

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

Sociology Optional Stratification and Mobility

Paper 1 · Unit 5

The unit that decides your Paper 1 score: the three theories of stratification, the dimensions they each miss, and what mobility research actually found.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

(a) Concepts - equality, inequality, hierarchy, exclusion, poverty and deprivation. (b) Theories of social stratification - Structural functionalist theory, Marxist theory, Weberian theory. (c) Dimensions - Social stratification of class, status groups, gender, ethnicity and race. (d) Social mobility - open and closed systems, types of mobility, sources and causes of mobility.

Concepts: Equality, Inequality, Hierarchy

Examiners open this unit by testing whether you can separate four words that aspirants use as synonyms. Inequality is a distributional fact. Stratification is inequality that has become structured, institutionalised and transmitted across generations. Hierarchy is stratification that a culture positively values. Equality is a normative claim, not a description.

- Rousseau, in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755), split natural or physical inequality (age, health, bodily strength) from moral or political inequality (wealth, honour, power), which exists only by convention and human consent. This is the standard opening for any 'natural versus social inequality' question.
- Not all inequality is stratification. Stratification requires that ranked positions be institutionalised, backed by a value system, and inherited. A one-off difference in income is inequality; a system that reliably passes advantage to the next generation is stratification.
- Andre Beteille draws the sharpest distinction: hierarchy is inequality that is culturally valued and ideologically legitimated, whereas inequality in a modern society persists in fact while being denied in principle. A caste order avows its ranking; a class order disavows the ranking it produces.
- Beteille's harmonic and disharmonic systems (*Caste, Class and Power*, 1965) formalise this: in a harmonic system the existing distribution of rewards matches the normative order, so inequality feels legitimate; in a disharmonic system the actual distribution and the professed values of equality diverge, and inequality becomes contestable.
- Louis Dumont (*Homo Hierarchicus*, 1966) grounds hierarchy in the pure/impure opposition and in what he calls the encompassing of the contrary. His central claim is the disjunction of status and power: in the traditional Indian order, ritual status encompasses and outranks secular power. Beteille and others contest this, arguing Dumont over-reads the Brahminical textual view.
- Equality itself is plural: equality of opportunity (equal starting rules), equality of outcome (equal results), and equality of condition. Affirmative action debates turn on this, since formal equality of opportunity applied to unequal starting points reproduces the inequality it claims to cure.
- Marx's counter-point, worth deploying wherever you use Rousseau: what appears as natural inequality is usually social inequality that has been naturalised. Race and gender are the standard illustrations, since both were long defended as biological facts and are now understood as social constructions.

KEY TERMS

Social stratification — Institutionalised, generationally transmitted ranking of categories of people in a hierarchy of rewards.

Hierarchy — Beteille's term for inequality that a society's value system openly endorses.

Disharmonic system — Beteille: one where the actual distribution of rewards contradicts the society's professed egalitarian values.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- What is the difference between natural and social inequality? Give examples from caste and class dimensions. [2018]
- How are Hierarchy and Exclusion the major impediments in the transformation of societies? Discuss. [2020]

Exclusion, Poverty and Deprivation

Poverty was long treated as a shortfall of income. Sociology moved it to a shortfall of participation. The three positions you must be able to separate are absolute poverty (Rowntree), relative poverty (Townsend), and capability deprivation (Sen).

- Seebohm Rowntree's York studies set the absolute standard: primary poverty means earnings insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for merely physical efficiency, secondary poverty means earnings sufficient but absorbed by other expenditure. The virtue is measurability; the flaw is that subsistence is itself socially defined.
- Peter Townsend (Poverty in the United Kingdom, 1979) redefined poverty as relative deprivation: people are poor when they lack the resources to obtain the diet, amenities and conditions of life that are customary in their society. He operationalised it as a deprivation index, not an income line.
- Amartya Sen's capability approach reframes poverty as the deprivation of basic capabilities, the substantive freedoms to do and be, rather than lowness of income. Income is instrumental; functioning is what matters. Sen's neat formulation: poverty is absolute in the space of capabilities and relative in the space of commodities.
- Sen's Poverty and Famines (1981) established that famines can occur without any decline in food availability, through entitlement failure, a collapse in what a person can command through endowment and exchange. This is the strongest evidence that deprivation is a relational and institutional fact, not a natural scarcity.
- The 2017 question 'can we equate poverty with poor living' turns on exactly this: poor living is a description of consumption, poverty is a relation of exclusion from the standard of life a society treats as normal. Someone may live frugally by choice and not be poor; someone may consume adequately and still be excluded from social participation.
- Social exclusion as a term entered policy through Rene Lenoir (Les Exclus, 1974) in France, describing those who fell outside the social insurance system. It shifts attention from a state (being poor) to a process (being kept out) and to the agents doing the excluding.
- Sen (Social Exclusion: Concept, Application and Scrutiny, 2000) makes two cuts. Active exclusion is deliberate policy, for instance denying refugees political rights; passive exclusion happens through the working of a process with no such intent, such as an economic slump cutting people out of work. Separately, exclusion may be constitutively bad (the exclusion is itself the deprivation, as in not being able to appear in public without shame) or instrumentally bad (it causes other deprivations, as when credit exclusion causes income poverty).
- Relative deprivation is Samuel Stouffer's finding from The American Soldier (1949), theorised by Merton and Kitt through reference group theory and developed by W.G. Runciman (Relative Deprivation and Social Justice, 1966). Runciman's point is decisive: grievance depends on the comparison group chosen, so objectively worse-off people may feel less deprived than better-off people with more ambitious reference groups.

