CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

America, Russia, India.

In this chapter an attempt is made to take a look at the 19th century socio-cultural and intellectual backgrounds of the three writers, O. Henry, Leo Tolstoy and Prem Chand. No doubt all the three possessed a greatness which transcends time and space yet such universality is always achieved by the greatest geniuses of the world in a particular temporal and spatial framework.

An important historical fact of United State in the 19th century was expansionism and political crisis alongside the social transformation -- a result of industrial revolution. Frederick Jackson Turner, the American historian in 1893 said that this ever-moving frontier (since the eastern settlers kept spilling over into Mississippi valley and beyond, pushing the frontier farther westward), was the most decisive influence on American civilization and values. Throughout the era Americans in varying numbers moved into regions south, west and north of the Louisiana territory. Because Mexico and Great Britain held or claimed most of these out lying lands, dispute inevitably broke out between these governments and the United States.

The growing nationalism of the American people was effectively engaged by Democratic Presidents Jackson and James K. Polk from 1845 - 49, and the expansionist whig President
John Tyler (1841-45) to promote their goal of enlarging the "empire for liberty". Each of these presidents performed shrewdly. Jackson waited until his last day in office to establish formal relations with the Republic of Texas, one year after his friend Sam Houston had succeeded in dissolving the ties between Mexico and the newly Independent state of Texas. On the Senators' overwhelming repudiation of his proposed treaty of annexation, Tyler resorted to the use of a joint resolution so that each house could vote by a narrow margin for incorporation of Texas into the Union. In the northwest, Polk succeeded in getting the British to negotiate a treaty (1846) whereby the Oregon country south of the 49th latitude would revert to the United States. These were precisely the terms of his earlier proposals, which had been rejected by the British. Intent on securing the Mexican territories of New Mexico and upper California and ready to resort to almost any means to do so, Polk used a border incident as a pretext for commencing a war with Mexico that the congress did not declare and that many congressmen disliked, but appropriations for which few dared oppose.

The nationalistic idea, conceived in the 1840's by a Democratic editor, that it was the "manifest destiny" of the United States to expand westward to the Pacific undoubtedly prepared public opinion for the militant policies shortly after undertaken by Polk. This notion reflected the feelings of many of the people.
Before the civil war, the United States experienced a whole generation of nearly unremitting political crises. Underlying the problem was the fact that America in the early 19th century had been a country, not a nation. The major functions of government—those relating to education, transportation, health and public order—were performed on the state or local level, and little more than a loose allegiance to the government in Washington, a few national institutions such as churches and political parties, and a shared memory of the founding fathers of the republic tied the country together. Within this loosely structured society every section, every state, every locality, every group could pretty much go its own way.

Gradually, however, changes in technology and in the economy were bringing all the elements of the country into steady and close contact. Improvements in transportation—first canals, then toll roads, and especially railroads—broke down isolation and encouraged the boy from the country to wander to the city, the farmer from New Hampshire to migrate to Iowa. Improvements in the printing press, which permitted the publication of penny newspapers, and the development of the telegraph system broke through the barriers of intellectual provincialism and made everybody almost instantaneously aware of what was going on throughout the country. As the railroad network proliferated, it had to have central direction and control; and national railroad corporations—the first true "big businesses" in the United States
For many Americans the wrench from a largely rural, slow-moving, fragmented society in the early 1800's to a bustling integrated, national social order in the mid century was an abrupt and painful one; and they often resisted it. Sometimes resentment against change manifested itself in harsh attacks upon those who appeared to be the agents of change -- especially the newly arrived immigrants who seemed to personify the forces that were altering the older America. Vigorous nativist movements appeared in most cities during the 1840's; but not until the 1850's, when the huge numbers of Irish and German immigrants of the previous decade became eligible to vote, did the anti-foreign fever reach its peak. Directed both against immigrants and against the Catholic church, to which so many of them belonged, the so-called Know-Nothing movement emerged as a powerful political force in 1854 and increased the resistance to change.

The economy of United States got a boost with the discovery of gold in California, and prospectors found gold or silver in every state and territory of the far west. There were few truly rich "strikes" in the post-civil war years. Of those few, the most important were the fabulously rich Comstock Lode of silver in western Nevada (first discovered in 1859 but developed more extensively later) and the discovery of gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota (1874) and at Cripple Creek, Colorado (1891).
In the quarter century after the civil war, the construction of the railroads from the Middle west to the Pacific coast was the railroad builders' most spectacular achievement. The southern states rail network was equally important in terms of national economy. The west developed simultaneously with the building of the western railroads, and in no part of the nation was the importance of railroads more generally recognized. The railroad gave vitality to the regions it served, but, by withholding service, it could doom a community to stagnation. The railroads appeared to be ruthless in exploiting their powerful position: they fixed prices to suit their convenience, they discriminated among their customers; they attempted to gain a monopoly of transportation wherever possible; and they interfered in state and local politics to elect favourites to office, to block unfriendly legislation, and even to influence the decisions of the courts.

