

Examiners' Report

Summer 2012

GCE Religious Studies (6RS02)

Paper 1D The Study of World Religions

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Introduction

General Comments

The Investigations Paper provides for a balance of teacher-directed and more independent student enquiry. The aim is to involve students as active participants within a process where they undertake individual research into a topic of particular interest. Questions are designed to be inclusive of all possible approaches to various topics and this is the reason the expression, “with reference to the topic you have investigated” is included in each question. The ability to select and manage individual research to fit the demands of the question is an important discriminator in terms of assessment. The mark scheme is generic and allows for a very wide range of possible approaches – there are no indicative mark schemes for each question because there are so many legitimate ways of answering questions based on independent research. Preparation for this unit is focussed around the two assessment objectives. Candidates are expected to determine whether there is sufficient material to access a variety of appropriate sources (Assessment Objective 1) and to evaluate alternative views (Assessment Objective 2). Candidates may develop their research with reference to the criteria in the level descriptors across both AO1 and AO2. The assessment criteria are typically mentioned in each question through the trigger words, ‘examine’ for AO1 and ‘comment’ for AO2. The candidates work is assessed according to the application of both assessment objectives as in the exam itself there must be explicit attention to these objectives in the examination answer.

In preparation for this examination candidates may find it useful to write up their investigation under exam timed conditions to a variety of different possible questions. They might build up a number of different essay plans to different possible questions. The important point in these activities is to enable candidates to develop their management of material such as how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. However, candidates should be careful not to use a pre-prepared answer in the exam which was not adapted to the question set or by answering a question that has been written for a topic they have not studied.

June 2012 demonstrated once again a very high level of scholarship evident across all areas of study and many answers demonstrated the engagement that candidates had with their area of investigation. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. Some Centres chose to focus on the same or similar topics for all their candidates, whereas other Centres permitted considerable choice for individual candidates. Candidates were very well prepared for the examination and it was evident that Centres used their specialist resources and interests to encourage candidates to research in depth a particular area of study. Many responses evidenced a wide range of relevant material with substantial background reading used effectively. A feature of high quality answers was the ability to manage research material to integrate an aspect(s) of the question. Candidates performed well across both assessment objectives with detailed content and insightful, cogent argument. There were well-structured responses based on the question and candidates used their knowledge to address the focus of the question.

In some cases candidates did not select their material in accordance with the specific question and could have adapted their material more effectively to address the question. The question was briefly mentioned and in some cases there was only reference to the question in the final section. At the lower levels some candidates drew on sources that were below the standard expected for GCE level. These responses tended to be descriptive rather than analytical and in some cases were too short to cover the topic in any breadth or depth; these responses typically lacked elaboration and lacked GCE level substance.

Centres should ensure that candidates are entered for the option that matches their area of study and that candidates are clear about which question they have been prepared for on the paper.

There were still a few examples where consideration entry for a different area of study may have been beneficial to the candidate. It is important to ensure candidates know which area of their investigation is the best fit for the question they answer on the paper. There was evidence of candidates choosing a different question on the paper to the question they had clearly prepared for before the examination.

Candidates were not penalised if correct entries were not made or a cross was put in a box that did not match the answer.

Question 1: Ethical Precepts & Applied Ethics

There was evidence of a more sustained academic approach within the quality of investigations for this unit. The use of detailed religious teachings and tradition often supported a very well researched argument and the higher quality essays made careful use of relevant scholarship to enrich the topic under discussion. This approach is strongly encouraged as candidates can reach the higher levels of the mark scheme if the argument is sustained by a substantial range of sources that are effectively deployed throughout the essay.

The most popular topics included Jihad, homosexuality, capital punishment, suicide and euthanasia with reference to two world religions. There was some very interesting work on the ethical teachings of War and Peace that was adapted to Hinduism and Buddhism and also to the debate of sexuality and marriage in Islam. There was much evidence of the proficient use of technical terms from a range of Islamic schools; candidates quoted a wide range of Islamic sources in addition to the Qur'an; for example hadith and various Islamic scholars. Candidates who chose to address the issues in these topics with reference to Buddhism presented some very knowledgeable responses that scrutinised closely the ethical precepts of Buddhism. Some weaker responses did not address the question and were mostly about the history of Buddhism. These responses also made little or no reference to scholarship. Candidates can improve their answers by demonstrating a much more detailed approach to studying any particular world religion. Weaker answers might contain a few quotes from sacred scripture but fail to include other sources such as relevant scholarship; scholarship is best accompanied in this Area of Study by ethical precepts that are derived from religious tradition and the authority of religious leaders.

Example 1

This is an extract from an essay on the caste system within Hinduism. The topic is not dealt with very often and it is a good example of a topic that provided scope for investigating key ethical precepts in Hinduism.

Examiner Comment

The candidate examines some key Hindu precepts and comments on issues related to the caste system within India. The introduction draws the reader in very quickly to the key ethical precept of Jati and immediately sets out to clarify how this principle should be understood within a social context.

