

HINDUISM

Paper 9487/01
Written Paper

Key messages

It is vitally important that candidates read the questions carefully and answer the specific question that has been asked, rather than writing on the general subject on which the question is based.

Marks in **part c** are awarded for evaluation rather than just knowledge so it is particularly important that candidates address the question and offer a variety of answers with justification to each one.

Teachers should make reference to the Level Descriptors on the Mark Scheme when preparing candidates for the exam. Candidates are advised not to spend time defining each term in detail, unless this is necessary to the question, but rather to spend as much of their response as possible directly addressing the question.

General comments

Questions 1 and **3** were the most popular by a significant margin. Candidates who answered **Question 2** were more likely to also answer **Question 4**, although there were exceptions to this.

There were very few rubric errors with most candidates attempting all three parts of their chosen questions. It appeared that candidates had sufficient time to complete the question although some struggled at the end, so that **part c** on **Section B** was rushed or incomplete. The most common reason why candidates did not achieve the higher levels was that the response too generalised rather than focussing on the specific question that had been asked. This was especially noticeable in **part c** questions, where many weaker candidates, referred only briefly to the question in their conclusion. This generally meant that the answer was limited to Level 1 as only one possible response to the question was given. In order to achieve a stronger response, a clear conclusion that referred to previous discussions on different viewpoints was required. For this reason, many candidates who had good knowledge of the topic gained relatively low marks. This trend was often repeated in **part b** questions where good knowledge was in evidence, but candidates failed to address the question. Weaker candidates often included Buddhism and Jainism into their responses. References to Buddhism and Jainism were not relevant and so were not credited but often took up significant space and therefore time, which would have been better spent elsewhere. Only where a question specifically asks candidates to refer to non-Hindu religious traditions will this material be credited.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was by far the most popular in **Section A** and most candidates displayed a high level of knowledge, although they were not always successful at applying this knowledge. Most candidates were able to recognise the terminology used in the question, although there were a few who confused kama with karma in **part b** and at least one candidate confused the purusharthas with the ashramas in **part b**.

- (a) Most candidates were able to offer valid definitions of both dharma and artha. Descriptions of dharma were usually detailed, while those of artha were often less so. A few candidates gave definitions of all four purusharthas which was not necessary for this. The majority of candidates explained that the relationship between the two was that artha should be pursued in accordance with dharma. Stronger responses explained in detail what this looked like, with the need to avoid

money gained by adharmic means and also the need to actively pursue dharma through artha by giving to charity, providing hospitality, and supporting temples and gurus.

- (b) Most candidates knew what the purusharthas were and were able to describe them accurately, although for some, their responses did not go beyond a detailed description of the purusharthas, commenting that they are all important. Some Candidates took the opportunity to explain that artha and kama were now the most important due to the general degradation of society. While this was a creditable response, a stronger approach would have been to look at why artha and kama are important in a healthy and well-functioning society, or to suggest that they are more important to grihasthas whose immediate concern may not be with moksha. Some weaker candidates misunderstood the question and argued that the state of the world means that the purusharthas are no longer seen as important. However, this does not address the focus of the question. Many candidates suggested that dharma is the most important since it guides all action and applies equally in all four ashramas. The strongest responses consisted of discussions based on the question rather than being purely descriptive.
- (c) Most candidates did offer the opinion that kama leads to adharma and supported this with observations about how there is very little moderation of sexual desire in the modern world. However, if their response was limited to this, it weakened the strength of their responses as only one point of view was considered. A small minority of weaker candidates described all four of the purusharthas, however this did not really address the question.

There were a number of good responses that balanced a discussion of the various contexts in which kama could be understood (such as a burning desire for dharma or moksha) as well as the positive connotations of karma within a dharmic sexual relationship, with the more negative elements of uncontrolled lust. Many candidates produced a clear conclusion that weighed up different points, often using examples from the Mahabharata before concluding that while kama may lead to adharma it does not necessarily do so.

Question 2

This question was not widely attempted. As with **Question 1**, those that did attempt it tended to have good knowledge (although several did not define Mahayuga correctly) but struggled to apply this appropriately to the question or to engage in a discussion of the question in **part c**.

