

ISLAMIC RELIGION AND CULTURE

Paper 2056/01

Paper 1

General Comments

The standard of answers given by candidates in this paper has risen each year. There were some excellent performances where the candidates achieved high marks.

Teachers are advised to encourage candidates to read questions thoroughly, think carefully as to what is being asked before beginning to write. Generally speaking part **(a)** of a question is factual. Some part **(a)** questions were subdivided into i. and ii. It was noticed that candidates sometimes only answered one or the other when both were to be answered. Part **(b)** of a question is evaluative and needs to be thought through.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

This is always a popular question.

- (a)** It is important that candidates can distinguish between social, religious and economic influences on Arabia in the pre-Islamic period. Good answers on social conditions described the chivalric code of the Arabs which gave meaning to their lives, and the protection given to weaker members of the tribe. Answers that were overly descriptive of the status of women, drinking, gambling and suggested there was nothing good in the social system of those times did not achieve many marks.
- (b)** Good answers here were by candidates who had the knowledge and understanding of part **(a)**. During the early years of Islam in Mecca social changes were not possible. These changes were not sudden as some answers seemed to suggest but became a part of Muslim life slowly, preceded by revelations in Medina when the Prophet (pbuh) migrated there. He incorporated and adapted good aspects of the Arab way of life such as loyalty and generosity, and radically changed the attitude towards women.

Question 2

On the whole this was well answered

- (a)** Candidates gave good answers in both parts of this question. There were some thoughtful answers on the incidents involving both men. It was generally noticed that candidates knew more about Bahira than about Waraqah bin Nawfal.
- (b)** Better answers here were able to reflect on some aspects of the Prophet's (pbuh) early life and the influences it had on his character. They mentioned him being an orphan which made him sympathetic towards the destitute in Meccan society especially women and children, and the importance of family ties. Some excellent answers mentioned how he valued peace having witnessed the wars of Fijar and inter-tribal feuding. Weak answers mentioned incidents without linking them to how they may have influenced his character. The incident of replacing the Black Stone and the first revelation are not regarded as having happened during the Prophet's (pbuh) early life.

Question 3

This was a popular question though part **(a)** was better answered than part **(b)**.

- (a)** Many candidates answered this question confidently mentioning the Prophet (pbuh) waiting for the command to come from God before he migrated. Weaker answers went to great lengths about the time the Prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr spent in the cave and their arrival in Medina rather than what occurred in Mecca that resulted in them leaving.
- (b)** Some quite long answers missed the point of what was being asked. Successful candidates contrasted the Prophet's (pbuh) life in Mecca and the later years in Medina. Better answers suggested the message of Islam went against everything the Meccans believed in. The Prophet (pbuh) was one of them and the Meccans knew him well. His message was conveyed peacefully but the Meccans needed time to absorb it. Although the Prophet (pbuh) had clan protection in Mecca other poor Muslim converts did not which led to many migrations. The people of Medina had heard of the Prophet (pbuh), met him, became Muslim and invited him to their city to arbitrate, hoping he would put an end to all their inter-tribal feuding. Good candidates also wrote about the treaties he made in Medina, the roles and responsibilities that were given to everyone especially the freedom to practice their religion in peace. Weaker candidates suggested it was easy for the Prophet (pbuh) in Medina because everyone there was a Muslim and 'civilized'. They did not write about the three Jewish tribes residing there and why the Prophet (pbuh) was invited to Yathrib in the first place.

Question 4

This was a popular question. It was important to read the question properly.

- (a)** The question asked for the reasons for the battle of Uhud not what happened in the battle itself. Good answers mentioned the Meccans wanting revenge for their defeat at Badr and the taunts of their women, the growing power of the Muslims in Medina and the episode in the market because of which the tribe of Qaynuqa were expelled. These reasons plus the Prophet's (pbuh) growing importance in the region made the Quraish want to overcome the Muslims once and for all. Weak answers described the battle in detail for which they achieved only a few marks.
- (b)** This part was better answered than **(a)**. Candidates said that though this was a military defeat many positive lessons were learnt by the Muslims, such as being more disciplined and having greater faith. The Prophet (pbuh) himself had to rebuild the prestige of the Muslims amongst the desert tribes of the region.

Question 5

Another popular question though part **(b)** was better answered than part **(a)**.

- (a)** Candidates who answered this well were able to describe accurately how Abu Bakr and Umar became caliphs. Others had some knowledge of the difficult situation after the Prophet (pbuh) died and the Muslim community had different ideas about who should become Caliph so could answer i. in some detail. Weaker candidates had very little to say for ii. When Abu Bakr became ill he suggested Umar's name to the other companions. After their initial misgivings about his stern character they were reassured by Abu Bakr that Umar would change once he held office. Umar's speech on taking over reassured everyone that Abu Bakr's choice was correct.
- (b)** On the whole this part was well answered. Most answers gave examples of the friendship and special relationship between the Prophet (pbuh) and Abu Bakr as well as their relationship through marriage. Good answers mentioned Abu Bakr was asked by the Prophet (pbuh) to lead the first *Hajj*, and to lead the prayers during the Prophet's (pbuh) illness.

Question 6

Many of the candidates who answered this question gave a better answer for part **(b)** than part **(a)**.

