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**WHAT ARE THE KEY AXES OF DEBATE BETWEEN PROPONENTS OF MULTICULTARILISM AND**

### **PROPONENTS OF INTEGRATION IN BRITAIN TODAY?**

A Mori poll conducted for the BBC in 2005 asked a sample of people if multiculturalism makes Britain a better place; 62% agreed that it does, whilst 58% of the respondents thought "*people who come to live in Britain should adopt the values of and traditions of British culture*".<sup>1</sup> Today, some believe, notably world leaders, that multiculturalism is a dead concept in Western democracies. In Britain, multiculturalism has been embraced by policy makers over recent years who advocated legislation and encouraged local initiatives towards a cohesive British society. However, this concept has become critical for deepening divides between communities, who may be perceived as spurning common characteristics often associated with a British national identity. This paper will explore the facets of multiculturalism by examining the arguments put forward by key advocates of this theory from Bhikhu Parekh and Tariq Modood. Both favour this concept as a viable method of inclusion, whereby public policy concerning communities does not do so to the detriment of minority groups, ensuring mutual

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<sup>1</sup>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4137990.stm>

respect of difference or equality is attained. Andrew Pilkington will also be observed as another proponent of the multiculturalism debate, from the context of racial equality. Contesting the multiculturalism, are key advocates of the integration concept, such as David Goodhart, Trevor Phillips and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, whom all agree that multiculturalism has offset a degree of isolation from some communities and have readily consigned the concept to the past and are keen to fulfil an integrationist approach towards Britain's multiethnic make-up.

Multiculturalism in Britain today has been brought about by a culmination of factors post World War, from mass migration of Commonwealth countries to its annexation of the European Union. Undeniably, it is one of the few countries in the West to have advocated government policy in favour of a multicultural society, encouraging diverse cultures to live together under one framework. A simple definition of multiculturalism throughout this essay will be referred to as; the doctrine that several different cultures (rather than one national culture) can coexist peacefully and equitably in a single country.<sup>2</sup> Multiculturalism as previously mentioned has

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/multiculturalism>, 3rd December 2010, 15:00

been an evolving concept in Britain post world war and with it a widely debated matter in recent years in terms of its feasibility to remain a guiding principle for governments to enact policy making towards its multiethnic nation.

A key proponent of the multiculturalism debate is Bhikhu Parekh. Parekh (1998) likens a multicultural society to one to include several distinct cultural, ethnic and religious communities that work towards achieving two equally legitimate and sometimes conflicting demands.<sup>3</sup> In his viewpoint, Parekh recognises the challenges that beset a multiethnic nation, but remains optimistic that communities can pull together for a common set of purposes. A turning point on the multiculturalism debate can further be examined in Parekh's report *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (2000). In the report, Parekh and his team undertook the task to evaluate multiethnic Britain and propose measures to discount forms of racial discrimination. Parekh's conclusion of the report, held a view whereby Britain could develop as a community of

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<sup>3</sup> B.Parekh (1998) 'Integrating Minorities', T.Blackstone, B.Parekh and P.Sanders (eds.) *Race Relations in Britain a developing agenda* (London: Routledge) pp. 1

citizens and communities.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, Parekh recognises that England, Wales and Scotland, have reached a key era in its history and attention must not only be driven centrally, but locally, and should work towards a better inclusive society, whereby equality and difference are accepted as a means to build a community of communities. The drive towards this notion, would create a sense of belonging amongst all racial and religious divides that would come under one political governance.

Parekh (1998) questions the desirability of minorities integrating into a collective way of life without losing its continuity in five ways. Firstly, the state needs to be culturally neutral; secondly, all members share a common national culture, thirdly, partial assimilation be accepted, fourthly, a pluralistic mode of integration be advocated and finally, a union of communities should be the necessary framework for which they can pursue traditional ways of life and engage in necessary social, political and economic interactions.<sup>5</sup> Parekh has explored

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/reportIntroduction.html> , 3rd December 2010, 12:36

<sup>5</sup> Blackstone, T, Parekh, B and Sanders, P (1998) *Race Relations in Britain - a developing agenda*, (Routledge: London & New York) pp.4

the issue of minorities integrating into a multiethnic nation in far greater detail than is explained here, but in essence, a pluralistic society composing equal rights and recognition of differences would be desirable.

