

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCE
Religious Studies 6RS02- Investigations
Paper 1D – The Study of World Religions

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AREA 1D The Study of World Religions

Introduction

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2015 examination season was another very successful season for candidates who presented inspirational studies in the Investigations Paper. The quality of candidates' work is a testimony to the high level of engagement with selected studies drawn from a wide range of academic fields. The high standard of work evidenced in June 2015 was no exception to historical high standards as candidates demonstrated a high level of independent enquiry which clearly demonstrated what their chosen area of investigation had meant to them as a learning experience. Candidates showcased their knowledge of a particular academic field in the way they identified a line of enquiry, clearly expressed their view, analysed key concepts and deployed evidence with coherent understanding of their task whilst fluently evaluating a wide range of source material. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. A few centres continue to focus on the same or similar topics for all their candidates, whereas other centres permitted considerable choice for individual candidates. Candidates were mostly very well prepared for the examination and it was evident that centres used their specialist resources and interests to encourage candidates to research in depth a particular area of study. It is important to stress again that the Investigations Unit has a definite academic purpose. The aim is to involve students as active participants pursuing open-ended enquiries with an emphasis on independent learning. Questions were designed to be inclusive of all possible approaches to various topics and all valid answers were considered. At this stage in the life of the specification, there are limited issues to report because in the main, centres possess a high degree of expertise, which is clearly evidenced in the work that is produced on the day of the examination.

However, there are a few areas for development that are reported similarly each year and once again, 2015 showed evidence of a small minority of centres that need to take this on board. Centres are encouraged to review their performance in 2015 against all or some of the following points:

Whilst most centres had entered their candidates for the correct option there were still a few entries for particular Areas of Study where consideration regarding entry for a different Area of Study may have been beneficial to the candidate. It is important to ensure candidates know which area of their investigation is the best fit for the question they answer on the paper.

There was evidence of candidates choosing a different question on the paper to the question they had clearly prepared for before the examination. In some of these cases, the candidate was using material suitable for Question 1 to answer Question 3 (or vice versa) and not really grappling fully with the demands of the question. This practice does not always work to the best effect as the candidate might end up answering neither question as fully as

possible. It must be noted that each question was written for ONE of three topics within each particular Area of Study. Candidates were not penalised if the boxes indicating the questions they answered were marked incorrectly. However, evidence shows that some candidates selected inviting looking questions that they had clearly not prepared for, which did not lead to a best prepared answer. Whilst it is good to note that fewer candidates than in 2014 attempted this approach, there were still some candidates in this session who answered a question they had not prepared for. These candidates may need to be advised as to which question their material is best directed at. Examiners were encouraged to mark positively and to credit all valid material according to the mark scheme and question paper. Centres should ensure that candidates are entered for the option that matches their Area of Study and that candidates are clear about which question they have been prepared for on the paper. There is still evidence of centres studying Papers 1B and 1F being entered for 1A. This might be an oversight regarding filling out the form, centres must choose 6RSO2 and then identify which of the seven papers from 1A to 1G is the specific entry.

Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. These objectives should receive prominent attention in the process of the investigation. Importantly, there must be explicit attention to both objectives in the examination answer and also to the question that is intended to focus the answer. Each question consistently referred to the Assessment Objectives (AOs) with the trigger word 'Examine' for AO1 and 'Comment on' for AO2. These dictated the structure of the question and helped candidates to plan their answers. It would be advisable for candidates to pay regular attention to the level descriptors for these assessment objectives as a way of monitoring their development and progress during their investigations. The phrase 'with reference to the topic you have investigated' will always appear in the question to ensure that the generic question can be answered with material from any appropriate investigation. The mark scheme itself is generic to all questions but the answer itself is not necessarily generic as candidates are expected to use their material to answer the question. The purpose of the question is to challenge candidates to adapt their material so that at the highest levels they may demonstrate a coherent understanding of the task based on the selection of their material. Widely deployed evidence/arguments/sources were evident in well-structured responses to the task whereby a clearly expressed viewpoint was supported by well-deployed evidence and reasoned argument. There was skilful deployment of religious language in many answers and the fluency of good essays showed command over the material; such command makes for high outcomes and rewards the amount of hard work done by the candidate. Many candidates had clearly learned much in the process and their overall grasp of the issues involved and command over their material was highly commendable.

Candidates at the lower end of achievement struggled with the demands of the question. In preparation for this examination, some candidates may find it useful to write up their investigation under timed, exam conditions to a variety of different possible questions. They might build up a number of different essay plans to different possible questions. The important point in these activities is to enable candidates to develop their management of

material, such as how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. However, success can be undermined by writing up a rote-learned answer which has not been adapted to the question or by answering a question that has been written for a topic they have not studied. In 2015, there was still far too much evidence of rote-learned answers using the same structure and material inclusive of quotes. Whilst much information was relevant to the topic and consequently was awarded in terms of AO1, there was a significant lack of engagement with the specific demands of the question and consequently marks for AO2 were low, with only generic evaluation provided. This approach is contrasted with another form where candidates were trained to answer the question; arguably, this is evidence of good practice but at the lower end, some candidates thought it was sufficient to simply use the question stimulus at the end of each paragraph. The best answers were those guided by the statement as opposed to simply 'tagging it on' to content that they were already anticipating writing about. A balanced approach to the question that meets the highest levels of achievement according to both assessment objectives is obviously desirable and the generic question accommodates many possible routes to success whereby any valid approach to the question was credited.

