**Urbanization and Environment**
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Module - 03
Urban (environmental) trajectories in India: Plans, policies, visions and missions
Lecture - 13
Limits and Legacies of "Colonial Urbanization"

So in this lecture, lecture 13, we will be discussing Limits and Legacies of Colonial Urbanization.

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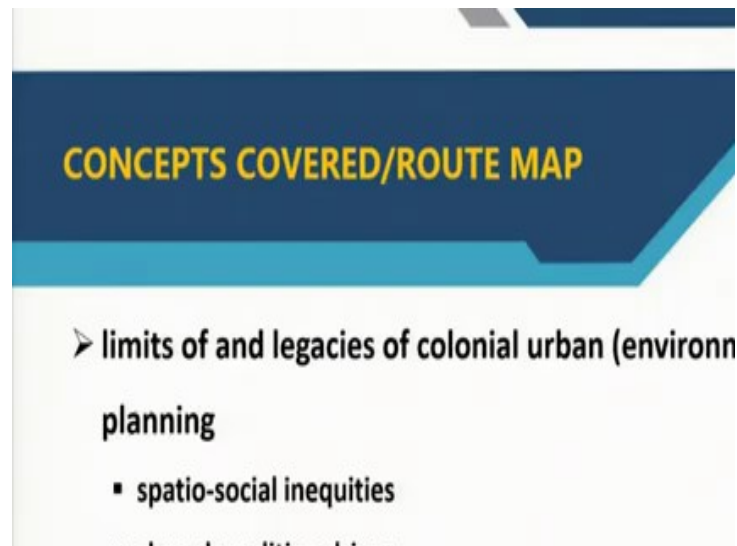
So, the concepts that will be covered in this lecture or the root map that this lecture will follow. So, the discussion would mainly surround relating to the limits and legacies of colonial urban environmental planning.

And so, we would, this lecture would demonstrate you know how spatio-social inequities actually got entrenched you know, as part of the colonial urbanization or urbanizing processes. And how slums and squatters were demolished and people were de housed, they were evicted displaced without proper rehabilitation and alternative you know housing facilities.

And how you know there was also like a lot of discrepancies, in terms of official projection and actually what was taking place at the ground level, so. And also one needs
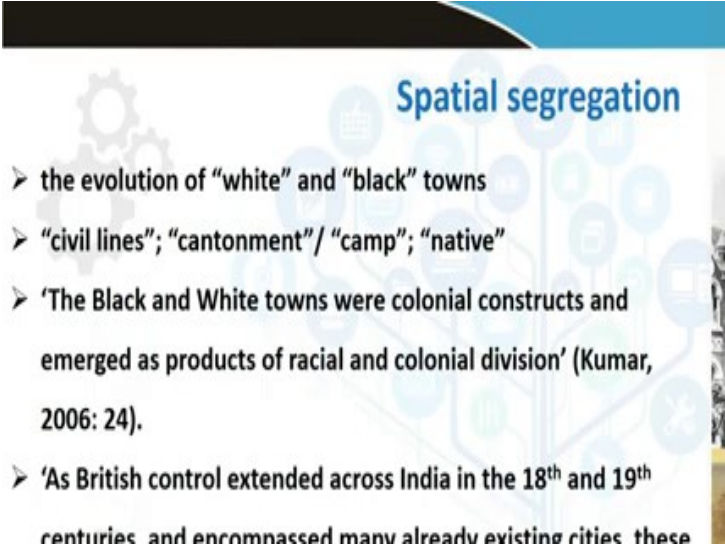
to remember that you know, today we discuss beautification projects and it is impact on you know, on the lives and livelihoods of the marginal section, the urban poor. And this is an important you know it is the crux of the urban political ecology literature.

But I think like if we apply the urban environmental history perspective, we can understand that how you know the colonizers also you know for example, Bombay or Calcutta as important imperial cities. So, as centers of you know, as important centers of commerce, how the colonial urban imageries were also getting shaped you know with this idea of imperial you know, power and imperial centers so far as commerce was concerned.

So, I mean the state was also interested to flush out filth and not only filth, but also to flush out dirty people, quote unquote 'dirty people'. So, how like colonial urban imageries were kind of crafted, you know with this particular idea in mind.

