

Sociology and Resource Management
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Module - 03
Understanding Urban Commons
Lecture - 12
Urban Common and social ownership

Hello everyone. Welcome back to the course on Sociology of Resource Management. So, today, we are beginning with the second lecture of the third module which is on Urban Commons and social ownership. Covering a bit of the inequality issues in the last lecture, as you must be remembering, that we were talking about the fact that in many cases in the cities, we see that the ecological commons do not have an equal access.

So, several communities in the city, they do not have equal access to the commons in the city for several reasons because of city transformations, because of different kinds of different visions of urban planning and multiple other factors. So, what we will be doing today is that we will complicate this idea a little bit, we will make it a little more complex through the idea of social ownership by using different case studies; both conceptual as well as empirical.

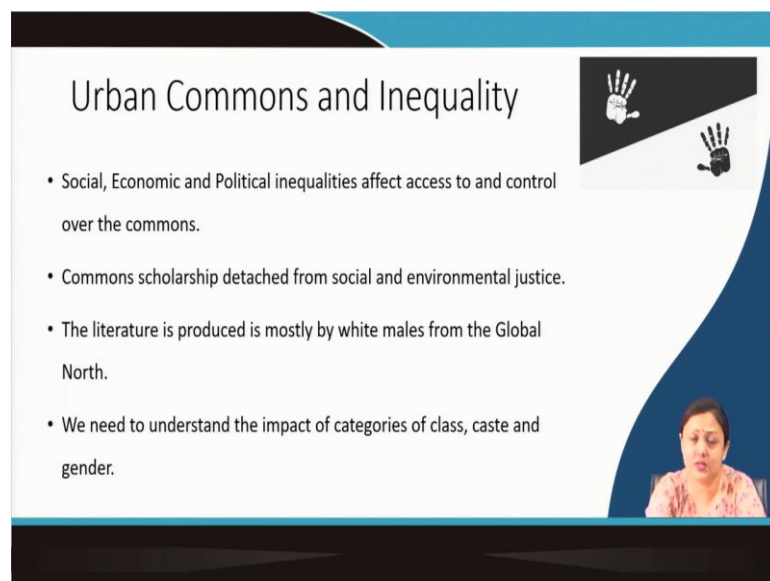
But before that we will try to look into some of the foundational concepts of commons; so, what exactly had been the classical arguments on the theorization on commons and how they have been contested and how they have been critiqued and how they have been approached through very different lenses over time.

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So, as you can see that this is the outline for today's class. We will first try to examine urban commons in the context of inequality and then, we will visit Garrett Hardin's famous essay on the tragedy of the commons and we will try to critically analyze it using some of the recent studies that have revisited and critiqued and analysed this particular work on the tragedy of the commons. And we will then, move on how to access and have control, how the particular access and control over the commons is affected by one's race, gender and caste.

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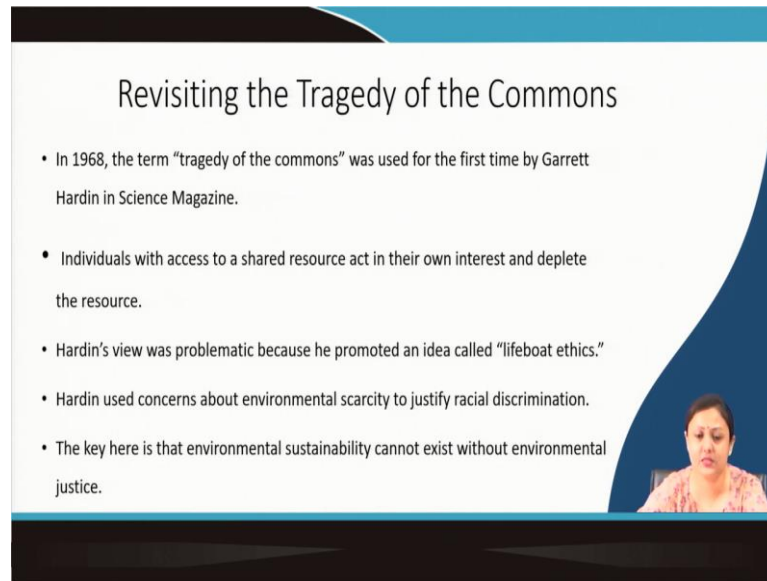