Another key proponent of multiculturalism is that of Tariq Modood. In Modood's '*A Defence of Multiculturalism*', recognition is given that the Muslim community presents a challenge to the notion of Britishness and 'politically incorrect' multiculturalism has fostered fragmentation rather than integration.<sup>6</sup> Modood (2005) talks about multiculturalism in a political context, confining it to three key ideas: equality, multi and integration.<sup>7</sup> Modood acknowledges that equality merit's a degree of mutual dignity and respect amongst communities, but also accepts that communities may determine this in terms of piety rather politically.<sup>8</sup> This point further permeates the point by Parekh, of communities recognising differences under a given political framework. The notions of multi and integration put forward by Modood, ascertains plurality of

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<sup>6</sup> T. Modood (2006) 'A Defence of Multiculturalism', *Soundings*, Issue 29, April, pp.63

<sup>7</sup> Ibid pp. 64

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp.64

racial groups in the former, and recognition of various identities, not in terms of assimilation, but in a way that different identities exist on a premise of collective identity in the latter. In summary, Modood differentiates between ethnic groups so racial discrimination can be levelled off as communities are reconciled with differences and no single ethnic group has its identity absorbed into the majority one.

Modood & Meer (2009) question how the Muslim community fit into Britain's multicultural society. In their paper '*The Multicultural State We're In: Muslims, Multiculture and the Civic Re-Balancing of British Multiculturalism*' , the Muslim community and multiculturalism have become interdependent for two reasons; firstly, because of the certain practices/life style choices Muslims are required to undertake and secondly, the impact of global events, specifically Islamic terrorism.<sup>9</sup> Whilst multiculturalism as a concept is to encompass all ethnicities, it is poignant to mention the Muslim community as having been treated differently in recent years within Britain's multicultural society for the reasons Meer & Modood state. The

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<sup>9</sup> Meer, Nasar and Tariq Modood (2009) '*The Multicultural State We're In: Muslims, Multiculture and the Civic Re-Balancing of British Multiculturalism*' , *Political Studies*, 57, 3 (Oct) pp.481

Muslim community has inevitably been thrown into the spotlight, as an ethnicity not fully conducive to multiculturalism, by those favouring integration, coupled with governments pursuing counter-terrorism policies impactful on British Muslim communities. However, Modood's views on British multiculturalism lies in a two way approach, that it be interactive and not conform of assimilation. The case of British Muslims is a challenge because of the religious aspect attached to Muslim identity. For this reason, Modood (2005) argues, at a time when a third of Britons do not claim a religious affiliation, most South Asians in Britain do, and as a result a changing level of religiosity is being experienced in Britain which would be out of step with native trends.<sup>10</sup> Multiculturalism is a recognition of varying traits attached to ethnicities, that need not be negatively contrived but included and accepted as part of the whole society. Modood furthers this point, by stating minority groups have their own distinct characters and are likely to develop distinctive forms of integration.<sup>11</sup> Modood also states; *"No one form of integration should be elevated to a paradigmatic status, either theoretically or in*

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<sup>10</sup> T. Modood (2006) 'A Defence of Multiculturalism', *Soundings*, Issue 29, April, pp. 70



*the area of policy*"<sup>12</sup>. Modood is a fervent proponent of the multiculturalism debate, believing a move away from this policy could alienate minorities and that a single, one way form of integration would have a destabilising effect on multiethnic Britain.

In addition to Parekh's and Modood's defence of multiculturalism, Andrew Pilkington is another key proponent of this concept. In Pilkington's view (2007), the changing nature of politics since 2001, has inevitably forced thinking on national identities and what it's composition for governments and alike should be. For Pilkington, the reiteration of defining who we are is a recurring phenomenon which prompts the mainstream to consider an integrationist approach towards communities.<sup>13</sup> As the ethnic composition of societies changes over time, it is inevitable that people question their identity, as has been the case when determining what Britishness is. Pilkington highlights the impact of globalisation and how people learn to live with

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid pp. 71

<sup>12</sup> Ibid pp.71

<sup>13</sup> PILKINGTON, A. (2007) 'In Defence of both Multiculturalism and Progressive Nationalism: A Response to Mike O'Donnell, *Ethnicities*, Vol. 7, No.2.

difference by quoting the then Chancellor Of Exchequer Gordon Brown on Britishness who pointed out that he is Scottish, British, European and could accommodate all of these, and viewed diversity as a strength to forge a unique pluralist society.<sup>14</sup> As Pilkington acknowledges, the attempt to redefine national identity in this context, embraces difference in line with changing international circumstances.

