HINDUISM

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Paper 9487/01
Written Paper
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Key messages

- Read the question carefully and follow the instructions.
- In **part (c)** questions marks are awarded for evaluation and analysis so make sure that a variety of viewpoints are considered and discussed.
- It is not necessary to spend time defining key terms or giving their etymology.
- In particular, where two parts of a question are closely related, such as **2(a)** and **2(b)**, the same material does not need to be repeated again.
- In **part (c)** questions it is useful to finish with a paragraph that directly addresses the question.
- In **part (a)** questions that ask candidates to summarise a passage, it is not necessary to offer an opinion on the content or to introduce material from outside the content.

General comments

Most candidates were able to complete the paper in the time allowed and few candidates attempted to answer more questions than required. Where there were rubric errors it was often because the candidate omitted one part of a question, most commonly **3(b)**. **Questions 1** and **3** were the most popular questions, although there was a more even split than has been the case in some previous years and candidates did not appear to be avoiding any of the questions.

There was evidence that candidates are becoming more skilled in selecting the relevant material to answer a question, rather than writing everything they know about the general subject, although they still struggle to relate the material they have selected to the particular question, particularly in **part (c)** questions.

Candidates sometimes have a tendency to treat statements offered for discussion in **part (c)** as truisms, often offering a great deal of evidence as to why they are true. Unfortunately, this tends to limit the marks the candidate can receive to Level 2 as only one viewpoint is offered. It might be helpful, when teaching, to emphasise that evaluation questions will only be set around issues where there is a genuine debate and differences of opinion. In general, some candidates struggle with the idea that genuinely different and irreconcilable opinions exist within Hinduism, and they will sometimes go to great lengths to reconcile different viewpoints and present them as being essentially the same. Candidates are likely to access the higher levels by showing a genuine understanding of differences of opinion (for example in the case of the cat and monkey analogies in **Question 3(b)**.

Candidates should avoid spending time defining terms used in the question. A response that focuses clearly on the question will demonstrate understanding of these terms, and long definitions use up valuable time without gaining additional marks. In particular, there is no need to repeat the same material in different parts of the same questions. Likewise, candidates often copy out the whole question, which also uses valuable time. This becomes a particular issue where candidates have copied out the entire passage in **Question 1(a)** or **4(a)**. Long Sanskrit or scriptural quotations should also be avoided unless their relevance to the question is explained or they are clearly used as part of an argument.

In summary, candidates display an impressive amount of detailed knowledge of most aspects of the specification. What is needed is the exam skills needed to select and apply that knowledge, along with critical thinking and evaluation to the particular question asked.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This was a popular question and one with which candidates generally coped well. Subject knowledge was detailed and secure.

(a)   Many candidates included a great deal of material in their response that is correct as a description of the Hindu concept of Varna, but which does not have even an implied reference in the passage that the question is asking about. The most common errors were to describe the varna origin story from the Purusha Sukta or to give a summative account of the distinct roles of the varnas within society. Almost all candidates noted that brahmins have the responsibility to teach the Vedas, so very few gained no marks at all. However, a significant number suggested that the passage says no other varna can read the Vedas, which is not correct. Some candidates offered a critique of the varna system as corrupted or distorted in practice, which goes beyond the demands of the question and could not be credited. Some responses spent a lot of detail on the phrase 'twice born' with a surprising number implying (and in a few cases explicitly saying) that it means all shudras will be liberated after death.

Among the responses which did actually summarise the contents of the passage omitting to mention the reference to there being no fifth varna was common, meaning relatively few responses gained all the available marks.

(b)   This was the weakest part of **Question 1** in terms of responses. Most answers were descriptive, rather than explaining how svadharma and varna might be connected. A few candidates confused varna with ashrama and so failed to gain any marks, although this was not common. Most candidates were able to give detailed accounts of the dharma associated with each of the varnas (sometimes repeated from **part (a)**). Most also gave an etymological description of svadharma as personal or individual dharma which they then related to the requirements of each varna. Some explained the pitfalls of failing to complete svadharma, which they tended to equate exactly with varnadharma, often using the example of Arjuna. The stronger responses linked the ideas of svadharma and varnadharma with the gunas, suggesting that it is the gunas that determine varna, and therefore svadharma when the system works correctly. Very few, if any candidates, however, discussed svadharma as a concept with a wider remit than varna, such as its application to ashrama, conscience or raja-dharma, as in the case of Rama and his rejection of Sita. Most answers were descriptive and linked to varnadharma, with little consideration of svadharma beyond a simple definition. Since this only partially addresses the question the majority of responses were limited to Level 2.