So, as I was telling you that there are different kinds of sociological understanding of this entire study of commons that we are discussing right now and in order to enrich this sociological understanding on the commons or more specifically urban commons that we are doing right now, I think that we have to raise very important and very fundamental questions in certain contexts and particularly, I think that we must question on how social, economic and political inequalities affect the ways in which people, different kinds of people have access to and control over the commons.

And it is also the very unfortunate fact that we see that many of the scholarship which are largely focused on a natural science and technical issues have absolutely remained silent or they have not touched upon the broader ideas of social and environmental justice, which are very fundamentally associated to the idea of commons.

As I was telling you in the beginning that the use and access of commons also along with the ecological issues, they also mark a major area of social analysis because there are stark major injustice and issues of inequality that we see happening around the use and access of commons and that is why being sociologists, I particularly feel that we need to very strongly associate issues of social and economic justice, environmental justice as well, to the holistic understanding of urban ecological commons. And this is why I also feel that it is particularly important for scholars like us to explore the studies on urban commons through the lens of different kinds of social problems; different kinds of social issues like race, caste, class and different other kinds of complexities.

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Revisiting the Tragedy of the Commons

- In 1968, the term “tragedy of the commons” was used for the first time by Garrett Hardin in Science Magazine.
- Individuals with access to a shared resource act in their own interest and deplete the resource.
- Hardin’s view was problematic because he promoted an idea called “lifeboat ethics.”
- Hardin used concerns about environmental scarcity to justify racial discrimination.
- The key here is that environmental sustainability cannot exist without environmental justice.

Now, I will begin with a bit of foundational studies and their critique and let us in this context talk about one of the most important - I would say a pathbreaking essay in the context of understanding commons in the entire study, scholarship that sort of discusses about the commons and this is what I was mentioning about the ‘tragedy of the commons’ by Garrett Hardin.

And the tragedy of the commons refers to a situation in which individuals with access to a shared resource also called a common, act in their own interest and in doing so, they ultimately deplete the resource. In the year 1968, the term “tragedy of the commons” was first used by Garrett Hardin in the Science Magazine.

But in the aftermath as I will be discussing right now, there had been several studies, critiquing multiple aspects of this particular observation on the commons by Hardin, I will try to touch some of them. So, for instance a very recent report by Mildenberger in that has been published in The Scientific American, the author mentions that this particular essay, the person who wrote about one of the most influential issues on environmentalism about 50 to 60 years ago and in this particular essay, we saw that Hardin saw all the humans who are associated to a particular common as very selfish herders; the fact that we worry that our neighbour’s cattle will graze the best grass and that is why what we do is that we send more of our cows to consume that grass first.

So, this happens with a very selfish and self-centred motive having established our right on a particular resource before someone else does that. And he also says that we take it first because someone else can steal our share because the resource is limited and everyone has equal right, we cannot exclude anyone from coming to that particular land and grazing their own cattle.

And what he also says is that this creates a vicious cycle of environmental degradation - this is something that Hardin very strongly focuses on. And this particular condition, where self-interested individuals are focusing on their own self gain is what he terms as the 'tragedy of the commons' and we saw in the aftermath that his views, this particular tragedy of the commons is being taught widely in multiple disciplines.

So, the 'tragedy of the commons' actually became a very effective multidisciplinary area, where it is taught across very effectively in disciplines like economics, political science, ecology, environmental studies. And so, this particular essay that I was talking about that is published in Scientific American, the author says that his essay actually remains an academic blockbuster with almost 50,000 citations and it gets republished in several ways. It is analysed in multiple ways.

But there are particular ideas that most, that many of many of the facets, many of the factors that have been pointed out here about the study of the commons exposes us to a racist outlook, which is also something that be a sociologists should be worried about, about this particular essay.

