

Cambridge International AS & A Level

HINDUISM

9487/04

Paper 4 Hinduism in Contemporary Society

October/November 2025

MARK SCHEME

Maximum Mark: 60

Published

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and candidates, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began, which would have considered the acceptability of alternative answers.

Mark schemes should be read in conjunction with the question paper and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

Cambridge International will not enter into discussions about these mark schemes.

Cambridge International is publishing the mark schemes for the October/November 2025 series for most Cambridge IGCSE, Cambridge International A and AS Level components, and some Cambridge O Level components.

This document consists of **14** printed pages.

Generic Marking Principles

These general marking principles must be applied by all examiners when marking candidate answers. They should be applied alongside the specific content of the mark scheme or generic level descriptions for a question. Each question paper and mark scheme will also comply with these marking principles.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 1:

Marks must be awarded in line with:

- the specific content of the mark scheme or the generic level descriptors for the question
- the specific skills defined in the mark scheme or in the generic level descriptors for the question
- the standard of response required by a candidate as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 2:

Marks awarded are always **whole marks** (not half marks, or other fractions).

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 3:

Marks must be awarded **positively**:

- marks are awarded for correct/valid answers, as defined in the mark scheme. However, credit is given for valid answers which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme, referring to your Team Leader as appropriate
- marks are awarded when candidates clearly demonstrate what they know and can do
- marks are not deducted for errors
- marks are not deducted for omissions
- answers should only be judged on the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar when these features are specifically assessed by the question as indicated by the mark scheme. The meaning, however, should be unambiguous.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 4:

Rules must be applied consistently, e.g. in situations where candidates have not followed instructions or in the application of generic level descriptors.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 5:

Marks should be awarded using the full range of marks defined in the mark scheme for the question (however; the use of the full mark range may be limited according to the quality of the candidate responses seen).

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 6:

Marks awarded are based solely on the requirements as defined in the mark scheme. Marks should not be awarded with grade thresholds or grade descriptors in mind.

Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
N/A	Highlighting areas of text
N/A	Allows comments to be entered in speech bubbles on the candidate response.
N/A	Allows comments to be entered at the bottom of the RM marking window and then displayed when the associated question item is navigated to.
L1	Level one
L2	Level two
L3	Level three
L4	Level four
L5	Level five
SEEN	Indicates that the point has been noted, but no credit has been given.
EVAL	Evaluation

Generic Levels of response descriptions

These level descriptors address Assessment Objectives (AOs) 1 and 2 and should be used in conjunction with the indicative content for each question in the mark scheme.

Assessment Objectives

AO1: Knowledge and understanding

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of teachings, beliefs and practices, including relevance for individual Hindus and communities.

AO2: Analysis and evaluation

Analyse, evaluate and discuss evidence, points of view and issues in Hinduism.

Generic marking principles

- (a) Examiners should use the performance summary statements at the top of the descriptors to help to identify a level which matches the candidate's response. However, the final decision on the band and the mark within the band should be made on the basis of **all** the descriptors in the level and not primarily using the performance summary statement.
- (b) Examiners should start at the lowest level, if the answer meets all the criteria they should then move to the next level and so on. The Examiner should repeat this process until there is a match between the overall answer and the level descriptor. Examiners should use a best-fit approach when deciding upon the level, it is possible for a different level to be chosen for each AO.
- (c) If the Examiner identifies all aspects of the level descriptor within the answer, then the highest mark for the level should be given. Examiners should also make reference to the indicative content when deciding on the mark within a level to ensure that there is sufficient relevant content evident within the answer for the level and mark. Examiners should be prepared to credit material in answers which is not contained in the indicative content.
- (d) The Examiner may need to make a judgement within a level or between two or more level statements. Once a 'best-fit' level statement has been identified, use the following guidance to decide on a specific mark:
 - Where the candidate's work **convincingly** meets the level statement, you should award the highest mark.
 - Where the candidate's work **adequately** meets the level statement, you should award the most appropriate mark in the middle of the range.
 - Where the candidate's work **just** meets the level statement, you should award the lowest mark.

