

Cambridge International AS & A Level

HINDUISM**9487/04**

Paper 4 Hinduism in Contemporary Society

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 **18** 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		

Question	Answer	Marks
1(a)	Compare the ways the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and the Sathya Sai International Organisation worship the divine. 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 International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) describes itself as a form of Hinduism within the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. In keeping with these roots, it is a bhakti tradition, focused on an intense devotion to Krishna as the Supreme Godhead. ISKCON practices include murti puja, singing kirtanas and repetition of the divine name (nam japa). There are also differences with other bhakti practices, for example, the manifestation of transcendence in public dancing and singing. The Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO) describes itself as a non-denominational voluntary organisation rather than a religious movement. The aim for members is to realise the divine within themselves and others and this aim is pursued via the principles and pathways espoused by the organisations founder, Sathya Sai Baba. These pathways are action (karma), devotion (bhakti) and wisdom (jnana). All three are considered important and they are often intertwined. While acts of worship such as chanting/devotional singing are part of SSIO practice bhakti is also understood to include virtuous living, offering good qualities, good conduct and good thoughts to God. This is bhakti based on the idea of the love of God (prema) which is described by some as a fifth (and higher) purushartha. Everything is done in the service of God because the highest aim to is serve and please the divine. Devotees of ISKCON worship in temples and some live in communities surrounding a temple but, as with many other forms of Hinduism, murti puja can also be performed at home. Murtis are likely to include both Radha and Krishna. Wherever the murtis are, this form of worship involves bathing and dressing them and making offering, usually of water, flowers and/or food. There might also be an arti (or arati) ceremony, where a flame is offered to the deity. Sathya Sai Baba did not reject this form of worship, but he also said that performing ritual actions in a mechanical way with the expectation of reward would not result in inner knowledge of the divine. However, people are not expected to give up their existing religion when they join SSIO and many Hindus would be familiar with murti puja as much more than an empty repetition of actions. Devotees of ISKCON view the murti as the living presence of God and the ritual actions of puja as facilitating a relationship. Within many Hindu traditions gurus and saints can be honoured through puja, sometimes known as guru puja or guru darshan. Murti of Swami Prabhupada, the founder of ISKCON, are commonly present in ISKCON temples and daily offerings are made to them. He is fully present in his murti and in this way he is believed to remain available to his followers. Sathya Sai Baba is considered to be a reincarnation of the saint Shirdi Sai Baba, and Shirdi Sai Baba was believed by his followers to be an avatar of Shiva and many people in India worship him as such. Sathya Sai Baba is not so widely worshipped in this fashion, although during his lifetime he gave darshan on a daily basis.	12

Question	Answer	Marks
1(a)	Candidates do not need to refer to all of this material to gain the marks. All accurate material will be credited as appropriate.	