- (a) A number of candidates misinterpreted 'Mahayuga', reading it as 'kali yuga' and went on to describe the kali yuga in detail, which was only credited at Level 1. However, those who did define Mahayuga correctly were usually described each of the yugas. The strongest responses described the system of the four yugas and how it related to some Hindu ideas about creation and destruction and the passage of time.
- (b) Given that **part a** referenced the Mahayuga, it was surprising that many candidates did not refer to or build on this concept in their responses to **part b**. Many candidates suggested that people understood their place in society better in the past, and that there were fewer distractions. Many candidates suggested that society is now full of evils and that nobody cares about dharma anymore, but often this idea was not connected with the kali yuga. As a result, these weaker responses were often quite vague and unfocused.
- (c) This question was not generally well answered. Most responses tended to be descriptive, merely explaining what a dharmic society would be like. These weaker responses did not go beyond this, except to suggest that society is in decline with all sorts of social evils prevalent. So, by implication, there was no dharmic society. This is different from discussing whether it is possible. Some suggested that it would be possible if people did what they should. However, there was often little discussion of the question, with responses tending to say that a dharmic society is not possible or that it would be if people behaved differently. There was minimal discussion of different viewpoints.

Section B

Question 3

This was by far the most popular question in **Section B**. Most candidates displayed a high level of knowledge concerning samsara, moksha and nishkarma karma. However, weaker responses tended to ignore the specific question and wrote about the general topic. However, stronger candidates were clearly

knowledgeable, and engaged with the skills of critical thinking and evaluation in order to reach the higher levels.

- (a) Almost all candidates knew what samsara is and most were able to explain it well. There was a tendency for candidates to drift off topic into a discussion of moksha and the ways to attain it, which was not relevant here. Overall, the question was well answered with a fair proportion of candidates gaining full marks.
- (b) Overall, this was not a question that was well answered. A number of candidates spent the response discussing, with a high degree of accuracy, how it is possible to attain liberation rather than why a person might want to. Most gave a very brief response to the question, usually along the lines that people want to achieve moksha to escape suffering, although very few explained why samsara should lead to suffering. The rest of the response was not focussed and was taken up with the four margas as a means to escape samsara. The strongest responses looked at a variety of reasons, including to escape suffering, to escape delusion and see the truth, in order to be with the divine, and because it is prescribed by the scriptures as the natural goal of humanity. Each of these suggested reasons was explained in focussed detail with references to scriptures in support.
- (c) Most candidates understood what was meant by nishkarma karma and were able describe it in detail, usually in the context of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. Most candidates were also able to give detailed accounts of all of the margas. However, the great majority of responses gave a hugely detailed descriptive account of all four margas with the conclusion that there are, therefore, many ways to reach moksha, not only through nishkarma karma. Since they had only discussed one possible view, this approach was limited to Level 2, meaning that candidates achieved well below what might be expected for the level of knowledge displayed in their responses. The best responses considered different traditions within Hinduism, and whether the statement might be considered true from different perspectives, suggesting, for example, that Shankara believed that only jnana led to moksha and therefore that nishkarma karma is not in itself a route to moksha. The strongest responses were truly evaluative responses, discussing whether nishkarma did, in fact, play a role in all of the margas. In **part c** questions it is imperative that candidates read and directly address the particular question asked, including the discussion of different possible conclusions and points of view.

Question 4

This question was not widely answered. Once again, the major issue was a failure to answer the specific question asked, particularly in **part c**. On the whole, this was not a very high performing question.

- (a) This is a style of question that candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with. Candidates seemed uncertain that they really had been asked only to explain what was in the passage and so many wrote generally about the topic of jnana yoga whilst largely ignoring what was in the passage. As a result, their response was limited. Others repeated the passage, but with no explanation. Stronger responses were where candidates summarised the content of the passage and also offered some comment. For example, the idea that a guru is not required is a controversial one and candidates could have mentioned this.
- (b) This question was not well answered and unlike elsewhere in the paper, this did genuinely seem to be due to a lack of knowledge and understanding. Most candidates were able to give both analogies accurately. The cat carries the kitten and the kitten surrenders and does nothing, while the baby monkey must actively hang on to its mother's back, while the mother does nothing. Most candidates were able to explain the cat analogy reasonably well, and had the idea of surrender, but not necessarily of grace. Many responses listed the things people did in the cat model to gain moksha- not understanding that things like worship and the singing of bhajans are done not to earn liberation, but rather out of love and gratitude for having been freely given it. Candidates struggled much more with the monkey analogy, and particularly with the view of the divine given in each model. Few equated the 'monkey' with the idea of an impersonal God. Many said that both models would lead to moksha as if they presented two alternative choices rather than two different ways of understanding the way moksha works, that are mutually exclusive. Weaker responses tended to compare the cat and monkey analogies with Buddhist ideas of liberation. This was irrelevant to the question and therefore was not credited.
- (c) Most candidates described the four margas in great detail, showing that their knowledge was good. The strongest responses went beyond this to engage in a discussion of the question. Whilst many

weaker candidates were able to describe the four margas and then conclude that this proved the statement correct. However, this only constituted a single viewpoint. The strongest responses were the ones that considered the different Vedantas and the fact that many of them consider only one marga to be a valid way of attaining moksha.