Finally, there is increasing evidence of poorly written scripts that are almost illegible. Scripts are scanned into software for marking and even though the examiner can enlarge the screen, many scripts were still very difficult to read. Candidates are strongly advised to develop their handwriting skills and practice writing under timed conditions, and those who cannot achieve legible writing may need to consider accessing the centres' word processing facility according to regulations. Centres are assured that much time was invested in attempting to decipher illegible answers but there is always the risk that a badly written word/phrase/paragraph could be misinterpreted and it is best to avoid the chances of this occurring. Examiners understand the time constraints that candidates are writing under but this problem regarding illegible handwriting seems to be on the increase. Centres need to address this issue because the current format for examinations requires candidates to sustain handwriting and academic standards under examination pressure. That said, the excellent work of centres and candidates in 6RS02 bears testimony to the academic potential of candidates that is a joy to behold when it is fully realised.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS PAPER 1D – The Study of World Religions

Question 1

ETHICAL PRECEPTS & APPLIED ETHICS

The Study of World Religions continues to attract a more sustained academic approach within the quality of investigations for this question. Many candidates have really taken on board new ways to improve the quality of their studies. There was a marked improvement in the level of detail about religious teachings and traditions that resulted in much better quality essays. There is a more concerted effort in the majority of responses to grapple more fully with the relationship between ethical precepts and applied ethics within

one or more particular religious world views. The best answers to this question were attempted with reference to scholarship and candidates had a wide ranging understanding of the topic and included an in-depth knowledge of a wide range of religious and ethical teachings. Most candidates who attempted to answer this question did so with a good degree of success. The best responses married breadth with depth to produce an effective argument. The best candidates were able to apply their knowledge to the question and actually answer it, although other responses only gave a vague indication that the question was there. Candidates on the whole gave comprehensive and detailed responses to the question. Evaluation was evident through direct exposition of religious teachings and critical appraisal of particular relevant standpoints. However, at the lower range of achievement, Question 1 was hallmarked by a 'structure' of candidate response that was evidently framed by a model answer which was hoped to fit likely questions. Although this direction does not negatively impact on examiner marking, there should be awareness that such modelling may lead to a constraint on the natural and nurtured ability of candidates to produce something original and compelling to read. As such, many candidates missed out on higher achievement despite their ability.

Once again candidates studying Judaism presented impressive studies on Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought that evidenced independent research; candidates understood clearly the different positions taken by a group of Jewish theologians from Orthodox, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism to the ethical dilemma of Nazism. Rubenstein, Fackenheim, Greenberg, Berkowitz and Cohen were placed in the correct context and carefully contrasted against Weisl's Protest Stance and Nietzsche's nihilism. It is refreshing to see work that engages with an issue with such carefully selected detail; the only caveat being that a few candidates missed out on making the most of such rich material to substantiate their own view. The challenge of this unit and this particular topic is to ensure that a range of meticulous detail surrounding the issue is coupled with sufficient analysis to achieve high levels of attainment. Overall, there is no doubt that candidates studying Judaism are thoroughly grounded in Jewish theology and this has an impact on the quality of discussion about Jewish beliefs and practices

Candidates investigating Islam presented essays that were scholarly and full of scriptural references; the use of detailed religious teachings from Qur'anic Suras, Hadith and Fatwa often supported a well researched argument, and higher quality essays made careful use of relevant scholarship to enrich the topic under discussion. This approach is strongly encouraged as candidates can reach the higher levels of achievement if the argument is sustained by a substantial range of sources that are effectively deployed throughout the essay. It is a shame that too few candidates did not explore more fully the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a followings, as the largest and oldest division within the history of Islam, for its relevance to the ethical dilemma under scrutiny. The best candidates, however, paid attention to this point and were able to ground their discussion in a thorough exposition of a range of Islamic schools of thought with proficient use of technical terms. There has been much improvement in the academic approach to Islamic studies and this

year was no exception. Candidates were well grounded in Islamic thought but also over-reliant on the 'model answer framework' that limits opportunity to critically appraise their material in a meaningful way.

Candidates investigating Buddhism generally produced higher standard answers and the best candidates made a more concerted attempt to discuss alternative views within various branches of Buddhism that were supported by religious teachings. The best answers were guided by the question and grappled with a detailed discussion of how ethical teachings might resolve ethical dilemmas. At the lower end, some Buddhism answers lacked depth or breadth regarding their application to a dilemma. These answers confined themselves to outlining the five precepts and four noble truths without drilling down further into why the practice of Buddhism, with its particular response to ethical dilemmas, emphasises the individual search for liberation from the cycle of samsara. Some candidates missed an opportunity to discuss the differences between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism; this might have raised the level of achievement according to the level of detail.

