

# dharmaic religions

## Vedic Religion (1500 - 500 BCE)

- Religion based on the **Vedas** (Indo-Aryan Holy Books)
- Led by **Brahmins** (priests) who perform **rituals** and make **sacrifices** to the Indo-Aryan gods
- Vedas describe many Indo-Aryan gods, called **Devas**, imported from Indo-European tradition, such as
  - **Indra** = main god, the god of war and of thunder
  - **Agni** = god of fire
  - **Mitra** = god of trust and the morning sun found in many cultures from Persia to Rome
- **Dravidian** gods, like those of the **Indus Civilization**, more commonly included female figures, as well as animal gods, were included among the Indo-Aryan gods but given a lower position
- Promoted the **Caste System** as part of religious duty

## Sramana Movement (??? - 500 BCE)

- May have existed since the **Indus Valley Civilization**
- Existed alongside but separate from **Vedic Religion**
- Focused on **meditation** and **asceticism** (life of self-denial) to detach from world and gain enlightenment
- Key Beliefs of Sramana
  - **Samsara**: (Rebirth/Reincarnation) the belief that, after death, a person is reborn into a new body
  - **Karma**: (Action) the good and bad actions of a person, which affect the quality of the next life
  - **Dharma**: (Duty) a person's religious and social duties or responsibilities in life that must be fulfilled
  - **Mokhsa**: (Liberation) release from the cycle of rebirth, achieved by perfecting karma and dharma
  - **Ahimsa**: (Non-Violence) release from the cycle of rebirth, achieved by perfecting

## Reform Vedic Religion

- Reform Period (800-200 BCE)
- Vedic Religion blends with Sramana
- **Upanishads**: Philosophical texts written 700-500 BCE reinterpreting the Vedas

## Reject Vedic Religion

- Reject Vedas
- Reject Caste System
- Reject Brahmins and their rituals
- Maintain Sramana beliefs/practices



### **Brahmanism (500 BCE-300 CE)**

- Early version of Hinduism drawn from Upanishads
- All gods were seen as manifestations (forms) of **Brahman**, the One Supreme Power of the Universe
- Some viewed every soul as a small part of **Brahman**
- By achieving **Moksha**, the soul can be released from this mortal world and united with **Brahman**
- Fulfilling your **caste** is part of your **dharma**
- At the time, not as popular as Jainism and Buddhism



### **Hinduism (300 CE-Today)**

- Many sects, but all believe in **Vedas** and **Brahman**
- Introduced new major gods: **Trimurti** (Hindu Trinity)
  - **Brahma** (Creator)
  - **Vishnu** (Sustainer)
  - **Shiva** (Destroyer)
- Religious devotion to individual gods now open to all people (very popular development)
- Figures from Indian Epics (Mahabharata, Ramayana) important in the religion as gods (Krishna, Rama)
  - **Bhagavad Gita**, a part of the *Mahabharata* Epic, teaches Hindu philosophies



### **Jainism (500 BCE-Today)**

- Version of Sramana taught by **Mahavira** (497-425 BCE) religious teacher, starved himself to death
- Emphasized extreme self-denial and **ahimsa**
  - Extended fasting (not eating)
  - Some ascetics wear no clothes
  - Sweep floor and cover mouth to avoid killing bugs; Total vegetarians
- Universe is eternal, no concept of God or Brahman
- Pure liberated soul is seen as divine (after **Moksha**)



### **Buddhism (400 BCE-Today)**

- Buddhism taught by **Siddhartha Guatama** (480-411 BCE) known as **Buddha** (Enlightened One)
- Former prince turned religious teacher
- Emphasized moderate self-denial, the “Middle Way”
- **Four Noble Truths**
  - All life is suffering
  - Suffering is caused by desire
  - Eliminate desire → End suffering
  - How? Follow the **Eightfold Path** = Dharma
- No belief in soul: nothing is real, all illusion, even you
- Goal = **Nirvana**: (Extinguished) release from rebirth, like Moksha, except you just stop existing

**Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism all have their own view of Dharma, so we call them the Dharmic Religions**