There was a tendency among a minority of candidates to discuss Buddhist and Jain ideas of liberation, which were irrelevant to this question and did not focus on discussing the question asked.

HINDUISM

Paper 9487/02 Written Paper
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Key messages

Most candidates were clearly familiar with key terms and concepts named in the questions and were able to deploy substantial amounts of knowledge around these. However, there was less evidence of understanding what the question specifically required. Many candidates responded to each question by setting out everything they knew about a particular topic. This not only resulted in a lot of repetition, because the questions are conceptually related to one another, but it also limited the marks available for each part because the level descriptors focus on how well the question has been answered. This requires selection and application of knowledge.

In order to achieve this it might be helpful for candidates to focus on the following:

Firstly, the importance of command words; candidates need to recognise the very different demands of the different command words used. Fully answering the question depends on understanding what words such as 'summarise', 'explain' and 'discuss' means in terms of how knowledge is used and deployed.

The use of a stimulus; questions which ask for an outline or summary of material contained in a passage only require the material from that passage to answer them. Adding other knowledge or commenting on the accuracy or contestability of what is in the passage does not contribute to answering the set question.

The role of a conclusion in evaluation (**part c**) questions; a conclusion is the part of a response which offers a definite position on the question asked. This does not need to be the final paragraph, although it often is, but it does need to be justified with some reference as to why this view is considered the better one.

General comments

This was the first session for these papers with a significant entry. Most candidates demonstrated a broad range of relevant knowledge and were able to identify the relevant topic area for the questions they chose. However, not all of them demonstrated a clear ability to select and apply this knowledge to the specific question, meaning responses were often summaries of the entire topic area rather than a direct response to the question.

Candidates appeared familiar with the rubric of the exam, and most candidates did attempt all parts of the questions they selected. **Questions 1 and 3** were the most popular choices, with **Question 4** being the least popular. Some candidates chose to address the question sections in reverse order, answering **part c** first, then **part b** and then **part a**. There is nothing in the rubric to prevent this and it makes no difference to the marks given, but it is worth noting that the parts of these questions are conceptually related so that parts b and c connect to ideas and material raised in **part a**. The structure is intended to enable a candidate to progress from a purely descriptive response in **part a** to an evaluative in **part c**. Candidates working backwards from **part c** might therefore be creating difficulties for themselves.

Most candidates did well on the **part a** questions, which ask for a descriptive account of some knowledge. The b parts, which require specific explanation and/or application of knowledge, and the **part c** evaluation questions were less well answered. Many candidates focused primarily on a key term in these questions and wrote about that term without considering the requirements of the command word or recognising that the question puts the term into a context which requires them to select from their overall pool of knowledge.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates dealt well with this question, they were familiar with the two terms ‘astika’ and ‘nastika’ and able to describe each, meaning that their responses did address the differences between them, as the question required.
- (b) Most responses to this question were able to give an outline of the nature and concerns of both the Epics and the Manusmriti as smṛiti texts, with the former taking a narrative form and the latter being more concerned with social rules and structures. Some responses gave a lot of descriptive detail, including accounts of the stories contained in the Epics and some did not do more than that. Where explicit comparison was attempted, it was most commonly done at the end of the response in a concluding statement. Some responses chose a key theme or themes and considered how it is addressed in each text; the role of women was a common choice for candidates taking this approach with svadharma and the caste system also being used by some. This approach tended to produce the most direct comparison.

It is worth noting that many responses turned their answers into a discussion about whether either or both sets of texts named in the question was still relevant today, which is a different issue to the comparison of nature and concerns asked for in the question. While contemporary relevance could certainly be one point of comparison among others, focussing the answer entirely on this suggests a lack of understanding of the demands of the question.