- Explaining persistent poverty splits sharply. Oscar Lewis's culture of poverty thesis argues the poor develop a subculture of fatalism and present-orientation that is transmitted across generations; Charles Murray extends this to an underclass with a dependency culture. Critics, above all William Julius Wilson (*The Truly Disadvantaged*, 1987), argue the causes are structural, deindustrialisation and the spatial isolation of jobless neighbourhoods, and that culture-of-poverty accounts amount to blaming the victim.
- Exclusion is not always imposed. The 2013 question on people excluding themselves points to voluntary withdrawal: renunciatory groups, gated elite enclaves opting out of public schools and public health, and self-segregating communities. Note the asymmetry: elite self-exclusion is an exercise of power, subaltern self-withdrawal is usually an adaptation to prior humiliation.

KEY TERMS

Entitlement failure — Sen: a collapse in the bundle of goods a person can legally command, causing starvation without any fall in food supply.

Relative deprivation — Runciman: felt disadvantage generated by comparison with a reference group, not by absolute condition.

Active exclusion — Sen: exclusion produced by deliberate policy, as against passive exclusion arising from impersonal processes.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Can we equate 'poverty' with 'poor living'? Elaborate your answer. [2017]
- Discuss the relationship between poverty and social exclusion. [2016]
- Distinguish between people being socially excluded and people excluding themselves socially in societies. [2013]

Structural Functionalist Theory: Davis and Moore

Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore, in *Some Principles of Stratification* (*American Sociological Review*, 1945), asked why stratification is universal and answered: because every society faces the problem of placing and motivating individuals in the social structure. Stratification is the unconsciously evolved device by which societies ensure the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons.

- The argument runs in steps: some positions are functionally more important to societal survival than others; they require scarce talent and long, burdensome training; to induce talented people to undertake that training and then discharge the duties, the positions must carry differential rewards; therefore inequality of rewards is a functional necessity.
- Rewards are of three kinds in their scheme: sustenance and comfort, humour and diversion, and self-respect and ego expansion. Note that money is only one instrument; prestige and honour do the same motivational work.
- The determinants of rank are two: differential functional importance, and differential scarcity of personnel. A position may rank high because it is vital, or because few people can do it, or both. This two-factor structure is what the 2016 question on 'basic premises' wants.
- Two phrases carry the 2019 question. 'Functional necessity' means stratification is not an accident or an injustice but a requirement of any complex social system. 'Unconscious device' means it is not a conspiracy consciously designed by an elite: no one planned it, it evolved, and it persists because it works. Davis and Moore explicitly disclaim any justification of the specific amount of inequality any given society displays.

- Parsons supplies the wider frame: for him stratification is the differential ranking of individuals according to the common value system of the society. Rank follows from moral evaluation, so stratification is an expression of shared values and contributes to integration. Where Marx sees stratification dividing society, Parsons sees it binding society.
- Locate the theory correctly: it is consensus-based, system-centred, teleological in form (it explains a phenomenon by its consequences), and it takes the value system as given rather than asking whose values these are.

KEY TERMS

Functional importance — Davis and Moore's claim that some positions matter more to system survival and so command higher reward.