Section A AO1 12 mark questions
Section B Essay Marking grid AO1

Level	AO1 Knowledge and understanding	Marks
Level 4	<p>Accurate knowledge with good understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a range of detailed, accurate and relevant knowledge. • Demonstrates understanding through a well-developed response. • Fully addresses the question. • Good understanding of the wider context, if relevant. 	10–12
Level 3	<p>Mostly accurate knowledge with some understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a range of mostly accurate and relevant knowledge. • Demonstrates understanding through a developed response. • Addresses most aspects of the question. • Some engagement with the wider context, if relevant. 	7–9
Level 2	<p>Partially accurate knowledge with limited understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a range of knowledge which may be partially accurate. • Demonstrates limited understanding through a partially developed response. • Addresses some aspects of the question. • Attempts to engage with the wider context, if relevant. 	4–6
Level 1	<p>Basic knowledge and basic understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies a limited range of knowledge which may not be accurate. • Demonstrates basic understanding through a limited response. • Response is relevant to the topic but does not directly address the question. • Little or no reference to the wider context, if relevant. 	1–3
Level 0	No relevant material to credit.	0

Section A AO2 18 mark questions**Section B Essay Marking grid AO2**

Level	AO2 Analysis and evaluation	Marks
Level 5	<p>Thorough discussion supported with evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyses the importance and/or strength of different arguments/points of view. Uses accurate evidence to support a well-structured discussion. Coherent conclusion to the question which evaluates knowledge and points of view and assesses alternative conclusions. 	16–18
Level 4	<p>Coherent discussion supported with evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discusses different arguments/points of view in some detail. Uses accurate evidence to support a structured discussion. Coherent conclusion to the question which evaluates knowledge and points of view. 	12–15
Level 3	<p>Clear discussion with some support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognises different arguments/points of view and discusses at least one in some detail. Uses some evidence to support discussion. Clear conclusion to the question which is linked to a range of knowledge and points of view. 	8–11
Level 2	<p>Attempts a discussion with limited support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outlines one or more argument/point of view. Uses supporting evidence for one or more relevant point. The support may not be wholly relevant or accurate. Attempts a conclusion to the question which is linked to knowledge and/or a point of view. 	4–7
Level 1	<p>Basic response with a point of view</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> States a point of view. Little or no supporting evidence. May attempt a basic conclusion, which may not directly address the question. 	1–3
Level 0	No relevant material to credit.	0

Question	Answer	Marks
1(a)	<p>Explain why the payment of dowries causes concern about women’s rights.</p> <p>AO1 – Knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>Responses will be marked according to the 12 mark level descriptors (AO1).</p> <p>Candidates might refer to some of the following:</p> <p>Dowry, meaning the payment of money or goods by the family of a bride to the family of the groom, has been a tradition in many societies across the world, including Hindu societies and remains an ongoing concern for people seeking to protect women’s rights. Dowries are also often associated with arranged marriages, which can also be of concern in the field of women’s rights. Not every practice which comes to be associated with a religion has been clearly supported by religious authorities throughout the history of that religion, but where practitioners regard something as a religious requirement, they are more likely to object to attempts to remove or change it.</p> <p>Dowries can be paid in any form of property that has value. Dowry is distinct from wedding presents in both common practice and legal understanding. This is because a dowry is directly connected to the consent of the groom and his family to the marriage. Some traditions gift the money to the bride herself, to ensure that she has property of her own if the marriage fails in some way; this form is perhaps less likely to be considered problematic. Of greater concern is paying the groom or his family. This practice can cause significant financial hardship to the bride’s family, especially if they have multiple daughters to consider, and this is a contributing factor to a cultural preference for sons and possibly also to the fact that more abortions are sought where the foetus is known to be female.</p> <p>In some places there are prohibitions on women holding property in their own right, meaning the dowry cannot be paid directly to her in the first instance or used by her if the marriage ends. Hindu sources show some ambiguity around this issue: there are scriptural sources that support the rights of women to own and manage property but there are others which reject it. One example is the traditional restriction of widow’s rights which means she cannot live independently after the death of her husband. It might be noted that contemporary practices are not necessarily the same as historical ones and even traditions which can be traced to fairly recent origins might not be regarded as either new or changeable by societies which practice them.</p>	12