And so far as leak several other limitations of colonial urbanization a concern, I think one major limit was these continuous frictions among multiple actors and agencies. And these has a endearing legacy on contemporary urbanization. We you know have these continuous frictions and you know no coordination or rather lack of coordination among multiple actors, sectors and agencies. It is still a very significant feature of the Indian urbanization process.

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Spatial segregation

➤ the evolution of "white" and "black" towns

➤ "civil lines"; "cantonment"/ "camp"; "native"

➤ 'The Black and White towns were colonial constructs and emerged as products of racial and colonial division' (Kumar, 2006: 24).

➤ 'As British control extended across India in the 18th and 19th centuries, and encompassed many already existing cities, these

Yes, so to start with you know the students from literature or from history, they very much know you know these terms; they are familiar with terms like black town and white town. And this black town and white town definitely you know this nomenclature signify that, they are like colonial constructs and historians are worked on with the emergence of black towns and white towns. And the differences you know between these towns in terms of access to infrastructures, in terms of you know protection, in terms of fortification etcetera.

So, for example, you know the first British cities like Madras 1644, Bombay 1661 and Calcutta 1690. So, all these were like these were fort cities and port cities; because like the inner core it consisted of fort or a fortified settlement, which was strongly controlled and this was like designed and dominated and occupied by the British and this area or the space was known as civil line.

And this was kind of bounded by the cantonment area, where the British troops were accommodated. And then you know surrounding the core the area where the native people settle, that area known as the native or the black town actually sprang up. So, this was the kind of a, of the layout or the urban fabric.

And Kumar who has worked on the Madras you know urban planning in Madras; he says that 'the black and white towns were colonial constructs and they emerged as products of racial and colonial division'. Yes, no doubt about this. And Spodek, we talked about Spodek in a last lecture also.

So, Spodek specializing on city planning in India during the British times. So, he says that, 'as British control extended across India in the 18th and 19th centuries, and encompassed many already existing cities; these patterns of spatial segregation by nationality and race were repeated'.

So, for example, other modes of urban plan or architecture are also evident in, I mean so far as colonial cities are concerned. So, for example, very large areas of cantonment and civil lines alongside preexisting Indian cities we find you know these areas. And the examples include New Delhi, Bangalore, Secunderabad adjoining Hyderabad. And there was also the creation of residency areas.

So, residency areas, so in the capitals of India's large princely states and in the centre of regions with numerous smaller princely states, the British they created the residency areas as headquarters to run local administration. So, and also troops were garrison, troops were accommodated in this residency areas.

So, you can see some images here of the residency areas, from where local administration was run and garrison, I mean troops were garrison.

Now, a lot of literature as I told you on spatial segregation on this evolution of, I mean concurrent evolution of white and black towns. So, for example late I mean, historians focusing on late 18th and 19th century urban history; they had actually you know talked about this spatial and morphological distinction between white towns and black towns. But you know there is also recent literature that talks about, how white towns and black towns should not actually be understood as sacrosanct categories. So, the boundary is somewhere there blurred.

And so, white town should not be understood as a space or rather a homogenous space only inhabited by Europeans. So, we there are strong or I mean records show that there are strong features of colonial native interactions, right, even within fort areas. And if you see this table, so the table also speak of you know colonial native habitation even within the fort area. So, this is from the Bombay fort area.

So, there are if you weave the snippets that we get the record, from records together you will find you know interactions, negotiations and resistance between the raj and the native. For example, there is one record that talks about like when, in long back like in 1800 when the British asked the Indian businessman to evacuate or to vacate you know the fort area, how they actually resisted.

And during that time the British actually did not have any legal tool or legal means to kind of you know to put pressure on the Indian businessman. So, we have this interesting

stories of interactions, negotiations and resistance continuously you know going on, which went on between the native and the colonizers.