Unconscious device — Stratification as an evolved, unplanned mechanism of role allocation, not an elite conspiracy.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Davis and Moore made it clear that social stratification is a functional necessity and also an unconscious device. Discuss. [2019]
- Elucidate the basic premises of Davis' structural-functional theory of social stratification. How far is it relevant in understanding contemporary Indian society? [2016]

Tumin's Critique and the Functionalist Balance Sheet

Melvin Tumin's *Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis* (1953) is the single most examinable critique in this unit. Reproduce it as a numbered attack, not as vague disagreement, and then close with the dysfunctions he lists.

- Functional importance cannot be measured. Tumin asks how we would establish that a manager is more important than a machine operator, and answers that we cannot, because the only index used is the reward the position already receives. The argument is circular: high reward proves importance, importance explains high reward.
- The pool of talent is not naturally scarce, it is socially restricted. Stratification itself limits the discovery of talent by denying the children of the poor the chance to develop or demonstrate ability, so the observed scarcity is manufactured by the system Davis and Moore are explaining.
- The sacrifice of training is overstated. Training is often funded by parents rather than the trainee, the trainee's costs are recovered within a few years of high earnings, and training carries its own rewards, leisure, prestige and freedom from adult responsibility.
- Motivation need not be material. Tumin argues intrinsic satisfaction, social duty and the desire to serve can motivate performance, so unequal reward is not the only functional alternative. Włodzimierz Wesolowski adds a related point: what a complex division of labour requires is that people accept subordination to authority, and that could be secured without a hierarchy of material rewards.
- Power, not function, sets rewards. Tumin argues rewards reflect the bargaining power of incumbents, their capacity to restrict entry and to organise, which is exactly what Weber's social closure and Marx's class power describe.
- The dysfunctions Tumin lists (learn these, they answer 'evaluate if stratification is functional'): stratification limits the discovery of the full range of talent; it sets arbitrary limits on the expansion of productive resources; it acts as a conservative influence by legitimising the status quo; it distributes unfavourable self-

images to those at the bottom; it encourages hostility, suspicion and distrust, so it is a divisive rather than integrating force; it distributes loyalty unequally and so weakens social integration; and it distributes motivation to participate unequally.

- The concession worth making in an answer: Davis and Moore are defensible on the narrow point that some role differentiation and some incentive is present in every known society, but they cannot explain the degree of inequality, its inheritance, or why reward tracks power rather than contribution. Ascription is the theory's fatal case, since inherited advantage cannot be defended on motivational grounds at all.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Evaluate if social stratification is functional for society. [2018]
- Social stratification is claimed to contribute to the maintenance of social order and stability in society. Critically assess. [2022]
- Critically examine the functionalist tradition in Sociology. [2013]

Marxist Theory of Stratification

For Marx, stratification is not a functional device but a relation of exploitation. Class is defined by a group's relation to the means of production, not by income, occupation or prestige. Every stratified society since primitive communism has rested on the extraction of surplus by a non-producing class from a producing class.

- The class dichotomy is structural: in every mode of production there is a class that owns the means of production and a class that does not. Under capitalism, the bourgeoisie owns capital, the proletariat owns only its labour power, and the relation between them is exploitative because the worker is paid the value of labour power while producing value in excess of it. That excess is surplus value.
- Class divisions therefore are outcomes of exploitation, which is the 2014 question stated directly. Exploitation is not unfairness in wages; it is a structural feature of a system where the direct producer sells labour power and the owner appropriates the surplus product.
- Class in itself and class for itself (from *The Poverty of Philosophy*): a class in itself is an objective category sharing a common relation to the means of production; a class for itself has acquired class consciousness, organisation and a will to act. The transition is what turns a structural fact into a historical force.
- False consciousness blocks that transition. The ruling ideology naturalises the existing order, since as *The German Ideology* puts it, the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas. Note the attribution carefully: Marx and Engels develop the argument, but the phrase 'false consciousness' itself appears in Engels's 1893 letter to Mehring.
- Marx's predictions: polarisation (intermediate strata are squeezed into the two great camps), homogenisation of the proletariat through deskilling, immiseration, and the growth of a reserve army of labour that disciplines wages. Revolution follows when the contradiction between forces and relations of production becomes acute and the class for itself is formed.
- The strongest empirical objections: the middle classes expanded rather than disappeared; ownership separated from control through joint stock companies, which Dahrendorf calls the decomposition of capital, while the working class internally differentiated by skill, which he calls the decomposition of labour; and workers won citizenship rights and rising wages instead of absolute immiseration.
- The productive repairs to the theory: Erik Olin Wright's contradictory class locations, which places managers and professionals in positions that are simultaneously exploiter and exploited, so the middle class becomes an object of Marxist analysis rather than a refutation of it. Pierre Bourdieu extends class beyond

economic capital to cultural, social and symbolic capital, showing how the school system converts inherited cultural capital into apparent merit, which is his answer to how class reproduces itself without visible coercion.