- (c) There was often a lot of repetition of material between **parts b** and **c** with candidates giving the same description of the Epics they had given in their **part b** response. Such repetition is not necessary to answer the question. Most responses agreed that they are enjoyable stories, observing their popularity across different entertainment media. Other responses suggested that this is not all they are, by identifying key teachings that can be found within them. These were usually exemplified with a detailed account of a section of the story, but without additional comment. Responses that considered both perspectives, or any variety of views at all, were not common, meaning both discussion of the question and the evaluation, which is necessary for the highest-level marks, were also not common. However, most candidates did offer an explicit conclusion at some point in their response.

Question 2

- (a) This question, which asks for a summary of the content of the passage quoted, requires candidates to demonstrate their comprehension of what they have read. Some candidates added additional material or commentary upon the passage; this could not contribute to the overall mark because it was not relevant to what had been. Most candidates gained some of the available marks by observing that many rituals are described in scriptures which are studied by priests, but a lot of responses then moved away from the question, for example by describing specific ceremonies.
- (b) As with other **part b** responses most answers to this question contained a lot of descriptive detail about the Vedas and their contents. However, explanation about why the Vedas might be important today was more limited. It was noticeable that most candidates dealt in detail with each of the four Vedas separately in their description of the texts, but where they did consider contemporary importance, this tended to be more generalised, writing about them all collectively.
- (c) Many responses to this question offered no clear focus on what had actually been asked i.e. whether Hindus should read the Vedas for themselves. Most responses were concerned solely with the need to know what is in the Vedas, which was generally presented as being of vital importance, but without much justification of this position or consideration of different ways in which such knowledge might be acquired. Some responses took an historical view, presenting the Vedas as the foundation to Hinduism. However, there was often little attempt to relate that to the question of whether people today still need to read them and described their foundational position within Hinduism without explicitly addressing how this knowledge might be acquired or which forms of knowledge transmission might be preferable.

Section B

Question 3

- (a) While most candidates gained some of the marks here there was often confusion between Shaktism as a discrete theistic tradition and the place/role of goddesses in other forms of Hinduism. This limited the marks available to them since the question was asking for what is unique to Shaktism.
- (b) Theistic traditions identified in the syllabus are Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Smartism and Shaktism; a common misconception was to identify monotheism, polytheism, pantheism and henotheism as theistic traditions. It was unusual to see multiple candidates demonstrate this kind of confusion between topic areas on this paper. However, since the monotheism etc. are general descriptive terms rather than specific traditions this approach did make answering the question asked much more challenging.

Some responses did identify the theistic traditions and were able to describe their practices and core beliefs in some detail and some candidates described both sets of terms. An explicit consideration of how similar the different traditions are was less common; candidates who did so generally identified points such as worship of saguna Brahman, the importance of moksha and the need to follow dharma and demonstrated how each tradition is concerned with these.

- (c) Most responses to this question outlined a range of ways in which Brahman might be understood. As with other **part c** questions this descriptive material was relevant and the identification of different views is a starting point for discussion, but explicit discussion and reflective analysis of these views was often missing.

Some candidates, having written full descriptions of these different approaches to understanding Brahman, then concluded their response by saying they had demonstrated there is no difference. This was a particularly noticeable example of a common tendency to use a reiteration of the question asked as a conclusion. This can certainly be a helpful tool, but the phrase taken from the question does need to be justified in relation to the discussion which precedes it. In this case, quoting a question which states a view that is directly contradicted by the material preceding it does not really demonstrate a clear understanding of that question.

Question 4

- (a) Most candidates gained some marks here and there was less use of material beyond the scope of the quoted passage than was seen in **Question 2**.
- (b) Most responses seemed unclear on what 'unknowable' might mean in this context because they did not address that aspect of the question. Instead, responses described concepts of nirguna and saguna Brahman, sat chit ananada and neti neti. The knowledge deployed was certainly relevant to the question, but it was often not applied to it and this limited the response.
- (c) Most candidates attempting this question were able to explain the theistic traditions as concerned with saguna Brahman and to show this as an easier concept to grasp than other ways of understanding Brahman. However, discussion of this or consideration of other ways in which the people might relate to the divine was not often present.

HINDUISM

Paper 9487/03 Written Paper
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Key messages

Candidates **MUST** answer the specific question that has been asked in order to access the highest levels. Knowledge must be applied to the question and used in a discussion and/or evaluation of the question. Highly detailed knowledge of the general topic will not access the higher levels.

