Q.1 Why is it insular for European historians to term the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire “The Dark Ages”?

Ans. Although the term “The Dark Ages” is generally applied to the early medieval period of Western European history, specifically, it refers to the time (476-800) when there was no Holy Roman Emperor, or the time (500-1500) when there were frequent warfare and a virtual disappearance of urban life. In either case, it was only the Christened Europe which was going through a period of intellectual darkness and barbarity. The Muslim world, as well as Spain, and the Chinese Empire were both culturally brilliant and geographically extensive. Thus, Bertrand Russell in the chapter ‘Reflections of the Re-awakening East’ says that it is the narrow outlook of the Europeans to term this period “The Dark Ages”.

Q.2 On what grounds does the author argue that Communism is the “most modern and virulent form of Western Imperialism”?

Ans. In the chapter ‘Reflections on the Re-awakening East’ Bertrand Russell argues that Communism is the most modern and bitterly hostile form of Western policy to establish their political and economic hegemony over other nations. He says that although Communism is not widely recognized in either the East or the West, it is wiping out the ancient and glorious traditions of civilization in Asia. He also says that China has been greatly affected by it and advises the other Asian countries that re-awakening of East should not mean subjection to Communism as its philosophy is German and its regime is imposed by military force. In addition, he says that poetry and music and art and love and the simple joys of life are necessary to make human life tolerable, but these elements are forgotten in the Communist philosophy. That is why Bertrand Russell considers Communism the most modern and virulent form of Western Imperialism.

Q.3 Why does the author consider it useless to resist industrialization?

Ans. In the chapter ‘Reflections on the Re-awakening East’ Bertrand Russell considers industrialization an essential condition of survival in the modern times. It was a source of power for England in the 19th century, and it is a source of power for America and Russian in the present day. Industrialism prevails wherever there is sufficient civilization to make it possible. Therefore, it is useless to resist industrialism. Bertrand Russell quotes two examples of such ineffective protests. Firstly, he mentions Carlyle’s book Past and Present, which eloquently expresses such angry protests on account of ruthlessness of industrialization and destruction of beauty. The second example, Russell gives, is that of Gandhi whose immense influence on his countrymen remained equally ineffective to restore the spinning-wheel.
Q.4 Does the author welcome cultural uniformity or not? How does he justify his attitude?
Ans. Bertrand Russell does not welcome cultural uniformity. In the chapter ‘Reflections on the Re-awakening East’, he strongly advocates both political and cultural independence. He says that Asia contains at least three distinct civilizations: that of Islam, that of India and that of China. Therefore, it is a trifle absurd to expect cultural or political unity. History shows that no great civilization – such as, Indus Valley, Babylonian, Macedonian, Roman, Chinese and Islamic – has ever been cosmopolitan. Thus, the distinctive identity, and not cultural uniformity, leads civilizations to great heights.

Q.5 How is traditional culture threatened in an age dominated by science and machinery?
Ans. Traditional culture indicates all human activities which have been preserved, learned and transmitted over a long period of time. Bertrand Russell says that traditional culture is threatened by science and machinery. In ‘Reflections on the Re-awakening East’, he says that science and machinery have been superimposed on the older cultures, sweeping away not only what was bad, but also what was good in the culture of the past. To counter this constant threat, Bertrand Russell suggests that science and machinery should be rightly controlled because they are good and absolutely essential in modern times. He also suggests that we must continue appreciating poetry, music, art, love and simple joys of life to make human life tolerable.

Q.6 What, in the author’s view, has been the most serious flaw in the character of the West over the last few centuries?
Ans. The most serious flaw in the character of the West has been the love of power over other human beings. In ‘Reflections on the Re-awakening East’, Bertrand Russell says that the West displayed extraordinary energy from 16th century onward, which took both good and bad forms: abundance of necessaries and comforts on the one hand; racial and political oppression and exploitation of Asians and Africans on the other hand. The West used this energy and ingenuity to further imperialistic aims rather than attend to the needs and wants of humanity at large.

Q.7 What, in the author’s opinion, should Asian countries accept from the West and what should they reject?
Ans. In ‘Reflections on the Re-awakening East’, Bertrand Russell advises the Asian countries to accept industrialism from the West because it is a necessary condition of survival in modern times. Industrialism is a source of power and Asian countries will it difficult to preserve their independence without it. Bertrand Russell also warns Asian countries of the devastating consequences of copying the mistake of the West. Ruthless despots have brought the West to disaster. Their deep desire to have control other nations crushed human happiness at large. Thus, Asian countries should accept all means of prosperity and reject all ways of destruction.