

THE ARTS OF EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

Sanjana Vijayan & Mahathi Sathish

Introduction

The Arts of Eastern Philosophy by Bishnu Pathak and Susmita Bastola presents a comprehensive exploration of various Eastern philosophical traditions deriving from cultures such as Indian, Chinese, and Persian, along with the discussion of contemporary individuals like Gandhi and Mother Teresa. Through detailed analysis of key concepts and extensive descriptions of the historical context, the authors explore the core principles of Eastern philosophy and emphasise the relevance of Eastern philosophy in concepts and areas such as harmony, justice, and wisdom.

This review will look into the book's arguments and contributions to discourse regarding philosophical and international relations.



The Arts of Eastern Philosophy

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Chapter 1 starts off with the origin of the word 'philosophy', setting the groundwork for the ideas that will follow throughout the book. It also serves as an introduction, outlining the themes, relevance, and objectives of the book. This chapter delves into the history of philosophy and touches on the philosophies belonging to various cultures.

In regards to Eastern philosophy, Egyptian and Indian philosophies are touched on. Specifically in relation to Egyptian philosophy, the story of Gilgamesh is shared briefly. This allows the readers to connect their understanding of the concepts and ideas presented on Egyptian philosophy with the story as an example. Indian philosophy and its many branches are introduced, and the authors have articulated their various aspects clearly. A few of these aspects include but are not limited to: Dharma and Veda (the secondary categories of Mantras, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads are also discussed). The book also outlines the development of philosophical traditions in Persian, Chinese, and ancient Greek cultures, while highlighting prominent figures that aided in shaping these ideologies, like Confucius. Apart from simply stating Eastern and Western philosophies, the two are contrasted, highlighting their disparities. While Eastern philosophies have been around longer than Western philosophies, one key imbalance is the lack of argumentative and discursive ability present in Eastern philosophies. Western philosophies tend to be rooted in notions like idealism and realism that are more structured.

Chapter 2 goes deeper into and details the concepts introduced in Chapter 1. The fundamentals of Western philosophy are described in a succinct manner, stating the various aspects and their origins. A few examples include Epistemology (the study of knowledge) and Aesthetics (the study of art). An intriguing point that piqued my interest is the logic of the Greek philosopher Protagoras in Aesthetics, who stated that one views beauty through discernment. A similar structure follows through for Eastern philosophy, but its backstory and context is explored more thoroughly. A key point that aids in outlining Eastern philosophy is that it is grounded in existence, morality, and conscience. Indian philosophy is employed here to expand on Eastern philosophy's traits, as concepts on the Aastika and Nastika schools of thought are explained. In the final section, Buddhist philosophy is touched on, and it serves as a transition to the introduction to the next chapter.

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In Chapter 3, Buddhist philosophy is discussed extensively. The fundamental essence of the universe utilises theories to explain and discuss themselves. The theory of universal truth explains the history of the universe and how it came about. Additionally, the essential role of women in aiding Buddha to achieve enlightenment was also emphasised. The theory of rights shares the essentiality of keeping order in sectors like politics and culture. The other theories are transformation, equanimity, and buddhology. Those theories touch on the human duty in pursuing wisdom, serenity, and a more scholastic review of Buddhology respectively.



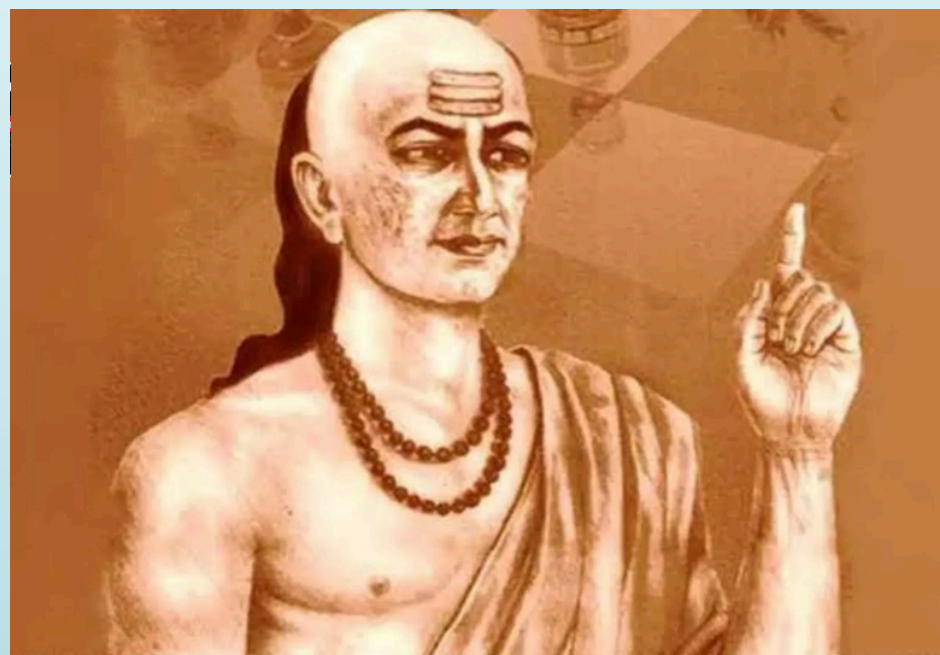
Chapter 4 of 'The Art of Eastern Philosophy', focuses entirely on the crucial distinction between Confucianism, and Taoism, elaborating on what makes these the core principles of Eastern Philosophy and the pillars of morality as well. Pathak and Bastola carefully break down the building blocks of Confucianism, into Politeness, Humanity, Righteousness, Filial Piety, Wisdom, Gentleness, and Power—delving deep into each ideology and empowering the readers to see the miraculous prowess these ancient arts offer. Taoism, on the other hand, is shown to focus more on developing a oneness with the natural world, emphasising communal harmony and the peace established from living not just amidst nature, but alongside it. Concerning the extent to which unity is of significance, the authors quote Verse 39 of the 'Tao Te Ching' and bring to light the "final goal" of Taoism: being one with both Heaven and Earth.