KEY TERMS

Class for itself — A class that has attained consciousness of its common interest and organises to pursue it.

Surplus value — The value produced by labour over and above the value of labour power, appropriated by the owner of capital.

Contradictory class location — Wright's term for positions such as managers that occupy exploiting and exploited relations at once.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- For Marx, class divisions are outcomes of 'exploitation'. Discuss. [2014]

Weberian Theory: Class, Status and Party

In the essay on Class, Status, Party in Economy and Society, Weber accepts that class is economic but refuses Marx's reduction of all stratification to it. Stratification is multidimensional and the three dimensions vary independently: class belongs to the economic order, status to the social order, party to the legal or political order. All three are orders of the distribution of power within a community.

- Class for Weber is market situation, not the ownership relation alone. A class is a group sharing a common causal component of life chances, determined by their command over goods and skills in the market. This lets him distinguish property classes from acquisition classes and to rank skilled from unskilled labour, because a doctor and a labourer both lack capital yet have wholly different market situations.
- Life chances is Weber's key concept: the probability of gaining access to valued goods and outcomes, determined by market position. Do not confuse it with lifestyle, which is a status phenomenon: life chances are what the market gives you, lifestyle is how a status group displays and enforces its honour. The 2019 question asks exactly for this pair.
- Status is social estimation of honour, expressed in a shared style of life, restrictions on social intercourse, endogamy, and conventions of consumption. Weber's most quoted asymmetry: classes are not communities but merely represent possible bases for communal action, whereas status groups are normally communities. Class is a statistical aggregate; status is lived and organised.
- Party is association aimed at acquiring social power and influencing communal action, oriented to the political order. Parties may recruit from a class base, a status base, or neither; they are the most consciously organised of the three orders.
- Class and status can vary independently, producing status inconsistency: the newly rich businessman with money but no honour, the impoverished Brahmin or the déclassé aristocrat with honour but no money. Weber's rule of thumb is that when economic conditions are stable, status stratification dominates; when there is rapid economic and technological change, class stratification comes to the fore.
- Social closure, Weber's concept, explains how these groups persist: a group monopolises opportunities by restricting them to insiders on the basis of some marked characteristic. Frank Parkin (Marxism and Class Theory, 1979) develops this into exclusion (the powerful shutting out the subordinate, through credentials, property law, caste rules) and usurpation (the excluded pushing back), plus dual closure where a group is excluded from above and excludes below, which describes intermediate castes and craft unions precisely.

- The Weberian critique of Marx, which is the 2017 question: Marx's ownership criterion is too coarse to explain the differentiation within the propertyless; class consciousness and revolutionary action do not follow from class position, and Weber saw no reason to expect polarisation; status honour and party power are not epiphenomena of class, since caste, race and religious standing stratify people independently of the market; and Weber's own answer to how capitalism arose (The Protestant Ethic) shows ideas can be causally prior to economic structure rather than a reflection of it.
- The convergence worth noting rather than overstating: both treat inequality as rooted in the economy, both reject the functionalist claim that reward tracks contribution, and both see stratification as a power relation. The difference is that Marx sees one determinant and a revolutionary destination; Weber sees three plural orders and an open, bureaucratised future.

The three theories side by side

Basis of comparison	Functionalist (Davis-Moore, Parsons)	Marxist	Weberian
Why stratification exists	Functional necessity: role allocation and motivation	Exploitation: extraction of surplus by owners	Unequal distribution of power across three orders
Determinant of rank	Functional importance plus scarcity of talent	Relation to the means of production	Market situation, status honour, party power
Nature of the system	Consensus, based on a common value system	Conflict, based on antagonistic interests	Conflict, but plural and not reducible to class
Number of dimensions	One continuum of prestige and reward	One: class	Three that vary independently
Is it inevitable	Yes, in any complex society	No, ends with classless communism	Yes in some form; power inequality survives even socialism
Chief weakness	Circular, ignores power and ascription (Tumin)	Economic determinism, failed polarisation	Descriptive plurality without a theory of change

KEY TERMS

Life chances — Weber: probability of access to valued goods, set by market situation.

Status group — A community sharing a style of life and a claim to social honour, usually endogamous and closed.