By 1878 the United States had re-entered a period of prosperity after the long depression of the mid-1870's. In the ensuing 20 years the volume of industrial production, the number of workers employed in industry, and the number of manufacturing plants all more than doubled. The expansion of the iron and steel industry, always a key factor in any industrial economy, was even more impressive, in 20 years from 1880 to 1900. And before the end of the century, the United States surpassed Great Britain in the production of iron and steel and was providing more than one-
quarter of the world's supply of pig iron.

Many factors combined to produce this burst of industrial activity. The exploitation of western resources, including mines and lumber, stimulated a demand for improved transportation, while the gold and silver mines provided new sources of capital for investment in the east. The construction of railroads, especially in the west and south, with the resulting demand for steel rails, was a major force in the expansion of the steel industry and it increased the railroad mileage tremendously in the United States. Technological advances, including the utilization of the Bessemer and open-hearth processes in the manufacture of steel, resulted in improved products and lower production costs. A series of major inventions, including the telephone, typewriter, linotype, phonograph, electric light, cash register, air brake, refrigerator car and the automobile, became the bases for new industries, while many of them facilitated the conduct of business. The use of petroleum products in industry as well as for domestic heating and lighting became the cornerstone of the most powerful of the new industries of the period, while the trolley car, the increased use of gas and electric power, and the telephone led to the establishment of important public utilities that were natural monopolies and could operate only on the basis of franchises granted by state or municipal governments. The widespread employment of the corporate form of business organization offered new opportunities
for large-scale financing of business enterprise and attracted new capital, much of it furnished by European investors. Over all this industrial activity, there presided a colourful and energetic group of entrepreneurs, who gained the attention, if not always the commendation, of the public and who appeared to symbolize for the public the new class of leadership in the United States. The period was also notable for the wide geographical distribution of industry. The Eastern seaboard from Massachusetts to Pennsylvania continued to be the most heavily industrialized section of the United States, but there was a substantial development of manufacturing in the states adjacent to the Great lakes and in certain sections of the South.

The dominant forces in U.S. life in the last quarter of the 19th century were economic and not political. This fact was reflected in the ineffectiveness of political leadership and in the absence of deeply divisive issues in politics, except perhaps for the continuing agrarian agitation for inflation. There were colourful political personalities, but they gained their following on a personal basis rather than as spokesmen for a program of political action. No president of the period was truly the leader of his party, and none apparently aspired to that status except Grover Cleveland during his second term (1893-97). And in the absence of leadership from the White House, public policy was largely formulated in Congress. As a result, public policy commonly
represented a compromise among the views of many congressional leaders -- a situation made the more essential because of the fact that in only four of the 20 years from 1877 to 1897 did the same party control the White House, the Senate, and the House.

The Republicans appeared to be the majority party in national politics. From the civil war to the end of the century, they won every presidential election save those of 1884 and 1892, and they had a majority in the senate in all but three congresses during that same period. The Democrats, however, won a majority in the House in eight of ten congresses from 1875 to 1895. The success of the Republicans was achieved in the face of bitter intraparty schisms that plagued Republican leaders from 1870 until after 1890 and despite the fact that, in every election campaign after 1876, they were forced to concede the entire south to the opposition. The Republicans had the advantage of having been the party that had defended the Union against secession and had freed the slaves. When all other appeals failed, Republican leaders could salvage votes in the North and West by reviving memories of the war. A less tangible but equally valuable advantage was the widespread belief that the continued industrial development of the nation would be more secure under a Republican than under a Democratic administration. Except in years of economic adversity, the memory of the war and confidence in the economic programme
of the Republican Party were normally enough to ensure Republican success in most of the Northern and Western states.

The response of various groups to problems raised by the rapid industrialization and urbanization that followed the civil war, was called progressivism. These problems included the spread of slums and poverty; the exploitation of labour; the breakdown of democratic government in the cities and states caused by the emergence of political organizations, or machines, allied with business interests; and a rapid movement toward financial and industrial concentration. Many Americans feared that their historic traditions of responsible democratic government and free economic opportunity for all were being destroyed by gigantic combinations of economic and political power.

