

Cambridge International AS & A Level

HINDUISM**9487/03**

Paper 3 Hinduism: Philosophy and Religion

May/June 2025**MARK SCHEME**Maximum Mark: 60

Published

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and candidates, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began, which would have considered the acceptability of alternative answers.

Mark schemes should be read in conjunction with the question paper and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

Cambridge International will not enter into discussions about these mark schemes.

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This document consists of **16** printed pages.

Generic Marking Principles

These general marking principles must be applied by all examiners when marking candidate answers. They should be applied alongside the specific content of the mark scheme or generic level descriptions for a question. Each question paper and mark scheme will also comply with these marking principles.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 1:

Marks must be awarded in line with:

- the specific content of the mark scheme or the generic level descriptors for the question
- the specific skills defined in the mark scheme or in the generic level descriptors for the question
- the standard of response required by a candidate as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 2:

Marks awarded are always **whole marks** (not half marks, or other fractions).

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 3:

Marks must be awarded **positively**:

- marks are awarded for correct/valid answers, as defined in the mark scheme. However, credit is given for valid answers which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme, referring to your Team Leader as appropriate
- marks are awarded when candidates clearly demonstrate what they know and can do
- marks are not deducted for errors
- marks are not deducted for omissions
- answers should only be judged on the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar when these features are specifically assessed by the question as indicated by the mark scheme. The meaning, however, should be unambiguous.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 4:

Rules must be applied consistently, e.g. in situations where candidates have not followed instructions or in the application of generic level descriptors.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 5:

Marks should be awarded using the full range of marks defined in the mark scheme for the question (however; the use of the full mark range may be limited according to the quality of the candidate responses seen).

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 6:

Marks awarded are based solely on the requirements as defined in the mark scheme. Marks should not be awarded with grade thresholds or grade descriptors in mind.

Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
N/A	Highlighting areas of text
N/A	Allows comments to be entered in speech bubbles on the candidate response.
N/A	Allows comments to be entered at the bottom of the RM marking window and then displayed when the associated question item is navigated to.
L1	Level one
L2	Level two
L3	Level three
L4	Level four
L5	Level five
SEEN	Indicates that the point has been noted, but no credit has been given.
EVAL	Evaluation

Generic Levels of response descriptions

These level descriptors address Assessment Objectives (AOs) 1 and 2, and should be used in conjunction with the indicative content for each question in the mark scheme.

Assessment Objectives**AO1: Knowledge and understanding**

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of teachings, beliefs and practices, including relevance for individual Hindus and communities.

AO2: Analysis and evaluation

Analyse, evaluate and discuss evidence, points of view and issues in Hinduism.

Generic marking principles

- (a) Examiners should use the performance summary statements at the top of the descriptors to help to identify a level which matches the candidate's response. However, the final decision on the band and the mark within the band should be made on the basis of **all** the descriptors in the level and not primarily using the performance summary statement.
- (b) Examiners should start at the lowest level, if the answer meets all the criteria they should then move to the next level and so on. The Examiner should repeat this process until there is a match between the overall answer and the level descriptor. Examiners should use a best-fit approach when deciding upon the level, it is possible for a different level to be chosen for each AO.
- (c) If the Examiner identifies all aspects of the level descriptor within the answer then the highest mark for the level should be given. Examiners should also make reference to the indicative content when deciding on the mark within a level to ensure that there is sufficient relevant content evident within the answer for the level and mark. Examiners should be prepared to credit material in answers which is not contained in the indicative content.
- (d) The Examiner may need to make a judgement within a level or between two or more level statements. Once a 'best-fit' level statement has been identified, use the following guidance to decide on a specific mark:
 - Where the candidate's work **convincingly** meets the level statement, you should award the highest mark.
 - Where the candidate's work **adequately** meets the level statement, you should award the most appropriate mark in the middle of the range.
 - Where the candidate's work **just** meets the level statement, you should award the lowest mark.

Section A AO1 12 mark questions**Section B Essay Marking grid AO1**

Level	AO1 Knowledge and understanding	Marks
Level 4	Accurate knowledge with good understanding • Uses a range of detailed, accurate and relevant knowledge. • Demonstrates understanding through a well-developed response. • Fully addresses the question. • Good understanding of the wider context, if relevant.	10–12
Level 3	Mostly accurate knowledge with some understanding • Uses a range of mostly accurate and relevant knowledge. • Demonstrates understanding through a developed response. • Addresses most aspects of the question. • Some engagement with the wider context, if relevant.	7–9
Level 2	Partially accurate knowledge with limited understanding • Uses a range of knowledge which may be partially accurate. • Demonstrates limited understanding through a partially developed response. • Addresses some aspects of the question. • Attempts to engage with the wider context, if relevant.	4–6
Level 1	Basic knowledge and basic understanding • Identifies a limited range of knowledge which may not be accurate. • Demonstrates basic understanding through a limited response. • Response is relevant to the topic but does not directly address the question. • Little or no reference to the wider context, if relevant.	1–3
Level 0	No relevant material to credit.	0

