H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Pathik Pathak. *The Future of Multicultural Britain: Confronting the Progressive Dilemma.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008. xi + 209 pp. $110.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7486-3544-3.

Reviewed by Katharine A. Keenan

Published on H-SAE (August, 2010)

Commissioned by Abby L. Drwecki (Indiana University)

The Future of Multicultural Britain by Pathik Pathak offers a compelling analysis of emerging political discourses in England and India. Exploring both Left and Right-leaning politics in England and India, Pathak identifies "majoritarianism" as a growing threat to inclusive democracy in these two multicultural societies. Pathak finds that issues of community and citizenship are the sticking points where progressive conventions have failed to resolve the divisions between majority and minority groups. Yet the solutions offered by both Left and Right seem to perpetuate these divisions and even to incubate new racisms. Pathak makes no attempt to conceal his indignation with what he sees as the triumph of xenophobia and cultural nationalism over the rights of minority citizens. The book thoroughly dismantles the thinly disguised racisms of pundits, politicians, and their platforms, and ultimately concludes with a call for "future political directions and necessary intellectual labor" (p. 188).

While this reader agrees with Pathak's concern, and certainly hopes he will succeed in mobilizing the "intellectual labor" required to cultivate a more inclusive Britain, she also finds that important definitions and necessary links to his intellectual predecessors are missing or incomplete. Anthropologist Douglas Holmes (*Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism* [2000]), for instance, has made precisely the same argument regarding the convergence of the Right and Left in Europe into majoritarian or integralist positions, and Isaiah Berlin's definition of "pluralism" (*Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* [1976]), though not cited, is an important conceptual antecedent of multiculturalism as Pathak defines it. However valuable and imperative its message, *The Future of Multicultural Britain* does not succeed at placing itself properly within its broader intellectual context, limiting its potential contribution to our theoretical understanding of multiculturalism, citizenship, community, and other themes of twenty-first-century British society. Regardless, Pathak's text should be appreciated for its insertion of India into a political discussion that has heretofore concerned only

Europeanists addressing backlash against the European Union and Europeanization.[1] Pathak also offers thorough and intriguing examples, acerbic analysis, and a refreshing earnestness and urgency in his tone.

First, a note on structure: the book is divided into an introduction, conclusion, and five interstitial chapters, which alternate between examples from England and India. In these, Pathak addresses various instances of what he terms the "progressive dilemma," or how the Left attempts to counter the Right's anxieties toward cultural diversity, while itself verging closer and closer to a majoritarian position. He examines the antiracist policies of the New Labour Party, the anti-diversity discourse of *Prospect* editor David Goodhart, and the political consequences of the "new times" project.[2] From India he takes aim at the Hindu nationalist party, Hinduvata; anti-secularist Ashis Nandy; and the legacy of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's economic liberalism. Pathak is admirably clear in laying out his argument for each chapter within the first few paragraphs. The value of this straightforward style is twofold. First, it lends cogency to Pathak's analysis and aids the reader in following his underlying reasoning. Second, it makes space for Pathak's more subjective claims. Early in the text we see that Pathak is motivated by a progressive agenda for radical equality and inclusive citizenship in Britain (p. 8). "We cannot build a common culture of shared citizenship if some citizens are more equal than others; if some have more rights and some have more duties; and if we discriminate against the very citizens we want to bring into the common fold," he implores. "We're missing the opportunity to strive for the real political devolution that many are crying out for" (pp. 51, 58). Such imperatives, thickly dispensed throughout the text, are not merely political bias. Indeed they underscore his analytical reasoning, helping to illuminate his concern at the rightward creeping of the Left's multicultural policy.

However, what Pathak's explicit outline lacks is an indication of ***why*** he has chosen to include India in his discussion of Britain. Does he consider India to be included in his definition of Great Britain? What beyond their postcolonial relationship and diasporic links merit this classification? If his intention is simply to compare the two locales, why address the title and conclusions only to progressive politics in Britain? Pathak admits to "obvious incongruities between the prevailing forms of discrimination against minorities in Britain and India" (p. 22). British and Indian demographics are diverse in different ways; even the parties and pundits he critiques in both places represent equally divergent platforms. Yet these differences underscore a more striking similarity in their "political and intellectual approaches to redressing discrimination by managing diversity" (p. 22). The parallels he observes include the impulse among both minority and majority groups to cleave to inherited identities, the increasing radicalism among both groups, and the tendency in both Left and Right-leaning parties to identify cultural difference as a threat to democratic society. Ultimately these shifts have global implications in the very definition of citizenship and the rights of minority citizens throughout the modern world.