Question	Answer	Marks
1(b)	Assess the claim that equality is central to new religious movements in Hinduism. AO2 – Analysis and evaluation. Responses will be marked according to the 18 mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Equality is commonly used in a social/political context to summarise the idea that every person has the same rights, including access to facilities and opportunities, regardless of who they are. In the context of religion it also refers to spiritual potential/capacity. Inequality can be based on a range of characteristics, but the rights of women and caste-based discrimination have been of particular concern in the context of Hinduism because of historical inequalities. The International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) makes a distinction between the spiritual and the physical natures of human beings. It is taught explicitly that all people have equal access to bhakti and can perform it fully because the soul has no gender. The same principle could be said to apply to caste, in that ISKCON temples and educational services are open to everyone. In accepting not only lower caste Hindus but people who were not born Hindu into ISKCON and even initiating them with the sacred thread, Swami Prabhupada arguably made a very strong practical demonstration of his belief in equality. However, he did see differences between men and women in a practical sense, as he believed they have inherently different dispositions making them naturally inclined towards and suited to different roles. He held a similar view with regard to the idea of varna, arguably the basis of the caste system: he considered basing caste on birth to be wrong, but the organisation of society into strata based on personal qualities to be beneficial and desirable. Within ISKCON these views are not considered discriminatory or supportive of inequality, because they do not establish any group of people as being worth more or less than any other. Instead, they allow people to be as they are meant to be. However, this kind of ‘equal but different’ view can be problematic. For example, emphasising the importance of women as wives, mothers and nurturers can be used to prevent them choosing anything else. Even within ISKCON itself there are concerns about women being regarded as inferior or less capable or less intelligent than men. It is an ISKCON convention to address male devotees as ‘prabhuji’ (master) and female devotees as ‘mataji’ (mother); this is intended as respect, but it also carries an implicit restriction or limitation to female roles. Swami Prabhupada taught that any role which spread Krishna Consciousness was appropriate for women to do, but he also said that women needed men to protect them and compared them to children in that they could be easily misled. Sathya Sai Baba held similar views to Swami Prabhupada about caste, famously saying that humanity was the only caste, but supporting the concept of varna which he claimed was present in every society. He also said it was not a human invention and, since it was established in the Vedas, it could not be unjust. The SSIO does not prevent anyone from joining – they are not even expected to abandon their previous religious practices – so it is certainly open to all castes. However, by endorsing the varna system and even, apparently, saying that social equality was an impossibility, Sai Baba might be argued to have been less than welcoming to members of lower castes.	18

Question	Answer	Marks
1(b)	Feminine aspects of divinity are emphasised in the teachings of the SSIO, and this is generally presented as indicative of the high status women have and the respect they are due. However, this status is rooted in valuing the traditional female roles as wife and mother. Discourses given by Sai Baba during the celebration of Ladies Day explain the importance of women in the education of children and of a woman's duty to promote and exemplify purity. He also exhorted women to practise the virtues traditionally associated with a good Hindu wife, including submission to her husband: he told women not to get angry if their husband or his family finds fault with her, but to consider how much she might be to blame. Such advice is not inherently unequal, if it is given to everyone and Sai Baba certainly said that everything which happens to someone is a result of how they think. But he does not seem to have given this same instruction to focus on one's own faults as a general instruction for both men and women, neither does he explicitly place the burden of moral responsibility for the actions for others on men although he does on women. While Sai Baba taught that women and men have the same responsibility of self-development it could be argued that, by placing the whole responsibility for her children and for the purity of her family and society onto women, he made it far harder for them to live according to the virtues he specified. In summary both organisations support the view that all human beings are equal, and both engage in practical attempts to address inequality through action and service (sewa), which is a particularly important practice for the SSIO. However, the extent to which the movements view of equality accords with the values of the societies within which they work, and how far members experience themselves as being treated equally, is certainly more open to discussion than the stated position of the organisations. It might also be argued that equality is not central to the teachings of either movement because something else is considered more important. 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 M K Gandhi's ideal of a secular state. 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 term 'secular state' describes any situation where the government of a country claims to be neutral regarding religion. This is usually taken to mean that there is no government support for any particular form of either religion or non-religion and that people living within that state are treated equally by the law regardless of their religion or lack of it. It is also generally presumed to preclude the idea of a state or official religion; however, some countries, including the UK, might be described as secular societies, because this kind of equality is protected in law, while still having a state religion. MK Gandhi often spoke and wrote about how politics and social order were intertwined with religion. He did not support the idea of an official state religion, and he did not believe any one religion should have preferential treatment over others. His view of the relationship between religion and the state was based on his understanding of dharma as the quest for truth: he believed that ideally political decision making should be guided by that same principle, which he regarded as a universal value rather than one particular to Hinduism. Gandhi's thinking about the nature of religion is often described as syncretic and/or pluralist in that he believed there were elements of truth in all religions and that no religious form could be perfect or even superior to others because they are transmitted through the agency of fallible, imperfect humanity. He also considered religion to be a personal concern, a matter for individuals, while the state should focus on social welfare. Gandhi's ideal 'Kingdom of God' (Ramarajya) was a utopia run through democratic self-governance at all levels, from the grass roots of villages and small communities all the way up to national government, with the administrative functions of government decentralised. It could be described as an empowerment of the people, based on a cooperative spirit and equal opportunity. He believed that there had to be a difference between the philosophical position of the state and all religious or philosophical perspectives held by its citizens; it must be secular in order to ensure better relations between the members of all the distinct religious communities which make up the whole society. Gandhi's ideas about secularism were not identical to those developed in the Western world, because the context in which he was working was very different. In India a great diversity of religions, and of different perspectives within a single religion, was and is very much a given, while much European history has been characterised by violent striving for a single acceptable form of religious expression practised by everyone. Gandhi believed this made India a unique proposition in terms of the relationship between the state and religion, although he did believe that the state should be able to intervene to support social harmony – including protecting religious freedoms for minority groups – if necessary.	12