There were a number of answers that discussed fully the ethical precepts of Islam that were accompanied by excellent information about schools of thought within Islam. There were a few answers on greater and lesser Jihad by more able candidates who were knowledgeable about their subject, whilst less able candidates simply wrote all they knew about Jihad without making reference to the question. The most popular topics included Jihad, homosexuality, capital punishment, suicide and euthanasia, with comparative reference to one or two world religions. There was some interesting work on the ethical teachings of War and Peace that was adapted to Hinduism and Buddhism and also to the debate of sexuality and marriage in Islam. Candidates at the higher end who addressed the issues in these topics with reference to Buddhism presented some knowledgeable responses that scrutinised closely the ethical precepts of Buddhism. Some weaker candidates failed to address the question and spent most of their time merely writing about the history of Buddhism with little or no reference to scholarship. Candidates can improve their answers by demonstrating a much more detailed approach to studying any particular world religion. Weaker answers may have contained a few quotes from sacred scripture but failed to include other sources of relevant scholarship. Scholarship is best accompanied in this Area of Study by ethical precepts that are derived from religious tradition and the authority of religious leaders. There is continued evidence of an increased number of candidates from the same centre using the same pre-prepared answers and having difficulty adapting the selection of material to answer the question. Centres are encouraged to find ways of ensuring that candidates are given the space to do some independent work, as the same structure of quotes and content are not always adapted sufficiently to the question. It must be emphasised that candidates are not marked down for this but works of this types are self-levelling if insufficient attention is paid to the assessment objectives.

The following essay illustrates an approach to ethical precepts that delayed the impact of the discussion. The first two pages were occupied by three definitions of ethics taken from a standard reader that was duly referenced followed by a definition of abortion by way of introducing the topic. It must be stressed that the candidate was not marked down for omission but arguably could have achieved a more desirable grade with more precision and coverage of concepts across 13½ pages. The candidate does understand the material but this particular essay is a useful exemplar to identify why some much weaker candidates fall short of higher achievement.

Chosen question number: **Question 1** **Question 2** **Question 3**

Ethics has been defined as "The normative science of the conduct of human beings living in society, a science which judges this conduct to be right or wrong, to be good or bad or in some similar way." - William Lillies, An Introduction to Ethics. Ethics are the basic principles which all individuals ~~sto~~ in society should follow. It is the ~~the~~ way in which they

Ethics and they are the following:

Meta-Ethics: This defines what is the definition of what Ethics is and moral behaviour and conduct should be in accordance to this.

Normative-Ethics: This is the norm/standard of ethics which is set in Society and the standard that people should follow. It is the theory of what

ethics is.

Applied-Ethics: This is the application of ethics in Society and the application of ~~moral~~ so theoretical solutions to practical problems in Society.

The topic within regards to Applied ethics that I have investigated is the topic of Abortion. Abortion is the termination of the foetus in the womb before it has the

chance to fully develop and the mother gives birth to it. Abortion is a highly controversial topic and hasn't had a solution to it in the recent years although many have tried. Although it is controversial, Abortion is very common in the UK and thousands of abortions take place

Two pages are spent on a definition, which does not bring the reader very far into the intricacies of applying ethical precepts – the candidate still had not stated which religion was being studied.

Applying the key ethical precepts of ethics to the case of abortion can be very difficult due to the complications. People have different views, opinions and theories due to their own selves i.e. their religion or their own initiative. For example, the shooting of Dr. George Tiller outside of a church in Wichita, Kansas in 2009. The person who made the assault said "I thought I was doing what was right to protect the children"

The essay really begins on the third page and even at this point, it has not moved beyond the idea that abortion might be controversial for some.

important to state what the fetus actually is considered as. Is it that of a human being? Is it of high value / importance? Does it have the basic human rights if so? If these are the cases then it would ~~understandably~~ understandably most likely be accepted that abortion was/is wrong. Although there is no answer to the case of Abortion by neither philosophers or religion etc. The mother should have a right to decide what

Moving on to the issue of personhood we still have not been offered any religious teachings, nor any technical terms such as ensoulment, personhood or sanctity of life. Opportunities are being missed to raise the level of discussion.

there is no answer to the case of Abortion by neither philosophers or religion etc. The mother should have a right to decide what happens to her child and there should not be an outright ban on Abortion.

The sanctity of life claims that the life of a human is very important and of high

After briefly asking what it means to be human, the candidate defines sanctity of life.

value and it should be treated as such. In all religions this ~~more~~ more or less does apply although there are some differences. In the religion of Islam ~~it~~ it is taught that the life of human being are important. "Take not life which Allah has made sacred otherwise than in the course of justice" - The Holy Quran (Sura 6:151 and 17:33) In the religious book this same concept is accepted and taught. However, some other religions

At last, on the fifth page, the candidate is beginning to grapple with religious teachings and the associated concepts. We now know which religion is under study.

not be accepted under any conditions at all. "You shall not kill." - Exodus-20. This teaches that abortion absolutely can't be accepted. Whereas in the religion of Islam it is permissible depending on the circumstances. "Muslim Jurists hold Abortion to be blameworthy but permissible under certain conditions, ensoulment of the foetus is believed to occur 120 after conception; after ensoulment, abortion constitutes homicide

This is still valid material but could easily be part of a GCSE discussion question.

people as they believe different things in accordance to their faith. Due to this reason it is difficult to apply the standard of ethics regarding abortion in society. Therefore, it is arguable as to whether religion helps solve the moral controversy of abortion or makes it worse.

