



Research Paper

The Reflective Philosophical Isms

*Prof. Dr. G N Sharma

Retd. S.B. Science college
Aurangabad – 431001
gnsharma1951@rediffmail.com

*Corresponding Author

Principal Irfan Shaikh

Al-Irfan CBSE School
Khulatabad, Aurangabad

Abstract

Everything undergoes a change or rather is subjected to a change. That is why many times a sweeping statement is made, indicating that nothing, in its original format, remains forever. This could be acceptable in the zone of science but may not necessarily be, in the realm of metaphysics. Only wise people sportingly accept a revision for the betterment in the interest of the progress of the existing societal norms. Rigidity in any field to a certain extent has helped but on a large-scale has done more subjective harm. Relying on a particular stream of thought, and expecting it to be a consistently working panacea may not be agreeable on all count. Generally, it is the over enthusiastic approach and wildly tossed up ideas, that do more harm than any service. Certain philosophical or otherwise, behavioural sciences crop up mainly because of the need of the hour but somehow they are short lived. On the other hand some of them initially impress but lose consistency in meeting life challenges, owing to which find place only in the theoretical arena. Very few have the capacity to create a lasting effect and remain as a usable or living philosophy. Earning an appreciation as a scholarly attempted work may carry its importance but on a scale of practical utility might fail to draw any niche. It is also found that some of the philosophical Isms which lost their grace in history have again regained an appeal in the modern age. It is in this context that some of the popular reflective type of philosophies are selected for an unbiased discussion. The Paper envisages to take on Existentialism, Stoicism, Absurdism and Nihilism for a general survey and check the roots which have influenced them.

Keyword: Behavioural sciences, Change of Law, Realm of metaphysics, Theoretical arena.

Received 25 Jan., 2024; Revised 05 Feb., 2024; Accepted 07 Feb., 2024 © The author(s) 2024.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction

A distinctive doctrine or theory which emerges as need of the hour, may be called 'Isms'. Many times in society certain theories get so much of attention that they are considered as ultimate and generally they are not challenged. From a scientific point of view they are short-lived or their half-life is only for a few decades. There are many factors owing to which they enjoy unflinching support and status. However, as time passes on the claims and credibility become questionable. They sound perfectly faultless in theory but collapse when put to the test of validity in practice. Usually much due to the enthusiastically and emotionally introduced excesses this happens and this could be seen in the study of the religions. At the same time, the descriptions go to such an extent that they cross boundaries of nature laws and human logic. It is a curious fact that human problems have been changing their format and somehow no solution irrespective of the source has remained very satisfying in the modern age. Using jargons and technical terms of the subject or taking advantage of the language has become a recognized pathway to impress people. It is in this context that certain 'Isms' have exposed the limitations of the theories or philosophies that had markedly promised positive results. Instead of accepting the existing reality from ages covering it with false hopes has become a trend. The fact that in the mart of the world vices have overtaken the virtues, is not emotionally accepted. That is why instead of pragmatically dealing with the problems humanity is wantonly misled with illusory inferences. Once the historical survey is done impartially, we could realize what a puny human personality is in front of nature and its forces. The very paradigm of life cannot be considered as very intelligently fabricated by any agency. Otherwise, same questions would not have cropped up. Even today, thinkers and philosophers are not totally complacent. It is only the religious preachers who have been sentimentally claiming the right knowledge and for everything, without

revision for centuries, they have some modules and answers. Majority of the existing population does feel very poignantly the negative aspect of life but a very few have the courage to question or challenge the claims. Therefore, in the modern age, the upcoming generation is steadily watching and analyzing the facts and subsequently relying on the philosophical Isms which have dared to question the self-claimed authorities.

