



Research Paper

## Minimalism: A Philosophical Edification for Equipose

- 1) Dr. G.N.SHARMA\*, Retd.Prof.,S.B.College of Science, Aurangabad-431001  
, \*Corresponding Author
- 2) B.K.Chary, Retd. Engineer, Govt. MKP Dept., Aurangabad-431001

### ABSTRACT

Many thinkers, preachers and philosophers of religious studies have written at length regarding the successful way of living. They have evenly advocated moral and ethical principles though mostly theoretically drawn from the epics. At times, surprisingly, there is a quick and stealthy reference to Pragmatism too. Every generation has a different situation and stiff competition to face. Therefore, enthusiastically granting a Universal status to the sentimentally attached religious principles would turn out to be a self inflicted disaster. Just as every person has own perception and voluntarily adopted defense mechanism, nothing can and should be hurriedly concluded. Life as a whole provides various combinations with regard to experiences and therefore it would never be wise to declare something as the ultimate dictate unless there is a scientific base or backing. Physical phenomena also differ in results when subjected to different conditions, external or internal. This is a proof that generalizing a personal experience is nothing else than a sign of total immaturity. Unfortunately this tendency is not curbed but to the contrary held in high esteem. Many philosophers have exerted, particularly in past, even from the pre-Socratic period to come out with a single and simple theory to combat with human predicament. However, though in some cases only, the lengthy postulates had been over-explained or they would sound to be highly idealistic. The behavioural sciences have been extensively used and there is a clear overtone in support of the same. Life had never been and cannot be a riddle to be solved applying totally scientific principles or Laws as usually done in mathematics. Every situational based problem is an exclusive case and poses a challenge. Therefore it would be wise to take into consideration both physical and metaphysical aspects and their demands, before arriving at any conclusion. Therefore this paper would attempt to take on the principles of the philosophical outlook on life based on Minimalism. This is chiefly because Minimalism always lays emphasis on minimizing the load of our expectations and also giving room to only the genuinely important principles of life for storage and living complacently.

**KEYWORDS:** Human Nature, Phases of Life, Challenges and Remedies.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Epicetus said, “All human beings seek the happy life, but many confuse the means-for example, wealth and status-with that life itself. This misguided focus on the means to a good life makes people get further from the happy life. The really worthwhile things are virtuous activities that make up the happy life, not the external means that may seem to produce it.”<sup>1</sup> Minimalism is a philosophical outlook or theory towards life instructing the followers to maintain a perfect equipose. There are certain postulates quite clear to understand but some of the subtle expressions, at times, may confuse us as mostly they firmly stick to the unrevised moral grounds and much publicised ethical planes. In fact, most of the Western and some of the Eastern philosophies have exclusively dealt with the problem of contentment and happiness. Even then, there doesn't seem to be a concrete universally applicable guideline. Of course, it would be too optimistic an imagination to have a single avenue covering all aspects of life, to provide genuine satisfaction. Conditions do differ drastically on many counts and umpteen factors crop up challenging our effortful attempts. Therefore, it would be wise to begin with the supposition that our approach may be sincere and enthusiastic but ,at any rate, results would not be proportionate. Minimalism does not pretend to be ascetic in nature but is essentially guided by it. It holds on to the wisdom drawn from practical knowledge or various aspects of life. Man in general is thoroughly connected to many things in life, viz; people, objects, events, memory etc. The sad part is that he does not have the art of disconnecting himself at his “Will”. On a temporary basis he may be successful but gathering many things

without examining is absolutely customary to him. Hanging on to the past, accumulating the objects which have no lasting importance and subsequently burdening self with loads of unworthy memories, has become a common personality trait. The hangover of such feelings takes a heavy toll and at this juncture, “Minimalism” approach draws our attention. This philosophical approach begins cautioning us that whenever we cross the limits of any of the above mentioned entities we for sure attract grief, dependency and in special cases unsurmountable disaster. Handling of virtues is also an art in itself. Just getting a theoretical appreciation, moral or ethical sanction does not assure us of positive results. Focusing on the right things, can surely be the basic requisition of Minimalism. Sorting out from the gathered stuff which comprises of many useful and absolutely useless things, is a logical necessity. It is a continual process. It is, as well, never a one time job. “Attachment” in itself is good but if it is extended to every minor thing that rolls in our life, it would make us handicapped for a very longer duration. Everything has an age and nothing can be considered “eternal” unless we acknowledge it to be so.

Since “Minimalism” is taken as a life philosophy, obviously it is a basic necessity to understand life and human nature. It is a proven fact that the insecurity factor looms large and affects all human beings. Therefore, struggling to acquire security on all planes of life is natural. However, much of the insecurity is temporary and its inflow is chiefly owing to our own thinking pattern. There is a certain percentage of phobia pervaded by our own faulty imagination. In fact in the initial phases of life this could be viewed and accepted as quite natural. But with experience, advancing in life should be accompanied by common sense and maturity. Nothing is new and therefore, no happening should surprise a real evolved mind or personality as a whole. Accumulation of wealth, sentiments and nostalgic moments for a while is fine but later on they themselves turn out to be stumbling blocks in the path of progress. Life at any stage and for any rung of the society, demands very little. However, our over-stretched out imagination for own and those around us in terms of security, particularly physical, invites all trouble. A very minor percentage of our gathered entities has been of real use on daily basis. If importance is given to quality than quantity, then the gist of Minimalism can easily be grasped. Most of the things that are under our custody are rarely used or of real utility. It is, therefore, wise to seek the aesthetic sense on a small scale than hunting out for the same on a large spread out canvas.

