



NATIONAL CHARACTER

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Any meaningful or constructive thinking by a Pakistani on the subject of National Character must answer a number of questions: What is a nation? What is character? How does a national character emerge? What are the natural factors which unite us into a single nation? How can we Pakistanis develop a national character of the best and highest quality?

What is a Nation? A nation is a group of human individuals who have a common ideal of life to love and strive after. The ideal of a nation is an idea possessing as its component parts a number of elements or qualities which appeal as a result of its particular psychological or educational environment. A nation is a nation because it feels like a nation and it feels like a nation because all its members love that idea.

The component parts, elements or qualities of a national ideal may be some or all of the following with one of them as their core or nucleus: race, language, colour, culture, history, belief, creed, philosophy or religion.

What is Character? In order to know what character is we have to study further the nature of an ideal.

Character manifests itself first of all in an individual. Every human individual is bound by his nature to have an ideal of life. His ideal is, from his point of view, (1) the most attractive and most lovable of all the ideas known to him. Hence (2) he subordinates all his other ideas to this one idea which he thereby raises to the level of an ideal. His ideal may be high or low, ugly or beautiful, true or false, perfect or imperfect, sectional or universal, yet (3) he attributes to it all the qualities of beauty, goodness and truth which he desires or cares for or which he thinks should have any worth or value for him or for anybody. This is indicated by the fact that his ideal (4) serves him as a criterion for determining what is true and what is false, what is good and what is bad, what is beautiful and what is ugly, what to approve and what not to approve, what to admire and what to hate, what to do and what not to do. It is for this reason a property of an ideal that when its love grips an individual, (5) it dominates and controls all the activities of his life. He, therefore, acquires a set of habits and

attitudes, likes and dislikes, views and opinions, manners and motives, beliefs and standards, hopes, aspirations, desires and inclinations which are relevant only to that ideal—the ideal that creates them. The sum total of all these habits, attitudes, likes, and dislikes, etc., constitutes his character. The character of an individual is, therefore, a matter of development. It is a development of his consciousness that takes place because of his ideal, for the sake of his ideal and in the direction of his ideal. It follows that the character of an individual will be high or low, good or bad, beautiful or ugly according as his ideal is high or low, good or bad, beautiful or ugly.

How does a National Character emerge ? Since all individuals forming a nation love and strive after the same ideal, they must naturally develop the same habits and attitudes, likes and dislikes, views and opinions, manners and motives, beliefs and standards, hopes and aspirations, desires and inclinations. That is why we say every nation has a character of its own, that it has a national character of a particular type.

In the course of its application to practical life an ideal becomes an ideology and this explains why a nation is said to be an ideological community. Nations or ideological communities at the psychological level of evolution are like species or biological communities at the biological level of evolution. As a species has its own physical form and features, so a nation has its own ideological form or character.

Natural factors which unite us into a single nation. We are a single nation not because we have been artificially made into one as some used to say but because we are united by some natural factors and conditions which go to make a nation. These factors and conditions do not include any regional language, race, colour, culture or history, but a living faith of the majority of our people in the religion of Islam, the essence of which is a belief in one God.

Pakistan is divisible into a number of regions each of which has its own regional language, culture and history. One of these regions is hundreds of miles away from that compact territory which constitutes the other four. If people of each of these areas emphasise the idea of their particular regional language, race, culture, history or territory and give it the importance of an ideal they cease to have one national ideal and cease to have a uniform national character. But if they continue to look upon their belief in one God as their national ideal, then the various languages, races, cultures, histories and territories remain subordinate to this one idea and the people living in those areas continue to be a single uniform nation having a single uniform character.

How can we Pakistanis develop a National Character of the best and highest quality? The answer to this question follows from the definition of the term 'character' given above. We have seen that national character is the sum total of the habits and attitudes, desires and inclinations, views and opinions, motives and standards, beliefs and ideas, and hopes and aspirations of an individual which he shares with other members of his nation and that the quality of these habits and attitudes, etc., depends upon the quality of their common national ideal.

This means that if we desire our national character to be of the best and highest quality we should have a national ideal of the best and highest quality; in other words, we should adopt as our national ideal an ideal to which we ascribe the qualities of beauty, goodness and truth of the highest degree of perfection. Such an ideal is only one and that is the ideal of God. We cannot think of a better, higher, truer, more perfect and more universal ideal than that of God. Thus to make God our national ideal is not only a political necessity for us arising out of our geographical conditions which prevent us from making any regional language, culture, history, colour, race or territory as our national ideal as many other nations do, but also a psychological necessity arising, on the one hand, out of our keen desire to raise our national character to the highest level of excellence and, on the other hand, out of the inexorable laws of our nature as human beings according to which a national character of the highest excellence can emerge only out of a national ideal of the highest excellence which, as everybody will have to agree, can be only the ideal of God.

