Buddhism and Jainism

Series: Encyclopedia of Indian Religions

- Builds understanding of Buddhism and Jainism in India, Asia and beyond
- Views these religions in dynamic interaction with other religions on the Indian landscape
- Explores the history, effects, role and impact of Buddhism and Jainism
- Contributes to structured knowledge of religions relating to the Indian identity

This volume focuses on Buddhism and Jainism, two religions which, together with Hinduism, constitute the three pillars of Indic religious tradition in its classical formulation. It explores their history and relates how the Vedic period in the history of Hinduism drew to a close around the sixth century BCE and how its gradual etiolation gave rise to a number of religious movements. While some of these remained within the fold of the Vedic traditions, others arose in a context of a more ambiguous relationship between the two. Two of these have survived to the present day as Buddhism and Jainism. The volume describes the major role Buddhism played in the history not only of India but of Asia, and now the world as well, and the more confined role of Jainism in India until relatively recent times. It examines the followers of these religions and their influence on the Indian religious landscape. In addition, it depicts the transformative effect on existing traditions of the encounter of Hinduism with these two religions, as well as the fertile interaction between the three. The book shows how Buddhism and Jainism share the basic concepts of karma, rebirth, and liberation with Hinduism while giving them their own hue, and how they differ from the Hindu tradition in their understanding of the role of the Vedas, the “caste system,” and ritualism in religious life. The volume contributes to the debate on whether the proper way of describing the relationship between the three major components of the classical Indic tradition is to treat them as siblings (sometimes as even exhibiting sibling rivalry), or as friends (sometimes even exhibiting schadenfreude), or as radical alternatives to one another, or all of these at different points in time.