In 1890’s and later there were numerous movements for reform and reconstruction on the local, state and national levels that were too diverse, and sometimes too mutually antagonistic, ever to coalesce into a national crusade. But they were generally motivated by common assumptions and goals -- e.g., the repudiation of individualism and laissez-faire, concern for underprivileged and down trodden, the restoration of government to the rank and file and the enlargement of governmental power in order to bring industry and finance under a measure of popular control.

In the vanguard were various agrarian crusades, such as
the Grangers and the populists and Democrats under Bryan, with their demands for stringent railroad regulation and national control of banks and the money supply. At the same time a new generation of economists, sociologists and political scientists was undermining the philosophical foundations of the Laissez-faire state and constructing a new ideology to justify democratic collectivism; and a new school of social workers was establishing settlement houses and going into the slums to discover the extent of human degradation. Allied with them was a growing body of ministers, priests and rabbis -- proponents of what was called the social Gospel -- who struggled to arouse the social concerns and consciences of their parishioners. Finally, journalists called "muckrakers" probed into all the dark corners of American life and carried their message of reform through mass-circulation newspapers and magazines. Their contribution was significant and brought an awakening leading to positive measures taken by the people at the helm of affairs. One such writer journalist was O. Henry.

Theodore Roosevelt with his experience as Police Commissioner of New York City and governor of New York state, had board democratic sympathies and an intimate knowledge of modern urban problems. Because congress was securely controlled by a group of arch conservative Republicans, the new president had to feel his way cautiously in legislative matters; but
he emerged fullgrown as a tribune of the people after his triumph in the presidential election of 1904. By 1906 he was the undisputed spokesman of national progressivism and by far its best publicity agent. Meanwhile, by his leadership of public opinion and by acting as a spur on congress, he had revived the presidency and made it incomparably the most powerful force in national politics.

In 1901 Americans were perhaps most alarmed about the spread of so called trusts or industrial combinations, which they thought were responsible for the steady price increases that had occurred each year since 1897. Ever alert to the winds of public opinion, Roosevelt responded by activating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890, which had lain dormant because of Cleveland's and McKinley's refusal to enforce it and also because of the supreme court's ruling of 1895 that the measure did not apply to combinations in manufacturing. In 1903 Roosevelt persuaded a reluctant congress to establish a Bureau of Corporations with sweeping power to investigate business practices the bureau's thorough going reports were of immense assistance in antitrust cases. While establishing the supremacy of the federal government in the industrial field, Roosevelt, in 1902, also took action unprecedented in the history of the presidency by intervening on Labour's behalf to force the arbitration of a strike by the United Mine workers of America against the Pennsylvania anthracite coal operators. Roosevelt moved much more aggressively after his
1904 elections and some of these were the result of his response to the publication of revealing stories with gory details about American life at this point of time. This made him the idol of the masses of 1908 America.

19th century India was face to face with a confused and complex socio-political and cultural situation -- the time of British rule in India. The administrators of the first 30 years of the 19th century gave British India the form it retained until 1947. Outstanding among them were Sir Thomas Munro in Madras, Mountstuart Elphinstone in western India, and Sir Charles Metcalfe in Delhi; and Holt Mackenzie, whose planning determined the lines of settlement from Benares to Jamna.

The administration of British India was largely Indian in pattern, though it was now British in direction and superintendence. It was paternalistic and hierarchical; and it suffered, like its immediate predecessors, from a chronic tendency to over assess. The emperor was replaced by the mystical entity, the company Bahadur; and its representative, the governor general, moved about with almost equal pomp. The higher direction was exclusively European, but the officers acted in a Mughal spirit, and the administration at sub district and village-level went on much as before. But there were also large changes. Their new security
benefited the commercial classes generally, but the deliberate sacrifice of Indian industry to the claims of the new machine industries of Britain ruined such ancient crafts as cotton and silk weaving. The new legal system, with its network of courts, proved efficient on the criminal side but was heavily overloaded on the civil.

The strain and the scandal of this situation created a demand for increased Indian agency and caused the first breaches in the British monopoly of higher office. Indianization began with the confessed inefficiency of the British legal system. The picture is completed by the company's army, separately organized in the three presidencies and officered, like the civil service, exclusively by the British. It was backed by contingents of the British army. The Bengal army preponderated in numbers and fighting spirit. On European standards it was cumbersome and inefficient; some of its defects were exposed in the early days of the Nepal war. But it was more than a match for anything that could be brought against it.

The administration of British India thus established was impressive though ponderous. But it was essentially static; it was a repair of the machinery of government without any decision about its direction. Such a situation in a sub-continent could not be viable for long.

