



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (2060)

RST3G World Religions 1

(either Buddhism

or Hinduism

or Sikhism)

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General Comments

This is the first set of scripts for the new specification and it was pleasing to see that most areas of the specification were covered on each of the sections. There was a good range of ability and a very satisfactory standard of attainment in most scripts. The most popular section was Buddhism, which consists of more than 80% of the entry, with Hinduism having about 10% and Sikhism 5%.

Section A Buddhism

Question 1 *Themes in Mahayana Buddhism*

This was the second most popular question in this section.

Part 01

Most candidates were able to describe the distinctive features of Pure Land Buddhism in reference to Amitabha Buddha and the practice of chanting and evocation of Amitabha's name. However there was often insufficient emphasis on the Japanese forms in which Honen propagated 'nembutsu' (chanting) as complete reliance on Amitabha, the Jodo school which placed complete faith in Amida and the further developments of Shinran who advocated salvation by faith alone.

Part 02

The AO2 part of this question was not very well answered as many candidates did not confront the issue about Pure Land Buddhism being entirely based on the saving grace of the Buddha. They needed to also focus on the equally essential need for complete faith and surrender of the devotee, as well as other features such as nembutsu.

Question 2 *Aspects of Buddhist philosophy*

Part 03

This part of the question was well answered by most candidates and although most grasped the essential teachings of samsara and karma, many also included Nagarjuna's interpretation of this doctrine. However some candidates spent too much time on Nagarjuna's interpretation and did not examine the process of dependent origination as an expression of the second noble truth.

Part 04

This was quite well answered by most candidates who recognised the issue that abstract doctrines have little meaning in the practical conditions of life but also the effect that a belief in the law of karma might have on moral behaviour and understanding of life's conditions.

Question 3 *Meditation*

This was a popular question in this section.

Part 05

The best answers here, examined in some detail the different methods used in vipassana and samatha, including a full description of the various levels of jhanas both formed and formless in samatha meditation and the use of breathing mindfulness, walking meditation and the themes of impermanence and non-self in vipassana meditation.

Part 06

This was well answered by those who realised that although the aims of meditation might be the same in the ultimate goal of nibbana, these aims can also differ. There are various aims from needing a calm mind to gaining wisdom and understanding of the human condition and each of these aims relate to different methods of meditation.

Question 4 *Buddhist Ethics*

Part 07

The six perfections were usually well known and understood, but not all candidates examined the purpose of the six perfections. Each perfection has an intrinsic purpose as well as all the six perfections having an overall purpose. For example the perfection of sila morality ensures a pure mind and heart as the basis for the perfection of meditation and the overall purpose of the perfections is the fulfilment of the bodhisattva vow.

Part 08

This required a balanced appraisal of whether the six perfections were an unrealistic ideal for a Buddhist. Whilst on the surface they might seem beyond most humans' capacity, the better answers referred to the long term view in which these perfections are developed over many life times and are central to the Buddhist path, especially in Mahayana traditions.

Section B Hinduism

Question 5 *Foundations of Hinduism*

Part 09

This was a new area of the specification and was attempted by many candidates who attained a high level of marks in their answers. There was a great deal of material to draw upon from the polytheistic deities of the Rig Veda to the more abstract concepts of the later texts. The higher level answers showed a sound understanding of the great variety of concepts supported with relevant examples.

Part 10

This was less well answered as although most candidates were able to argue the case that the concept of god in the Vedas reveals contradictions, not many developed the argument further to discuss the claim that the Hindu concepts of god are incomprehensible.

Question 6 *Hindu dharma*

Part 11

Many candidates got side-tracked in their responses to this question and gave full descriptions of the various features of varnsashramadharma when the question required an explanation of the meaning and importance of dharma as a general concept. What was required in more depth and detail was the various aspects of Sanatana Dharma with a clear reference to ahimsa (non violence), satya (truth), Asetya (not stealing) and sauca (purity).

Part 12

Some of the best responses were made to this question. Those who recognised the apparent discrepancy between abstract ideals and everyday life, as well as the fact the such ideals do affect attitudes and behaviour in a real and profound way, gained the higher level marks .

Question 7 *Hinduism and society in the modern world*

Part 13

Very few candidates chose this question, although those that did provided a sound understanding of the aims and work of Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahmo Samaj.

Part 14

There were some well balanced evaluations of the role of the Brahmo Samaj in reforming Hinduism. Whereas on the one hand its effect was minimal in relation to actual practice within Hinduism, on the other hand its effect was very considerable in changing attitudes to certain aspects of Hinduism such as idol worship and cultural practices such as suti.

Question 8 *Hindu philosophy*

Part 15

Whereas most candidates were able to examine the teaching on the law of karma and samsara they were not able to give a clear and coherent explanation of how these concepts contributed to the Hindu understanding of human destiny. They needed to point out how karma and samsara gave rise to a view of destiny in which many of the conditions of human existence are perceived to be determined by actions in previous lives.

Part 16

Not many candidates took on the challenge of this question which required a debate on how far Hinduism is a fatalistic religion. Whilst many aspects of life are fixed before birth, the practice of dharma gives Hindus considerable control of their present and future destinies. However Hindus are never able to determine how far and how much past conditions and karma which affect their present and future lives.

Section C Sikhism

Question 9 *Sikh identity, marriage and family life*

Part 17

Whilst the form of amrit sanskar was very well known by most candidates, not many explained the meaning of the various actions as well as the ritual as a whole as a form of initiation and maintaining the essential features of Sikhism. Some answers gave too much attention to the origins of this ceremony, and too little to the contemporary form and meaning.

Part 18

Some very good responses to challenge to assess the view that Sikh identity relies on outward symbols. The best answers were able to give a balanced view of the importance of the 5ks in relation to other aspects of Sikh life such as diwan and sewa; weaker responses tended to give a one-sided view.

Question 10 *Key concepts and beliefs*

Part 19

Very few candidates answered this straightforward question and those who did examined the practice of kirt karo, nam japo, and vand kakko but did not always explain the purpose of these practices in the lives of Sikhs.

Part 20

A sound balanced appraisal of the values implied in these practices was seen in many of the responses to this question.

Question 11 *Sikh ethics and conduct*

Part 21

Those who answered this question on the Sikh concepts of sant sipahi (saint soldier) and dharam yudh (just war) gave basic and brief explanation but more depth and detail was required in most cases.

Part 22

Some good arguments were advanced in agreement with the view that the Sikh ideal of sant sipahi was impossible for Sikhs to achieve but the view that these ideals were achieved by many Sikhs was also advanced and expressed very well.

Question 12 *Equality and sewa*

Part 23

This was the most popular question on this section and most candidates were awarded high level marks. The better answers addressed both gender and caste as separate issues rather than a general approach to equality and gave relevant examples from lives of the Gurus well as their teachings.

Part 24

Some good examples of current practice in the Sikh community in the UK today, which go against the principle of equality, were provided as well as a recognition that the issue of equality is just as relevant, if not more so today both within the Sikh community and outside it.