A key ethical precepts in Hinduism is the ~~east~~ Principle of Jāti. The Principle of Jāti is a form of social stratification in India. Its origin is social but has been confused with the religious Caste System. They have become so emerged that to ~~fully~~ understand the Principle of Jāti you first need to understand the Caste System. Hinduism is a monotheistic religion believing in the God Brahma who has many manifestations. They believe that you are reincarnated through karma merits and demerits, and this is how you are placed into a Jāti. It is important to note that you are born into your caste and die in the ^{same one}.

It is thought that the Aryans brought the Caste System over from Iran ^{in 1500}. These Indo-European people invaded India pushing the indigenous people original inhabitants southwards towards the mountains. This is where the original social divide occurred. The Aryans were in possession of the Vedas and merged their religion with the original beliefs of the indigenous people thus creating the Vedic Tradition, also known as Hinduism. Originally there was 3 castes

but the Aryans added a 4th consisting of the indigenous people.

The original 3 castes were Brahmins, Kshatriya and Vashyas. Brahmins ~~were~~ considered the priestly caste and are more spiritually pure, therefore closer to Brahma. These people were the only people who could become priests. The Kshatriya caste were the rulers and warriors, there have been many debates within the caste system to who has more power, Brahmin or Kshatriya. The 3rd is the Vashyas who are the producers of the economic wealth, The 4th Caste added was the Shudras, labourers and servants who were the indigenous people.

The Caste system is a hierarchy the higher up you are the more spiritually pure you are. The origins of the Caste system can be seen in the myth of the Primeval man, where it says where each varna, caste, came from Brahma. The Brahmins came from Brahma's mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arms, Vashyas from his thighs and Shudras from his feet. Varna means ~~color~~ ^{color} which is seen in the Caste System as Brahmins tend to have lighter skin and Shudras dark. Because of this it is easy to tell which caste someone belongs to which leaves problems for the lower caste members, as they are discriminated against.

There is a 5th group of people outside the Caste System. These are the 'untouchables' or Dalits. They are considered too lowly to be considered a varna. These people get the unwanted jobs and are forced to live on the outskirts of villages and drink downstream so not to infect other caste members. They are known as untouchables as they were not allowed to touch or be touched by anyone to make sure they did not infect others. If you were touched by an untouchable a Brahmin would have to perform a ritual to cleanse you. In 1950 untouchability was legally abolished and they were known to be called Dalits, which means oppressed. However, it is still present in individuals and communities. The Dalits were used as scapegoats and discriminated against. Forced to do ^{unwanted} unhygienic work for little or no pay.

Even though the Caste System seems cruel it is believed to represent the ideal way of running a society as every function in the community is fulfilled.

However, there is discrimination throughout the Caste System and those of lower caste are used as scapegoats. Many of crimes were a Dalit or Shudra were the victims or left unsolved due to the officials or

people of higher caste and does not care about them. In riots, due to the fact that you can tell which caste and jāti someone is causes problems for the rioters as they can be tracked down easily. The discrimination of the lower castes is not unlike to the ways the Jews were treated by the Nazis in the 2nd world war and there have been massacres where thousands of dalits have been murdered just because of the varna they belong to.

The Principle of jāti has been confused with the caste system and jāti translated means caste. Hence, they have both been so jolly merged it no longer is a part of the caste system. A jāti is passed down from generation ^{to generation}. It specifies what your job is, where you live, who you marry etc. It is important as it keeps every function of a community filled as jobs are passed down from father to son/daughter making sure each generation has people to fill all every need. It is a known fact that you are born in a jāti, live in a jāti, marry in a jāti and die in that jāti. There is no social movement, people can't ^{their} not change jāti job as they can not change caste. A father has a hard job of finding a partner for his daughter who is of the same caste and varna and is not too closely related.

Examiner Tip

A clear structure can help candidates to set out their material effectively in order to pursue a line of argument that answers the question. Clear knowledge of the topic also helps candidates to differentiate the issues under discussion.

Example 2

This essay is a full response on contrasting Buddhist views on war and violence.

Examiner Comment

The candidate has clear knowledge of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism and contrasting Japanese Zen Mahayana Buddhism. This is clearly set out in relation to the topic of War and Peace and effective use of relevant scholarship and Buddhist ethical precepts set out within a very clear argument that Buddhists take morality very seriously. Much ground is covered and the essay moves from a very strong introduction towards a conclusion that is fully justified in this very thoughtful and well researched essay.

Chosen question number: Question 1 ☒ Question 2 ☒ Question 3 ☒

Buddhists take morality very seriously. It contributes to one third of the noble eightfold path and offers an applied way of expressing wisdom. All Buddhists are presented with the 5 precepts which act as a guideline to Buddhist ethical code. However unlike western religions, Buddhism does not have a black and white ethical code. Instead actions should be judged upon their karmic consequences. This action therefore must be judged in reflection to the surroundings of the individual. As Keown highlights "The Buddha allowed for the adjustment and abandonment of minor rules." Instead of the ethical code, actions should be judged skillfully and unskillfully. In line with virtue ethics, Buddhists believe that the macrocosm judges rules the microcosm, therefore all ethical conduct should be judged against this greater truth.