(c)   Once again, the level of detailed knowledge regarding dharma as it is applied to both men and women was impressive, however responses tended to be descriptive rather than engaging with the question. Many responses offered only one point of view, limiting them to Level 2. Most usually this was to disagree with the suggestion on the grounds either of the existence of sthree dharma, or the equality of men and women in the modern world. Some suggested that dharma was more relevant to men as they found it inherently more difficult to abide by the principles of dharmic living. The specific issue of relevance was not generally well handled, with most candidates debating whether men or women were more likely to live dharmic lives. Where candidates did engage with the question there were some excellent responses that engaged effectively with the nuances of dharma.

Question 2

This question was less popular than **Question 1**, although the distribution was fairly even. Most candidates who attempted this question did so reasonably well, although part c was answered significantly less well than **1(c)**.

(a)   Most candidates were able to give a detailed account of the four yugas, although there did seem to be a disproportionate emphasis on the incarnations of Vishnu as they related to each one, which was of limited usefulness and often led to candidates excluding more relevant material. The thing that was rarely mentioned was the idea of the yugas as a repeating cycle without beginning or end, which was an idea that was central to the phrasing of the question. This omission meant that few

candidates achieved full marks. A common error was to confuse the four yugas with the four ashramas, although most candidates did not carry this misunderstanding into **part (b)**.

(b)   Most contrasted the satya yuga with the kali yuga, concentrating on why it's more difficult to live dharmically in the kali yuga. It was not necessary to take this approach, but it is a valid one that was credited appropriately, as long as the emphasis of the response was on the satya yuga, as this is what the question was about. Some candidates turned their response into an opportunity to describe in detail everything that is wrong with the kali yuga and the people that live in it. This was not a response to the question and was not credited in its own right. Some candidates tended to employ circular logic, suggesting that it was easier to live dharmically in the satya yuga because there was more dharma in the satya yuga. The strongest responses discussed the idea that both varna and ashrama operated 'correctly' in the satya yuga, and that longer life spans and easier living conditions meant that there were fewer distractions. The lack of modern technology as a distraction was also mentioned frequently.

(c)   The majority of candidates choosing this question did not really understand the concepts of universal and relative morality. Most responses opened by stating that morality was obviously universal because everyone knows how to behave and then presented the fact that some people choose to ignore this knowledge as if it were a second perspective on the question, which it is not. The best responses contrasted concepts of Sanatana and Sadharana dharma with those of svadharma. A significant number of candidates spent too long describing the idea of morality. Candidates need to have a firm understanding of the difference between the concepts of universal and relative morality as they apply to Hindu teachings.

Section B

Question 3

This question was the more popular of the two in *Section B*. It was generally well answered, with the exception of **3(b)**, which caused difficulty for the majority of candidates who attempted it.

(a)   Most candidates did well on this question with the majority attaining 3 or 4 marks. The most common errors were to spend too much time either defining the state of jivan mukti, or explaining in depth the various ways in which it could be reached, without describing the characteristics of a person who is jivan mukti. Some gave a generalised description of a 'good Hindu' without engaging with what is distinctive about a jivan mukti, such as a lack of concern with discomfort. These responses were credited, but did not reach the higher levels.

(b)   This question produced the weakest responses on the paper, by a significant margin. A significant number of candidates who attempted **Question 3** omitted **part (b)** and those that did not generally gave very poor responses. The weakest responses gave generalised accounts of the different routes to liberation without making any reference at all to the cat and monkey analogies. A central issue for many candidates seemed to be the idea that the two analogies fundamentally disagree with each other about the relationship between the atman and the divine and the means of gaining liberation. Many candidates tried to find ways to reconcile the analogies so that they said the same thing, which was, fundamentally, about bhakti and divine grace. Only a very few responses were able to identify the connection to bhakti with the cat and jnana with the monkey. Some assumed that there must be a connection to Hanuman. The overall conclusion is that this part of the syllabus is not well understood.