As religion does not give any answers to the problem of abortion, philosophy gives an alternative approach to the understanding of

There is some attempt to grapple with different understandings within religions but at this stage have not been offered a distinctive Islamic teaching such as the 120 days ensoulment belief.

As religion does not give any answers to the problem of abortion, philosophy gives an alternative approach to the understanding of human life. One of the key precepts of medical ethics is that of personhood. Personhood is defined as the individual characteristic / personality traits of a unique individual being. ~~A foetus~~ The question arises: is a foetus a person? if it is then how can abortion be permissible. This concept is also

Personhood is eventually defined a couple of pages from asking the question, what it means to be human. Some of this repeats earlier material and there is still no sign of scholarship on abortion.

precepts of medical ethics is that of personhood. Personhood is defined as the individual characteristic / personality traits of a unique individual being. ~~A fetus~~ The question arises; is a fetus a person? if it is then how can abortion be permissible. This concept is also taught in religions such as Islam where it is stated that every individual is created by God and is unique in its beauty / personality

Still asking the same question – is the foetus a person and we are now on the seventh page of the booklet (p1 is the front cover, p2 contains the questions)

rights. ~~These~~ This is also stated by Society itself. Moral rights are said to be the basic human rights that everyone is entitled to. The rights of humans and all living organism need to be respected and accepted. Here the question arises; are fetus's beings with moral / human rights? because if this is the case the abortion of a fetus which can harm them would be ~~a~~ a violation

Two pages later on page 9, the candidate has moved into a useful area of debate but still has presented no scholarship. At the bottom of the page, the first relevant scholar is finally mentioned: Don Marquis.

that philosophical approaches to abortion fail to say why abortion is immoral. In his Article 'Why abortion is immoral' he states that the foetus is deprived of its future. The same way humans don't want die early because of the experiences, enjoyment and fulfillment of dreams/ambitions that may take place in the future, is the same way foetus's have a chance of this future. Both

Don Marquis' view is outlined simply without development or analysis.

a chance of this future. Both deserve this chance not only the fully grown human being/born human beings. This argument is a strong one; however, there is a weakness; humans are aware and conscious of their existence and future but foetus's are not and therefore won't display/have emotions or resent loss. However, this cannot be made an exception due to this a there is value of human life even without

The tenth page was useful in that the candidate is now discussing an argument and shows signs of assessment of it here.

the concept of a future. Also if the fetus is aborted, the chance for it to develop these abilities, are taken away.
in the first place,

Religions all have different / similar views / faiths regarding ~~the~~ abortion and this is also even relevant ~~to~~ to the ideologies of philosophers. However, there are a lot of problems that occur due to differences / implications.

due to differences / implications. Also society has its own view regarding abortion too. ~~Some people see~~ In some religions, people see abortion as a criminal act of injustice, and also at the same time as a medical need or a need of society. This is also apparent in some other religions.

In most religions i.e. Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism

The discussion on page 11 suggests differences between religions but limits the discussion to a statement rather than explaining it further.

and very relevant key ethical precept is that abortion is immorally wrong and shouldn't be carried out. Here, it seems that an agreement is made amongst most religions regarding this. However, there are some minor/major differences in the ethical precepts of the religions. This is why a full agreement cannot be made and accepted even though the main idea is well established with all the

well established with all the religions. This is why there is an increase in ~~controversy~~ controversy regarding the already highly controversial topic of Abortion. This again shows why it is difficult applying these key ethical concepts in society. As religion is a major factor and is important to a lot of people around the world.

The final narrative remains vague but it is a valid answer to the question.

Overall, the topic of Abortion is very complicated and seems as if though it simply just cannot be resolved. As there are complications, such as the involvement of religion, the different faiths, opinions, moral/human rights, the aspects of certain philosophical and religious ethical precepts regarding abortion and all the moral controversy that

Half-way down page 13 the conclusion begins.

there are complications, such as the involvement of religion, the different faiths, opinions, moral/human rights, the aspects of certain philosophical and religious ethical precepts regarding abortion and all the moral controversy that surrounds it. ~~The~~ There has been no answer to this problem and this is why it cannot be



P 4 3 4 7 1 A 0 1 5 1 6

Solved. Also due to all these various implications, it is really difficult to apply these ethical precepts of religion regarding abortion to society. The implications excluding religion make this harder. This is what causes this big dispute and clash and makes applying the ethical concepts and providing a solution to ethics very difficult.

And finally ends half-way down page 14.

The essay was very long and only covered a few teachings from Islam, one scholar and confined the discussion to asking questions and defining terms unnecessarily. A more fluent use of terms conveys how far these are understood so there is no need to over define vocabulary that is considered basic at Advanced Level.

There is also a possibility that the candidate might have been better advised to enter for 1C, but would still need to research current scholarship on abortion beyond the facts and figures provided by discussion of UK Law and abortion methods. A wide range of scholars have written in great detail on natural rights, feminism, natural moral law, personhood, theologians, and are representative of viewpoints across the whole spectrum.

