In India’s encounter with the west, there has been one experience that has not been shared with India by any other society in the world. India is a whole world in herself; she is a society of the same magnitude as our western society; and she is the one great non-western society that has been not merely attacked and hit but overrun and conquered outright, by western arms, and not merely conquered by western arms but ruled, after that, by western administrators. In Bengal, this western rule lasted for nearly 200 years and in the Punjab for more than 100 years. India’s experience of the west has thus been more painful and more humiliating than China’s or Turkey’s, and much more so than Russia’s or Japan’s; but, just for this reason, it has been also much more intimate. Personal contacts between Indians and westerners have been more numerous, and our western iron has probably entered deeper into India’s soul. Perhaps India would not have been conquered by western arms if she had not been conquered by Moslem arms first. In a previous talk, I have already mentioned that the Mogul last wave of Moslem conquerors of India overland—the Great Moguls, we call them—arrived in India not many years after the first landing in India, in 1498, of the Portuguese first wave of western mariners. These Mogul Moslems forestalled the British westerners in bringing almost the whole of India under a single government. The Mogul peace in India may not have been as effective as the subsequent British peace was to be at its zenith; but the Mogul peace lasted as long as the British peace was to last, and when, in the eighteenth century, it fell to pieces, it left legacies that made it not so difficult for the Moguls’ British successors to reassemble the fragments of the Mogul Empire. One legacy was an imperial, laud-revenue organisation which ran on by its own momentum - during the eighteenth-century bout of anarchy in India. It ran on because it had become an Indian habit, and the conditioning of Indian hearts and minds to acquiesce, by force of habit, in an empire imposed on India by alien conquerors was the second of the Mogul legacies from which the Moguls’ British successors profited.

The British successors of the Mogul rulers of India condemned their own revival of the Mogul raj to come to an end when, in the eighteen-thirties, they deliberately set out to change the habits that their Mogul predecessors had implanted in Indian minds. In the eighteen-thirties the British rulers of India opened a window to the west for Indian minds. They substituted a western for an Islamic and a Hindu higher education in India, and so introduced the Indians to their British rulers’ own western ideas of liberty, parliamentary constitutional government, and nationalism. The Indians took this western political education to heart. It moved them to demand for India, and eventually moved the British to concede to India, the self-government that Great Britain enjoys; and today the Hindu successors of the British raj in the Indian Union, and the Moslem successors of the British raj in Pakistan, are dedicated to the enterprise of ruling their shares of the sub-continent on the lines on which their British
predecessors in the government of India have been conducting the government of Great Britain since 1688.

It is perhaps particularly noteworthy that the present Hindu rulers of the greater part of the Indian sub-continent should have chosen, as they have, to carry on the government on western lines originally laid down by alien conquerors. In the territories included in the Indian Union, the Hindus are now masters in their own house for the first time since the beginning of the Moslem conquest of India 800 or 900 years ago. In the eighteenth century, when the Mogul Moslem raj was breaking up, there were moments when it looked as if it was going to be followed immediately by the establishment of Hindu successor states. In the eighteenth-century scramble for the Moguls’ heritage, a Maratha Hindu power had arisen in the highlands behind Bombay, and these Marathas seemed for a time to be well on the way to winning the lion’s share of the spoils. This eighteenth-century attempt to transform the Mogul Moslem raj into a Maratha Hindu raj was foiled by the intervention of a more powerful western hand. But the establishment of a British raj instead of a Maratha raj did not bring to a halt the resurgence of the Hindus in their homeland. When the military line taken by the Hindu renaissance in the eighteenth century ended in a military failure, the gathering stream of Hindu energy was merely diverted into a different channel. Under the British raj in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as during the interregnum in the eighteenth-century, the Hindus continued steadily to regain power in India, but under the British regime they gained it not by force of arms, but by force of mastering a western system of education, administration, and law which were so many keys to power in a westernising world.