Section A AO2 18 mark questions**Section B Essay Marking grid AO2**

Level	AO2 Analysis and evaluation	Marks
Level 5	Thorough discussion supported with evidence - Analyses the importance and/or strength of different arguments/points of view. - Uses accurate evidence to support a well-structured discussion. - Coherent conclusion to the question which evaluates knowledge and points of view and assesses alternative conclusions.	16–18
Level 4	Coherent discussion supported with evidence - Discusses different arguments/points of view in some detail. - Uses accurate evidence to support a structured discussion. - Coherent conclusion to the question which evaluates knowledge and points of view.	12–15
Level 3	Clear discussion with some support - Recognises different arguments/points of view and discusses at least one in some detail. - Uses some evidence to support discussion. - Clear conclusion to the question which is linked to a range of knowledge and points of view.	8–11
Level 2	Attempts a discussion with limited support - Outlines one or more argument/point of view. - Uses supporting evidence for one or more relevant point. The support may not be wholly relevant or accurate. - Attempts a conclusion to the question which is linked to knowledge and/or a point of view.	4–7
Level 1	Basic response with a point of view - States a point of view. - Little or no supporting evidence. - May attempt a basic conclusion, which may not directly address the question.	1–3
Level 0	No relevant material to credit.	0

Question	Answer	Marks
EITHER		
1(a)	Explain how the idea of three levels of reality supports the Advaita view that everything is Brahman. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 12 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: The three levels of reality can be described as low or the most unreal (pratibhasikha), intermediate or pragmatic (vyavaharikha) and absolute or supreme (paramathika). The first two are contingent but the third is not. The human capacity to experience these different levels varies. On a contingent level, the world is real. We experience it and interact with it. If we do not eat, we will die; if we do not get out of the way of a speeding car, we will die. Therefore, we cannot, in the usual course of things, ignore the world. Advaita recognises that from the empirical perspective of embodied existence different experiences of reality are possible and it classifies these into three different levels of reality, based on the extent to which the reality being experienced accords with the absolute ontological reality of Brahman. The lowest level is the level of dreams, mirages and illusions. This level is not absolutely unreal because, while the things experienced within it are the product of the mind alone, they are also possible things: the mind builds these experiences out of things that can be perceived and experienced in the next level of reality. Pragmatic or empirical reality describes the world as it is experienced in a waking state. In that state it is possible to recognise the dreaming experience as unreal or at least less real than the waking one. It is at this level of reality that cause and effect are experienced. But while this appears to be wholly real from a position within pragmatic reality Advaita philosophy views it as having the same relationship to absolute reality as sleeping reality has to waking. In other words, once the third level of reality has been realised the unreality of the second level is clear. The level of absolute reality cannot be assimilated into any other, as the lower levels can. This level of reality can only be grasped through the realisation that the self is not different to Brahman. This is not a cognitive understanding, which would preserve the notion of a separate self, but a wholly different kind of consciousness. The three levels of reality illustrate that the phenomenal is not sui generis or self-existent but dependent on particular conditions in order to be experienced. Brahman is self-existent and dependent upon nothing. Once paramarthika is realised the other levels of reality can still be experienced but they will no longer carry the delusion that they exist at the ultimate level; richness or poorness, good and ill fortune, illness and health can be experienced in exactly the same way, without causing any disturbance of the self because they have no ultimate reality. Candidates do not need to refer to all of this material to gain the marks. All accurate material will be credited as appropriate.	12

