

Cambridge International AS & A Level

HINDUISM**9487/01**

Paper 1 Concepts in Hinduism

May/June 2026**MARK SCHEME**Maximum Mark: 60

Published

This mark scheme contains the instructions and marking guidance that our examiners used to mark candidate responses for this component.

Before they start marking, examiners complete a standardisation process. They review a range of candidate responses and discuss the mark scheme in detail to agree which answers can and cannot be accepted. Examiners award marks where it is clear that candidate responses have met the requirements of the mark scheme. These requirements may vary between different components or different versions of the same component, depending on the exact requirements of the question and the candidate responses seen during the standardisation process.

Sometimes, our mark schemes may allow marks to be awarded to responses which contain elements that are factually incorrect or for content not covered by the syllabus. We do this in response to the demands of a specific question to support candidates and make sure that our assessments are fair. However, these allowances should not be used as a guide for teaching and learning.

We cannot discuss the mark scheme with schools, and we recommend that schools read the mark scheme together with the assessment material and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

This document consists of **21** printed pages.

General marking principles

All examiners must apply these marking principles when marking candidate responses.

1	Examiners must award marks for each response in line with: - the specific content defined in the mark scheme - the specific skills defined in the mark scheme or in the level descriptions - the standard of response required as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.
2	Examiners must award whole marks (not half marks, or other fractions).
3	Examiners must award marks positively . This means that: - marks are not deducted for errors or omissions - marks are awarded for correct/valid answers as defined in the mark scheme and also for other valid answers which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme referring to your team leader as appropriate - the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar are judged only when the mark scheme indicates that these features are specifically assessed in the question. However, the meaning of all responses must be unambiguous.
4	Examiners must consistently apply the requirements of the mark scheme and any rules for what to do when candidates have not followed instructions correctly.
5	Examiners must use the full range of marks defined in the mark scheme, unless limited by the quality of the candidate responses seen.
6	Examiners must award marks according to the mark scheme and must not award marks with grade thresholds or grade descriptions in mind.

Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
N/A	Highlighting areas of text
N/A	Allows comments to be entered in speech bubbles on the candidate response.
N/A	Allows comments to be entered at the bottom of the RM marking window and then displayed when the associated question item is navigated to.
L1	Level one
L2	Level two
L3	Level three
L4	Level four
L5	Level five
SEEN	Indicates that the point has been noted, but no credit has been given.
EVAL	Evaluation

Generic Levels of response descriptions

These level descriptors address Assessment Objectives (AOs) 1 and 2 and should be used in conjunction with the indicative content for each question in the mark scheme.

Assessment Objectives

AO1: Knowledge and understanding

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of teachings, beliefs and practices, including relevance for individual Hindus and communities.

AO2: Analysis and evaluation

Analyse, evaluate and discuss evidence, points of view and issues in Hinduism.

Generic marking principles

- (a) Examiners should use the performance summary statements at the top of the descriptors to help to identify a level which matches the candidate's response. However, the final decision on the band and the mark within the band should be made on the basis of **all** the descriptors in the level and not primarily using the performance summary statement.
- (b) Examiners should start at the lowest level, if the answer meets all the criteria they should then move to the next level and so on. The Examiner should repeat this process until there is a match between the overall answer and the level descriptor. Examiners should use a best-fit approach when deciding upon the level, it is possible for a different level to be chosen for each AO.
- (c) If the Examiner identifies all aspects of the level descriptor within the answer then the highest mark for the level should be given. Examiners should also make reference to the indicative content when deciding on the mark within a level to ensure that there is sufficient relevant content evident within the answer for the level and mark. Examiners should be prepared to credit material in answers which is not contained in the indicative content.
- (d) The Examiner may need to make a judgement within a level or between two or more level statements. Once a 'best-fit' level statement has been identified, use the following guidance to decide on a specific mark:
 - Where the candidate's work **convincingly** meets the level statement, you should award the highest mark.
 - Where the candidate's work **adequately** meets the level statement, you should award the most appropriate mark in the middle of the range.
 - Where the candidate's work **just** meets the level statement, you should award the lowest mark.