Question	Answer	Marks
1(a)	<p>Dowry is illegal in many countries, including India, because it is linked to a range of crimes against women. This can include the threat of violence against a new bride, after the wedding is complete, if more dowry is not forthcoming. Women being murdered or driven to suicide by abuse relating to their dowry is common enough that it has a name in the Indian legal system: dowry death. Emotional and physical abuse and ‘abatement to suicide’ are also crimes with strong links to dowry and the desire by the husband’s family to retain a dowry seems likely to have been a factor in encouraging or forcing widows to commit sati. There is also dowry fraud, where a potential groom remains apparently willing to marry until he has the dowry and then disappears.</p> <p>An additional ethical implication of the concept of dowry is that it suggests a woman has no value in her own person and will be a burden upon another family when she joins it.</p>	
1(b)	<p>‘Marriage places equal expectations on men and women in traditional Hinduism.’ Discuss.</p> <p>AO2 – Analysis and evaluation.</p> <p>Responses will be marked according to the 18 mark level descriptors (AO2).</p> <p>Candidates might refer to some of the following:</p> <p>Expectations in relation to marriage are connected with dharma. For most Hindus marriage is a part of their personal dharma (svadharma) because it marks the start of the householder (grihastha) ashrama. Traditionally the ashramas apply only to men, suggesting that expectations are different for men and women from the very outset of this stage of life – a woman takes her status as a householder from her husband and, when he becomes a vanaprastha, she should go to the forest with him. However, he is meant to have her consent if she is still alive at the time he wishes to renounce the world entirely and become a sannyasa.</p> <p>Rama and Sita are often said to depict the ideal couple, with Ram the epitome of male dharma and Sita that of female. Probably the best-known account of women’s dharma (sthriddharma) is found in the Manusmriti, which sets out explicit principles and rules: women can be daughters, wives and widows, and each such role makes a man responsible for her. There is no sanctioned role for a woman independent of a man in the Manusmriti.</p> <p>A wife is the most important of the various roles permitted to women. Her dharma is, essentially, helping her husband to pursue his dharma. She should serve him as devotedly as she would serve a god, even if he is unable or unwilling to care for her in return, and she should do so without complaint. A wife’s devotion should continue even after his death, as she remains in permanent mourning. Inequality of expectation would appear to be built into this, since there are no comparable requirements upon a husband. The practice of sati can also be linked to different expectations upon husbands and wives.</p>	18

Question	Answer	Marks
1(b)	<p>A good wife is expected to have children, ideally sons and she has the main responsibility for their upbringing. She is also responsible for the overall management of their shared household. Purity, virtue, beauty, grace and a desire to serve are the qualities an ideal woman should display, as these are the qualities which will please and best serve her husband. They are also considered by many to be the virtues towards which women are naturally inclined. As such it should be less burdensome for them to strive to perfect these than if they were to try to live according to the principles of male dharma. This kind of thinking might form the basis of an 'equal but different' view of the expectation involved in a Hindu marriage. Since men have the greater level of overall responsibility the argument can be made that women's roles are limited to ensure them an easy and peaceful existence; women are protected and cared for because they are of higher status than men.</p> <p>Dharma can be used to describe the inherent or intrinsic nature of something, such as the sweetness of sugar. Since, for many Hindus, the essential natures of men and women are different so too is their dharma although there is a shared expectation that a person will strive to fulfil their dharma. but, because human beings are self-aware and can make choices, the idea of dharma extends to the appropriateness of those choices. Some core ethical principles are considered universally applicable by most Hindus, including the duty to discriminate between right and wrong and, by extension, to determine and follow one's personal dharma in any given situation.</p>	

Question	Answer	Marks
2(a)	<p>Explain what the International society for Krishna consciousness teaches about how moksha is reached.</p> <p>AO1 – Knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>Responses will be marked according to the 12 mark level descriptors (AO1).</p> <p>Candidates might refer to some of the following:</p> <p>The International society for Krishna consciousness (ISKCON) is centred around belief in Krishna as the Supreme Godhead. It therefore falls within the broad category of Vaishnava Hindu traditions and it is the primary form of Gaudiya Vaisnavism known outside India. It emphasises the bhakti marga (path of devotion) as the path to moksha. As with other schools ISKCON understands moksha as an end to the cycle of rebirth; in ISKCON teachings this means an eternity in the realm of Krishna (Vishnu). The precise relationship between the divine and the individual soul (jiva) is, according to the philosophy upon which Swami Prabhupada based his teachings, one of 'inconceivable oneness and difference'. This is in effect the Vishistadvaita view of jivas as made of the same substance as Brahman but being separate, individual entities. These teachings are Swami Prabhupada's interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita, which he regarded as the gateway to moksha.</p>	12