Question	Answer	Marks
1(b)	‘Liberation cannot be achieved without an understanding of maya.’ Discuss. AO2 – Analysis and evaluation. Responses will be marked according to the 18 mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Liberation, or moksha, is the end of the cycle of samsara, meaning it is the point at which the atman ceases to be reborn into the material world. This is the ultimate aim of Hinduism, but there are many different views on what moksha is and how it can be gained and the role and significance of maya is different for different schools of thought. Within the teachings of the Advaita Vedanta an understanding of maya might be considered extremely important. Candidates might build on what they have written for part a above to explain how maya contributes to creating three distinct levels of reality, which must be understood if the illusion is to be dispelled. This process is commonly illustrated with the analogy of a man who, in the darkness, mistakes a piece of rope for a snake and so experiences fear that is very real. When the illusion (maya) is dispelled by light (knowledge or jnana) the ‘snake’ is revealed to be a rope, the man no longer experiences fear as the snake now no longer appears to be a reality to him. However, it could also be argued that experiencing the highest level of reality is not dependent on or based on an understanding of maya in particular but rather on a broader understanding of the nature of reality. Simply reflecting on maya might distract someone from the totality of understanding that they need. While in Advaita Vedanta, maya is often seen in negative terms as a barrier or deception to be overcome, other philosophies take a different view and therefore understanding the concept might be less important. In both Vishistadvaita and Dvaita philosophy, maya is understood as the creative power of Brahman. It is therefore a means through which God can be understood – if God is fire then maya is the flame. Madhva’s Dvaita suggests that maya is deliberately used by Vishnu (whom he considered the Supreme form of God) to encourage human beings to seek God. This might be less about understanding maya than experiencing it, through the diversity and complexity of the world. ‘Understanding’ strongly implies a connection to the jnana marga, the path of wisdom, but this is not the only path to liberation. The bhakti marga is the path of devotion to the divine, with liberation being achieved through self-surrender (prapatti) and the grace of God (prasada); maya might not be consciously reflected upon within this path at all, because reaching liberation is not within the control of the individual. But it could be argued that in order to devote oneself fully to God there must be a degree of detachment from the material world, and this entails a rejection of maya even if it is not described in those terms.	18

Question	Answer	Marks
1(b)	The karma marga consists of selfless action or nishkarma karma, which involves acting within the material world but without being attached to the fruits of any such actions. As with bhakti it would be possible to follow this path without reflecting on the concept of maya, but equally possible to argue that overcoming maya is an inherent part of the process. Candidates do not need to refer to all of this material to gain the marks. Credit all relevant discussion.	

Question	Answer	Marks
OR		
2(a)	Explain how a Hindu might reach moksha according to Dvaita Vedanta. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 12 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Dvaita is the only one of the Vedantic schools to teach that Brahman is a totally different substance to the world and to the atman, and this distinctive teaching impacts on understandings of moksha and the means through which it can be attained. In Dvaita Brahman is the Creator and usually understood as being personal and with attributes (saguna). This enables the possibility of a personal devotional relationship between an individual person and Brahman understood as ishvara or personal lord/god. For Madhva this deity was Vishnu and the path to moksha can therefore be described as being through Vishnu bhakti. However, Madhva also taught that the individual jiva (soul) is ignorant of the ultimate truth. This is not the truth of non-difference, as in Advaita, but rather the truth of total dependence upon God. This truth is realised through effort, including both devotion (bhakti) and knowledge (jnana). Good works are also considered important. The jiva must strive for wisdom and understanding while constantly remembering God and renouncing the ego. It is all of this self-effort that makes the jiva worthy of liberation – and Dvaita is unique among Hindu traditions in that eternal damnation is also a possibility. The final state of liberation can only ultimately be attained through the grace of Vishnu. Candidates do not need to refer to all of this material to gain the marks. All accurate material will be credited as appropriate.	12

Question	Answer	Marks
2(b)	'Ishvara is equally important in all the Vedanta philosophies.' Discuss. AO2 – Analysis and evaluation. Responses will be marked according to the 18 mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Ishvara means 'lord' and it is commonly used to denote a personal form of deity who is the focus of bhakti or loving devotion. The best-known Vedanta philosophies are Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism), Vishistadvaita Vedanta (qualified non-dualism), and Dvaita Vedanta (dualism). As a non-dualist philosophy rooted in the idea that the atman is not different to Brahman, it might be argued that Advaita Vedanta rejects the idea of ishvara as meaningful. Brahman in this philosophy is nirguna and ascribing qualities to a personal form of god would be considered maya. Jnana is the recommended path to moksha, and the state of liberation consists of the realisation of non-difference. Therefore, there is no importance to a personal emotional connection with the divine. However, Advaita does recognise that jnana is a challenging path, and not everyone is spiritually ready for it. Although devotion to an ishvara could result in further entanglement in maya, it could also serve as a first step towards a true understanding of Brahman. The Smarta Tradition, which is rooted in Advaita philosophy, performs murti puja of five deities together as a means of realising nirguna. Saguna Brahman (Brahman with attributes), as represented by the five deities, is seen as an interim step and this perspective can be applied to worship of a single deity. Such worship cannot lead to liberation by itself, so the concept of ishvara can only be considered as of lesser importance in the Advaita tradition. Both Vishistadvaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta give more prominence to the concept of ishvara. In Vishistadvaita teaching Brahman is understood as consisting of different modes of existence. Ishvara is the supreme being, immanent within the material world; it is both an in-dweller in conscious beings and wholly transcendent. This means that it is possible for the atman to have a relationship with saguna Brahman through devotion to ishvara. In this philosophy saguna Brahman is not seen as a lesser form of divinity, or as a partial understanding of the whole, and so ishvara could be said to have central importance. Bhakti is of primary importance in Vishishtadvaita, as total self-surrender (prapatti) is the sole means of attaining moksha. The devotee must realise their dependence on ishvara so that, at the end of their life, they can receive divine grace (prasada). Dvaita Vedanta also considers ishvara, meaning Vishnu, to be central. Brahman is the creator, and the atman is dependent upon Brahman. Devotion is therefore an appropriate expression of respect and thanks. It removes that which binds the jiva atman to samsara and enables realisation of the truth. Maya is seen as the tool of a loving deity to encourage people to work for liberation, but it cannot be overcome, nor can liberation be earned solely through devotion. Since all jiva are individual and distinct they must be worthy of liberation in order to attain it. This involves all three of the margas identified in the Bhagavad Gita – karma, jnana and bhakti. Through them, the jiva atman understands its true nature and its dependence upon God, performs virtuous and detached actions in the world and is wholly devoted.	18