5 mark questions

Level	AO1 Knowledge and understanding	Marks
Level 3	Accurate knowledge with good understanding • Uses a range of detailed, accurate and relevant knowledge. • Demonstrates understanding through a well-developed response. • Fully addresses the question. • Good understanding of the wider context, if relevant.	5
Level 2	Partially accurate knowledge with limited understanding • Uses a range of knowledge which may be partially accurate. • Demonstrates limited understanding through a partially developed response. • Addresses some aspects of the question. • Attempts to engage with the wider context, if relevant.	3–4
Level 1	Basic knowledge and basic understanding • Identifies a limited range of knowledge which may not be accurate. • Demonstrates basic understanding through a limited response. • Response is relevant to the topic, but does not directly address the question. • Little or no reference to the wider context, if relevant.	1–2
Level 0	No relevant material to credit.	0

10 mark questions

Level	AO1 Knowledge and understanding	Marks
Level 4	Accurate knowledge with good understanding • Uses a range of detailed, accurate and relevant knowledge. • Demonstrates understanding through a well-developed response. • Fully addresses the question. • Good understanding of the wider context, if relevant.	9–10
Level 3	Mostly accurate knowledge with some understanding • Uses a range of mostly accurate and relevant knowledge. • Demonstrates understanding through a developed response. • Addresses most aspects of the question. • Some engagement with the wider context, if relevant.	6–8
Level 2	Partially accurate knowledge with limited understanding • Uses a range of knowledge which may be partially accurate. • Demonstrates limited understanding through a partially developed response. • Addresses some aspects of the question. • Attempts to engage with the wider context, if relevant.	3–5
Level 1	Basic knowledge and basic understanding • Identifies a limited range of knowledge which may not be accurate. • Demonstrates basic understanding through a limited response. • Response is relevant to the topic, but does not directly address the question. • Little or no reference to the wider context, if relevant.	1–2
Level 0	No relevant material to credit.	0

15 mark questions

Level	AO2 Analysis and evaluation	Marks
Level 5	Thorough discussion supported with evidence - Analyses the importance and/or strength of different arguments/points of view. - Uses accurate evidence to support a well-structured discussion. - Coherent conclusion to the question which evaluates knowledge and points of view and assesses alternative conclusions.	13–15
Level 4	Coherent discussion supported with evidence - Discusses different arguments/points of view in some detail. - Uses accurate evidence to support a structured discussion. - Coherent conclusion to the question which evaluates knowledge and points of view.	10–12
Level 3	Clear discussion with some support - Recognises different arguments/points of view and discusses at least one in some detail. - Uses some evidence to support discussion. - Clear conclusion to the question which is linked to a range of knowledge and points of view.	7–9
Level 2	Attempts a discussion with limited support - Outlines one or more argument/point of view. - Uses supporting evidence for one or more relevant point. The support may not be wholly relevant or accurate. - Attempts a conclusion to the question which is linked to knowledge and/or a point of view.	4–6
Level 1	Basic response with a point of view - States a point of view. - Little or no supporting evidence. - May attempt a basic conclusion, which may not directly address the question.	1–3
Level 0	No relevant material to credit.	0

Section AAnswer **either** Question 1 **or** Question 2.

