Chapter-VI

Cultural Conflict

An essential aspect of becoming aware of ourselves is discovering the amount of conditioning we have. Much of how we perceive the world is based upon what we believe and these beliefs are often unquestioned assumptions. The conditioning process starts early with our parents. Parental discipline instills within us a sense of right and wrong – what we can and what we cannot. We are not taught to consciously decide for ourselves whether something is correct or incorrect, instead we are taught to fear the consequences of being wrong.

The socio-cultural bindings condition us to operate like robots, leading our inner thinking to decide upon things only as positive or negative and right or wrong. Whenever our mind and heart hits an emotional issue or the intellect, we stumble over the question – what is the right answer? It is when this happens that we open our eyes to the world to clearly view the dilemma of correct or incorrect actions or thoughts. We may believe that we are being selfish when we think of ourselves because we are taught that others come first. The awareness of an awakened mind is in direct conflict with the pre-conditioned mind. This is when the ‘inner conflict’ arises. We end up with a conflict between our true inner-self and our programmed-self. Culture Conflict exposes the real inner conflict ripping apart the souls of the ailing hearts bound by invisible chains of socio-moral values.
Anandamath

*Anandamath* reflects a genuine image of nationalism that comes straight from his heart and touches the soul of each and every child of the nation. He believed strongly in the mother image – “an image that could hardly have been better suited to the purpose. In fact, no other image would have had such powerful emotional appeal in Bengal as the figure of mother.”¹ It was a common factor that evoked an intense upsurge and a poignant riposte. The immediate consequence was an unconditional adherence and solidarity that called for a national unity - ‘Bande Mataram’. This platitude raised a massive national movement to bring forth success and glory.

The greatest advantage of the mother image was that its root is dug deep into the ancient tradition and worshipped devoutly all through the land of India. Devi, the Mother Goddess is highly revered, dutifully awed and devotedly adorned. Prostrating oneself to Mother Goddess, the universal Mother, is practised since time immemorial.

The profound influence of this ancient concept is to be found everywhere in modern Bengal. A notable example of the strength of the Mother image in other parts of India is to be found in the widespread veneration of The Mother in Pondicherry.²

This devotion towards the mother image is not limited to temples, but phenomenally followed in the Indian society. Here, mother, wife, sister, daughter

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¹ Van Meter, Rachael Rebecca., p. 205.
² *ibid.*, p. 206.
and the images of a woman are idolized and worshipped. The religious life of people and society is predominantly ruled by the worship of Goddess Durga, the Navaratri and Durga Puja being entirely devoted to the various forms of Durga. It is undoubtedly an asserted fact that, Bankim Chandra's creative genius is a heartfelt attribute to the image of motherland which had an overwhelming trance on the people, who deeply revered the mother figure.

Bankim Chandra deeply asserted the Mahakali figure - warrier mood of the great Goddess – as an ideograph of extremist nationalism. He had intricately developed this image in Anandamath, where the message of sacrifice, duty and devotion is expounded extensively. “The patriotic hymn, ‘Bande Mataram’, contains the line *Tvam hi Durga dashapraharini* (Thou art Durga, bearer of ten weapons).”

When Mahendra is taken to ‘Anandamath’ and Mahatma Satya shows him the three images – “the different forms of the Mother – the Mother in her true self, as she was, as she is and as she is to be.” (AM, Pt. III, Ch. 2, 55)

In the beginning the Mother is sitting on the lap of Vishnu, then she is Jagaddhatri, then Kali and last of all she is Durga. It is the last conception of the Mother that appealed to the Sanatans most as it is in that form that she is universally worshipped in Bengal.

It is the greatest and the pious of all relations in the whole cosmos, the mother – child relationship which the sanatans established with the motherland.

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4 Dasgupta, Jayanta Kumar., *op. cit.*, p. 106.
Sanyasis attained a personal touch in being the sanatan of the Mother – which would let them sacrifice even the last drop of blood at the feet of Mother. As the Sanyasis declared the motherland as their only mother, they solely belonged to Mother India, as they were born on this land. Their body, their blood and their soul all belonged to this magnificent Mother.