The Hindus were quicker than the Indian Moslems to see and seize the opportunity that, in a western age of Indian history, was open to Indians who effectively cultivated the western arts of peace. Unlike the Indian Moslems, the Hindus had no enervating memories of recently lost power and glory to keep them brooding ineffectively over a dead past instead of reaching out into the future; and so a balance of power, which had begun to incline against the Moslems in an anarchic eighteenth century, continued to go against them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under a British peace which set a premium on intellectual ability, in place of military prowess, as the qualification for advancement in the continuing competition between Hindus and Indian Moslems who were now alike subjects of a western Crown. The Indian Moslems did, of course, eventually follow their Hindu fellow-Indians’ example. They, too, set themselves to master the arts of our western civilisation. Yet, when the voluntary liquidation of the British raj in India came within sight, the Indian Moslems insisted that the re-transfer of the government of India from British to Indian hands must be accompanied by a partition of India between a Hindu and a Moslem successor-state; and this insistence on separation was, in effect, a recognition of the truth that, since the days of ‘the Great Moguls’, there had been a reversal of the balance of power between Moslems and Hindus in India to the Moslems’ disadvantage. In a joint Hindu-Moslem state including the whole sub-continent, the Indian Moslems feared that they would now be swamped by the Hindu majority of the population.
A Continued Partnership?
Though in 1947 a predominantly Moslem Pakistan thus parted company with a predominantly Hindu Indian Union, the objective of the British Indian Empire’s two successor-states has so far been the same. In this first chapter of their histories, the power in both states has been in the hands of the element in their population that has had a western education and that has been inspired by this with western ideals. If this element remains in power in India and Pakistan, as well as in Ceylon, we may look forward to seeing the statesmen of these Asian countries use their influence over their countrymen to persuade them to remain members of our ‘free world’. No doubt these same Asian statesmen will continue to demand that, in a ‘free world’ that is to be the common home of western and Asian peoples, there shall be no unfair and invidious discrimination against the Asian members of the family, and we western members are bound to give satisfaction to our Asian fellow-members on this point if, in calling our world ‘free’, we are sincere. Unless we western members of ‘the free world’ grievously fail to live up to our professed liberal principles, we may hope to see the present western-trained and western-minded rulers of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon continue in partnership with us.

It is one of the vital interests of the western peoples that this partnership of ours with the peoples of the Indian sub-continent should be preserved; for these Indian peoples together constitute one of the two Asian quarters of the human race; and, only two years after Great Britain had made a move for the reconciliation of Asia with the west by completing the liquidation of British rule in Ceylon, Pakistan, the Indian Union, and Burma, the Chinese, who constitute the second of the two Asian quarters of the human race, went over from the western camp to the Russian. If, after thus losing the friendship of the Chinese sub-continent, our western world were to lose the friendship of the Indian sub-continent as well, the west would have lost to Russia most of the old world except for a pair of bridgeheads in western Europe and Africa; and this might well be a decisive event in the struggle for power between ‘the free world’ and communism. So the Indian Union—the successor-state of the British Empire which covers most of the Indian sub-continent, and the state in which the Hindus are predominant—occupies a commanding position in the divided world of today, in which the United States and her associates are competing for world power with the Soviet Union and her associates. In which direction is the Hindu fifth of the human race going to incline? Let us look at some of the considerations telling for and against the likelihood of the Hindus continuing to go our western way.

I am going to take a promising point first. I fancy that, today, personal relations between Indians and westerners are more friendly than they have ever been. Many citizens of the United Kingdom will, I am sure, have had the experience, which I have had a number of times since 1947, of being surprised and touched by the friendliness that Indians have been going out of their way to show to English people. This has happened to me several times in foreign countries, where the local people were on the look-out to see what the relations between Indians and English people really were now; and, as I say, I have found Indians in conspicuous positions abroad going out of their way to show that the former unhappy estrangement between them and us was now dead and buried as far as they were concerned. When Great Britain did completely fulfil her promise to liquidate her rule in India, the Indians were, I think, taken aback. They had perhaps never fully believed that the English intended ever to fulfil their promises to India; and so, when the English did keep their word, there was
a revulsion of feeling on the Indian side from hostility to friendliness. It is handsome of the Indians to make their new friendliness towards the English apparent; and this happy change in the relations of the Indians and the English with one another is, I would venture to add, something gained for our ‘free world’ as a whole.