Question	Answer	Marks
1(a)	‘Dharma derives from the Sanskrit root dhr (to support or uphold) and appears to have developed in relationship to the Vedic conception of rta. Whereas rta affirmed the existence of an orderly creation, subject to patterns and orderly cycles, dharma developed into the notion of the way things should be if harmoniously aligned with rta. There is a sense that the gods themselves are dharmic, placing things in their proper place, such as the sun in its orderly movement through the sky, and making the seasons change, the rain fall and so on.’ Summarise what this passage says about the relationship between dharma and the Vedic concept of rita. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 5-mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Dharma literally means to support or uphold and is linked to the Vedic idea of rita, which refers to the proper cosmic order. Dharma evolved to relate to the actions that humans need to carry out in order to make sure that the universe continues to function as it should, subject to its patterns and cycles. Since the gods are responsible for making sure that the sun, the seasons and the rain are operating as they should, they are understood to be behaving dharmically.	5
1(b)	Explain the relationship between dharma and kama. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 10-mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Kama is the enjoyment of aesthetics or sensual pleasures, including sexual pleasure. It is one of the four purusharthas, meaning that it is one of the four legitimate aims or objectives of human life prescribed by the Hindu scriptures. However, it is one of the secondary purusharthas, which are legitimate, but only under the guidance and governance of dharma or duty/righteousness. Kama is only appropriate for Hindus during the grihastha ashrama of life (the householder stage) and only within marriage. It functions not only for the benefit of the couple, but also for the benefit of society, since it leads to the conception of children. If enjoyed according to dharma and in the correct context, there is no fault in engaging in sex and enjoying it, or in other sensual pleasures such as music and the acquisition of beautiful things. It has been suggested that if kama is understood as desire then it is a necessary motivation to seek moksha. However, kama that is pursued outside the guidance of dharma becomes adharmic and leads to becoming trapped in samsara. It becomes lust and acquisitiveness and leads to affairs, rape and a lack of order in society.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
1(c)	‘It is not possible to pursue a dharmic life without seeking moksha.’ Discuss. AO2 – Analysis and evaluation. Responses will be marked according to the 15-mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Dharma is central to the Hindu world view and way of life, however there is generally an underlying assumption that the purpose of living a dharmic life is to seek moksha. The four purusharthas, usually translated as the goals or aims of life for Hindus are dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Of these two, dharma and moksha are intimately related and there is an assumption that everyone will seek moksha and that for this, dharma is of fundamental importance. However, the secondary aims of artha and kama also contribute not only to the quality of an individual life, but also to the wellbeing of society, providing that they are pursued in accordance with dharma. The grihastha ashrama gives Hindus legitimate access to the pursuit of material wealth (artha) and sensual and sexual pleasure (kama). The grihastha ashrama is presented as being a necessary stage for most Hindu men, since it is the lynchpin that upholds and resources the rest of the ashrama system, thus ensuring that everyone has the opportunity at some point in their lives, to concentrate on achieving moksha. The Manusmriti teaches that if someone fails to fulfil the obligations of the grihastha ashrama they will go to hell after death, and that only after this has been done is someone permitted to seek moksha. This contradicts the idea that moving directly from the brahmacharya to the sannyasin ashrama, as sages such as Shankara did, is a legitimate thing to do. However, there is also a strong assumption in much of Hindu scripture that while there is a dharmic requirement to complete the obligations of the grihastha ashrama, there is also a requirement to move on from it into the vanaprastha ashrama at the appropriate time, and that failure to do so is selfish and shows an unhealthy attachment to artha and kama, which arguably becomes adharmic beyond a certain point. It is undoubtedly true that many people in modern Hindu society do not enter the vanaprastha or sannyasin ashrama, or an equivalent to it, and continue to live and work as householders. It is also true that according to Hindu thought there may be people who are not able to reach moksha during their current lifetime. This could be due to karma accumulated during a previous life; because of gender (in some schools of thought) or varna, or because of a seriously adharmic action committed in the current lifetime. There are also some who may not wish to seek moksha, which requires a huge investment of time and mental energy. Some would argue that those who do not actively seek moksha in this life are acting in ignorance due to the influence of maya, but the fact remains that many people do this.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
1(c)	Some might argue that since the whole point of Hindu philosophy, theology and thinking is to achieve moksha, and that this is the aim of the purushartha system, which is based on dharma, then someone who does not ultimately aim to pursue moksha during their life is acting against dharma and cannot be leading a fully righteous life. They are attached to the pleasures of the material world, which the Upanishads consistently warn against. The Upanishads, however, are arguably designed as a guide to those who are actively seeking moksha. It could also be argued that a life lived in accordance with the requirements of dharma is a righteous life and will result in the acquisition of positive karma and merit which, while it will not result in moksha, will result in a positive rebirth and will actively reduce the store of negative sanchita karma that will have to be experienced in future rebirths. Consequently, it could be argued that living a moral life and fulfilling societal obligations with no thought to moksha is a dharmic option for Hindus, which will result in a positive rebirth that might allow a better chance to pursue moksha.	

Question	Answer	Marks
2(a)	Outline the factors that influence a Hindu's understanding of their personal dharma. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 5-mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Personal dharma, specific to a particular person at a particular time in his or her life, is known as svadharma. It is situational and relative and is closely related to varnashramadharma, which lays out the particular dharma appropriate for a person dependent on their varna and ashrama (stage of life). For women, it may also be related to sthri dharma, which can vary depending on their varna and their husband's ashrama. However, svadharma goes beyond varnashramadharma, which cannot provide guidance on every possible situation. There are also situations when different dharmic obligations contradict each other and the individual needs to decide what the right thing is for them to do, perhaps by seeking guidance in scripture for principles that might be applicable or relying on their own intellect and conscience. Svadharma is specific to each individual and the Bhagavad Gita stresses the importance of doing one's own dharma rather than that of another. It is better to do one's own dharma poorly than to do another's well.	5

