

Module Detail and its Structure	
Subject Name	Sociology
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Module Name/Title	New Religious Movement
Module Id	SM 12
Pre-requisites	Basic concepts in sociology of religion and social movements like sects, cults, denominations, socio-religious reform movements.
Objectives	This module seeks to conceptualise new religious movement (NRM) as a social phenomenon. In particular, it seeks to define NRMs and outline the need for a new concept like NRM. In addition to this, the module deals with the types and sources of NRMs. It would also outline the significance of studying NRMs.
Keywords	new religious movement, secularisation, sect, cult, anti-cult movement

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1. Objective

This module seeks to conceptualise new religious movement (NRM) as a social phenomenon. In particular, it seeks to define NRM and outline the need for a new concept like NRM. In addition to this, the module deals with the types and sources of NRMs. It would also outline the significance of studying NRMs.

2. Learning Outcome

After reading this module, you will have an understanding of the following:

- the definition of new religious movement (NRM)
- the need for a new concept like NRM?
- what is 'new' about new religious movements?
- the different sources of NRMs?
- the different types of NRMs?
- the significance of NRMs?

3. Introduction

Sociology since its inception has considered religion as an important social phenomenon. The classical theorists: Durkheim, Marx and Weber, have in fact provided several insights on this issue, which are till today taken as the basic starting points on which contemporary sociologists base their studies. Durkheim while reflecting on the fate of religion in the modern society in the concluding part of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, emphatically writes, 'there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive' (1968: 427). Durkheim asserts that, 'It is said that science denies religion in principle. But religion exists; it is a system of given facts; in a word, it is a reality' (*ibid.*: 430). But Durkheim realised that, 'since there is no proper subject for religious speculation outside that reality to which scientific reflection is applied', religion 'cannot play the same role in the future that it has played in the past' (*ibid.*: 430). Therefore, according to Durkheim, once the authority of science is established, religion must submit to the logic of science and substantively have its scope delimited.

Researching further on Durkheim's prediction about the evolution of religion in modern pluralistic society, Frances Westley (1978: 136-37), in his paper '*The Cult of Man: Durkheim's Predictions and New Religious Movements*' argues that, 'Durkheim suggested that increasing individualism was the irrepressible wave of the future'. To Westley, 'Durkheim suggests that as a society characterized by unilateral kin group affiliations produced a totemic religion, so a highly specialized and diversified society will produce highly specialized, diversified and individualistic religion' (*ibid.*: 137). However, in the "cult of man", man's relation to his society would be expressed by the location of sacred power within each individual, as opposed to outside of him. As religion relinquishes its need for a god to symbolize society and relocates the sacred power within man, so it will relinquish its explanatory power to science and social science. In short, Durkheim predicted that in the "cult of man" religion and science would combine, the one expressing, the other explaining the relationship of the individual to society. It is in this conception of religion that we can find the roots of NRMs.

Unlike Durkheim, who envisioned the role of religion, though limited, in the modern society, Marx believed that religion, was a significant hindrance to reason, inherently masking the truth and misguiding followers. The well-known phrase ‘religion is the opium of the people’, considered as the quintessence of the Marxist conception of religious phenomenon by most of its supporters and opponents. Mehta contextualising Marx in the context of NRMs argues that, ‘An attentive reading of the whole Marxist paragraph where this phrase appears shows that the author is more nuanced than usually believed. He takes into account dual character of religion....While being a materialist, and atheist and Philosophically irreconcilable enemy of religion, Engels nevertheless grasped, like the young Marx, the dual character of the phenomenon; its role in legitimating established order, but also according to social circumstances, its critical protest and even revolutionary role’ (Mehta 1993: 18). The formulation indicates that religion has, in a number of situations, protest potential. NRMs to an extent utilise this protest potential to express discontent against modernity.

In fact, among the classical thinkers Max Weber was the one who explicitly discussed about the relation between religion and modernity. Weber extensively reflected on the nature of human existence in modern society, ‘a world robbed of Gods’ (Gerth and Mills 1948: 282). He is of the view that modern society is ‘characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by disenchantment of the world’ (*ibid.*: 155). While this ‘disenchantment of the world’ was historically inevitable, he was also conscious of the fact that the long term consequences of loss of progressive rationalisation were likely to entail heavy costs. Due to this progressive rationalisation, Weber saw modern man trapped in an ‘iron cage’ (Weber 1930: 181). The secret birth place of NRMs lies in catering this civilized life which as such is meaningless, with a ‘hope’ to rescue people from the ‘iron cage’.