General comments

Candidates often seemed to struggle with the idea of applying their knowledge to a specific question. There was too often little evidence of evaluation, or an attempt to engage with the question focus. This was particularly seen in AO2 questions where analysis and evaluation is being assessed. Some candidates seemed unsure as to what they were being asked and many gave detailed information about Samkhya and Yoga when the questions specifically asked about Vedanta traditions. In addition, many candidates discussed Buddhism and Jainism at length when they were not relevant to the question. This material was not credited and so served only to waste time and space that could have been better used.

Knowledge was generally good, and often very good, in areas that had been part of the legacy specification, but candidates seemed to struggle with new areas, particularly the Dvaita Vedanta. In **section A** the huge majority of candidates answered **Question 1**, while in **Section B** it was slightly more balanced, but with the majority opting for **Question 4**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Candidates seemed not to understand that the a and b parts of **Section A** questions are closely related and that **part a** is designed to lead into the **part b**. However, some candidates answered **part b** first, which often meant that they did not include relevant material and ideas that were alluded to in **part a**, which placed themselves at a disadvantage. Also, there was often a repetition of material from **part a** into **part b** that was unnecessary. **Section A** questions are better viewed as a single essay divided into two sections, rather than as two unrelated questions. Candidates did not seem to be particularly well prepared for a question on Dvaita. This was by far the more popular question in **section A** with the vast majority of candidates opting to answer it.

- (a) Most candidates were aware that Dvaita means dual or dualism, but many struggled to explain what this actually means in terms of philosophical ideas. Many confused Dvaita with Vishistadvaita, suggesting that they were essentially the same thing. Many spent much of the response comparing Dvaita with Advaita, but which was not strictly relevant to the question. Responses were often confused and contained many inaccuracies and misunderstandings. However, there were a small number of excellent responses which gave a full account of the three realities, the Five Differences, the importance of bhakti and the three types of jiva, including the possibility of eternal damnation.
- (b) Candidates often failed to grasp the relationship between **part a** and **part b** in this question, particularly if in **part a** candidates had failed to acknowledge the central role of bhakti in Dvaita soteriology. Many candidates gave detailed accounts of three or four margas and finished by saying that the statement is wrong. However, this only gives a single point of view and therefore limits the response.

The question asks whether bhakti is the *only* path to moksha and the majority of candidates failed to engage with this as a point of discussion. Even very highly detailed knowledge of the margas would not gain more than Level 2 unless this issue was discussed. Many failed to see it as an opportunity to compare and contrast the views of the different Vedanta traditions, and there seemed to be a tendency to make the Vedantas agree with each other even when they clearly do not. Once again there was a high level of confusion between Dvaita and Vishistadvaita. Genuinely evaluative responses considered whether bhakti was necessary as a first step to jnana or not. No responses were seen that engaged with Ramanuja's view that pure bhakti and absorption in Vishnu is a form of jnana, and so there is no real difference between the two. Many candidates gave a detailed account of jnana marga in Advaita thought and mentioned bhakti other than as a precursor to jnana only very briefly. However, there was a tendency to drift into irrelevant material, such as Advaita's view of the world and Maya. Many candidates discussed the views from Samkhya, even though the question specifically asked for the Vedanta views. This demonstrates the importance of reading the question carefully. In addition, surprisingly, a few candidates brought Buddhist and Jain ideas into their responses.

Question 2

Again here, as in question 1, some candidates seemed not to understand that the a and b parts of **Section A** questions are closely related and that the **part a** is designed to lead into the **b part**. Some candidates answered **part b** first, which often meant that they did not include relevant material from **part a**. Also, there was often a repetition of material from **part a** into **part b** that was unnecessary. This question was not answered well, candidates often gave a biographical account of Vivekananda, but struggled to engage with his teachings and ideas, or with the focus of the question. This was not a popular question, and few candidates chose it.

