



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Religious Studies

RST3G

(Specification 2060)

**Unit 3G World Religions 1: Buddhism
Hinduism
Sikhism**

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

There was a significant increase in entry this year and the standard of scripts was generally very high; some scripts were excellent and there were very few weak ones. More than two thirds of the candidates were entered for Section A Buddhism with equal numbers taking Hinduism and Sikhism. The questions were accessible to all candidates and gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in meeting Assessment Objective 1 and Assessment Objective 2.

Section A Buddhism

Question 1 *Themes in Mahayana Buddhism*

- 01** This was the most popular question and most candidates demonstrated a very good level of knowledge and understanding of the differences between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism, but were less secure about the similarities.
- 02** In response to 02 candidates needed to recognize which features of these schools of Buddhism are most important and significant in order to effectively evaluate the view that the similarities are more important than the differences.

Question 2 *Aspects of Buddhist philosophy*

- 03** This question on the teaching of sunyata with the teachings of Nagarjuna is quite challenging but some candidates showed a very good grasp of the complex logical arguments which lead to Nagarjuna's assertion that the true nature of any phenomena is emptiness of essence of any kind and thus nibbana and samsara are ultimately the same.
- 04** This part of the question was less well answered and not many explained that these teachings can lead to an attitude of 'egolessness' and a balanced perspective on the vagaries of life even though they may initially appear to have little value and relevance to Buddhists today.

Question 3 *Meditation*

- 05** This question was very well answered by most candidates, who had a detailed and accurate knowledge of both methods of Soto and Rinzai in Zen Buddhism, using the trigger 'examine' to make some comments and comparisons.
- 06** Most candidates also answered this very well, as they were able to argue for the essential role of meditation in Buddhism but also the importance of the role of morality and wisdom.

Question 4 *Buddhist ethics*

- 07** This was a popular question and the better answers fully explored the purpose of ethical living in relation to karma and perfection of human nature as well as the creation of a well balanced and harmonious society and community. Most were able to outline the five moral precepts and the ways in which they are put into practice as well as some reference to recent developments in engaged Buddhism in undertaking social welfare and health projects.
- 08** The answers to 08 were quite variable as some presented rather general answers about the importance of motive but did not refer to Buddhist teachings about right intention and the notion of skilful means.

Section B Hinduism

Question 5 Foundations of Hinduism

No candidates answered this question.

Question 6 *Hindu dharma*

11 This part of the question on Hindu understandings of marriage and family life was generally well answered and higher levels were awarded to those who showed accurate and detailed knowledge of both the practical and spiritual aspects of marriage and family life. The former relates to the extended family and system of arranged marriages and the latter the fulfillment of these duties as part of dharma of the householder stage of life and the role of the home and family in maintaining Hindu values and culture. There was also relevant reference to personal deities as role models of married couples and family life.

12 Some well balanced discussion and arguments were presented in response to 12 in which candidates recognised that the traditional roles of wife and mother and some attitudes towards widows and dowries was out of line with contemporary society. In contrast to this, some mentioned that the sharing of responsibilities within the extended family was very useful and relevant for working mothers in contemporary society.

Question 7 *Hinduism and society in the modern world*

Not many answered this question.

13 A few candidates did demonstrate a very good knowledge of the work of Vivekananda in advocating Hindu values and philosophies to the western world at the Parliament of World Religion in Chicago in 1893. The achievements of the Ramakrishna mission in establishing dispensaries, health centres and provision of relief in disaster areas as well as schools and universities were quite well described.

14 A good debate could have been developed but not many candidates did this. Vivekananda and Ramakrishna mission alone could not modernise Hinduism but they did introduce some new developments, which have a continuing influence in India and the west.

Question 8 *Hindu philosophy*

15 This part of the question required the analysis the main ideas of Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism) of Ramanuja. Some excellent answers were presented which showed a sound and deep understanding of the particular interpretation of Ramanuja in relation to such concepts and issues as the extent to which material reality is maya / unreal, or the extent to which the atman has the same nature as Brahman. They explained the three forms of knowledge advocated by Ramanuja to explain the different ways of understanding the nature of Brahman and the dependency of atman on Brahman and surrender to it as the ultimate goal of moksha.

16 Most candidates presented a very well balanced argument in support of the view that he was non-dualist due to his affinity with Advaita Vedanta in his assertion that Brahman was the ultimate reality, but since he also recognized and valued bhakti yoga and personal deities as the physical manifestations of Brahman he was a dualist in his thinking.

Section C Sikhism

Question 9 *Sikh identity, marriage and family life*

This was the most popular question in this section and was answered well by most candidates.

- 17** In this part of the question the form of anand karaj was well understood and written about with detail and accuracy but the meaning of it as a sacred union of two souls, the uniting of two families, and as means of reinforcing Sikh values and social harmony was not always made explicit.
- 18** Some good points were made in response to 18 in which it was argued that Sikh marriage is even more important today, especially in diaspora communities, as a means of asserting identity and maintaining cultural practices and traditions.

Question 10 *Key concepts and beliefs*

There were very few answers to this question.

Question 11 *Sikh ethics and conduct*

- 21** In this part of the question most candidates had a good understanding of the concepts of miri and piri and the higher levels were awarded to those who illustrated these concepts with appropriate examples from the lives of the gurus, most notably Guru Hargobind.
- 22** Some good arguments were presented about how miri and piri are still possible to put into practice in the 21st century in the Sikh responses to issues of social justice and inequality.

Question 12 *Equality and sewa*

- 23** The higher levels were given to those candidates who not only presented ways in which Sikhs practiced sewa but commented on how the principles of sewa had many dimensions and gave specific examples such as Khalsa Aid to examine expressions of sewa in contemporary society.
- 24** Responses to this part of the question varied from a simple agreement with the statement to a fuller assessment in which the cultural context determined the meaning and purpose of sewa in the time of the gurus and this was now re-interpreted in contemporary society.

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