

**Sociology and Resource Management**  
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**Module - 03**  
**Understanding Urban Commons**  
**Lecture - 14**  
**Rethinking environmental justice in cities**

Hello everyone and I again welcome back all of you to this course on Sociology of Resource Management. And today's lecture as you can see is on rethinking environmental justice in the cities now before I begin with you this particular lecture, I would like to just mention about something very interesting, that many of you by now might have been made familiar to what environmental justice exactly is, so, as we see in several places in the Global South, that many of the traditional, marginal indigenous communities they are subjected to several kinds of challenges because of multiple issues that are associated with environmental crisis. So, that can be issues of mining, issues of forest depletion, issues of resource crisis - different kinds of issues which impinge on the lives and livelihoods of the indigenous communities, the traditional communities who are largely dependent on nature.

So, for instance, many of you might have heard about the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the Chipko movement all of which are very good examples, I would say, of environmental justice, where the communities themselves made their voices heard and the communities ensured that justice is being provided both to the environmental resources as well as to them, in terms of restoring their livelihood requirements, in terms of restoring their own cultural heritage and association with nature.

So, I think that this is an approach the approach of environmental justice stands in a bit of a contrast to how we technically understand environment, environmental science or maybe environmental impact assessment, environmental quality, which I would say are largely which can be measured in a way by quantitative methods quantitative techniques.

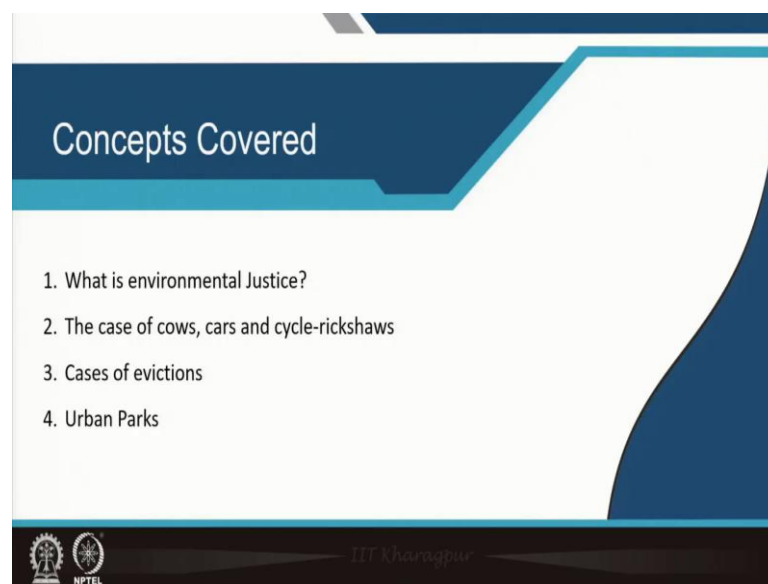
But different kinds of issues that we are doing here for instance, earlier we talked about environmental racism, environmental casteism then thinking about sustainable development issues of poverty and inequality that are related to the environmental thinking and right now, we are talking about environmental justice. So, all these issues I

think require very intense and very in-depth qualitative explorations because more than the environment itself, more than the environment as a resource in itself - these issues that are associated with the discourse on environmental justice speak about the lives of the communities, the livelihoods of the communities in association with nature. Many of the communities, erstwhile communities as we know in our country, it has been a very intense tradition it had been a historical heritage to find different communities, different people living in very close association with nature. So, in the north, in the west, in the south, in the east I think all over our country we find that our cultural systems in several places are very, very integrally associated to nature.

So, any kind of assault to nature, any kind of assault to the physical nature to the resources also means an assault to the livelihoods, to the lives, to the cultural system, to the belief system of these communities and I would also say that these kinds of assault leads to an erosion of environmental justice and this is something we have seen multiple environmental movements as I was giving you examples from the Narmada Bachao Andolan, from the Chipko movement. So, these are, there are several others contemporary movements as well.

There are several others which actually speak very very qualitatively, I would say about these environmental justice issues which are very very integrally linked to the lives and everyday experiences of these communities.