(c)   Most candidates were able to offer a strong argument in favour of the statement, using the Advaita Vedanta as the basis of their case. As always, knowledge of the Advaita was strong and detailed, and candidates had a strong level of understanding. Less in evidence was the ability to offer a strong counter-argument. Many suggested that maya or attachment also kept people from liberation. This suggested a weaker understanding of the Advaita viewpoint as both of these things can in fact be linked to an ignorance of the true Self. A strong response would have been to point this out and discuss the extent to which maya and attachment to the material world are or are not the same as ignorance of the self. This would have been a genuinely evaluative response that would have accessed the higher levels. However, very few candidates took this approach. A disappointing number of candidates gave only one viewpoint, agreeing with the question, which limited them to Level 2 regardless of how detailed their knowledge was. A different approach was to argue that karma is also responsible for keeping people tied to samsara. This was a reasonable approach which was often well argued although none took the next step of linking the idea of

nishkarma karma to knowledge of the true self- or at least a lack of attachment to a false sense of self. Arguments based around karma as an alternative to ignorance tended to be sound and well-reasoned, but rarely evaluative, meaning that they tended to be placed in Level 3.

Question 4

This question was less popular than **Question 3**, and, with the exception of **3(b)**, was slightly less well answered.

(a)   Candidates seem to struggle with questions that ask them to summarise a passage, as they seem to assume that more must be required. In fact, all that is needed is to demonstrate understanding of what is said in the passage, and not to omit any significant point. Almost all responses to this question discussed karma to a greater or lesser degree, which was not relevant since it was not mentioned in the passage. This meant that points that were relevant were often left out, preventing the candidate from achieving full marks.

(b)   Most candidates were able to identify and accurately explain all three types of karma mentioned in the question, although some did confuse them. The difference between sanchita and prarabdha karma seemed to be particularly difficult for some. They were aware that both were concerned with past action but could not clearly distinguish. Very few candidates addressed the relationship between the different types, which was at the heart of the question. Surprisingly few mentioned that agami is the only form of karma over which a person has control, and which is therefore the key to the others. Many candidates used the analogy of the archer, with varying degrees of success. A common error was to go on to describe various other forms of karma that were not mentioned in the question, and so were not creditable.

(c)   The obvious way to approach this question was to consider the relationship between nishkarma and sakarma. However, few candidates took this approach. Most gave an account of the idea that good actions lead to moksha whereas bad actions do not. Many did not even link this to the necessity of thinking about actions before taking them, rather ignoring that part of the question entirely. This approach tended to lead to a one-sided response that partially addressed the question, limiting marks to Level 2, which is what most responses to this question achieved. The strongest responses, which were few, argued that 'thinking about' karma in terms of earning a reward (sakarma) prevented liberation, while thinking about performing dharmic actions could lead to liberation provided it was done in the spirit of nishkarma.

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Key messages

Most candidates demonstrated familiarity with the key terms and concepts given in the questions set, with many deploying substantial amounts of knowledge. The ability to select relevant aspects from this pool of knowledge and to apply it to the question was generally less evident in responses. Responses giving a generalised descriptive account of material from the relevant section of the syllabus were common, often resulting in repetition where the questions were conceptually related to one another, limiting the marks available for each part question as the level descriptors focus on how well the set question has been answered.

To improve upon selection and application of knowledge to ensure that responses are focused on the question set, it might be helpful to consider:

The importance of command words; different command words entail different uses of knowledge. Addressing the question that has been asked begins with understanding what words such as '*summarise*', '*explain*' and '*discuss*' mean in terms of how knowledge is used and displayed.

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

The nature of a discussion in evaluation (**part (c)**) questions; there is no correct or expected conclusion to these questions and no requirement to offer and justify opposing views on the issue. However, there is a requirement to discuss and to evaluate the differing perspectives that arise during a discussion in order to reach and justify a conclusion. Discussion entails a consideration of different views. These could be complementary views with analysis and evaluation being present through a critique of different ways of reaching or supporting the same conclusion, or they could take the form of an absolutist stance on the issue and a more relativist one. Regardless of form, a discussion must consider perspectives on the issue raised in the question and justify those perspectives with relevant and applied evidence. One-sided arguments or responses which simply describe the issue are unlikely to reach the higher level of marks.

General comments

Most candidates demonstrated a broad range of relevant knowledge and the ability to identify the relevant topic area for the questions they chose. Fewer candidates demonstrated clear ability to select and apply their knowledge to the specific question asked, which often led to summaries of the entire topic rather than responses to an explicit question.

Overall, there were very few rubric errors. Most candidates attempted all parts of the questions that they selected with few responses left unfinished.

Questions 2 and **3** were the most popular choices overall. **Question 4** was the least popular choice.

