



Cambridge International AS & A Level

HINDUISM

9487/02

Paper 2 Development of 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 **17** 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 **three** questions.

Question	Answer	Marks
1(a)	‘Shruti (literally that which has been heard) and smriti (literally: that which has been remembered) are the two main categories of Hindu religious literature. Shruti has implications of ‘revelation’ or ‘truth’ in an unquestionable or absolute sense and, according to Hindu orthodoxy, shruti is identical with the Vedas.’ Summarise what this passage says about the concept of shruti. AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding. Responses will be marked according to the 5 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Shruti is one of two categories of religious literature in Hinduism. It means ‘that which has been heard’ and is applied to texts which are generally considered to have been divinely revealed. This makes them true in a way that is beyond question. In orthodox Hinduism when shruti literature is being discussed it is a reference to the Vedas.	5

Question	Answer	Marks
1(b)	Explain why understanding the difference between astika and nastika might <u>not</u> be important for some Hindus. AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding. Response will be marked according to the 10 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: ‘Astika’ means ‘orthodox’; in the context of religion this term is generally used to indicate conformity to the traditional or most widely accepted tenets of practice and belief associated with that religion. In the specific context of Hinduism, it describes those schools which regard the Vedas as being of divine origin and therefore the foundational source of the religion: Astika schools of Hinduism are those which accept the Vedas as authoritative. ‘Nastika’ means ‘heterodox’, describing a position that is not in accord with the orthodox view. In the context of Hinduism, it is most commonly applied to those schools which do not accept the Vedas as authoritative. Because astika literally refers to an affirmation of existence the terms are sometimes used more broadly, with astika describing a position affirming the reality of Brahman, atman or ishvara and nastika being the opposite view. These are terms that describe scholarly categories rather than necessarily being important personal descriptors. Some individuals might wish to use them to explain or understand their own position within the various schools of Hinduism and, since accepting the authority of the Vedas is sometimes presented as an essential element of being a Hindu, it might be considered vital for an individual to understand the difference between astika and nastika positions if they are going to describe themselves as Hindus. However, Hinduism is known for its diversity and most scholars – including Hindu scholars – recognise nastika as a classification within Hinduism rather than a division between what is Hindu and what is not and for most people, most of the time, self-identification as a Hindu is unlikely to require justification or be subject to challenge. In practical terms most paths to liberation do not require a consideration of whether the individual or the path is best categorised as astika or nastika. A Hindu who rejects the authority of the Vedas might not wish to study with a guru who emphasises understanding or accepting their contents as essential to liberation, but a Hindu practicing bhakti is likely to be less concerned with authoritative texts and more concerned with pleasing their ishvara.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
1(c)	Assess the claim that contemporary Hindus do <u>not</u> need to know the contents of shruti texts. AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation. Response will be marked according to the 15 mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Hinduism is unusual in the range and diversity of texts that are recognised as religious in nature. The Vedas, regarded as the foundational texts of Hinduism, are widely agreed to be shruti or revealed texts. Sometimes other texts are classified as shruti, such as the Bhagavad Gita, believed by many Hindus to be the words of Krishna, but there is less agreement over these. The Vedas explain the structure and form of rituals presented as necessary for the maintenance of cosmic order (rita). They also set out the roles and responsibilities of the priests who carry out these rituals. It could therefore be argued that contemporary priests must be aware of at least some of the contents of shruti texts, although there is no need for them to know anything beyond the actions they must perform and the words they must say. Since priests perform rituals on behalf of other Hindus it might seem that there must be a degree of knowledge outside of the priesthood, so that an individual would know what ritual they are seeking in a given situation. However, this knowledge need not have come from the text but could be a matter of tradition or custom. It might be noted that traditional Hinduism would not agree that a need to know the contents of the Vedas is universal since there were specific rules about which of the varnas could read or study the Vedas. Similarly, Vedic study was restricted by ashrama and both varna and ashrama traditionally applied only to men. So, it could be argued that a requirement to know the Vedas has only ever existed for some Hindus in some circumstances and that remains the case today. Belief in the authority of the Vedas has been suggested as a means of identifying who is 'really' a Hindu and who is not, which might imply a need for at least a degree of familiarity with their contents. However, it is possible to agree that the Vedas are authoritative without having read any part of them, especially since other, arguably more accessible, texts are presented as summaries of the Vedas. The idea of a 'fifth Veda' is sometimes used for these texts; for example, the Mahabharata uses this term to describe itself, as a new Veda for a new age. Similarly, the Bhagavad Gita is often described as a synthesis of the Vedas. This means that a Hindu could use them in the same way as the Vedic texts, as a guide to Hindu beliefs, practices and traditions. This is an argument against a need to know the contents of the Vedas specifically but, it is not necessarily one against a need for familiarity with the concepts and beliefs contained in shruti texts. It might also be argued that the size, scope and language of the Vedas makes a total familiarity with all their contents impossible for one individual although this does not preclude a need to be familiar with the broader concepts the texts address.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