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Now, this is the outline for today's lecture as you can see that we would be talking about environmental justice in the cities because in this module we are primarily talking about the cities about the urban. And we will first discuss about, we will elaborate a bit about what environmental justice is and to substantiate or to provide an example, later we will talk about a very interesting case study that had been a very interesting paper that is authored by Professor Amita Baviskar and this particular paper is empirically contextualized on Delhi's streets and the findings or the empirical categories from this particular paper actually illustrates what environmental justice in the cities look like. And further we will also talk about a few more cases, where we find that the urban marginals have been largely evicted through the environmental, through the so, called environmental concerns.

And finally, we will discuss about the urban parks and problematize the very notion of city beautification and how this particular vision of city beautification or making spectacular cities is a major compromise with environmental justice.

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The slide features a white background with a blue and black decorative border. At the top center, the title "Environmental Justice" is displayed in a black sans-serif font. To the right of the title is a black icon of a balance scale. Below the title, the text reads: "It redresses structures and situations arising from environmental discrimination." This is followed by another line of text: "There are three different types of urban environmental justice problems that the Gelobter (1993) distinguishes:". Below this, a numbered list is provided: "1. Health Related Environmental Injustices", "2. Spatial environmental Injustice", and "3. Structural/Economic Environmental Injustice". In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small inset video frame showing a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned top, looking towards the camera.

Now, I think that we have already understood from the lectures earlier that a detailed discussion about the social issues associated, social and cultural issues associated with the environment is very important and more so when we are talking about the urban environmental commons. So, I would like to quote here from a particular paper by

Gelobter where this paper particularly mentions that environmental justice redresses structures and situations arising from environmental discrimination.

And particularly environmental racism that we had discussed earlier that many of our own actions are borne by the communities who are considered to be people of color, who are considered to be caste marginals, who are compulsorily, who have to stay near hazardous spaces and things like that. So, I think this is a very useful definition in this context, that is being provided by the author that environmental justice redresses structures and situations arising from environmental discrimination and particularly environmental racism.

Environmental discrimination are actions and practices arising from both individual ideologies and social structures that preserve and reinforce domination of subordinate groups with respect to the environment, while such discrimination with respect to race is environmental racism.

This is exactly something that we had discussed before I am not going into the detail, but we can just to sort of elaborate this particular idea about environmental justice, we will introduce another concept which is just; which is just, seems to be a kind of a, which would link the these two together environmental justice and environmental injustice.

So, environmental injustice as a contrary to environmental justice is actually a 3-dimensional nexus of economic injustice, social injustice and unjust incidence of environmental quality. So, I think that many of these incidences if we speak historically a bit, we will be able to find that the roots of urban environmental injustice can be traced much further back to the 1960s and although the outcomes of environmental injustice may be apparent - what is not so easily noticeable are the subtle nature of power structures and relations in the city and there are I would be primarily talking about three different kinds of urban environmental justice problems, this is particularly being identified by the author, by the paper that I was mentioning. So, I will come to them one by one.

So, there are three different types of urban environmental justice problems, that the author that I was mentioning about talks about here. So, the first is health related environmental injustice - where we see that in cities cancer respiratory sickness and heart disease are common and its actually, the author writes, that it is actually a surprise that

people of color and low income groups have significantly greater rates of environmental disease, than their white wealthier urban counterparts owing to the poor background levels of environmental quality.

The causes of such disease prevalence are numerous, but they are very poorly understood. Contributing factors may include poor outdoor air quality, poor indoor air quality, the disproportionate presence of allergens like dust and fumes from nearby industrial operations. Lead poisoning is also common among the people of color.