Classical sociologists did not expect religion to disappear, but certainly expected it to be more or less radically transformed in the modern world. The next generation of scholars elaborated these arguments in more detail, usually fusing the traditions of Durkheim and Weber as they understood them. A number of theories appear to regard NRMs as a distinctively modern phenomenon which reflects fundamental social and cultural change. Some sociologists argue that new religious movements should be seen as a response to the process of secularisation within society and even within traditional religions (Bellah 1976; Berger 1969; Wallis 1984; Wilson 1982). Whereas others, such as the prominent scholar like Beckford (1986) has indicated that NRMs are the outcome of rapid social change. As traditional social norms are disrupted, people search for both explanations and reassurance. The rise of NRMs fulfils individual’s need to reconnect with their own values and beliefs in the face of instability and uncertainty by providing them a surrogate family.

Some scholars have attributed the source of NRMs to crisis of values or a climate of deepening normative ambiguity (Bellah 1976; Eister 1974; Glock 1976). Robbins (1988) has attributed the primary source of NRMs to ‘dislocation in communal pattern’. Some sociologists tend to pinpoint some acute and distinctively modern dislocation which is said to be producing some mode of alienation, anomie or deprivation to which people are responding by searching new structures of meaning and community. Therefore, they broadly attribute NRMs to modernity and its discontent (Jung 1993; Giddens 1990, 1991). Concern for health and spirituality is also an important source of NRMs (McGuire 1993; Illich 1976). Any movement and for that purpose NRMs also surface in wake of certain deprivations. So a group of sociologist have indicated how certain state of deprivation contributes in the growth of NRMs (Glock and Stark 1965; Inger Furseth & Pal Repstad 2006). What most (though not all) of these theories have in

common is the positioning of a relationship between the rise of contemporary NRM and occurrence of a fundamental change in society and culture.

4. Defining 'New Religious Movements' (NRMs)

The term New Religious Movements (NRMs) was initially applied by social scientists to, 'a bewildering variety of spiritual enthusiasms that had emerged in the West after 1960s, and was later used chronologically to refer to all religions that had established themselves in Western Europe, North America, India and Japan since 1945, and in Africa since the 1890s' (Clarke 1988: 907). Not all scholars would contend in limiting the interpretation of NRMs only in terms of time frame. Eileen Barker, rather than conceptualising NRMs purely in terms of time period, also delves into the content of these movements and, therefore, adopts a pragmatic definition. She writes, 'The definition from which I personally start - for purely pragmatic reasons - is that an NRM is new in so far as it has become visible in its present form since the Second World War, and that it is religious in so far as it offers not merely narrow theological statements about the existence and nature of supernatural beings, but that it proposes to answer to at least some of the other kinds of ultimate questions that have traditionally been addressed by mainstream religions, questions such as: Is there a God? Who am I? How might I find direction, meaning and purpose in life? Is there life after death? Is there more to human beings than their physical bodies and immediate interactions with others?' (Barker 1999: 16). Therefore, Barker defines NRMs in a broader sense.

One need to ponder over the fact that emergence of newer forms of religious expression is not a recent phenomenon. Such newer forms of religious expressions have been conceptualised in terms of sect, cult etc. The question which needs to be asked is - what necessitated academicians to propound a new concept such as NRM which could not be explained with the existing terminology? Where lies the 'newness' in new religious movement; how is it different from the old religious movements?

5. Why the need for a new concept?

With the advancement of modernity and progressive rationalisation, there is visible decline in the institutional dimension of religion. Pluralism has gained prominence in various spheres of social life and so is pluralism visible in the sphere of religion too. Therefore, we increasingly witness new forms of religious expression in most societies. These newer forms of religious expression can't be explained with the old vocabulary of church, sect and cult resonating with defiant orthodoxy and judgmentalism.

The need for a new term 'new religious movement' emerged because firstly, there was lack of consensus amongst sociologists about other terms - 'sects' and 'cults' which were traditionally applied by academics to such small scale religious movements, and secondly, in the wake of counter-cult movement of 1970s the term 'cult' acquired a derogatory meaning. Scholars were of different opinions on the application as well as the definition of traditional terminologies like - sect and cult used to refer to the small scale religious movements.

