

## *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*

Knut A. Jacobsen et al., ed. *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Boston: Brill, 2009-2012. 5 vols.: 4,444 pp. \$1731.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9789004180475 (set).

**B** *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* is a thematic encyclopedia that attempts to encompass the great breadth of Hindu traditions within a multi-disciplinary context. The opening statement given in the preface of each of the five volumes of this collection asserts that it is both for the scholar and the general reader interested in the study of Hinduism. That being said, this collection is not for the faint of heart. Rather than a multi-volume encyclopedia of fairly short entries on the widest variety of topics on the subject, with information one could most likely find on the Internet, this work is set up as a collection of critical essays ranging from fifteen to fifty pages. Each essay tackles the subject in depth, with an extensive bibliography and cross referencing. This collection is not for the casual researcher interested in getting a brief answer to a question on Hinduism. It is a collection of scholarly treatises that are appropriate for graduate level research.

The scope of this collection underscores that it seeks to be the most comprehensive reference work on Hinduism in the English language to date. With five volumes and over 4,000 pages, it accomplishes this task and then some. With authors like Vasudha Narayanan, Hans Harder, Alf Hiltebeitel, Ramdas Lamb, Dietmar Rothermund, and David Gordon White, to name only a small number, *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* has collected works from the top scholars in a range of fields related to Hindu studies. The work is incredibly interdisciplinary, with author expertise in religion, anthropology, Sanskrit studies, comparative philosophy, and South Asian Studies.

The arrangement of the text is fairly straightforward. Each of the five volumes covers some primary subjects. The volumes are as follows:

- Volume 1: Regions; Pilgrimage; Deities
- Volume 2: Sacred texts; Ritual traditions; Arts; Concepts
- Volume 3: Society; Religious specialists; Religious traditions; Philosophy
- Volume 4: Historical periods; Philosophers, poets and saints; Relation to other religions and traditions; Hinduism and contemporary issues
- Volume 5: Religious symbols; Hinduism and migration: contemporary communities outside South Asia; Some modern religious groups and teachers

Within these primary subjects the essays are entered alphabetically by short title. Individual bibliographies are provided with each essay, and every volume contains a glossary related to that volume. A comprehensive index for all five volumes is included in volume 5.

In addition to the impressive scope and depth of this collection, there is a wonderful added feature that all of the primary subjects found within the articles are then cross referenced to the other articles where further information can be found, even between the volumes.. For instance, in volume 3's chapter on the Ādivāsīs, when referencing the deity Jagannāth of Puri there is the reference (see Orissa). One can then go to the essay on Orissa to find further information on this deity.

In addition to the option of purchasing this collection in print, Brill has also made this encyclopedia available online. While possibly cost prohibitive for those with a smaller budget, the online interface is well put together and simple to use. Similar to most of their online encyclopedic resources, there is a search option as well as the ability to browse through the alphabetical list. One feature this author was quite pleased with was that the cross references noted in the print resource are hyperlinked in the digital resource, allowing researchers to jump between essays quickly to find all the relevant information on a particular subject throughout the hundreds of essays. The current downside to the digital format is that it is incomplete. Currently only volumes one through three are available, and the index (which is contained in volume five) is unusable. A sample of the forthcoming index has been put up on the site, but it has no interactive functionality. A personal hope is that the index will contain hyperlinking similar to the cross references available within the essays, allowing the user to find a subject and then jump directly to the pages needed rather than having to find them within the digital framework of the encyclopedia.

In all, *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* exceeded every expectation. I commend the publisher for tackling such a broad category with extreme depth. The choice to essentially create a five-volume essay collection rather than shorter, less extensive entries has truly set this resource apart. Every essay is meticulously researched and written by the foremost scholars with care to be even-handed even when tackling the more controversial content. The only caveat is that, as stated above, this collection is not for the casual researcher looking for basic information. While the editor clearly states in the introduction that this resource is meant for readers of all levels, which could potentially be true, those who will most benefit from this resource are those looking for a higher order of research work. This collection is essential for any academic institution that has a serious program in Hinduism or South Asian Studies, on undergraduate or graduate levels. It is also highly recommended for institutions that want to gain a greater understanding of Hinduism in its broadest and deepest context and would be a wonderful resource for seminaries that either have an interreligious dialogue element or that look to better understand ministerial work with those of Hindu culture and faith. However, for institutions that have no program in Hinduism or if only a cursory knowledge of the subject might be required by students, I would not recommend this set due to the high cost and depth of scholarship.

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