Creed/ Practice

A creed is a statement that sums up what followers of a religion believe. Hinduism is the belief and practice of different peoples who settled in India over many centuries. Hinduism has no known founder, no one sacred text, no organised church, nor a set creed or statement of faith like other religions.

Brahman

What is important in Hinduism is belief in Brahman. Hindus see Brahman as something mysterious that unites everything in the universe. It is invisible but it is everywhere. Brahman is an energy or power that is beyond all description. There are thousands of gods and goddesses in Hinduism. Each god highlights one aspect or one quality of Brahman. Hindus are free to worship their own favourite god or goddess.

Three important Hindu gods:

- Brahma - the part of Brahman that creates the world.

- Vishnu - the part of Brahman that comes to save and preserve the world from evil.

- Shiva - the part of Brahman that comes to destroy and then rebuild the world.

Dharma

The word Dharma means sacred duty. Hindus try to do what is right according to the social group into which they are born, and the stage in life they have reached.

Hindu scriptures describe four main social groups or Varnas: Brahmins (priests), rulers, business people and manual workers. Each group has its own duties and code of behaviour.

The religious idea of Varnas later gave rise to the political idea of the caste system. A group of people called the ‘untouchables’ existed outside the caste system. They did all the menial jobs, and were discriminated against in society. (In India it is now illegal to set people apart as ‘untouchable’.)

Hindu scripture states that there are four stages in life.

- Student (learning the Vedas from a teacher).
- Householder (running a home and serving the community).
- Middle Age (children grow up and the retired person has time to think and meditate).
- Holy Man (gives up family ties and material possessions and goes off in search of spiritual truth).

Reincarnation

The cycle of life, death and re-birth is called Samsara. Another word for re-birth is reincarnation. In the West, people are used to thinking about the passage of time in straight lines. In the East, Hindus see time as a cycle or as a wheel that goes round and round. Life is a cycle of birth, death, and re-birth that occurs again and again.

Hindus believe that when a person dies, the Atman (soul) goes into a new body or into an animal. A person’s fate is decided by their Karma, the actions they perform during their lifetime. Good actions are rewarded by a good re-birth and bad actions lead to a bad re-birth.

Hindus strive to achieve good Karma. Each good action takes them a step closer to a good re-birth. To be re-born again and again until they become perfect is called Reincarnation. The cycle comes to an end when the Atman (soul) is finally united with Brahman. This is called Moksha.

Questions

1. What is the Hindu belief about Brahman?
2. Name the three main Hindu gods.
3. What do Hindus believe about Dharma?
4. Explain the meaning of reincarnation in Hinduism.
5. Explain how Hindus can believe in many gods and at the same time believe in one supreme God.