*House of Cards*

Tarashankar’s *House of Cards* holds firmly the theme of conflict in the mind of young Shaila as she suffers from the flaw of lying and exaggerating things in order to create a glorified image of her parents in front of her in-laws and of her in-laws in front of her parents. Shaila neither lacks the beauty, nor the grace and not even the skill. She is adept at whatever she does. She still falls prey to the irrelevant and undesired urge to “drag in a comparison of her in-laws’ house with her father’s at every small excuse.” (HOC, 4)

Throughout the story, Shaila’s character seems harmless; she does not intend to harm anyone. It is her innocence that leads her to draw an exaggerated comparison that hurts each one’s feelings. She remains unaware of this fact and suffers the pangs of insult, is reprimanded bitterly and bears the separation of her husband and even the family members whom she loved dearly. The best part of it being, before it is too late she realises the true way of life and that imagination never amalgamates with reality. To set the things right she again has to pose
imaginary situations but just to charm each one and return a smile on each face. She never ever lets her parents know about her banishment, rather speaks highly of the riches and prosperity of her in-laws, about her husband’s success and her brother-in-law’s good result. When her mother-in-law reads all about Shaila’s narration of their wealth and success, she is overjoyed and her anger melts immediately at her pure innocence. She immediately asks Amar to bring Shaila back. Thus, Shaila succeeds in winning the true love and faith of everyone that seemed to be lost somewhere.

Tarashankar pens down his each and every character on its own basic instinct. Mahashweta Devi supports this as -

Elemental passion and instinct form the basis of many of his stories. He accepted the idea that people did act unusually under strange impulses. Fond of high-charged emotions and melodrama, he found interest in dramatic events caused by extraordinary circumstances.\(^5\)

Similarly, the theme of exaggeration and Shaila’s falling prey to it persistently is remarkably painted by Tarashankar. Human folly, in other words, Shaila’s folly, forms the epicentre of the story. From the use of Afghani ‘Hing’ at her parents’ place, her mother’s stern treatment with her sister-in-law, her brother’s taste for Khadi and his being hugely attached to education – Shaila’s imagination knows no limit. Here we feel a sheer mixture of innocence and ignorance in Shaila. Whatever she utters may be ignored as childish or immature. But the ball rolls further and this forms a fiery issue when Shaila, unable to behold her strong

\(^5\) Devi, Mahashweta., *op.cit.*, p. 18.
emotion, babbles in front of the guests that her husband enjoys and accepts money time and again from her father. This is completely wrong and untrue. It is too shameful for Shaila's mother-in-law to bear the brunt of an offensive ignominy in front of the guests. Hell falls down not only on Shaila but more devastatingly on her mother-in-law who could not withstand such a severe allegation.

By the time Shaila realises what sin she had committed, it is too late. On the other hand, when she realises her mistake she finds a way out. She has to patch up everything in the same manner in which she had found it in disarray. It was this time that her heart pained and she could do nothing except hide her face and cry. The author has brilliantly captured the pathetic dilemma of Shaila who could neither pacify herself nor control the rising storm in her heart.

Within a short span of time such a conflict stormed her mind that she could not share it with anyone. Her suffering was the result of her 'tragic flaw'. But what she learnt was the true gift of her culture that at each and every step of life we learn a lesson by committing a mistake and we also get a chance to mend our ways.

_Song of the Road_

It is interesting to note that while the spirit of _Song of the Road_ resides in a society where boys are prized over girls, women dominate in one way or the other reciprocating the broadened vision. Though Horihor is the unquestioned head of
the family, his absence ensures that Shorbojaya wields the power. She cements them together against the blows of existence, while all Horihor does is earn too-little money and hardly support the family. In some respects he is similar to Indir, a part of the family but not quite in the inner circle. Luckily Indir has presence, a cranky and cunning spirit, to make up for her physical failings. Without this how else could she tolerate being abandoned to fend for herself? Of course, in a wider sense, this is just what happens to Shorbojaya and the children when Horihor leaves; as the funds slowly drain away they slide further into poverty, despair and misfortune.