Some candidates chose to address the question sections in reverse order, answering **part (c)** first, then **(b)** and then **(a)**. Whilst this does not affect the way in which marks are awarded, it is worth noting that the parts of these questions are conceptually related to one another, with the structure intended to enable a candidate to progress from a descriptive response in **part (a)** to an evaluative one in **part (c)**. The ideas and material introduced in **part (a)** connect to **parts (b)** and **(c)**. Working backwards from **part (c)** might therefore create a greater challenge.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) This question was generally dealt with well. Responses not attaining higher-level marks generally did so because they focused on material about Vedic writings which was not part of the passage. This material was often correct, but it could not contribute to answering the question set.

(b) Responses generally demonstrated good knowledge of the Epics and their contents but gave far less attention to the reasons for their importance in contemporary Hinduism, which was the focus of the question. Most responses gave one reason – that they contain examples Hindus should follow – followed by extensive description of the stories within them that constitute such examples.

(c) Most responses recognised that the question asked them to discuss a claim, opening with a statement relating to that claim. Many responses took the claim in this question to be a truism and therefore were often one-sided; it was possible to achieve a high-level discussion without presenting directly opposing views, for example by exploring different reasons why the same view might be held, but the construction of arguments was necessary. In many of these responses, statement of agreement with the claim was made but followed by a descriptive account of the history, structure and/or use of the Vedas, which supports the argument by implication, but which does not by itself constitute a discussion in response to the question set.

Question 2

(a) Most candidates who chose this question were familiar with the Manusmriti as a smriti text containing laws/rules for structuring society. Stronger answers to the question expanded on this, identifying the role and responsibilities of the varnas, interactions between the varnas, crime and punishment and the role and status of woman as areas with which the text is concerned. Other responses focused on critique of the contents as outdated or erroneous in its interpretation of the Vedas, which was not relevant to the question.

(b) Responses demonstrated good knowledge of the Vedas, with some giving detailed outlines of the structure and content of each Veda. Most responses were able to offer some reasons why these texts might no longer be relevant; most referenced language/translation and accessibility when compared with other texts. References to the Kali Yuga were also quite common. The reference to religious practices in the question was generally addressed only by implication, so that most responses focused primarily on how widely read the Vedas are, rather than the extent to which they are used in ritual or during religious events.

A small number of responses approached the question by explaining why the Vedas are relevant to contemporary Hinduism; these responses did not answer the question set and so could not gain marks in the higher levels.

(c) This question was generally well answered, with most candidates arguing that sacred texts are of great importance in Hinduism, offering examples of the teachings they contain as support for that view. Some simply stated that texts were obviously important because Hinduism has a lot of them, following this with a description of selected examples.

Overall, responses often contained a great deal of description about what different texts contain to support the argument that they contain important teachings but did not then expand the discussion with further development, use or critique of the examples. In particular, those responses which used the Epics as their exemplars often gave multiple, in depth, accounts of how different characters are great examples for Hindus but in doing so lost track of the focus of the question set.

Many responses were entirely one-sided and responses which did include an alternative view often focused on the Kali Yuga and the deterioration of dharma. Almost no responses included consideration of what else might be important to a religion or its practitioners, which was a useful way to demonstrate the evaluation needed to access the higher-level marks.

Section B

Question 3

(a)   Responses to this question commonly included material not present in the passage, usually in the form of general descriptions of concepts relating to Brahman.

(b)   Most candidates who answered this question addressed both concepts of Brahman and described them in some depth. Explanation of the differences between them was commonly left implicit, with most responses taking the form of two separate blocks of descriptive material.

(c)   The majority of responses opened by stating the claim made in the question and agreeing or disagreeing with it. Most of those which opened with agreement were not followed by evidence supporting that view, with most of the justification presented supporting the view that it is possible but difficult. Very few responses included clear and justified arguments in support of the statement, although many gave detailed accounts of practices which supported the opposite argument.

Some candidates brought in knowledge from other sections of the syllabus in their responses, making comparisons between the different Vedanta traditions and their views of Brahman. This was not necessary for high-level marks, but many of the responses which took this approach were analytic in their approach and suggested a thoughtful approach to the issue.

Question 4

(a)   Some responses identified the traditions included on the syllabus by name and were able to link them with the relevant central deity. A few responses went beyond this to include detail about the nature of these traditions in terms of more specific beliefs or practices.

Many responses confused the philosophical theisms (monotheism, polytheism, etc.,) with the Hindu bhakti traditions which are the focus of this section of the syllabus. The philosophical terms were relevant if used to describe the beliefs devotees hold about the nature of their central deity, but few responses did this and many made no reference to the named traditions of Vaisnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and Smartism.