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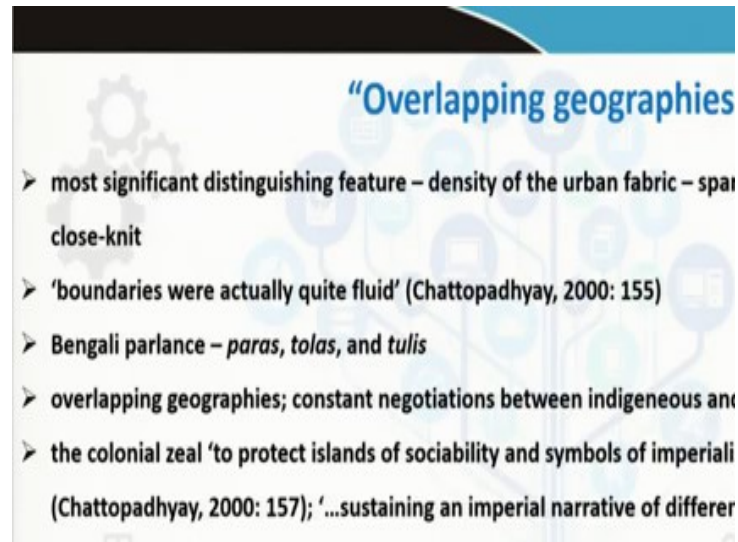
So, I am, I continue with this argument of overlapping geographies or blurring, blurred boundaries between white towns and black towns. You know the historians who had worked on white town black towns; they argued that the most significant feature that actually distinguished the black town from the white town was that, that the was, the actually the density of the urban fabric. So, in one hand like sparsely populated and sparsely dense houses of the white town against the close-knit urban fabric of the black town.

So, but as I have talked about Chattopadhyay and her article, specifically focusing on Kolkata and she talks about this blurring boundaries and the name of the article itself is blurring boundaries, which came out in 2000. And there she says that 'boundaries were actually quite fluid'.

And she you know, she kind of brings into; I mean in this article she talks about an interesting, I mean she advances an interesting argument where she says that, how the various terms or terminologies, Bengali native dialect or terminologies like para, tola, tuli etcetera. So, they actually do not hint this white town black town duality.

This para, tola, tuli do I mean. do not address you know the duality evident in black town; evident in the spatial segregation between black town and white town; rather you know. For example, para, para is an area or it is it was a space consisting of 1 quarter by 1 mile for example, which could be walked by foot, right.

So, there is no legal bearing, so far as this spatial categories were concerned; but these were you know cognitively constituted territories. So, it is quite important to also know the local terms or the, you know native dialect which were used to kind of designate boundaries, which to a great extent like critically interrogates the so called sacrosanct white town, black town binaries or boundaries.
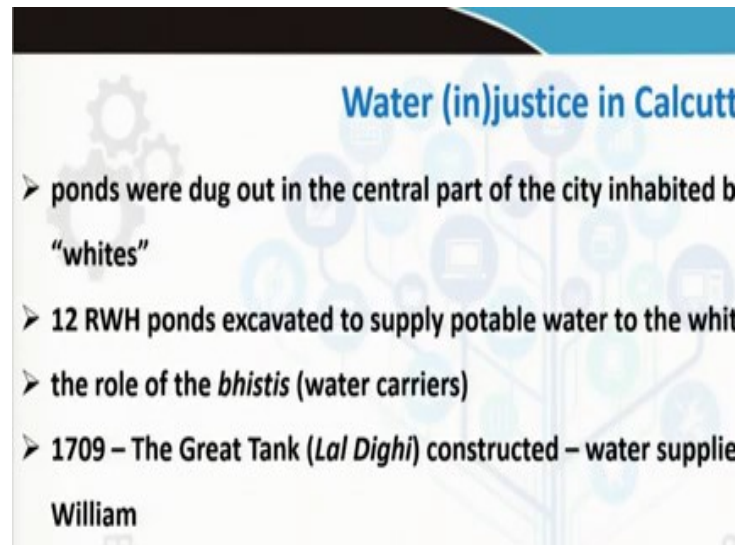
Then the question is like, I mean what led to you know the emergence of this sacrosanct categorization? So, Chattopadhyay and before Chattopadhyay; even Spodek work, I think Spodek has talked about, I mean this this, this categorization or this division, I mean the root, it is root can be found in the British desire to, or the obsession you know to continue with classification, zoning, segregation, etcetera.

And to a great extent this actually reflect the colonial zeal to protect islands of sociability and symbols of imperialism; sustaining an imperial narrative of difference in European society, superiority, sorry. So, the self and other, you know this is also very much evident you know in this kind of discourse.

And also like this I think this, so European superiority these ideas also to a great extent it gets manifested in the castigation of the black town and the black or the native, you know, of the native and also the native space, the space where the native inhabited.

And this is definitely connected this to the with the story of like municipal indifference to these areas, leading to lack of access to infrastructures; hence, henceforth like infrastructure iniquity, slum demolition drives to suit you know, or to kind of advance the colonial urban imageries relating to centers of imperial commerce like Bombay, Kolkata etcetera.