Some of the Isms, philosophical or otherwise had been short-lived but had dared to question the rigid assumptions publicized by religions regarding the phases and shades of life. Many of the religious philosophies have gone into so much of idealism that the pragmatic sense is overruled and to some extent disdained. Therefore, the Isms had strongly objected to such sort of thinking or analysis. Realm of spirituality is not for a common man or suitable to his level of comprehension. Getting tuned to it psychologically is in a way anaesthetic, having a very limited influence. Later on, it is merely the game of human ego which handles human temperament. Therefore, mostly it is a psychological game and nothing else. In the 'Problems of Philosophy' Bertrand Russell thinks, "There is a common impression that everything that we believe ought to be capable of proof or at least of being shown to be highly probable. It is felt by many that a belief for which no reason can be given is an unreasonable belief... Almost all our common beliefs are either inferred or capable of being inferred..." But let us imagine some insistent Socrates, who whatever reason we give him, continues to demand a reason for the reason.'¹

Isms with a Pensive mood

Existentialism

To begin with, the hunt for the 'purpose' of or for living had a question for humanity from ages. Religions have intelligently avoided a straight answer. But have gone tangentially covering the psychological weakness or psyche of human beings. Those are well informed can speak logically in a convincing manner but may also efficiently hide confusions. Avoiding the metaphysical arguments if we hit straight to the point, then it is an existing fact that the majority of the global level has failed to confirm the very purpose of living. Secondly, it has become almost an inherent inclination to avoid shouldering the responsibility for the happenings in our life. Even from the Causal theory, it is an undeniable fact that everything begins with us, and we are almost cent percent responsible for every result. Rare exceptions may be quoted, but then most of the times the tendency to put blame on some external agency is totally faulty. Next to it is the mishandling of the freedom granted to us. We as weak human beings are thoroughly incapable of employing the freedom properly, owing to which ennui settles in. Since the existing reality is absolutely harsh and we generally blindly trust in some higher force to intervene on time for assistance and solace. In turn, we are losing confidence in own ability. Jean Paul Sartre urges all those who are the victims of such a mentality to take responsibility or charge to control life by taking proper decisions. Depending on some external force is a sign of timidity and this dependence would cause more harm than any good. In animal kingdom there is the instinctive power which guides them and there is no burden of the unchecked desires. For human beings, unlike for animals, tremendous freedom is granted which brings in confusion, doubt and misery when not probably employed. That is why it is the moral responsibility of everyone to create meaning or sense while living and defining purpose. In fact, this is a special faculty and subsequently power granted to humanity as a whole.

In a simplified version there is an impetus on the term 'Existence'. According to Sartre it precedes essence. Man is always accompanied by fallible Will, and therefore he cannot blame others for his actions, decisions and their proportionate results. In fact, it is his choice which creates the scenario. At times he is forced to adapt or select according to own preference to adopt. 'This is the real situation in which he is caught chiefly because of the enormous freedom granted to him. In turn, due to the failure in handling the freedom, he has to face helplessness, anxiety and fear. Another reason could be the continued tussle that goes on between freedom and the societal or cultural forces. 'What could be the message of existentialism for a common man? In fact, it is helpful even to the academicians who are engaged in their own pursuits and yet not totally complacent. Our problems are personal and therefore we cannot transfer the responsibility to solve them to others however expert they may be. That is why thinking and feeling processes for the given situation are must. They do help us. The problems of life are never the same. They do not give us enough time or scope to master the situation or become specialist. Existentialists for this matter prefer down to earth position to check the reality'².

Stoicism

One of the dominant/impressive schools of thought from the Hellenistic period in ancient Greece which is uniformly globally acknowledged, is Stoicism. No doubt, we also reckon Epicureanism, Cynicism and Skepticism too. However, these couple of philosophies did sound quite a bit of abstract type compared to the earlier ones. At times, the propounders did not bother about the practical application of the preachings on the

ethical ground. Of course, it does not mean that there was any sort of disregard to the social values or ethics. The unfortunate part of most of the philosophical and religious idealism, was their failure in the actual mart of life. This naturally disappointed the adherents of Stoicism. However, at any rate, they never went against the ethical plane for any quick gains. The concept of Eudaimonia remained almost the main point of focus upon and therefore all the postulates were automatically driven only in that direction living or leading a life of complacency, satisfaction and gain purpose may be considered as the chief motto of the stoics. However it is surprising that the stoics have voluntarily chosen a path of the existing reality than relying on some invisible agency whose characteristics had been manmade. The surprising part is with such an objective view there is no reproachful attitude towards the failure of the virtuous or ethical part. The insistence on the righteous part has remained consistent throughout. In fact Stoicism places more importance on the nature facts as experienced by one and all. For example, nothing in life can forever retain its form because everything is subjected to change. The four major principles of life to lead it successfully have been suggested as Wisdom, Courage, Justice and Temperance. This means every soul can adopt these virtues to experience a quality of life. Accumulation of materialistic gains does lead to comforts but then there is no assurance of a satisfying life. The golden rules strongly suggested by all famous stoics is to treat others as we expect them in turn to treat us. So leading a life as per the dictates of nature is one of the healthy habits to rely upon and never losing the track of virtues is the only way to gain happiness in life. The very thought of controlling external forces or events is detrimental. We have the only option of controlling our thought-process and further actions. There are many things which are beyond our control and one has to sportively accept this fact. Isolating self from the toxic emotions is everyone's prime duty because fear, anger impractical hope and lust are the worst enemies whom we nurture for no avail. These are the destructive emotions leading only to a disaster and nothing else.

