

HINDUISM

Paper 8058/01
Paper 1

Key messages

Candidates must address the specific question asked, selecting relevant knowledge to support their arguments in order to gain the highest marks.

Candidates must follow the rubric, answering five questions with at least one from each section.

Responses that write about the general topic, showing no selection and failing to address the question asked limit themselves to Band D.

Many candidates compare a 'Vedic ideal' to the problems and failings of the modern world, and seem to assume that this fulfils the requirement for analysis and critical argument even where it is entirely unrelated to the question. This is not helpful, as it is only worthy of credit where it genuinely forms part of an answer to the question (and even here it is often not the best approach). In most questions it is a drain on the time available to candidates.

General comments

Candidates' responses were generally weaker than in previous years, with some seeming uncertain of basic information. **Questions 2, 7 and 11** were particularly problematic with many candidates appearing to struggle with basic information. While most candidates completed the paper within the time allowed, there were a worrying number of scripts where only 4, or occasionally 3 questions had been attempted, and others where five questions had been attempted, but one section had been omitted, meaning that candidates could not be awarded all of the marks for the questions they had answered.

The biggest single limiting factor on candidates' achievement was a failure to address the question as it was asked. Candidates are strongly inclined to write a response on the general topic which does not address the question, thus limiting themselves to Band D. It is important that candidates are taught to read the question carefully and to address it specifically in their responses, considering different views and arguments where possible. Knowledge should be detailed and accurate, but should also show evidence of having been selected to address the question rather than covering the whole topic.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was quite popular with candidates and was one of the better answered. Many managed to move beyond Band D as some specific response to the question is almost inherent in a description of the Vedic gods (for example the role of Agni as fire in everyday domestic and religious life.) Many were able to identify the Vedic gods as being associated with the natural world and so to identify them as still important, or as less important as science has advanced and is able to explain natural disasters that once seemed like the anger of the gods. Many candidates suggested that the Vedic gods are not as significant today because of a general decline in religion/dharma and people having less time for religious activity. On this occasion this did gain some credit, as it does constitute a possible answer to the question. The better responses, however, went beyond this to argue that there is still a place for worship in the modern world and that many people still honour the gods. Some commented on the fact that while the other gods might have diminished in importance, Agni is still central to Hindu puja through the havan.

Surprisingly, there was little evidence to suggest that candidates are aware of the fact that religion has changed significantly between Vedic and modern Hinduism and that different deities are now popular objects of worship. A few mentioned Krishna's display of superiority over Indra in the Bhagavata Purana, but this was surprisingly rare. Some mentioned that the Trimurti has eclipsed the Vedic gods, but not go beyond this to suggest why this might be, or what significance it might have.

Question 2

This was the least popular question in **section 1** and was not generally well answered. Many responses were brief and lacking in detail and some described Purusha as it appears in Samkhya philosophy in some detail, but showed little evidence of knowing the Purusha Sukta. A surprising number of candidates discussed various Upanishads or the Brahmacharya Sukta in some detail, but hardly mentioned the Purusha Sukta. Better candidates gave a detailed description of the contents of the Purusha Sukta and some were able to discuss the 'cosmic significance of sacrifice' quite well, suggesting that sacrifice is an intrinsic part of creation and that this tells us something about the nature of Brahman. Candidates who did this well were able to reach Band C. A few candidates misunderstood the meaning of Brahmanas and wrote about the Brahmins being corrupt and unnecessarily complicating ritual. Often this was used as an opportunity to describe the inadequacy of modern society in comparison to the Vedic age, which in this question gained no credit as it is completely unrelated to the question. Almost no candidates at all were aware of the Brahmanas as a category of texts or of the way in which sacrifice is conceived of in them. This is very worrying as Brahmanas appear clearly on the specification and candidates should be aware of them and of their nature. As a result, it was very difficult for even the best candidates to move beyond Band C on this question.