Water (in)justice in Calcutt...

➤ ponds were dug out in the central part of the city inhabited b...
  "whites"

➤ 12 RWH ponds excavated to supply potable water to the whit...

➤ the role of the *bhistis* (water carriers)

➤ 1709 – The Great Tank (*Lal Dighi*) constructed – water supplie...
  William

Yes, so not much has been written till date, on you know on ecological infrastructures of cities, though there is lot of literature on hardware and software of cities. But again, as I mentioned earlier that, with urban environmental history becoming more and more prominent in since the last one, one and a half decade; I think this I mean this domain or this research domain is actually now kind of emerging and amenity.

So, we did a project 5 years back, so in 2015, we did an ISSC - International Social Science Council, sponsored project, where we were actually studying water injustices in the 3 cities of the global South. So, Kolkata, India; Dar-e-Salaam, Tanzania and Cochabamba, Bolivia. And so, we were actually try to, we were trying to map you know the city by looking into the piped networks.

So, which parts of the city were, I mean which part of the city the households got access to piped drinking water and which part of the cities or which wards actually remain unconnected.

And like, so whether this is merely you know this is this could be understood by lack of availability or this is only a technical story or whether you know like powered equations and political interest, you know vested interest also I mean shaped this network infrastructure. So, this was a basic the major question that which we raised, you know so far as this project on water injustice in the cities of the global South were concerned.

So, what I did was that, I was actually leading the Kolkata part of it and what I did was that I being as again a student of history and with long term interest in environmental history. I wanted to look into the; I mean what was going on in the city during the colonial times and since it is inception.

So, from record and I mean it was, I mean quite difficult and quite challenging, it was a tough job to get data and so far as this particular domain was concerned. But then, the data which I found from there I could get some information, some facts. For example; that you know initially during the early decades of colonial rule, few ponds were only dug out in the central part of the city, which were inhabited by the whites.

So, 12 rain water harvesting ponds were excavated to supply potable water to the white settlers again. And also social class called the 'bhistis', who were water carriers they played an important role in carrying water you know. And they went to this to the white houses, and so you can see the picture of a bhisti. And so they carried water and the, these bags were made of goat skin.

So, today you know, so there can be very interesting social history on this social class, bhistis themselves and like how the changing; you know, the changing economic and political dimensions and also environmental dimensions to a great, extent you know it have influence and determined the different occupations, including you know these water carriers. We do not have; I think they are very few in number, because this job no more I mean applies within the present context.

So, anyway in 1709, the Great Tank Lal Dighi in Dalhousie was constructed, which supplied water to Fort William in the major centre in Kolkata from the major administrative centre. And between 1805 and 1836, numerous tanks were constructed again in the white town. So, for example, in Cornwallis Square, College Square, Wellington Square, Wellesley Square and rest of the city was of course, you know it was not connected.

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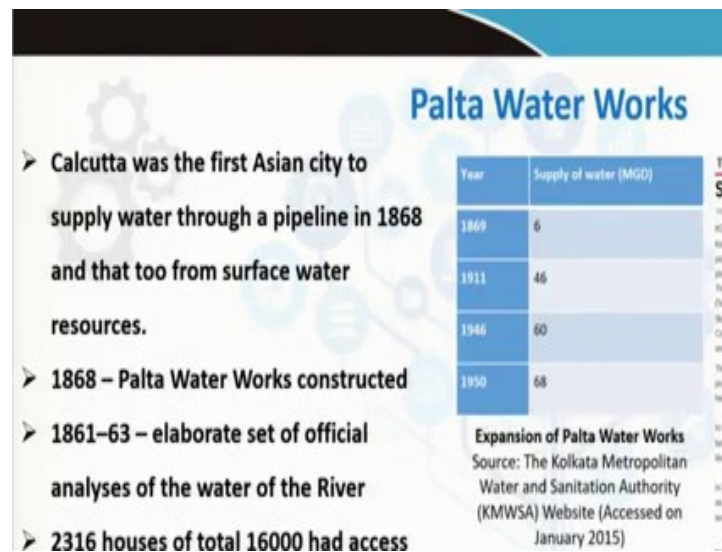
Again, another very important you know history so far as the networked infrastructure or so far as the history of potable water in the city of Kolkata is concern, is the construction of the Palta water works. And why is it so important? Because Calcutta was the first Asian city to supply water through a pipeline and that too in 1868.