‘ Diogenes of Sinope (not to be confused with Diognes Laertius, who wrote a biographical sketch of him and other philosophers) was a student of Antisthenes and went on to become the most famous Cynic. In defense of simple living Diogenes observed “The gods had given to men the means of living easily but this had been put out of sight, because we require honeyed cakes, unguents and the like.” Such is the madness of men, he said, that they choose to be miserable when they have it in their power to be content. The problem is that ‘bad men obey their lusts as servant obey their masters, “and because they cannot control their desires, they can never find contentment.’³

Nihilism

Nothing in the world has a real existence, despite the fact that some of the entities have owned a social approval. The much publicized values according to nihilism are absolutely meaningless and carry no perfect base. Many times this is looked upon as an outcry of frustrated souls or those who have embraced pessimism without any scrutiny. That is why there seems to be no perfect ground for any belief system nor settled emotions. Apparently at least it provides an impression that the adherence of this thought process have failed to handle the vagaries of life or they are unable to bear the burden of their own expectations. Therefore everything sounds to be the result of nurtured impulsiveness. But then this does not mean that the frustration, despondency and ennui, leave the Nihilist to strive meaninglessly. On the other hand there is a strong proposal to create own meaning in one’s own life than completely depending on the traditional or socially acknowledge value systems. In fact, this kind of protest has a reference in Russian literature and politics too around 1900C. The general opinion carried for the society is that Nihilism in itself is not totally wrong or fault filled with only protest. On the other hand it encourages every individual to think for self and create own destiny, than relying upon the religious or even moral dictates. Everyone's life is designed differently and therefore it is not at all any intelligent move to suggest same set of principles to face the negative tides in life. Since mostly such principles find a base in religious writings, Nihilists criticize them. Ultimately, the meaning of nihilism is to lead a healthy and happy life. The major problem with the zealous followers of all religions is that they are never prepared to accept any limitations pointed out and that is where the mess is created.

Usually any educated or well informed person with a rational outlook would expect knowledge to provide Truth for all in same proportion and any time must stand for the same without alteration. But somehow with reference to perception, it is observed that though well defined it may or may not be true or same to all. It, many times, stands true only on individual basis. However perception is the route to grasp all knowledge. ‘Hence the famous saying of Protagoras Homo Mensura, ie. Man is the measure of all things in other words, what appears to me is true for me, and what appears to you is true for you. Is there no knowledge which is valid and acceptable to all men universally? No, then the conclusion of Homo Mensura not only shows relativism, of knowledge, but also its universality as impossibility. This is known as Scepticism.... The very momentariness of perception really rests on the Heraelitean theory of flux. Everything is fleeting. No object to remains the same

for two moments. Thus relativism of knowledge couched in the phrase *homo mensura* leads to Scepticism and even Nihilism of Gorgias.’⁴

Absurdism

Getting highly idealistic has the danger of making a spacious room for pessimism. Defeatism automatically makes an entry, draining off all enthusiasm for living. Too much of analysis may also lead to the same. Taking every word of the popular textual matter breeds in disproportionate measure of expectations and obviously that would make the person accept diffidence itself as a shelter for safety. Refusing to accept the fact that there is a wide gap between our surmising capacity and the existing reality, always encourages negative and detrimental emotions causing a total damage. In this when Absurdism, though sounds like Existentialism at the base, has more of frustration and helplessness. Owing to this very aspect of life seems to be meaningless to the core. Existentialism at least, swings to different extreme poles instilling optimism even though Theism and Atheism but, at any rate, Absurdism remains very steadfast in its approach disallowing even a minor variation in its rigid approach. In fact, nihilism too does the same to a certain extent. Anti-Absurdism naturally stoutly opposes this thinking. There had been and will be in future to a large gulf between human desires or expectation and the surprising results that arrive. It is quite clear that Existentialist with all protests and criticism maintain the magnanimity by announcing quite optimistically that this life, though meaningless, can be rearranged and it’s our personal sole responsibility. On the other hand Absurdism describes life as thoroughly irreparable and our experimental efforts would prove to be futile only. Followers of Absurdism had been entertaining the feeling that no doubt there is a conflict between our desires or understanding of the world and the uneven reciprocation by the world, there is no remedy for this.

