

Religion in India in the 6th century BCE

*At one of our Dharma study group meetings, we came across this statement:
When Sākyamuni Buddha began teaching, in India in the 6th century BCE, he tried various methods advocated by his contemporary religious masters but found them useless in achieving his objective.*

This surely raises the question:

What were the beliefs of religious thinkers in that country at that time in history.

Overview (AI generated)

Before Buddhism arose in 6th century BCE, the primary religions in ancient India were the **Historical Vedic Religion** (Brahmanism, an early root of Hinduism) and the non-Vedic **Śramaṇa traditions**, which included early **Jainism** and ascetic movements. Indigenous tribal and older Indus Valley religious customs also existed.

Historical Vedic Religion (Brahmanism)

- Based on sacred texts called the Vedas.
- Led by priests known as Brahmins.
- Focused on rituals, fire sacrifices (*yajna*), and a structured social caste system.
- Gradually evolved over centuries into classical Hinduism.

The Śramaṇa Movement and Jainism

- Independent, non-Vedic ascetic traditions that rejected the authority of the Vedas and Brahmin priests.
- Promoted a lifestyle of intense self-discipline, meditation, and non-violence (*ahimsa*).
- **Jainism** was already established and reformed by Parsva and Mahavira around the 6th to 9th centuries BCE, existing right alongside early Buddhism.
- **Ancient Folk and Tribal Beliefs**
- Local nature worship, village deities, and spirit veneration practiced by various regional tribes before being integrated into mainstream traditions. [1, 2]