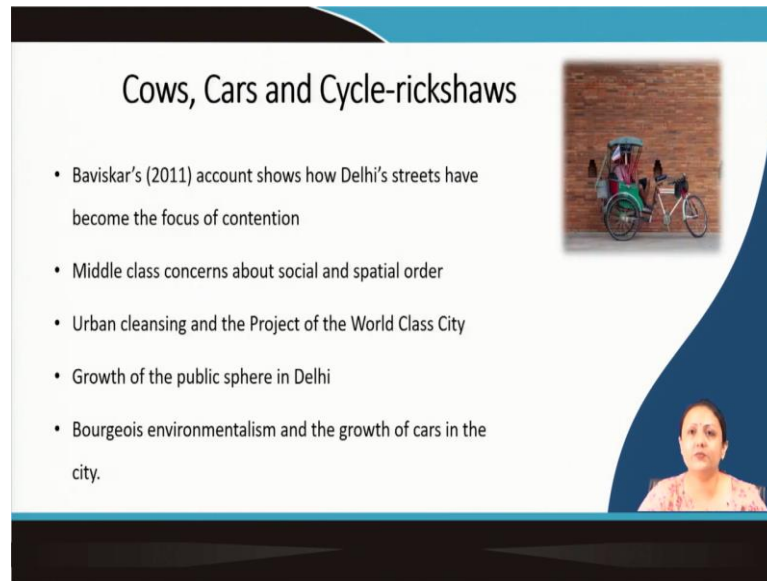
Now, the second is spatial environmental injustice. Here we see that the author mentions that inner city communities of color have lesser access to high quality environments. The clearest urban manifestation of this is the organization and design of the spaces in which people of color and low-income groups live in. Many inner-city ghettos are among the most inhumanly designed and constructed living situations ever.

The most densely populated neighborhoods in every city are those inhabited by people of color and to the impoverished. People of color have long been denied access to urban public amenities, designed to relieve urban tension and provide outlets for physical activity, recreation and relaxation with the often-awful arrangements of metropolitan environments. Parks and open spaces in the city have generally been built in white affluent communities and the last is structural or economic environmental injustice.

Cities, as the global economies economic engines, continue to have a voracious thirst for labor, causing a steady migration of people from rural to urban areas, across national borders. And this phenomenon does not increase the quality of life in most economies, but rather work to maintain international labor devaluation. Because of the increasing demand of housing educational and sanitary services as a result of significant immigration influxes urban abuses rise.



The loss of unique cultures as individuals are torn from their ancestral homes and relocate to hostile urban areas is one very long-term effect.

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**Cows, Cars and Cycle-rickshaws**

- Baviskar's (2011) account shows how Delhi's streets have become the focus of contention
- Middle class concerns about social and spatial order
- Urban cleansing and the Project of the World Class City
- Growth of the public sphere in Delhi
- Bourgeois environmentalism and the growth of cars in the city.



So, as I was telling you in the beginning that we would be discussing about a very interesting case study, a very interesting paper by professor Amita Baviskar, who writes who has written a paper some years back, this paper is entitled to the Cows, the Cars and the Cycle-Rickshaws.

So, as you can see that as the name in itself suggests that there are three categories that she has chosen here. One are the cows, the second are the cycle rickshaws and then there are the cars. Now, it is very interesting to see how the author Professor Baviskar brings these three elements together to draw a picture of environmental thinking in the cities. And how this very environmental thinking in itself is related to visions of environmental justice or I would rather say environmental injustice.

Now, what the author tries to say in this paper is the fact that, in many of the cities like here in this specific case she talks about Delhi, we see that there is a growing prominence of the middle class and these Indian middle class because of their recent increase in purchasing power, because of their very transforming aspirations, what they would want to live in a city which is a world class city, which has world class infrastructures, which looks good, which looks spectacular which has maybe high rise places of entertainment and all kinds of amenities available to for instance that can suit their lifestyles.

And there is a very interesting projection about the urban environment in this particular vision of the middle-class sort of middle-class thinking about the city. So, they would

want to look their cities hygienic, they would want that their cities have a kind of special order they would want that their cities should be devoid of any kind of menace and here exactly, Professor Baviskar talks about two categories, one are the cows and the second are the cycle rickshaws.

So, in the city of Delhi as she mentions that there had been rampant cases and public interest litigations filed over multiple issues, where cows have been seen straddling along the streets of Delhi. So, the middle class in the city would essentially not want to live in a capital which where the streets are infested with cows, where so many cows can be seen on the streets, cows are seen to be loitering, they are seen to be causing traffic, they are seen to block the roads, they are seen to cause a lot of inconvenience to the people who are commuting.

So, in order to resist or in order to protest against the movement of the cows in a city like Delhi, one of the most convenient legal instruments that have been used by the citizens, by the middle-class citizens, is that of the public interest litigation and it is the same in the case; in the case of the cycle rickshaws. So, another menace, cycle rickshaws look ugly, they do not suit the image of a world class city they, they are sort of - they are thought to bring very downward trends to a city which is thinking in the lines of a world class city.

