

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/07 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 7 series overview

All four questions were attempted by candidates across the full range of ability and almost all candidates managed to attempt the required three questions within the available time. The majority demonstrated good time management/exam skills, with very few leaving the third essay obviously unfinished.

Most candidates demonstrated knowledge of Hindu specific concepts and terminology relevant to the questions asked and were able to arrive at some form of conclusion on the central issue. The depth and complexity of knowledge, and its application to the specific questions were more variable and so formed the basis of differentiation.

Overall candidates who did well on this paper demonstrated both a high level of knowledge about Hinduism and understanding of those concepts sufficient to help them to make relevant selections from that pool of knowledge. Additionally, the best responses were clearly focused on the religious aspect of the questions being tackled, beginning with an understanding of the religion and religious concepts and connecting this to relevant sociological or historical material. Less effective responses often took a generic approach, offering a generalised consideration of an historical interpretation or sociological phenomenon with more limited references to religious beliefs, philosophical concepts, Hindu specific practices and/or areas of controversy or discussion around these.

Question 1

1* 'Hinduism is a feminist religion.' Discuss.

[40]

The majority of responses to this question approached it as a discussion of women's rights and social equality. This is a valid way to understand feminism, but it did risk the responses becoming more of a sociological reflection on contemporary society than an engagement with the way in which religious ideas both inform and challenge social values. The best responses avoided this potential pitfall in a range of ways, most commonly an exploration of the ways in which society/culture and religion interact and inform one another with regard to issues of equality and value.

Much of the relevant material candidates deployed in response to this question was associated with historic issues and the ways they are dealt with in contemporary society. The practice of sati, dowry payment and the status of widows were all relevant in this context. A common weakness in the way this material was used was an apparent lack of awareness as to the historical context - both cultural and religious - in which these practices originated, thus limiting the discussion of their place and relevance in contemporary Hindu attitudes. Almost all candidates were familiar with the form and nature of such practices and able to offer strongly felt opinions about them; many candidates also knew and were able to discuss in some measure legal restrictions on discriminatory practices as well as the challenges of legislating for changes in attitude. However, knowledge of the connections between such controversial practices and the religious concepts which were used both to justify and to oppose them appeared far more limited.

While almost all candidates who attempted this question recognised the central issue and had pertinent material to use in discussing it there was one, uncommon but significant, confusion around the term 'feminism' - that is a misinterpretation of it as misogyny. The small number of responses which did this were still able to gain marks although the application of relevant material to the specific question was limited by the misunderstanding. However, it does seem important to observe that the most serious misconception with regard to this question was not located around knowledge and understanding of Hinduism but of the more generic terminology from the specification.

Question 2

2* To what extent is *Vishishtadvaita Vedanta* different from other *Vedantic* philosophies?

[40]

This was the most philosophically focused question and candidates engaged with it as such, demonstrating a good level of knowledge of the existence of different Vedantic schools of thought. While there was some confusion over which philosopher is associated with which school this did not detract from candidates demonstrating their understanding of the distinctions between them.

Most responses took the straightforward approach of directly comparing Vishishtadvaita thought on issues like the relationship of Brahman and Atman or the most direct path to liberation with the thinking of other Vedantic schools on this same issue. This allowed for both the demonstration of knowledge and understanding and the beginnings of a reasoned discussion about the question. The best of these developed this one-to-one comparison into an overview of the three schools.

Question 3

3* 'Modern Hinduism has its origins in the Indus Valley Civilisation.' Discuss.

[40]

The nature of this question meant that most responses took the form of a consideration of differing interpretations of archaeological evidence. Most candidates had a good range of knowledge of such evidence to draw on and responses that dealt with the issue well were also able to give an account of different scholars reactions to both the artefacts themselves and to the archaeologist's/historians interpretations of them.

Common areas of confusion included the length of time that has passed between the height of the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) and today and the placement of the IVC within other historical eras associated with Hinduism. In particular a number of responses conflated the IVC and the Vedic age, which resulted in a confusion when discussing the difficulties of understanding a culture whose written language is untranslatable. Exemplar 1 demonstrates this confusion, with the candidate explicitly stating that the Vedas are physical evidence of the link between the IVC and contemporary Hinduism thus closing off the discussion about what can be known of practices in the IVC and moving instead into a confused summary of the relevance of Vedic sacrifice today. By contrast Exemplar 2 demonstrates an effective and analytic use of the candidates knowledge about the content and significance of the Vedas as they reflect on how this understanding has been used to interpret physical discoveries from the IVC.

Exemplar 1

It is suggested that modern Hinduism does in fact have its origins from the Indus valley civilisation, there are many reasons as to why this is thought to be the case. One main reason for this is by the texts that India and Hinduism use. ~~But~~

Although, Hinduism does not have a specific founder or a specific book like most religions do, Hindus do follow a variety of texts: including the vedas and the use of Sanskrit texts.

Although again these do not have a specific date they have both been known to date back to the Indus valley civilisation, is not before. This therefore, suggests that ~~Hinduism~~ does modern Hinduism does have origins that came from the Indus valley civilisation, as Hindus still follow specific elements from both these texts. For example, throughout the vedas practice of yoga and the use of sacrifices and rituals are often referred to which Hindus still do ~~in~~ in modern

clays. In the vedas, sacrifices such as animal sacrifices or fire sacrifices may have been mentioned and although these sort of sacrifices no longer have a role in modern Hinduism, other sacrifices do. Such examples as modern Hinduism sacrifices and offerings is saying some of their food and offering it to the God's or Goddess' they choose to worship.