The first step in the direction of making the ideal of God our national ideal is to believe that God and no other ideal is our national ideal. This step which we took long ago gave us a stupendous victory in our struggle against two nations stronger and mightier than us and brought Pakistan into existence. The next step is to educate ourselves in a way that we may begin to love our national ideal to the maximum capacity of our being so that it becomes the sole force determining all aspects (namely, political, ethical, legal, economic, educational, social and military) of our peace-time life. This step we should take as soon as we can.

When the love of an ideal develops in an individual or a community it incarnates itself in such habits and attitudes, knowledge and skills, likes and dislikes, desires and inclinations, views and opinions, standards and motives, hopes and aspirations of the individual or the community as are relevant to that ideal; in other words, it takes the shape of the character of the individual or the community. We can grow a national ideal into a national character by means of suitable education as we can grow a seed into a tree by watering and manuring it in a suitable manner. But

just as we can grow only that particular kind of tree which is latent in the seed we sow, we can grow only that type of national character which is potential in the national ideal that we choose. The national ideal of God is on account of its nature the only ideal that can develop the best and highest type of national character.

It is sometimes suggested that we should take from religion only the true moral principles like equality, freedom, justice, truthfulness, fraternity, courage, tolerance, honesty, etc., which it advocates and leave alone the idea of God which it emphasises. This would have indeed simplified for us very much the problem of evolving an excellent national character, but this is not possible. True and universal moral principles of morality are implied in the idea of God as a particular type of leaves and flowers are implied in the seed of a tree that bears them. If a person loves the sight of fresh and real leaves and flowers of a particular kind he must have in his garden a tree which is known to bear them and must water and manure that tree properly. Otherwise the only alternative left to him will be to be content with dead, dry or paper-made imitation leaves and flowers of that kind. As fresh leaves and flowers die when they are separated from the tree that bears them, so true universal principles of morality become lifeless and meaningless when they are separated from the ideal to which they really belong, namely, the ideal of God. If we desire an individual to act according to these principles we have to make sure not only that his ideal is God and no other ideal but also that he is educated in such a manner that his love for this ideal develops to the maximum limit of his capacity. As true and universal principles of morality are implied in the ideal of God they can find their fullest manifestation only in the actions of an individual who loves this ideal to the fullest extent. The reason for this is plain to see. Every individual must have an ideal of life to love. If he does not love one ideal he must love another. If he does not love the ideal of God he is forced by the laws of his nature to love some other inferior ideal in place of it and he must in that case take from that ideal alone (whether he is fully conscious of this fact or not) his criterion determining what is good and what is bad, what is true and what is false, what is beautiful and what is ugly, what to approve and what not to approve, what to admire and what to hate, what to do and what not to do. If he still pays a lip service to universal principles of morality, it will mean either that he wants to camouflage his immoral attitude born out of his love for an imperfect ideal or that he is not fully aware of it. Every tree bears its own fruit. We cannot expect a good national character to grow out of a bad national ideal.

In Britain, France, Italy and U.S.A. and in fact in all the non-Communist countries of the world, the belief in God is almost universal. Yet we cannot say that God is the national ideal of any of these countries. The reason is that in the case of each of these countries it is the secular nationalism of that country and not the idea of God which fulfils the five conditions of an ideal I have just enumerated. Thus although the majority of the people of Britain believe in God, yet with them it is not the idea of God but the idea of British nationalism that is, from the practical point of view, the most attractive and most lovable of all the ideas known to them. They are ready to subordinate all other ideas to the idea of British nationalism but not to the idea of God. It is not the idea of God but the idea of British nationalism which serves them as a criterion for determining what is true and what is false, what is good and what is bad, what is beautiful and what is ugly, what to approve and what not to approve, what to admire and what to hate, what to do and what not to do. An Englishman becomes ready to leave his God for his nation any time (when there is a conflict between the practical demands of the two) and as a secular nationalist he cannot do otherwise.

In Pakistan there are people of different religious affiliations like the Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Parsis; we should therefore include in our official philosophy, as a State, only the doctrine of the oneness of God and the moral principles implied in this doctrine which, indeed, are universally known and accepted and about which there is no difference of opinion among the various religious communities of Pakistan. There is every justification for us to do so in the present circumstances in view of the following Quranic verse: 'Say: O people of the Book, come back to the principle which is common between you and us that we do not worship aught but God and that some of us do not take some others among us as their lords besides God.'

By so doing, we shall, as a State, recognise officially the most essential and fundamental common principle underlying the philosophies of all the religious sects and communities of Pakistan and thus utilise the most powerful of all our sentiments—the religious sentiment—to weld ourselves into a single homogeneous nation possessing a single national ideal which we can really love and admire. We shall thus leave our sectarian and religious differences to be taken care of by each religious sect or community itself and give them full freedom to believe and act in the manner they like, being satisfied, at the same time, that they are in full agreement with our common philosophy and ready to order their practical life in accordance with the universal moral principles that it implies. By so doing, we shall not be interfering, in the least, with the religious beliefs and practices of any

of the religious sects and communities of Pakistan and on the other hand, shall be giving them an additional support on account of our common philosophy from which according to all these sects and communities, they will be really derived. In this way all of us—Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Parsis—will live in Pakistan as a single family of God feeling no ill-will or hatred towards each other on account of our religious or sectarian differences and working collectively and in harmony with each other for the realisation of our common ends as a nation.

