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Q4(c)

Critically assess social mobility in closed and open systems.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Stratification and Mobility: Concepts

Stratification and Mobility: Concepts - equality, inequality, hierarchy, exclusion, poverty and deprivation; Theories of social stratification - Structural functionalist, Marxist, Weberian; Dimensions - Class, status groups, gender, ethnicity and race; Social mobility - open and closed systems, types, sources and causes.

Core demand of the question

- Critically assess social mobility in closed and open systems
- Keep the assessment within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Mobility:** movement across class, status, or power.
- **Closed systems:** birth, endogamy, honour; Sanskritisation as group style.
- **Open systems:** achievement ideology and actual status attainment.
- **Critique:** Bourdieu, gender, caste, and class close the open school.

Measure tables; do not trust the label.

Introduction

Social mobility is movement across ranks of class, status, or power. Pitirim Sorokin distinguished vertical and horizontal, individual and group. Closed systems tie rank to birth. Open systems tie it to achievement. Real societies mix, so assessment must be critical.

Body**Closed systems**

- Caste, estate, and racial caste-like orders restrict marriage and occupation.
- M. N. Srinivas's Sanskritisation is group mobility of style, not an open individual market.
- Max Weber's status closure explains how honour survives a wage.

Open systems

- Industrial class societies promise school-to-job mobility. Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan measured status attainment.
- The promise is never pure. Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital closes the "open" school.

Critical assessment

- **India:** reservations open some doors; endogamy and informal labour close others. Census education tables show both.
- **Gender:** women's mobility through jobs can coexist with hypergamy rules. NFHS still maps constrained movement.
- Openness can be ideological, as Davis and Moore's functionalism made unequal reward look necessary.

- **Karl Marx:** even open markets rest on a class that is hard to leave across generations.

Verdict

- Closed and open are poles. Mobility exists in both, of different kinds.
- **Assessment:** measure intergenerational tables, then name the closures that the word "open" hides.

Flow diagram

Closed -> Ascription endogamy
Open -> School market
Ascription endogamy -> Group style mobility
School market -> Bourdieu reproduction
Real societies -> Closed
Real societies -> Open

Conclusion

Closed systems restrict individual vertical mobility and allow some group mimicry. Open systems increase occupational movement and still reproduce class, caste, and gender through school and honour. **Sorokin**, **Weber**, **Bourdieu**, and **Srinivas** are the assessment kit. Do not take the label "open" as a completed fact.

Facts & figures

Sorokin

Classical typology of mobility: vertical, horizontal, individual, group.

Blau and Duncan

Status-attainment models of occupational mobility in an "open" US.

Bourdieu

Reproduction through cultural capital inside formally open education.

Srinivas

Sanskritisation as collective mobility without a free market in rank.