



GSOC.ST7 Forms of Social Stratification: Caste, Feudal and Slave Systems

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 60 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Write full sentences for any question worth 4 marks or more. Allocate about 60 minutes for this paper.

- 1** Which one of the following best describes social stratification as taught in GCSE sociology, in the context of whole societies?

- ☐ A) the random arrangement of people by age only
- ☐ B) the hierarchical ranking of individuals and groups within a society
- ☐ C) a single factor, such as income, that determines every social outcome
- ☐ D) the legal system governing property rights

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define the term 'caste system' as it is used in GCSE sociology, naming the typical key feature of status transmission.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Define the feudal estate system as used in the study of historical stratification in medieval Europe, and name the key relationship on which it rested.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Define slavery as a form of social stratification and state its most important legal characteristic historically.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

- 5** Define an open class system in the modern British context and state the key mechanism that allows movement between strata.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

- 6** Identify and explain one feature that distinguishes a caste system from an open class system in a society.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

- 7** Identify and explain one way feudal obligations affected the economic life of peasants in medieval Europe.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

- 8** Identify and explain one reason why slavery reduced the legal rights of enslaved people historically.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** Explain two features of the feudal estate system in medieval Europe that show it was neither fully open nor identical to a modern class system.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

- 10** Describe one way the practice of slavery historically affected family life among enslaved populations, in a social historical context.

(Total for Question 10 is 3 marks)

- 11** Identify and explain two similarities between the caste system and historical slavery as forms of stratification.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

- 12** Item A: A short public survey on perceived openness of the British class system. Item A data: 60 percent of respondents say people can change class by education, 25 percent say class is fixed by family background, 15 percent are unsure. Using Item A and your own knowledge of social stratification, explain two reasons why many respondents might say education allows class change in modern Britain.

(Total for Question 12 is 4 marks)

- 13** Describe two characteristics of an open class system in modern Britain that sociologists emphasise when comparing it with closed systems such as caste.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

- 14** Give one legal change in British or international history that reduced the practice of slavery, and briefly explain its effect in a social historical context.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

- 15** State one limitation of comparing the caste system with a modern open class system when studying social stratification.

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

- 16** Discuss how far sociologists would agree that the British class system is genuinely open, allowing movement between classes.

(Total for Question 16 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.ST7 Forms of Social Stratification: Caste, Feudal and Slave Systems

Question 1

- **B1** B (the hierarchical ranking of individuals and groups within a society)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies caste system as a closed, hierarchical social system in which social position is fixed by birth, often linked to religious rules (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. notes status is ascribed and passed down within families
- **Answer: A caste system is a closed, hierarchical social system where social position is fixed by birth and often regulated by religious rules; status is ascribed and passed down within families.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies feudal estate system as a land based, hierarchical system in medieval Europe where social rank was organised by estates or classes
- **B1** development, e.g. notes it rested on reciprocal obligations between lords, vassals and peasants tied to land
- **Answer: The feudal estate system was a land based hierarchical system in medieval Europe organised by estates, resting on reciprocal obligations between lords, vassals and peasants tied to land.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies slavery as a system where people are owned as property and forced to labour
- **B1** development, e.g. notes slaves historically had no legal rights and were controlled by owners
- **Answer: Slavery is a system in which people are owned as property and forced to labour; historically slaves had no legal rights and were controlled by their owners.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies open class system as a stratification system in which social position can change during life, not fixed at birth
- **B1** development, e.g. states achieved status and social mobility via education and occupation allow movement between classes
- **Answer: An open class system is a stratification system where social position can change and is not fixed at birth; achieved status via education and occupation allows social mobility between classes.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies a distinguishing feature, e.g. status is ascribed in a caste system but achieved in an open class system
- **B1** explains why, e.g. ascribed status is fixed by birth and limits mobility, whereas achieved status can change through individual effort
- **Answer: Status is ascribed in a caste system but achieved in an open class system; ascribed status is fixed by birth and limits mobility, while achieved status can change through individual effort like education.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies one effect, e.g. peasants had to give labour, produce or rent to their lord
- **B1** explains the effect, e.g. this limited peasants economic freedom and tied them to the land, making independent farming difficult
- **Answer: Peasants had to give labour, produce or rent to their lord; this limited their economic freedom and tied them to the land, making independent farming difficult.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies a reason, e.g. slaves were legally defined as property of owners
- **B1** explains why, e.g. being classified as property meant they lacked legal personhood and so had limited or no rights under law
- **Answer: Slaves were legally defined as property of owners; being classified as property meant they lacked legal personhood and so had limited or no rights under the law.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies one feature, e.g. status was largely determined by land ownership and birth
- **B1** development of that feature, e.g. land and birth limited upward mobility because estates and titles passed through inheritance
- **B1** identifies a second feature, e.g. reciprocal obligations between lords and vassals structured social life
- **B1** development of that feature, e.g. these obligations tied people into fixed social roles rather than encouraging individual achievement
- **Answer: One feature is that status depended on land ownership and birth, limiting upward mobility because estates and titles were inherited. Another feature is the system of reciprocal obligations between lords and vassals, which tied people into fixed roles rather than encouraging individual achievement and movement.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies one effect, e.g. families were often separated when members were sold
- **B1** development, e.g. this created instability and loss of family support networks
- **B1** further development, e.g. children could be removed from parents, weakening cultural transmission and care structures
- **Answer: Families were often separated when members were sold, creating instability and loss of family support networks; children could be removed from their parents, weakening cultural transmission and care structures.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a similarity, e.g. both involve limited social mobility
- **B1** explains that similarity, e.g. caste status is ascribed and slaves are owned, so both groups find movement between ranks difficult
- **B1** identifies a second similarity, e.g. both involve restricted rights or privileges for lower groups
- **B1** explains the second, e.g. lower caste groups and slaves historically had fewer legal rights and social privileges than higher groups
- **Answer: Both involve limited social mobility, since caste status is ascribed and slaves are owned, making movement between ranks difficult. Both also involve restricted rights or privileges for lower groups, with lower castes and slaves historically having fewer legal rights and social privileges.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies one reason linked to Item A, e.g. education is seen as a route to better qualifications and higher paid jobs
- **B1** develops that reason, e.g. qualifications can give access to professional occupations and therefore higher social status
- **B1** identifies a second reason linked to Item A, e.g. policy initiatives and scholarships increase educational opportunities for some from poorer backgrounds
- **B1** develops the second, e.g. such policies are perceived to improve social mobility by reducing barriers linked to family background
- **Answer: One reason is that education provides qualifications that open access to better paid and professional jobs, raising social status. Another reason is that policies such as scholarships, bursaries and widening participation are seen to increase educational opportunities for people from poorer families, which respondents may view as helping social mobility.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies one characteristic, e.g. social mobility based on achieved status such as education or occupation
- **B1** development of that characteristic
- **B1** identifies a second characteristic, e.g. less rigid legal or religious rules fixing status at birth
- **B1** development of that characteristic
- **Answer: One characteristic is social mobility based on achieved status such as education and occupation, which allows people to change their social position. A second is the absence of rigid legal or religious rules fixing status at birth, meaning status is less determined by family background than in a caste system.**