War and non-violence pose a difficult question for Buddhists. Non-violence is one of the precepts and therefore reflects its huge

Karmic backlash if broken. This is because violence is the embodiment of certain unmeritorious actions. For mainly it is motivated always by a level of hatred or greed which are mental poisons. However these all feed back into the more fundamental delusion of anatta and failure to accept anicca. As Harvey observes "The Buddha also often mentioned the negative effects of attachment to speculative or fixed views". In effect, violence results out of a failure to accept that you are impermanent, and your existence on earth is very temporary and ~~undurable~~ short lasting. Therefore to act violently is a mark of your existence and is thus going against the Dhamma, which ~~shows~~ returns with bad karma. thereby all Buddhists should act non-violently. As the Dhammapadam says: "conquer evil by love, ~~anger~~ the hatred by good." However Ideology does not always go with practicality. If a Buddhist faces annihilation should he respond with violence. If so how can it be justified.

In the Tibetan Mahayana tradition, much of the teachings agree with the central Buddhist thought. As the ~~for~~ Mahayana poet sahetideva

expressed: "whenever conflict arises amongst living creatures, the sense of possession is the cause."

This view has been challenged in recent years.

Since the 1950s, Tibet has been under occupation by the Maoist Chinese. Compared to just a routine invasion the Maoist elements of the Chinese forces offer complete annihilation of the Buddhist religion in Tibet. So much so, that after 60 years of the invasion and the cultural revolution, just 2% of the monastic institutions survive. The Chinese aim to squeeze Buddhism out of Tibet, and in some cases the Tibetans are fighting back.

This can be justified in a few ways. Firstly the real sufferers of a loss of a monastic institution are the laity, whose alms rounds are the only way of gaining merit. The destruction of the monasteries by the Chinese, cuts this vital path to nirvana. Thereby karmically it must be judged whether a short-term spout of violence against the Chinese would be compensated by a long term supply of merit from a reinstalled monastery. Seeing as the Dhamma is timeless, this karmic re-balance would surely be better for individuals in the long run.

A second justification shows a slightly more

accepting view of violence. As Harvey highlights, "Mahayana texts contain passages ^{which} allow killing in constrained circumstances, provided that it is motivated by compassion and carried out with skilful means." Here Mahayana Buddhism seems to allow for a limited amount of violence. The situation would certainly count as a 'constrained' one. In terms of compassion, Mahayana Buddhism ~~is~~ often looks to a form of karmic compassion. This means that if an individual is causing more damage to his own karma and to others, it is better to kill him, than to let him sink so far into Raksha. Thereby for a Tibetan to kill a Chinese soldier who has killed many other people, Tibetan Mahayana acknowledges and accepts the act. ~~to to~~

Therefore elements of Mahayana belief and teachings allow for violence. Yet it must be maintained that Buddhists have remained predominantly non-violent, in Tibet. Also to kill through compassion would require great wisdom that only Bodhisattvas possess, therefore ~~violence~~ ^{non-violence} is self-maintained by the structure of Mahayana itself.

Compared to Tibetan Mahayana, Zen Mahayana

is much more embarrassing of violence. This is mainly down to the secular world of Japan between the 10th - 17th Century. As Harvey highlights "the sectarian differences were much more strongly defined than in other Buddhist countries." In Zen though there is a more inbuilt acceptance of violence, bred through the need for survival. In Tibet, to fight for the country and religion would count as a level of delusion, Zen has been forced to remove these qualms by the uncompromising nature of the Secular world. This built up to the point that "sohei or warrior monks were considered a part of national life" (Reverendum).

The main justification for this violence comes from the exclusively Zen teaching of No mind. In effect Zen ~~does~~ increases the importance of anicca and counter-balances it to violence. As Harvey summarises: "There is only evil in killing if the person killed is not recognised as empty and dream-like." Thereby Zen does not discount violence as a precept but highlights that seeing as nothing is permanent, there can be no killing. As Demerille phrases it, "[Zen views violence] in a similar way to a storm collapsing a cliff kills people." Therefore Zen, using its Daoist links, views violence

as a natural phenomena. The result of this is a curious fusion of Buddhist-nationalism whereby monastic institutions became like secular warlords. Whereas Tibetan Buddhism condemns this as anatta, Zen accepts it. The result is that the monastic institutions must defend themselves and even attack neighbours. Therefore it is almost as though one is being invaded by a religion... One such scholar the Tendai made many scriptures, the Mahāvairocana Sutra "which openly accept violence... in defense of the Dharma" (Harvey).

Zen thus has been forced to accept violence out of sheer need to survive in a hostile secular world. Therefore it uses violence as an expression of defending a religion. This particular aspect is a blind-spot in Buddhism, and plagues the hostilities in Tibet, yet Zen has found a way around it. The 'No mind' principle enables a bypass to the negative karmic impacts of killing, by using a separate and equally important teaching. Therefore Zen has managed to accept and justify violence.