- (a) Candidates seemed to have difficulty with the specific focus of the question. Many gave detailed accounts of Vivekananda's life story with some, usually confused, idea of what his beliefs and teachings were. Many gave detailed accounts of Ramakrishna instead, with which they seemed far more comfortable. Once again there seemed to be a hesitation to engage with a new area of the specification. Surprisingly, few connected the question with the World Conference of Religions in Chicago, and when they did, they often spent much of the response focussing on his opening remarks, which had limited relevance to the question. Overall, it seemed that the great majority of candidates had little idea about what is meant by 'World Religion' as a category (For example a religion with a multi-national presence with scriptures, ideas about God and a clearly defined ethical system.) Instead, they tried to demonstrate that Vivekananda presented Hinduism as tolerant.
- (b) Overall, this was a poorly answered question, and showed that while candidates knew a lot about the life of Vivekananda, they knew little about his beliefs and teachings. Some responses give detailed accounts of how diverse and tolerant Hinduism is, but with very little reference to Vivekananda. Some compared Vivekananda with Gandhi, which had no relevance at all to the question. A few discussed Vivekananda's acceptance of religious pluralism, or his teaching of yoga in America as evidence of diversity. No responses were seen that engaged with the fact that Vivekananda accepted Advaita, or at least a version of it, as the truth with little question or discussion of other Hindu approaches.

Section B

Question 3

In this question candidates were able to include a great deal of relevant material. However, this was not always linked to a clear understanding of what the question was asking. Many candidates gave a detailed account of the huge variety of approaches within Hinduism, which was generally relevant, and so did well in AO1. However, very few engaged directly with the question focus of whether or not Hinduism was genuinely pluralistic. Instead, candidates took it as a given that it was, and used evidence to support this viewpoint, which limited their AO2 marks since only one point of view was discussed. In addition, there did not seem to be a clear understanding of what is meant by pluralism, often being referenced purely in terms of diversity. There was no discussion of whether all of the theistic traditions and margas are actually seen as being valid. The better candidates discussed the Hindutva movement as a counter argument, and some discussed the discrimination in Hinduism against women and lower castes as evidence that Hinduism is not always pluralistic. This is relevant but does not show that the candidates have understood what is meant by

pluralism. Some argued that Hinduism is not a pluralistic religion since it is not a religion but a way of life. This might have been a valid approach if developed, but the argument was generally limited to the statement with no explanation or development which limited its relevance to the question. A few candidates spent much, even the majority of their response, discussing Buddhism and Jainism, which is not relevant. There are possible ways of making a discussion on Buddhism and Jainism relevant, perhaps by suggesting that some ideas could not be accommodated by Hinduism and so formed separate religious traditions showing that Hinduism is not fully pluralistic, but there appeared to be no responses that took this approach, and instead just gave detailed accounts of Buddhist and Jain teachings as part of the Hindu diversity.

Question 4

This was an accessible question that allowed candidates to discuss and evaluate the opinions of the different Vedantas on the nature of the material world. However, a number of responses lacked relevant knowledge about Dvaita, and particularly about its teachings on the world. Many candidates gave exhaustive and accurate accounts of Advaita, but these were often not limited to its teachings on the world, but covered all they knew about Advaita, much of which was irrelevant. Most candidates attempted to contrast this with Vishistadvaita, although ideas on what exactly Ramanuja taught about the world were often confused. Many candidates failed to mention Dvaita at all, and those that did tended to equate it with Vishistadvaita with little additional comment. However, many candidates did include an account of Samkhya and its teachings on purusha and prakriti, although the question had specifically asked about Vedanta traditions. Most responses took the form of 'Advaita says this and Vishistadvaita says that', with no discussion or evaluation of the different ideas. In addition, conclusions tended to be limited to 'different traditions say different things.' Candidates need to engage in a discussion of the question and an analysis and evaluation of the arguments presented by the different schools is needed in order to access the higher levels in AO2.

HINDUISM

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Key messages

Most candidates were clearly familiar with key terms and concepts named in the questions and were able to deploy substantial amounts of knowledge. However, there was less evidence of understanding what the question specifically required. Many candidates just responded to each question by setting out everything they knew. This often resulted in a lot of repetition, because the questions are conceptually related to one another. It also limited the marks available for each part because the level descriptors are concerned with how well the question has been answered. This requires selection and application of knowledge.

In order to achieve this it might be helpful for candidates to focus on the following:

Firstly, the importance of command words; candidates need to recognise the very different demands of the different command words used. Fully answering the question depends on understanding what words such as 'summarise', 'explain' and 'discuss' means in terms of how knowledge is used and deployed.

Secondly questions in *section A* are in two parts, **a** and **b**, but they are related to one another. The **b part** asks for an evaluative discussion in relation to some of the ideas addressed in the **part a**. The marks in **part a** are given for knowledge, applied to the question in ways which demonstrate understanding. The marks in **part b** are given for analysis and evaluation. **Section B** gives single essay questions, but these incorporate the same requirements to select and present relevant knowledge (AO1, for which 12 marks are available) and to discuss and evaluate the issue raised in the question (AO2, for which 18 marks are available).