Question 14

- **B1** gives a correct legal change, e.g. the British Slavery Abolition Act 1833
- **B1** brief explains its effect, e.g. it legally ended slavery in most British colonies and began a process of emancipation and change in labour systems

Question 15

- **B1** identifies a limitation, e.g. different historical and cultural contexts make direct comparison difficult
- **B1** brief development, e.g. features such as religion and legal codes that enforce caste have no direct equivalent in modern Britain
- **Answer: A limitation is that different historical and cultural contexts make direct comparison difficult, for example religious rules enforcing caste have no direct equivalent in modern Britain.**

Question 16

- **Level 1** (1-3): Limited response. Makes one or two simple points about openness or closure with little sociological explanation or evidence. Little or no use of concepts or examples.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Some development. Describes reasons why the system might be open and reasons why it might be closed, with basic examples or theory. Some sociological concepts used, but evaluation is limited.
- **Level 3** (7-9): Clear argument. Presents well developed reasons and evidence both for openness, such as the role of education and meritocratic ideals, and for closure, such as persistent inequalities and inheritance of advantage. Good use of sociological concepts and examples and some evaluation.
- **Level 4** (10-12): Excellent balanced evaluation. Provides sustained, well supported argument considering multiple sociological perspectives and evidence, for example noting policies that promote mobility, structural barriers that limit it, and that agreement among sociologists is partial. Reaches a supported judgement on how far the British system is genuinely open.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Points in favour of openness: the open class system idea, achieved status through education and occupation, examples of social mobility via higher education, meritocratic rhetoric in policy and public life, anti discrimination laws increasing equal opportunity.
 - Points against openness: evidence of persistent intergenerational inequality, the role of wealth inheritance and home ownership in reproducing advantage, regional inequalities in opportunity, the effects of social capital and networks that favour those born into higher positions.
 - Sociological perspectives: note that some sociologists emphasise openness and mobility possibilities without denying barriers, while others argue structural factors make mobility limited; avoid lengthy functionalist or Marxist theory beyond stating general perspectives on mobility.
 - Empirical evidence and examples: reference to statistics showing limited mobility or to well known cases of mobility, caution that specific figures are not required but using an example strengthens the answer.
 - Evaluation and judgement: weigh the evidence and perspectives, acknowledge that the British system has features that support mobility but also structural limits that mean it is not fully open, and conclude with a supported judgement on the balance.