Question	Answer	Marks
2(b)	Explain why it might be difficult for modern Hindus to follow varnashramadharma. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 10-mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Varnashramadharma is central to much of Hindu ethics, particularly for Vaishnava Hindus. It prescribes the correct dharma for an individual depending on their varna and ashrama or stage in life, although it is very commonly applied only to men, and it is not required of those who are not 'twice born'. One reason it might be difficult to follow in the modern world is because the varna system is now largely replaced by the jati system, which imposes strict codes on ritual purity and social contact based on the job somebody does. The jati system requires that a person must stay in the jati they are born into, and must not marry, or even eat with a person of lower jati. This means that a person cannot make full use of their natural qualities and talents. The varna system, whilst it still divided people into classes based on what they did, did teach that a person should find the varna that best suited their abilities and gunas. Furthermore, many people believe that the varna system itself is inherently unfair as it places people into a hierarchy and that it should have no place in modern life. For Hindus living outside India, varna may have less significance, meaning that it does not form a part of a Hindu's day to day experience. Arguably, the varna system was in accordance with dharma as the scriptures describe it, while the jati system is not, meaning that this aspect of dharmic living is harder for modern Hindus to fulfil. Ashrama might be even more difficult to follow in the modern world, as society is no longer constructed to support it if, indeed, it ever was. The gurukul system is not in place so there is no possibility of a brahmacharya ashrama as it was originally envisaged, where young children left their families to study the scriptures with a guru in the forest. The 'student' stage is now in state schools where education in Hinduism is not at the heart of the curriculum and boys are exposed to the temptations of both sex and material possessions. Likewise, while renunciates still exist in India, society is not really set up to support this, and particularly not in the Hindu diasporas. Most people spend their retirement at home with their families, and many keep working well past the point where the scriptures would expect them to be vanaprasthas, so that the material working world remains their central concern. Society is no longer set up to support bramacharyas, gurus, vanaprasthas or sannyasins, and this could be interpreted as a decline in dharma generally in the kali yuga.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
2(c)	‘Lakshmi is <u>not</u> a good role model for Hindu women.’ Discuss. AO2 – Analysis and evaluation. Responses will be marked according to the 15-mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Lakshmi is the consort and shakti of Vishnu, who, in the Trimurti, is regarded as the Preserver. Vishnu is often seen as the defender of dharma, and Lakshmi is also a guardian of dharma. She is usually perceived as a goddess of wealth and is associated with artha pursued in accordance with dharma. She is worshipped particularly at Divali, at the end of the business year when accounts are brought up to date, and rangolis are drawn on doorways to welcome her into households, bringing with her good fortune and health. Lakshmi is portrayed as very loving and devoted to her husband, Vishnu, accompanying him to the earth as Sita when he was incarnated as Rama. Iconographically she may be depicted holding his feet on her lap, or as standing on a lotus flower with gold coins falling from her hands. Lakshmi could be seen as a positive role model due to her association with dharmically acquired wealth and prosperity. Wives and mothers may see her as an inspiration to them as they seek to increase the prosperity and happiness of their households through hard work, and through the role that they take in household puja. As Lakshmi rises up from a lotus, she is associated with enlightenment and wisdom, which may also be seen as something for women to aspire to. Lakshmi, in contrast to goddesses such as Parvati, Durga and Kali in the Shaivite tradition is always submissive and obedient to her husband and could be seen as the embodiment of sthri dharma. In fact, in comparison to the Shaivite goddesses, there are very few stories concerning Lakshmi, other than that of her birth from the churning of the ocean. Most of the stories that can be linked to Lakshmi concern the actions of her avatar Sita, who, again, is often seen as the embodiment of sthri dharma, although the extent to which Sita mirrors the qualities of Lakshmi could be debated. She is unquestioningly obedient to Rama, following him into exile in the forest and submitting to his demand that she walks through the fire to demonstrate her chastity. Both Sita and Lakshmi are often held up as models of how dharmic Hindu girls should behave. They are obedient to the men who have authority over them, and are always cheerful and helpful, putting the needs of others above themselves. Whether these are indeed good qualities for girls and women to have in the modern world can be debated. Whilst most would argue that kindness is a good thing, many would also say that women should also be concerned with their own needs and that they are entitled to a life beyond that of their husband and family. One of the characteristics commonly associated with Lakshmi is courage, and this is demonstrated by Sita when she leaves the palace to follow Rama into exile. Lakshmi dwells in and brings prosperity to households where courage and hard work are in evidence, and these are certainly qualities that Hindu women, and anyone else for that matter, might aspire to. In this way it could be said that Lakshmi provides a good role model.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
2(c)	Whether or not Lakshmi is seen as a role model will depend on the view one takes of Hindu society. For someone with a traditional view, there is no doubt that she embodies the qualities that a woman should possess according to the Manusmriti and for this reason many would say that she is a good role model. On the other hand, many would argue that society is changing and that this is a good thing, as women are more independent and have greater expectations of a role in society. For these people, Lakshmi might not be seen as a good role model. It could be argued that Durga, for example, could be seen as a better role model since she challenged the power of the gods and refused to accept the role prescribed for her when she rejected proposals of marriage and acted independently to protect the world.	

