Class Notes # 1

WHAT IS NATIONAL CHARACTER?

NATIONAL CHARACTER:

National Character refers to relatively functional personality characteristics and patterns that are prototype among the adult members of a society. The assumption is that virtually all individuals behave in conformity with the prescribed norms of their society. In other words it 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.

The aggregated characteristics are considered when majority of the people occupies a common territory and the group is politically defined. The influence of history and legal system upon the formation of national character has also been emphasised. Hans Kohn stated,

“Life in a common territory, subject to the same influences of history and legal systems, produces certain common attitudes and traits, often called national character.”

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT:

It started in an unspecific period in history when the first traveller visited a new place, saw something different to which he was familiar earlier. He started narrating stories of these people when he returned to his hometown. People gave their weightage because they were informed about something other then their own. The first such incident in history is the visit of a hoopoe to a place unknown to him and to his fellow beings reported in the holy Qur’an. Hazrat Sulaman (sm) was told about the people of Saba when a woodpecker visited the place. The story is narrated in Surah Al-Naml(ant), as

“And he sought among the birds and said: How is it that I see not the hoopoe, or is he among the absent? I verily will punish him with hard punishment or I verily will slay him, or he verily shall bring me a plain excuse. But he was not long in coming, and he said: I have found out (a thing) that thou apprehendest not, and I come unto thee from Sheba with sure tidings. Lo! I found a woman ruling over the m, and she hath been given (abundance) of all things, and hers is a mighty throne. I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allah; and Satan maketh their works fair seeming unto them, and debarreth them from the way (of Truth), so that they go not aright:”

There are reportage and travelogue of Chinese and Muslims describing events, people and their physical appearance, culture, customs and traditions tastes and habits etc other then their countrymen. Many of the account of these travellers are available in different languages.

After the success of science over religion in the West and the development of science and technology in Europe, the Europeans start looking to outside world i.e. other then Europe. The influence of Europe beyond the borders grew steadily in pursuit of wealth or trade or propaganda or liberty. The Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, French and British laid their hands on non-European territory, especially that of Asia and Africa. In fact, one of the important features of the nineteenth century has been the Europeanisation of the world. In order to carry out their imperialist designs the Western nations took interest in the study of the people, religion, society and culture, elements of actual and potential resistance etc. of their colonies. They start encouraging men from intellegentia in their home country to concentrate
on the study of the colonial areas. That is way we found a number of Orientalists in each country of Europe. The Dutch in the middle of 19th century carried out the earliest organised efforts.

French King Louis XIV provided huge amount of money to carry out research on Arabs their language and culture and concentration on racial superiority of Arabs over the Turks. The British concentrated on the Indian soil, its people and culture. British civil servants during their posting in the different localities thoroughly studied the people. Their memories, diaries, reminiscences, and official monographs provide an adequate picture of the indigenous people and culture.

During World War II, the study of national character was primarily motivated by the practical requirement to know about one’s national enemies, allies and self in wartime, especially after the involvement of the USA in the war. Consequently, different centres were established in different universities in the West to concentrate on the study of people, history, culture, characteristics etc of the different people of the world.

