasants' party i.e. Socialist Revolutionary Party.

4. Before the revolution, there occurred some intellectual revolution as well. For example, scholars like Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev and Dostoevsky etc. encouraged new ideas in Russia. Tolstoy instilled a sense of glory in the Russian public through his master-piece "War & Peace". Gorky, who himself was a member of the Bolshevik party, composed a revolutionary work called 'Mother'. Under the influence of these writers, a powerful intellectual class emerged.

5. **Revolution of 1905-** The discontent against the Russian monarchy had been going on for years. Its first visible expression was seen in the revolution of 1905. When Russia suffered a humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, prestige of monarchy was tarnished. The movement broke out all over the country. Reforms were demanded, workers stopped working. The farmers started robbing the landlords. While observing the situation to be unmanageable, the Tsar was compelled to announce the reforms. He promised to establish a National Assembly Duma. But Monarchy proved to be a failure in running a parliamentary government with

aristocratic people. In middle of such political upheavals, the Tsar again strengthened his position. He made the Duma powerless and made it merely an advisory body. By 1906, the tide of the movement turned down. In spite of its failure, the revolution of 1905 became a dress rehearsal of revolution of 1917.

6. **The First World War** proved a big game-changer. It prepared the way for the revolution in following manner:

- a. It created a further gulf between the executive and the legislative body.
- b. The First World War gave a big boost to inflation and scarcity of goods. In fact, before entering the war, the government didn't formulate any practical economic plan. So after the outbreak of the war, Russia faced scarcity of essential goods. It encouraged popular discontentment. Government committed double mistake by issuing new currencies in the market.
- c. As the Russian government followed the '**Scorched Earth Policy**' against the enemy, so, it created discontentment among Russian peoples as well.
- d. Russian monarch Tsar Nicholas II decided to take command of the army himself. So he went on the battle front and in his absence his queen and her spiritual guide Rasputin dominated the court. They encouraged conspiracy & counter conspiracy. So, the prestige of the monarchy declined further.

■ **The progress of the revolution:**

- In March 1917, due to the scarcity of goods, workers were much grieved and at least 4 lakh workers came on the roads of Petrograd. The governments passed an order to soldiers to open fire on the mob but the soldiers refused to follow the command. So, the government was helpless, and on 15th March government of Czar Nicholas II resigned. Thus

occurred the March Revolution.

- **The formation of Bourgeoisie government–** A bourgeoisie government was formed in April 1917 under the leadership of Lovav. But it could not function for long due to the following reasons–

- a. Apart from political freedom, Russian people expected socio-economic freedom as well.
- b. The Russian government became sandwiched between the Duma and Petrograd Soviet, as both had contrary opinions (Petrograd Soviet was a democratic alliance between peasants and soldiers).
- c. The land of the landlords were captured by the peasants during the revolution. So the future of that land had to be decided.
- d. One major challenge before the government was regarding the role of Russia in WWI.

- **Liberal Socialist Government–** The Bourgeoisie government declined in July 1917 and it was replaced by a new government under Kerensky.

#### ■ **October-November Revolution or Proletariat Stage:**

- Lenin came back to Russia in April 1917 from Germany where he was deported by Tsar Nicholas II due to his revolutionary acts.
- **Contribution of Lenin in Bolshevik revolution–**
  - i. **Ideological Contribution–** In a Marxist context, Russia was not a fertile ground for a proletarian revolution as it was not much industrialized. Thus, Lenin's ideological contribution was that he defined Marxist revolution as per the conditions prevailing in Russia. He declared that the world capitalist system was like a long chain. In this chain, the weakest link should be attacked and the whole chain would automatically

collapse.

- ii. **Contribution in Strategy–** Lenin chalked out the following strategy in his essay "Two tactics of social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution"-

- a. Russian proletariat should join with the peasants to carry out the first stage of the revolution. In case there is a dissention between the rich peasants and the poor peasants then the proletariat should take the reins of revolution and it should complete it with the support of the poor peasants in the second stage.
- b. Russian proletariats should make contact with proletariats of other regions so that the objective of world revolution can be accomplished.
- c. To strengthen the position of Bolshevik Party Lenin adopted opportunistic measures as well and formed an alliance with the opposition party for some time.
- d. Like Napoleon, he used to take timely decisions. He allowed the Liberal Socialists to form a government in July, as he knew that Bolsheviks were not in a position to capture power. Then, in October 1917 itself, he asked his companion Trotsky to seize the power with the help of selected band of disciplined volunteers.

- **Steps taken by Lenin to consolidate the revolution after seizing power–**

- a. **Withdrawal from the WWI–** The priority of Lenin was to consolidate the revolution in Russia, so he decided to end the war with Germany. It was definitely a bold decision as two earlier governments had hesitated to take any decision.
- b. Lenin signed the '**Treaty of Brest-Litovsk**' in March 1918 with Germany and submitted to Germany one-fourth of its European region, as Germany was not ready to give lenient terms. In reaction, allied powers invaded the Soviet Union, but the 'Red army' under Trotsky faced

the invasion boldly and since the allied powers too were exhausted due to WWI, they withdrew from USSR quickly.