So, even if the cycle rickshaws are environmentally sustainable, even if they are not causing any kind of vehicular pollution, the citizens would not want to see cycle rickshaws, even cycle rickshaws in the streets of Delhi. But on the other hand, the author mentions that this same group of citizens would not be having any problem with the growing number of personal vehicles - the growing number of cars in cities like Delhi, even if they are causing a lot of congestion, even if they are causing a lot of vehicular pollution.

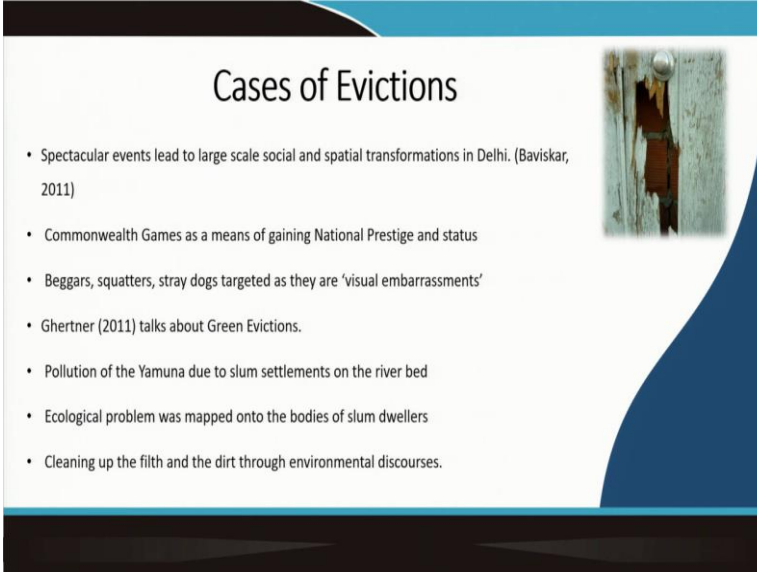
Absolutely no public interest litigation has been filed against the growing numbers of vehicles personal automobiles and vehicles that are found in the city. Because mostly because of the fact - this is a very contradictory vision of environmentalism that she points out that this particular engagement with hygiene and civic order, civic rights, spatial order it does not actually take into account particular things that are considered to be most destructive.

So, for instance she writes that through growing advertisements, it is a part it has become a part of the aspiration of the middle class that they should buy more, they should shop more, a car is something that a scooter rider should aspire for and with the ease of car loans and all other amenities, it is actually it has actually become an essential part of the middle-class lives to travel in personal vehicles.

And this kind of thinking, this kind, this is I feel that this is a very holistic idea about our vision of the city which is in a way which is in a very strong way connected to the environmental concerns. And the author calls this a ‘bourgeois environmentalism’, where this particular environmental thinking that is associated with the middle class rules over any other kinds of environmental thinking.

And because this class has an imagination of superiority that is attached to themselves and to their particular visions about the environment, they feel that urban cleansing; projects like urban cleansing, eviction of beggars, removal of cows and cycle-rickshaws are the only ways in which the city can be cleansed and the environment of the city can look orderly. So, I think that this is one of the most pragmatic and realistic examples of our very compromise or the ways in which we are relegating justice issues associated with the environment to a large extent.

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**Cases of Evictions**

- Spectacular events lead to large scale social and spatial transformations in Delhi. (Baviskar, 2011)
- Commonwealth Games as a means of gaining National Prestige and status
- Beggars, squatters, stray dogs targeted as they are 'visual embarrassments'
- Ghertner (2011) talks about Green Evictions.
- Pollution of the Yamuna due to slum settlements on the river bed
- Ecological problem was mapped onto the bodies of slum dwellers
- Cleaning up the filth and the dirt through environmental discourses.

The slide features a blue and black decorative border. A small photograph in the upper right corner shows a person standing in a doorway, partially obscured by shadows.

So, let us look at some more examples to get a bit more clarity on this idea. So, I will again talk about another case study by Amita Baviskar and this is an account of the



Commonwealth Games in Delhi. As all of you know that Commonwealth Games have been had been hosted earlier in the city of Delhi and here, we find a similar situation unfolding. So, the author writes how the project of making Delhi into a world class city is radically restructuring the city's landscapes.