Pilkington assesses the importance of Parekh's Report, mentioned previously, as one that supports the three principles of cohesion, equality and difference. However, for Pilkington, it is noted that these principles will be irreconcilable at times, and this needs tackling. Pilkington proposes this be done in two forms: procedural and substantive.<sup>15</sup> Both forms will comprise of tolerance, mutual respect and international human rights values, as preconditions for a multiethnic nation like Britain. For Pilkington, in order for multiculturalism to survive, the dominant identity is one that promotes racial equality to achieve the ideal of a community of

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<sup>14</sup> Pilkington, A (2003) *Racial Disadvantage and Ethnic Diversity in Britain*, Palgrave pp.200

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* pp.267

communities and a community of citizens.<sup>16</sup> Multiculturalism can set ideals to ensure communities are tolerant of one another, whilst a recognised common set of human rights for citizens is complicit with everyone and racial equality is paramount.

Having examined the key proponents of multiculturalism, attention is focused upon the key proponents of integration in Britain today. Integration throughout this paper will refer simply as; the bringing of people of different racial or ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal association.<sup>17</sup> Integration will not assume association with assimilation, as the two are different concepts, however, integration will be thought of in terms of creating space for individuality within the parameters of a multiethnic Britain.

David Goodhart is a keen advocate of the integration approach, believing if Britain becomes too diverse, British common culture erodes.<sup>18</sup> To further Goodhart's viewpoint, the more different

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid pp.278

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/integration>, 3rd December 2010, 15:15

<sup>18</sup> Goodhart, D (2004) 'Is Britain becoming too diverse to sustain the mutual obligations behind a good society and the welfare state?', Prospect, Issue 95

the nation becomes, the more diverse ways of life, religion and ethnic backgrounds become, the less communities will share a moral consensus or fellow feeling towards one another.<sup>19</sup> To put into context, Goodhart is referring to a possible erosion of the welfare state if people are unable to trace a common ground with one another, due to a multiethnic nation that cannot easily associate. Goodhart is primarily concerned with the interplay of diversity and the welfare state, and how this can be affected when a nation is less homogenised ethnically.

The multiculturalism versus the integrationist debate has invoked a further debate on the subject of Britishness. Goodhart (2006) writes on the subject of Britishness and considers it to be in retreat.<sup>20</sup> Goodhart consolidates events from the last fifty years that have contributed to the succession of micro-communities that have in his opinion eroded the sense of solidarity amongst people that was commonly felt within communities. However, the time and place Goodhart is referring to, is one that was very homogenised and compounded by very different world affairs. Goodhart sets out what kind of integration Britain should pursue, which is one

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<sup>19</sup>

Goodhart, D (2006) 'Progressive Nationalism: Citizenship and the Left (London: Demos) pp.16

based on a citizenship contract.<sup>21</sup> In this, a 'vertical' state-based rights and duties is combined with a social based 'horizontal' citizen-to-citizen solidarity welfare system.<sup>22</sup> A given set framework will easily help communities integrate if there are guiding principles that apportion equality for all.

Furthering the integration debate, is Trevor Phillips, who as the then head of Commission of Racial Equality (CRE) in 2004, raised the subject of Britain's multiculturalism policy, publicly condemning it and warning Britain of sleepwalking into segregation, ethnic enclaves and potential conflicts.<sup>23</sup> According to Phillips there is a danger of people becoming strangers to each others communities - "*People share space in Britain's towns and cities but do not know who each other are*".<sup>24</sup> The multiculturalists approach, can be criticised here for allowing

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<sup>20</sup> Goodhart, David (2006) *Progressive Nationalism: Citizenship and the Left* (London: Demos) pp20

<sup>21</sup> Ibid pp.26

<sup>22</sup> Ibid pp.26

<sup>23</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4270010.stm>, 2nd December 2010, 18:37

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 2nd December 2010, 18:55

communities to build away from each other. However, it may be questioned where the responsibility of nation building lies - is it with the government, the people or both? Clearly, Phillips regards the responsibility to rest with government to facilitate a mutual understanding and collective feeling amongst its people, by implementing public policy to steer communities to a cohesive wellbeing.

Phillips has expressed his fall-out with multiculturalism, and channels his enthusiasm into regaining the sentiments of what being British is about. In 2005, Phillips publicly denounced the term “multiculturalism” saying it should be scrapped and furthered the multiculturalism debate at the time, by announcing the CRE would no longer fund grants to ethnic minority projects that failed to promote “Britishness” and integration.<sup>25</sup> Phillips viewpoints clearly sent a strong message to communities across Britain of the need to act more homogeneously or ethnic divisions could become a very real threat to British society. The stark warnings that Phillips perpetuated via the CRE, certainly added fuel to the debate about multiculturalism and

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<sup>25</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3615379.stm>, 3rd December 2010, 10:08

integration, prompting government officials and academics alike to rethink the multiculturalism approach and to question its sustainability, at a time when global and national events, namely security concerns, were taking shape and national identity became the focus.