(b)   Some responses showed knowledge of practices specific to both the named traditions. However, the range and depth of knowledge demonstrated seemed to be less than in other **part (b)** responses on this paper. Many responses were generic accounts of murti puja and meditation being practices within both traditions. Where specifics were given, there was often more detail presented for the main practices of Shaivism than Vaisnavism. Weaker responses often gave lists of things associated with each group rather than explicitly identifying and explaining the differences between them.

(c)   Most responses took a very specific view of Shakti, as referring to any female deity, and described the role of goddesses in each of the theistic traditions named on the syllabus before concluding that Shakti is universally worshipped. While this is one way to understand the concept, providing one perspective on the question, it is not the only one that could have been taken and it tended to often limit responses to being one-sided and descriptive.

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Written Paper

Key messages

- Read the question carefully and follow the instructions.
- In evaluation questions marks are awarded for evaluation and analysis so make sure that a variety of viewpoints are considered and discussed.
- It is not necessary to spend time defining key terms or giving their etymology, or to repeat material already given in another part of the question.
- It is useful to finish with a paragraph that directly addresses the question.
- Material on Buddhism and Jainism will not be credited unless it is specifically required by the question.

General comments

Most candidates were able to complete the paper in the time allowed and few candidates attempted to answer more questions than required. In *Section A*, **Question 2** was significantly more popular than **Question 1**. While the split was more even in *Section B*, there was still a marked preference for **Question 3**.

There is still a tendency in this paper for candidates to give detailed and accurate knowledge around the general subject of the question, rather than selecting the particular elements that would be most relevant and relating them specifically to the question that has been asked.

Candidates sometimes have a tendency to treat statements offered for discussion as truisms, often offering a great deal of evidence as to why they are true. Unfortunately, this tends to limit the marks the candidate can receive for AO2 to Level 2 as only one viewpoint is offered. It might be helpful, when teaching, to emphasise that evaluation questions will only be set around issues where there is a genuine debate and differences of opinion. In general, some candidates struggle with the idea that genuinely different and irreconcilable opinions exist within Hinduism, and they will sometimes go to great lengths to reconcile different viewpoints and present them as being essentially the same.

Candidates should avoid spending time defining terms used in the question. A response that focuses clearly on the question will demonstrate understanding of these terms, and long definitions use up valuable time without gaining additional marks. In particular, there is no need to repeat the same material in different parts of the same questions. Long Sanskrit or scriptural quotations should also be avoided unless their relevance to the question is explained, or they are clearly used as part of an argument.

In summary, candidates display an impressive amount of detailed knowledge of most aspects of the specification. What is needed is the exam skills needed to select and apply that knowledge, along with critical thinking and evaluation to the particular question asked.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was not popular, and it was generally not well answered where it was attempted. Responses did not show a sound understanding of this area of the specification, particularly with regard to key terms such as 'world religion'.

(a) Candidates found this question difficult. Candidates possessed a good knowledge of the life and key teachings and beliefs of both M K Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda; however, they did not select material that was relevant to this particular question. A definition of 'world religion' would have been a useful starting point to this question and would have helped to keep candidates on track in their responses. The majority of candidates did not seem to have a firm understanding of the meaning of 'world religion' as an academic term within the study of religion. The majority of responses ignored this part of the question or did no show an understanding of its meaning or significance. Many responses gave accounts of the two people mentioned in the question with no reference to world religion. Other responses chose to show how both figures presented Hinduism as a coherent or as a tolerant or pluralistic religion and obviously thought this was the same thing, although they did not explain how or why. Many candidates mentioned the World Parliament of Religion but did not explain how or why this was significant. An account of Vivekananda's speech would have helped to explain how he framed Hinduism in a particular way to make it conform to ideas of world religion. Most candidates could not do this beyond his opening line, to which they gave huge significance but, again, without explaining why. Candidates were able to identify key ideas such as vegetarianism, ahimsa, satya graha, but again, with no clear idea of 'world religion' as a category they were not able to explain why these were significant. The better responses were able to show that both were keen to show Hinduism in a good light on a global stage, but there was very limited discussion of the diversity within Hinduism and how this was addressed by both figures, or of Sanskitisation. With no clear idea of the meaning of 'World Religion' candidates were not able to do more than 'partly address the question' and as a result the majority of responses were limited to Level 2.

