



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES A

Paper 1 Hinduism

Report on the Examination

8062

June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General comments

This was the first year of the examinations for the new specification.

The fifth question of each set of five parts accounted for 50% of the total mark. A significant number of students found they ran out or were short of time and so their attempt at the final question was affected. This is also borne out by the fact that most students wrote more and achieved a higher mark on the first essay than on the second essay. Some students appeared to not manage their time well, perhaps because they complete two papers in the allotted time, and this was the second paper tackled. This impacted on responses to 02.5.

It was clear that students are confident in using a wide range of religious beliefs and teachings in their responses. The strongest responses routinely used and applied a wide range; the weaker responses were able to use some teachings. Generally the variety shown was clearly relevant and specific. It was also the case that good quotations were frequently used rather than general concepts/beliefs – particularly, but not exclusively, in stronger responses.

The examination questions required good understanding of key terms, as well as a knowledge of diversity within the religion. It is helpful for students to learn key terms since not only do they then understand fully the questions but they can use them to assist them in their responses.

The strongest responses demonstrated a more holistic understanding of the religion, as questions were answered from different elements of the specification effectively. This was especially true of the 12 mark essay questions, where the best answers did not limit themselves to a narrow ‘Yes/No’ response, but made good use of wider analysis.

Hinduism: Beliefs

Question 01.1

Students found this to be a very straightforward start to the paper.

Question 01.2

Hindus believe we live in the Kali Yuga, the Yuga of greatest corruption, decline and decay. This belief links into many other Hindu beliefs, helping explain attitudes to worship, ethics and the problems of the world today. Around half of the responses did not recognise the concept in question, and were unable to gain marks. Additionally, a number used historical ages, eg Bronze Age, or ages in a person’s life, eg retirement. Whilst marks could be gained without using the Hindu terms for the ages, few responses demonstrated much knowledge of the terms beyond this age (Kali Yuga).

Question 01.3

This question focused on how beliefs influence thought, word, deed or attitude. Most students did recognise the term ‘Trimurti’ and could name the three deities (which was not required by the question). It was common amongst weaker responses to see no reference to how belief in the Trimurti influences Hindus today, but rather descriptions of the Trimurti.

Question 01.4

Only half of all responses clearly recognised the term. A common misconception amongst those failing to gain marks but who had attempted this question was confusing ‘illusion (maya)’ with special revelation or visions of God. A small number of students did not attempt the question, suggesting this was one of the key terms within the paper students found more challenging.

Question 01.5

The whole range of responses was seen to this question – from demonstrating outstanding insight to appearing to barely grasp the meaning of the statement. It differentiated well. Where responses failed to gain marks was focused around two key areas. Firstly, a number of responses simply argued whether moksha was difficult or not – this did achieve marks, but precluded a response from reaching the highest levels of the mark scheme as it was simply not answering the question directly. Secondly, a number of response did not appear to understand the concept of ‘human free will’ – it was common to see ‘free will’ being equated entirely with wrongful behaviour, or ‘free will’ as some kind of force separate to humans as a tempter. The strongest responses showed free will as innate to humanity, separating humans from other sentient beings, a force for good or evil, and the key to moksha rather than a barrier, and they were able to discuss controlling or being controlled by our free will, and gave examples to strengthen their arguments. It is advised that exemplification is often a very good way to develop and strengthen points made, which amplifies the sense of a student’s grasp of the subject matter, and should be encouraged.

Hinduism: Practices**Question 02.1**

Kumbh Mela is held on a twelve yearly cycle in each of four venues, so that every three years there is a Kumbh Mela. The correct answer was therefore ‘once every three years’ which was the most selected of the options given, however many students incorrectly selected ‘once every ten years’.

Question 02.2

Few students had any problem achieving the two marks for this question. Whilst the specification lists specifics as focuses of worship, the question was interpreted much more widely by students. Responses such as a personal focus of worship, eg for good health, were credited, as were those things focused on during worship, eg the journey in pilgrimage. A few responses referred to murti and deities as ‘idols’, which is both wrong and potentially offensive.

Question 02.3

This question was left blank by more students than any other question on the paper. The issue of diversity within the faith was the central focus here, and is one of the principles of the new specification. Hinduism should be seen as a diverse religion, not one single mass – it may help students for this to be a constant reference throughout coverage of specification content. A significant number of responses offered examples of worship as exclusive to one or the other, which are actually true for both, eg both attend temples, both have home shrines, etc. Where a response could only describe worship in one of the two groups, they still received some credit

Question 02.4

This was generally well-answered, with over three quarters of responses gaining three or more marks. Unlike in other questions, religious teachings here were limited almost exclusively to a small number – ahimsa, Krishna, and the holy status of cows. At times, the application of the teaching to Hindu practice was weak.

Question 02.5

Varanasi is the only city named in the specification, and is a key site for Hindus of all persuasions. Responses rarely showed knowledge of the importance of Varanasi generally or specifically to Shaivites, and it appeared that many had no idea what Varanasi was in any sense. This proved a big barrier for many responses. There were responses which fared well in spite of demonstrating little knowledge of Varanasi, as they weighted the opposing argument well, often referring to Kumbh Mela and the Ganges. Stronger responses were able to link Varanasi to Shiva and its long history, and bring in such other destinations as Mt Kailash (for Shaivites) and Vrindavan (for Vaishnavites). Additionally, a number of responses made strong arguments that the point of pilgrimage is the internal motivation and dialogue not the actual destination. This was the last question that some students faced in their Paper 1 examination. It appeared for many hindered by the little time left to them.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.