The sharp edges of tension, surprise and terror that tear through the fabric of *Song of the Road* grow naturally from within the story. Events happen, then the consequences; destiny, good or bad, comes to be inescapable. What makes *Song of the Road* more than just a lyrical work of fiction is universal concerns; how families deal with random catastrophe, how people unwittingly hurt one another, how parents love their children unconditionally. It is this vanquishing power of life that asseverates itself even in the face of poverty, misery and death.

Then there was Durga who, as a free spirit, struggled round the wide stretch of the village. Her only loyal follower being Apu, her meandering caused her a lot of scolding and beating from her mother. But behind this aimless loitering and rollicking, there emerged a delicately innocent pure beauty with a juvenile heart. As Durga matured from an innocent girl to a young girl, she nurtured dreams of
marriage and a new life with his dream prince. At the same time Durga discovers a mixed feeling of longing and parting with parents, brother, home, village and everything – she had a chord attached to everyone and everything. Durga’s heart and mind, none exposed to an inevitable conflict of joy and sorrow – remains a universal truth for every girl to be married, in the world and across any human culture. She swiveled on her thought race wondering, “If she got married it would be like that with her. She would have to leave her mother and father, and Apu and go and live a long way off. The thought had occurred to her before. All the places she loved, the orchards, the bushes where the Basok flowers grew, the red cow and the jack fruit tree in the yard and this smell of dried leaves, and the path down to the river, all to leave forever, forever . . .” (SOR, 210)

This conflict left her pondering restlessly – to rejoice her impending flight to a new horizon or to clutch on firmly, her people, places and the placid memories. Even the excited exhilaration of a personalised picnic could not keep her mind off the excruciating phase of her life. Marriage and the resultant pangs of separation haunted her incessantly.

Durga loves her trees! She loved the village too, every stick and stone in it, and the river, and the path that led down to it. She had known them all her life so naturally and intimately that they had become a part of her. Yet now she was beginning to learn that love could hurt. Something seemed to be telling her that she was going to lose them, and she longed to be able to gather them all in her to be able to gather them all in her arms and hold them close forever. How could she live without them? (SOR, 228)
Social beings are so encompassed into the complacent tenets of tradition and culture that one bears even a tormenting farewell with gleeful exuberance. As Durga bore the “black and frightening shadows under that cloud of separation which she felt thickening overhead” the immense joyousness of getting married could also not drive her away from the spiteful venomous apprehension that “........something was going to happen to her and it was going to happen soon.....The fear like a dreadful savage beast dogged her, wherever she went and whatever she did.” (SOR, 229)

The cultural feasts showered moments of merry and joy into the monotonous life of the people in Nischindipur where those from well-to-do families breathed in a sheet pleasure as “some of the women used the occasion to show off to their neighbours by making a public display of what they had brought, and the finest rice, a great variety of pulses, butter, milk, sweetmeats and so on” (SOR, 225). Although a feast was meant to enliven the wearisome life in the vastness of a repetitious square life, at times festivities and merriments took a toll on the mendicancy of reduced circumstances of a few. The snobbery and material exhibition of prosperity by the means of tantalising delicacies took away Shorbojaya’s peace and patience leaving her torn apart. The bruised heart of a palsied mother could not bear the craving eyes of her children. “All the unhappy Shorbojaya could scrape together was some coarse rice, and not much of that, a little of very ordinary pulse and a couple of eggplants . . . Shorbojaya saw it all, as she was intended to do, and she thought bitterly of the meagre fare which was all
her own children ever had to hear. She was so mortified; she could have screamed”. (SOR, 229)

Not only Shorbojaya, but even Durga’s innocence was shackled by the downcast pitiable state of Apu in a rancorous impecuniousness. Owing to abject penilessness, Apu’s “hands and feet were dirty and his clothes were patched and torn” (SOR, 23). Ineluctable to win over the penury, Durga’s intellect struggled incessantly and erupted in utter trepidation as she landed into a paralysed state—“How I wish I had some money to buy him toys with . . .” This combat of mind and heart dissuaded her from any thought except being a feeble desolation as “She had none, and her heart ached with longing for what could not be”. (SOR, 229)