Judith Fox has discussed the variation and ambiguity implicit in definition of the term 'sect' and 'cult' in the works of different scholars. Fox argues, that American scholars Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge on the basis of doctrinal distinctiveness, classified 'sects as breakaways from older religious groups' (Fox 2005: 324). Cults, they said, 'were movements that drew their inspiration from somewhere

besides the primary religion of the culture in which they were located, and so they were deemed culturally innovative' (*ibid.*: 324). In the works of Bryan Wilson, cults and sects are defined 'on the basis of their social organisation' (*ibid.*: 324). Wilson characterized 'sects as exclusive and elitist groups offering salvation through membership, with lifestyles and concerns that were markedly different from those of mainstream society' (*ibid.*: 324). Further, Roy Wallis defines these terms in yet another way. He defines cults 'as loosely organized groups seen by their members to be just one of the variety of paths to salvation, rather than as the only path' (*ibid.*: 324). Sects, according to Wallis, were 'usually authoritarian and run by a single leader' (*ibid.*: 324). Cults, he argues, 'characteristically had no clear organisational boundaries and the locus of authority was vested in the members rather than in the leadership' (*ibid.*: 324). Some cults eventually coalesced into sects, as, for instance, self-help oriented Dianetics courses, eventually transformed into the Church of Scientology. However, many other cults simply dissolved after a short period of time.

This conceptual ambiguity turned into apprehension when psychologists of religion used the term 'cult' quite differently. In their view 'cult are authoritarian religious groups that combine group processes with hypnotic techniques, resulting in what is often called 'mind control'' (*ibid.*: 324). It was this usage that found its way into popular discourse in the 1970s. The word 'cult' gradually took on more disturbing connotations, no longer indicating just an enthusiastic and relatively unorganized following. Alarmed with the apprehension implicit in psychologist's definition of cult, a counter wave in terms of 'anti-cult movement' started taking shape. The apprehension of the 'anti cultist' regarding the term 'cult' were legitimated and reinforced by the tragic events related to the members of the Solar Temple and Heaven's Gate in North America and Europe, and Aum Shinrikyo in Japan.

The overall result was as Judith Fox puts it succinctly,

By 1970s, however, a feeling grew among other scholars in the field that the term 'cult' had become politicized and unstable, and that the time had come for a new name for the groups they studied. Scholars of sociology of religion often look to how the people they study represent themselves when attempting to choose an appropriate label. But, with groups from all major (and minor) religious, spiritual and alternative traditions being included in this category, there was consensus only in one important respect: by now, nobody- perhaps for obvious reasons- wanted to be called a member of a 'cult', or saw themselves as such. In the absence of a commonly agreed upon definition from the movements themselves, the term 'new religious movements' - chosen for its apparent neutrality - became widely used in the academic community (Fox 2005: 324).

Though there is hardly any consensus amongst sociologists regarding the time frame for emergence of NRMs, but certainly there is consensus on the fact that the term 'new religious movements' is apparently neutral in comparison to other traditional terms like 'cult' and 'sect' used for religious movements. Having outlined the context in which term like new religious movement emerged, it is imperative to discuss the way 'new' in new religious movement has been conceived by sociologists of religion.

Do you know?

Aum Shinrikyo, is a cult founded by Shoko Asahara in 1984 in Japan. It allegedly carried out the deadly Tokyo subway sarin attack in 1995 and is believed to be responsible for small scale sarin attack previously. This group has formally been declared a terrorist organization by many countries, including USA and Canada.

The Order of the Solar Temple, popularly known as **the Solar Temple**, is a secret society that claims to be based upon the ideals of the Knights Templar. It was started in 1984 by Joseph Di Mambro and Luc Jouret in Geneva. The members of this group are allegedly believed to have committed mass suicide. From 1994 to 1997, nearly 74 deaths were reported from this group. The letters left by the members, revealed their belief that their deaths would be an escape from the "hypocrisies and oppression of this world."

Heaven's Gate, a cult based in San Diego, California, was founded in the early 1970s by Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles. 39 followers of this group in 1997, are allegedly believed to have died in a mass suicide in California. These followers believed, as per the teachings of this cult, that through their suicides they were "exiting their human vessels" so that their souls could go on a journey aboard a spaceship they believed to be following comet Hale-Bopp.