Before delving any deeper into Pathak's political analysis, it is necessary to interrogate the terms on which his argument is predicated. The text offers an excellent platform from which to explore such concepts as multiculturalism, majoritarianism, culture, and citizenship, however Pathak's definitions often seem problematic or incomplete.

Pathak's text is premised on the classification of the United Kingdom and India as multicultural societies. In both cases, multiculturalism seems simply to be defined as the presence of ethnic and religious diversity, specifically Muslim and Asian minorities in England, and India's Muslim, Hindu, and secularist groups. Importantly we observe an

implicit presumption that such groups are also discrete and cohesive communities that remain unassimilated in the "majority population," which in Britain is white Anglo-Saxon, and in India is primarily Hindu. This "multicultural communitarianism" is what predicates the problems of citizenship and racism with which Pathak is concerned. Pathak identifies what he perceives as a conflation of "philosophical multiculturalism" and "state multiculturalism" (p. 27). The former is defined, following theorist Bhikhu Parekh, as cultural diversity that is "a legitimating, democratizing energy for civil society and the polity"; the belief that difference forces people to engage, and seek mutual understanding (p. 22). The latter, "state multiculturalism," instead reduces engagement and mutual intelligibility to mere toleration, such that antiracist policies are predicated on essentialized understandings of cultural difference, and ultimately only serve to perpetuate racialized imaginaries. Within the discourse of state multiculturalism, Pathak argues, "the fact of cultural diversity itself is ... indicted for a host of social problems, from crime and disorder to the fragility of the welfare state" (p. 10). While Pathak seems to believe that diversity is a collective human asset, endemic to global society, he recognizes that both majoritarianism and liberal antiracist policies are reactions to the assumption that diversity is a *recent*, *modern* social problem.

Majoritarianism, therefore, is a reflex, according to Pathak, that "draws its strength from the isolation of so-called minority blocs from mainstream society by expressing exasperation at the reluctance of those communities to 'integrate'" (pp. 9-10). It holds up a particular cultural identity as a "norm" on which the rights and duties of citizenship are based, to the exclusion of anyone who does not fit. This is a familiar theme in the politics of many countries. We see the vestigial xenophobia of mid-century nationalisms reincarnated in backlash against immigration throughout the European Union; in the United States, we see the labor-class angst against illegal aliens who work for low wages. The conservative impulse is to stockade the majority core against the encroachment of an alien other while the progressive Left presumably fights to include them. Pathak points to two examples of extreme violence, which he offers as consequences of radical majoritarianism and misguided liberal policies; a series of race-related riots between whites and Asians in Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford, England, in 2002, and in 2002 to the Gujarat incident in India, in which Hindu neo-Fascists perpetrated brutal pogroms against Muslim communities in retaliation against a Muslim-led riot in the town of Godhra. What is important about these examples is that in both cases the Left and Right responded in similar ways; the conflict was blamed on the cultural incommensurability of the groups involved. Both British and Indian governments, despite their commitment to liberal multiculturalism, betrayed a tendency to "demonize minorities as inassimilable communities and a disinclination to recognize them as citizens.... In both cases, protection for minorities has been displaced by the aggrandizement of the majority community, circumscribed by conspicuously cultural parameters" (p. 7).

As important as this observation is, it is not original. Holmes identified the very same pattern in his 2000 publication *Integral Europe*. What Pathak calls majoritarianism, Holmes dubs "integralism," which he describes as a "praxis of belonging" (p. 3, citing John Borneman, ***Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation*** [1992]). For Holmes, integralism is more complex than merely the privileging of the majority, for him it is "a framework of meaning, a practice of everyday life, an idiom of solidarity, and above all, a consciousness of belonging linked to a specific cultural milieu" (p. 3). As such it explains the impulse for both majority and minority communities to consolidate and stockade themselves against threats from the other, as well as the potential for violence that this engenders. "Under the influence of integralism," Holmes cites that "people become