So, for instance during the commonwealth games in the city, the state very speedily tried to accomplish large scale social and spatial transformation of great economic and social value, which would have otherwise been very difficult to achieve. And this speed and efficacy were driven by the fact that the Commonwealth Games would bring a lot of national prestige and status to the country and India would get its recognition in the globalized economy.

Yet spectacular events such as these are successful in conjuring consent from the citizens even if it means wasting a lot of public money, even if it leads to the exclusion of the urban marginals- the idea that the game represents the coming of the age of India as a superpower and Delhi as a world class city and the symbolic value that the games would boost local jobs and incomes ultimately make the public welcome this kind of socio spatial transformation.

And there have been different kinds of infrastructural growth, infrastructural advancement that were planned for the city. So, for instance for the games to be a success, it meant different kinds of things, so for instance the author says that, new air conditioned stadiums were made, new kind of games village complex were made to house athletes and officials, the Delhi airport was expanded and then there were different other kinds of infrastructural improvements.

And other than infrastructural changes many things had been removed and changed for the greater interest of the city. Before the games, I will just give you some examples of these what are these greater interests and you would be surprised to know that as the author mentions that before the games about 1 lakh beggars were caught and tried in the mobile courts, they were sentenced to special beggar's homes, stray dogs were targeted, other visual embarrassments like the slums were to be kept out of sight, sight including the round rundown colonies that had to be hidden from the eyes of the visitors.

Vegetable vendors were removed without prior notice. Thus, these cases of eviction are just one example of the ways in which the state exercised very power and in the course

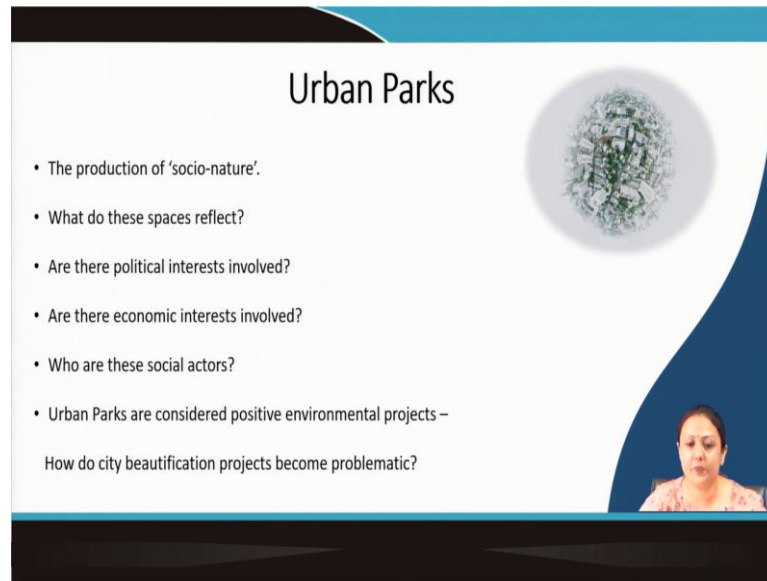
of repackaging the city they redefined the shifting categories of what they consider to be legal or illegal at any given time.

So, we find another very interesting paper by Gautam Bhan, where he writes that public interest litigations as I was talking about, that are very frequently and very like very easily filed by the elite residents in the Delhi High Courts have started to play a very very important role in shaping urban environmental transformations because these legal instruments, the public interest litigations have the power to reconfigure the nature of citizenship of slum dwellers by constructing them as dishonest, illegal citizens who do not have to pay for land, who do not have to pay for a flat. However, the state does not acknowledge its own failure to build low-cost housing for this very population.

We see that Asher Ghertner, yet another very prolific writer on urban issues in his essay on green evictions, mentions how environmental pollution is constructed as a problem embodied by the slum dwellers in Delhi. The Delhi High Court in 2002 took a complex ecological problem such as the pollution of the Yamuna and simplified it to the visible presence of slum settlements on the Yamuna river bed, as if pollution to the Yamuna is being only caused by the slum dwellers, who are settled in and around the area.

Thus, the slum dwellers dread any high-profile events as it prompts authorities to clean up the city, to cleanse them out of the city. Slum dwellers are well aware that they are the dirt that the government does not want the world to see. It must be remembered; however, that it is not the slums that pollute, rather slums are usually located in a dangerous health threatening environment where the poor have no choice, but to live in constant fear of disaster.