Section BAnswer **either** Question 3 **or** Question 4.

Question	Answer	Marks
3(a)	‘Moksha requires attainment of liberating wisdom, a [deep] insight into Truth, into the Self, or Absolute Reality. And it is held to be possible and necessary to achieve such a realization while one is alive. Thus, moksha is not a state that is typically achieved in the afterlife, like a heavenly reward for a good life. Rather, it is an understanding that grants immortality before one physically dies. Such a Self-realized being is [truly] Brahman and is known as a jivanmukta (liberated while alive). Such sages or saints are highly sought after for teachings and blessings.’ Summarise what this passage says about the state of being jivan mukti. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 5-mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Moksha involves gaining insight into the nature of ultimate reality, which is the same as the Self. Moksha is not only possible in this lifetime but could be considered necessary. It is not a reward, like heaven, for living dharmically, but is the result of a true understanding of the true nature of reality and of the self, specifically to realise that the atman and Brahman are one and the same. People who have achieved this are jivan mukti and are often valued as people who can offer teachings and blessings that are seen as helpful to others.	5

Question	Answer	Marks
3(b)	Explain how maya can make it easier for Hindus to understand Brahman. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 10-mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Maya is a complex and nuanced concept that does not have a simple translation. It is often translated as illusion – something that makes the material world to appear real, in fact a more appropriate word might be delusion. Hindus who understand maya in this way do not believe that the world is unreal, but rather that it is not as it appears to be. It possesses contingent rather than absolute reality, and it is maya that makes it appear to be absolutely real. This understanding veils the real nature of the world, and of the atman, and so makes it more difficult to achieve moksha. However, this is not the only way in which maya is used and understood in Hindu scriptures or philosophy. In Vaishnavism, in particular, it is often maya that makes the nirguna Brahman appear as saguna, having form and attributes. This allows Brahman to manifest in a way that is accessible to humans as Ishvara or Bhagavan, and so able to receive devotion or bhakti. This allows the possibility of achieving moksha through bhakti, and a loving and devotional relationship to a personal God. Some Hindu schools of thought have understood maya as divine will and wisdom. In some forms of Vaishnava thought, Maya is conceived as the consort of Vishnu, Lakshmi. She represents the material world, and what is referred to in other forms of Hinduism as Prakriti. Prakriti/maya is eternal and pre-existent, consisting of the three gunas. It is the body to the 'soul' that is Brahman in some Hindu schools. Thus, the nature of Brahman can be revealed through Prakriti/maya, making it easier for humans to relate to the divine. Maya can also be understood as divine lila or play, it is the creative power of Brahman to manifest and create the material world in all its diversity. This reveals the nature of God and makes it accessible to people. The Bhagavad Gita describes maya as the creative power that allows the divine to enter the realm of nature as an avatar. Maya can be interpreted as magic, as the 'trick' of the creation of the world, be it real or seeming and this reveals the divine to be full of imaginative creative energy.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
3(c)	‘Freeing oneself from karma is the only way in which moksha can be achieved.’ Discuss. AO2 – Analysis and evaluation. Responses will be marked according to the 15-mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Moksha is liberation from the cycle of samsara and is often seen to be the ultimate goal of Hinduism. However, opinions vary greatly within Hinduism as to what moksha is and how it can best be achieved. According to Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, all action generates karma, and it is karma that keeps an atman trapped in the cycle of samsara. Therefore, it could be argued that actions that free one from the negative effects of karma, such as pilgrimage and certain rituals are a pre-requisite for moksha. However, ceasing to act is not an option, and therefore Krishna’s advice is to continue to act in a way that is appropriate to your own dharma, but without any expectation of reward or engagement with the outcome of your actions. This is nishkama karma or disinterested action. Actions performed in this way do not accumulate any new karma and in this way, it is possible to free oneself from karma and so to achieve moksha. This makes it seem like the only way that a Hindu could achieve moksha is through freeing themselves from the effects of karma. However, Krishna himself says in the same text that anyone who offers him so much as a leaf, or water out of pure love will be liberated. This seems to suggest that there are other ways to moksha apart from nishkama karma. Krishna also refers to the jnana marga or path of knowledge, which he suggests is appropriate for those of an intellectual disposition. There is an implication, possibly, that jnana is suited to brahmins and nishkama karma to kshatriyas, while bhakti, or the path of devotion is open to all. Some Hindu schools of thought suggest that bhakti is the most direct and easiest route to moksha but also suggests that this level of pure devotion is only a possibility for those who already have a high level of jnana and are practising nishkama karma. This would also agree with the statement that freeing oneself from karma is necessary before any route to moksha can be effective. In other schools the view is strongly opposed to the statement. Moksha is defined as the realisation that the individual atman and Brahman are non-different. It is the realisation that one is not a part of the material world but in fact Brahman that frees the atman from samsara. In this case karma of any kind is largely irrelevant, since it belongs to the material world. The aim is to overcome the illusion of maya, which suggests that the apparent world has absolute reality. This can be done through the study of scripture, through spending time with a guru or through meditation and experiential knowledge. It could be argued, however, that in order to be receptive to jnana, and so be capable of moksha, a person must first be virtuous and live dharmically.	15