In the early 19th century a great debate went on in Britain
about the nature of the government in India. The company wanted India to be regarded as a field for British Commercial exploitation, with the company holding the administrative whip with one hand and exploiting with the other. This pleased no one but the company itself. As an extension of this, the new regime could be regarded as a law and order or police state, holding the ring while British merchants in general traded profitably. This was assailed from several quarters. There was the whig demand, first voiced by Edmund Burke in his campaign against Warren Hastings, that the Indian government must be responsible for the welfare of the governed. This was reinforced by Evangelicals in England, both Anglican and Baptist, who added the rider that as the ruler Britain was responsible for India's spiritual and moral welfare as well. The Evangelicals were a rising force, influential in the British "establishment". Their specific for India, as a preparation for conversion, was English education. They were reinforced in this by the rising group of free thinking utilitarians - followers of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill - who were influential in the company's service, who wished to use India as a laboratory for their theories, and who thought Indian society could be transformed by legislation. Finally, there were radical rationalists who had borrowed the doctrine of human rights from France and wished to introduce them into India; and on the political side there was a body of British merchants and manufacturers, who saw in India both a market and
a profitable theatre of activity and who chafed at the restraints of the East India company's monopoly.

In 1813 the East India Company lost the monopoly of trade with India and was compelled to allow free entry of missionaries. British India was declared to be British territory, and £ 10,000 was to be set aside annually for the promotion of both Eastern and Western learning. 1828-35 was Lord William Bentinck's period and he carried the great Reform Bill. On his arrival Bentinck was confronted with an agitation against Sati, or the burning of Hindu widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands. In suppressing the practice, he had to face the reproaches of both Hindus and Europeans on the grounds of religious interference. But he was also fortified by the support of the Hindu reformer Raja Rammohan Roy. In thus acting and in prohibiting child sacrifices and discouraging infanticide -- a widespread practice among the Rajputs -- stressing that the general good did not permit violations of the universal moral law, even if done in the name of religion. But Bentinck alienated the oriental further by substituting English for Persian as the language of record for government and the higher courts, and he declared that government support would be given primarily to the cultivation of western learning and science through the medium of English -- in this he was supported by Macaulay.

Some discernible Indian attitudes of this period speak of
the complex state of affairs. There were Indians who rejected all things western, retiring to their houses and estates to dream of the past. There were those who were clients and employees of the British, as they had been of the Mughals and the Turks before them, without any intention of giving up their traditional culture. But there were also those who, while remaining good Hindus or Muslims, began to study western ways and thought for careerist purposes. And there was, finally, a small group who sought to study the ideas and spirit of the west, with a view to incorporating in their own society anything that seemed desirable.

Generally speaking, there was a political, economic, social and cultural westernization. Politically, the princes of India had retired into a sulky seclusion after their final defeat in 1818. But the wars against the Afghans and the sikhs and then the annexations of Delhousie alarmed and outraged them. The Muslims had lost the large state of Oudh; the Marathas had lost Nagpur, Satara and Jhansi. Further the British were becoming increasingly hostile toward traditional survivals and contemptuous of anything Indian. Therefore, there was both resentment and unease among the old governing class, fanned in Delhi by the decision to end the Mughal imperial title on Bahadur Shah's death. The vast Indian masses were illiterate - bristling with its racial feuds, its religious antagonism, its castes, its social exclusions, its babel of tongues, its fierce communal controversies.
Economically and socially, there was much dislocation in the land holding class all over northern and western India as a result of British land-revenue settlements, setting group against group. There was thus a suppressed tension in the countryside, ready to break out whenever governmental pressure might be reduced. A combination of factors produced, besides the normal tensions endemic in India, an uneasy, fearful, suspicious, resentful frame of mind and a wind of unrest ready to fan the flame of any actual physical outbreak.

The dramatic capture of Delhi turned mutiny into full-scale revolt. The whole episode falls into three periods -- first came the summer of 1857, when the British, without reinforcements from home, fought with their backs to the wall, the second concerned the operations for the relief of Lucknow in the autumn, and the third was the successful campaign of Sir Colin Campbell and Sir Hugh Rose in the first half of 1858. Mopping-up operations followed, lasting until the British capture of Tantia Tope in April 1859.

The six decades between the end of the "mutinous" war of 1857-58 and the conclusion of world war I saw both the peak of British imperial power in India and the birth of nationalist agitation against it. The period was haunted by dark memories of the "mutiny" and heartened by dreams of freedom; its first phase was dominated by fear, its later years by hope. Queen Victoria's
promise of racial equality of opportunity in the selection of her servants for the government of India was never implemented during this era, and the most tragic legacy of 1857-58 was the unbridgeable gulf of racial hatred left by the "mutiny" between British and "native" communities throughout India. The English writer Rudyard Kipling captured the typical attitude of British officials who came to India in this period, as to "take up the white-man's burden". Britishers lived, by and large, throughout the interlude of their Indian services to the crown as 'super-Brahmin' remaining as aloof as possible from "native contamination" and counting the months till they would be eligible to return home to retire in Great Britain on their ICS pensions.