Social closure — Monopolisation of opportunity by restricting it to insiders; Parkin splits it into exclusion and usurpation.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Critically examine Max Weber's theory of Social Stratification. [2021]
- What is Weberian critique of Marxist notion of social stratification? [2017]
- According to Max Weber, 'class' and 'status' are two different dimensions of power. Discuss. [2014]
- Compare and contrast the contributions of Marx and Weber on social stratification in capitalist society. [2019]
- Differentiate between 'Life-chances' and 'Life-style' with suitable examples. [2019]
- How do Karl Marx and Max Weber differ in terms of their analysis of social stratification? [2013]

Dimensions: Class and Status Groups

The syllabus lists class and status groups as dimensions, which means you need the empirical sociology of class, not only the theory. Two debates carry most marks: whether the working class is dissolving into the middle class, and whether status has detached from class in consumer society.

- Class schemas matter because they show what sociologists actually measure. John Goldthorpe's schema, built with Erikson and Portocarero, classifies positions by employment relations, distinguishing the service class on a service contract (salary, career, trust, autonomy) from the working class on a labour contract (wage for effort, supervised). It is relational rather than a prestige ladder, which is why it dominates mobility research.
- The embourgeoisement thesis held that affluent manual workers were becoming middle class. Goldthorpe and Lockwood's Affluent Worker study in Luton tested it and rejected it: well-paid car workers held an instrumental orientation to work, treating the job as a means to income rather than a source of identity, and practised instrumental collectivism, using unions for pay rather than solidarity. They were privatised, not bourgeois. Money had changed, class relations had not.
- Dahrendorf's counter-position: in post-capitalist society, ownership and control have separated and class conflict has been institutionalised through unions, collective bargaining and labour courts. He relocates class in authority relations within imperatively coordinated associations, so the division is between those who command and those who obey, not those who own and those who do not.
- Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class supplies the mechanism of status display: conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure signal exemption from productive work. Bourdieu's Distinction sharpens it, showing taste itself is a class marker and that the dominant class maintains itself by defining legitimate culture, so exclusion operates through aesthetics rather than through rules.
- The new middle class, which UPSC has asked directly, is best handled with three claims: it is defined by credentials and cultural capital rather than property; it occupies contradictory class locations in Wright's sense; and in India its expansion after 1991 has been accompanied by a shift from an older salaried, state-linked middle class to a consumption-defined one, with a caste composition that remains skewed. Say plainly that the term is contested and covers groups with very different market situations.
- Caste as a status group is the highest-yield Indian application: caste is closed, endogamous, ritually ranked and reproduced by commensal restriction, which is Weber's status group in nearly pure form, and Weber himself treated caste as the extreme case of closure where status distinctions are guaranteed by ritual and law. Do not say caste equals class; say caste is a status order that increasingly overlaps with class as market position and caste rank correlate but no longer coincide.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Present a sociological review on the 'new middle-class'. [2019]
- Modernisation presupposes class society however, caste, ethnicity and race are still predominant. Explain. [2019]

Dimensions: Gender, Ethnicity and Race

This subsection exists because both Marx and Weber were weak here. The examiner's recurring move is to ask why gender, ethnicity and race count as dimensions of stratification in their own right and not as by-products of class. The answer is that each independently structures life chances, is transmitted across generations, and is legitimated by an ideology of natural difference.