2(a)	Outline the contents of the Sama Veda. AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding. Response will be marked according to the 5 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: The Sama Veda contains songs, chants and melodies. It is divided into two large sections: one is for melodies, and this is further divided into those for shared ritual and those for private practice; the other is the mantras. The verses of the mantras correspond to the melodies and the text as a whole is meant to be sung or heard rather than read. The Sama Veda has more than 1800 verses, but it is the shortest of the four Vedas. Most verses in the Sama Veda can also be found in the Rig Veda and some are repeated within the Sama Veda. Some of the Principal Upanishads, including the Chandogya Upanishad, are part of the Sama Veda.	5
2(b)	Explain why some Hindus see the Bhagavad Gita as their most significant religious text. AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding. Response will be marked according to the 10 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: The Bhagavad Gita is a part of the Mahabharata, which is usually regarded as a smriti text overall. The Bhagavad Gita however takes the form of a dialogue with Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu, and it is therefore seen by some Hindus as shruti. This means that it is a divinely revealed text, with the additional status that implies. Some Hindu traditions, including the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, regard it as their most important scripture. M K Gandhi also viewed the Bhagavad Gita as an essential text, calling it his 'eternal mother'. He described it as both non-dogmatic and non-sectarian, with the battlefield it depicts being a metaphor for the internal struggle between good and evil taking place inside the human heart. Since it is not the only shruti text in Hinduism this classification alone is not sufficient to explain why it might be considered the most important of all. The other texts generally agreed to be shruti are the Vedas; these are both older and more complex than the Bhagavad Gita, with large sections that have never been translated from the original Sanskrit. Study of the Vedas was also traditionally restricted to the higher varnas. These things make the more accessible Bhagavad Gita additionally significant. It has not only been translated into many languages but the style in which it is written is more straightforward and the need for interpretation less acute. Accessibility and readability combine to make the Bhagavad Gita popular. It is also understood by many to be a synthesis of the Vedas, deliberately given by Krishna to summarise the dense and complex philosophy of those texts into a single, shorter form. As such it might well be considered the most significant religious text by some Hindus, explaining central concepts such as dharma (duty/righteousness), varna (class), the nature of the atman and the different paths to liberation that inform much Hindu practice in the contemporary world.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
2(c)	Assess the claim that religious stories are <u>not</u> helpful in understanding Hinduism. AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation. Response will be marked according to the 15 mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: The Mahabharata and the Ramayana are probably the most widely known and best loved of the Hindu scriptures; they tell epic stories of heroes overcoming adversity, battling villains and winning great victories. The narrative form makes these texts more accessible than many others and the stories can be shared dramatically through different media. The events, characters and their actions can be used as guides to dharma and other concepts, as ways of understanding aspects of Hindu philosophy in particular contexts. Gods are often characters in these stories, teaching others through both their words and their actions. The stories also contribute to the religious iconography associated with these deities. It cannot therefore be said that the stories are unconnected from the religion of Hinduism but how useful they are in terms of achieving understanding of the religion is open to discussion. Since they are commonly used for entertainment, stories are certainly a useful way to share ideas. In the setting of a story, it is possible to teach by implication and example rather than appearing to dictate or lecture. The examples set by the characters illustrate lessons, values and principles in an almost surreptitious way. The disadvantage of this is that people might miss the lesson entirely, forgetting about the story once it is finished or desiring a different outcome for specific characters. In the absence of explicit teaching or more formal guidance on how to interpret the stories things could be misunderstood. On the other hand, differing interpretation is an element of the study of any religious text and, so long as the different interpretations are recognised, the fact that they exist need not undermine understanding of the religion as a whole and could even enhance it. The epics are not stories about ordinary people living ordinary lives, but about people with important responsibilities and roles in society. They are also set in different ages and so very different worlds and societies than the present. Since Hinduism views time as cyclical the contexts depicted will return but this difference in context could be used to suggest that stories are more helpful in understanding traditional or idealised forms of Hinduism but have less immediate relevance to contemporary Hinduism as they require further interpretation or application to modern situations. However, it could also be argued that the principles illustrated remain unchanged, it is simply that people in the Kali Yuga do not value them as they should; the stories are true at a deeper level than any context-dependent specifics. This would mean that the stories paint a picture of Hinduism as it should be rather than as it necessarily is. For some Hindus the stories enable a sense of emotional connection to deities and this might be considered a part of understanding bhakti practice.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