Self-check Exercise- 1

1. What do you understand by the term 'new religious movement'?

NRMs refers to a bewildering variety of spiritual enthusiasms that had emerged in the West after 1960s, and was later used chronologically to refer to all religions that had established themselves in Western Europe, North America, India and Japan since 1945, and in Africa since the 1890s.

2. What was the need for a new term like NRM?

The need for a new term 'new religious movement' emerged because firstly, there was lack of consensus amongst sociologists about other terms - 'sects' and 'cults' which were traditionally applied by academics to such small scale religious movements, and secondly, in wake of counter-cult movement of 1970s, the term 'cult' acquired a derogatory meaning.

3. What is Anti-Cult Movement?

The term 'anti-cult movement' is generally used as a generic designation for any, usually secular, organized initiative opposed to at least some aspects of NRMs. They are also sometimes called the counter cult movement. The apprehension of the 'anti cultist' regarding the term 'cult' were legitimated and reinforced by the tragic events related to the members of the Solar Temple and Heaven's Gate in North America and Europe, and Aum Shinrikyo in Japan.

6. What is 'new' about new religious movements?

New forms of religion are new only in relation to earlier expressions. Religion's novelty is relative to both time and place. They are more or less adaptations of such ancient traditions as Hinduism, Shinto, Buddhism, and primal religions of Africa. Farquhar argues that, 'the old religions are the soil from which the modern movements' spring' (1967: 1). NRMs though comprise of different religious groups, but taken together or separately, it is nevertheless possible to make certain generalisations about their shared tendencies, which also brings forward the differences between the 'old' and 'new'.

The 'new' elements of NRMs are following-

- Firstly, NRMs are said to be 'more specialized or esoteric than those of longer-established religious groups' (Beckford 1986: xiii).
- Secondly, and closely related to the question of specificity, 'is the tendency of new religious movements to allow *lay people* to participate more fully in their activities than is common in many older religious organizations' (*ibid.*: xiii).
- Thirdly, emphasis of NRMs is to encourage the followers to translate their spirituality into '*practical, everyday action*' (*ibid.*: xiv) . This is, of course, possible in older forms of religious organisation as well, but an emphasis on the value of practical application of faith is much more explicit and evident in new movements.
- Fourth, new religious movements often promise men more rapid spiritual mobility. 'They may legitimize short-cuts in learning, and often they encourage education for the laity in matters that were once the specialist concern of priests' (Wilson 1982: 124).
- Fifth, aspect of difference in the 'old' and 'new' is as T.N. Madan writes about contemporary religious leaders all venture exercise, 'Religious leaders are today more visible as the promoters of modern (medical, technical, other) education and providers of integrated modern health care (for instance at Sathya Sai Baba's institutional complex at Puttaparthi) than as holy preceptors, and as religious leaders, they command larger following as instructors of practical yoga and the 'art of living' (Sri Sri Ravishankar) than of esoteric doctrines and arcane rituals. The religiousness of these contemporary gurus is open rather than secret; it is for anyone who is interested (irrespective of caste and creed) and not for the select few' (Madan 2006: 18-19).
- Sixth, NRMs differ from their traditional counterparts through a 'hybridization of sorts' (Mehta 1993: 41), by which these new religious leaders have very clearly borrowed the essential core of various schools of philosophy, but project the message to new members in a seemingly rational secular, non-sectarian manner.
- Seventh, 'new' feature of these NRMs is their compatibility with rationality and scientificity. The preaching and practices of most of these modern gurus are backed by scientific claims.
- Eighth, NRMs are a matter of 'choice' or 'preference' of the individual or group, whereas one is born in the organised religion and conversion is still not a widely prevalent phenomena.
- Ninth, emergence of NRMs has also led to commercialization of religion and spirituality. Some of the NRMs leaders like Sri Sri Ravishankar, the founder of Art of Living, openly admit that, "Mind has become commercial and it needs to be captured commercially". This commodification, packaging and consumption of religion and spirituality is a recent phenomenon.

The phrase ‘new religious movements’, however, has generated its own issues, apart from the debate in the domain of sociology of religion regarding the time frame of ‘new’, and also the nature of ‘new’; protests over use of the word ‘new’ have also been made by a number of the groups usually labelled as NRMs and some NRMs have objected to the description ‘religious’ being applied to them.