- Gender qualifies as stratification because it meets every criterion: it allocates people to unequal positions from birth, transmits the arrangement across generations through socialisation, distributes rewards unequally, and is legitimated as natural. Ann Oakley's sex/gender distinction is the entry point: sex is biological, gender is the socially constructed set of expectations attached to it, and cross-cultural variation proves the second does not follow from the first. Simone de Beauvoir's formulation, that one is not born but rather becomes a woman, and her account of woman as the Other, is the philosophical anchor.
- Sylvia Walby's *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990) is the best single framework for a gender-stratification answer: patriarchy operates through six structures, paid work, the household mode of production, culture, sexuality, male violence, and the state. Her historical claim is a shift from private patriarchy (exclusion from the public sphere, individual control by a father or husband) to public patriarchy (inclusion in work and politics, but subordination through segregation and collective appropriation).
- The competing explanations: Marxist feminists tie women's subordination to capitalism, since domestic labour reproduces labour power for free and women serve as a reserve army of labour. Radical feminists make patriarchy prior and independent, so ending capitalism would leave it intact. Heidi Hartmann's dual systems theory holds that patriarchy and capitalism are two distinct, interacting systems, and that Marxist categories are sex-blind. Christine Delphy's materialist feminism locates exploitation in the domestic mode of production, where the husband appropriates the wife's labour.
- Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality (1989) is the concept the 2019 question asks for: the dimensions do not simply add, they compound and produce distinct positions. A Dalit woman agricultural labourer does not experience caste plus class plus gender as three separate handicaps; her position is not reducible to the experience of upper-caste women or of Dalit men, which is why single-axis frameworks make her invisible.
- R.W. Connell's gender order and hegemonic masculinity answer the 'male identity' question: masculinity is plural and itself hierarchical, with a hegemonic form (the culturally exalted ideal) dominating subordinated and marginalised masculinities as well as women. Men are stratified by gender too, and the hegemonic ideal is honoured by many men who do not embody it.
- Race is a social construction with no biological foundation: human genetic variation within so-called racial groups exceeds variation between them, and racial categories have shifted across time and place, which is decisive proof they are social. Yet race stratifies with brutal reliability, which is the point: a fiction with institutional force has real distributive effects. This is a textbook Thomas theorem case.
- Explaining racial stratification: Oliver Cox (*Caste, Class and Race*, 1948) argues racism arose with capitalism as a device to justify the exploitation of labour, and rejects the American caste school of W. Lloyd Warner that treated the segregated South as a caste system, insisting that caste rests on consensus while race rests on conflict. Edna Bonacich's split labour market theory explains racial antagonism as competition between higher-priced and lower-priced labour, so racism serves the higher-paid workers, not only capital. John Rex and Robert Moore's housing classes study is the Weberian version, locating racial disadvantage in market situation in the housing market.
- Ethnicity is not the same as race: race is ascribed from outside on the basis of alleged physical markers, ethnicity is a claimed shared identity based on culture, descent, language or religion. Fredrik Barth (*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1969) made the decisive analytical move: what defines an ethnic group is the boundary it maintains, not the cultural stuff it encloses, and boundaries persist even as the culture inside them changes completely.
- The growing salience of ethnicity, asked in 2021, is explained by: the failure of the modernisation prediction that ascriptive identity would fade; ethnicity as a resource for political mobilisation where the state distributes goods to groups, which is instrumentalist; globalisation producing localised identity reassertion

as a defence against homogenisation, which is Castells's resistance identity; migration making ethnicity a live boundary in receiving societies; and the primordialist argument that ethnic attachment carries an affective depth class never had. Illustrate with India's ethnic movements in the North East, but do not reduce ethnicity to caste.

KEY TERMS

Public patriarchy — Walby: subordination through segregation and collective appropriation in the public sphere, replacing household exclusion.

Intersectionality — Crenshaw: axes of inequality compound to produce distinct positions that no single axis can capture.

Ethnic boundary — Barth: the socially maintained line dividing groups, which defines ethnicity irrespective of cultural content.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Examine gender, ethnicity and race as major dimensions of social stratification. [2017]
- Why is gender a dimension of social stratification? How does gender intersect other dimensions of inequality based on caste, class, race and ethnicity? [2019]
- Explain the growing salience of ethnicity in the contemporary world with illustrations. [2021]
- How do sociologists construct gender in their analysis on social inequality? [2022]
- What do you understand by gender? How does it shape 'male identity'? [2014]

Social Mobility: Open and Closed Systems, Types, Sources

Pitirim Sorokin's Social Mobility (1927) founded the field and gave it its vocabulary. Mobility is movement of individuals or groups within social space, and the question the syllabus poses is not whether societies are open or closed but how open, since the answer everywhere is: partly.

- The open/closed distinction is a continuum, not a dichotomy, which is what the 2015 statement wants. Closed systems allocate position by ascription and prohibit movement in principle (caste, estate, slavery); open systems allocate by achievement and permit movement in principle (class). No real system sits at either pole: a closed system leaks, and an open system reproduces advantage so reliably that mobility rates fall far short of its own ideology.
- Mobility does occur in closed systems, which the 2018 and 2016 questions test. Srinivas's Sanskritization documents group mobility, where a low caste adopts the ritual practices, vegetarianism and rituals of a twice-born caste and claims higher rank over a generation or two. Note the crucial qualification Srinivas himself makes: Sanskritization brings positional change for the group, not structural change to the hierarchy itself. The ladder is climbed; the ladder stays. Srinivas's dominant caste shows the other route, where numerical strength, land and now political power convert into rank. Weber similarly noted that whole castes could rise over generations.
- This is why 'vertical mobility brings structural change even in a closed social system' must be answered with a distinction, not a yes or no. Individual and group mobility within a closed system is positional and can leave the structure intact; but cumulative mobility plus new sources (education, reservation, urban anonymity, the market) does erode the ritual basis of ranking, and India's disjunction of caste and occupation is real structural change. Say both, and say which weighs more.