Entering this paper does not mean that offering a few basic religious teachings will do the trick; there is evidence of scholarship in religion that is representative of philosophical and theological viewpoints.

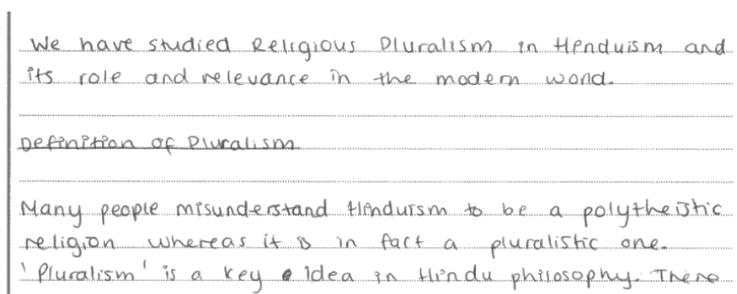
Question 2 RELIGIOUS PLURALISM, INTERFAITH DIALOGUE, and RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

There was a mixture of responses to this question and as entry numbers are still low, the range of topics offered remains narrow. The Interfaith Dialogue attracted some good answers which showed secure knowledge of Barth, Rahner and Hick's contribution. This topic can be a little difficult for candidates who have not experienced the excitement and renewal of the Vatican Council era; however, the strongest candidates distinguished

themselves by showing secure knowledge of the intricacies of this dialogue through appropriate sources and scholarship. There was evidence of interesting research on pluralism within Hinduism. This approach to the question worked well and demanded an in-depth knowledge of Hinduism that strong candidates could thrive on in their research. On the whole, candidates deployed a wide range of evidence and were able to draw sophisticated conclusions using sound religious terminology.

Amongst weaker responses, candidates who focused on the role of women in Islam failed to present alternative opinions. Candidates need to include a range of evidence in their investigation that is supported by sound scholarship, and where possible, show knowledge of more than one point of view. Answers in the lower levels tended to be brief, descriptive and generalised. Some candidates also relied on pre-prepared essays and failed to understand or answer the question. Answers can be improved by taking decisive views, based on the evidence and also by paying close attention to the demands of the question. There was some evidence of fresh approaches in some answers but clearly there are more candidates that would benefit from treading new, if not deeper, waters.

The essay below is indicative of a 'structure' that some candidates used to answer Question 2. Throughout each essay and new paragraph, the strengths, weaknesses and conclusions are given a heading. Whilst the material itself was clear, the extra time taken to break up an essay into note form is not the best use of examination time. The headings did not add to the essay because each point was clearly set out, albeit needing more individual commentary by the candidate. This style might be helpful to some candidates but it was apparent that the whole centre structured candidate response within this form of modelling. It does seem to appear as a constraint on the natural and nurtured ability of a fairly wide range of candidates.



We have studied religious pluralism in Hinduism and its role and relevance in the modern world.

definition of pluralism

Many people misunderstand Hinduism to be a polytheistic religion whereas it is in fact a pluralistic one.

'Pluralism' is a key idea in Hindu philosophy. There

another. The path chosen by the individual is best for them. 'Just as rivers merge in the same ocean, all pathways lead to God,' Munduka Upanishad III 2.8.

Bhaktiyoga

'Bhakti' means 'love' and this is the path of devotional worship. Here they look at God as a personality. The aim is to build a relationship with God. This is the most common path to follow. Examples of deities are: Shiva, Vishnu,

To conclude all these pathways will lead to moksha.

Weaknesses of Pluralism

Confusion

~~Pluralism~~ Hinduism is often misconceived as a ~~polytheistic~~ polytheistic religion whereas it is actually a pluralistic one. Pluralism is a very vast topic which can lead to

Charlatans

Pluralism is so broad which makes it open to misuse and abuse. There are many charlatans climbing the bandwagon of Hinduism, for their own benefit. This can put people of religion.

These charlatans are claiming to be prophets and teachers for money.

Relativism

As pluralism is so vast people can mistake it for relativism (anything goes). Abrahamic traditions often say

want to keep their beliefs exclusive.

Strengths of Pluralism

Interfaith and Intrafaith issues resolved

There are many people fighting in the name of religion. Suni and Shia muslims are killing each other as ~~they~~ each of them ~~are~~ believe that only they are right. Pluralism is needed as it has ~~been~~ allowed ^{to} 'tolerating other religions' to change into ~~accepting~~ 'accepting other ~~religions~~ religions.'

Conclusion - Spiritual Democracy

Even though pluralism can be misused and abused it does not take away its validity. Pluralism is necessary as it brings about community cohesion. Gandhi (1869-1948) said, 'every ~~man~~ man is truest to his own religion, even if it stands low in philosophical comparison.' ~~It~~ If Pluralism were to be followed it would ensure a safe environment and allow people to make spiritual progress the way they wish.

