Abstract

India has a long rich history tolerant coexistence and cultural interaction among its many diverse cultural and religious groups. But today, there is a promotion of a kind of nationalism which identifies with certain religions or cultural groups at the exclusion of others. The temptation is to try to strengthen India as a nation-state at the expense of its pluralistic past. The philosophy of Isaiah Berlin is valuable in this context, for it shows that value pluralism is not incommensurable with liberal democracy and that the two can support one another. He recognizes that an individual can pursue freedom, but that they also possess an innate ability to respect the freedom of others. In this regard, he develops the notion of fantasia or imagination as a faculty which is instrumental in creating understanding and tolerance of other cultural beliefs and practices. This essay will show how through these processes described by Berlin, a large democratic country like India can both create and national identity and preserve the rich heritage of its pluralistic past.

Keywords: Isaiah Berlin, Value Pluralism and India.

INTRODUCTION

Indian society is today facing many challenges concerning its identity. There are today many nationalists who would like to restrict this identity to certain religious and cultural groups. But India throughout its history has always been a very diverse society. This pluralist nature can be traced back to the ancient period of Indian civilization. Momin states that “since ancient times Indian civilization has had a pluralistic and composite character, the pluralistic and composite ethos of Indian civilization, which began germinating during the Vedic period, was supplemented by the rise of Buddhism and Jainism...” (1996, p. 101). This pluralistic character has historically contributed to its flourishing. This can be seen in its rich intellectual, religious and cultural traditions and its powerful influence on other cultures.

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