Sociologically speaking many of these movements, whether they see themselves as ‘religious’ or not, also exhibit characteristics that are usually associated with ‘new religion’. These characteristics include communal ownership of property, charismatic leadership, relationships based on personal trust rather than on institutional regulation, a message of salvation, liberation or transformation and a high turnover of members. In the face of all these considerations, and despite its methodological problems, ‘new religious movements’ has prevailed as the label most commonly employed by scholars of religion. After discussing the concept of ‘new religious movements’, it is important to describe in detail the sources of ‘new religious movements’.

7. Sources of New Religious Movements

There are certain structural and cultural changes which necessitate and facilitate the rise of NRMs. It includes a vast array of changes such as - moral ambiguity and value confusion; dislocation in communal patterns; modernity and related discontents; rapid social changes; state of deprivation; and health and spirituality etc.

7.1. Moral Ambiguity and Value Confusion

Early predictions of modernity and its discontent can be found in the works of Max Weber. Weber wrote that modern society is ‘characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by disenchantment of the world. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations’ (Gerth and Mills 1948: 155). Max Weber was probably the first to hint towards the meaninglessness of modern society because of increasing rationalisation. Extending the idea implicit in Weber’s proposition, some sociologists have pinpointed the climate of normative breakdown, moral ambiguity and value confusion as the context of spiritual ferment. Charles Glock is of the view that the rapid proliferation of new religious movements in 1970s is partly attributed to a ‘disorienting shift of cultural values’. He argues that traditional conceptions have been undermined leading to the search for new structures of meaning. Glock writes that, ‘The diffuse socio-cultural protest and experimentation of the sixties reflects this crisis of meaning and legitimation’ and has led to ‘search for new forms and structures of meaning’ (Glock 1976: 311-12). Therefore, according to these theorists, the upsurge of NRMs is primarily due to crisis of values and normative ambiguity because of decaying cultural tradition of absolute moral standards in a highly differentiated and pluralistic society.

7.2. Dislocations in Communal Patterns

In a rapidly modernising urbanised mass society dominated by impersonal bureaucratic mega structures, NRMs emerge as a solace and provide the comfort of a surrogate family. According to Robbins, ‘The structural isolation of the family may lead to a radical discontinuity between the ‘loving’ quality of familial roles and the impersonal quality of ‘adult’ roles in educational and vocational milieu. Because of

this discontinuity, many young persons may seek surrogate families in extra familial relationships. Various movements and ‘guru’ groups appear to promise devotees alternative kinship systems featuring unconditional acceptance, emotional warmth, and moral authority’ (Robbins 1988: 45-46). In comparison to the traditional, institutionalised religions, NRMs employ the language of kinship like - brothers and sisters, father and mother in a more expressive way. Devotees of these NRMs have a feeling of a large extended family with fellow devotees as spiritual sisters and brothers with the charismatic spiritual guru of the movement as the guardian. This theory provides an explanation how dislocation in communal patterns create a fertile ground for the upsurge of NRMs, but it fails to provide a reasonable explanation as to why the other informal agencies are not adequate to fulfil the sense of belongingness.

7.3. State of Deprivation

Deprivation theory maintains that religious commitment is a result of the compensation that religion provides in situations where individuals meet obstacles in life and search for alternative goals. Inger Furseth & Pal Repstad while discussing the deprivation theory argues that, ‘The concept of deprivation in the study of religion can be traced back to Karl Marx. As noted, Marx claimed that religion would fulfil the needs of those near the bottom of the social hierarchy; that is, religion serves as a source of comfort and it takes the form of protest and reaction against injustice and misery’ (2006: 112). Glock and Stark were the first to expand this idea of Marx and regarded deprivation as a necessary condition for the rise of new religious movements. They define deprivation as, ‘any and all of the ways that an individual or group may be, or feel disadvantaged in comparison either to other individual or groups or to an internalised set of standards’ (Glock and Stark 1965: 246). They specify that whether directly or indirectly experienced, whether its causes are known or unknown, deprivation tends to be accompanied by a desire to overcome it. There are five kinds of deprivation to which individuals or groups may be subject to relate to others in society. Glock and Stark call these five as: economic, social, organismic, ethical and psychic. They are of the view that, ‘The types are not pure; any one individual or group may experience more than one kind of deprivation’ (*ibid.*: 246). Glock and Stark suggest that a necessary precondition for the rise of any organised social movements; whether it is religious or secular, is a situation of felt deprivation. However, while a necessary condition, deprivation is not, in itself, a sufficient condition. Also required are the additional conditions that the deprivations are shared, that no alternative institutional arrangements for its resolution are perceived, and that a leadership emerges with an innovative idea for building a movement out of the existing deprivation. There is also a sixth type of deprivation ‘existential deprivation’ (Inger Furseth & Pal Repstad 2006: 112) which indicates towards the fact that an individual may be rich, powerful, successful, popular, and in good physical and mental health, and still feel unhappy when it comes to existential questions on the meaning of life. Overall the central argument of deprivation theory is that people who meet obstacles in their lives or are in unsatisfactory situations will search for alternative goals to compensate and that religion offers such compensation.