Theravada Buddhism has often stuck much more closely to the original teachings. So much so that as Neale highlights: "I never saw

two Siamese so much as touch each other out of anger." Despite this inherent non-violence, Theravada has also been plagued by violence. Gomberich highlights Sri Lanka under the reign of King Dutthagamani as a particular example.

Dutthagamani is actually revered in Sinhalese culture as ~~the~~^a savior. His wars against the muslim Tamils in the country are described by, known as "the nearest thing Buddhism has come to a Holy war." The reason for this violence, like in Tibet and Japan, is a fusion of religion, ethnicity and nationalism. The unfortunate link of the Sinhalese to Buddhism, means that it is tied into secular squabbles such as the one against the Tamils. The vulnerability of the Sinhalese has often made them feel a need to defend themselves. As Fenchwanger ^{expressed Sri Lanka's position} ~~at~~ put it: "a tiny grain of sand... a drop of water in the an enormous sea."

Theravada has found ways to justify the king's actions despite having "no canonical texts justifying violence" (Harvey).

One of these, links much more into the Tibetan predicament. Theravada puts great emphasis on the Jangha, so much so that, the whole Sinhalese population of Sri Lanka could be viewed as

a 'Sangha'. In response to the destruction of monasteries etc, the Sangha is expected to respond in a skillful manner which ensures all sections of society profit. Therefore Puththagamani's attack on the Tanals could be expressed as a way of saving the Sangha from future attack. In fact many Sinhalese view it as "delayed action defensive" (Renoudeau). Even Puththagamani's brutal invasion of southern India has been allowed for, through this.

The further justifications follows a similar line to Zen; playing down the karmic impacts of killing. As Harvey highlights: "Puththagamani was said to have been motivated by love of the Dhamma and not the joy of sovereignty". Therefore this effectively says, that the king was free of motivation by the three mental poisons. The second justification again shows a darker side to Theravada, which aligns with the Mahayana tradition. An account of an arakat recalled "the rest were wicked... they died like beasts". This follows the line that to kill someone who is less virtuous is better than to kill a virtuous person. Unlike Mahayana, Theravada retains some of the negative effects of killing, but highlights that some killing is less karmically

damaging than other forms.

Therefore unlike Zen, Theravada does not fully accept violence, but like Tibetan Mahayana, there are cracks which accept violence under certain circumstances.

In Conclusion it is mostly clear that Buddhism remains non-violent until it is confronted by a threat which could completely destroy the religion as a whole. The Zen perspective of accepting violence stems straight from a brute need to survive in a difficult secular world. This also drags in the premise that violence only erupts when a form of nationalism sets in for Buddhists. The concept of defending the religion of Buddhism is a definite blind spot. All of the situations where violence has erupted relate back to a form of defending the Dhamma. In the cases of Theravada all the religious sects, this results also in the need to defend monastic institutions and the Sangha. It should also be highlighted when this 'defense of the Dhamma' has not happened such as in India. Particularly after the rise of Islam, Buddhism has been systematically driven from India, through brute force. The Theravada approach of trying to find the most peaceful means of war, were ineffectual against a religion which

didn't accept any belief except its own. The removal of Buddhism from India has hung heavy as a black cloud over modern approaches to non-violence. Especially in modern Tibet, a violent approach is deemed to only way to drive out the Chinese. Despite frequent calls for peace from the Dalai Lama, violence has erupted. Considering that Tibetan Buddhism is the most hierarchical of all Buddhist sects, this almost disobedience reflects another fault line in Buddhist ethical teaching. Is a skilful action always non-violent? Certain Bodhisattvas in Tibet clearly think not. Therefore the lack of a clear rule in Buddhism, makes violence almost inevitable. One person's view of a situation may always be different to another person.

Therefore although in theory Buddhism is non-violent, the different perceptions of the Dhamma can make even a precept redundant. As mentioned this almost always springs out of a form of socio-religious nationalism, which drags Buddhism into a secular world, which is dominated by Panksha and violence. Therefore some Buddhists have been forced to accept violence.

Examiner Tip

Know your topic! Hard work always pays off and fluent knowledge of the distinctive nature of the material helps the candidate to manage a range of views within a clear line of argument.

Question 2: Religious Pluralism, Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Practice

There were fewer answers to this question and hence the range of topics offered was narrow. The Interfaith Dialogue attracted some very good answers which showed secure knowledge of Barth and Rahner's viewpoint within this topic. The strongest responses were distinguished by showing the intricacies of this dialogue through secure knowledge of appropriate sources and scholarship throughout their exposition. There was evidence of interesting research on pluralism within Hinduism. This approach to the question worked well and demanded an in-depth knowledge of Hinduism that some candidates could thrive on in their research. On the whole, candidates deployed a wide range of evidence and were able to draw sophisticated conclusions using sound religious terminology.