The Indian National Congress held its first meeting in December 1885 in Bombay city, while British Indian troops were still fighting in upper Burma. Just as the British Indian Empire attained its outermost limits of expansion, the institutional seeds of the larger of its two national successors was thus sown. Provincial roots of Indian nationalism, however, may be traced to the beginning of the era of crown rule in Bombay, Bengal and Madras. Nationalism emerged in 19th century British India both in emulation of and as a reaction against the consolidation of British rule and the spread of western civilization. Then there were two turbulent national mainstreams flowing beneath the deceptively placid official surface of British administration: the larger
predominantly Hindu movement, which led eventually to the birth of India, and the smaller Muslim one, which acquired its organizational skeleton with the founding of the Muslim league in 1906 and led to the creation of Pakistan.

Many English-educated young Indians of the post mutiny period emulated their British mentors by seeking employment in the ICS, the legal services, journalism and education. The universities of Bombay, Bengal and Madras had been founded in 1857 as the capstone of the East India Company's modest policy of selectively fostering the introduction of English education in India. At the beginning of crown rule, the first graduates of these universities, reared on the works and ideas of Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Macaulay. They sought positions that would help them improve themselves and society at the same time, convinced that with the education they had received and the proper apprenticeship of hard work they would eventually inherit the machinery of British Indian government. Few Indians, however, were admitted to the ICS, and among the first handful who were, one of the brightest, Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925) was dismissed dishonourably at the earliest pretext and turned from loyal participation within the government to active national agitation against it. Banerjee became a Calcutta college teacher and then editor of The Bengalee and founder of the Indian Association in Calcutta. In 1883 he convened the first Indian National Conference
in Bengal, anticipating by two years the birth of the congress on the opposite side of India. After the first partition of Bengal in 1905, Banerjee attained nationwide fame as a leader of the Swadeshi and boycott movements. In Bombay, young leaders of new India were also busily at work in the 1870's, establishing provincial political associations such as the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha founded by Mahadev G. Ranade -- a graduate from Bombay University in 1862. Ranade found employment in the educational department in Bombay, taught at Elphinstone College, edited the *Indu Prakash*, helped start the Hindu reformist Prarthana Samaj in Bombay, wrote historical and other essays, and became a barrister. Ranade was one of the early leaders of India's emulative school of nationalism, as was his brilliant disciple Gopal Krishna Gokhale—1866-1915. Gokhale, revered by Mahatma Gandhi as his political guru, taught at Fergusson College and was an editor and social reformer as well as a nationalist political leader. He was elected president of the congress in 1905. Moderation and reform were the keynotes of Gokhale's life, and by his use of reasoned argument, patient labour, and unflagging faith in the ultimate equity of British Liberalism, he achieved more for India, working within the system of British rule, than did any of his contemporaries.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak—1856 - 1920 was Gokhale's Poona Colleague at Fergusson College and the leader of Indian
nationalism's revolutionary reaction against British rule. Tilak was Poona's most popular Marathi journalist, whose vernacular newspaper *Kesari* became the leading literary thorn in the side of the British. He was jailed for seditious writings in 1897. He looked to orthodox Hinduism and history as his twin sources of nationalist inspiration. Tilak called upon his compatriots to take keener interest and pride in the religious, cultural, martial and political glories of pre-British Hindu India, rather than slavishly focusing their attention on foreign learning and emulating the ideas and attitudes of British white Christian oppressors. He helped found and publicize the popular Ganapati and Shivaji festivals in the 1890's in Poona, former capital of Maratha Hindu glory. Tilak had no faith in British justice, and his life was devoted primarily to agitation aimed at ousting the British from India by any means and restoring swaraj to Indian people. But the orthodox Hindu character of his revolutionary revival, while bringing many non-English-educated Hindus into the nationalist movement, alienated Indian Muslim minority and exacerbated communal tensions and conflict. With the prevailing conditions Muslim response could not be expected to be different to Gandhiji's Satyagrah call from that of Tilak's revivalism. Though Mahatma Gandhi laboured valiantly to achieve Hindu Muslim unity, Mohammad Ali Jinnah disgusted with the situation left the Nagpur Congress. The days of the lucknow pact were over, and by the start of 1921 the forces of Hindu and
Muslim agitation destined to lead to the birth of the independent dominions of India and Pakistan in 1947 were clearly set in motion in their separate directions.

