

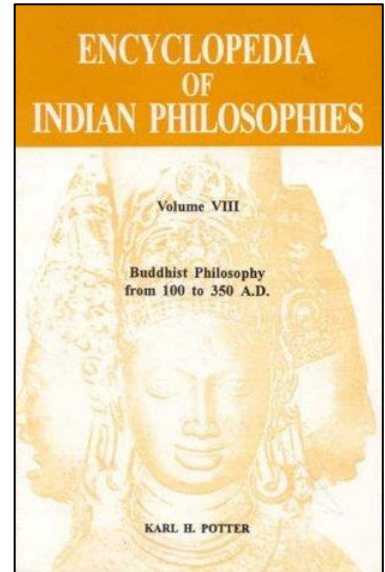
## The Staggering Scope of the Philosophy of India

### A Review of Karl H. Potter’s *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Vol. 8: Buddhist Philosophy from 100 to 350 A.D.*

Review by Blaine A. Snow

Posted on September 10, 2020

Revised, updated, 9-21-20, 3-14-24.



For decades the venerable University of Washington emeritus professor Karl H. Potter (1927-2022) directed an international team of scholars who produced the most extensive survey of the philosophy of India to date, a Herculean effort of 25 volumes (completed 2019), taking up about four feet of shelf space. The series attempts to provide a definitive summary of current knowledge about each of the systems of classical Indian philosophy. Each volume consists of an extended analytical essay together with summaries of every extant work of the system, a Bibliography, and a Glossary. Volumes in the series include treatments of *Nyaya-Vaisesika*, *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Purvamimamsa*, various *Vedanta* systems and certain philosophically important sects of *Saivism* and *Vaisnavism*, as well as *Jain* and *Buddhist* philosophy. The aim of this 28-volume Encyclopedia is to present the contents of different streams of Indian Philosophical texts citing experts on the points that seem debatable. This series should give serious pause to any Western philosopher who has been trained to think that philosophy begins and ends with the Greek-European tradition.

Of the twenty-eight volumes, the editors describe the five volumes on **Buddhist philosophy** as follows:

*The volumes on Buddhist philosophy treat the subject altogether chronologically, beginning with the Buddha and ending when Buddhist thought leaves India around 14th century A.D. The purpose behind this approach is to avoid imposing more divisions into Buddhism than are historically apparent. The scope of these volumes is limited to summaries of the texts that are of philosophical interest throughout, theoretical rather than practical in their intended function, and polemical or at least expository in a context where defense of one view among alternatives is appropriate. These criteria have been interpreted here broadly and loosely. In these volumes dealing with Buddhism, the original Sutras (the Pali Sutras), the earliest literature regularly ascribed to the Buddha or his immediate disciples, is not summarized.*

Volume eight covers the texts and philosophical development of Buddhism from the beginning of the second century to the middle of the fourth:

*This [Volume Eight, 827 pages] constitutes the second devoted to Buddhist philosophy. It takes up where its predecessor, Volume Seven of this Encyclopedia, leaves off, around the beginning of the second century A.D. This is a period still not well understood, with a great deal of scholarly disagreement remaining about many aspects of the history and thought of*

*the period. The editor of the volume has tried to utilize the most up-to-date scholarship known to us.* [From the inside front flap]

Volume Eight begins with a three-chapter, 75-page introduction on this early period of what would eventually become Mahayana Buddhism. It continues with summaries of works such as the original *Prajnaparamita* literature appearing around the beginning of the new millennium, the centrally important works of **Nagarjuna** and **Aryadeva**, then later works such as the 18,000-, 25,000-, and 100,000-line large *prajnaparamita*, and summarizes many well-known sutras that would eventually become the Mahayana canon, works such as *the Heart and Diamond Sutras*, *The Gandavyuha* (Entry into the Realm of Reality) *sutra*, *Dasabhumika* (The Ten Stages) *sutra*, the *Lankavatara* and *Samdhinirmocana* (Third Turning) sutras, plus hundreds of lesser known texts, culminating in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century works of **Asanga** and **Vasubhandu**.

These volumes provide an excellent way for a student of Buddhism to get a general sense of Buddhist history and its relationship to the many other schools, philosophers, and texts that make up the philosophy of India.

There are some disappointments to the Encyclopedia volumes on Buddhism. One is that all volumes were originally published in India by Motilal Banarsidass (<https://www.mlbd.in/>) so they are not promoted well in the West and their production quality isn’t the greatest. Currently as of 2023, the set is available and distributed by Exotic India Art (link below). Another related issue is that there are no Chinese characters used, only strings of Pinyin transliterations (e.g., *Bei-jing* instead of 北京). This usually isn’t a problem with other forms of Indian philosophy but since so much of Buddhist research is in Chinese (and other languages, particularly Tibetan), this can be a problem because one sometimes has to guess what character the transliterations refer to.