A

mongst weaker responses; candidates who focused on the role of women in Islam failed to present alternative opinions. Candidates need to include a range of evidence in their investigation that is supported by sound scholarship and, where possible, to show knowledge of more than one point of view. Answers in the lower levels tended to be brief, descriptive and generalised. Some candidates also relied on pre-prepared essays and did not understand or answer the question.

Example 3

This essay on pluralism within Hinduism uses a style that helped the candidate to organise their material.

Examiner Comment

Headings are not encouraged as time can be wasted writing out material that is subsequently contained within the body of the essay. However, this tool can work for some candidates if it helps them to organise their answer.

Chosen question number: **Question 1** ☒ **Question 2** ☒ **Question 3** ☒

~~My exploration has~~

Exploring Pluralism in Hinduism

My exploration has been the idea of 'Pluralism' that Hindu philosophy is firmly grounded on. This concept can be seen in the Rig Vedic Verse 'Ekam Sat Vira Bahuda Vadanti' (RV 1.164-46) which states that He one and the same ultimate reality has been thought of and approached in different ways - be it Vishnu, Shiva, Mother Goddess, Buddha or as Christ. It also teaches that one can use any or a combination of the bhakti, karma, jnana or raja yoga pathways to find God. Hinduism recognises the issues of religious conflict and attempts to solve it through its pluralistic nature, teaching how different religions can co-exist without threatening or being threatened by others. Pluralism opens up a plethora of perceptions and approaches to reach God or spirituality and these can be classified in two broad groups: viewing God as a personality (male ~~or~~ or female) or ^{as} a principle that underlies absolutely everything.

God as a Personality.

Within viewing God as a personality there are two variations. The first is called 'Saguna Sakara'. This is considering God as having ~~8~~ attributes, 'Saguna' and form, 'Sakara'. This is believed to be the simplest and most popular way of relating to God as the devotee is able to create God in their image with 'superhuman' qualities. This is

traditionally done through the portrayal of a deity, enabling the devotee to develop a relationship with a physical, attributed God. Moreover, this approach encourages a more disciplined society as it portrays God sitting in judgement. Some may challenge this concept as it can be seen as a limitation but in reality it is a very practical way of relating to and approaching God as this personified God ~~can~~ can be regarded as kith and kin. For example, as a mother ~~or~~ or father, a brother or sister or a child or friend. The Abrahamic religions resist this approach as they insist that the infinite God cannot become finite through form. However the Hindus disagree as they say that having infinite powers ~~is~~ must include the power to become finite.

The second variation is called 'Saguna Nirakara' in which the devotee approaches a formless, attributive God. Similar to the Abrahamic Traditions, God is not given any form or shape, 'Nirakara' but is thought of as attributes, 'Saguna' such as 'power', 'love' or 'truth'. Two recent Hindu movements called the 'Arya Samaj' founded by Dayananda Saraswati and the 'Brahmo Samaj' founded by Ram Mohan Roy advocated this unpopular approach. This approach encourages practising religion in daily life by applying observances such as 'satya' (truth) ~~and~~ and 'tap' (austerity). A weakness to this concept is that it ~~can be seen~~ ~~as~~ ~~is~~ is difficult to understand how God can be both with and without form. Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), a Hindu prophet, explained how God can simultaneously be both with and without form through the metaphor of ice and water: Essentially, both ice and water are the same but one has form and the other is formless.

It is the love of the devotees that freezes God in the form they desire.

This idea of viewing God with form and attributes has been adopted by many Hindus as it is easier to develop a one pointed concentration with a physical God rather than a formless one. In my opinion, ~~the~~ viewing God as a personality is not very effective as it introduces many unanswered questions especially why there is the issue of evil and suffering when God is supposed to be omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing) and all-compassionate.

God as a Principle

The second approach to God is one beyond all classifications. The idea of ~~the~~ God as formless, 'Nirakara' and without attributes, 'Nirguna' is called 'Nirguna Nirakara'. Here, the word 'God' is replaced with the term 'Ultimate reality' to convey this principle. This eliminates the idea of a 'superhuman' God watching over us. Then again, it can encourage aspirants to operate in a 'less effort' manner. Again there are many variations ~~to~~ to this approach, the two most popular being 'Brahman' and 'Atman'. 'Brahman' is the principle that forms the basis of everything we experience. It is the 'Ultimate reality manifesting as the Universe'. 'Atman' on the other hand is the principle that states essentially we are all God, that is, the 'Ultimate reality manifesting as the individual, I'.