Question	Answer	Marks
2(a)	Candidates do not need to refer to all of this material to gain the marks. All accurate material will be credited as appropriate.	
2(b)	‘Secularism is the only system that really gives people religious freedom.’ 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: Both ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’ are concepts subject to different definitions and the relationship between them is likely to differ depending on how each is understood. The freedom to practise a specific religion is determined by national laws and encompasses other freedoms such as the freedom from persecution. The relationship between the state and any social group or institution is formed by legal definitions as well as by tradition and wider social attitudes. In broad terms, secularism is a position that encourages the separation of religion and the state. This is usually presented as implying an attitude of neutrality: regarding religion as a private matter for individuals; not endorsing a state religion or privileging any single religious group; not including religious values or principles in government or law making. Neutrality also means, arguably, that the state does not promote anti-religious or irreligious stances either. Religion is simply excluded from the work and functions of government as completely as possible. However, in practice there are different forms of secular state, and it is possible to have an established religion while still considering the political establishment essentially secular: having a state religion does not automatically amount to being a theocracy, neither does it necessitate that everyone living within that state conforms to that religion. The UK is an example of a state with an established religion that nonetheless regards itself as largely secular and which has a range of laws to protect individual freedom to keep, practise, change or reject religion according to personal choice. In the interests of social harmony, a state might choose to restrict religious practices that could create the opposite. They might also choose to restrict other freedoms in order to protect religious interests, for example blasphemy laws. Religion is often considered to be synonymous with faith in a God or gods, and to practise a religion is thus to carry out particular acts of worship focussed on these. However, it can be more broadly understood as including both personal and communal acts, systems of philosophy and ethical thought as well as cultural traditions and values. Freedom of religion is generally understood as encompassing both belief and practice and, while practices are perhaps more likely to be subject to legal interventions, beliefs can be addressed by secular laws too. Ethical ideas are often a source of controversy in the context of law making and freedom to practise one’s religion; sometimes religious groups consider new laws around sensitive issues to be a threat to their religious freedom.	18

Question	Answer	Marks
2(b)	Many secular states share values and/or ethical principles, and these might be expressed through international law, conventions and declarations such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One such value in the contemporary world is a support for the freedom of religious practice, provided those practices don't restrict or interfere with anything else considered to be a basic right or freedom within that society. Where rights do conflict the law must judge which of the conflicting rights is of greater fundamental significance. Practices associated with Hindu traditions which have been judged by secular authorities to conflict with other rights include sati, dowries and child marriage. Practices are more likely to be subject to restriction than beliefs, with freedom of belief being generally considered a more fundamental human right as it is less likely to affect the rights of others. Equality in the eyes of the law and equal access to services is another right considered fundamental in many secular states. The constitution of India is secular specifically because of the vast diversity of religions practised by its population; secularism was seen as offering the best option for all those communities to live side-by-side and to practise their own religion as they chose. However, equality also means that practices such as discrimination on the basis of caste cannot be accepted by the state. Because of the links between cross-caste contact and ritual purity, some Hindus might prefer to be able to maintain exclusive spaces for worship and would regard being required to share them as an attack on their religious freedom. Secularism might also be seen as promoting an indifference to religious concerns, or as assuming that religion is inherently unequal and/or discriminatory in nature. Although preventing religious concerns from being written into national laws is meant to ensure no-one is discriminated against, there are religious groups and communities that would judge some secular laws to be harmful, in that they allow things that are considered morally wrong in the religious context. While this is not a direct restriction on religious freedom it might be felt as such in that it implies a negative judgement on the religious perspective. Candidates do not need to refer to all of this material to gain the marks. Credit all relevant discussion. Candidates can argue for or against the view as long as their discussion is focused on the question.	