All that we, as a State, shall have still to emphasise and assure will be that the Pakistani individual makes his belief in God the real driving force of all his activities, even those which take the shape of the activities of the State, and we shall, of course, have to create an educational system which suits that end.

The unity, solidarity and efficiency of a nation depend upon the fact whether it has or has not a national ideal to love, and if it has, whether that ideal is or is not the same for the whole nation and in accord with its temperament and traditions, and if it is, whether or not the qualities of that ideal are really lovable and admirable. If this last condition is not fulfilled by the national ideal, no educator, even with the best of his educational policies and arrangements, can work up the sentiment of love to the required pitch of intensity. The intrinsic ugliness of the ideal, concealed in its nature, frustrates his ends. Fortunately for us Pakistanis we have in the idea of God a national ideal which fulfils all these conditions admirably well.

It will be for us a national ideal which is not set up artificially and loved superficially in imitation of other nations, as for example, the ideal of Indian nationalism which is challenged by so many communities of India, but a genuine national idea which is in-keeping with our temperament and traditions and our psychology and history and which will be, therefore, loved by us from the core of our hearts. If we ignore the Communists we can say that the idea of God is as popular, as new and fresh and as satisfying to the nature of man to-day as it ever was, in spite of all the advancements of the human race in science and technology. Indeed it is generally admitted that humanity needs it much more to-day than it ever did in the past.

In the face of an increasing intellectual realisation of the human situation in the present times, secular nationalism is losing its ground as a national ideal more and more everyday and its place is being taken by various philosophies of man and the universe. The ultra-modern States

are philosophical States having definite views—whether right or wrong—of the purpose and destiny of human life. Russia and China are not the only examples of such States. Even U.S.A. looks upon democracy to-day not as a form of government but as a philosophy of life. Most of the national States which were once glittering stars on the political firmament of the world are showing signs of senility and the attending weakness. The new national States that are emerging in late imitation of these once glorious States are feeling doubtful of their secular, national foundations and inclining more and more towards the philosophy of the Communists. What is happening to nationalism to-day happened to tribalism in the past. Pushed by the relentless forces of evolution, the human race is heading towards an ultimate World-State based on a philosophy of man and the universe. But this philosophy will not be Communism. If we agree that evolution is a movement towards a state of perfection and sure to result in the emergence of a perfect human society—a society of human individuals possessing a character of the highest perfection—then we must agree that that society can be based only on the most perfect of all ideals, viz., the ideal of God. The trends of human evolution, which is, of course, ideological evolution, leave no doubt, therefore, that if we Pakistanis make God our national ideal, Pakistan will become the centre of the coming World-State and the nucleus of the perfect human society of the future. But in the meantime, Pakistan will continue to have more and more of the goodwill and friendly co-operation of other States on account of the nature of its national ideal. Friendly co-operation of other States depends upon the fact whether in the eyes of all good people that State is dependable or not, whether it is just and honest in its dealings with other nations and whether it is prepared to co-operate with them in establishing world unity. If God-fearing and God-loving nations cannot be just, honest, peaceloving, peaceful and dependable, what other nation can be ?

I conclude with two quotations, one from Iqbal and the other from the Quaid-i-Azam. In his New Year's message (January 1938) Iqbal said :

“ The world's thinkers are stricken dumb. Is this going to be the end of all this progress and evolution of civilization, they ask, that men should destroy one another in eternal hatred and make human habitation impossible on this earth ? Remember, men can be maintained on this earth only by honouring mankind, and this world will remain a battleground of ferocious beasts of prey unless and until the educational forces of the whole world are directed to inculcating in man respect for mankind. Only one unity is dependable, that unity is the brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationality, colour or language. So long as this so-called democracy, this accursed nationalism and this degraded imperialism are

not shattered, so long as men do not demonstrate by their actions that they believe that the whole world is the family of God, so long as distinctions of race, colour and geographical nationalities are not wiped out completely, they will never be able to lead a happy and contented life and the beautiful ideas of equality, liberty and fraternity will never materialise. ”

Quaid-i-Azam said in June 1945 :

“Pakistan not only means freedom and independence but the Muslim ideology which has to be preserved, which has come to us as a precious gift and treasure and which, *we hope, others will share with us.*”

What others can share of the Islamic ideology with us is fortunately the most essential part of it and it is the idea of God and the universally known and accepted moral principles implied in it. It is this idea which can be also the only basis of our national character of the best and highest quality.

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