'Dvaita' and 'Advaita' are two main branches to Hindu philosophy, each with their own interpretation of 'Brahman' and 'Atman'. The 'Dvaita' or

'dualistic' tradition defines God as essentially different from an individual soul. It states that 'Brahman' is the creator of 'Atman' and that the nearest manifestation of 'Brahman' is ~~marked~~^{man} there, instead of worshipping God by tinkling bells in front of images, it is better to serve the 'Living God' i.e. mankind. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) says that 'the ~~near~~ highest worship of God is service to man.' Similarities can be seen between this and the Abrahamic approach. The 'Advaita' or 'non-dualistic' tradition states that there cannot be two different ultimate realities, hence, 'Brahman' equals 'Atman' (Atman-Brahmasmi). This suggests that the reason why one should be compassionate to all living things is that essentially, we are all one. It replaces the idea of 'service to others' with 'helping oneself' which results in the ego being removed. A third approach known as 'Vishisht-Advaita' or 'qualified non-dualism' teaches that God and the individual soul have a closer link. They are similar but not quite the same, just as the individual soul can be seen as a spark and God, the fire.

I believe that the Advaita Philosophy is the best as it stands well with rationality and resonates with the findings at cutting edge of sciences but for the masses, viewing God as a principle is too abstract and again, they prefer to relate to a God with form and attributes.

Weaknesses and Strengths of Pluralism

One of the greatest misconceptions in Hinduism arises when it is viewed as a polytheistic religion (belief in many Gods) or a henotheistic religion (promoting a hierarchy of Gods) rather than a pluralistic religion.

Religious Pluralism is a uniquely Hindu idea, however, it can cause confusion for the individual as to which pathway is the best. In fact, the best pathway is dependent on the individual's temperament and needs. Then again, as pluralism is an open system, it is open to abuse and for every genuine spiritual teacher, a host of impostors climb the band wagon of Hinduism for their personal benefits, which the gullible masses cannot discern. The whole nation is at the mercy of spiritual dignes as opposed to progress.

For me, the strengths outweigh the weakness as pluralism offers a rational explanation for the existence of God and gives genuine reason why people of different religion can co-exist with people of other or no religion. Hinduism recognises that all religious teachings are leading to the same destination and so it incorporates the Agnostic (as seen in Buddhism) and Atheistic (as seen in Jainism) viewpoints. It also incorporated the Humanist approach which focusses on common human values. Religious Pluralism is important in a multi-faith society with more than one Monotheistic religions (believe in one God) each claiming to have a monopoly on God and keen to convert the rest of the world to their viewpoint. These ~~single~~ singular approaches ^{which} are non-compromising and obtain ambitions to convert others could be the cause of religious conflict. With a pluralistic religion, conversion is ~~seen~~ ^{viewed} as unnecessary as phrases such as 'Religious Tolerance' are not in their teachings. They are replaced ~~with~~ by 'Acceptance of other religions as valid pathways to the same ultimate reality'. This was said by Swami Vivekananda who ~~became~~ became famous after he addressed the first ever 'Parliament of Religions'.

held in Chicago in 1893. He is given ^{the} credit of being the first to start a serious inter-faith dialogue with his first speech focusing on the issues of Social Harmony. He promoted a multi-faith society due to its numerous benefits such as the community being able to take the best from many cultures, bringing colour and variety to life. It allows different religions to be explored from many angles, reviving and refreshing the message of spirituality. By achieving community cohesion successfully in only one society, it can act as a template for the rest of the world. Ancient prayer in the Six Mahaman Stotra ^(Mundaka Upanishad 111 2-8) supports community cohesion as it allows people to reach spiritual progress without the need of a religion. It reads, 'As the different streams having their sources in different ~~at~~ places, all mingle their water in the sea, so O Lord, the different paths men take, through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.'

Examiner Tip

Develop examination techniques that help you to achieve the highest possible level in the time allowed. There is no hard and fast rule provided the question is addressed effectively according to the two assessment objectives.

Example 4

The extract from an essay on multicultural religious society adopted the same style throughout.

Examiner Comment

The argument contained an assumption about Christianity that was not substantiated through a discernible source other than an extrapolation from the Wedding at Cana and the Last Supper to the argument that Christianity is taught to continue to consume alcohol. The meaning of the miracle at the Wedding at Cana is different to the event of the Last Supper.

There are many other factors, one that mainly exists today is businesses. Businesses in multicultural societies may include pubs, butchers, off licenses etc. These businesses are ~~more~~ always included in different religious parts. Places such as pubs are always put in Alcohol consuming religions such as Christianity as it is a requirement to their beliefs. Jesus taught that Alcohol is allowed as he ~~provided~~ provided it in many events such as the wedding feast, The Last Supper, in which he taught Christians to continue with the tradition.

Examiner Tip

All topics have relevant academic scholarship which must be researched alongside religious teachings and religious tradition. This unit demands detailed knowledge of the particular religion or religions that are being studied. Avoid sweeping statements about any religion that might amount to an unfounded perception.

Question 3: Contracting Standpoints on Beliefs About God.