So, if you remember my previous lectures, we had discussed in detail that how you know in the 19th century itself the European cities or the modern cities were getting you know connected to portable water. So, Kolkata establishing or getting its first water works established under the British rule in 1868 was a big thing, and that too from surface water resources.

So, the Palta water works was constructed after detailed discussions and lot of brainstorming and like several plans were passed and lot of exchanges among multiple actors and agencies. And after like elaborate set of official analysis of the water of the river. So, this was also, I mean it definitely involved a very elaborate, detailed and rigorous you know technical design.

And again, when I would discuss urban environmental history, so I would talk about how the discourse and practice of purity and pollution, you know it was created. And it is very much entrenched you know within the urban environmental fabric and rubric of the colonial city of Kolkata or Calcutta.

So, and so, when this Palta water works was constructed only 2,316 houses of total 16,000 houses had access to portable water. Unfortunately, I mean this faulty distribution mechanism in terms of getting access to potable water, it continues till date. We are aware of millennium development goals, we are aware of sustainable development goals, and we are aware of the United Nations promise and target that, how like clean water is the basic; I mean clean water should be should reach all the households and I mean how it is one of our fundamental rights.

But unfortunately, you know, in our water injustice project, when we were serving different wards of Kolkata, forget about peri-urban parts; when we just also concentrated on the different wards within the KMC area, we found you know severe water inequity in terms of access to portable water.

Like for example, the houses in the central areas or the central wards, each house get access to or rather each person actually get access to 180 liters of drinking water per day. And in the slums and I mean it is only 90 liters, like half and in the pavements, in some cases we found only it was 5 liters.

So, like very very severe water inequity still present and the faulty distribution mechanism is also an inherent characteristic of contemporary urbanization.

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Now, we discussed this improvement trusts. So, how did they perform? So, improvements, so improvements for whom and at what cost? So, we know that how improvement trusts actually focused on physical planning and their major objective was to improve poor living conditions through the development and construction of water sanitation facilities, widening of roads, and improvement of congestion, etcetera.
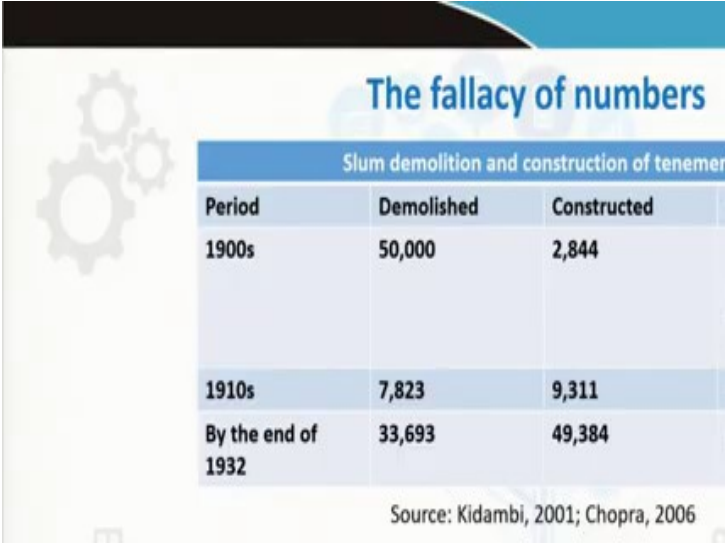
So, lands were reclaimed; land were reclaimed for urban expansion and for making, I mean for making way to the urban development projects, but this also in turn led to slum clearance and slum demolition. And this is very very important that in 1894, this Land Accusation Act was enacted and this also remains a very significant or the principal tool in urban planning in contemporary India.

So, there is lot of debate you know surrounding this, when smart city; smart cities where you know where discuss and smart cities were being constructed. So, for example, Aruna Datta has focused a lot on the inadequacies you know, the challenges the, I mean the impact of this act on the marginalized sections. And also like, so for example, when this Dholera city was created and also like for example, Rajarhat.

So, we know that how it actually led to slum clearance activities, and the promise, during the colonial times, the promise that was confirmed was that, yes housing projects will be built or you know housing projects will be implemented for low income groups. But we can see that you know when these houses came up, they were no more, they were no more affordable by the low housing groups or the low sorry low income groups, at best they were only affordable by the middle income groups.