Question 3

This was the most popular question in **section A**. Most candidates knew the story well and were able to give a detailed account of the events in the Upanishad, although quite a few were confused about the second boon. Many supplemented their account with material from other Upanishads and scriptural sources, which was not always relevant and rarely added much to their response as the question was focused on a particular text. Indeed there were a small but significant number of responses that discussed the candidate-guru relationship in general terms but made very little reference to the Katha Upanishad.

Better responses generally explained why Naciketas could be shown to be a good candidate, using evidence from the text and so were able to access Band C. Few, however, went beyond this to compare and evaluate the roles of teacher and candidate. There were a few excellent responses to this question, suggesting that the teacher has to be willing and sufficiently knowledgeable/spiritually advanced in order for the candidate to gain knowledge, and a few suggesting that given the nature of the question, only Yama was qualified to impart the knowledge. The majority of responses, however, were highly descriptive in nature. Some candidates focused more on the relationship between Naciketas and his father, rather than his relationship with Yama.

Section B

Question 4

This was quite a popular question and the majority of candidates were able to give a fairly detailed account of the contents of the Bhagavad Gita, however there was little evidence of selection and few demonstrated a clear understanding of the term 'ethical ideals'. Many responses gave detailed accounts of the teachings on bhakti and yoga which are not specifically ethical in nature. A small but noticeable minority of candidates did not focus on the Gita at all, but looked at the wider stories of the Mahabharata, sometimes with a passing reference to Arjuna's dilemma during the battle, and sometimes not. They discussed the ethical issues faced by Duryodhana, Yudhishtira and Draupadi which had no relevance at all to this question.

Better responses suggested that the world would be improved if the teachings of Krishna were universally followed. Some then went on to discuss the failings of modern life, which has very limited relevance and did not, generally, receive credit. Very few addressed the issue of 'all' Hindus, by looking at the accessibility to different genders, varnas etc. Surprisingly, no candidates that I saw attempted to discuss the issue of whether the advice is universally applicable or useful, for example, whether it encourages warfare.

Question 5

This was one of the better answered questions on the paper with the better candidates attempting some genuine evaluation and acknowledging that both characters had both strengths and moral failings. Some 'unpacked' the term 'dharma' suggesting that Duryodhana was following dharma as he saw it, and as it was necessary for him to behave in order for events to proceed as 'planned'. Most were able to demonstrate that Yudhishtira failed in his dharma as a husband, and there was some interesting discussion around the question of whether or not his acceptance of the challenge to the dice game was dharmic. While most candidates were able to demonstrate the many examples of Duryodhana's adharmic behaviour, some also demonstrated that he behaved dharmically as a son, as a friend and as a kshatriya.

Question 6

This was a popular question, but the majority of candidates limited their marks as their responses were almost entirely descriptive. Accounts of the stories of Lakshmana and Bharata tended to be thorough and detailed, but very little attempt was made to assess the significance. Weaker responses did not select material related to the brothers but also discussed other characters such as Sita, Hanuman and Jatayu in some depth. Attempts to discuss the significance tended to be limited to the fact that they demonstrated ideal brotherly behaviour, often coupled with harsh contrast with the bad behaviour demonstrated by brothers today. A few contrasted it with the behaviour of family members in the Mahabharata and discussed this in relation to dharma. A very few of the better candidates understood 'significance' in terms of the bhavas and suggested that it displayed the divine nature of Rama, overruling other commitments such as that of Lakshmana to his wife.

Section C

Question 7

This was the least popular question on the paper and was, on the whole, very badly answered. A very few who attempted it were able to name some or all of the Alvars and give some biographical information. Even fewer went on to demonstrate that the Alvars came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some clearly did not know who the Alvars were at all and spoke in very general terms about bhakti or tried to use material about Surdasa and Tulsidasa. Better responses addressed the 'aims and achievements' but generally briefly, and with limited understanding, and the part of the question about 'one liberating theme' was universally ignored. A few talked about bhakti as a countermeasure to exaggerated expense and complication in worship, but usually in vague terms that did not specifically address the Alvars. In general, candidates' knowledge of the Alvars appeared to be very limited.