Question	Answer	Marks
EITHER		
3	‘The poor treatment of dalits is <u>not</u> a result of the varna system.’ Discuss. 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: Varna is sometimes translated as ‘caste’ but ‘class’ is usually considered a better translation. In the contemporary world ‘caste’ has become a negatively loaded term, associated with discrimination and status being fixed at birth. Dalits, which literally means ‘oppressed’, are the lowest strata of the caste structure in India. Discrimination on the basis of caste is forbidden by the Indian constitution but many contemporary dalit communities still report high levels of inequality and oppression. There is still a clear discrepancy in average levels of education comparing dalits to other groups, especially for girls, meaning that there are fewer dalits in highly skilled or well-paid jobs. Human Rights organisations and dalit groups report that in rural areas the principles of untouchability in relation to living space and community resources such as wells are still observed. Dalits are more likely to be victims of violent crimes including rape and murder, and these crimes are less likely to be prosecuted or, if prosecuted, to result in conviction. This is in spite of the protections given to ‘Scheduled Castes and Tribes’ in the constitution and the positive discriminatory measures put in place to address historical inequities. Four varnas are described in the Purusha Sukta, which is part of the Rig Veda, the oldest Hindu text. It is a means of organising people according to their social functions or occupations: priest (brahmins), warriors (kshatriyas), traders (vaishyas) and servants (sudras). In theory this gives every individual within a society a role to fulfil and, if each member of each varna fulfils their dharma properly, that society should function well. It can therefore be argued that dalits are not recognised as part of the system, if it is working as it should. However, the connection between caste and varna is contested and complex. Some people regard the varnas as being inextricable from historic associations with caste and an oppressive social hierarchy, even if those elements were not inherent in the original system, while others argue that caste is a corruption of the ideal which could potentially be undone. It is clear that the practical realities of Hindu societies have been somewhat different to descriptions of the ideal. A substantial underclass, considered wholly outside the varna system, developed in the form of the people needed to perform necessary but spiritually polluting tasks for the benefit of the whole community. These ideas of ritual purity and pollution led to the idea that members of this fifth group are quite literally ‘untouchable’, being so impure (in the ritual sense) that physical contact with them would pollute the spiritual purity of the toucher. In turn, this idea of untouchability is the driver for much of the discriminatory treatment of dalits today. If the existence of avarna groups is an inevitable part of the varna system, then it is hard to argue that the ill-treatment of dalits is not a result of that system.	30