And the author here writes that its six pages; six pages of this particular essay are actually packed with fear because Hardin particularly advocates for a fascist state to eradicate undesirable gene pools; he proposed building a wall to keep the immigrants out.

And also, the author here says in this particular magazine that Hardin was a virulent nativist, whose ideas inspired some of today's very, very disturbing anti-immigrant sentiments. And he was actually it was also pointed out time and again that he was actually using concerns about environmental scarcity, the fact that there are self-interested communities, who would be maximizing on their own gains and they would not be bothered to think about the environment.

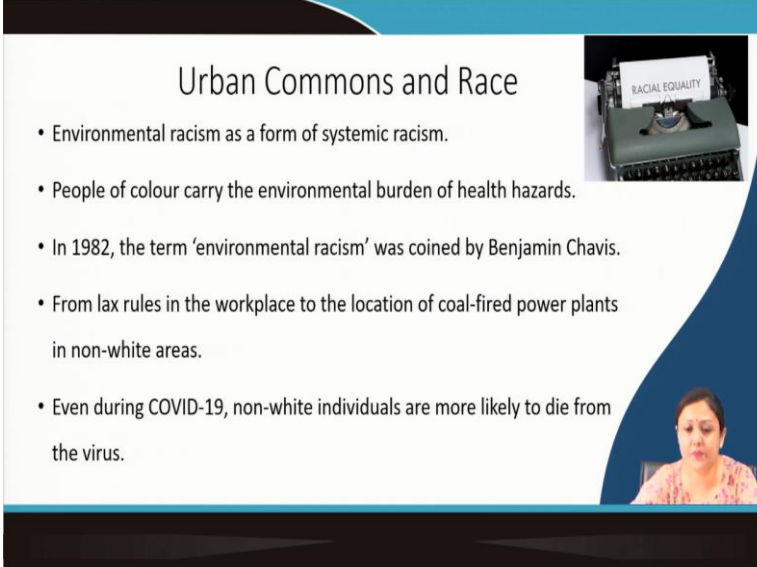
So, he was particularly using the concerns of environmental scarcity to justify different kinds of discrimination and also, Mildenberger points out very strongly in this particular essay that environmental sustainability something that Hardin talks about cannot exist with such pictures of discrimination.

It cannot exist without particular focus on environmental justice something that Hardin actually misses out on and he also mentions that the truth is that two-thirds of all the carbon pollution ever released into the atmosphere, I quote from this particular work in scientific American, can be traced to the activities of just 90 corporate companies.

And these corporations' efforts to successively thwart the climate action are the real tragedy. So, it is not those communities, those rural communities, who have to depend on the commons for their livelihood needs, for their everyday survival; but it is actually these tall international, multinational corporations which are actually making major and very, very harmful effects on the environment, actually exacerbating the climate change impacts.



And this particular article in Scientific American also mentions that we have to stop at some point championing policies that privilege environmental protection for some human beings at the expense of others and we have to somewhere replace or rethink Hardin's flawed metaphor with a more inclusive vision for humanity.

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Urban Commons and Race

- Environmental racism as a form of systemic racism.
- People of colour carry the environmental burden of health hazards.
- In 1982, the term 'environmental racism' was coined by Benjamin Chavis.
- From lax rules in the workplace to the location of coal-fired power plants in non-white areas.
- Even during COVID-19, non-white individuals are more likely to die from the virus.



Now, as I was telling you that we would be systematically talking about the particular sociological issues, to the discussion on urban ecological commons that we are doing right now. So, let us first examine commons in the context of race. So, here again, I will bring in another example from a very recent article published in the World Economic Forum. Here, we find the images of a poison, of a poisoned tap water in Michigan.

So, there are different other kinds of examples also like toxic waste dumps in the lower Rio-Grande valley and a town in China, where 80 percentage of the children have been poisoned by old un recycled computer parts. But apart from these incidences in itself, what I would like to highlight here is that, these many of these incidences have a particular thing in common.