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The slide is titled "Urban Parks" and features a list of bullet points on the left side. On the right side, there is a circular graphic showing a globe with green patches representing parks. In the bottom right corner, there is a small inset video of a woman speaking. The slide has a blue and white color scheme with a dark blue curved border on the right side.

## Urban Parks

- The production of 'socio-nature'.
- What do these spaces reflect?
- Are there political interests involved?
- Are there economic interests involved?
- Who are these social actors?
- Urban Parks are considered positive environmental projects –

How do city beautification projects become problematic?

Again, we see another very popular image where the government is attempting to create green spaces or urban parks. So, for instance municipal parks in Gujarat, but by displacing slum settlements that has inhabited that area and this is not uncommon. In fact, there has been forcible removal and several waves of destruction carried out in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Bombay, even New York's famous Central Park was made by displacing a predominantly African American community.

So, even though parks have been very popularly seen as very successful cases of ecological restoration, they are seen as very positive environmental projects. According to another study by Zimmer, Cornea and Veron they have been majorly and very popularly read as political. City beautification projects thus must be problematized.

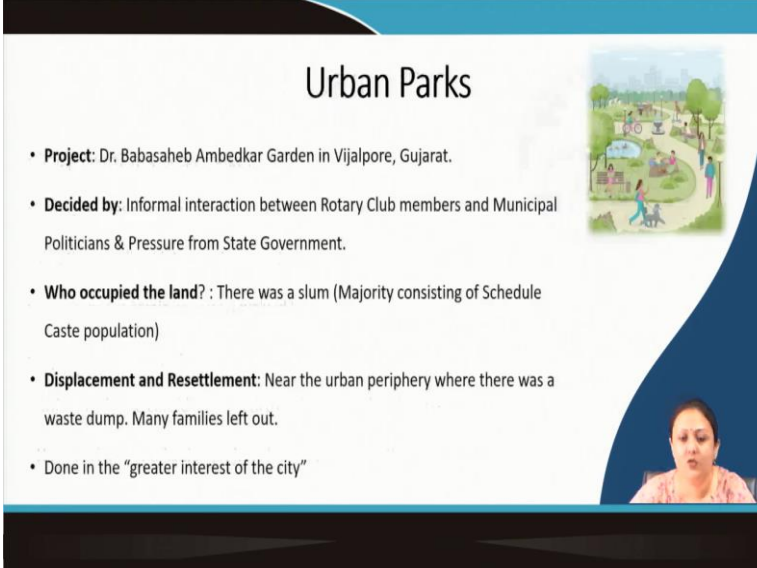
When particularly we look at parks, we see lush green lawns, trees home to birds and squirrels, at one glance what we can see can be characterized as nature. But when we think about the time this urban park was being made, certain other things come to the light. We see workers adding fertilizer, the children's playground being set up and the slum being removed to make space for this environmental project as we see in this particular study by Zimmer, Veron and Cornea in Gujarat.

This is when what seemed natural, does not seem very natural anymore. It seems socially produced as if this urban park is a part of the socio-nature. But what do these spaces reflect? We ask to ourselves are these political interests involved, are these economic

interests involved, who are the social actors who were able to influence or bring about such a change?

So, just imagine how integrally questions of the social and political are linked to issues of the environment, particularly in the city. Urban parks are always considered to be positive environmental projects, thus we never question these developments but we instead support them. Urban parks are home to many animals, they lower urban heat island effects and they also clean the air in the city. But who are these greening attempts for, who are these targeted to? If the slum in this case was removed, then for whom these urban improvements these urban restorations are for.

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**Urban Parks**

- **Project:** Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Garden in Vijalpore, Gujarat.
- **Decided by:** Informal interaction between Rotary Club members and Municipal Politicians & Pressure from State Government.
- **Who occupied the land?** : There was a slum (Majority consisting of Schedule Caste population)
- **Displacement and Resettlement:** Near the urban periphery where there was a waste dump. Many families left out.
- Done in the "greater interest of the city"

The slide features an illustration of a park with people walking, a dog, and a bicycle. A small video inset in the bottom right corner shows a woman speaking.