So, this British, I mean improvement trusts they remained to be unpopular symbols of the British rule.

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The fallacy of numbers

Slum demolition and construction of tenemer		
Period	Demolished	Constructed
1900s	50,000	2,844
1910s	7,823	9,311
By the end of 1932	33,693	49,384

Source: Kidambi, 2001; Chopra, 2006

Yes, now if you go by numbers, you can see that there was some improvement in terms of displacing people and then constructing new houses for them. But then, you know, numbers also, numbers or the quantification technique cannot explain or convey the truth, the actual reality. So, that is why I have like, you know put the heading as the fallacy of numbers.

So, like for example, let us take the example of the Bombay improvement trust. So, during the period, I mean during 1900s, 50,000 houses in slums; I mean 50,000 people they were de-housed. And only, 2,844 houses were constructed or erected, where the displaced people were kind of accommodated. So, you can see the difference in the number. And only 2,844 houses were erected, so far as the so called quote unquote no sanitary 'chawls' were concerned, but then 1,067 units were also constructed in police chawls or in semi-permanent hearts.

Now, the number started improving in terms of demolition and construction, because in 1900, 1910's just a decade later, we find that 7,823 people were de-house and 9,311 houses were erected. But, you know and also like by the end of 1932, 33,693 houses were demolished and 49,384 houses were constructed of which 39,278 were of single room.

But again, you know this as I said that, this statistics do not actually convey the real truth or the actual reality. Because the rents seem to be too high and also with you know as

there was a whole lot of like obsession to create sanitary, sanitary you know spaces. So, many houses were actually demolished to make way to large and big courtyards, so that, I mean so that ventilation, air and light or I mean, the areas remain spacious and airy and also like full of light etcetera. But, what happened is that, the landlords of course you know they started building and constructing 2 storied or even sometimes 3 storied buildings. So, the outcome finally, was actually overcrowding.

And inflexible payment schedules, the people the when they had to move to these new houses; they were they were not at all happy, because they now the payment schedule that they had to meet remain extremely inflexible. And as I told that it no more could be afforded by low income, but at best by middle income groups and communities.

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So, the improvement trust you know; if you take the example of BIT or CIT, Bombay Improvement Trust or Calcutta Improvement Trust, to a great extent they were failures, because there were conflicts over land, wasted interest of multiple actors.

Even like you know this is a quote from, S Clarke who was the governor of Bombay and he says; so this is, this has been his co his remark has been cited in Kidambi's work. And so, he says that 'in the absence of any definite policy in the past, Bombay has been permitted to grow up almost haphazard'.
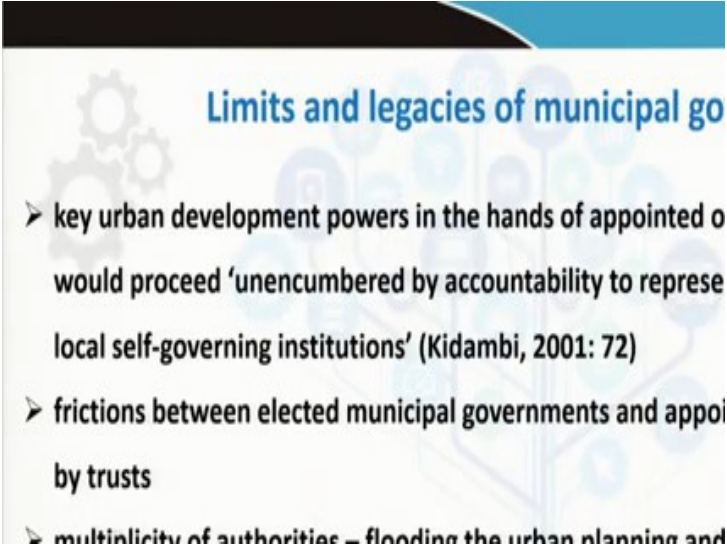
So, by this I mean the haphazard or unplanned growth of cities, we actually owe back to the colonial period. So, Clarke also, I mean he desperately urge for kind of a coordination among different sectors and agencies like the BIT, the Port Trust, the Railway Board, the Bombay Municipal Corporation, Mill Owners' Association, Chamber of Commerce, but in vain. And so far as Calcutta is concerned, Calcutta also like for example, this is a book by Richard and E P Richard, it is also known as the Richard report.