Question	Answer	Marks
2(b)	Overall, it can be argued that there is a place for the concept of ishvara in all Vedanta philosophies, but it would be harder to claim it has equal significance across them. Candidates do not need to refer to all of this material to gain the marks. Credit all relevant discussion.	

Question	Answer	Marks
EITHER		
3	Evaluate the claim that all religions are viewed as equally true in Hinduism. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding AO2 – Analysis and evaluation Responses will be marked according to the level descriptors. Candidates might refer to some of the following: A position that holds that all religions are equally valid in terms of the access they provide to ‘salvation’ or ‘transcendence’ is known as pluralism. This means more than tolerating other religious positions, or accepting they have their own truths. Rather, it is the view that all religions lead to the same ultimate truth. In the context of Hinduism, pluralism would mean accepting that Christians, Muslims, and members of other religions can achieve moksha through following their own religious tradition, with no need to become Hindus or understand Hindu teachings. Hinduism is commonly understood to be inherently pluralistic, with support for this going back to the Rig Veda and the declaration that “truth is one, but sages call it many names.” It might be noted in this context that the Rig Veda is significantly older than most of the religions practised today, and it is therefore not explicitly referring to any of them. Influential figures within recent history have endorsed the view that all religions are equally valid. These include M K Gandhi, who believed that the New Testament, and particularly the Sermon on the Mount was a scriptural work of comparable importance to the Bhagavad Gita; Ram Mohan Roy, who saw Christianity, Islam and Vedic Hinduism as being different iterations of the same monotheism; and Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his disciple Vivekananda. Vivekananda spread the idea into the West of Hinduism as a monotheistic, pluralistic religion. However, all of these individuals come from a particular understanding of Hinduism that emphasises monism or monotheism and all of them could be broadly considered within the category of Advaita thinking, believing that the ultimate aim of religion is to realise one’s absolute identity with the divine. Even Ramanuja, who did endorse murti puja of various deities as a part of his mysticism, had a monist position at the heart of his teaching, believing that there is no ontological difference between Christ, Kali, Mary or Allah. This is a problematic position for Hindus who see murti as the living presence of a specific deity. While the Advaita position is certainly an important strand of Hindu thought there are other views, and these might be less inherently pluralistic. Hindus who believe that Krishna or Vishnu, for example, is the Supreme form of God might consider that devotion (bhakti) should be towards him alone. Others might criticise a pluralistic approach on the grounds of differences of belief that cannot be reconciled to those of Hinduism. For example, Christianity teaches human beings have only one life, which is then judged and results in an eternity in heaven or hell, but almost all Hindu sampradayas believe in cyclical rebirth and an ultimate destiny of moksha, or liberation from it. These two beliefs cannot both be true; if one is right then the other is wrong, meaning they cannot be accepted as equally true.	30