So, the case that has been studied in this particular paper was the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Garden in Vijalpore Gujarat. The making of the park was decided through an informal interaction between the rotary club members and the municipal politicians. There was also considerable pressure from the state government. But the space was already being used by a slum. The majority consisting of scheduled caste population, ultimately, they were displaced and they were resettled near the urban periphery, where there was a waste dump, many families had nowhere to go.

When asked about the displacement it was said that the urban park was created for the greater interest of the city. So, it is apparent that this is an extreme example of injustice where greening in the city is happening at the expense of the poor.

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The slide is titled "Urban Parks" and features a list of five bullet points on the left side. To the right of the text is a small photograph of a green park bench in a wooded area. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small inset video of a woman speaking. The slide has a blue and white color scheme with a dark blue footer.

### Urban Parks

- Slum dwellers as 'polluters'
- *People embodying filth?*
- Caste Belief : Purity and Pollution
- Restricting access to the lake.
- Eviction by using the environmental discourse.

The basis on which the slum dwellers were evicted was based on the fact that they were polluting the environment. For example, there was open defecation which the other urban residents found filthy. But this was because the slum dwellers were excluded from many basic urban services, like and still they are so for instance proper sanitation facilities.

This concept that the slum dwellers were embodying filth or seen as the filth in the city could have come from the caste belief of 'purity and pollution' as we have discussed earlier. If we remember these slum dwellers were predominantly a scheduled caste population. In fact, they were also restricted from accessing the Dudhiya Talav which was the drinking water reservoir.

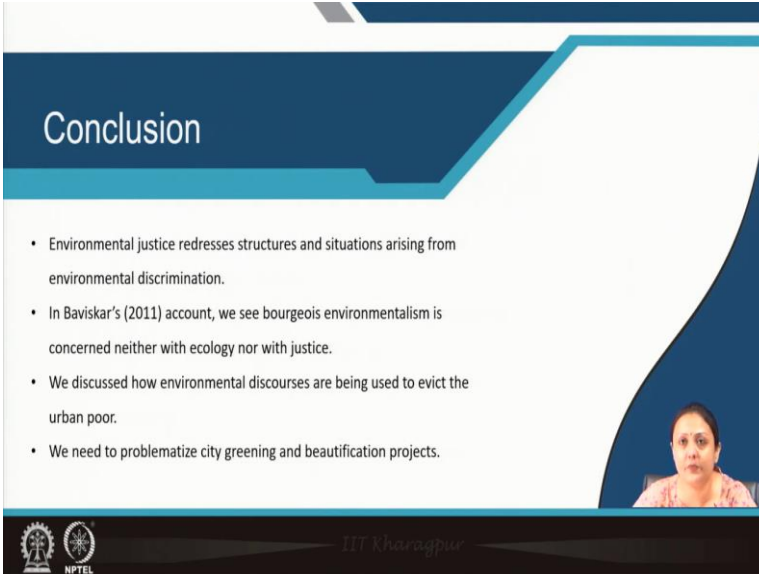
The rotary club members often complained about how the slum residents were climbing and polluting the lake. Thus, this relocation was largely made by using the environmental discourses of pollution, to ultimately make the city look beautiful. Thus, it is safe to say that urban parks too are sites of great environmental injustice and political struggle between powerful actors in the city in the urban societies.

In fact, naming the park as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was done to make the slum dwellers accept this kind of land use as the character of Ambedkar is very close to their heart. As these cases and example examples help us understand how different actors shape the city, the fact that nature too can be socially and politically produced is a

concept that we must understand in order to analyze environmental injustices in our society.

So, this particular paper I would be sharing with you with the other papers that I mentioned over here. So, you can go through the details in this paper to have a much greater understanding about what exactly urban environmental injustice is.

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**Conclusion**

- Environmental justice redresses structures and situations arising from environmental discrimination.
- In Baviskar's (2011) account, we see bourgeois environmentalism is concerned neither with ecology nor with justice.
- We discussed how environmental discourses are being used to evict the urban poor.
- We need to problematize city greening and beautification projects.

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So, these are the main points that were covered in today's class. Environmental justice redresses structures and situations arising from environmental discrimination. In Amita Baviskar's; both of Amita Baviskars' account, accounts we see bourgeois environmentalism is concerned neither with ecology nor with justice.

We discussed how environmental discourses are being used to evict the urban poor. We need to problematize the city greening ecological restoration and beautification projects.

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These are the references that has been used for today's class.

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