#### PHILOSOPHICAL HANDLING

But for the scientific developments, nothing in the human affairs or metaphysical world sounds to be a novel idea. In the twentieth century itself it looked as if all ideas were completely explored and therefore exhausted. Their essence many times had a reference in the ancient time or literature. Nevertheless, the art of presentation has its own value and it does provide new style. Each upcoming generation is keen to find out a differently designed capsule for quick results so that it gains publicity and the required appeal. Many people are claiming “Minimalism” outlook as something freshly designed and is a guideline which wasn’t presented earlier. In fact in the eastern religions “Minimalism” did remain a solid base and same could be traced out in the Socratic and pre-Socratic periods. Human weakness for accumulation and further deriving a theoretical joy thereof is not at all any new thing. Everyone irrespective of the background with very few exceptions, does it. It is indeed a sort of psychological security experienced by almost all. Therefore, the temptation to collect irrespective of the utility is global. There is no sense in criticizing this tendency because it is very commonly natural. On the other hand when a philosophical outlook is encouraged and steadily nurtured, slowly one realizes the inherent futility. In other words, while gathering various experiences we do detach ourselves from many objects after realizing their limitations. However, without discounting further it would be wise to see the intrinsic or indispensable quality of this philosophy. It is in this context that some of the philosophies are referred to.

#### PHILOSOPHIES IN SUPPORT OF MINIMALISM

“Through vigilance, we can forestall the tendency to excess. Your possessions should be proportionate to the needs of your body, just as the shoe should fit the foot. Without moral training, we can be induced to excess. In case of shoes, for instance, many people are tempted to buy fancy, exotic shoes when all that is needed is comfortable, well fitting, durable footwear. Once we fall, however slightly, into immoderation, momentum gathers and we can be lost to whim.”<sup>2</sup> It is quite difficult to cover all those philosophers who supported Minimalism, particularly from the East. There had been numerous references references but in brief subscribing to the outlook of Minimalism. We do find most of the religious philosophies having a clear inclination towards Minimalism much owing to the ascetic tendency towards life and therefore we are tempted to attach more importance to the ‘detachment’ in life. This would clearly mean minimizing our wants from the arena of physical and emotional planes had remained the main defense mechanism for all. It is in this connection that a few philosophers/philosophies are presented.

**SOCRATES** : We are so much accustomed to some of the Delphic adages that the base of all his thinking could easily be concluded under the spirit of Minimalism. There is absolutely no ostensity in his views nor any uncontrolled exuberance involving the subject jargons. His main aim was to clarify every aspect of life, howsoever minor, bringing in simplicity in thinking and living. The famous life guiding proverbial type sayings, “Know Thyself” and “An unexamined life is not worth living”, stand as a proof for this. His emphasis on simplicity for gaining happiness in life takes us straight to concrete Minimalism or as roughly drawn sketches in philosophy. According to him it is not how much we accomplish or accumulate in life but how meticulously we use what we have. Happiness solely depends on a qualitative scale but never adhering to sumptuousness. Humanity as such is always confronted with a number of routine questions to which, honestly speaking, no thoroughly satisfying answers are available. Therefore there are merely certain possibilities which may be recommended. At times fortunately they might click. We do prefer either to entertain our own conjectures drawn from wishful thinking or display arrogance by fooling self and the world around us with some abstruse ideas. Socrates was an enigmatic personality and never wrote anything for records, though his thoughts continue to remain as the most appealing even today. Since he never appreciated fruitless philosophical speculations, he preferred discussing rather than instructing. He would question those who claimed to be the masters of the ultimate knowledge and thereby easily expose. His main intention was to remove the screen of ignorance or pretense nurtured and strongly recommend the use of common sense. Of course, in doing so he could himself feign ignorance which we know is popularly referred to the famous Socratic Irony. “So it is not surprising that, as time went by, people found him increasingly exasperating, especially people who had status in the community. ‘Athens is like a sluggish horse’, he is reputed to have said, ‘and I am the gadfly trying to sting it into life.’”<sup>3</sup>