John Nesbit poignantly apprehends the gospel truth of life in Song of the Road that, whatever or howsoever the circumstances may be, life is destined to take its own turn and what is irrevocable can in no way be metamorphosed. “Born into the prestigious Brahmin caste doesn’t insure material wealth, especially when living in his father’s ancestral village. To pay off his own father’s debts, Horihor Ray has bequeathed the family orchard to the neighbors, which troubles his more practically minded wife Shorbojaya. She argues that they could live far more comfortably in Benares on the banks of the Ganges, where her husband could regularly perform priestly rituals. But with a loving wife, an energetic daughter named Durga, newborn son Apu, and enough food to survive Hari feels content . . . Apu’s obvious fascination with the train foretells change in the family traditions, as
he is destined to travel his own path.”6 Thus as ordained; Horihor, Shorbojaya and Apu leave their village to move towards Benares, detaching all their ancestral, emotional and extant ties with Nischindipur.

The train started with a jerk and swayed to begin with the journey not only to Benares but to an eternal life changing journey for Apu and his family. As the rail hurled up to what was ordained for Apu, “Apu’s mind wend back to another day a long time ago. He and his sister were out looking for the calf, and they went to look at the railway line. They ran so fast that they were out of breath. How different it was then from now . . . had not brought her with them; They had all come away and left her behind. Though she had been dead for a long time now, he always felt her near him when he was in any of the places where the two of them used to lay together . . . Suddenly Apu’s heart was filled with a curious emotion. It was not grief, nor was it loneliness. He did not know what it was. It was compound of so many feelings, so many memories, that flashed across his mind in a single moment of time: Aturi the witch, the steps down to the river, the path under the Chalta tree, Ranu, the game she played in the afternoon, the games he played at midday, Potu, Durga’s face and the things she longed for and never got . . . Then the words of his heart found expression in tears, as time and time again he struggled to send her a message: ‘I’m not really going away, Didi . . . I haven’t forgotten . . . it’s not that I want to leave you . . . they’re taking me away!’ It was true. He had not forgotten and he did not forget.”

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The society was influenced to a larger extent by religion and its social canons. The social administration commanded wholehearted devotion to one’s family and society only. Individual concerns were overshadowed rarely brought to the forefront. Each one was made to be governed by socio-cultural and moral dominion. “Compliance with social regulations, covering manners, customs, rituals and moral codes was the test of a good life. One was supposed to live, not for the fulfilment of one’s self, but for the family, the clan and the caste-class, and faithfully to continue and transmit the inherited lines of traditions and conventions.”

One was made subservient to surrender to the social rules. But a human is a human and thus one’s emotions could not be completely subdued and gagged. Muzzled desires found deceitful inclination and deviated under the pressure of obedience. The inhibition of desires erupted with the breeze of new cultural ideas and awakening from urban and modern education. The outburst of the enduring rage gives rise to cultural conflict, where new ideas stand against the traditional values and moral rules.

Sachindralal Ghose prominently exclaims the testified fact that, “cultural conditioning so crippled personality that a sensitive mind . . .” like that of Sashi, a

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7 Ghose, Sachindralal, op.cit., p. vii.
well trained and well practised doctor, “whose urban education and culture conflicted with his family upbringing had to endure lifelong frustration and a tragedy no less intense for never reaching a dramatic climax.”

The so called cultural morality forcibly infused into the minds of people even cost their lives at times. As in the case of Jadav – the sage who sacrificed both his wife’s as well as his own life at the cost of bring revered as a highly esteemed omniscient sage, even though he had a strong desire somewhere in the depth of his heart, to stay alive. Even Jadav was afraid of death and yet he embraced it willingly in all his senses just for the matter of honour and reverence. “Perhaps the overflowing sentiments of the admirers had acted on his mind like a narcotic and so stupefied him that he had no time to reflect.” (PT, 134)

Manik’s view of the contemporary society was quite accurately judged and scientifically pictured. Throughout his writings he retained a scientific proclivity. This scientific inclination proved to be the most justified reflection of the dispassionate truth of the society and its forces that subdued the human emotions and passions. “Manik noted with discerning eyes the vice, the injustice and the corruption in the class to which he belonged. This class, he found to be rotten to the core and on the verge of collapse. According to him, two things that characterised it most were hollow sentimentalism and vile hypocrisy.”

