

HINDUISM

Paper 8058/01

Paper 1

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most of the questions were well understood and answers showed evidence of study. This examination is designed for candidates who have done up to two years study beyond O Level. In all cases, candidates need to be clear about the topics that have to be studied. They also need to study the specified texts with care. After that they need practice in discussing different aspects of the topic. At this level, questions will not be asking candidates to 'tell a story' – candidates will be expected to comment on different aspects of a story and show its significance as related to the question. Much background material is now available on the Internet. Guided by their teachers, candidates preparing for this examination should find such material helpful.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Section A

Question 1

'The Vedic hymns are evidence of a religion far more profound than simple nature worship.' Discuss.

Knowledge of the Vedic gods, and their specific functions in the natural world, was good in some answers. To achieve higher marks, candidates needed to show knowledge of the themes of hymns addressed to Agni, Varuna and Indra. Only by reading some of the hymns can candidates understand the religious standpoint of the worshipper. This understanding was needed to discuss the 'religion' of which the hymns are evidence.

Question 2

Explain the relationship between sacrifice and creation in Hindu teaching.

To answer this question, candidates had to refer to the 'creation' texts they had studied. Most concentrated on the Purusha Sukta, and some mentioned the Nasadiya Sukta as well. A few also realised the significance of the 'creation' and 'sacrifice' themes in the Brahmacharya Sukta. The best answers were those that understood the 'relationship' between sacrifice and creation, and who emphasised the vital presence of 'tapas'. There were some very perceptive answers, including those which explained that sacrifice is still an important concept in Hindu belief and practice.

Question 3

'The wisdom of the Upanishads challenges Hindus to reject the temptations of materialism.' Discuss, with reference to the texts you have studied.

It was not necessary here for candidates to explain what Upanishads are. Candidates should start to answer the question straight away. Many answers were very good, with most candidates managing to explain the temptations offered to Naciketas without too much 'story-telling'. References to other Upanishads, such as the Isa Upanishad, showed a good level of understanding.

Section B

Question 4

‘Yudhistira never fails to uphold his own high moral standards.’ Discuss with reference to the religious and ethical ideas of the Mahabharata.

In answers to questions about the ‘epics’, candidates need to comment on the story as well as telling it. In good answers to this question, the key concept of ‘dharma’ was understood well. Some were critical of Yudhistira’s dice-playing, while others said he found himself in an impossible position. There is no correct answer to such questions: what is important is that the candidate shows knowledge and understanding of the ethical problems raised.

Question 5

‘...a leaf, a flower, fruit or water...’ (Bhagavad Gita 9.26) Explain the significance of these simple offerings in the context of Krishna’s teaching about bhakti.

Most answers showed a general understanding of bhakti in the context of Krishna’s teaching. To answer the question well, candidates had to give evidence of study of the themes of Book 9 of the Gita. Here Krishna explains why simple offerings are sufficient, and that the sincere quality of devotion is all that is required of any worshipper, even one who for some reason is an ‘outsider’. Candidates need practice in discussing these texts, so that their answers are a commentary, not a ‘sermon’.

Question 6

‘Take the course of sense and wisdom, cast all idle faith aside.’ (Ramayana Book 4) Comment on the Brahmin Jabali’s sceptical views and Rama’s reply.

There were some good answers to this question which were not too general. The reasons for Rama’s rejection of Jabali’s arguments were understood quite well. The best answers included the key idea that Jabali rejected all idea of a future life, or of accountability after death (not just the belief that a promise to a dead man still had to be kept). Some good candidates noted that Jabali’s comments were specifically aimed at Brahmins, whom he accused of spreading lies among the faithful for their own enrichment. So Rama was upholding not only the demands of dharma for himself, but the truth in which he believed.

Section C

Question 7

‘Immersed in the experience of God...’ In what ways did the Alvar saints influence Hindu thought and worship in the medieval period?

Candidates should only attempt a question on the Alvars if they have studied this topic in some detail. Those who knew the names of some of the Alvars and the themes of their songs and poetry produced good answers. It is important to note, however, that candidates should not attempt to write about Surdas or Tulsidas when asked to write about the Alvars, as no marks can be awarded for this.

Question 8

‘Great as it is, the Ramacaritamanasa is a human creation, not the word of God.’ How far do you agree with this opinion?

There was a great variety of answers to this question, many of them very thoughtful. Most candidates were able to contrast the ‘human’ writer, Tulsidas, with the scriptural status which his work has achieved among many Hindus. The best answers were more than a simple narration of the stories about the exploits of Rama, they included commentary which showed understanding.

Question 9

'This maya mighty and bewitching coaxes my mind and soul to sin.' According to Surdasa, what is the remedy?

In many cases the candidates expanded on the idea in the quotation, but did not add much more. Others knew quite a lot about Surdas's life, but needed to relate this knowledge to the question. Although 'maya' was the key idea here, and a theme running throughout Surdas's work, the better answers needed to relate the theme to the poetry itself. It is important to learn notes about such authors, but it is vital that candidates actually read some of the poetry itself, so that they can write about what the poet actually said.

Section D

Question 10

'The Indian reformers achieved change by reminding Hindus that a woman had rights as a human being as well as traditional duties.' Discuss.

This question was fairly well answered by many candidates. It is important to pay attention to the question. There was quite a lot to write about 'traditional duties' within the context of the grihastha ashrama. This was not simply a general question about 'reforms'. Candidates should also be careful not to assert that women generally in the 19th and 20th centuries achieved 'equality' with men.

Question 11

On what grounds did Swami Dayananda Saraswati believe that the Vedas were the key to reforming Indian society?

Although a lot of detail was known about Dayananda's reforming work, it was necessary in this question to refer to those teachings of the Vedas which seemed of vital importance to Dayananda. The best answers pointed out the elements which had become enshrined in Hindu practice, but which Dayananda pointed out were not mentioned in traditional scriptures. These covered large areas of Hindus' religious, social and legal practice. Candidates studying Dayananda need to consult his writings, which are widely available.

Question 12

Discuss the attitude of Indian reformers towards Western culture and scientific education in the period you have studied.

There were some quite well-informed and sensitive responses to this question, but it was important to note that it referred to the 19th and 20th centuries. Differing attitudes to industrial and scientific advances were noted, as well as the belief of all the reformers that an appropriate level of education should be on offer to all Indian children. The outstanding influence of Ram Mohan Roy was well understood, that of Vivekananda less so.