Yasmin Alibahi-Brown is another proponent of the integration debate, having written extensively on multicultural issues in Britain, an article entitled *“Why Multiculturalism has Failed”*, Alibahi-Brown claims *“multiculturalism is pitting all communities against each other”*.<sup>26</sup>

It is evident here, before Phillips public condemnation of multiculturalism in 2005, how sentiment towards this ideal was felt amongst communities in Britain. Alibahi-Brown’s viewpoint simply strengthens the argument that multiculturalism is separating communities, as minority ethnicities assert themselves against the dominant one, in this case the White identity, which in turn is facing an identity crisis of its own, as government policy focused on improving race relations in Britain. It is clear that Alibahi-Brown contests the notion of multiculturalism, as a divisive measure and that a collective identity conducive to all creeds be pursued.

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<http://fpc.org.uk/articles/38>, 4th December 2010, 15:23

Alibhai-Brown's paper "*After Multiculturalism*" talks about the meaning of citizenship, and how people bond with their own tribe.<sup>27</sup> It is important that communities do not become insular, as this creates a negative impact on local community relations and further separates the multiplicity of cultures abundant in Britain. If communities were to draw more commonalities with one another, it would prevent a dominant identity absorbing ethnic minorities and prevent ethnicities claiming to be the righteous one over others. In addressing this issue, Alibhai-Brown proposes a nation of 'live citizens'.<sup>28</sup> The model put forward by Linda Colley of a Millennium Charter for Citizens or a Contract of Citizens Rights, is what Alibhai-Brown refers to, as a means for people to understand their role in society, based on values, rights and responsibilities equally attained by citizens of Britain in a globalised world.<sup>29</sup> Communities will have a better understanding of each other, as citizens, if an egalitarian framework is adopted for all to abide within the confines of a British society. Discrimination and community conflict should diminish

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<sup>27</sup> Alibhai-Brown, Y (2001) "*After Multiculturalism*", *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 72, S1 pp. 50

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* pp.51

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* pp.51



as communities are afforded a sense of equality that can be achieved through a democratic and civic means.

In conclusion, key proponents of the multiculturalism and integration debate have been put forward in the case of Britain today. It has been assessed if there can be a multicultural future in Britain or whether there needs to be something like a leading culture, following something that can be called Britishness. This will certainly depend on how the majority of people see it.

Parekh's report on *Multiethnic Britain* certainly was a turning point on how Britain viewed itself. The notion of multiculturalism setting Britain as a 'community of communities and a community of citizens', became the standard by which Britain should measure its approach to its diverse population. If Britain accepted its framework of a country of multiple ethnicities, it would work towards building a community receptive to enhancing racial relations in an ever changing global climate. Modood offered an exception to the multiculturalism debate, concerning Muslim communities in Britain. The point of religiosity attached to an ethnic identity was attributed as a new challenge to Britishness. However, it was also mentioned that minorities warrant distinct characteristics that should not be overlooked if deemed to be out of

the ordinary, in this case, the level of piety against an overarching trend of secularism so often associated with British people. It's a challenge, but one which can be tackled under the realms of multiculturalism. Pilkington's viewpoint on Britishness is one that is indicative of a reoccurring theme concerning national identity. For multiculturalism to work, racial equality has to be embraced by all communities concerned.

The shift to integration in Britain has been put forward by Goodhart, who argues the more diverse a nation becomes, the less a common culture holds. However, external factors to the territorial boundaries, such as globalisation and security concerns as mentioned in the wider context of this paper, have forced the debate of what Britishness equates. Phillips condemned multiculturalism with damning evidence that Britain was sleepwalking into segregation if communities continued to live in isolation of surrounding cultures. The CRE's decision to halt funding to ethnic minorities, who failed to promote Britishness and integration, was a chilling wake-up call to government and local authorities to work towards an integrated society. Alibhai-Brown also put forward the view the multiculturalism was counter-productive and that it actually set communities against one another, as minority cultures assert themselves against

bigger ones.

Britain has been beset by viewpoints from all sides concerning the multiculturalism versus integration debate, what is clear is, is a country that has dealt with a diverse population in an optimistic way, embracing a truly multicultural society. The notion of Britishness has been publicly challenged and will continue to do so as new communities and challenges are encountered in Britain.

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