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Q8(b)

What are new religious movements? Elaborate emphasizing their forms and orientations

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- What are new religious movements? Elaborate emphasizing their forms and orientations
- Keep the elaboration within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

NRMs are organised religious groups that are new relative to majority institutions.

Wallis's world-rejecting, world-accommodating, and **world-affirming** orientations are the main map.

Forms include commune, urban clientele, transnational franchise, and therapy market.

Weber's charisma and its routinisation, and **Durkheim's** sacred, explain rise and hardening.

Indian guru and bhakti-derived movements often keep caste honour beside spiritual equality talk.

Introduction

New religious movements are organised religious groups that arise outside, or on the edge of, long-established churches, mosques, temples, and caste sects, usually with a recent founding, a distinctive practice, and a claim to transform the person. They are new relative to the host society's majority institutions, not necessarily new in every idea they use.

Body

How to define without a slur

- The older word cult is a stigma. Sociology prefers new religious movement, sect, and denomination as more analytical terms.
- **Roy Wallis** distinguished world-rejecting, world-accommodating, and **world-affirming** orientations.
- **Bryan Wilson** treated sects as protest against the church's compromise with the world. Some NRMs fit that pattern. Others sell therapy to the already comfortable.

Forms

- Charismatic founder and inner circle, which **Weber's** charisma and Michels's oligarchy both help to read as the group hardens.
- Commune or ashram with a break from household caste duty, or a loose urban clientele that attends weekend sessions.

- **Transnational franchise:** ISKCON, Brahma Kumaris, Soka Gakkai, and similar bodies that keep a brand across states.
- Therapy and New Age forms that mix healing, meditation, and market workshops.
- Millenarian and apocalyptic forms that date the end or the dawn of a new age.
- Online-only fellowships that never meet as a parish.

Orientations

- **World-rejecting:** high boundary, communal life, suspicion of the ordinary economy, sometimes conflict with the state.
- **World-accommodating:** intensified piety inside ordinary jobs and families, close to revival inside a tradition.
- **World-affirming:** success, health, and self as the sacred goods, close to the market.
- **Reform versus rupture:** some NRMs rework bhakti or Sufi stocks. Others claim a complete break.
- Political orientations range from withdrawal to aggressive public morality campaigns.

Indian and comparative illustrations

- Nineteenth-century reform associations were new in their day. Late twentieth-century guru movements and urban yoga brands are new in ours.
- ISKCON shows a transnational Vaishnava form with both temple piety and counter-cultural recruits in its early Western phase.
- Scientology and similar therapy-churches show the world-affirming pole outside India.
- Caste does not vanish. Many Indian movements reproduce vegetarian honour and marriage closure even as they preach spiritual equality.

Durkheim and Weber in this field

- Durkheim's sacred can be rebuilt around a living person or a technique of the self.
- Weber's routinisation of charisma explains the shift from founder to office, which many NRMs undergo or split over.

Elaboration

- Forms are organisational. Orientations are the stance toward the world. Both must be stated, or every new group is collapsed into one scare-word.

Flow diagram

NRM -> Founder commune franchise therapy
 NRM -> Reject accommodate affirm
 Weber charisma -> Founder commune franchise therapy
 Durkheim sacred -> Reject accommodate affirm
 Routinisation -> Office or split

Conclusion

New religious movements are recent organised alternatives to established religion, taking forms from commune to franchise to therapy market. Wallis's three orientations to the world organise the field. **Weber's** charisma and **Durkheim's** sacred explain energy and rite. Caste and oligarchy often return as the movement ages. The term is analytical, not a synonym for danger.

Facts & figures

Roy Wallis

Classified NRMs by orientation to the world: rejecting, accommodating, affirming.

Bryan Wilson

Analysed sects as forms of religious protest and response to the world.

Routinisation of charisma

Weber's process by which a founder's gift becomes office, rule, and sometimes schism.

ISKCON

Transnational Vaishnava movement often cited as an NRM in the Western sociology of religion.

World-affirming

Orientation that treats success, health, and self-realisation as sacred outcomes inside the existing world.

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