

HINDUISM

Paper 8058/01

Paper 1

General comments

Performance this year was steady in comparison with previous years. Examiners' concerns were those which have been voiced in these reports year on year:

- Although there were some good and a few very good responses, answers were in the main a 'standardised product', with candidates from the majority of Centres repeating word for word, paragraph for paragraph, some class notes or similar material, so that it was difficult to achieve any meaningful differentiation. It is disappointing that so many candidates do not feel challenged, or do not have the confidence to answer the question set. Often they ignored it completely or referred to it only in a final paragraph.
- A related concern was the lack of any perceptible research or independent reading, on the evidence of the responses offered. In the case of **Question 2** (see below) few candidates seemed even to have had sight of the prescribed text, without which it was impossible for them even to understand the question. It is imperative that Centres provide candidates with full information on every Section of the syllabus and suggest how they can explore each topic for themselves by using libraries, news items and the Internet.
- Selection of material was rather better than in the past, which is encouraging. Some candidates, however, still waste time and energy on long introductions and biographical details where these are not necessary. Examples are given below.
- Unhelpful clichés are slowly disappearing, it was pleasing to note. There were fewer instances of 'clarion call' and 'pristine purity' than in previous years, though some candidates still have to note every point as 'crystal clear'. It would now raise Examiners' spirits if 'utter darkness' could be replaced by something less emotive and, in historical terms, more precise.
- Lastly, it shocked all of the Examiners to discover that the instruction to enter the numbers of questions attempted (which now clearly appears on the front sheet of the Paper) was **ignored by more than 90% of the candidates**. Centres must ensure that candidates are trained to read, understand and act upon all the instructions on the front sheet at the beginning of the examination. Invigilators must be made aware of their responsibility to see that candidates **complete the grid** with their question numbers before handing in their scripts.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

There were some excellent answers here but also many that were very basic. Most candidates had some general ideas about Agni as one of the Vedic gods, but there was little evidence that many had read any of the hymns addressed to him. Although the question did not ask for this specifically, the idea of 'the present' was taken up by most candidates, and there was some good understanding of the enduring influence of fire as a symbol in all Hindu ceremonies.

Question 2

With the exception of candidates from a very few Centres, most candidates who chose this question wrote about the Brahmacarya Ashrama (a topic on the syllabus for Paper 2) instead of the Brahmacarya Suktam. In fact most (even if they had confidently identified the Sukta as coming from the Atharva Veda) said that the Sukta was 'the stage of studentship' or a 'set of rules' for candidates, which it is not. Much of what appeared in answers was then, unfortunately, either irrelevant or wrong. The Sukta is a hymn in which the dynamic relationship of the Vedic candidate and his guru is said to please all the gods and engender the creation of everything in the universe. It is not about 'celibate' children doing chores in the forest. Strangely, in the midst of this incorrect material some hints of quotations from the Sukta text did appear - the children had developed long beards and were going about educating the populace. As noted in the General Remarks above, it is disturbing that large numbers of candidates were prepared to write on a text they had never been given to study or had found for themselves.

Question 3

This was well done. Candidates usually showed that they understood the teachings of the Upanishads in some depth. Some have still not been advised that they should not start by giving a general page (or more) on the nature of Upanishads. Unless this is asked for, there are no extra marks for such material. A great improvement on previous years is that only a few candidates spent valuable time in 'telling the story' of Naciketas, material not required by the question.

Section B

Question 4

This question was well tackled by most, though at the weaker end of the scale there was more simple story-telling than analysis. It was perfectly in order for candidates to point to examples of *adharma* as well as *dharma* in the course of the discussion.

Question 5

The main concepts were well understood, but in some cases the discussion of Arjuna's dilemmas was very general. There could have been closer attention to the teaching and examples in Bhagavad Gita Book 2 on the need to develop a 'fixed' mind undisturbed by external factors.

Question 6

There was a wealth of possible material here, which good candidates realised. Too many, however, depended on story-telling alone. Even the tale of Dasharatha was often poorly remembered (e.g. 'he shot a bird', 'he thought he heard a deer'). Study of these epics involves close attention to the text. In this case the candidate only needed to **refer** to the story, however. The topic was the understanding within it of the 'law' of karma. 'As one sows . . .' was quoted by almost everyone, and is appropriate enough. Some strange 'science' crept in as well, however. How 'reactions' to moral actions can be described as 'equal' needs some explanation. Common sense indicates that a trivial or careless action's repercussions can often have far-reaching effects, never anticipated by the doer. And how can the result be 'opposite', if it is claimed that bad actions have bad consequences, not good?

Section C

Question 7

Asked to discuss 'movements', candidates should at least have been able to write in general about the Alvars and similar groups. Reference to 'saint-poets' was made by some, and good understanding of bhakti was shown by those who discussed only Surdas and Tulsidas - but they were poets, not 'movements'.

Question 8

Although most candidates had knowledge about Tulsidas, there were far too many pre-learned 'all-answers', obviously learned and produced in the examination room without any thought given to the question itself. This question was about Tulsidas's view, devotion to Rama meant following the perfect example, that specific rules were not necessary. Biographical details about the poet's early life were not asked for and should not have been included. Good candidates did have some ideas, however, as to why he was and is considered a 'moral teacher'.

Question 9

Again this should have been a straightforward question about the appeal in Surdas's poetry of the child Krishna and the young man Krishna's amorous adventures. The majority of answers, however, followed one unchanging pattern, including biographical details and Surdas's modes of bhakti. Only the better candidates showed that they had read some of the poetry and could put an answer together.

Section D

Question 10

Possibly because biographical material was integral to the question and the answer, response here was usually good or very good. Candidates showed a sensitive appreciation of the character of Ramakrishna and his ecstatic experiences, occasionally of his sayings. Only a few, however, went on actually to attempt an answer to the question of his continuing popularity. Surprisingly all but a handful missed the opportunity of mentioning the Ramakrishna Mission, or even Swami Vivekananda, among the many for whom Ramakrishna had practically divine status.

Question 11

Most of the very few who tackled this question did so only in the most general of terms. Some thought it was a question about social reform. This is strange, in that acceptance of the concept of Hinduism as a 'world religion', by Hindus and non-Hindus alike, was what set in motion the academic study worldwide of what had been confined only to Hindu philosophers in past ages. Incidentally it opened the doors in public education systems to exactly the kind of study of 'sanatana dharma' which these candidates had been undertaking.

Question 12

The popularity of Dayananda over Gandhi was about 95% to 5%. The quality of answers on Dayananda was also much better. Although some candidates were intent on writing all they knew about him, most of the answers were fairly well presented. Selection is really important in such answers: the candidates who spent time and effort on his early life or religious teaching did not get marks for that, since the question was about social reforms. His religious views did have a strong bearing on his attempts at social reform, but the candidate has to show how and why this is so. Apart from poor selection of material, the greatest weakness was the uninformed sweeping statement that e.g. Gandhi or Dayananda 'banned' or 'eradicated' some social evil or gave women 'equal rights'. More realistic candidates were careful to say that although the influence of these reformers was great, much remains to be done for the poor and exploited.