Exemplar 2

Another way in which it could be argued that modern Hinduism has its origins in the IVC is due to the presence of two fires. In the IVC there were two fire pits present one being in the homes which was assumed to have the purpose of cooking, suggesting there was not a practical use for having two suggesting a ritual purpose for the second. A development in the significance of fire can be seen throughout Hinduism from the two fires in the IVC to the ritual sacrifices of the yajna and agni in the vedas.

to the aarti lamp in Modern Hinduism. The presence of two fire pits in the IVC and the development of the importance throughout Hinduism makes it likely that ~~we~~ modern Hinduism has its origins in the IVC and if not at least the significance of fire in Hinduism does. However, there are also issues with making connections between fire in the IVC and modern Hinduism. As we have no translated language and no Rosetta Stone from the IVC we cannot know if the fire pits were actually used for rituals or whether they in fact had a different purpose. Furthermore, there is no evidence that rituals ~~of~~ ^{or} fire sacrifices actually took place in the IVC and therefore we cannot make these connections. These suggested relationships could just be ~~archaeologists~~ ^{archaeologists} trying to find an origin for Hinduism that isn't actually there. This is supported by Ian Jamison who said that any links between the IVC and modern Hinduism are "based on conjecture rather than fact" and as a result we cannot know for sure. This shows ~~that~~ ^{while} developments can be seen from the IVC through time to modern Hinduism today, they need to be critically analysed and cannot provide us with factual conclusions.

Question 4

4* Assess the claim that all Hindus should practise the virtue of non-violence.

[40]

While candidates overall had no difficulty understanding the central issue they had been asked to discuss this question produced less reflective and discursive answers than others on the paper.

Descriptive accounts of Gandhi's work were common, but awareness of the religious ideas which informed his political stances were much less so. Similarly, there was limited reference to or recognition of the specific interpretations he put on traditional teachings and scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita. This same approach was characteristic of other examples cited, whether they were of pacifist or non-pacifist Hindus - knowledge of their activities was made very clear but understanding of the relationship between their actions and their religion was usually left inference. Exemplar 3 demonstrates this. By contrast Exemplar 4 gives no named examples of Hindu pacifists but examines the connection between pacifism and vegetarianism as well as social justice through religious principles used by Gandhi, among others, to support such practices. This is a more effective use of knowledge in relation to the specific question that has been asked.

Exemplar 3

KNOWLEDGE AS WARRIORS, therefore violence is a vital aspect of their religious dharma. Thus, not all Hindus must adhere to the practice of non-violent virtues, as the example of the deities and dharmas show otherwise.

However, Mahatma Gandhi was a Hindu who adhered to non-violent principles. He fought for the unity of all religions within India independent of which sub-group you follow. He stressed the importance of Mohandas - or mother India, he also disagreed with the partition of India and Pakistan, believing that this would only increase the issue and not resolve the divide. In order to get his view across to society Gandhi was a pacifist and chose to use less violent methods for fighting, like peaceful protest. This coincides with Hindu teaching as Jnana yoga teaches meditation which is a peaceful. Also, Gandhi achieved more globally through his peaceful methods spreading Hinduism into the West. Then there are those who use violent methods like the Aurobindo gang. They actively seek men and beat them as a form of personal retribution towards abusive men. However, this is subverting Hindu beliefs as a woman's place should be at home not on the street. However in our society sometimes violence is necessary in order to be heard and the Aurobindo gang have shown this.

In conclusion, Hindus do not have an absolute view

towards violence. Sacred texts illustrate that violence is necessary through stories of Rambo who used violence to free his wife's sister. However, non-violent acts have proven capable of also doing something. Thus, not all Hindus must practise non-violence

Exemplar 4

The principle of non-violence or ahimsa is a key Hindu virtue. In this essay, I shall discuss the significance of this virtue and why all Hindus should practise it. However, I shall also note how there are some aspects of Hinduism which seem to contradict with this principle of non-violence. For example, in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjun that as a kshatriya, it is his dharma to fight in battle and subsequently cause deaths. However, it could be argued that things like varna and dharma have lost their significance. Thus, the roles and duties of castes have evolved. Therefore, for modern Hindus, it can be seen as more important to practise the virtue of non-violence, as all Hindus should.

The virtue of non-violence has also developed and influenced other Hindu beliefs. For example, under the principle of ahimsa, all Hindus should be vegetarian and not harm any living thing and a failure to do so will result in a build up of bad karma. However, there is a debate as to whether ahimsa is truly achievable. Although it may seem trivial, the accidental killing of animals or insects is a violation of this non-violence.

principle as all sentient beings are jivas in themselves. Thus, this argument makes it difficult to concur as to whether non-violence is actually achievable for Hindus today and whether all should pursue it. Nevertheless, modern societies often require a development in traditional religious principles and so today ahimsa can be achieved in pacifism and vegetarianism. Although this is not always followed by all Hindus, it can be said that the practise of non-violence should be sought after in this way as it is still a key principle of Hinduism. Therefore, Hindus should practise the virtue of non-violence.

Despite the argument above, there are some significant contradictions in Hinduism that questions whether ahimsa should be followed or not. The most important example can be found in the Bhagavad Gita. In the Gita, Krishna consults Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra because he is having second thoughts about participating in a war against his family. But Krishna reminds Arjuna that as a kshatriya, the warrior caste, it is his duty to fight. This example causes confusion for Hindus over non-violence as it is God commanding violence in the name

of dharma which intrinsically goes against the practise of ahimsa. In response to this, it could be argued that the importance of dharma and caste have deteriorated as Hinduism has evolved. Therefore, the duty of a kshatriya isn't to fight as this isn't applicable to modern society. Furthermore, the United Nations declared the caste system an abuse of human rights and so its relevance to modern Hindus can be seen as fairly unsubstantial.

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