This is not a criticism but a note to the reader: since the Encyclopedia focuses on India, a few Buddhist texts that originated in India which went on to have huge influence in East Asia aren’t given much attention. For example, in this volume, the summary of what is perhaps the single most important Buddhist text of East Asia, *the Lotus Sutra*, is a measly two pages. Despite its huge influence in East Asian cultures, this Indian text neither has much philosophical content nor did it have much influence in India, so its summary here is perfunctory. Other texts which originated in India which also went on to have influence in non-Indian cultures (e.g., *the Lankavatara*), are given worthy summaries, mainly because they satisfy the criteria: 1) have philosophical content, 2) influenced philosophical thought in India. I suppose one could quibble with what constitutes “philosophical content,” that it is to some degree a culturally relative judgment, but it is clear that the choices for what to include and not include were not solely Mr. Potter’s but the judgments of teams of scholars both Indian and Western.

The other four volumes on Buddhism in Potter’s Encyclopedia series are as follows:

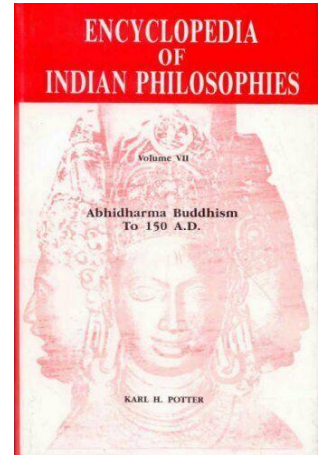
**Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Vol. 7  
Abhidharma Buddhism to 150 A.D.**

by Karl H. Potter with Robert E. Buswell, Padmanabh S. Jaini, and Noble Ross Reat

Hardcover: 636 pages

Publisher: Motilal Banarsidass; 1st Edition, 1996

[From the inside front flap]: The present volume undertakes to summarize the gist of these philosophical teachings, termed Abhidharma, from the first texts that developed after the Buddha up to and including the mammoth text called *Mahavibhasa*, generated from convention held in the first or second century A.D.



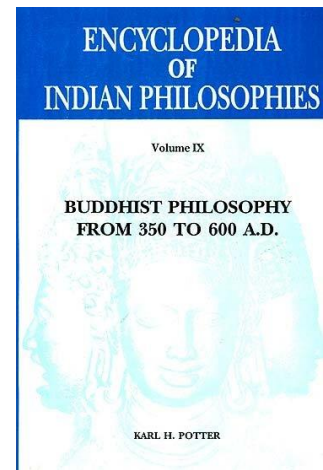
**Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Vol. 9  
Buddhist Philosophy from 350 to 600 A.D.**

by Karl H. Potter

Hardcover: 762 pages

Publisher: Motilal Banarsidass; 1st Edition, 2003

[From the inside front flap]: This, the third Volume in this Encyclopedia to deal with Buddhist philosophy, takes the reader from the middle of the fourth to the end of the sixth centuries. Many of the authors and texts treated here are not well known to the casual student of Buddhism. The most important author is clearly **Dignaga**, who is almost entirely responsible for turning Indian Buddhism toward an exhaustive analysis of epistemic considerations and in particular of inferential reasoning. But other author whose works are summarized here deserve to be better known, in particular the rival Yogacara commentators **Buddhapalita** and **Bhavya**, the latter of whom in particular introduces for the first time into Buddhism contrasts between the viewpoint of his particular brand of Buddhism and all the other systems of contemporary India, and not just the Buddhists.



Contents: Preface, Abbreviations, PART ONE: Introduction, Historical Overview, Abhidharma Developments, Epistemology, Logic and Language, PART TWO: Summaries of Works, Endnotes, Glossary, Index.



Photo: 14 of 25 volumes of Potter's Encyclopedia

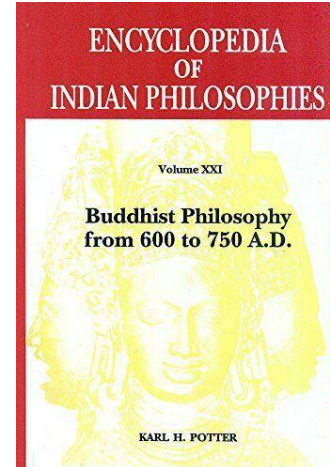
**Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Vol. 21  
Buddhist Philosophy from 600 to 750 A.D.**

by Karl H. Potter

Hardcover: 662 pages

Publisher: Motilal Banarsidass; 1st Edition (January 1, 2017)

[From the inside front flap]: The fourth volume of the Encyclopedia to deal with Buddhist philosophers of India, focuses on **Chandrakirti** and **Dharmakirti**, along with a few others (importantly **Shantideva**) who appear to have lived in the period of 600-750 CE. The volume consists of summaries of these philosophers, preceded by an Introduction by Eli Franco and Karen Lang. Topic of interests discussed in both the Introduction and summaries include ontology, epistemology, soteriology, inference, causation, and (in Shantideva’s case) ethics.



**Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Vol.22  
Buddhist Philosophy from 750 Onward**

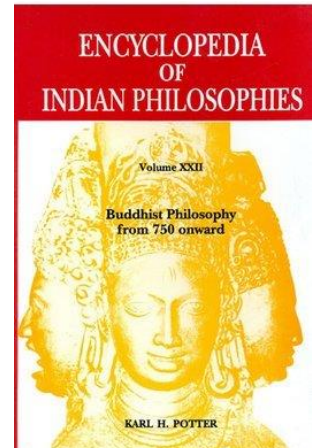
by Karl H. Potter

Hardcover: 691 pages

ISBN-10: 8120841530, ISBN-13: 978-8120841536

Publisher: Motilal Banarsidass; 1st Edition (January 1, 2017)

[From the inside front flap]: This is the fifth and last volume of the Encyclopedia to deal with Buddhist philosophy of India. The volume consists of summaries of the works of Buddhist philosophers who lived from the mid-8th century to the early 13th century (**Santaraksita**, **Vimalamitra**, **Kamalasila**, **Haribhadra**, **Atisa**). All major systems of Buddhism—*Sautrantika*, *Vaibhasika*, *Madhyamaka*, and *Yogacara*—were fully developed at the beginning of this period, and a time of syncretism was underway. Such pivotal figures as Santaraksita were integrating various of these schools into an ordered hierarchy that could lead a person from a state of greatest ignorance to an enlightenment that would end the cycle of rebirths. As a source of philosophical literature, Buddhism largely disappeared from India after this period, although it continued to flourish in other parts of Asia such as Tibet.



As the volumes in this series demonstrate, the philosophical heritage of India is unquestionably every bit as sophisticated, detailed, multi-dimensional, argued, revised, and developed as anything in the Western tradition. This review highlights the five volumes in the series on Buddhist philosophy, but it should be kept in mind that, even though Buddhism is the most well-known of the Indian philosophical traditions, the other major schools of Indian philosophy deserve much attention as well. Perhaps in some distant future, the Western philosophical tradition will more thoroughly engage with the philosophical traditions of other great world cultures.

## **Full List of the 25 Volumes in the Series**

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**Volume I: Bibliography** (Sections I and II) constitutes a bibliographical listing of the philosophical literature of India during its classical phase and also the secondary material on this literature that is available in European languages. For an updated electronic version of this Bibliography, [click here](#) .

Karl H. Potter, compiler.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970, 1974; 2nd rev. ed 1983; 3rd rev. ed. 1995.

**Volume II: Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology: The Tradition of Nyaya-Vaisesika Up to Gangesa.** This volume summarizes the major works of the classical Indian philosophical system of Nyaya-Vaisesika from its inception with the *sutras* of Gautama and Kanada and continuing up to the time of Gangesa (about 1350 AD).

Karl H. Potter, ed.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass and Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977; Motilal Banarsidass, 1955

**Volume III: Advaita Vedanta up to Samkara and His Pupils.** Part One contains an exposition of the philosophical concepts of Gaudapada, Samkaracarya, and Mandanamisra. Part Two consists in summaries of all the known authentic works of these authors together with those of Suresvara, Padmapada, Totaka, and Hastamalaka.

Karl H. Potter, ed.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass and Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981

**Volume IV: Samkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy.** Part One, the volume's lengthy introductory essay, discusses the history of the system and its overall philosophical contours. The remainder of the volume (Part Two) is devoted to summaries of extant Sanskrit texts of the system. Many of the summaries are of texts that have never been edited, translated, or studied before. Included are extensive treatments of the *Yuktidipika*, the *Samkhyavrtti*, and the *Samkhyasaptativrtti*.

Gerald J. Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, eds.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass and Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987.

**Volume V: The Philosophy of the Grammarians.** Part One constitutes an introductory essay that summarizes the main ideas contained in grammatical philosophy. Part Two contains studies of the primary texts of this school that expound these philosophical ideas, examination of which makes it possible for those who are unable to read the original Sanskrit to get an idea of the positions taken and the arguments offered. Bhartrhari, Mandanamisra, Kondabhatta and Nagesa in particular are treated at length. Part Three constitutes an exhaustive bibliography of original and secondary writings on Grammatical Philosophy.