Question 8

This was a popular question and candidates generally had detailed knowledge about Surdasa and were able to describe the themes of his poetry and the various bhavas in considerable detail. Some contrasted this with the supposedly degenerate nature of people in modern times although this had no bearing on the question at all. Many knew that Surdasa's earliest poetry was very conscious of his own sinfulness and was sorrowful in nature and that his guru had encouraged him to change this, but few explicitly connected this to the idea of a spiritual journey through the bhavas towards Krishna. Some candidates misread the question and talked instead about Krishna's spiritual journey. The majority, however, merely described Surdasa's themes of the Rasa Lila, and the various bhavas, and while they often did this in great detail, such responses were limited to Band D. There was little evidence of any biographical knowledge about Surdasa.

Question 9

As with the previous question, candidates showed very little knowledge of the life of Tulsidasa other than his birth and the story of his leaving his wife, both of which figured quite widely, despite being of limited relevance. Candidates generally described the theology/philosophy of Tulsidasa in quite a bit of depth or described the events of the Ramayana/Ramcharitmanas (they did not seem to be aware of the differences in the narration) with little further detail and almost no reference to Tulsidasa at all. Quite a few of the stronger candidates explained that the Ramcharitmanas was written in the vernacular, although surprisingly few of these specifically gave this as a reason for its popularity. Some, once again, described how degenerate and money orientated modern society is and gave this as a reason for the loss of popularity, but again, this was of no relevance to the question. Very few went beyond this, although the stronger responses suggested that the writing helped to overcome differences between Shaivites and Vaishnavas, and also to combat discrimination between castes that was leading people to abandon Hinduism. Some also suggested that

people needed a clear demonstration of a dharmic life, which was provided in the writings. Candidates generally gave a good account of the philosophy of Tulsidasa or of the events of the Ramcharitmanas, but rarely went much beyond this.

Section D

Question 10

This was a popular question, and generally well answered, with a significant proportion of candidates specifically addressing the question. Most had detailed biographical knowledge of Ramakrishna and of his religious experiences. Fewer went on to address the question of lasting significance, but many did, and those that did often did so quite well, usually focussing on his assertion that all religious paths lead to God, and of the value of women. There was often some discussion about how useful these teachings were in the modern world, in the light of widespread violence and discrimination against women, and religious violence and terrorism, which, in the context of this question, was relevant and creditable. Fewer mentioned the ongoing relevance of the Ramakrishna mission or the work of Vivekananda, although a few did. Weaker candidates assumed that Ramakrishna was a social reformer in the same way as Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayanada and so included quite a lot of information that was factually incorrect.

Question 11

After **Question 7**, this was the least popular question on the paper and it was badly answered. Most answers were very vague indeed and contained little biographical information about Gandhi. The better responses talked about ahimsa, and many guessed that Satyagraha was about truth, in the sense of 'telling the truth' and wrote extensively about that. It was apparent that very few candidates understood what Satyagraha was and most were unable to give an accurate translation. Even those who could, tended not to go beyond this by explaining how he applied it to his life and protests. Biographical information tended to be limited to social reform and Gandhi's concern with caste discrimination and the role of women. Candidates did not make the connection between satyagraha and the way that Gandhi campaigned against the British. Some responses were very vague indeed and gave almost no specific knowledge about Gandhi.

Question 12

This was a very popular question and was answered reasonably well by most candidates. Most were able to describe the works of Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayananda in some detail, although when they also tried to include Ramakrishna and Gandhi the detail often became too dispersed. Candidates displayed varying accuracy in their information, but most were clear and fairly detailed. Many went on to address the question at least in so far as pointing out that things such as equality for women and caste discrimination continue to be a problem and so were able to access Band C. Few, however, went beyond this in a consideration of whether the reformers failed to respond to the challenges of the modern age. A few of the better candidates questioned if the modern age had produced issues that did not exist at the time of the reformers, concerned with technology, weapons of mass destruction and religious terrorism.