(b) This part of the question was answered significantly better than part a. Most candidates were able to give a good account of both Buddhism and Jainism and to compare these with Hinduism. Candidates seemed to be aware of the significance of issues such as acceptance of the Vedas and belief in a Divine power, although only a few pointed out that uncertainty about God existed also within Hinduism. The diversity within Hinduism was not discussed as fully as it could have been here, and many candidates compared the Shramana traditions with a monolithic and unified 'Hinduism' that does not actually exist. Candidates also tended not to fully engage with the 'contemporary' part of the question by pointing out that whatever its origins, or points of contact, Buddhism exists as a very different entity to Hinduism in the modern world. Nonetheless, most candidates were able to argue more than one point of view and to reach a conclusion, meaning that many responses were into Level 3. Candidates seem to be more comfortable with this part of the specification than that addressed in **part (a)**.

Question 2

This question was significantly more popular than **Question 1**, and most candidates had a good and detailed knowledge of the relevant material. Once again, the areas for development are selection of the material and its application to the question. This question provides a good example of the importance of recognising a connection between a **part (a)** and a **part (b)** question, where **(a)** builds upon **(b)**. In these cases a candidate may disadvantage themselves if they answer **part (b)** first. There is no need to repeat large amounts of material in both parts. If a candidate has given a detailed account of ashtanga yoga in **part (a)** there is no need to repeat it in **part (b)**.

(a) Almost all candidates were able to give a detailed and accurate account of Ashtanga yoga, however, not very many were able to clearly connect this to a means to achieving liberation. The majority of responses explained each of the limbs in detail and concluded with 'this helps to achieve liberation' or at best 'this helps to calm the mind which leads to liberation' with no explanation as to how or why this should be so. A very few addressed the 'worldview' of yoga, explaining that the core purpose of the Eight Steps is to help a person to dissociate themselves from a false understanding of the Self by withdrawing from sense experience. The few candidates who were able to do this did so very well and were able to achieve the highest level.

(b) Many candidates repeated much of the material they had used in **part (a)**, describing Ashtanga Yoga in detail, which was not necessary and which did not really contribute to the argument in **part (b)**. Most candidates accurately explained that Samkhya is non-theistic while yoga acknowledges the Ishvara. Some suggested that this meant the two systems had very little in common and so could operate separately. Some pointed out that yoga is practised widely, including in the West, with little or no understanding of the Samkhya philosophy and so the statement must be true, although these responses rarely made a distinction between the philosophy of Patanjali and yoga as it is practised in the West. Candidates did less well at arguing against the statement, although

some did suggest that Ashtanga Yoga helped to develop the sattva guna which in turn will help a person to identify with Purusha rather than Prakriti, which is entirely in keeping with Samkhya. Many suggested that Samkhya was the theory and Ashtanga the practice, although very few could do any more than state this as a fact and did not have a strong understanding of what this might mean. A few of the stronger responses pointed out that the practice of Ashtanga Yoga was compatible with, and helpful in any Hindu darshana, and, arguably in the Shramana traditions as well, meaning that it is not necessarily linked with Samkhya. The majority of responses only developed a single viewpoint, which limited them to Level 2. However, there were a small number of excellent responses to this question.

Section B

Question 3

Candidates, as is always the case, had an extensive and detailed knowledge of Advaita Vedanta and were able to explain it well. However, candidates are less comfortable with the ideas of Ramanuja. Confidence with the material concerning Dvaita Vedanta is increasing. Candidates often spent a disproportionate amount of time discussing Advaita, leaving discussions of the other two traditions as rushed and sometimes confused. A small, but still significant minority of candidates also discussed Samkhya and even Buddhism. This showed a limited understanding of the question which limited the response to Level 2. There were some excellent and comprehensive accounts of the Vedanta philosophies, meaning that a good proportion of candidates achieved an AO1 mark in the top level. Having said this, detailed accounts of the Vedanta philosophies, often accompanied by extensive Sanskrit quotation from scriptures, often took the emphasis away from discussion and argument to the detriment of evaluation and hence AO2.

AO2 marks tended to be much lower, although there were still a small number of excellent responses. One issue that seemed to recur frequently is that candidates do not seem to acknowledge that the Vedanta philosophies fundamentally disagree with each other on key issues and that they cannot be reconciled. A number of candidates seemed keen to prove that they basically said the same things about Brahman and the atman even though they very clearly do not. The strongest responses in AO2 pointed out that the Vedanta traditions have points of congruence in that they are all concerned with interpretation of the Vedas and with understanding what those scriptures have to say specifically concerning Brahman, atman, maya, moksha and the material world. They also point out the fundamental differences of opinion concerning these points. Some of the best responses addressed the fact that Vishistadvaita had some points in common with Advaita and others with Dvaita and were able to discuss these confidently.