The estrangement between India and a western world which, for India, has been represented by Great Britain, goes back behind the beginning of the Indian movement for independence in the eighteen-nineties, and behind the tragic conflict in 1857. It goes back to the reforms in the British administration in India that were started in the seventeen-eighties. This birth of estrangement from reform in the relations between Indians and English people is one of the ironies of history; and yet there is a genuine inner connection between the two events. In the eighteenth century the then newly installed British rulers of India were free and easy with their newly acquired Indian subjects in two senses. They were unscrupulous in using their political power to fleece and oppress them, and at the same time they were uninhibited in their social relations with them. They hob-nobbed with their Indian subjects off duty, besides meeting them at work on less agreeable terms. The more intellectual Englishmen in India in the eighteenth century enjoyed the game of capping Persian verses with Indian colleagues; the more lively Indians enjoyed being initiated into English sports. Look at Zoffany’s picture ‘Colonel Mordaunt’s Cock Match at Lucknow’, painted in 1786. It tells you at a glance that, at that date, Indians and Englishmen could be hail-fellow-well-met with one another. The British rulers of India in the first generation behaved, in fact, very much as their Hindu and Moslem predecessors had behaved. They were humanly corrupt and therefore not inhumanly aloof; and the British reformers of British rule, who were rightly determined to stamp out the corruption and who were notably successful in this difficult undertaking, deliberately stamped out the familiarity as well, because they held that the British could not be induced to be superhumanly upright and just in their dealings with their Indian subjects without being made to feel and behave as if they were tin gods set on pedestals high and dry above those Indian human beings down below.

Today, when the Indians are once more governing themselves, so that Lord Cornwallis’ problem of finding how to make western administrators in India behave decently no longer arises, there is nothing today to prevent the relations between Indians and westerners from being intimate and decent at the same time, and this is a promising change for the better. But just how far does it go? After all, so few thousand out of India’s 450,000,000 ever did or do meet a westerner—or even meet a member of that western-minded minority of the Indian people that is now governing India in her former western rulers’ place. And what is the future of this new Indian governing class? Will it be able to maintain its leadership? And will the western outlook and ideals, that have been implanted in the souls of this minority by their education, be able to hold their own, even here, against the Hindu tradition?

**Three Societies**

It is remarkable that even a minority in the great Hindu world should have gone as far as this now ruling minority has gone in assimilating western ideas and ideals, considering how alien the western and Hindu outlooks on life are from one another. In the first two talks in this series, in which we were discussing Russia’s and Islam’s relations with the west, we were dealing with two cases in which the non-western...
party with whom the west had collided had something in common with the west which Hinduism does not possess. Though our Russian contemporaries are not the children of western Christians, they are the children of eastern Orthodox Christians; and so the Christian religion and also the Graeco-Roman civilisation—which the Christian Church has taken over and preserved and handed down—are parts of the Russians’ spiritual background, as they are parts of ours in the west. Our Moslem contemporaries, again, are adherents of a religion which, like communism, can be described as being a Christian heresy; and the philosophy and science of the Greeks are parts of the Moslems’ spiritual background as they are of ours; for Islam followed Christianity’s example in taking over this Greek legacy. In fact, if, looking at the contemporary world as a whole, one were to try to make the broadest and simplest analysis of the main cultural divisions in it, one would find oneself grouping the Moslems, the ex-eastern Orthodox Christians, and the ex-western Christians together as members of a single great society which one could distinguish from both the Indian world and the far eastern world by giving this society, like each of the other two, an over-all label of its own. Since the spiritual possession that all we Christians and Moslems have in common with one another is a pair of common heritages, one from the Jews and another from the Greeks, we could label our Christian-Moslem society the Graeco-Jewish, to distinguish it both from a Hindu society in India and from a Confucian-Buddhist society in the Far East.

From this bird’s-eye view that takes in the whole of mankind, the divers Moslem and Christian variations on a common Graeco-Jewish way of life fade almost out of view. They look quite insignificant by comparison with the characteristics that are common to all of us Moslem and Christian members of our Graeco-Jewish cultural family. When we contrast our Moslem-Christian way of life as a whole with the Hindu way or with the far eastern, the differences, inside our Moslem-Christian family, between eastern Orthodox Christendom and western Christendom, or between either of these Christendoms and Islam, almost cease to be visible. And yet we know that these relatively small cultural differences can produce violent spiritual disturbances in the souls of the children of one of these Graeco-Jewish sister civilisations of ours when these souls are played upon by the spiritual radiation of one of the other civilisations in our family.