Question	Answer	Marks
3	However, it is possible to argue that the outcaste or avarna groups are not an inevitable part of the system. This is partly because of the lack of scriptural support for them but it can also be challenged by rejecting the idea of caste being determined by birth and thus fixed and unchangeable. A system that does not accept the possibility of changing status seems likely to be oppressive to some but if the idea of a connection between birth and varna is rejected there is at least a theoretical possibility of being able to improve one's position. Supporters of varna argue that it is meant to be determined by suitability and that each varna is of equal status. This view of the varna system relies on it not being considered a hierarchy, with no single group having higher status or value than another. It can be argued that these are ideals which have not been realised, and perhaps cannot truly be realised, given the history of caste. The nature of the different roles associated with each varna cannot avoid apparent differences in status, even if their overall worth to society as a whole is judged equal: it would be hard to argue that a servant is the equal to a king in terms of their everyday experiences, even if they both perform their roles perfectly within a system that regards them as equal in the abstract. Tasks traditionally performed by the dalits, such as clearing sewers and gutters, might be necessary, but it would be hard to consider most of them desirable to someone with a choice in the matter. 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	Evaluate the claim that Hindu women should be allowed to choose sati. 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: Equality and women's rights span a great range of issues, from traditional expectations in relation to marriage to access to education and equality before the law. Key to the issue is the idea that women are as able as men to make their own choices and should have the same freedom to do so. Sati is the name given to the practice of a widow being burned alive on the funeral pyre of her husband; it is also used as a kind of title for the women who do it – a sati is a good and virtuous wife because her sacrifice wipes out any negative karma carried by her husband, thus ensuring him a positive rebirth. The name comes from Shiva's first wife, who killed herself this way to protect Shiva's honour; therefore women who perform it could be seen as having the status of a goddess. The practice is referred to in the Mahabharata and other smriti texts, although some forbid it rather than endorsing it as virtuous. And, while some texts suggest it has many benefits, it is not presented as mandatory but as a matter of the woman's own choice. With the emphasis in many contemporary societies on freedom of choice as a fundamental human right it might seem clear that women should be allowed to make this choice as well. However, the right to end one's own life is a disputed one in many societies, with different contexts contributing to debates. Concerns about the implications of such choices for people other than the woman herself and questions around whether a healthy and rational person would ever freely choose to die, particularly in an extremely painful way, are likely to form parts of the discussion. Sati has been illegal in India since the nineteenth century. Hindus live in many different countries today and, without the same cultural history, there are less likely to be laws specifically against it. There are however laws in most countries which would prevent encouraging or pressuring a person into killing themselves. Some countries also have laws about how cremations may be carried out that would make it impractical or impossible even to try to commit sati. It is unclear how prevalent sati was historically but, by the nineteenth century, it was raising concern among reformers. This was partly because women were being pressured or forced into it – Ram Mohan Roy famously determined to end the practice after witnessing the forced sati of his sister-in-law – but it was also because of humanitarian concerns about the nature of the practice itself and about the attitudes towards women that it implied. From a humanitarian perspective death by burning is likely to be torturous and it could be argued that if a woman truly wants to die there are preferable ways, although these might not be believed to have the same spiritual qualities.	30

Question	Answer	Marks
4	The public nature of sati means that other people would be forced to witness the act, and even to participate in it since the widow did not traditionally light the pyre herself. This has implications for the health and mental well-being of those people which could justify restricting freedom of choice in this context. There is also the possibility that witnessing sati, and hearing praise for it, could contribute to cultural pressure on other women to feel they have to make the same choice. For this reason, it is not only illegal to commit or to help someone else commit sati but also to glorify or encourage the act in any way. It might also be noted that even when sati was legal and, perhaps, encouraged, some women would be prevented from carrying it out – pregnant women or women with responsibility for very young children might have been considered to have a higher duty than sati. Sati is linked with the status of widows, a state which has traditionally been regarded as inauspicious in Hindu societies to such an extent that even the sight of a widow might be considered to bring bad luck. Because of this, widows have been expected to live in seclusion, avoid participating in rituals, to wear plain white clothes and to shave their heads. It seems likely that the practice of sati evolved, at least in part, as a means for women – or their remaining family – to avoid the inauspiciousness of widowhood. It also prevented her being a burden in anyway on the remaining family. Since this view of widowhood is unlikely to be considered acceptable to modern eyes it is also unlikely to be accepted as a reason to permit sati. If widows were treated with dignity and respect, they would not wish to die, and if they were allowed to inherit property then they would not be a burden on anyone. The status of widows might be a reason why women chose sati in the past, but it is more likely to be used today as a reason not to allow it, since allowing it could justify or enable the continuing oppression of widows. 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.	