

HINDUISM

Paper 9014/01

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.



HINDUISM

Paper 9014/02

Paper 2

General:

The standard seemed a little better overall than last year. Some candidates showed outstanding knowledge and understanding particularly in **Section A**. It is important in **Section B** that candidates understand the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism/Jainism. Evaluative skills should be employed when answering the questions.

Comments on individual questions:

Section A

Question 1

'Purusha means the light which shines in Prakriti, the body.' Discuss the relationship between Purusha and Prakriti in the Samkhya System.

This question was well understood and well explained by those who tackled it. It would be useful to explicitly refer to the teaching of a multitude of purushas in Samkhya in contrast to Vedanta.

Question 2

'Samadhi is not the final limb of Yoga, it is also the foundation for all the other limbs.' Discuss this view of Patanjali's eightfold system of Yoga.

This was also a popular question. Most gave an excellent account of Patanjali's eightfold system. It was important for candidates read the question and to consider Samadhi as the foundation for the other limbs. Marks tended to be mainly for 'knowledge', the better candidates did attempt to discuss the quotation. The implication behind the quotation was that union or Samadhi/experience of unity was the key to everything! There was limited evidence of evaluative thinking, many of those who addressed the part of the question dealing with Samadhi finished with a sentence agreeing with the statement or saying that the other seven are prerequisites to achieving Samadhi.

Question 3

'Brahman is real, the world is illusory. The individual Self is not different from the Brahman.' Explain why this statement of Sankara is said to express the essence of Advaita Vedanta.

Comparatively few attempted this question. Those that did generally gave a good account of Shankara's Advaita Vedanta and most who attempted this question did so very well. As for **Question 1**, the topic had been well understood. Some very mature answers were given indicating real understanding of the unity of Atman and Brahman as a practical matter.

Question 4

'Vishista Advaita is the doctrine that the Spirit of man is separate and different from the Supreme Spirit, though dependent on It, and ultimately unites with It.' To what extent is this an accurate representation of Ramanuja's interpretation of Vedanta?

Very few attempted this question. Those that did so generally contrasted Vishista Advaita with Sankara's Advaita which they understood better. The basic theme was understood by those who attempted this, but apart from filling out the quotation in their own words they had little extra to say. Perhaps reading some of Ramanuja himself or at least Prabhupada/ISCON on the Gita would bring the understanding to life.



Section B

Question 5

‘Be ye a light unto your selves. Hold to the truth as a refuge.’ To what extent is this statement consistent with the Buddha’s ethical teaching?

Most candidates did reasonably well with this - giving a good general account of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, although they tended to ignore the word ‘ethical’.

Answers on Buddhism have certainly improved, with much less narrative than before, and this was the popular choice in **Section B**. The quotation needed to be addressed in an evaluative way and comment on the significance of ‘truth’ was needed.

Question 6

Assess the relevance of Mahavira’s ethical teaching for humanity today.

Very few attempted this question. Candidates need to read the question carefully so that they can answer the question, in this instance it was important to talk about ‘ethical’ teaching. Most candidates made reference to the relevance of Jain teaching today. It was surprising that very few made reference to ahimsa. Candidates need to understand Mahavira and the relation between Jainism and Hinduism.

Question 7

‘There are more similarities than differences between Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism as regards the doctrines of karma and rebirth.’

This was a very popular though searching question and answered well. There was a fair understanding of similarities and differences between the doctrines of karma and rebirth in the two religions among some candidates. There is a need for greater understanding of the key role of atman and anatta in appreciating the differences.

Question 8

‘The Jain teachings on knowledge are totally different from those of Hinduism.’ Consider the validity of this statement.

Not a popular choice, but some of those who had studied Jainism gave some excellent answers. It was important that candidates focused on teachings about knowledge as required by the question and not write about the similarities and differences between Hinduism and Jainism generally. It would be useful for example if candidates were made aware of the difference between ‘knowledge is Brahman’ of the Upanishads and ‘syad vada’ of Jainism.

Section C

Question 9

‘For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked; for the firm establishment of religion; I am reborn in every age.’ How far is this sloka (verse) an adequate account of the significance of Vishnu in the spiritual life of Hindus?

This was a very popular question. Descriptive knowledge of various avatars gained marks, but consideration of the spiritual significance of Vishnu extending beyond the Avatars was also required. The qualitative difference here was between those who gave ‘significance’ rather than ‘narrative’. The question was asking the candidates to bring out the personal significance of the concept of a saviour coming to earth to overcome evil and restore righteousness today.

Question 10

‘Durga’s appearance is that of a beautiful yellow woman riding on a tiger in a fierce and menacing attitude.’ Discuss the extent to which Durga as Shakti (female power) of Shiva reflects his contrasting or conflicting qualities.

Candidates need to read the questions carefully. This question was about the fact that the female power of Shiva was as paradoxical as the male power.

Question 11

‘On the level of the body I am the servant of Lord Rama; on the level of mind I am his friend, but in truth I am the Rama.’ What light does this statement of Hanuman throw on the relation between ‘the one and the many’ in Hindu devotion?

This was popular. Candidates need to take the time to read the question and decide what it might be asking. Most were able to give a good descriptive account of Hanuman. The question also requested them to link together two different parts of the syllabus in an evaluative way.

The profound statement of Hanuman was meant to remind the reader that there is a journey from outer practise of religion, the servant level, ultimately to union with God which is an aspect of the relation between the one and the many.

Section D

Question 12

‘The Brahmacharya stage of life provides an essential basis for Hindu spiritual growth.’ Discuss this statement in relation to the ashrama system, past and present.

This was a popular question. Most candidates compared and contrasted the Brahmacharya ashrama with the experience of modern youth, some interestingly commenting on contemporary attempts to increase spiritual awareness in ‘youth’. A few high scoring answers considered whether the Brahmacharya ashrama was essential to spiritual growth or to the other ashramas. There was a qualitative difference between answers which could refer to all four ashramas and those which had to describe them all. There were a few examples of well-reasoned essays which brought out the wisdom in basing education and the rest of life on a spiritual foundation.

Question 13

‘Of the purusharthas, one is more important.’ Discuss.

This was well done, in that most candidates actually did attempt to make a case, and there were several valid approaches. There was some good intelligent evaluation of the relative importance of the purushartha. Predominant of course was dharma, but some candidates were able to reason that Moksha was the most important because it is eternal, whereas the other three have a relative nature in comparison.

Question 14

‘The Self is not born, nor does it die.’ Explore the relationship between belief in the unity of the Self and Brahman, and the law of karma.

This was a challenging question because it was asking candidates to show appreciation of the two levels, paramarthika and vyavaharika, absolute and relative. The best answers showed some understanding of ‘the law of karma’, especially seen in the light of the absolute statement that in truth the Self is not born nor does it die. The law of samsara operates under ignorance.