The final period of British rule can best be understood by the two visible trends. First, there was the transformation of British policy, the period opened with Britain in the twilight of an era of liberal reform; then followed a long, almost uninterrupted government by conservatives with labour finally taking over after world war-II to implement a programme of radical change. The initial reforming impulse of the pre-world war I liberal governments was thus followed by caution and an insistence upon "safeguards" in constitutional evolution, with the movement toward a transfer of power making rapid headway only after the election of the labour government in 1945. The second major trend was the endeavour of the Indian National Congress to mobilize a broadly based nationalist movement that would compel the British to hand over power. This endeavour was constantly hampered by the tendency of different sections of the movement to pull away in different directions resulting in the Muslim political leadership opting for a separate form of independence.

Russia of early 19th century was in a state of hostility with most of Europe though its armies were not actually fighting, its
only ally was its traditional enemy, Turkey. The new Emperor Alexander I, quickly made peace with both France and Britain and restored normal relations with Austria. His hope that he would then be able to concentrate on internal reform was frustrated by the reopening of war with Napoleon in 1805. Defeated at Austerlitz, the Russian armies fought Napoleon in Poland in 1806 and 1807, with Prussia as an ineffective ally. After the treaty of Tilsit (1807), there were five years of peace, ended by Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. From the westward progress of its arms in the next two years of heavy fighting, Russia emerged as Europe's greatest land power and the first among the continental victors over Napoleon. The immense prestige achieved in these campaigns was maintained until mid-century. During that period, Russian armies fought only against weaker enemies. Persia in 1826, Turkey in 1828-29, Poland in 1830-31, and the mountaineers of the caucasus during the 1830's and 1840's. When Europe was convulsed by revolution in 1848, Russia alone among the Great Powers was unaffected, and in the summer of 1849 the Tsar sent troops to crush the Hungarians in Transylvania. Russia was not loved, but it was admired and feared. To the upper classes in central Europe, Nicholas I was the stern defender of monarchial legitimacy; to democrates all over the world, he was "the gendarme of Europe" and the chief enemy of liberty. But the Crimean War (1853-56) showed that this giant had feet of clay. The vast empire
was unable to mobilize, equip and transport enough troops to defeat the medium-sized French and English forces under very mediocre command. Nicholas died in the bitter knowledge of general failure.

Alexander I as a young man had longed to reform his empire and benefit his subjects. His hopes were disappointed, partly by the sheer inertia, backwardness, and vastness of his domains but chiefly because Napoleon's aggressive enterprises diverted Alexander's attention to diplomacy and defense. Russia's abundant man power and scanty financial resources were both consumed in war. The early years of his reign saw two short periods of attempted reform. During the first 1801 to 1803, the Tsar took counsel with four intimate friends, who formed his so-called unofficial committee, with the intention of drafting ambitious reforms. From 1807 to 1812 he had as his Chief advisor the liberal Mikhail Speransky. Both periods produced some valuable administrative innovations, but neither initiated any basic reform. After 1815 Alexander was mainly concerned with grandiose plans for international peace; his motivation was not merely political but also religious. The years of war and national danger had aroused in him an interest in matters of faith to which, as a pupil of the 18th century enlightenment, he had previously been indifferent. While he was thus preoccupied with diplomacy and religion, Russia was ruled by conservatives, among whom the brutal but honest Gen.
Aleksey Arakcheyev was outstanding. Victory in war had strengthened those who upheld the established order, serfdom and all. The mood was one of intense national pride. Holy Russia had defeated Napoleon, the Corsican Anti-Christ, and therefore it was not only foolish but also impious to copy foreign models. Educated young Russians, who had served in the army and seen Europe, who read and spoke French and German and knew contemporary European literature, felt otherwise. Masonic lodges and secret societies flourished in the early 1820s. From their deliberations emerged a conspiracy to overthrow the government, inspired by a variety of ideas: some men looked for a model to the United States, others to Jacob in France. The Conspirators, known as the Decemberists because they tried to act in December 1825 when the news of Alexander I's death became known and there was uncertainty about his successor, were defeated and arrested. Five of these were executed and many more sentenced to various terms of imprisonment in Siberia. Nicholas I, who succeeded after his elder brother Constantine had finally refused the throne, was deeply affected by these events and set himself against any major political change, though he did not reject the idea of administrative reform. After the revolutions of 1848 in Europe, his opposition to all change, his suspicion of even mildly liberal ideas, and his insistence on an obscurantist censorship reached their climax.