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8 *op.cit.*, p. viii.
Sashi finds himself choked amidst the series of affairs with Jadav’s death and his bewilderment being undeniably deserted by Kusum. Sashi’s intellect, emotion or logic all failed miserably to have knowledge of Kusum’s sudden decision to leave Gaodia forever. His mind was stormed by a rally of thoughts as he failed to realise the anguish hidden in Kusum's words that, “Are human beings made of steel that they would stay always the same and never change?” (PT, 221) But when he realized his deep love for Kusum, “Sashi understood clearly the full implication of the words Kusum had spoken. Kusum had been madly in love with him for many years.” (PT, 223)

Unable to withstand the extreme fluctuation of emotions, a tormenting exposition of the raging love in both the hearts, a sudden emphysematous obliteration of the innocent love, that he could hardly cherish, left him split apart in a fanatical agony. “But there was no apparent reason why he should have been so irritable . . . with thoughts of Kusum occupying his mind. He was sick with regret and self reproach . . .”. (PT, 224)

Sashi’s mind conflicted outrageously. Suddenly he realised that this hidden love was the rejuvenating and lively inspiration behind his strong urge to survive in Gaodia, despite his unwillingness. All of a sudden his tattered heart and mind found respite in a strongly driven cultural morality which saved the whole episode from a great mayhem. His innermost culture driven values earned him solace while he self mediated, “But had it not been all for the best from another point of view?” (PT, 224) At a point he felt like trespassing all limits of society to win his love, but
as a great actualisation and realization that whatever happened, “A married woman’s chastity and virtue had been preserved; mortality and religion had been saved” (PT, 224) This is the true might of stalwartness in the social conduct which seem strait-laced and orthodox at times, but when followed practically with a balanced mind and judgemental approach protects one from a social upheaval, “Sashi ought really to have felt better, looking at things in that light. He respected, no doubt, the ancient values of right and wrong . . . ” (PT, 224)

Sachindralal Ghosh apprehends the case of cultural conflict in the characters of The Puppet’s Tale as, “inhabitants of a rather sequestered village.” Their minds suffer the pangs of mental conflict as they are confined to the boundaries of cultural values and social protocol. They, “live insensitive, petty lives – marionettes moving on the stage of the world to the compiling pull of strings by hand invisible behind the screen.”

Manik’s viewpoint about the origin and mention of cultural conflict in his works remains a genuinely experienced and bitter fact as he questions: “will not literature reflect that life which, while roving in villages and towns all over Bengal, I have myself experienced – life in its rugged nakedness that repeatedly tears off the veil of sentimentality because of the contradictions and conflicts one feels within oneself?” This cultural conflict is directly attributed to the social contract of our civic life. Saroj Mohan Mitra analyses the socio-cultural complacency in his

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10 Ghose, Sachindralal., op.cit., p. ix.
11 ibid. p. 251.
words as “Manik’s theme is how one's surroundings guide and influence man and how the latter tends to degenerate into a mere plaything in the hands of circumstances that would control and finally destroy him with cruel inexorability.”

**Evam Indrajit**

There is often conflict between our awareness of reality and our conditioned belief of reality. Similar is the scene in *Evam Indrajit* where on the one hand is the story of four friends and their trials and travails from eighteen to thirty-five, living in urban middle-class India, and on the other hand is the struggle of a writer who wants to write a play about these four friends. Through the story of these friends the play projects all the prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and undefined frustrations gnawing the hearts of the educated urban middle-class which Rangaraj sums up as some pertinent queries: “whether to be a part of the crowd or to stand out, be willing to be singled out and voice one’s opinion? Are our thoughts our own or do they just mirror those of countless others? Does everything go round and round, following the logic of everything that goes round and comes around.”

The conflict of *Evam Indrajit* dominantly flows as a strong current with the questions unanswered. ‘What am I?’ ‘Who am I?’ ‘Why am I?’ The questions

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would not torment us as long as our intellect remains dormant and ironically enough, the moment knowledge dawns upon our consciousness, we find ourselves on the verge of identity crisis.