- Sources and causes of mobility, the standard list, best organised by level. Structural causes: industrialisation and the expansion of white-collar and professional positions; differential fertility, where higher strata reproduce below replacement and create room at the top; migration and urbanisation, which sever people from ascribed local hierarchies; technological change destroying and creating occupations. Institutional causes: mass education as the chief channel, legal abolition of ascriptive barriers, affirmative action and reservation, the market economy rewarding purchasing power over ritual status. Individual causes: educational attainment, skill, marriage, and entry into the army, church or bureaucracy.
- Sorokin's channels of vertical circulation, which he calls elevators, are the army, the church, the school, political and economic organisations, and the family through marriage. His deeper point: these institutions are also testing, selecting and distributing agencies, so the school does not just move people up, it sorts them and legitimates the sorting.
- What mobility research actually found, and cite these rather than assert. David Glass's *Social Mobility in Britain* (1954) found considerable short-range mobility but little long-range movement, and a strongly self-recruiting elite. Lipset and Bendix's *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (1959) compared industrial nations and found broadly similar total mobility rates, puncturing the belief that America was uniquely open. Blau and Duncan's *The American Occupational Structure* (1967) built the status attainment model and showed that education mediates most of the effect of father's status on son's, which is the finding underlying the 2021 question on education and mobility. Goldthorpe's *Oxford Mobility Study* (1980) drew the most important distinction of all: absolute mobility rose sharply because the occupational structure changed and there was simply more room at the top, but relative mobility, the comparative chances of a service-class child and a working-class child reaching the service class, barely changed. More people moved up; nobody's odds improved.
- Carry that distinction into every mobility answer. Absolute mobility is a fact about the shape of the occupational structure; relative mobility, or social fluidity, is a fact about fairness. A society can look dramatically more open while remaining exactly as unequal in its chances. This is the single most examiner-rewarding sentence in the unit.
- Ralph Turner's contest and sponsored mobility distinguishes two normative modes: in contest mobility the prize is won in an open competition kept going as long as possible (his American case), in sponsored mobility recruits are selected early by the established elite and inducted (his English grammar school case). It is useful for any education-and-mobility question.
- The caution to record: education promises mobility and delivers reproduction. Bourdieu's cultural capital argument explains why, since the school rewards a competence transmitted at home in the dominant class and misrecognises it as talent, so the meritocratic mechanism becomes the most effective legitimator of inherited advantage. Add the Indian evidence that expansion of schooling has raised absolute mobility without dissolving caste and class disparities in access to quality education.

Types of social mobility

Type	Meaning	Illustration
Vertical	Movement up or down between ranked strata; Sorokin's ascending and descending currents	A clerk's daughter becoming a civil servant; a landowning family losing its land
Horizontal	Movement between positions at the same rank, no change in strata	A schoolteacher moving from one district or school to another
Intergenerational	Change in position between parents and children; the standard measure of a society's openness	A landless labourer's son becoming a factory supervisor
Intragenerational (career)	Change in position within one person's own working life	Joining as a clerk and retiring as a manager
Structural (forced)	Mobility caused by change in the occupational structure itself, not by individual merit	Industrialisation creating white-collar posts that must be filled from below
Exchange (circulation)	Mobility where one person's rise requires another's fall, the structure staying constant	A genuinely open competition for a fixed number of elite posts
Group mobility	A whole collectivity changes rank, positions relative to each other preserved	Sanskritization of a caste; a caste rising through political power
Absolute vs relative	Absolute: proportion who end up in a different class from their parents. Relative (fluidity): comparative odds, net of structural change	Goldthorpe: absolute mobility rose in post-war Britain while relative rates stayed constant

KEY TERMS

Structural mobility — Movement produced by change in the shape of the occupational structure, independent of individual effort.

Relative mobility (social fluidity) — The comparative chances of children from different origins reaching a given destination, net of structural change.

Sanskritization — Srinivas: a low caste's adoption of twice-born ritual practices to claim higher rank; positional, not structural, change.