"The masters of old attained unity with the Tao. Heaven attained unity and became pure. The earth attained unity and found peace... Humanity attained unity so that they might flourish".

Furthermore, this chapter also emphasises the importance of Sun Tzu's 'Art of War' in establishing the philosophical strength of the Oriental regions and goes on to describe the book as one that "stresses the unpredictability of fighting, surprise attack, and deception of the enemy". Authors Pathak and Bastola show tremendous respect and gratitude for the military genius of Master Sun, stressing also upon his relative importance in modern times with the book's psychological extension into any field of competition.

In continuation, Chapter 5 focuses instead on the Indian influence on Eastern philosophy, zoning in on the works of Chanakya and Gandhi—giving the readers a much-needed perspective on the various insights that emerge from this side of the globe. Chanakyaism explores the Arthashastra, the Indian equivalent to the 'Art of War' where the Master Strategist hones into his insights on diplomacy, righteousness, and the very bedrock of fine governance.

Chanakya's diplomatic principles focus on the pillars of Sama (concillation), Dana (offering gifts), Veda (study of sacred texts), and Danda (punishment), and these four concepts are explained in significant detail, helping one develop a collective sense of what ethics means for a society.



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After exploring Chanakya's pioneering influence on modern life, Pathak and Bastola then turn to Gandhism and move to understanding the concepts of Swadeshi (self-reliance), Swaraj (self-rule), Satyagraha (non-violent resistance), and Sarvodaya (welfare of all). Swaraj, they call, the "integral revolution" to Gandhi's political approaches and try to urge the readers to appreciate his relentless search for the truth through his focus on unity. Pathak and Bastola, therefore create interesting parallels to the concepts of togetherness—as one between Heaven and Earth, Nature and Mankind, and Nation and Citizen—helping the readers place themselves at the forefront of the Eastern revolution and evaluate their own allegiances best.

After the focus on diplomacy and its political entanglement with our lives, the book moves to understand the impact that kindness, and those with kind intentions, leave behind. This brings the authors to the altruism of Mother Teresa, as they explore most of her journey in India and other parts of the world, searching for the goodness of Jesus Christ. While exploring the necessity of human-driven growth, they write,

"Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person",

and urge us to consider our impact in the modern world as well as how we can grow it. Apart from untangling the influence Mother Teresa had on the underprivileged, they also provide a closer look at her practices, including her preference for her White Saree with Blue Stripes, which she believed was closely associated with the Virgin Mary. To a great extent, therefore, 'The Art of Eastern Philosophy', humanises icons to a point where they can be studied, examined, and analysed not only for the impact they've left behind, but for the people they were, and for those they wanted to be. Thus, the book in its own way lets us explore the precipice of wisdom and come to our own reasonings on what is the best way to get there.

Chapter 7 focuses primarily on Arabic thinker Ibn Khaldun. His familial history is shared, and his work on creating secular philosophies during pre-modern era is explained. Furthermore, his flaw of being harsh is attributed as a reason for his short-lived duration in serving courts. His theories are named the cynical theory, theory of asabiya, and umran. His theories are related to civilization and the power at play.

The Arts of Eastern Philosophy, after much debate and scrutiny, gives life to icons and philosophies that have been forgotten by the Western world. The book portrays the many routes to being a better version of one's self while emphasising the role humanity plays in a larger, global context. By humanising visionaries and making their visions more accessible, The Arts of Eastern Philosophy is a portrait of society coming one step closer to understanding its ancestral wisdom. This review, concludes therefore, with my acknowledging the effort put in by both Bishnu Pathak and Susmita Bastola in preserving, retaining, and transforming the essence of these values into something much more.

Bibliography:

- Pathak, B., & Bastola, S. (2023). Arts of Eastern philosophy. Lulu.com.