



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2011**

Religious Studies A (4050)

Unit 14: Sikhism

405014

Report on the Examination

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Unit 14: Sikhism

General Comments

The second year of this specification saw a rise in the overall entry for this. A full range of ability was seen, and candidates responded well to all aspects of the paper with no question posing any significant problems for candidates. There was evidence that candidates had been thoroughly prepared, and the use of technical language by many was very impressive. More able candidates made excellent use of Sikh beliefs and teachings to respond to questions asking them to analyse or evaluate aspects of Sikh values and ethics.

Part A

Question A1 Justice and Equality

In part (a) many candidates focused on the status of women in Sikhism and framed their answers accurately to respond with a diverse number of ideas related to family life, work and the contributions made by women to worship in the gurdwara. The instruction was to describe rather than explain and, as such, specific teachings were not required. Some candidates missed the top level available because their responses lacked description. There were also a large number of responses that concentrated solely on the traditional role of women as homemakers and missed the opportunity to comment upon the wider involvement of women in the Sikh community and society in general.

The focus of part (b) was to encourage candidates to consider the complex and challenging responsibilities of the dual role many women take on when they become mothers. Candidates responded very well to this question, picking up on the phrase 'should not have to', and were able to make reasoned and thoughtful arguments that recognised that women make important contributions in the workplace and society. Answers included reference to family life and to the difficult situation many parents encounter when working full time and raising children. There were comments made on role reversal, the cost of childcare and the importance of pursuing a career, as well as reference to Sikh values such as Kirat Karna and Vand Chhakna. The dual role faced by many women was recognised and commented upon by candidates who had sometimes missed this in their responses to part (a).

Candidates responded well to part (c). Many made use of specific teachings and beliefs and responded in a variety of different ways. For example, some focused on the irrelevance of wealth to spiritual growth, the importance of honest earnings and support for the poor. Reference was made to the virtues to be developed and vices to be overcome.

Most candidates responded well to part (d) and, again, the teachings relating to Vand Chhakna and Sewa were much in evidence. Weaker responses were undeveloped. Some responded against the statement by picking up on the phrase 'all they can' and offered reasoned responses on the importance of caring for the family, sometimes also dealing with personal poverty.

Question A2 Beliefs and Sources of Authority

The stimulus for part (a) helped many candidates to understand the term 'religious authorities', and some focused responses on the specific importance of one or more of the images given. Some candidates referred to how the authorities were used rather than their importance. Many gave accurate generic reasons for the importance of religious authorities in Sikhism.

Most candidates provided reasoned arguments contrasting the importance of understanding the nature of God against the significance of a diverse range of other teachings and authorities in part (b). Some did not know what the Mool Mantra was and, consequently, their responses lacked focus.

Part (c) drew some excellent answers from candidates, who demonstrated considerable knowledge and understanding of Sikh teaching which they applied with considerable skill. Answers were very diverse and drew on many aspects of the course to present and develop ideas. Most were able to gain at least some credit.

Question A3 Practice and Organisation

Candidates provided some excellent and detailed responses in part (a); however, significant numbers focused on explaining rather than describing the worship. There was also a trend to overlong accounts of peripheral content about preparation for worship rather than focusing on the actual act of worship. Some interpreted the question to mean types of worship that occur in the Gurdwara ; these responses were worthy of credit. Those that responded either by describing the diwan hall or by explaining the purpose of worship had missed the target of the question and therefore received little, if any, credit.

Most candidates achieved full marks in part (b) by showing full understanding of the langar. A few simply described it as either a kitchen or a meal.

In part (c) many candidates contrasted worship in the home with that in the gurdwara, but responses often lacked focus on the statement and did not consider which may be more meaningful. Candidates tended to conclude with which they thought was better. Very good answers considered the spiritual dimension of worship and argued appropriately.

Question A4 Festivals and Gurus

In part (a) candidates mostly made accurate and detailed references to the life and work of Guru Arjan and gave full accounts explaining his importance within Sikhism. Quite a number of candidates, however, confused him with either Guru Gobind Singh or Guru Hargobind.

Most candidates could give two reasons for the significance of the names Singh and Kaur in part (b), though some simply stated the meaning of the two names with variable accuracy.

Part (c) posed problems for candidates who did not know what Baisakhi celebrated and consequently provided weak answers loosely based on the general significance of festivals. Some candidates seemed unable to distinguish between festivals, general worship and rites of passage, and thus alternative viewpoints lacked appropriate focus on the evaluation given. Some gave lengthy accounts of how the festival is celebrated rather than writing evaluative argument. The best answers contrasted Baisakhi with other festivals, notably Divali and Gurburbs.

Part B

Question B5 Personal Lifestyle

This was less popular than Question B6, but a full range of answers was seen.

Candidates demonstrated excellent understanding of the 5Ks in part (a). Weaker answers simply described them, sometimes including reference to basic symbolism. Some wrote lists, and thus their responses often fell short of the Level 4 requirement to show development.

In part (b)(i) many candidates were familiar with the Rahit Maryada and gave very good answers. Most chose to give an overview of several aspects, though some focused on one aspect. Either approach yielded some good answers. Some again tended to explain the content, and some responses consequently lacked focus. Some did confuse the Rahit Maryada with the Guru Granth Sahib, and weaker answers tended to simply state that it was a rule book of dos and don'ts.

Many candidates made good arguments in part (b)(i), contrasting tradition with the challenges presented by the modern world. There were some exceptionally insightful points about the importance of spiritual life, application of teachings and understanding of the importance of religion to some people in framing a purpose and meaning to life.

In part (c) significant number of candidates did not focus on action and instead explained the importance of the created world to Sikhs. Whilst they made good use of religious teachings and beliefs, the question focus required candidates to actually explain how Sikhs may undertake to demonstrate respect for the created world. Well focused answers referred to many different ideas including living a green lifestyle, vegetarianism, sewa and care for the poor.

The best answers to part (d) considered alternative issues rather than simply arguing whether or not it was important to care for the created world. Notably, candidates considered issues such as poverty, prejudice and discrimination, and living a spiritual life. Conclusions considered whether any single issue could be considered the most important for Sikhs today. Many candidates provided very thoughtful and balanced arguments.

Question B6 Family Life

Candidates responded well to part (a)(i), with many giving detailed accounts of the marriage ceremony using technical language and showing full knowledge of several aspects. Weaker answers tended to give an overview of everything from the engagement to the celebrations after the ceremony, often giving scant attention to the actual marriage ceremony itself.

Candidates responded well to part (a)(ii) and demonstrated clear understanding of the importance of marriage in Sikhism. Weaker answers lacked development of the points made.

Many candidates wrote thoughtful and considered responses including several viewpoints in part (b). The best answers were familiar with Sikh teachings about divorce and used these appropriately to support their arguments.

In part (c) candidates offered a range of different ideas about why funeral rites take place. Many included reference to the importance of mourning and support of the bereaved. Weaker answers described funeral practices rather than explaining their significance.

The best answers to part (d) considered the purpose of ceremonies to provide an alternative argument to that stated in the evaluation statement. Others chose to contrast worshipping God in ceremonies with worship generally, and some candidates made good arguments this way. Weaker answers often lacked an appropriate alternative view and thus wrote a response that was lacking evaluation.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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