So, all these examples from China, Michigan, examples from the lower Rio Valley, these are very discrete examples of environmental racism which is also a very systemic form of racism, where communities, so this particular article in the World Economic Forum mentions that this particular in this particular form of racism 'environmental racism' - communities of colour are seen to disproportionately carrying the tasks, the 'environmental burden' of health hazards through policies and practices that force them to live in proximity to the sources of these toxic wastes such as sewage works, such as different kinds of mines, different kinds of landfills, power stations etcetera.

So, this article further mentions that it was an African American civil rights leader Benjamin Chavis, who coined the term 'environmental racism' in 1982 describing it as a racial discrimination in environmental policy making, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities and the history of excluding people of colour from the leadership in different ecological movements.

So, as you can see that this is a very powerful definition, I would say of environmental racism and this article goes on to discuss environmental racism even more deeply because it says that in actuality, this kind of racism can take different kinds of forms ranging from lax health rules in the workplace to the location of coal-fired power plants in predominantly non-white areas; citizens may be forced to drink contaminated groundwater or attend schools in crumbling buildings with asbestos issues.

So, Doctor Robert Bullard, the father of environmental justice, as this paper quotes, conducted a ground-breaking study in 2007 that found race to be more important than socio-economic position in predicting the location of the nation's commercial hazardous waste facilities.

So, he established further that African American children were five times more likely than Caucasian children to get lead poisoning from being around waste or dump sites. For example, Flint Michigan as I was giving examples in the beginning of this slide is an excellent illustration of environmental racism. To save money, the city switched to the Flint River as a water source in 2014; but failed to effectively treat this new supply of water exposing the cities almost 1 lakh, mostly black residents to unsafe amounts of lead from aging pipes and other toxins including e-coli.

And we can actually see that just as in other kinds, other forms of racism that we often hear about, environmental racism is very very widespread among indigenous people. So, this article for instance mentions that corporations take advantage of weaker land rules in the United States. This is just to give you an example, where the federal government holds property in trust on behalf of the Native American tribes exposing Native American communities to massive quantities of nuclear and other kinds of hazardous wastes.

On an international scale, again drawing on this particular article, globalization has increased the possibilities for environmental racism. It refers to the dumping of pollutants like e-wastes in developing countries, where safety regulations and environmental norms are inadequate.

Globally, more than 44 million tons of e-waste were generated in 2017; 6 kg for every person on earth with about 8 percent of that being transferred to Asia each year. Academic studies media pressure campaigns and public action are all used by environmental justice movement to raise awareness of the condition of vulnerable population.

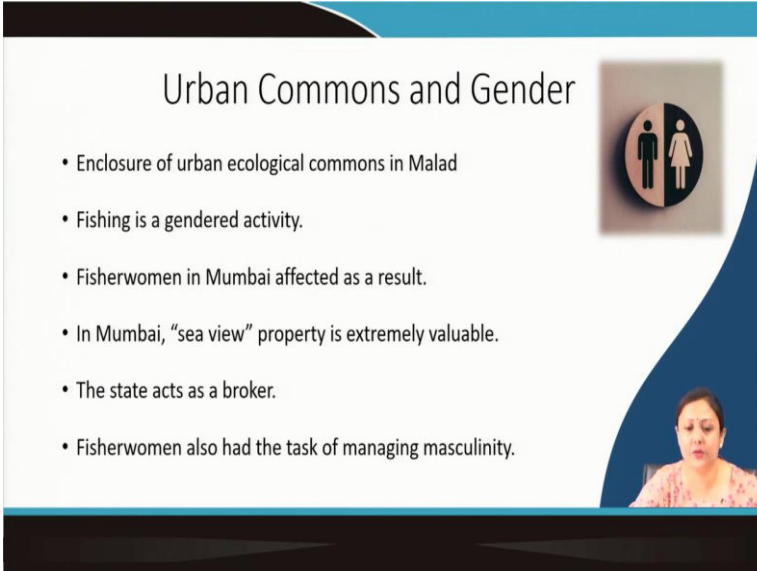
To make their voices heard, grassroots movements used social media as well as civil disobedience and mergers. In the very recent age of COVID-19, combating environmental racism may risk falling below the poverty- the policy curve, yet with the

non-white individuals being more likely to die from the virus; complicating factors like asthma, heart disease caused by pollution are likely to play a very crucial role.