This question attracted a number of excellent answers; candidates who wrote about Judaism knew their material well and included a range of sources in their essays. Candidates were very well informed about the different beliefs about God in Islam, however some candidates did not understand fully the Christian teachings on the existence of God and Christian denominations were mixed up. Some candidates were not very clear about the differences between the contrasting viewpoints on belief about God they were arguing for. Responses about Sunni and Shia Islam were often one sided and unfortunately answers can be one-sided if candidates are not confident about a tradition other than their own. That said, candidates generally appreciated differences in belief and their research conveyed the desire to understand in greater depth a view they did not ascribe to. Candidates, in most cases, were aware that in this type of topic it is important to create a balance of material between the different traditions under investigation.

Candidates focusing on Hinduism produced some excellent responses. Candidates discussed different beliefs about God using the Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita, Vedas and different schools of thought. The better responses to this question included detailed knowledge of different beliefs about the existence of God; in particular Shankaras Advaita Vedanta and critically compared this with Dvaita Vedanta.

Example 5

This is a full response to the question.

Examiner Comment

The candidate's secure knowledge of Hinduism is evident and the question was clearly tackled from the outset. The candidate refers to Hindu beliefs in a proficient manner and detailed knowledge of Hinduism was supported by relevant scholarship throughout.

Chosen question number: Question 1 Question 2 Question 3

There are many different conflicting ideas about God within Hinduism as it is a diverse and complex religion. All of this has a great significance to Hindus today as 'Hinduism' is a many headed animal. The main key themes which show differences between them regarding God would be the development of belief, ~~as~~ Shiva, gender, nirguna and saguna Brahman, and the schools of philosophy. There is no single scripture ^{deity} ~~text~~ or religious teacher that is common to all that can be designated as the core of Hinduism. However,

There are many ways in which the differences are far more important ~~than~~ and significant.

If we look back to the origins of Hinduism we see the belief in polytheism. In the Indus Valley civilisation, evidence of mother goddesses were found in Harappa. Terracotta statues of pregnant female figures with vegetation coming out of their wombs may be suggesting mother earth.

goddess. Ling said that these were 'evidently intended to represent motherhood; so if you venture a child but were unable to do so you would pray to the statues. Another key feature from the IVC that demonstrates is the bull. Toy models of bulls were found in Mohenjo-Daro. They were seen as very sacred, as in the Rig Veda the bull represents power and strength. 'You O Agni, me Indra, the bull & all that exists'. The bull was also the transport of the god Shiva and was seen as the 'door keeper of the temple'. Another key feature would be the yogic hunched pose. 'The hach seated with his legs drawn up to his body, with his hands touching surrounded by ministers. Shiva is portrayed as the great yogin.'

The belief in polytheism then outgrew towards the Vedic period, and the belief in henotheism came into practice. Thus the subtle but important shift of emphasis takes place from polytheism to henotheism. This was the idea that one god was more dominant than others ^{rose to the top of the pantheon}. Then the belief in henotheism came into practice.

which is the impersonal intimate force.

The large number of gods, spirits, demons mentioned in the vedic hymns is an indication of the mythological domination of the Aryan religion. Soon after there was the belief in monotheism. Evident from the Bhagavad Gita, God is seen more personal. An example being Krishna.

There are more conflicting views about God which have great significance within the God Shiva. He is known as 'God of the opposites' Janison. The creator, and destroyer, serene, gentle, erotic and ecstatic. Shiva is unique amongst other gods in that his main representation is aniconic; the phallic symbol of power.

'Shiva is a considerably more complex figure' Janison. He is the third and final member of the trimurti who works to destroy the part of the process of life (nataraja). Shiva is represented as both Male and female which causes possible disputes among different sects within Hinduism.

Another theme which shows the diversity of God was a gender. 'God is both

made an attempt. Hinduism is unique as a world religion as it worships female deities' Jamison. ^{gender} The first originated from the Indus Valley. ^(IV) Evidence of mother goddess statues were found 'so numerous that they seem to have been kept in every home' Barlen. Male deities also originated from the IV, from the jagged horned god who was thyphallic. Shiva comes in many forms one of which is Shiva parashuti. There seems to be no coincidence in same type of relationship between Rudra & Shiva as 'proto-type Shiva' Marshall.

Into the vedic period the belief in mother goddesses were gone 'The Aryans thought neither goddesses were insignificant' Flood. They believed in a pattern of gods who were predominantly male as their society was patrilineal. He believed they were arranged in a hierarchical order which mirrored the Aryan social structure. No heavenly deities were priests, gods of the atmosphere were warriors and gods of the earth were peasants. An example of a heavenly deity would be Varuna. Varuna is

guardian of cosmic law and moral order
he is seen as the 'greatest lawgiver' in the Rigveda.

Not long after this came the Ramayana.

The Ramayana was one of the two great
epics of India and Nepal (the other being
the Mahabharata). The Ramayana includes
Rama and Krishna, two avatars of Vishnu,
who were sent to restore Dharma. Rama
is represented iconographically as
a handsome man bearing his famous bow
Janaka. Krishna is viewed as the 'true
god' Janaka. Both male deities
are worshipped as warriors, husbands, kings
and descendants.