Question 3 CONTRASTING STANDPOINTS ON BELIEFS ABOUT GOD

This question attracted a larger number of excellent answers. Candidates who wrote about Judaism knew their material well and included a range of sources in their essays. They were well informed about the different beliefs about God in Islam, however some candidates did not understand fully the Christian teachings on the existence of God and Christian denominations were sometimes confused with each other. Some candidates were not clear about the differences between the contrasting viewpoints on belief about God they were arguing for. Those who wrote about the Sunni and Shi'a Islam were one sided and unfortunately, answers can be one-sided if candidates are not confident about a tradition other than their own. That said, candidates generally appreciated differences in belief and their research conveyed the desire to understand a view they did not ascribe to in greater depth.

Candidates, in most cases, were aware that in this type of topic, it is important to create a balance of material between the different traditions under investigation. Candidates, whatever their religious background, should be aware that the Roman Catholic Church is a branch of Christianity, not a separate religion. Natural Law, as propounded by Aquinas, is regarded by Catholics as a separate source of authority, as opposed to scripture, since its basis is in reason not revelation. Likewise, if candidates are going to refer to Islam, they should show some awareness of different traditions within this world religion, as most did for Christianity. These remarks apply *mutatis mutandis* to other non-Christian religions. Candidates focusing on Hinduism produced excellent responses to this question, discussing different beliefs about God using the Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita, Vedas and different schools of thought. The better responses to this question included detailed knowledge of different beliefs about the existence of God, in particular, Shankaras Advaita Vedanta and critically compared this with Dvaita Vedanta.

The strongest candidates had sound knowledge of the complexities of Hindu scholarship. Much of this year's report repeats points made every year because the same issues persist; however, it is encouraging to see more evidence this year, of candidates exploring the latest scholarship where they can.

The essay below is the same length as the essay discussed above for Question 1. This highly competent essay demonstrates a different approach and all the learning points raised for Question 1 are resolved in the approach taken by the candidate here. This essay was given full marks and speaks for itself.

There are many significant differences within Hinduism, and some similarities. This is due to the five main contrasting standpoints within the religion; Nirguna/Saguna Brahman, the nature of philosophy, God as male/female, the nature of siva, and ~~the~~ belief. The implications that arise from these similarities and differences mean that they are both significant, however, the differences seem to be far more significant due to the impact they have.

A difference in regard to beliefs about God is the idea of a Nirguna or Saguna Brahman. The idea of a Nirguna Brahman arose in the early ^{Upanishadic} ~~Upanishadic~~ Era, with the writings of the Upanishads. ~~As~~ There was a shift to female monism, and the Upanishads describe a goddess with no attributes - 'the supreme being was no form.' (Campbell). God is described as an intangible, transcendent figure, who is omnipresent and omniscient, but has no attributes. The idea of a ^{Nirguna} Saguna Brahman is further extended (Zaehner) with the 'Brahman-atman synthesis' ^{whereby} the relationship between Brahman & atman is defined.

It is unclear what the exact relationship is, but what is ~~clear~~ ^{clear} is that 'Brahman does for the universe what women does for every living thing' (Jamison). The close relationship between the two is further established as the two terms are used interchangeably. *Upanishads* by *Ushyapada* & *Niguna* Brahman comes about by *para*. This involves ascension, and is only available at the top three cosmic, and so a *Saguna* Brahman was developed to make God more accessible.

Saguna Brahman was developed in the ^{writings} ~~writings~~ of the epics - 'the New Testament of Hinduism' (Zachner). It is here that gods and goddesses were given attributes eg Krishna is the shepherd *Pastor*. ~~He~~ when Krishna reveals himself to Arjuna in the *God's* *Theophany* ('a theological discourse on the nature of the soul, dharma & *atman* (*vociferous*)), he is given attributes. He is ^{described} ~~described~~ as a 'form with many a mouth and eye' and as a 'creator' by Arjuna, and the name of God is revealed. It was then believed that the gods and goddesses were merely ^{part} ~~part~~ of Brahman, and that each represented a different side to him. 'God is one, Men call him by many different names' (Lg. Veda). It then

became possible to build a relationship with God,
and liberation could be reached through bhakti;

A second difference with regard to beliefs about
God is the reasons of philosophy. One school,
the Samkhya school, is an atheistic school,
and ' can be traced ~~back~~^{back} to the Indus Valley
(Kamrukar & Coe). It is dualistic and talks
about two entities - purusha (spirit) and
prakriti (matter). It establishes the relationship
between the two as the idea that purusha
is caught up in prakriti, and is bound to
it by maya (illusion). Maya convinces
us that purusha and prakriti are one, and
liberation comes with the knowledge that the
two are separate - 'the soul somehow becomes
caught up in matter and its salvation lies
in realising its difference from it' (Baskaran).
Once liberation is reached, the soul is
suspended in its own eternity. Brahman is
rejected and so the school is atheistic.
Mataru on 'something that is permanent and
changing cannot be the cause of something
that is impermanent and unchanging' (Fourest).