In each society there are prototype descriptions of people, which may carry or may not carry any soundness. These stereotypes have been usually depicted in proverbs of a language or available in verbally in rural areas. Sometime literary pieces have also comprised of such characteristics. In Pakistan different communities, ethnic and linguistic groups and their further sub-division are depicted in different notions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY OF NATIONAL CHARACTER:
1. Oriental scholarships: Since the dawn of the western imperial powers the west shows interest in the study of colonial people. People were supported and Institutions were established for the said purpose. The western scholars established contacts with the intelligentsia of the colonies through frequent visits and inviting them to visit their masters’ country. The information collected was then utilised in making generalisations about different people. All sorts of literature published have been accumulated in their libraries.
2. In post World War II period the world was divided into two main groups; 1. The American and/or Capitalists and 2. The Russians and/or Communists. The successful penetration and grabbing of political powers by the Socialists in Eastern Europe and elsewhere in the world cautioned the capitalists led by America to stop not only the political expansion but also to meet this challenge ideologically. The days of this Cold War enhance the study of different parts and people of the world.
3. National Character is contributing in our understanding of what is distinctive in single nations and of what is relatively universal in human society.
4. No effective economic and political planing or national policy can be devised without a proper understanding of the national character.
5. International relations and the successful foreign policy of a nation is also possible after an effective understanding of the nations and their national character, with which they are linked
6. In the present day process of globalisation, i.e. formation of a supra national entities one may crumbled any attention given to the local entities. In an opposed way, it enhanced awareness of “others”.
7. The display of national symbols and symbolism, the theme of nation is playing a great role in any international interactive activity like Olympics and world cup football etc.
8. Economically successful countries record the so-called positive traits of their own national character. For example, how Japanese national character contributed to the Japan’s economic prosperity.
9. The countries underdeveloped are looking towards the negative aspects of their national character.
10. When the countries are not ahead in the economic development their national character is termed as obstacles. The subordinates start to see the world through the eyes of their rulers.

TYPES OF THE STUDY OF NATIONAL CHARACTER:

THE STUDY OF ANOTHER NATION:

The study is conducted on a nation other then owns one. As the Colonialist and Imperialists did in the past and the developed countries are doing now by offering different projects to individuals and institutions of their own or to the members of the target nations.

A NATION’S OWN IN-DEPTH STUDY:

The focus is on the nation’s own detail study of the national character. For example American national Character, German Character, Japanese Character, English Character, Hindu character, etc. It provides information about one’s own self, sometime unknown to them or they did not any notice to it earlier. It strengthened positive attitude among its citizens. It means the stress is on the socialisation aspect or reformatory aspect.

PART II: PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF NATIONAL CHARACTER:

1. Generalisation ignores specific and uniqueness:
2. Explanation always involves reference to generalisation: All sciences assume that generalisation about its subject matter is possible, ignoring specific and unique. e.g. piece of iron may be unique but all of it can be categorised on the basis of mass.
3. Generalisation about people is not possible:
4. If the first assumption stands still then there is no place for this objection. Social Scientists also assume that generalisation is possible.
5. Variability within national groups: Possible forms of group differences:
6. complete differences and partial differences
7. Complete differences
8. Partial differences
9. These group differences can not be interpreted as complete differences
10. These group differences can be ignoring because there are differences within the groups.
11. Social scientists are not against the social class differences on the basis that there are differences within the social class.
12. Characteristics are changing: Change---those national characteristics are changing over the passage of time. In the nineteenth century it was often believed that national Group judgements are irrational. National characteristics are not the only feature of the world, which is subject to historical change.

13. National characteristics as innate and racial---those ethnic groups have inborn psychological characteristics.

14. The ethnocentrism of evolution

15. Ethnocentrism refers to the phenomenon in which a group thinks of the norms of one’s own group as right for others e.g. Chinese are superstitious and Italians are religious. The first one is not in scientific terms while the second is a recognised fact and accepted by the westerners.

16. Group judgements are irrational:

17. It involves different evaluations that reflect the norms of the judge. It is suggested that judgements about groups must involve principles such as categorisation.

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1 Dean Peabody, National Characteristics, University of Cambridge, 1985, p.419
2 Raffiuddin in The Problem of National Character of Pakistan, Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963, p.12
4 Surah An-Naml 27, 20-24
5 For example for the history of NWFP, researchers are indebted to the British officers for their publications. A brief survey can be found in Akbar S. Ahmad’s bibliography on N.W.F.P.

6 In our society in N.W.F.P we describe different tribes in different notions, e.g. Khatak, Swatis, Afridis, Bunerwal.

7 The library of Congress is one of the rich repositories of the published material on Asian and African nations. The British Museum library is the greatest source for material for the British colonies. The Dutch colonial record for its Far East colonies is preserved in Holland.
8 Peabody, p.428
10 Fromm, 1936; Erikson, 1950.
11 Gorer, 1943; Bendeict, 1946; Haring, 1946.
12 Gorer, 1955.