Question	Answer	Marks
3(c)	For some, liberation is achieved through meditation, which gives the ability to distinguish between what is and is not 'Self', but this is at the end of a process that begins with moral guidelines and the development of self-restraint. It could be said, then, that karma plays a role even in jnana marga. It could be seen that even here nishkama is necessary, since if one is attached to the consequences of their actions, they are, in effect, attached to the apparent world and the illusion that it is real. Since even a yogi cannot completely withdraw from action, it could be said that nishkama karma is a necessary pre-requisite for the jnana marga to be effective. Thus, there is a way in which nishkama karma can be seen to be a fundamental pre-requisite of any method for achieving moksha. Not all would agree, however, as there are some who believe that moksha can be granted through the grace of Bhagavan or Vishnu spontaneously even to a person who might appear to be adharmic. Moksha is in effect the gift of God and does not necessarily follow any outside rules. Some even believe that moksha can be gained by dying or being cremated in Varanasi or by calling on the aid of Rama at the point of death.	

Question	Answer	Marks
4(a)	Outline what is meant by prarabdha karma. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 5-mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Prarabdha karma is karma that forms a subset of sanchita karma, which is the accumulated reserve of karma from the whole of an individual's previous lives, which may be almost infinite. Karma remains in this reserve until it is 'used up' in a lifetime. Prarabdha karma is the subset of past karmas that determines the precise characteristics and circumstances of a particular incarnation. For example, it can determine whether one has a human incarnation, or not, as well as specifics such as gender and varna, as well as any particular challenges an individual might face. In the parable of the archer, sanchita karma is seen as the total number of arrows a person owns, prarabdha karma is represented by the quiver of arrows an archer has to draw on, and agami karma is the arrow that is being released, the actions in this lifetime that will bear karmic consequences later.	5
4(b)	Explain how the raja marga can lead to liberation. AO1 – Knowledge and understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 10-mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: The Bhagavad Gita advocates three distinct paths or margas that lead to moksha. To these, a fourth can be added, that is alluded to in the Gita but less developed. This is the raja marga or royal path of meditation. It is often called the royal path either because it is thought to be superior to other methods, or because it allows one to gain sovereignty over oneself and so access one's own highest self which is sometimes identified with Ishvara. Raja marga is sometimes thought to move from the physical to the spiritual through a number of different steps. These begin with moral standards that emphasise clean living and self-control, before a series of exercises designed to help a person to withdraw their attention or consciousness from the world around them and develop increasingly pronounced states of introspection and self-awareness. In this way it is possible for a person to cease to identify with the material world around them or prakriti and instead identify with purusha. For some, this means experiencing themselves as non-different to Brahman and so achieving liberation; for others it means identifying oneself as purusha rather than prakriti, which is kaivalya or 'aloneness'. Rather than being a separate marga in its own right, meditation is rather a methodology or technique that can be used by people who are on another marga, often jnana, as a way to experience the reality of their true nature which is usually veiled by maya.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
4(c)	‘It is possible for any Hindu to achieve liberation in this lifetime.’ Discuss. AO2 – Analysis and evaluation. Responses will be marked according to the 15-mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Liberation from the cycle of samsara (birth, death and rebirth) is the goal of most Hindu teachings and is usually referred to as moksha. There are many different understandings of what moksha is within Hinduism and therefore many different teachings about how to attain it. Some Hindus believe that it is possible to become jivan mukti; that it to become liberated before death, through jnana, or the experiential knowledge of themselves as Brahman. A jivan mukti continues living in order to ‘use up’ existing karma but does not accrue new karma. For some Hindus, these different methods are complimentary, allowing an individual to choose one that is most suited to their dispositions, characteristics, or gunas, or even to combine the different paths in the way that is most suitable for them. For example, a brahmin who is inclined towards study might follow the way of jnana but might also practise nishkama karma. Other schools of Hinduism, however, believe that there is only one path that will ultimately lead to moksha and that everyone must take this path or remain bound in samsara. For some, moksha is understood as the realisation that there is no difference between the individual atman and Brahman. The atman does not ‘merge’ with Brahman on attaining Brahman and is not understood to be a ‘piece’ of Brahman, rather it realises that it is, and has always been, Brahman in its entirety. To reach this realisation and understanding requires great time and effort. It can be achieved through the study of scripture, through study with a guru, or through meditation, which is a skill built up over many years and requiring dedication and practice. Not everyone is in a position to be able to do this. It is difficult, for example, to see how someone might be able to do this while doing a conventional job and having a family, although the varnashramadharma system could be said to ensure that every ‘twice born’ male has the opportunity to devote themselves to the pursuit of moksha at some point in their life. Although society does not generally allow women to pursue this way of life, there have been exceptions to this. Not everyone possesses the mental capacity or spiritual insight to succeed at this path even if they were physically able to pursue it, and many would say that the capacity to achieve moksha through jnana is built up over many lifetimes. If this is the only way in which moksha can be achieved, then it follows that not everyone can achieve moksha in their current lifetime. The advice to women, people of low varna, and anyone lacking the capacity for full realisation would be to lead a life full of dharma and support the sannyasins seeking moksha in any way they can. In this way they can accumulate positive karma and hope for a rebirth where the conditions will allow them to seek moksha through jnana.	15

Question	Answer	Marks
4(c)	Since the Middle Ages, bhakti has become popular within Hinduism. This is the practice of showing pure and loving devotion to an Ishvara or personal God. This is advocated by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita as being the easiest way to achieve moksha. Some Hindus might believe that moksha is more difficult to achieve in the Kali Yuga, and that therefore the grace of an Ishvara is needed. Bhakti does appear to give every Hindu individual the ability to achieve moksha in their current life, even if they are people who have traditionally been marginalised and excluded, such as women and dalits. Krishna promises liberation to anyone who offers him so much as a leaf or a drink of water with a pure heart and genuine love. There is also the expectation that sins can be forgiven, and past karmas wiped out through the grace of Krishna. Shabri is an example of this. She is someone who would not usually be expected to be able to achieve moksha, and yet her single minded devotion to Rama leads to liberation even though she is a low cast woman. This would suggest that moksha is open to all in the current life. However, bhakti is also often said to require a degree of learning and understanding and of study with a guru for most people, so it may not be as accessible as at first appears. To some Hindus, also, this would be a false hope since they believe that Brahman is ultimately nirguna and cannot favour people with grace or love. Some Hindu teachers have taught that there are some jivas that are so lost in ignorance that they can never attain liberation, no matter how many lives they live. Others, by contrast, believed that all jivas could be liberated, and that bhakti was the best way of achieving this, but also that both nishkama karma and jnana were necessary in order for a person to fully and rightly engage in jnana. This suggests that for some, at least, even bhakti is not a guarantee of moksha without many previous lives of preparation. Ultimately, whether a Hindu believes that moksha is possible for any individual in their current life depends very much on their view of Brahman and their understanding of what moksha actually is, as well as the darshana or tradition that they follow. Some believe that since moksha is achieved exclusively through the grace of Ishvara or Bhagavan, it can be granted to anyone who is so favoured, making it possible for anyone to be liberated in this lifetime.	