7.4. Health and Spirituality

One important source of new religious movements is the growing concern for health and healing. It is believed that spiritual and religious attention to health is holistic in the belief that spiritual, emotional, social, and physical aspects of well-being are fundamentally interconnected. Today's spiritual healing movements are one expression of the dissatisfaction with the limitations of compartmentalised, rationalised medicine. Holiness, physical and emotional health, spiritual growth, salvation, and sense of

well-being are intertwined in a holistic linkage of mind-body-spirit. While such linkages have never been absent from the Indian religious scene, in the last decades twentieth and twenty first century many diverse religious and quasi-religious movements promoting a mind-body-spirit holism have flourished. There are certain social structural changes specially the following two aspects of modernisation: 'institutional differentiation and rationalisation' (McGuire 1993: 146) which have necessitated and facilitated the synthesis of health and spirituality. Contemporary spiritual healing movements are one expression of the dissatisfaction with the limitations of compartmentalised, rationalised medicine. While locating the causes of illness, the new religious and spiritual healing movements do not reject the medical explanations of disease causation, but they strongly consider medical causes to be inadequate explanations for illness.

8. Types of New Religious Movements

The study of NRMs has been replete with various typologies of new movements. Frederick Bird (1979) distinguishes between the various new religious movements in terms of the relationship of followers to masters or the relationship of the religious seekers to the sacred power they revere. Thus, 'adherents may become devotees of a sacred lord or lordly truth; disciples of a revered or holy discipline; or apprentices skilled at unlocking the mysteries a sacred, inner power' (*ibid.*: 336). In the first category would fall Divine Light Mission and Krishna Consciousness. In the disciple category fall some of the smaller groups such as Integral Yoga. In apprenticeship group comes Transcendental Meditation or Scientology etc. Bird seeks to show that these different types of movements provide different ways of coping with the problem of 'moral accountability' which he believes to be one of the factors in their appeal.

The development of a range of new religions and the revival of some old ones, in the 1970s, led Roy Wallis to categorise these new religious movements. Weber's influence on Wallis is discernible, especially in Wallis's assumption that groups tend to become increasingly more accommodating towards the mainstream over time. Wallis following the Weberian style divided his typology into three 'ideal types'. Wallis's conceptual space is formed by the components of a logical trichotomy, the elements of which constitute an exhaustive set of ways in which a new religious movement may orient itself to the social world into which it emerges. 'A new movement may embrace that world, affirming its normatively approved goals and values; it may reject that world, denigrating those things held dear within it; or it may remain as far as possible indifferent to the world in terms of its religious practice, accommodating to it otherwise, and exhibiting only mild acquiescence to, or disapprobation, of, the ways of the world' (Wallis 1984: 4).

The first type he proposed was that of world-rejecting groups, and it perhaps most closely conforms to popular images of new religions. According to Wallis, 'world-rejecting groups', are like a closed group of followers who believe that the outside world is impure, therefore, minimum contact needs to be maintained with outside world. Being closed, they in course of time develop authoritarian tendency and group take a clear precedence on the individual. In the cosmology of such movements, the members remain hopeful that a new 'world order' will usher in which the movement will have a significant role to play. Wallis places ISKCON and the Children of God in this group.