Russia under Alexander I and Nicholas I was ruled by its
bureaucracy. The efforts of successive sovereigns after Peter the Great to establish a government service of the European type had had partial success. The Russian bureaucracy of 1850 combined some features of a central European bureaucracy of 1750 with some features of pre-Petrine Russia. One may speak of a "service ethos" and trace this back to 16th century Muscovy. But the foundation of this ethos was, for the great majority of Russian officials, servile obedience to the Tsar and not service to the state as that phrase was understood in a country like Prussia. The notion of the state as something distinct from and superior to both ruler and ruled was incomprehensible to most government servants. Russian bureaucrats were obsessed with rank and status. Indeed, this was the only incentive that the government could give, as salaries were very meagre. Rank was not so much a reward for efficient service as a privilege to be grasped and jealously guarded. In order to prevent able persons, especially of humble origin, from rising too quickly, great emphasis was laid on seniority. There were exceptions, and outstandingly able, cultured and humane men did reach the top under Nicholas I, but they were few.

The rank and file of the bureaucracy was mediocre, but its members steadily increased, perhaps trebling in the first half of the century. It remained poorly paid. The government's poverty was caused by the backward state of the economy, by the fact that no
taxes could be asked of the nobility, and by the cost of waging wars—not only the great wars but also the long colonial campaigns in the Caucasus. Government officials were badly educated. They lacked not only precise knowledge but also the sort of basic ethical training that competent officials need. They were reluctant to make decisions: responsibility was pushed higher and higher up the hierarchy, until thousands of minor matters ended on the emperor’s desk. Centralization of responsibility meant slowness of decision and delays of many years were not unusual; death often provided the answer. There were also many antiquated, discriminatory, and contradictory laws. Large categories of the population, such as Jews and members of heretical Christian sects, suffered from various legal disabilities. Since not all of those discriminated against were poor and since many small officials were unable to support their families, bending or evasion of the law had its market price, and the needy official had a supplementary source of income. Corruption of this sort existed on a mass scale. To a certain extent it was a redeeming feature of the regime: if there had been less corruption the government would have been even slower, less efficient and more oppressive than it was.

No significant changes were made in the condition of the serfs in the first half of the century. Alexander I, perhaps from fear of the nobility and with the memory of his father’s fate in mind, approached the problem with caution, though with a desire for
reform, but first war and then diplomacy diverted him. His successor, Nicholas disliked serfdom but there were political hazards in eliminating it. And if serfdom were to be abolished some other authority would have to be put in place, and the existing bureaucratic apparatus was plainly inadequate. The Decemberist conspiracy in 1825 had greatly increased the Tsar's distrust of the nobility. He was determined to avoid public discussion of reform, even within the upper class. The one important exception to the general picture of bureaucratic stagnation was the creation of the Ministry of state Domains, under Gen. Pavel Kiselev. This became an embryonic ministry of agriculture, with authority over peasants who lived on state lands. These were little less than the rural population. Kiselev set up a system of government administration down to the village level and provided for a measure of self-government under which the major of the villages was elected by male householders. There was also to be a court for judging disputes between peasants. Kiselev planned to improve medical services, build schools, establish warehouses for stocks of food in case of crop failure, and give instruction in methods of farming. Something was done in all these fields, even if less than intended and often in a manner that provoked hostility or even violent riots; the personnel of the new ministry was no more competent than the bureaucracy as a whole.

Only minor measures were taken to benefit the serfs on
private estates. Opposition to serfdom grew steadily, however, not only among persons of European outlook and independent thought, but also among high officials. It seemed not only unjust but intolerable that in a great nation men and women could be owned. Serfdom was also obviously an obstacle to economic development. Whether serfdom was contrary to the interests of serf owners is a more complex question. Those who wished to abolish it argued that it was, since their best hope of getting the nobility to accept abolition lay in convincing them that their self interest required it certainly in parts of southern Russia where the soil was fertile, labour was plentiful, and potential profits in the grain trade with Europe were high, a land owner would do better if he could replace his serfs by paid agricultural labour and be rid of obligations to those peasants whom he did not need to employ. In other regions where the population was scanty, serfdom provided the landowner with an assured labour supply; if it were abolished, he would have to pay more for his labour force or see it melt away. In large parts of northern Russia where the land was poor, many serfs made a living from various crafts -- in cottage industries or in factories -- and from their wages had to pay dues to their masters. The abolition of serfdom would deprive the serf owner of this large income and leave him with only what he could make from farming and from tenants with rather poor economic prospects. No doubt the short term interests of the great majority of serf owners
favoured the maintenance of serfdom, and in any case, this is what most serf owners believed.