**MARCUS AURELIUS** : The stoic philosopher once indirectly remarked about the common human weakness and therefore suggested, “Do not indulge in dreams of having what you have not, but reckon up the chief of the blessings you do possess, and then thankfully remember how you would crave for them if they were not yours.” It is factually very difficult to take a full control over the wayward or flighty human feelings which ever recklessly dominate and one has to pay a very heavy price for the same. Aurelius cautions us for having the propensity of letting loose moral principles and in turn inviting all unwarranted trouble. Actually it is always the faulty analysis which misguides and finally that lands us into trouble. In ‘Meditations’, he said, “How much trouble he avoids who does not look to see what his neighbor says or does or thinks but only to what he does himself, that it may be just and pure.” And elsewhere he writes, “For nowhere either with more quiet or more freedom from trouble does a man retire than into his own soul, particularly when he has within him such thoughts that by looking into them, he is immediately in perfect tranquility.” In Shakespeare’s words, “There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.”...Marcus quoting the cynic Moninus, puts it even more succinctly “All is Opinion.”<sup>4</sup>

The main contention of Stoicism is to delineate human personality as having severe limitations on many counts. Therefore, the mundane affairs both objectively and subjectively, show human incapacity in various forms. Nature by itself is very capricious, strong, uncontrollable and at the same time human nature has more of conflicting ideas with confusions. It is sad that we expend more energy in trying to convince others of our personality as flawless. The societal norms and subsequently pressure brings out a pseudo image and that becomes the root cause of our suffering in spite of having many amenities more than necessary. Aurelius wants us to accept self as it is and acknowledge only its requirements that are always minimum. The moment we step out crossing the genuine requisition or needs, we voluntarily invite all trouble because we strive more to present an image which is not original. Whenever we are successful in maintaining our own limited needs, life would not pose many problems.

**BUDDHISM** : Generally a grossly unjust remark against Buddhism is made, claiming the Buddhistic outlook of life as totally pessimistic. It is sad that the majority revel happily under the cover of ignorance and that is why cannot bear the truth. A falsifying hope is extremely soothing for them. Ignoring deliberately the existing reality, as given by Buddha, becomes extremely difficult to digest. This is the reason that although there is an enviable status granted to Buddhism as one of the universal religions, yet it has to, occasionally atleast, meet severe opposition or criticism by the followers of other religions. In fact Buddhism is one of the most compact type of philosophies portraying nothing else than the ground reality and wisdom. The very life design when viewed impartially with the compulsory unfolding phases mostly indicates a gloomy picture. Everyone does experience too much of defeatism and therefore, there is bound to be an open entry to the Pessimistic thought. Buddhism definitely exposes the hollow and overenthusiastic claims made by the then existing dominant religions but also provides a path to sway over these difficulties. The very concept of Nirvana is meant for all those who seek the meaning of life in earnest and anyone desirous can qualify to be on the righteous path. Buddhism does not concentrate only on any single phase of life of but covers all phases in an integral way, before drawing

conclusions. The paradigm of life shows there is no permanence granted to any animate or inanimate thing and therefore sentimentally clinging to objects that have ephemeral existence works out to be a futile exercise. Getting too attached to the chosen desires which ultimately provide no lasting respite or happiness, brings in only drudgery and grief in life. Therefore, it would be quite a bit of a nonsensical act expending energy for objects which in themselves have no confirmed existence. 'Buddha preached the middle path to his first five disciples in his celebrated sermon in a park near Varanasi in which the lord said : a monk is removed from the two extremes-one devoted to self-indulgence is base, ignoble, harmful and unworthy: the other is self mortifying, gloomy, painful and not respectable. One should abandon these extremes and discover a way which lies between these two extremes. The middle way enables man to attain right vision, knowledge, calmness, awareness and enlightenment or Nirvana. This middle way is the eightfold way comprising right faith, right resolve, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right thought and right concentration.'

## II. CONCLUSION

Scores of philosophies from the past and present age are available but very few directly touch human problems that recur on daily basis. Many have indicated the tendency to stick on to the religious sentiments or serving a chosen school of thought as a kind of service. Some of them had been absolutely academic in tone and therefore stuck up with an 'ism' which may not necessarily have any standing connection with human affairs or life as a whole. Therefore, it is ever wise to hunt out for the baggage which creates chaos, confusion and intermittent uneasiness, so that the source itself could be discarded as a whole. Accumulation without pruning, at any rate, cannot be considered a sign of wisdom or maturity. Everyone's life has the need of basic requirements and they do serve the purpose in its true sense. Beyond a certain level, gathering objects is merely a display of ornaments which have no purpose as such to display than purposefully exhibiting vanity. Minimalism lays a lot of emphasis on those necessary objects which life too demands. Beyond a certain level the meaning and verve is lost and survival does not at all rely on the heavily burdened luggage unnecessarily and voluntarily carried by us. To conclude, according to Epictetus, ' In any events, however seemingly dire, there is nothing to prevent us from searching for its hidden opportunity. It is the failure of the imagination not to do so. But to seek out the opportunity in situations requires a great deal of courage, for most people around you will persist in interpreting events in the grossest terms : success or failure, polarized categories obscure more creative-and-useful-interpretations of events that are far more advantageous and interesting! The wise person knows it is fruitless to project hopes and fears on the future. This only leads to forming melodramatic representations in your mind and wasting time. At the same time, one shouldn't passively acquiesce to the future and what it holds. Simply doing nothing does not avoid risk, but heightens it.'

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