Sponsored mobility — Turner: elite recruits selected early and inducted by the established elite, as against open contest.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Is social mobility possible in closed systems of stratification? Illustrate from research work. [2018]
- "Vertical mobility brings structural change even in a closed social system." Comment. [2016]
- "No society can either be absolutely open or absolutely closed." Comment. [2015]
- Discuss social mobility in open and closed system. [2022]
- Critically assess social mobility in closed and open systems. [2020]
- Explain the concept of social mobility. Describe with suitable illustrations how education and social mobility are related to each other. [2021]
- How are open and closed systems of stratification undergoing transformation in the emergence of new hierarchical social order in societies? [2013]

Last-mile revision

- Inequality is a fact, stratification is that fact institutionalised and inherited, hierarchy is Beteille's term for inequality a culture openly values.
- Rousseau splits natural from moral inequality; Marx's rejoinder is that natural inequality is usually social inequality that has been naturalised.
- Davis and Moore: stratification is a functional necessity and an unconscious device; rank follows functional importance plus scarcity of personnel.
- Tumin in one line each: importance is unmeasurable and the argument circular, talent is socially restricted not scarce, training costs are overstated, motivation need not be material, power sets rewards, and stratification is dysfunctional because it wastes talent, conserves the status quo and divides society.
- Marx: class is a relation to the means of production; exploitation is structural; class in itself becomes class for itself through consciousness; ideology blocks it.
- Weber's three orders: class is market situation (economic), status is social honour and style of life (social), party is organised pursuit of power (political). Classes are not communities; status groups normally are.
- Life chances are what the market gives you; lifestyle is how a status group displays honour. Never swap these.
- Parkin's closure: exclusion downwards, usurpation upwards, dual closure for those doing both.
- Gender, race and ethnicity stratify independently of class; Barth's boundary defines ethnicity, not the culture inside it; race is biologically empty and institutionally powerful.
- Crenshaw: axes compound, they do not add. A Dalit woman labourer's position is not a sum of three disadvantages.
- Sanskritization is positional mobility for a group, not structural change to the hierarchy. Srinivas says this himself.
- Goldthorpe's decisive finding: absolute mobility rose, relative mobility did not. More room at the top is not the same as fairer odds.
- Blau and Duncan: education mediates most of the effect of father's status on son's, which is why education is the master channel and also the master legitimator.

Common errors to avoid

- Treating Davis-Moore as a defence of existing inequality. They explicitly disclaim justifying the amount of inequality any society shows, and calling it an 'unconscious device' is precisely a denial that it was designed by an elite. Attack it for circularity and for ignoring power, not for a claim it never made.
- Reciting Tumin as a mood rather than a structure. Give the numbered points and, separately, his list of dysfunctions. Half the marks in a 'is stratification functional' answer sit in that list.
- Defining Weberian class as income or occupation. It is market situation, that is, command over goods and skills that determines life chances. Income is a consequence, not the definition.
- Saying Weber added status and party to Marx's class, as though he agreed and extended. He rejected the reduction: the three orders vary independently and none is derived from the others.
- Confusing life chances with lifestyle. Life chances belong to class, lifestyle to status. The 2019 question exists because aspirants swap them.
- Writing that caste is a class. Caste is a status group in Weber's sense, closed, endogamous and ritually ranked. Say caste and class increasingly overlap without coinciding.
- Claiming Sanskritization causes structural change. Srinivas is explicit that it is positional change within an unchanged hierarchy. Use it as evidence of mobility in a closed system, not of the system opening.
- Ignoring the absolute/relative mobility distinction. Any answer on 'is society becoming more open' that does not use Goldthorpe's finding is answering the easy version of the question.
- Treating gender, race and ethnicity as by-products of class. The syllabus lists them as dimensions because they structure life chances independently; a purely Marxist answer here fails the question.
- Using race and ethnicity interchangeably. Race is externally ascribed on alleged physical markers; ethnicity is a claimed cultural or descent identity. Barth's boundary point separates them cleanly.
- Attribution slips that cost the most marks: 'relative deprivation' is Stouffer's finding developed by Runciman, not Townsend's; Townsend's contribution is relative poverty and the deprivation index. 'Culture of poverty' is Oscar Lewis, not Charles Murray, who argues the underclass and dependency culture. Social closure is Weber's concept, elaborated by Parkin. 'Contradictory class location' is Erik Olin Wright, not Poulantzas.
- Answering only in theory. Every dimension question rewards an Indian illustration: caste as status group, reservation as institutional mobility, the post-1991 middle class, North East ethnic assertion.