So, environmental racism is a part of a larger picture of systemic racism that must be addressed in order to achieve a more equitable society. Environmental privileges and benefits that accrue disproportionately to the whites and elites include green spaces, such as clean parks and playgrounds, schools with I would say adequate facilities, clean air, clean water and different other kinds of public facilities. Systematic differences between the quality of the services that whites and non-whites receive, these have to be documented.

And the exclusion and disposition, we see that it has now become central to the formation of environmental commons and these processes have been and continue to be very deeply racialized. So, I would be sharing these particular references from which I discussed this idea of environmental racism and I would largely urge all of you to go thoroughly through all these articles for a larger understanding.

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The slide features a title 'Urban Commons and Gender' at the top center. To the right of the title is a circular icon with a male figure on the left and a female figure on the right. Below the title is a bulleted list of six points. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a woman speaking.

Urban Commons and Gender

- Enclosure of urban ecological commons in Malad
- Fishing is a gendered activity.
- Fisherwomen in Mumbai affected as a result.
- In Mumbai, "sea view" property is extremely valuable.
- The state acts as a broker.
- Fisherwomen also had the task of managing masculinity.

So, let us now view the urban commons through a gendered lens. Here, I would be talking about a particular article by Aparna Parikh, where we find this is an example from a city in India Mumbai. We find how the fisherwomen in Mumbai are affected by the growth of the neoliberal service sector and the enclosure of several urban ecological

commons in a neighbourhood in Mumbai that is known as Malad led to detrimental changes in the Koliwadadas.

Koliwadadas are the fisher communities and women particularly bear a greater; but I would say drawing on this article, unrecognized, under recognized burden in maintaining the lives and livelihoods within these changing landscape. It is seen, she writes that for centuries the koli or the fisher community have lived and worked in this particular coastal stretch relying on fish for their subsistence as a very pivotal livelihood source.

Women are largely burdened with the task of selling fish and doing the household chores, both simultaneously and this analysis also illustrates how the structuration and maintenance of the koli commons relies very disproportionately on women's labour. And to this end, the neoliberal state has actually acted as a land broker and enclosed diverse property firms for the capitalist investors.

So, Mumbai as we know that it is one of the most vibrant cities, it is our commercial capital and it is also known for its magnificent huge buildings and it is for its spectacular look and in Mumbai, we see as the author mentions here whereas, sea view; so, sea view hotels for instance are very common in the city.

So, whereas, 'sea view' can actually fetch exorbitant sums of money for the residential and commercial property. Fishers' lives and livelihoods which transpire in environmental commons that are - the people, who are working day in and day out in the coasts; the livelihoods that extend to the marine ecologies as well -these kinds of livelihoods are absolutely relegated and more so with that of the women.

So, the Wetlands, for instance forms a very important I am talking about the Malad here drawing on this particular article. The wetland form a very important communal space in the neighbourhood of Malad, in Malad's, for the Malad's fishing communities and Malad has historically been occupied by the fisher communities.

These communities have historically relied on fishing for subsistence and livelihoods; a dependence that continues intergenerationally into the making of contemporary lives and livelihoods. So, neoliberal India have been marked by a shifting state discourse that centers the urban as the site for development intervention, as I quote from this particular article. Fishing many of us know is a largely gendered activity, where we see that men