Any step toward the modernisation of Russia meant abolition of serfdom. As it seemed to the new tsar Alexander II who came to power in 1855, that the dangers to public order of dismantling the existing system, which had deterred Nicholas I from action, were less than the dangers of leaving things as they were. As the Tsar said to the nobility of Moscow in March 1856 that it is better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait until the serfs begin to liberate themselves from below. The main work of reform was carried out in the ministry of the interior, were the most able officials, headed by the deputy minister Nikolay Milyutin, were resolved to get the best possible terms for the peasants. In this they were assisted by a few progressive landowners, chief among whom was the Slavophile Yury Samarin; but the bulk of the land owning class was determined, if it could not prevent abolition of serfdom, to give the freed peasants as little as possible. The settlement, proclaimed on March 3, 1861 was a compromise. Peasants were freed from servile status, and a procedure was laid down by which they could become owners of land. The government paid the landowners compensation and recovered the cost in annual "redemption payments" from the peasants. The terms were unfavourable to the peasants in many, probably most, cases. In the north, where land was poor, the price of land on
which the compensation was based was unduly high: in effect this served to compensate the landowners for the loss of their serfs and also for the loss of the share that they previously enjoyed of the peasant's earnings from non-agricultural labour. In the south, where land was more valuable, the plots given to the peasants were very small, often less than they had had for their use when they were serfs.

But of this main beneficiary was neither peasant nor landowner, but the state. And for tsar the principle of autocracy remained sacred depriving the government of the services of hundreds of talented men. The most negative event of 1860's was the decision against a national assembly depriving Russains of the possibility of public political education. During the same year small revolutionary groups began to appear on the scene. The outstanding figure was the socialist writer N.G. Chernyshevsky; the extent of his involvement in revolutionary action remains a subject of controversy but of his influence on generations of young Russains there can be no doubt. In 1861 and 1862 revolutionary leaflets were distributed in St. Petersburg, ranging from the demand for a constituent assembly to a passionate appeal for insurrection. The Polish uprising of 1863 strengthened the forces of repression. An unsuccessful attempt on the tsar's life in 1866 led to a certain predominance, among Alexander's advisers of extreme conservatives. In 1870 the main cities of Russia were
given elected municipal government and in 1874 a series of military reform was completed by the establishment of universal military service.

In 1870's revolutionary activity revived and its centre was the university youth who were increasingly influenced by a variety of socialist ideas derived from Europe but adapted to Russian conditions. They thought the potential for revolutionary action to be in the peasantry. But the peasants found the deliberations of revolutionaries beyond their comprehension. In 1876 a new party was founded that took the title of Land and Freedom. Some of its members favoured assassination of prominent officials in reprisal for the maltreatment of their comrades and also as a means to pressure the government in order to extract western-type political liberties. Experience taught them that while the peasants were physically too scattered to be an effective force, and in any case too apathetic, the work in the new industrial cities offered a more promising audience. This faction was opposed by others in the party who deprecated assassination, continued to pay more attention to peasants than to workers and were indifferent to the attainment of political liberties. In 1879 the party split. The politically minded and terrorist wing took the name People's Will and made its aim the assassination of Alexander II. After several unsuccessful attempts it achieved its aim on March 13, 1881, when the tsar was fatally wounded by a bomb while driving through the
capital. Alexander III reaffirmed the principles of autocracy without change. In 1882 he appointed Dmitry Tolstoy minister of interior. Tolstoy and Pobedonostev were the moving spirits of the deliberately reactionary policies that followed. Education was further restricted, the work of the Zemsivos was hampered, and the village communes were brought under closer control in 1889 by the institution of the "land Commandant" -- an official appointed by the ministry of interior, usually a former officer or a local land owner, who interfered in all aspects of peasant affairs. The Office of elected justice of the peace was abolished, and the government was authorized to assume emergency powers when public order was said to be in danger. Public officials retained their arrogant contempt for the public and especially for the poorer classes. The discriminatory laws against Jews and members of dissenting Christian sects remained a source of widespread injustices, hardships and resentment. Agriculture remained backward and poverty increased more rapidly than prosperity. One of the main reasons for this was the indifference of the government to agriculture. The governments economic policy was motivated by the desire for national and military power. This required the growth of industry and great efforts were made to encourage it. Agriculture was regarded mainly as a source of revenue to pay for industry and the armed forces. Exports of grain made possible imports of raw materials, and taxes paid by peasants filled the states coffers.
On the whole, the situation was quite depressing and this was reflected in the literature of the period by writers like Turgeneve, Dostovsky and Leo Tolstoy.