3(a)	Outline what the term ‘nirguna Brahman’ says about the nature of the divine. AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding. Response will be marked according to the 5 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Nirguna Brahman refers to Brahman without qualities or attributes. This is an impersonal and transcendent Absolute, entirely beyond time and space. Nirguna Brahman cannot be imagined, described or experienced by the senses and the concept is therefore associated with the idea of using neti-neti (not this, not this) being used to distinguish what is not Brahman and thus to remove ignorance; this is the aim of the jnana marga. Sat chit ananda is also a term used to give a degree of understanding of the nature of the divine. The phrase means being, consciousness, bliss and it is usually used as a means of describing the experience or realisation of the ultimate reality.	5
3(b)	Explain the relationship between saguna Brahman and the practice of murti puja. AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding. Response will be marked according to the 10 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Saguna Brahman is Brahman with attributes or qualities. It is a personal form of divinity, allowing for bhakti worship of an ishvara, since this requires a relationship between deity and devotee. Believing Brahman is saguna means that bhakti can be rewarded with divine grace, releasing the atman from karma and so from rebirth. While bhakti is usually focused on specific, named deities it is commonly underpinned by the belief that these are different aspects of a single divine. Their qualities are the qualities of this divinity: saguna Brahman. Puja means veneration or worship and can be used to describe any kind of ritualised devotion, including murti puja – the veneration of a deity in the form of an image of that deity. This is a common bhakti practice. A murti can be a model, statue or picture of the deity but some natural objects are also regarded as manifestations of a particular deity or an aspect of their power. Whatever form it takes a murti is the manifestation of the divine presence in the world, so the worshipper is literally in the physical presence of the deity during puja. This is only possible if Brahman is saguna as a qualityless absolute could not be depicted by any kind of murti. Darshan is an important element of murti puja. It literally means ‘looking at’ or ‘viewing’ and it refers to the meeting the devotee’s eyes with those of the murti; the devotee is seen and blessed by the deity. It is an active exchange of seeing and knowing by both the worshipper and the divine as the devotee sees beyond the inanimate material that makes the image to recognise the deity whose spirit infuses it, and the deity sees the devotee and accepts their offering. This again relies on the divine being both personal and immanent.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
3(c)	Assess the claim that the atman and Brahman are the same but eternally distinct. AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation. Response will be marked according to the 15 mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: The relationship between atman and Brahman is a central concern of the Upanishads and so of Hindu philosophy and different schools of thought understand it differently. There is generally agreement that atman is the essential or real element of a person, unchanging and eternal and so distinct from the impermanent and mutable material world. Atman is what is reborn into samsara, entangled with maya, and it is what will be freed from that cycle if moksha is attained. There are however different views as to how the atman is related to Brahman: The monist view is that atman and Brahman are identical and the belief that they are distinct is the result of confusion and entanglement with maya. This leads to identification of the self with what is unreal rather than what is real. The dualist view argues the Brahman and atman are entirely distinct with atman being created by Brahman, to be eternally different from Brahman although also real. This is generally characterised as a relationship between God and devotee with the difference between the two being eternal and real in the same way that souls are eternally different to matter. There is also a qualified view, between these two extremes, which sees atman and Brahman as made of the same substance but as being eternally distinct entities, even after liberation. Atman possesses chit (consciousness) and chit is eternally real. Brahman is the supreme reality and atman are modes of Brahman's existence. They are dependent upon Brahman but separate from the mode which is the Paramatman (Supreme Self). All of these philosophies are rooted in the same Vedic texts but rely on differing interpretations of those texts. They could therefore be said to have equal authority within Hinduism from an outsider scholarly perspective, but individual Hindus are likely to find one more in accordance with their own view than the others. There is arguably an emotional appeal to viewing atman and Brahman as eternally distinct, since it does not involve the end of existence as an individual once liberation is achieved. However, this attachment to individuality could be seen as an obstacle to liberation in itself. Different margas might be said to rely on different understandings of Brahman – jnana being associated with monist perspectives for example, or bhakti with dualist ones – and it could therefore be argued that Hinduism has room for all these differing views to be right in some sense. However, from within the specific philosophy it might be that liberation can only be achieved through reaching a specific understanding.	15