intolerant."[3] Indeed, Holmes even argues that integralism results in the very same "entangled politics ... that is both right and left."[4] Had Pathak accessed Holmes's study, he might have better integrated his own research into a broader body of literature that concerns the rightward shift of politics in Europe, the consolidating of communitarian interests, and the eerily similar instances of racial and religious discrimination in otherwise liberal states. He might also have recognized that, while majoritarianism in Britain may be just another instance of "Europeanization," the fundamental reorganization of "territoriality and peoplehood" occurring throughout Europe as a result of the European Union, majoritarianism in India is following the same patterns but for very different reasons.[5] Pathak has missed a valuable opportunity here to engage more deeply with the Indian example. What can we learn about majoritarianism, or integralism, in India that a myopic focus on Europe and the European Union has obfuscated? Does India illuminate a more global trend toward integralism and the "wrong" kind of multiculturalism?

Finally, the culminating change that Pathak identifies in both Britain and India as a consequence of majoritarianism is the redefinition of "citizenship." Here is where Pathak's argument becomes both compelling and frightening. Citizenship becomes a function of majoritarian culture; "Political rights and responsibilities therefore correspond to individuals' positions either inside or outside these boundaries" (p. 8). Indeed, he argues: "The British center and Right have ... designated ethnic minorities as 'trainee Brits' at an earlier evolutionary stage of citizenship. Closeted within culturally impermeable communities, minority individuals are precluded from identification with the 'common good,' a realization of [national citizenship] and ... active participation in the aspirations of the nation" (p. 10). While in Britain this shift is demonstrated by *Prospect* editor David Goodhart's recommendation for "earned citizenship," a system by which citizenship is granted only to the most assimilated immigrants, in India citizenship is under attack from the majoritarian Hinduvata party (p. 50). Hinduvata's brand of majoritarianism is based on a core cultural identity, which is constantly being reinvented to resemble "western" nationalisms; their idea of Indian citizenship is extrapolated from a "fantasy of the Hindu community," a fantasy that can neither accommodate Muslim minorities nor secularists of any kind (pp. 64-65).

However, as Pathak has led us to the alarming realization that new forms of citizenship are founded on reductive concepts of culture, we also see that he has failed to define "culture." Throughout the text, culture is referred to simplistically as "inherited identity" or an exclusionary community. Although these glib definitions are certainly meant to underscore the inadequacy of "state multiculturalism," Pathak never offers a better alternative. Even though he ultimately returns with a more critical eye to Bhikhu Parekh's concept of multiculturalism, suggesting his "philosophical multiculturalism" prioritizes "inherited cultural identities above experienced social identities," Pathak never discusses culture as anything more than a synonym for community (p. 172). It is a glaring void in Pathak's work, especially given the intellectual labor he demands of the progressive Left to fight back against the rightward pull of majoritarianism. This anthropologist might suggest that the first step in reclaiming citizenship is to recognize culture itself as a more ambiguous praxis of belonging.

Pathak has written a compelling book, which should be recommended to anyone interested in scrutinizing the major political shifts affecting Europe, India, and the world. The example of Indian majoritarianism is an exceptional contribution to our understanding of these political trends. Where many academics have been focused on Europe and the European Union, Pathak has recognized important similarities in India, prompting the question, is majoritarianism a global reality?

How will this trend affect citizenship and national relations on a global scale? Although sagacious readers will be aware of the book's flaws, they will also recognize its earnestness and urgency. What can be done to serve the immigrant and the individual, if "too diverse" becomes a call that legitimates discrimination and second-class citizenship? Pathak's conclusion addresses all those who hope that progressive politics will maintain its defense of the marginalized and disenfranchised, not just in Britain, but everywhere. ***The Future of Multicultural Britain*** is both a valuable discourse analysis and a clear call to action.

Notes

[1]. See John Borneman and Nick Fowler, "Europeanization," ***Annual Review of Anthropology*** 26 (1997): 487-514.

[2]. The "new times" project was a theoretical and political directive during Margaret Thatcher-era Britain toward the reduction of class bias in favor of communitarian solidarities. See Dick Hebdige, "After the Masses," ***Marxism Today*** (January 1989): 51-52.

[3]. Alberto Melucci, ***Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society***, ed. John Keane and Paul Mier (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), quoted in Douglas R. Holmes, ***Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism*** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.

[4]. Holmes, ***Integral Europe***, 13.

[5]. Borneman and Fowler, "Europeanization," 487.