Consider for example the effect produced on Russian souls by the impact on them of the western civilisation since the time of Peter the Great. The two parties to this encounter were, both of them, members of the same Graeco-Jewish family; yet the disturbance produced in Russian Graeco-Jewish souls by the strangeness of the intruding western variety of the same Graeco-Jewish spirit has been very great. We can measure the severity of this disturbance psychologically by the tormented and tormenting vein in a nineteenth-century Russian literature, which expresses, and gives vent to, the distress suffered by a soul when it is required to live in two different spiritual universes at once—even when these two claimants on the same soul’s spiritual allegiance are rather closely akin to one another. We can also measure the severity of the western stress and strain upon Russian souls politically by the explosiveness of the revolution in which this spiritual tension discharged itself in 1917.

As for the west’s effect on Moslem souls, the first faint tincture of western influence on the Ottoman Turkish regime in the nineteenth century was enough to let loose a
number of violent anti-western reactions among the less sophisticated Moslem peoples. The explosion in the Sudan in the 1880s is the most familiar example to us in Great Britain. And yet, if you think of it, the Mahdi Mohammed Ahmed’s personal religion was really remarkably like his infidel western opponent, General Gordon’s religion.

The disturbance produced by the impact of the west on Moslem and Russian souls, which has come to the surface in these sensational manifestations, is presumably a good deal milder than the latent disturbance produced in Indian souls by the same alien western spiritual force; for the disturbance in Moslem and Russian souls, violent though it has been, must have been mitigated by the presence, in Islam’s and Russia’s cultural heritages, of Jewish and Greek elements that were also present in the heritage of the intruding western civilisation, whereas in the Indian heritage there have been no Greek or Jewish elements, or at any rate none to speak of, to break the force of the shock administered by the impact of the west here. What, then, in India, is going to be the resolution of this presumably far sharper tension between a Hindu and an alien spiritual force? On the surface, those Hindus who have adopted our, to them, extremely alien western culture on the planes of technology and science, language and literature, administration and law, appear to have been more successful than the Russians in harmonising with their native way of life a western way that is intrinsically more alien to them than it is to the Russians. Yet the tension in Hindu souls must be extreme, and sooner or later it must find some means of discharging itself.

Whatever may be the relief that Hindu souls are going to find for themselves eventually, it seems clear that, for them, there can be no relief from the impact of our, western civilisation by opening themselves to the influence of communism; for communism—a western heresy adopted by an ex—Orthodox Christian Russia—is just as much part and parcel of the Graeco-Jewish heritage as the western way of life is, and the whole of this cultural tradition is alien to the Hindu spirit. There is, however, one factor in the economic and social situation in India today which might give communism an opening—exotic though communism may be in a Hindu environment—and this subversive factor is the rising pressure of population in India on the means of subsistence. This is an important point, because the same factor is at work today in China, Japan, Indo-China, Indonesia, and Egypt. In all these non-western countries the impact of the west has brought with it a progressive increase in the food supply through irrigation, through the introduction of new crops, and through the improvement in methods of agriculture under western inspiration; and in all of them, at every stage so far, this increase in the food supply has been spent, not on raising the standard of living of a stationary or gradually growing population but on maintaining the largest possible population on the old level, which was and is only just above starvation point. Since progressive improvements in productivity must sooner or later bring in diminishing returns, the standard of this swollen population seems bound to decline, and there is no margin between the present standard and sheer disaster on the grand scale.

In some such economically desperate situation as this, communism might win a foothold in India and in other Asian countries in which communism is just as foreign as our western way of life. For communism has a programme of wholesale compulsory collectivisation and mechanisation to offer as a specious remedy for the
plight, of a depressed Asian peasantry, whereas, to people in this plight it would be a mockery to advise them to solve their problem in the American way—because, of course, in Asian eyes, America is fantastically rich. This population problem, and its bearing on the competition between Russia and the west, will confront us again when we come to the Far East, which is the subject of the next of these talks.