In ‘The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays’, Albert Camus wrote regarding Absurdism or expressed the absurdity of very existence as follows.

‘If I try to see the self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water sleeping through my fingers. I can sketch one by one all the aspects it is able to assume, all those likewise that have been attributed to it, this upbringing, this origin, this ardor, or these silences, this nobility or this vileness. But aspects cannot be added up. This very heart which is mine will forever remain indefinable to me. Between the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give to that assurance the gap will never be filled.’⁵

II. Conclusion

If we just browse through the ancient philosophies, we realize that atheistic schools of thought were already extant and they did make their presence felt. Somehow much owing to the domination of religious cum physiological treatment certain philosophies always even today continue to hold that upper hand. It is but the minor percentage of the population which can muster courage to raise objections against the excesses committed. Any philosophy for that matter can be succinctly stated or explained briefly but the expected tidiness is unfortunately missing. Over expectation has caused an irreparable damage and prejudiced the weak minds thoroughly.

If we refer to Shunyavada from Indian philosophy, we do get a reference to skepticism or Nihilism. It advocates Reality as well as the very concept of relativity. The two diametrically opposite in spirit, viz.; Attachment and Detachment are explained in a relative manner. Attending to the worldly affairs and withdrawing from the same are explained which is technical terms are expressed through Samsara and Nirvana. The explanation is provided to gain the ultimate knowledge of the ‘Real’. Those which are based on certain conditions are connected to other objects might be concluded as falling under relative knowledge. Therefore, they cannot be held as the ultimate ‘Real’. Since ‘Shunyavada’ means emptiness, this philosophy might be called the philosophy of Void. That is why human suffering is chiefly due to the ignorance regarding the noumenal and phenomenal world. Sometimes this is also picked up as Nagarjuna’s (Indian Philosopher) Madhyamika or the philosophy emphasizing that “ All is Void. ”

It is in the same light that a sort of frustration is expressed through the ‘Isms’ referred to earlier but more poignantly in Existentialism and Nihilism. Stoicism and Existentialism to a large extent provide a sort of solace by suggesting remedial measures. Despite this, one has to accept these Isms, particularly Absurdism, currently describe the mart of the world and its consequences. From the thing I itself Shunyavada, One can take the reality in two ways, noumenal and phenomenal because nothing can be overlooked. both have the germ of ‘truth’ undeniable.

To conclude, ‘A religion which aims at ethical conduct of the highest order and cleansing of mind constitutes a directly perceptible religion. A true religion has the excellence of being a self-evident religion i.e. based on perceivable hard facts within human experience. Buddha was the first preceptor to establish the

importance of moral rectitude. Ethical conduct is the highest of all religions, not the rituals that own a place in the heaven nor the worship of god. The greatness of Buddha as a founder of a highly rationalistic religion over twenty four hundred years ago is simply an extraordinary development that will strike even the most brilliant philosopher of the modern age with astonishment. Buddha's thoughts have an incomparably high place in the philosophy of world religions.'⁶

References

- [1]. Russell Bertrand, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Books and Books unlimited, New Delhi, 2018, p.100
- [2]. Sharma G.N. , *Existentialism – A philosophy for living*, Ultra Publications, Bangalore, 2002, p.85
- [3]. Irvine William B., *A Guide to the good life*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p.31
- [4]. Masih Y., *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, Motilal Banarasi Dass Publishers, Delhi, 2016, pp.33,34.
- [5]. Camus Albert, *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*, Hamilton, France (tr. Justin O'Brien) 1942.
- [6]. Joshi Laxman Shastri, *Development of Indian Culture*, (tr. By S R Nene), Lokvangmaya Griha, Wai, India, p.394