Question 4

This question was less popular than **Question 3**, and also tended to be less well answered. Many candidates understood 'Ishvara' to be identical in meaning to 'Brahman' or 'God', including the nirguna Brahman of the Advaita philosophy. They then argued that Ishvara was important to all traditions. Better responses correctly identified Ishvara with saguna Brahman and specifically with a personal God who is an object of bhakti, Fewer specifically identified Ishvara with either Vishnu or Shiva depending on the tradition. While Ishvara is not exclusively linked to either Vishnu (more commonly as Bhagavan) or Shiva, the concept is rarely used in other contexts. Where candidates were not able to give an accurate definition of Ishvara, their understanding of the question was limited and they were only able to partially address the question, meaning that AO1 tended to be limited to Level 2.

In AO2, stronger responses tended to suggest that Ishvara was important in bhakti traditions, such as Vishisthadvaita and Dvaita, while it was non important where there was no belief in Brahman, such as Samkhya, or where Brahman was understood to be nirguna, such as Advaita. Strong responses introduced evaluation by discussing the extent to which Ishvara could be incorporated into Advaita as a stepping stone towards nirguna Brahman for the less spiritually advanced. Some went on to discuss Smartism as a tradition rooted in Advaita in which Ishvara remained an important concept. A significant number of candidates discussed Buddhism and Jainism in their response despite the fact that the question specified Hindu philosophies. Material about Buddhism and Jainism are not relevant and cannot be credited unless they (or Shramana traditions) are specifically mentioned in the question.

HINDUISM

Key messages

Marks are given to responses in relation to how well they have answered the question set; questions are written to assess both knowledge and understanding, so the selection and application of knowledge to a specific question is an important aspect of exam performance. Most candidates were clearly familiar with key terms and concepts used the question and many were able to give substantial and detailed knowledge around the relevant topic area. However, there was less evidence of understanding the specifics of individual questions and sometimes (see specific comments below) some examples of the question being disregarded in favour of recounting a complete set of notes on a topic.

Many candidates responded to each question by setting out everything they knew about a particular topic. In **Section A**, where each question has two, conceptually related parts, this leads to lot of repetition, particularly at the opening of a response where definitions of terms were commonly set out. This approach limited the marks available because the level descriptors are concerned with how well the question has been answered, which requires selection and application of knowledge.

It may be helpful to consider the following:

Questions in **Section A** are given in two parts, **(a)** and **(b).** These parts are related to one another, with part **(a)** looking for knowledge and understanding (AO1) and part **(b)** looking for analysis and evaluation (AO2) in the form of a discussion relating to some of the concepts and ideas raised in 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, which offers a definite position on the question asked. This does not need to be the final paragraph, although it often will be. However, it does need to be justified with some reference to why this view is considered the better one. Writing a conclusion which reflects on the points made in the discussion can be a useful way to ensure that the response as a whole answers the question that has been asked.

General comments

Most candidates demonstrated a broad range of relevant knowledge and were able to identify the relevant topic area for the questions they chose. However, many responses were summaries of the entire topic area rather than knowledge that had been selected and applied to the specific question that was asked.

Candidates appeared familiar with the rubric of the exam. There were few candidates attempting more than the necessary number of questions and most attempted all parts of the questions they selected. Some responses were very brief, but most appeared to be finished, suggesting appropriate use of the examination time. **Questions 1** and **3** were the most popular choices overall.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) Most responses began with a detailed description of varna. The majority also knew what jati referred to, but often not enough detail was given. Many drew comparisons between the two, which meant that they covered relevant material although these responses did not always explicitly address the question (which was about how the two concepts are related); very few responses dealt with this beyond a single sentence saying that jati was a distortion or misunderstanding of varna.

Many responses went into a lot of detail about the injustices and abuses of the jati system, which was not relevant to the focus of the question asked.

(b) Many responses began with accounts of the nature of the caste system and problems creating by it, which was not necessary to answer the question focus. Although it may have helped some candidates find their way into a discussion this approach often spent a disproportionate amount of the response focus on it, meaning it was not an effective use of the available time.

While most candidates were familiar with the names of a range of reformers and the issues on which they campaigned, knowledge about what these individuals actually did was much more limited. Observations like *'this reformer ended the practice of sati'* were commonly made without any further detail, which implies that all that is necessary to end something is for a prominent person to say that it should stop. Responses often dealt at length with sati and other social issues including child marriage, dowries, and purdah, at the expense of material more directly focused on the issue of caste.

Some responses did offer more detailed description of what specific reformers had done on this wide range of social issues, but this was rarely followed with the analysis of how effective or useful these actions were which was needed to fully answer the question focus.