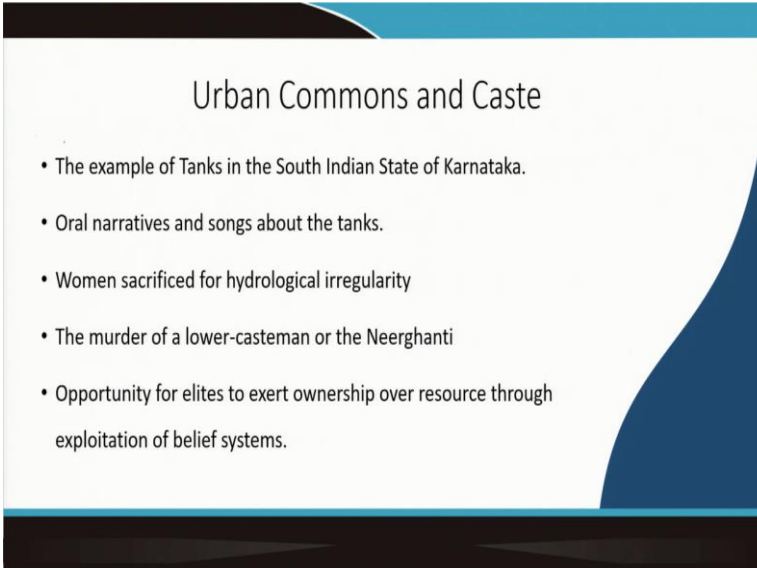
go out to fish in the wee hours of the morning; while women have to balance different kinds of domestic chores.

Women are the primary actors as both buyers and sellers in these vibrant fish markets and due to a lack of a good haul has become an increasingly prevalent following the concentration of wetlands and toxicity resulting from the construction of the call centers. The authors interview with the fisher folk revealed that men were uncomfortable selling fish because they considered it women's work and were also unhappy that their wives and daughters bought fish hauled by other fishermen as it made them feel less manly.

Because of the scarcity of fish and continuing gender division of labour, women in fishing communities are responsible for a variety of household functions including cooking. In fishing villages, cooking is carried out on wood stoves which are fueled by mangrove sticks; mangroves form a very vital source for wood stoves in koliwadadas for which sticks are collected slowly over time. Fisher women are responsible for collecting these sticks which they do each morning, very early in the morning.

So, this is a very, very interesting focus by Aparna Parikh on fisherwomen and this particular focus on the fisherwomen in the koliwadadas of the Malad also reveal the different implications of such enclosures within the fishing communities, where women actually face a very, very disproportionate burden to adapt to the daily practices; the daily practices of harvesting resources and extracting resources.

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Urban Commons and Caste

- The example of Tanks in the South Indian State of Karnataka.
- Oral narratives and songs about the tanks.
- Women sacrificed for hydrological irregularity
- The murder of a lower-casteman or the Neerghanti
- Opportunity for elites to exert ownership over resource through exploitation of belief systems.

Let us now explore the urban commons from the angle of caste, something that is again very important in the context of India and here, I would be particularly talking about an article by Esha Shah, who has done again a very very prolific work on tank irrigation in Karnataka, talking about many of these structural discrimination and caste practices.

And she writes how the agrarian landscapes in the South Indian state of Karnataka are dotted with thousands of tanks, irrigation reservoirs and many of these landscapes she also mentions in a very interesting anthropological account are marked by stories, songs, legends about the past the pre-modern period of these tanks.

And these oral narratives of these tanks are very rich with emotions, stories of love, along with other kinds of brutal incidents like murder, sacrifice where we see as the author Esha Shah in multiple examples, she talks about the many of the stories and songs that are associated with the tanks and she views them as a source of anxiety as well because of these specifically these caste and discrimination issues. Mostly, because she says that either they might not have received many of these tanks during different periods of time; they did not receive any water or they were also faced with the threats of flood.