However, there is a second contrasting school

called Advaita Vedant Vedanta, which is non-dualistic. It believes that there is only one true entity - Brahman, and that everything else is 'pure illusion' (Tamasin). Advaita Vedantists believe that the 'atman is Brahman' and so when one's ^{atman} is liberated, it doesn't unite with Brahman, as it was Brahman all along. Shankara developed two levels. The lower level is the acceptance of Brahman as the one supreme, and ~~Brahm~~ is used as a means of reaching the supreme. The higher level is the idea that even the gods and goddesses are an illusion, as Brahman is the only ^{true} entity; once one gains that knowledge, there liberation will happen. Ramanuja famously disputed this as he developed the idea of 'qualified non-dualism'. He believed in a certain dependence between the atman and Brahman, making bhakti a ~~legit~~ legitimate way of reaching the supreme.

A third ~~controversial~~ differing belief about God is the idea of many deities. The Hindu religion was purely polytheistic in the Indus Valley civilisation with there being many gods and goddesses - the most famous one being the 'horned god of the seals' (Pasupati) and the Mother goddess.

This polytheistic idea about belief in 500 continued through the early Vedic Period, with the pluralised name of gods. However, soon enough there was a shift in belief. The Aryan people realised that sacrifice was not working, and so there was a shift towards monotheism or 'one god or a Rishi-ism' (Surt).

This shift meant that each god had a time at the top of the Pantheon of gods. The Aryans would choose a god eg. Indra, and only worship him. However, when a prayer to that god stopped working, a new god was chosen. This continued until the Aryan people decided that 'all the gods had failed' (Zachner), and there was another shift in belief, this time to monism.

The shift to monism meant that the Aryans started to believe in a supreme Brahman, ~~and~~ ^{as} ~~and~~ they became more interested in cosmic speculation and the idea of creation. They named this supreme force 'Brahman' most likely after the Brahmins who were responsible for the prayers and sacrifices. The other gods disappeared, and merely became a subordinate means to reach the supreme. These multiple

Sheets in Kelley has opened up Hinduism to an array of people. * (see end of essay).

A fourth difference ^{with regard to Kelley} is ~~the idea of god as~~ about god as the idea of god as a male and female. God as female is described as shakti, meaning 'cosmic energy' (Merceier). Shakti is usually a goddess in her own right, but can be the consort to gods, or even is the creative energy behind all existence. There is, however, a contrasting name to shakti, where she is both protective & fierce, but also calm and peaceful. Shakti as protective and fierce can be seen through Durga. Durga is an extremely powerful goddess as she is said to have come from the trimurti. She will 'risk any situation to care and protect' (Samsom) her human children, and will kill and destroy any threat to the Hindu's safety. The image of her is fierce and frightening, but it is known that she is only fierce because she is protective. This displays the maternal nature of shakti, as her protectiveness is akin to that of a mother. However, a contrasting goddess would be Lakshmi) who displays 'immense ascetic characteristics' (Wargu). She is calm and serene, and is associated with lotus flowers. Despite the

contrasting nature to Shakti; what is clear is that
'it is in female terms that the sacred is understood;
God the mother' (Ling).

However, god can also, ~~as~~ be seen as male.
This is the ~~more~~ ^{more} common image of the gods, as
a patrilineal ~~deity~~ set of deities dates back to the
Vedic Period. An example of a male god is
Rama. He displays all the stereotypically male
attributes of a king, ^{brother} warrior and hero.
He is an ideal to Hindus, and Hindus all
over the world learn about how to live through
the Ramayana. ('Rama is not only a king, but
an ideal [warrior?]). Rama's friend Hanuman
also displays the qualities of a warrior and
a hero, but also the qualities of an ideal
devotee - 'Hanuman is the ideal devotee' (Ramayana).
He earns the utmost respect from Kali due
to his loyalty to Rama. It is through the epics
and stories that God can be seen as a male, and
these stories demonstrate a stark difference in the
~~two~~ ideas regarding belief about God.

Siva is also a demonstrator of differences regarding
belief about God. He is believed to be both
male and female - 'Siva himself is half male,

half female' (Zachner). Siva as a male can be seen in his three main forms, Maha-Yogi, Narayana and the Lingam. Siva as a female can be seen through Shakti where she represents his cosmic energy - 'without his feminine energy, Siva is a corpse' (Ling). Shakti is also associated with creation and fertility, which does represent an important similarity regarding beliefs about God as Siva as the Maha-Yogi represents nature and creation, as does Siva as the Lingam. Therefore, despite the difference in beliefs, there is still a huge similarity there.

Another difference regarding Siva is Siva as the creator and destroyer. Siva as the ^{destroyer} creator can be seen through Siva Narayana. He is 'wrathful, incalculable, jealous' (Ling) and he dances upon a demon with the flames of destruction in one hand and his other hand is held up in a gesture of 'peace and protection' (Vaidya). This image of Siva as a destroyer is contrasted due to the idea of Siva as a creator which can be seen through the Lingam. The Lingam is a phallic shaped object which represents creativity and life, and is the most commonly worshipped form of Siva, showing his creative

characteristics. When the lingam is joined with the
yonis, they represent 'the totality of all created
existence'; and is a clear image of both Siva and
Shakti's creative power.