Question	Answer	Marks
4(a)	Outline what the concept of Devi/Shakti teaches Hindus about the divine. AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding. Response will be marked according to the 5 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Devi literally means ‘goddess’ and shakti ‘energy’ or ‘power’. They are both used as names for the divine feminine. As a descriptor of a quality, shakti is manifest in all female deities and, in many forms of Hinduism, these are the consorts of masculine deities and represent their active, immanent power. By contrast Devi/Shakti names the Great Goddess, is the divine feminine as the Supreme or Absolute reality. Shakti can be used to illustrate two different views of divine nature; one is that shakti exists in a dualistic and interdependent relationship with shiva (the masculine). The other is found within the tradition of Shaktism, which is non-dualistic, seeing the divine as consisting of both masculine and feminine energies in an inseparable synthesis.	5

Question	Answer	Marks
4(b)	Compare the main practices of Shaktism and Smartism. AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding. Response will be marked according to the 10 mark level descriptors (AO1). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Smartism engages in murti puja as a means to moving towards the wisdom that will ultimately lead to liberation; it is rooted in Advaita philosophy and it does not believe that bhakti can lead directly to liberation. Shaktas often also engage in bhakti practices with individual named goddesses being offered devotion, and they might hold the view that divine grace can bestow liberation on bhaktas. However, Shaktism also includes those who seek to focus on Shakti more directly and this might be through a dedicated puja or other devotional practices. Smarta worship is based around five deities – Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesh, Surya and Shakti – who are all considered equal and are worshipped together through panchayatana puja. Murtis of all five deities are present during this puja but they can be arranged differently, placing a specific deity at the centre as the primary deity for this particular act of worship. Puja is unlikely to be offered directly to Shakti but, as with panchayatana puja in Smartism, puja to a personal goddess might be seen as a means of approaching the ultimate for those less spiritually advanced; devotion to a named saguna deity can be the first step on a journey towards realising ultimate truth. Shaktism is often strongly associated with tantra, an esoteric system of non-Vedic rituals, practices and philosophies. Tantra, in all its forms, is concerned with energy and its manipulation; since it is shakti which shapes everything that exists, most tantric practices involve worshipping the Goddess in some form. Some Shaktas seek to awaken the power of the Goddess they believe is sleeping within their own bodies, Mantras, mudras (hand gestures) and drawing yantras (geometric designs) are all practices Shaktas engage in to achieve awareness of oneness with the Mother. The nature of Shakta tantra makes initiation by a guru an important part of these traditions. Smartism is not a tantric tradition but one based on the smritis. Physical practices are not considered means of attaining liberation, although they might be steps to prepare for the right path. Puja is one such step. Scriptural study, reflection and meditation are the means through which liberation can be attained. Smartism recommends a monastic lifestyle as best for attaining liberation; Shaktism recognises monastic living as one potential path. Shaktas engage in many religious practices common in other theistic traditions but there is also an historical tradition of blood sacrifice in Goddess worship. Other traditions, including Smartism, are more likely to regard blood as a polluting substance.	10

Question	Answer	Marks
4(c)	‘Smartism is clearly a polytheistic tradition.’ Discuss. AO2 – Analysis and Evaluation. Response will be marked according to the 15 mark level descriptors (AO2). Candidates might refer to some of the following: Polytheism is the term used to describe belief systems that recognise many gods; Hinduism, which undoubtedly has a large pantheon of named deities, is often presumed to be polytheist overall but this is an oversimplification as the religion encompasses different traditions and philosophical schools of thought, with different perspectives on the nature of the divine. Smartism certainly allows for the worship of more than one deity. A central practice for many Smartas is panchayatana puja, in which five separate deities are venerated. This could certainly be called polytheism by some, but a consideration of the beliefs underlying the practice might lead to that classification being rejected. Smartism is often linked with Advaita philosophy, meaning that these five deities might not be considered distinct entities but rather as aspects of Brahman, not different to one another at all on the level of ultimate reality. That would be a monist position rather than a polytheist, or even a monotheist one. Smartism also has a broader meaning than the name of a specific sect within Hinduism; a smarta is anyone who follows the Dharmashastras and practises rituals as described in the Kalpa sutras, meaning essentially Vedic rather than Tantric ritual practice. There are therefore Vaishnava and Shaivite Smartas, with the different understandings of and relationships to the divine that implies. Some scholars would describe those traditions as monotheist, in their focus on a single, personal form of deity, while others would choose a different term since recognition and worship of other deities remains possible within these traditions. It might also be noted that beliefs relating to liberation and how it is to be achieved might complicate classification of the tradition. While Smartism recognises and even promotes, for some, the practice of murti puja as a means of approaching saguna Brahman liberation cannot be achieved through this practice. If only the jnana marga and the realisation of oneness with Brahman can lead to liberation then it could be argued that Smartism cannot meaningfully be described as a theistic tradition at all, since ultimately no personal God exists. Alternatively it could be argued that it begins as a theistic path until the individual has moved beyond the need for that, at which point it becomes something else. While Smartism is known for the practice of panchayatana puja and this is intended to remove distinctions between deities as a reflection of saguna Brahman it is nevertheless the case that practitioners are free to follow any religious practice that does not contradict the smriti texts on which it is based (principally the Puranas). Some Smartas are devoted to a single ista devata and the theistic tradition of Smartism accepts that Brahman is also saguna, meaning that a practitioner’s belief might be closer to henotheism or monotheism than to polytheism. The overlapping nature of these concepts, coupled with the great diversity of metaphysical perspectives accepted within Hinduism, means that there is unlikely to be absolute agreement on the classification of any given example.	15