

dharmaic religions

Vedic Religion (1500 - 500 BCE)

- Introduced to India by the **Aryans** (Indo-Europeans)
- 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) all living beings have the spark of the divine spiritual energy; therefore, to hurt another being is to hurt oneself.

Reform Vedic Religion

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

Brahmanism (500 BCE-300 CE) AKA Proto-Hinduism

- Early version of **Hinduism** based on the Upanishads
- All gods were seen as manifestations (forms) of **Brahman**, the One Supreme Power of the Universe
- The souls of all living things were seen as merely parts of a single universal soul called **Atman**
- Some viewed **Brahman** as the Creator of the **Atman**, while others viewed **Brahman** and **Atman** as One
- By achieving **Moksha**, the soul can be released from this mortal world and united with **Atman/Brahman**
- Fulfilling your **caste** is part of your **dharma**
- At the time, not as popular as Jainism and Buddhism