Question	Answer	Marks
2(a)	<p>While moksha is one of the purusharthas and often considered the ultimate aim of life for many devotees of ISKCON this is considered a secondary or even a selfish goal; they recognise a fifth aim of life as the ultimate one which is prema or love of God. This is arguably the essence of all bhakti practice, with every action being focused entirely on serving and pleasing God. This should not be viewed as a process of earning moksha, even though moksha may ultimately be the reward for it.</p> <p>Acts of religious worship such as kirtan, japa and puja are a part of bhakti in ISKCON, but so is ethical behaviour. This is structured around four ‘regulative principles’ which are specific prohibitions, based on what are considered to be constitutive of dharma, austerity, cleanliness, truthfulness and compassion.</p> <p>The specific regulative principles are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No intoxication: this includes both alcohol and drugs. These are to be avoided because they cloud the mind and make it harder to focus on or remember God. This is connected to the virtue of austerity. Intoxicants are also physically addictive and therefore could be seen as creating attachment to the physical world and/or the body. • No meat eating: this is because animals also possess jivas and killing them is an unnecessary act of violence and a failure of compassion. • No gambling: this is related to truthfulness in the sense that by gambling one is trying to get something for nothing, rather than through honest effort. • No illicit sex: this is because sex purely for pleasure encourages attachment to the material body and, through such identification, prevents one achieving higher levels of consciousness. It can also be seen as related to cleanliness since there are acceptable or pure forms of sex, within marriage and/or for procreation. <p>These four prohibitions are important because they apply a practice of moral restraint to things which might otherwise become perceived as needs. This enables someone to develop a deeper understanding of the jiva’s dependence upon God and to detach themselves from the material world and from ego – all things which ensure the continuance of the cycle of samsara. Fundamentally, though it is the grace of God which ultimately liberates the jiva, not human effort.</p>	

Question	Answer	Marks
2(b)	<p>Evaluate the claim that the International society for Krishna consciousness is <u>not</u> just a new form of Hinduism.</p> <p>AO2 – Analysis and evaluation.</p> <p>Responses will be marked according to the 18 mark level descriptors (AO2).</p> <p>Candidates might refer to some of the following:</p> <p>The International society for Krishna consciousness (ISKCON) describes itself as a form of Hinduism within the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the founder of this particular form of bhakti, lived in the late fifteenth century of the Common Era. It can certainly be argued that a six-century old tradition cannot be considered ‘new’ as, in terms of human experience, it is an extremely long time. However, it is also the case that the earliest forms of Hinduism are significantly older – even the most conservative dates put the origins of the Rig Veda around a thousand years before the Common Era - and so, in terms of the history of the entire religion, it is closer to new than old.</p> <p>ISKCON is undoubtedly related to this bhakti movement, but the organisation itself has a clear point of origin: in 1966, New York City. Swami Prabhupada founded the organisation with the specific intention of spreading bhakti more widely. His translation of the Bhagavad Gita, first published in 1968, is the most important scripture of the movement and sometimes handed out for free as a means of proselytisation. Proselytising is uncommon across Hindu traditions and its importance within ISKCON potentially supports the view that it is a new or entirely different form of the religion, as does the fact that the organisation welcomes non-Hindus.</p> <p>ISKCON teaches that Hinduism is Sanatana (eternal) dharma, and that other religious traditions simply worship different forms of Krishna. While the term Santana dharma is found in some Sanskrit texts (although it is not in the Vedas) it’s usage in this way is a modern (nineteenth century) one. It is sometimes linked to the work of social reformers seeking to respond to social ills connected with Hinduism and sometimes to nationalism and the need for a name for the religion that originated in Sanskrit rather than a non-native language. Either explanation supports the idea that this is a newer form of the religion. Similarly, the term ‘Krishna consciousness’ is a new term in the context of Hinduism and one arguably rooted in Western, or non-Hindu, understandings of the concept of consciousness and its relationship to minds and bodies.</p> <p>It might also be noted that, since Hinduism is a religion which originated in India and has significant connections with the geography of that region, the simple presence of the term ‘international’ implies a degree of novelty and/or a new approach.</p>	18

Question	Answer	Marks
3	<p>Asses the claim that M K Gandhi solved the social problems caused by the ‘caste’ system.</p> <p>AO1 - Knowledge and understanding AO2 - Analysis and evaluation</p> <p>Responses will be marked according to the level descriptors.</p> <p>Candidates might refer to some of the following:</p> <p>The ‘caste’ system is the generic name given to the organisation of society into castes, or classes. It is usually understood to be a hierarchical system with membership of a high caste signifying greater status and privilege than lower caste. India is often used as an example of such a system but the view that the Hindu varnas are the basis of the Indian caste system is contested: for many Hindus caste is a corruption of the idea of varna rather than an expression of it. The major ethical concern associated with the caste system is discrimination, oppression and even persecution of those individuals perceived as being of lower caste. Over time, Indian society developed an underclass of people who are ‘avarna’ (without varna), considered to be ritually unclean and therefore literally ‘untouchable’ by people of higher caste.</p> <p>MK Gandhi believed in the varna system, as outlined in the Vedas but he opposed untouchability, regarding it as non-Hindu and as a political tool used by India’s British rulers to keep the Hindu community divided. Gandhi referred to the groups who were then called untouchables as ‘harijans’ meaning ‘children of God’. He founded Harijan Sevak Sangh, (originally called the All India Anti-Untouchability League) to campaign for the end of untouchability. It built schools and hostels, held inter-caste dining events, performed inter-caste marriages and helped untouchable communities access public places. The organisation still exists today, which certainly implies that its work is not yet complete.</p> <p>Gandhi probably intended to find a neutral alternative to terms which were heavily stigmatised. However, from the very start of his campaign many dalits felt that Gandhi’s attitude towards their communities was paternalistic and patronising. Some argued that his campaigns actually undermined their attempts to speak on their own behalf. Dr Ambedkar, among others, felt that ‘harijans’ was a term that served to obscure the true level of oppression to which dalits – the name they chose for themselves - were subject. It might also be argued that the measures Gandhi promoted were responses to the symptoms of caste discrimination, such as poverty, malnutrition and lack of education, rather than attempts to alter the system which caused those problems.</p>	30