Harold G. Coward and K. Kunjunni Raja, eds.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass and Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990

**Volume VI: Indian Philosophical Analysis: Nyaya-Vaisesika from Gangesa to Raghunatha Siromani** This volume takes up the history of the Nyaya-Vaisesika where Volume II of the Encyclopedia left off. It begins with an Introduction by the editors (Part One) that provides a historical overview and analysis of the logical, metaphysical, and epistemological contributions

in the literature covered in Part Two. Starting in Part Two with Gangesa's *Tattvacintamani*, the basic text of the "new" school of Navya-Nyaya, the reader will find summaries of 32 texts datable from the time of Gangesa (c.1350) to Raghunatha Siromani (1510). Also included is a resume of what is known of some 50 Naiyayikas who lived and wrote during that period.

Karl H. Potter and Sibajiban Bhattacharyya, eds.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass and Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993

**Volume VII: Abhidharma Buddhism to 150 A.D.** This volume undertakes to summarize the gist of Buddhist philosophical teachings from the first texts that developed after the Buddha up to and including the mammoth text called *Mahavibhasa*, generated from a convention held in the first or second century A.D.

Karl H. Potter, Robert E. Buswell, Jr., Padmanabh S. Jaini, Noble Ross Reat, eds.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996

**Volume VIII: Buddhist Philosophy from 100 to 350 A.D.** This volume begins with the earliest Prajnaparamita Sutras and ends with the works of Vasubandhu and his acrimonious critic, Samghabhadra.

Karl H. Potter, ed.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999

**Volume IX: Buddhist Philosophy from 350 to 600 A.D.** This volume continues the coverage of Buddhist philosophical thought through the period that includes Buddhaghosa and Buddhadatta, Dignaga, Dharmakirti, and the commentators Bhavya, Dharmapala, and Sthiramati.

Karl H. Potter, ed.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003

**Volume X: Jain Philosophy (Part I).** Introduction by J. Soni. Following a chapter on the Jain Canon, there are summaries of texts from Umāsvāti to 1000 A.D.

Dalsukh Malvania and Jayendra Soni, eds.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007

**Volume XI: Advaita Vedanta from 800 to 1200. From Vacaspati Misra to Citsuka.**

Karl H. Potter, ed.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006

**Volume XII: Yoga Philosophy**

Gerald J. Larson and Ram Sankar Bhattacharya, eds.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008

**Volume XIII: Nyaya-Vaisesika Philosophy from 1500 to 1660.**

Sibajiban Bhattacharyya and Karl H. Potter, eds.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2011

**Volume XIV: Jain Philosophy Part II. Summaries of texts from 100 A.D. to 1300.**

Piotr Balcerowicz and Karl H. Potter, eds.

Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013

**Volume XV: Bhedabheda and Dvaitadvaita Systems**

M.M. Agrawal and Karl H. Potter, eds.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013

**Volume XVI: Purva-Mimamsa Philosophy.**

Karl H. Potter, ed. Introduction by P.T.Raju.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2014

**Volume XVII: Jain Philosophy Part III. Summaries of texts from 1300 A.D. to present.**

Piotr Balcerowicz and Karl H. Potter, eds.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2014

**Volume XVIII: Dvaita Vedanta Philosophy**

Karl H. Potter, ed.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2015

**Volume XIX: Acintyabhedabheda Vaisnava Philosophy**

Karl H. Potter, ed.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2015

**Volume XX: Visistadvaita Vedanta**

Stephen Phillips and Karl H. Potter, eds.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2017

**Volume XXI: Buddhist Philosophy from 600 to 750 A.D.**

Karl H. Potter, ed., Introduction by Eli Franco and Karen Lang  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2017

**Volume XXII: Buddhist Philosophy from 750 A.D. onwards**

Karl H. Potter, ed.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2018

**Volume XXIII: Suddhadvaita Vedanta Philosophy**

Karl H. Potter, ed.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2019

**Volume XXIV: Kashmir Saiva Philosophy**

Karl H. Potter, ed.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2019

**Volume XXV: Nyaya Vaisesika in Recent Times**

Karl H. Potter, ed.  
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2019

## **March 2024, Notes and Links**

- The entire set appears available for purchase from the following source:  
<https://www.exoticindiaart.com/book/details/encyclopedia-of-indian-philosophies-set-of-26-books-nal124/>
- Although missing some sections, the first seven volumes are available online through the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/the-encyclopedia-of-indian-philosophies/1%20Bibliography/>.
- Karl H. Potter bio: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl\\_Harrington\\_Potter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Harrington_Potter)
- Bibliographies of Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: extensive bibliographic lists:  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210508162741/https://faculty.washington.edu/kpotter/ckeyt/home.htm>
- University of Washington remembrance:  
<https://phil.washington.edu/news/2022/01/21/remembering-emeritus-professor-karl-potter>