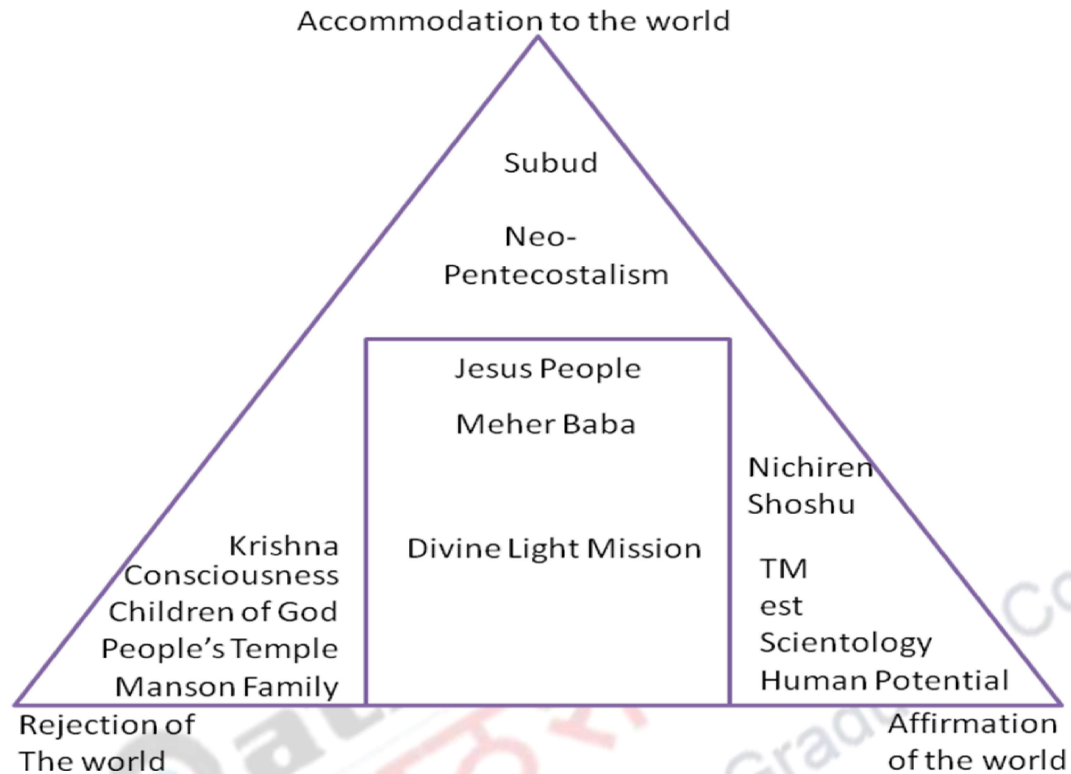


Figure 1 Orientations of the new religions to the world (Wallis 1984: 6)

Wallis's second type was that of 'world-affirming groups'. These are highly individualistic and less religious in comparison to the first category. But they don't treat the world as 'impure', rather they seek to attain 'human potential' through the release of divinity or creativity inherent in the person. They include seminar oriented organisations such as The Forum and Insight, Sahaja Yoga etc., which can be placed into this category. The third type according to Wallis contains world-accommodating groups. These are movements who do not necessarily see themselves as an all-encompassing or unique path. Instead, they offer highly experiential techniques that can be utilised by people in order to revitalize their spirituality more generally. Wallis included organisations such as charismatic churches in this category. This typology offered by Wallis is presented as ideal types, not as mutually exclusive empirical categories. Empirical instances will therefore only approximate these types, of course, often combining elements of more than one orientation. These typologies have considerable value in providing insight into the beliefs, and structures of the new religious movements.

Beside Wallis's typology of NRMs on the basis of orientations of the new religions to the world, there has been an attempt by scholars like Ambrose (1982) and Arvind Sharma's (1986) to provide a typological framework (indicated below) to understand new Hindu religious movements on the basis of their response to rapid social change and orientation to the West.