Elizabeth Roy mentions the conflict in *Evam Indrajit* as:

*Evam Indrajit* is a projection of the attitudes, fears and frustrations of the educated urban middle class of the 1960s. The sombre existentialism draws attention to the crisis of the individual. It is pessimistic and holds out little hope for those who value ideas, dreams and poetry. The play asks questions to which there are no answers. Is the individual redundant? Is everyone only a copy of a copy? Should we conform? What is our reality? What is our truth? Badal Sircar puts a playwright in conversation with his audience. Together we look at the uneventful life of Amal, Vimal and Kamal. Indrajit alone puts up feeble fight before he too conforms.14

No matter what we possess, howsoever wealthy we are, if we do not have an identity, we stand nowhere amidst the multitude of people. Similar is the conflict between the heart and the mind of Indrajit. When he is closely introspected, we find him divided on the questions of life, love and identity.

On one hand there are the traditions and conventions of the society which are followed not as “rules” but as the strands of complacency, on the other hand, is Manasi, his love. This tears him apart as he fails to rendezvous his own self and his heart and his soul travelling from Calcutta to “Bhopal, Bombay, Jullunder, Meerut, Udaipur, Calcutta, and London. Everything goes round and round, like a wheel.

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Still it’s not a proper wheel, it’s a spiral. And that perhaps is the tragedy – the tragedy of knowing.” (EI, Act III, 48)

He tries to escape in vain; he is unable to run away from the real world that is dug deep, sown perfectly and nurtured eternally in his culture. It restrains him from marrying Manasi, his cousin. He agonises and suffers inversely to break the social conduct, but cannot, and life keeps on moving in circles ‘round and round’, “One-two-three! Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit. And Manasi. From home to school. From school to college. From college to the world. They are going round. Round and round and round. One-two-three-two-one. Amal, Vimal, Kamal and Indrajit.” (EI, Act I, 19)

Scrutinising the issue of strictly following the rules of the society and that the girls have to strictly abide by the rules we find ‘Indrajit’ uttering resentfully, “Girls must follow the rules. Men can do what they like, but women must be obedient . . . Is there a rule that one has to abide by rules?” Embittered, he spits out his anger and rancorously gnaws, “What’s the point of worshipping the rope that binds you? . . . tear it into shreds. Bring down all these walls which surround us.” (EI, Act I, 22)

Indrajit’s brawl against the social binding makes him feel useless. His inner-self seems to cross the boiling-point when he irately charges to fight with ‘the world’ and the ‘people around him’. (EI, Act I, 22) At the scene of a small boy
‘pestering’ him to get his shoes polished, Indrajit chases away the lad and is incited to beat him. This incitement is definitely not for the innocent boy but for the incorrigible, hardened and hopeless rules of the society. These rules seem to Indrajit as irredeemable and he straight away rejects the rules of society, “I can’t accept the rules . . . the rule by which a boy of eight with a child in his arms has to go polishing shoes?” (EI, Act I, 22)

Even ‘Manasi’ is wheedled to accept Indrajit's anger – “Anger against rules” (EI, Act I, 23), rules which are aimless, incomprehensible, perverted and fallacious and thus the anger against the rules also seem to be, “pointless . . . blind . . . powerless. It only beats its head against the wall.” (EI, Act I, 23) At this point, ‘Manasi’ accepts being scared of Indrajit’s anger.

But, Indrajit being quite aware of the meaninglessness of the rules, is quite aware of the reason behind this futility. He seems to be well learned of the fact and the bitter truth that the knowledge of being aware gives rise to a conflict. He untangles and analyses this conflict born out of knowledge as, “If I hadn’t tasted the fruit of knowledge, I could have gone on living in this paradise of your blessed society of rules. Now I can only batter my head against the wall.” (EI, Act I, 23)

It is true to say that as a culture we have learnt to ignore what our senses report to us because we believe in the higher power of authoritative knowledge. Although we are aware that there is no correct or incorrect action or thought as
such, we generate the idea of doing a wrong thing when we rely too much upon our perception, on how we perceive our actions, thoughts and situations. We place high expectations upon ourselves because we are taught to believe that we are selfish when we think of ourselves and that others come first.