The role of a conclusion in evaluation (**part c**) questions; a conclusion is the part of a response which offers a definite position on the question asked. This does not need to be the final paragraph, although it often is, but it does need to be justified with some reference to why this view is considered the better one. Including a conclusion which reflects on the points made in the discussion can be a useful way to ensure that the response answers the question that has been asked.

General comments

This was the first session for these papers with a significant entry. Most candidates demonstrated a broad range of relevant knowledge and were able to identify the relevant topic area for the questions they chose. However, not all of them demonstrated a clear ability to select and apply this knowledge to the specific question, meaning responses were often summaries of the entire topic area rather than a direct response to the question.

Candidates appeared familiar with the rubric of the exam, and most candidates did attempt all parts of the questions they selected. **Questions 1** and **3** were the most popular choices overall.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) This was a popular question and candidates often had a lot of knowledge about Sathya Sai International Organisation, its history, the biography of its founder, its work and the practices of adherents. However, much of this material was not directly relevant to the question, which focused specifically on practices and how they help members be devoted to the divine within. Some

responses wrote generally about how practices within SSIO help members in their lives, which covered some relevant material, but did not fully address the question. In addition, a noticeable minority of responses wrote only about Sai Baba himself, giving a biography which often included very little that was relevant to the question.

- (b) In this question there was often was a lot of repetition with many responses reiterating the material used in **part a**. A number of responses also included a similarly detailed description of ISKCON. Responses taking this approach did sometimes attempt to compare ISKCON with older forms of Hinduism. This kind of comparison was made less often in relation to SSIO, even when it had been included regarding ISKCON. Such comparison could be a relevant of discussion of the question, but only a few explicitly connected it to the idea that non-Hindus might be more familiar with NRM groups, or that this greater familiarity might influence views about Hinduism.

Other responses focused on the views of NRMs in relation to issues such as caste, sati and women's rights. This sometimes turned into a discussion about whether Hinduism actually supports practices such as sati, which the modern world sees negatively, which is an interesting discussion but not required by the question.

Question 2

- (a) This was the least popular question in this section. Those candidates who chose it did not always demonstrate clear understanding of the central concept, Hindutva. This was surprising since familiarity with technical terms from the syllabus was clear across other questions. A minority of responses presented Hindutva as being essentially a synonym for Hinduism, or as some sort of new religious movement. However, most candidates were able to give an account of the ideas and principles underlying Hindutva views and some gave a narrative description of its history, which included implied reference to the reasons for its rise.
- (b) Many responses did not seem clear on what 'fundamentalism' is with some ignoring the term altogether to discuss in Hinduism in general whilst other responses assumed it to be a synonym for Hindutva. Discussion could have been built around this latter view, but it rarely was. Instead, focus was on considering whether Hindutva has ancient or modern origins and the existence of a clear timeline in modern history for the development of Hindutva. This approach does limit the opportunities for meaningful discussion.

Section B

Question 3

This was a very popular question. Most candidates had a lot of knowledge about the roles and rights of women in relation to Hinduism, and about why some traditional views and practices might be seen as problematic by contemporary feminism. There was however a general tendency to assume that any action relating to women's rights is inherently feminist, even when it is the result of men making decisions on women's behalf.

There were also responses turned into narrative accounts of the general work of social reformers. Here, almost always, the focus was on men and generally men whose work was motivated by ideas other than feminism.

It is perhaps worth noting that feminism is a term with many definitions. However, most responses appeared to consider that there was only one and few set out explicitly what either feminism or feminist values might be. There was a presumption that there is only one, universally agreed set of feminist values, which did seem to limit discussion about whether Hinduism has always supported these values.

Question 4

One common approach to this question was to give a biography of Dr Ambedkar. This obviously included reference to his own conversion and, sometimes, to his encouragement of other dalits conversions and so used relevant material.

Many responses to this question took the route taken by some candidates with **Question 3** and chose to give an account of the work of different social reformers in relation to the caste system. While most dealt

thoroughly with the concept of untouchability and the abuses experienced by dalits not all referred to dalit conversions to Buddhism.

Almost all responses were primarily descriptive, whichever approach was taken. Clearly those responses which did not refer to dalit conversions at all were also unlikely to discuss the success of that action as a contributor to wider reform, but even those which did mention it included very little discussion of its impact on overall change.