- (a)** Good answers here looked at the overall 'common characteristics' and mentioned points such as they had a 'perfect model' to follow in the Prophet (pbuh) and how he had lived his life and his interactions with those around him and others. The Caliphs treated their Caliphate as a 'trust',

were good administrators, promoting a healthy pattern of democracy with justice and guaranteed the rights of all their citizens, even non-Muslims. Some candidates gave vague answers giving examples of good administration from the lives of one or two of the Caliphs rather than discuss their common characteristics.

- (b) There were some good answers where candidates were able to assess the lessons Muslim rulers of today might learn from the time of the Caliphs and put them into practice. There were perceptive comments about the need to resist the temptations of corruption and to administer justice. Weak answers missed the instruction to write about any 'two aspects' and repeated what they had written in part (a).

Question 7

This was attempted by many candidates though answers were generally limited in content. Part (a) was better answered than part (b).

- (a) Good candidates were able to focus on the importance of Zaid bin Thabit in the collection of the Qur'an. He was a scribe of the Prophet (pbuh). On being asked to do this by Abu Bakr, Zaid was hesitant at first and later agreed. He worked with Umar and others collecting written suras which were attested by two witnesses. They also mentioned verses were compared with oral recitations for accuracy. Some answers strayed into detailed accounts of the involvement of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman with only a brief mention of the role played by Zaid bin Thabit.
- (b) The word 'reciting' did not seem to be fully understood by many candidates. Good answers spoke of early Arabs being used to memorising their history handed down verbally through generations. This skill became a valuable tool and developed into 'tajweed', the rules used in the recitation of the Qur'an for correct pronunciation. Weaker candidates thought the question was about 'reading' rather than 'reciting' and therefore wrote about what can be learned from 'reading' the Qur'an rather than the tradition of recitation.

Question 8

On the whole candidates answered this question confidently and accurately. Responses in part (b) were better than part (a).

- (a) Details of Sura Kauthar were known by most candidates who went on to say this was revealed to console and reassure the Prophet (pbuh) that the pagan Meccans would be forgotten in time, not him. Meanwhile he was commanded by God to pray and sacrifice. Candidates who explained what 'Kauthar' meant did well, as did those who said this Sura consoles all sincere Muslims.
- (b) Most candidates wrote good answers to this question. The answers that explained the importance of each 'ayat' of the Sura (not just its translation) did better. They mentioned this Sura as being the essence of Islam and stated the other names by which it is known.

Question 9

Stories from the Qur'an are generally well known and this one on Prophet Nuh was no exception. Part (a) was better answered than part (b).

- (a) Details from the life of Prophet Nuh were well known by most candidates. Good answers mentioned Nuh telling people to worship God but that they would not listen to him, not even his wife and son. They also remembered Nuh's prayer when he embarked on the ark which is still used by Muslims going on a journey.
- (b) Candidates need to think deeply of this aspect of the question. Weak answers said there was just one lesson that could be learnt from this story, that God destroyed the people who did not believe Nuh. Better candidates mentioned Nuh's message being the same as that which all prophets have brought i.e. belief in One God. Other lessons to be learnt which candidates could have written were of following God's guidance, the lesson of patience, being good to people regardless of how they behave, belief in God totally and know God deals with people in His own way and time.

Question 10

This was a very popular question which was attempted by almost all candidates.

- (a) There were many good responses here giving details of what the routine of a day is during the month of Ramadan. Some weak answers suggested doing nothing else except praying/reading the Qur'an which would be favourable in God's sight. They wrote vaguely about the importance of fasting rather than a description of the daily features.
- (b) Answers to this were generally good. Some candidates began well but digressed writing about the benefits of fasting rather than explaining and analysing the importance of Ramadan. Those who did well said fasting during this month meant following one of the Pillars of Islam hence obligatory. It is a special month of asking forgiveness from God, being thankful for His blessings, being patient, being aware of those who are less fortunate, giving *zakat*, uniting as a community in sharing food and praying together.

Question 11

Part (a) had many excellent responses.

- (a) Candidates mentioned that the first pillar has two parts, '*tawhid*' and '*risalah*' and were able to describe what each part means to Muslims. They also said it was an active statement repeated in prayer by Muslims many times each day and in the *adhan*. Some answers wrongly suggested the Prophet (pbuh) was the 'last' messenger as part of this Declaration.
- (b) This part of the question was not done so well. Prayer and fasting were chosen by many. To do well candidates needed to put this in the context of the importance for Muslims as the question asked. Better answers were the ones that were able to do so.

Question 12

Those who attempted this question demonstrated a fair amount of knowledge in both part (a) and part (b).

- (a) Good answers spoke about the *isnad* and *matn* of any Hadith and the criteria followed rigorously to authenticate them. The techniques used were strict and scholarly with many categories covering both *isnad* and *matn* which had to be agreed upon. Only then could a Hadith be classified as '*sahih*'.
- (b) Weak answers struggled to think of reasons why the Prophet's (pbuh) Hadith and his actions are important for Muslims. Good answers mentioned the Prophet's (pbuh) Hadith and *sunnah* being second in importance for Muslims as it has many details of how Muslims should conduct their lives which are only mentioned in the Qur'an e.g. details of *salat*, *Hajj*, *zakat* and many others. The Qur'an itself tells Muslims to obey the Prophet (pbuh).