Then came the belief in Shakti. Shakti means
'force' or 'empowerment'. Shakti is the primordial
cosmic energy said to represent the dynamic
forces running through the universe. Shakti is
worshipped in three different forms: one
as an individual goddess, the other as
her divine feminine power and lastly as
the consort of Shiva. She comes in the form
of Uma and Parvati and the consort of
Shiva. 'Only when Shiva is united with Shakti'

does he have the power to create 'flood'. He comes in the form of a fierce goddess as Kali and Durga 'drinks blood and of a human skull' Zaehner. Both Rama and Krishna have consorts whom without them they would not have their power. Some Hindus say that the consorts are as important as the male deities. 'Sita is never considered as one as Rama, even though her picture is next to his in temples' Jamison and some believe that the status of the consort is more elevated. Radha is seen as either higher or equal to Krishna's role.

~~Moreover~~ Having more goddesses allows women to have more significance to life. A role model to look up to as to how to be a good wife and a family member. The female having greater significance. It gives them a personal prospect which can relate to the ultimate reality being both personal and impersonal.

The impersonal aspect of the ultimate reality is called Nirguna Brahman with attributes. The key concept is that Atman is Brahman

and by understanding this though yogis get closer to achieving moksha. 'Atman and Brahman may be the same thing & atman may be a piece of Brahman, nobody is quite sure' opinion. However, towards the end of the Upanishads Brahman became more personal to ordinary men. The personal aspect of the ultimate reality is called Saguna Brahman. ~~Personal~~ Saguna Brahman is the creator, sustainer and controller of the universe. It isn't limited to one form and is worshipped in both male and female forms. An example being the Bhagavad Gita 'the Bhagavad Gita is like the new testament for Hindus' Gandhi. It says that through love (Bhakti) and devotion you can form a relationship with God. This is both Nirguna and Saguna contrasts to the conflicting views about atman and Brahman either being together or separate, with the influence of Maya in the schools of philosophy.

There are six main schools of philosophy all of which are orthodox and were written over several hundred years towards the end of the Upanishads.

as one of the first new schools which shows completely the existence of good would be the Sankhya school of philosophy. Its origins are obscure and could have originally been materialistic. Sankhya is regarded as one of the oldest philosophical systems in Hinduism. It's an atheistic school that teaches dualism. The dualism of Sankhya is not between good and evil or between good and bad but between the unchangeable and constantly changing. Its philosophy revolves around two eternal entities, *purusha* and *prakriti*. They believe that the spirit should not get caught up in matter. Salvation lies in realizing the difference between *purusha* and *prakriti*. Sankhya believes that man's biggest problem is *maya*. *Maya* makes people believe that *prakriti* is real making them ignorant. Therefore they overlook *purusha* which is more important. They sometimes use meditation as a way to cut off matter which can be compared to another school of philosophy, yoga. They use god as a focus point of meditation but the

becomes part of the matter.

Another school that came to compare and show differences which are significant to the existence of God was a little Advaita Vedanta school of Philosophy. It was expanded by Shankara. It is a non-dualistic or monistic 'Pure monism' *saekma*. Shankara did this by analysing the three states of experience. He taught that everything in the world is Maya and that when we see others and Brahman together we call this God. This ~~was~~ ^{was} then opposed by Ramanuja a word said that 'common sense and experience tells us we can see the difference between men', the said that God must ~~be~~ ^{be} the others and Brahman.

In conclusion, the differences about God are more significant as Hinduism is a complex religion. The Age of Hinduism itself has a huge influence. As it is 4500 years old, new questions are being raised and it becomes more complex as it adapts. As time goes on, many

sects and divisions within Hinduism. It means that they are in a sense searching with their different beliefs giving their ideas more of a significance to their lives. An example being Mother Goddesses. It first originated in the Indus Valley which means its age and importance, yet over time into the modern period it outgrew them and came back into practice in the belief in Shakti. It just means that 'Hinduism is a tropical confusion' Wagoner. And that it's a religion that will keep developing and adapting over time, but as Hardi says 'there may be different beliefs within the religion, yet they all lead to the same god'. The essence of Hinduism itself has a large influence on the significance. Hinduism has many ^{religious} books which go from the Sanskrit texts found in the Indus Valley to the Bhagavad Gita which is more recent. We see a development of beliefs which change over time so therefore we can postulate that Hinduism will maintain its complexity and ~~not~~ new ideas and questions will be brought in which will have great significance to all Hindus.

Examiner Tip

There is no substitute for secure knowledge of your topic. Research your topic with the breadth or depth that it requires and make sure that you know the scholars in that field.

Paper Summary

Key points to remember:

- Manage the material to focus on the demands of the question.
- Use appropriate sources and, if possible, include recent scholarship.
- Demonstrate how well you understand the topic by your selection of material.
- Do not forget to comment on your material. Show that you have thought about your research.
- Use your evidence to substantiate your argument.
- Comment on alternative views if you know them.
- Express your viewpoint clearly.
- Practice writing under timed conditions as part of your preparation.
- Do not spend too long writing out your essay plan to the detriment of the essay itself.

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