A final contrasting side to Siva is Siva as an
ascetic and eroti. Siva can be seen as an ascetic
through the Mahā-Yogi, where he is meditating.
His posture represents the serenity of ~~a~~ ^{his} mind,
and his blue complexion represents the 'infinity of
the skies and oceans' (Vocit). This image of
Siva with matted locks upon his head is
~~a peaceful~~ ^{a peaceful} one, and represents the idea of liberation
through asceticism. However, Siva as an eroti
can be seen through the lingam. Phallic
worship of Siva is extremely common, as the
phallus is 'worshipped and cherished as an
emblem of the deity' (Ling). Siva himself is
the 'god of apposes' (Zachner), and so there
differences regarding beliefs about him are a
part of the nature of Siva as a god.

There are many implications due to the ~~written~~
similarities and differences regarding the beliefs about
Siva, some being positive and some being negative,
and these help determine the significance of the

similar and ~~with~~ differing ideas

A positive implication of the differing ideas about beliefs about god is that 'Hinduism is free from dogmatic affirmations' (Tannir). This is significant as it means Hinduism is an universalistic religion, due to the fact that it encompasses so many different beliefs ~~to~~, e.g. polytheism, monism, monotheism and even atheism. This way of ideas means Hinduism is open to many different people, and is accepting of religions other beliefs as well. The fact that there was a clear shift in belief in the Vedic period shows that Hinduism is open to change and development, which is extremely significant.

.implication

However, a negative ~~implication~~ about the differing ~~ideas~~ beliefs regarding god is that Hinduism can be a 'jungle of ritual confusion' (Wagon). Due to the many differences in belief, there are many different ways to worship, and Hindus can become confused as to which one is the correct way to worship. Due to this, many people can turn away from Hinduism as it is unable to offer a secure way to liberation, as

no one knows what way is the correct way to worship. This makes the differing views regarding belief about God in Hinduism extremely significant.

Another possible implication of about the differing views about God is that God is seen as female. This automatically raises equality in a ~~part~~ previously notoriously misogynistic country. In 1998, 83% of girls were in full time education compared to the 61% of girls in 1992. Following on from that, the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2002 meant that all girls aged 6 to 14 in India must receive elementary education free of charge. There are also now a number of educational schemes aimed at girls living in rural areas where girls are seen as a burden due to the paying of dowry upon marriage. The literacy rate for girls in India is steadily increasing. This is extremely significant, and the fact that God is seen as female, and *Shakti* is the power behind all gods ~~before~~ definitely had a part to play in the gradual acceptance of women as ~~valuable~~ valuable members of society with ~~the~~ their right to an education and the right to their own bodies.

The fact that these are still ~~some~~ some women

Hinduism means that Hindus can feel united under one 'umbrella'. Despite this is significant as despite the ~~a~~ stark differences in the religion, the similarities ^{mean} that Hindus can feel united through their beliefs about the nature of God. Despite what one believes, the general idea within Hinduism is that God is a creator and Shakti is the mother figure and feminine energy is ~~seen~~ behind all creation. These ideas are important as if they were a varied religion, upholding the idea the the similarities are important as well.

A final negative implication on the differences regarding the ideas about belief is the fact that it can lead to disputes - the most famous one being the dispute between Ramanuja and Shankara, as mentioned before. This dispute, although bad, allowed for the development of qualified non-dualism, where Shakti was respected instead of rejected. This is significant as the development of new ideas allows a religion to grow and change which is extremely important.

To conclude, the differences within Hinduism

with regards to belief about God are much more significant than their similarities. This is due to the fact that the differences allow for development and acceptance - 'It is perfectly possible to be a good Hindu whether one inclines to monism, monothemism, polytheism or even atheism' (Zaehner). There are many more differences within Hinduism than similarities, and these differences ^{have} allowed social changes as well as religious ones. The social changes that have developed ~~soon~~ has meant that girls have a chance to be educated now, and the previous misogynistic name of India is slowly depicting as women are gaining more and more rights in a country where they used to have none. Therefore, it is fair to claim that the differences are far more significant, and it is fair to reject the notion that 'the ~~similarities~~ similarities between Hinduism with regards to belief about God and/or existence are more significant than their differences.'

* There is a final ^{idea within} ~~belief in~~ Hinduism ^{of a} ~~single~~ ^{idea about God.} monothemistic religion. This can be best demonstrated through the ISKCON movement (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), where Krishna is believed to be the 'one true God' (Jamirani), ^{and that} ~~there are~~ ~~also~~ ~~shaktas~~ who believe that all other gods

are merely avatars of Krishna. There are also
Shaktas who believe that Siva is the ultimate
god in the same way. ^{This means that Hinduism}
~~that the Hindu movement~~
encompasses all different kinds of ~~beliefs~~ ^{belief};
polytheism, monoism, monotheism as well as
atheism.

Advice for candidates:

Do not ignore the question; manage your material to focus on the demands of the question.

Use appropriate sources and, if possible, include recent scholarship. Demonstrate how well you understand the topic by your selection of material.

Do not forget to comment on your material. Show that you have thought about your research.

Use your evidence to substantiate your argument.

Comment on alternative views if you know them.

Express your viewpoint clearly.

Practice writing under timed conditions as part of your preparation. Do not spend too long writing out your essay plan to the detriment of the essay itself.

Spell key terms and key scholars correctly.

Write legibly.

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