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Q6(b)

Explain the conditions under which a collective action transforms into a social movement.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Politics and Society

Politics and Society: Sociological theories of power; Power elite, bureaucracy, pressure groups, and political parties; Nation, state, citizenship, democracy, civil society, ideology; Protest, agitation, social movements, collective action, revolution.

Core demand of the question

- Explain the conditions under which a collective action transforms into a social movement
- Keep the explanation within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

A movement is sustained organised challenge, not a one-day crowd.

- **Conditions:** strain plus belief, resources, opportunity, and identity.

Marx, **Smelser**, **resource mobilisation**, **Weber**'s charisma, and **Durkheim**'s community explain the passage.

Indian Dalit, farmer, and women's networks illustrate scale-up or stall.

Without organisation, action remains an episode.

Introduction

- **Collective action is joint behaviour in a situation:** a crowd, a strike day, a riot. A social movement is a sustained, organised challenge with a programme, identity, and some continuity. Transformation needs conditions, not only anger.

Body

From episode to movement

- **Neil Smelser's value-added sequence:** structural conduciveness, strain, generalised belief, precipitating event, mobilisation, and social control. Missing a step, the episode stays an episode.
- **Resource mobilisation (McCarthy and Zald):** money, leaders, networks, and media. Ideology without organisation dies.
- **Political opportunity:** splits in elites, elections, and courts, which Indian caste and farmer agitations have used.

Identity and framing

- **Karl Marx:** class-in-itself becomes **class-for-itself** when organisation and a theory of interest appear.
- New social movements add identity, as in gender and environment, after the limits of a pure class script.

- **Emile Durkheim**'s effervescence can found a crowd. Continuity needs a moral community, not only a night of assembly.
- **Max Weber**'s charisma can found a movement; **routinisation** into staff decides survival.

Indian illustrations

- From atrocity or price spike to a Dalit panther-type or farmer union form when associations, law cases, and symbols persist.
- SHG networks can scale women's local action into a public, or remain micro-credit without a movement.

When it fails

- Repression, co-optation, or a belief that names no opponent keep action as a one-day crowd.

Flow diagram

Collective action -> Framing identity
Collective action -> Resources organisation
Collective action -> Political opportunity
Framing identity -> Social movement
Resources organisation -> Social movement
Political opportunity -> Social movement

Conclusion

Collective action becomes a social movement when strain is framed, resources and opportunities are organised, and identity lasts beyond the event. **Marx**, **Smelser**, **Weber**, and **Durkheim** name pieces of that passage. Anger is a start, not the transformation.

Facts & figures

Smelser

Value-added model of collective behaviour as a sequence of necessary conditions.

Resource mobilisation

Movements as organisations that gather money, labour, and networks.

Class-for-itself

Marx: organised class with a political account of its interest.

Routinisation

Weber: charismatic protest must become staff or fade.