New Hindu Religious Movements in Contemporary India

Pre-independence	Post-independence	Main Features
Brahmo Samaj		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis on science and rationality • learn from the West • appreciation of other cultures and religions
Arya Samaj	Hindu Mahasabha, Anand Marg, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis on rationality combined with revelation • assimilate from the West, but more on one's own terms • militant attitude towards other traditions
Ramakrishna Mission	Divine Light Mission, Sai Baba movement, Rajneesh movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis on rationality combined with mysticism • assimilate material techniques of the West, offering in return the spirituality of the East
Theosophical Society	Hare Krishna Movement, Transcendental Meditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • originate outside India and then make their presence felt in India largely through a western following

Scholars would argue that new Hindu religious are 'new' in relation to the old. Therefore, post-independence movements are rooted in orientations of pre-independence movements. In contemporary India as is evident from the aforesaid table, the third orientation rooted in Ramakrishna Mission's philosophy lead to great influx of religious gurus and ideas to the West during the 1960s and 1970s, and thereby contributed to, what Gavin Flood would call the 'Global Hinduism' (1996: 265).

9. Significance of New Religious Movements

In a methodological sense the study of NRMs is significant because they present a window of opportunity to empirically explore basic issues in the sociology of religion. Sociologists of religion analysing the significance of NRMs are inclined to analyse the significance of these NRMs in terms of their role in progressing or inhibiting the larger process of modernisation. There are some NRMs which are considered to resist change as a result of the modernisation process, for example, ISKON. Another group of NRMs are seen as a facilitator in the process of modernisation. These NRMs justify and adopt techno-scientific means of modern society in order to propagate their own movement.

There is a group of sociologist like Bryan Wilson who argue that NRMs are features of societies experiencing secularisation, and they may be seen as a response to a situation in which religious values have lost social pre-eminence (Wilson 1966: 207). So, he allocates NRMs a marginal position and views them as the last outpost of religion in societies where religious beliefs and values have little consequence. Rather than being content to exclude NRMs on the basis of their marginality, I side with those who take the opposite view, that 'cult is culture writ small' (Baindridge 1997: 24). The importance of the study of new religious movements has been established on several grounds. First, it indicates the extent to which established religious organizations are challenged, both for the allegiance of their members and because

of the influence that they yield. Second, the conditions in which people are prepared to participate in new movements are revealing in that they display the shifting lines of tension or fracture in social and cultural structures.

Systematic studies of NRMs and cults have helped to scotch several common, but mistaken assumptions. They show that modern people are not necessarily less religious than their ancestors, that religious innovation is no more likely to be progressive than conservative, that religion is not the exclusive prerogative of church, temple or mosque type organisation, and that the dynamics of new religious movements cannot be separated from social change. NRMs look to become more numerous, and the rate of their proliferation will probably increase in the foreseeable future. The study of their dynamics is therefore central to an understanding of the place of religion in all societies.

Self-check exercise 2

1. What are the three types of NRMs identified by Wallis?

Wallis provided the typology of NRMs based on ways in which a new religious movement may orient itself to the social world into which it emerges. Wallis proposed three types of NRMs- world-rejecting groups, world-affirming groups, and world- accommodating groups.

2. What are the main sources of new religious movements?

There are certain structural and cultural changes which necessitate and facilitate the rise of NRMs. It includes a vast array of changes such as - moral ambiguity and value confusion; dislocation in communal patterns; modernity and related discontents; rapid social changes; state of deprivation; and health and spirituality etc.

3. What is the significance of studying NRMs?

The importance of the study of new religious movements has been established on several grounds. First, it indicates the extent to which established religious organizations are challenged, both for the allegiance of their members and because of the influence that they yield. Second, the conditions in which people are prepared to participate in new movements are revealing in that they display the shifting lines of tension or fracture in social and cultural structures.

10. Summary

To sum up, we can say that the rapidly modernising societies are increasingly witnessing new forms of religious expression. The old vocabulary of sect and cult resonating with defiant orthodoxy and judgmentalism are unable to explain these new forms of religious expression. Moreover, in wake of counter-cult movement of 1970s the term 'cult' acquired a derogatory meaning. Therefore, the need for a new term 'new religious movement' which is apparently neutral in comparison to other traditional terms like 'cult' and 'sect'. NRM is an umbrella term which covers a bewildering variety of spiritual enthusiasm. This module would have helped to understand the structural and cultural changes which necessitate and facilitate the rise of NRM. By now you would have also understand the typology of NRMs offered by Frederick Bird on the basis of relationship of followers to masters or the relationship of the religious seekers to the sacred power they revere, and typology of Wallis based on the ways in which

a new religious movement may orient itself to the social world into which it emerges. Finally, this module would have equipped you to appreciate the significance of these NRMs in terms of their role in progressing or inhibiting the larger process of modernisation.