Question 2

(a) The majority of responses were familiar with the history and practices of ISKCON and went into some descriptive detail about this. Reference to practices was clearly relevant and the history could have been made so, but many responses simply gave the fullest description of ISKCON they could manage without referencing the question focus. Responses which did seek to address the question directly usually focused on the idea of bhakti as the only possible path to liberation and the existence of a definite founder and place of origin as features that are not found within Hinduism more broadly. Proselytisation, which is referenced as an ISKCON practice in the part **(b)** question, and which is not really found in other Hindu traditions, was rarely mentioned in part **(a)** responses.

The responses that did refer to the question often suggested that everything ISKCON does is unique, including practices such as puja, mantras and avoiding alcohol which are practiced far more widely. While some of these explained that such practices are different within ISKCON because of the content of the chants or the intense focus on Krishna most did not; this undermined the overall quality of answers which demonstrated good knowledge because understanding was more limited.

A common approach was to spend a substantial amount of the response comparing ISKCON with one or more other traditions from outside what could be called mainstream Hinduism. This was often SSIO but sometime Buddhism or Jainism. Although some relevant points did appear in such comparisons, they were implicit rather than properly applied to the question and most responses which took this approach tended to simply describe a range of traditions which might be considered Hindu.

(b) Responses to this question revealed a range of different impressions about what proselytisation means. Some responses offered no clear explanation at all but instead gave a description of a range of practices associated with ISKCON – often a repetition of the part **(a)** response – and used the fact that none of these are explicitly called proselytisation to argue that ISKCON does not do this. Some responses showed understanding of the term in the abstract but found it harder to relate to specific practices, so that the connection between, for example, handing out free books and encouraging conversion was not clearly recognised. Additionally, some responses defined proselytisation as forced conversion, suggesting that since ISKCON must be chosen, it cannot possibly engage in the practice.

Descriptions of ISKCON practices often formed the bulk of a response, sometimes more detailed than the part **(a)** material. There was a common focus on charitable endeavours such as the Food for Life project, which was often described in depth. However, while such works can be considered a form of proselytising this was rarely explored, neither was it explicitly used to demonstrate that ISKCON has broader concerns than converting people.

Some responses appeared to have confused or conflated ISKCON with the SSIO, ascribing Sai Baba's views about conversion and the unity of different religions to Swami Prabhupada.

Section B

Question 3

Candidates were able to give a lot of detailed and potentially accurate information about both Sita and Draupadi and events in their lives. Responses often started with the assertion that they were clearly strong role models for women, followed by accounts of their lives and how the things they did reflect their characters. However, most of this was related to their either their value as role models in general terms or to the degree to which they conformed to sthri dharma. Feminism was rarely defined – an unusual omission as defining technical terms from the question is a common approach across the paper as a whole – and the way in which it was used tended to imply that it was considered a synonym for 'female'.

Where feminism was addressed explicitly it was usually presented as being the view that women should be fierce and outspoken rather relating to issues of choice, worth, social/cultural value and similar. This understanding of feminism led some responses into consideration of other figures from Hindu scriptures who fit that description, which took them away from the question. Similarly, there were responses which ignored Sita and Draupadi almost entirely in favour of describing individuals who worked for women's rights in India. All this material, which was generally given in some depth, was irrelevant to the question.

Most responses focused, in the case of Sita, on her docility and submission to Rama and, in the case of Draupadi on her fury at being dishonoured and her active participation in the war. These different characteristics did not prevent many candidates arguing for both women to be perfect examples of how women should behave, and these responses seemed to be built around an assumption that it was necessary to reach the same conclusion about both women. Responses that did address the possibility that there were different possible conclusions tended to argue that Sita was a better role model in the past, while contemporary values make Draupadi more appealing today.

Question 4

This was clearly the least popular question choice across the paper, and it was also less well answered for the most part. The concept of secularism did not seem to be clearly understood. Most responses were able to identify the idea of separating religion from the state, but without demonstrating understanding of what that could mean in practice. Many responses were also aware that Gandhi promoted secularism in a particular form but there was little explanation of what that form was or what makes it distinct from other forms of secularism.

Most responses focused on the existence of diverse societies without an official state religion, such as India and Mauritius, to support the statement made in the question. Hindutva was often included, usually as an example of the intolerance that can arise from religious tensions and sometimes as a response to the need to defend an indigenous religious or specific religious group from threats that general religious freedom might pose to it. This approach did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the relationship between Hindutva and the Indian state.