Question	Answer	Marks
3	It is also the case that while some significant figures in Hinduism have advocated pluralism, others have rejected it. For example, while advocating a return to Vedic Hinduism, Dayananda Saraswati attacked both Christianity and Islam. He considered Christianity, especially in its Trinitarian forms, to be superstitious and rejected it on the same terms as he denounced murti puja as idol worship. This could be seen as putting Christianity and some forms of Hinduism on equal terms, but it does so as the basis of rejection of both, rather than an equal affirmation of worth or value. It could be argued that Hinduism encompasses such a diversity of belief and practice that it would be impossible for it to reject the validity of other, different paths. In fact, it is sometimes questioned whether Hinduism can accurately be described as a single religion at all, rather than a closely related family of different religions, albeit sharing some important ideas. However, it should be remembered that the different approaches to Hindu practice do not always sit well together and there are Hindus who believe their approach is right and others are wrong, or at least not as good. The foundational status of the Vedas as shruti (revealed) texts could lead some Hindus to regard any religion based on scriptures of different status as less true than Vedic Hinduism. It might also be noted that the diversity of Hindu traditions is nonetheless rooted in shared concepts and values. India encompasses many different cultures, but they could be argued to have more in common with one another than with the cultures that emerged from religions originating in other places. It might be easier to accept different traditions of Indian origin as equally valid than to accept any religion from anywhere in the world as being so. Candidates do not need to refer to all of this material to gain the marks. Credit all relevant discussion. Candidates should provide a justified discussion which addresses the claim and comes to a conclusion.	

Question	Answer	Marks
OR		
4	‘Vegetarianism is a universal Hindu value.’ Discuss with reference to the teachings of M K Gandhi. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding AO2 – Analysis and evaluation Responses will be marked according to the level descriptors. Candidates might refer to some of the following: M K Gandhi is perhaps the Hindu figure best known by non-Hindus, forming part of the study of both history and religion and held up as an example of how to achieve social change without violence. His principles and teachings might therefore be understood to be indicative of values universally shared by all Hindus, shaping non-Hindu views of what the religion is like. While he did, undoubtedly, draw on pre-existing Hindu philosophy, his work reflects his interpretation and understanding of those ideas, and as such is one among many such expositions of what Hinduism ‘really’ is and/or should be. Hindu vegetarianism is often assumed in contemporary thought to come from the virtue of ahimsa. This literally means harmlessness and it is a key moral value, accepted as such by the vast majority of Hindus although specific understandings of what it entails might vary. Various lists of virtues or duties considered universal and/or central exist and ahimsa features on most of them, along with generosity, piety and compassion. This could lead to an assumption that vegetarianism is an essential practice for a good Hindu, but this is more a matter of personal interpretation than anything else. Gandhi’s vegetarianism is significant in this context because his interpretation was widely shared and explained to both Hindu and non-Hindu audiences. For Gandhi, ahimsa was the defining virtue of the religion of Hinduism, applying to all Hindus equally. It can be argued that prior to his work vegetarianism had been associated with ritual purity. It was necessary for brahmins who needed to preserve that purity in order to conduct the rituals correctly, but otherwise not widely practiced by the other varnas. Gandhi took the idea of ahimsa as applicable to all living things at all times from Jainism and believed that it meant for any Hindu to kill or harm a living thing was adharmic. Because of Gandhi’s fame, many non-Hindus adopted the idea that all Hindus were, and had always been, vegetarian all of the time. However, the idea of a connection between ahimsa and vegetarianism could be argued to predate Gandhi, having perhaps always been an ideal upon which he shone a brighter light.	30

Question	Answer	Marks
4	While Gandhi arguably created the impression that his understanding of ahimsa was universal within Hinduism, vegetarianism has never been considered obligatory for all Hindus at all times. Many Hindus eat very little meat or may avoid it entirely during festivals and other religious occasions. There is a clear connection between vegetarianism and the sacred status of the cow in Hinduism. However, there is also an historic association between eating meat and being a member of a lower caste and even beef might well be consumed by those Hindus who have no other food available to them. This creates a circle in which members of groups already considered impure are eating food considered impure out of necessity but thereby compounding prejudiced views about their caste. Caste-based discrimination is believed to have led to members of those castes adopting practices associated with higher castes as a means of improving the perceived status of their community. One such practice is vegetarianism. This process was not given a name ('Sanskritization') until the 1950s, which might imply a connection with Gandhi's influence leading to the practice being more widespread. However, it might also mean simply that no-one had considered it a phenomenon worth study before then. It might also be noted that poverty could lead to a greater reliance on vegetarian food as simply being cheaper and more widely available. Gandhi came from a Vaishnava family, which has no tradition of animal sacrifice. Other traditions, such as Shaktism do have such traditions and Hindus within them might therefore be more likely to eat meat or to avoid putting a negative moral load on the choice to do so. Candidates do not need to refer to all of this material to gain the marks. Credit all relevant discussion. Candidates should provide a justified discussion which addresses the claim and comes to a conclusion.	