Question	Answer	Marks
3	<p>Success can be measured in different ways; the laws of modern India do outlaw caste-based discrimination and there are various forms of positive discrimination in place to address historic inequities. How influential Gandhi's ideas and values were on the constitution is a matter of debate: certainly, it does not wholly reflect his ideas about what Indian society should be like. It does both promote equality and protect diversity, albeit not necessarily in the ways Gandhi would have chosen. His term 'harijan' is not now in common usage, and its use in official documentation has been banned by a number of states in India.</p> <p>It is also the case that issues relating to 'caste', and particularly the ongoing oppression of dalits, remain a concern with poverty, lack of education, exploitation and being victims of crime, including violent crime, remaining strongly correlated with 'caste' backgrounds. Outside the realm of the law, issues of negative social attitudes remain even when they are not acted upon in overtly criminal ways – for example, inter-caste marriage is highly stigmatised. The simple fact that courts are still having to pronounce on such matters argues against the contention that meaningful reform has been achieved by anyone, including Gandhi.</p>	

Question	Answer	Marks
4	<p>'It is necessary to live within a Hindu community to celebrate the festivals properly.' Discuss.</p> <p>AO1 - Knowledge and understanding AO2 - Analysis and evaluation</p> <p>Responses will be marked according to the level descriptors.</p> <p>Candidates might refer to some of the following:</p> <p>Hinduism is an extremely diverse religion which includes many different paths and forms of practice. Hindu practices may be wholly personal, family focussed or involving a wider Hindu community, so for an individual Hindu the extent to which communal aspects are an important part of their religion is likely to vary with their particular path and situation. Therefore, some Hindus might consider themselves able to fully celebrate festivals without a Hindu community around them and others might not. Hinduism has many different forms, and there is no single 'right' way to practise it.</p> <p>Hinduism originated in India and India has many of the most important sites of pilgrimage, which might also be the focus of festivals. It is also home to the majority of the world's Hindus. Large festivals are often spectacular and colourful, and Hindus might travel to take part in them but that does not mean it is impossible to celebrate them on a smaller, or even an individual scale. These large festivals are also likely to be costly, which would necessitate support on a communal and possibly governmental level. Similarly, large scale processions might require permission to close roads to traffic and this kind of consideration also implies a need for communal support if protests about it are to be avoided.</p>	30

Question	Answer	Marks
4	<p>Festivals are, generally, events which bring communities together. People are able to celebrate shared beliefs, values and traditions and connect with the history of their religion. But, even on a smaller scale, festivals have benefits, allowing for an escape from day-to-day routines and encouraging reflection on spiritual matters. Not living within a Hindu community means that some aspects of the festival might be harder to achieve or not possible at all, but that does not mean that the event can't be celebrated. It might also be noted that, increasingly, popular festivals such as Divali are marked in non-Hindu countries and offer Hindus opportunities to teach others about their religion while also celebrating.</p> <p>The timing of festivals is determined by a lunar calendar and the religious requirements of observing them might include the need for a priest and /or specific materials for specific forms of worship. Access to these things is arguably easier for those people living within a Hindu community, although modern forms of communication may make things like knowing the precise time the festival should start easier than it used to be for Hindus living apart from Hindu communities. Virtual puja and virtual celebrations are also increasingly available for Hindus to engage with their religion without being physically present in a Hindu community. The narration of important stories and education about the religion is an important aspect of festivals which these virtual forms can easily contribute.</p> <p>Living within a community with shared values and traditions provides a sense of belonging and emotional security that may be absent for people living as minorities. However, the diversity of Hinduism does mean that not every festival will be equally important to every Hindu. It is entirely possible to be a representative of a minority tradition even within a predominantly Hindu community and therefore communal celebration of every festival can never be a certainty.</p>	