- c. Lenin organised a secret police (**Cheka**) and unleashed coercive machinery against his rivals but simultaneously, he had learnt his lesson from the French revolution that application of terror should be external but not internal (within the party as in case of Robespierre). Apart from terror, he adopted the method of concessions with an objective to strengthen the position of Bolshevik party in Russia—
  - i. He permitted the peasants, who had already seized land from the landlords at the time of March revolution, to hold the land under their possession in spite of the fact that such a measure was running counter to the basic demands of Marxism.
  - ii. Marxism or Communism didn't recognize the racial or cultural division but Lenin accepted the distinct identity of minority groups in USSR. In the new constitution of the USSR, a special position of minority groups was accepted under Russian Federation. So, naturally Bolshevik party could enlist the support of different minority groups.
  - iii. After coming to power, Lenin initially adopted a very tough approach towards economic policy and tried to place the economy under state control. State started to fix the target of production for industries and in case of default, the management was punished. This system was known as '**War Communism**' and it was established in 1918. But by 1921, Lenin realised that the production in USSR was declining instead of increasing. So he brought a major modification in his system in 1921 and introduced the **New Economic Policy (NEP)**. Under this policy, nearly 90% of the Russian economy was placed under private capital. The NEP had the features of both capitalism as well

as socialism. For example—

- He abolished the policy of storage of grains from farmers (earlier farmers were supposed to collect grains instead of paying tax). Now they were permitted to sell it in the market.
- Foreign capitalists were allowed to run industries in Russia on the condition that their products would only be sold to government.
- Lenin was criticized for these measures as they were running counter to the basic tenets of Marxism. Lenin replied “after taking three long strides ahead, I have taken a single step back, even I am two steps ahead”.
- **Advent of Stalin and the phase of one-man dictatorship in Russia—**
  - Lenin's chosen successor was Trotsky but an ambitious leader, Stalin eliminated him and seized the power.

#### **Changes by Stalin:**

1. **Change in Ideology—** Lenin and Trotsky talked in terms of world revolution but Stalin abandoned that view and rather gave the slogan of '**World Revolution vs. Socialism in a single country**'. Stalin believed that due to the Russian emphasis on world revolution the western countries treated it as their arch enemy. Thus Russia should abandon this aim for a while and concentrate on strengthening the Russian economy. (Due to Stalin's policy the revolution couldn't move to the third stage and finally communism made a compromise with nationalism).
2. **Changes in Economy—** Stalin took the following steps to strengthen Russian economy-
  - a. He emphasised rapid industrialization and with this purpose, he introduced **economic planning** in 1928. Through the first three Five-Year Plans, Stalin built a strong industrial infrastructure in Russia.



- b. A strong agricultural base was required for industrialization. Thus Stalin abolished private property and the peasants' land was grouped together for collective farming (co-operative farming). Russian economy was completely transformed under Stalin. This was the reason that it could successfully face German aggression during the Second World War.

- c. In this industrialization, Stalin emphasized on two sector model. In other words, the goal of industrialization was to be achieved in two stages. In the first phase, Capital goods industries while in the second phase, consumer goods industries were to be established.

3. **Dictatorship of the government**– During his reign, the party rule changed into dictatorship of one man. All dissents were silenced with iron hand. For example, those who opposed him were either killed or were sent to a mental asylum. In the same way, the acquisition of land for co-operative farming was strictly pursued. During the process, almost 10 lakh people were killed and 50 lakh rich peasants were deported to Siberian region. Thus, the Communist government of Russia was an altered form of Marxism. It was a mixture of extremist Marxism and absolute Tsarism.

■ **Impact and Significance of Russian Revolution:**

- i. This was the world's first proletarian revolution. It was the Russian revolution that created opportunity for the Marxist ideology to be expressed materialistically for the first time.
- ii. After the Russian revolution, Europe was divided on the ideological lines in such a way that, it had never been divided after the Reformation Movement.
- iii. After the success of the Bolshevik

Revolution, there was a rapid spread of communist and socialist ideology in different parts of the world.

- iv. After this revolution, Soviet Russia presented an alternative model of economic development in the form of economic planning and state control. At the time of Great Economic Depression (1929-30), this economic model of Soviet Russia established its importance. After the economic success of Soviet Russia, this economic model was rapidly adopted in other regions of the world as well. Capitalist countries also adopted some of the characteristics of socialist economy after learning strong lessons from the world economic depression. Therefore, in a sense, the communist movement of Russia itself changed the nature of the capitalist system.
- v. The establishment of communist government in Russia gave impetus to the process of decolonization in different regions of the world. In other words, it provided an alternative view and perspective to the colonies, which inspired the freedom movement in those countries.
- vi. Further the whole world got divided on the basis of ideology. Therefore, the establishment of communist system in Russia gave impetus to the Cold War.

**Question: Lenin's New Economic Policy, 1921 (NEP) influenced the policies adopted by India soon after independence. Evaluate. (UPSC-2014)**

**Answer:** Lenin's New Economic Policy (1921) was a unique model of economy. It not only prepared a model of economic development for Soviet Russia and socialist countries of Eastern Europe, but it also left its imprint on a newly independent nation like India. It gave a new direction to Indian economic policy.

Lenin's new economic model had two important aspects-first, the two-sector model,

also known as the Feldman Model. Two sector model was influenced by ideas of Marx. According to this model, in the first stage initiative should be taken for the foundation of capital goods industries. Thus in second phase, consumer goods industries would naturally follow them. In other words, the establishment of consumer goods industries was seen as a natural follow up to the establishment of capital goods industry. This was called second generation industrialization.

India gave special importance to the economic model of Soviet Russia in the

Second Five-Year Plan soon after independence. P. C. Mahalanobis prepared the model of future industrialization of India under the Second Five Year Plan which was based on two sector model and capital goods industries.

In the industrialization of India, both the public sector and the private sector were given importance and special emphasis was given on the establishment of heavy industry. It was considered as the basic preparation for the future industrialization of India. Initially, this model was successful in both Soviet Russia and India, but later in Soviet Russia as well as in India, a kind of disruption was visible in this economic model.

