



This is a revision focused activity that follows on from the AO1 task, and puts together the earlier skills learnt. It is about creating an end product, applying the skills required by AO2. A number of lines of argument are given, though it is not necessary to develop all of them. The order may also need changing. A variety of quotations are provided, but again not all are required. You will need to do your own intermediate conclusions and develop a main conclusion. The completed essay should take 35 minutes. Then compare with others in the class and discuss any significant differences and ways it could have been improved.

### ESSAY TITLE:

#### The extent to which Brahman can be understood as nirguna. (AO2 – Theme 4)

- Some Hindus who express their faith and devotion through worship have no need for deeper investigations into deeper truths.
- The majority of Hindus place great importance on personal deities which are not regarded as the way to full self-realisation in Advaita Vedanta.
- Most Hindus find the complex philosophy hard to comprehend.
- Many Hindus see it as an intellectual religion rather than a popular religion.
- Advaita Vedanta philosophy takes a monist view, the belief that only one thing exists – which is contrary to what many Hindus believe. Many Hindus are dualists.
- The philosophy's view is that Brahman is utterly beyond description – non-personal interpretation does not appeal to many Hindus. They would argue that you cannot build a personal spiritual relationship with Brahman, if Brahman is beyond description.
- Some Western Hindus consider the philosophy as a negative way to view the world. The world being just an illusion makes everything in it empty and meaningless.
- Many Hindus who follow the philosophy would argue that worshipping deities is possible as well as developing an understanding of Advaita Vedanta.
- The loving relationship between deity and devotee is often compared to common human experiences of loving and being in love.
- Bhakti is founded on devotional service which by implication is practical in nature.



# Hinduism

The extent to which Brahman can be understood as nirguna (AO2 – Theme 4)

- However, Mukhti and liberation are spiritual goals. These are the goals of bhakti which show that it is a spiritual path.
- Developing a loving relationship with God is spiritual which shows that bhakti is a spiritual path.
- Purpose of bhakti is to assist the transformation of ordinary human existence into something sacred.
- The worship of deities can also be a stepping stone to higher knowledge.
- Others would argue that the principles of the philosophy are the basis of many.
- Hindu beliefs (it is the basis of belief in reincarnation and attaining moksha) and as such, are relevant to most Hindus.
- To experience the divine in a personal and direct way is spiritual and therefore shows that bhakti is spiritual.
- Within bhakti, the practical aspects and their spiritual value complement one another. All the practices have spiritual meaning.



### QUOTATIONS

He (brahman) is the swan (sun), dwelling in the bright heaven; he is the vasu (air), dwelling in the sky; he is the sacrificer (fire), dwelling on the hearth; he is the guest (soma), dwelling in the sacrificial jar; he dwells in men, in gods (vara), in the sacrifice (rita), in heaven; he is born in the water, on earth, in the sacrifice (rita), on the mountains; he is the True and the Great. (Katha Upanishad 5:2)

The self is hidden in all beings and does not shine forth. (Katha Upanishad 3:12)

A helpful analogy might be that of an Arctic ice-cap. At the North pole there is no land, merely a thick cap of ice resting upon the sea. If you were to stand there and look around, everything you could see would be composed of frozen water, supported by more water, going down to unknowable depths. Brahman is like this, mysterious and profound. It not only supports the physical universe, but penetrates it, running throughout everything that is. (Jamieson)

Ultimately Vishnu is pointing beyond his manifest self to the Unmanifest Brahman.....Many people support the view that humankind needs a tangible, manifest and anthropomorphic conception of God to worship. It is difficult, if not impossible, to worship a formless 'It' which is why manifested aspects of Brahman are so important within Hinduism. (Fowler)

He who knows this Brahman, hidden in the cave of the heart, cuts asunder even here the knot of ignorance. (Mundaka Upanishad)

He who knows that imperishable Being, bright, without shadow, without body, without colour, verily obtains the Supreme. (Prasna Upanishad)