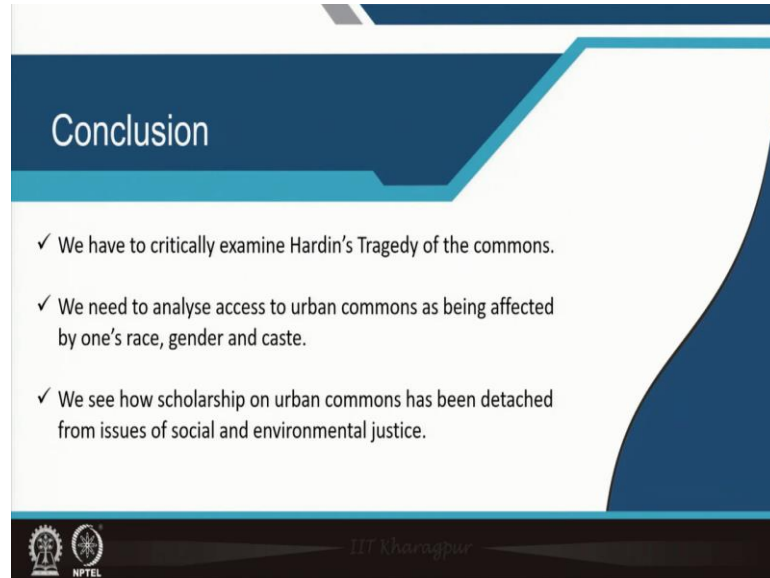
And there is a very she mentions in one of her works that I will be sharing with you that there are genres of traditional ballads that for instance tells the story of women being sacrificed in a tank as a testimony to hydrological irregularity. So, she also mentions about the sacrifice of lower caste men for instance to prevent the breach of embankment during particular periods when the tank system was in a threat.

So, she mentions about the Neerghanti, who were the lower caste men employed to ensure that the water is distributed in a particular, in a proper way. And many of these opportunities, actually for instance, the opportunities for elites to extract ownership over the resources are made through the exploitations of the belief system.

So, there are different kinds of there are other songs as well. I am not referring to that in the interest of time. But we I have also myself got some opportunity to work with many of these village communities, understanding about the traditional practices in the tank irrigation system, where we find that many of these traditional ballads, folk, folk songs mythologies - they actually narrate very very unpleasant and brutal stories of human sacrifice, human exploitation, brutality, a caste based coercion which have been very

very integrally associated with the tank irrigation system in Karnataka as well as in several parts of, several other parts of South India.

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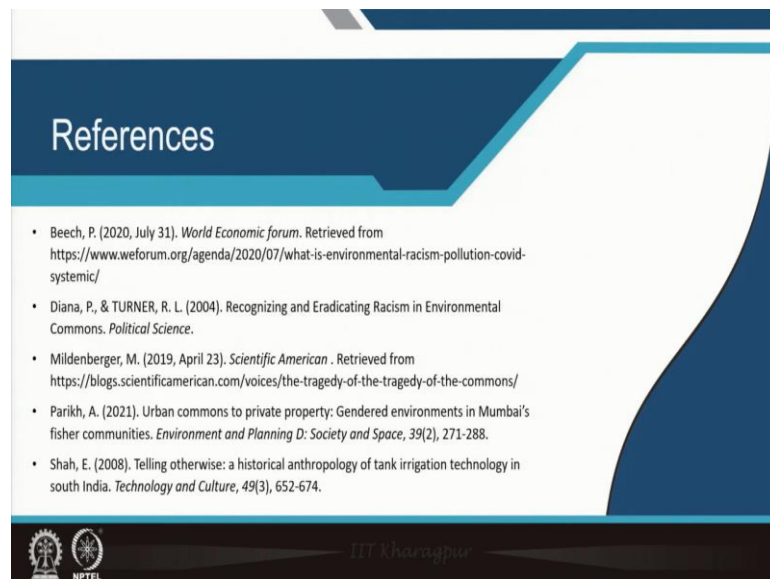
Conclusion

- ✓ We have to critically examine Hardin's Tragedy of the commons.
- ✓ We need to analyse access to urban commons as being affected by one's race, gender and caste.
- ✓ We see how scholarship on urban commons has been detached from issues of social and environmental justice.

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So, let us quickly summarize the points that we discussed in today's class. We have critically examined Hardin's tragedy of commons. We have analysed access to the urban commons as being affected by one's race, gender and caste and we see how the scholarship on urban commons have been detached from the issues of social and environmental justice.

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So, all these references have been used in the making of today's lecture and many of these readings have been directly referred to when I was talking about the issues of casteism and racism associated with environment and I would really like to again suggest all of you for going through all these readings that would be given to you.

Thank you and we will meet again in the next class.