So, Richard who was one of the major resource persons so far as this Calcutta improvement trust was concerned. He himself like when he, when he left India in 1914, he was so frustrated and he himself like had such a bad health that you know he wrote and he submitted a 259 page report and this is the report as. And so, this is this has come out again in 2014, with an introduction by Richard Harris and Robert Levy.

And if you go through this report, Richard's report, you will find that he talks about high rates of illness, disease, death you know in Calcutta. And Calcutta was the city which had the highest percentage of slums in any city. Slum demolition drives by the improvement trusts were also like, Calcutta also visualized this slum clearance activities, because the logic was to provide adequate circulation of traffic and ventilation of air.

So, of course, you know this era of improvement, it kind of conveys more declensionist narrative than you know positive stories or stories with optimism and hope unfortunately.
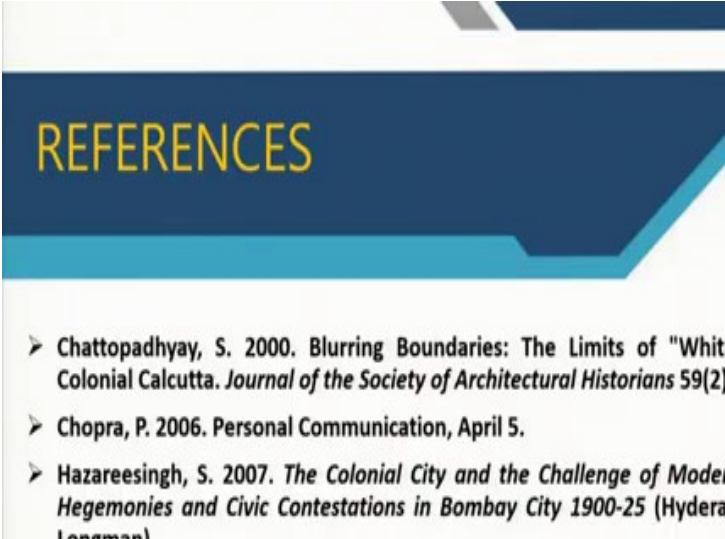
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So, the another final limit, limitation that of urban planning or colonial municipal governance which I need want to discuss here is that, is the frictions among multiple actors and agencies. So, for example, like when these improvement trusts were created; then key urban development powers, like powers to carry on key urban development projects remained at the hands of, or were given to the appointed officials by the improvement trust.

But, this appointed officials then they, I mean they in their activities they proceeded unencumbered by accountability to representatives of local self-governing institutions. So, these intern created frictions and conflicts between elected municipal governance, governments and appointed officials by trust. So, multiplicity of authorities, flooded the urban planning and development scene, and this has an endearing legacy, you know so far as Indian contemporary urbanization or Indian contemporary urban scene is concerned.
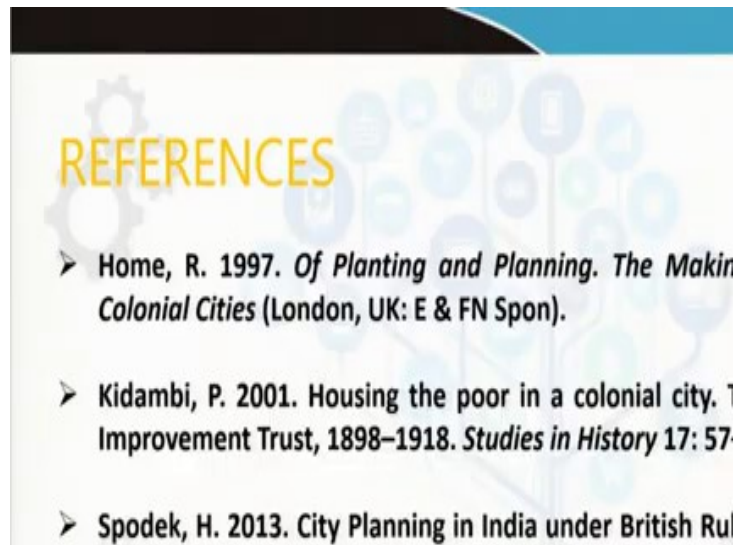
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So, these are the references, please go through Swathi Chattopadhyay's work and also the report by Richards, Spodek's work definitely.

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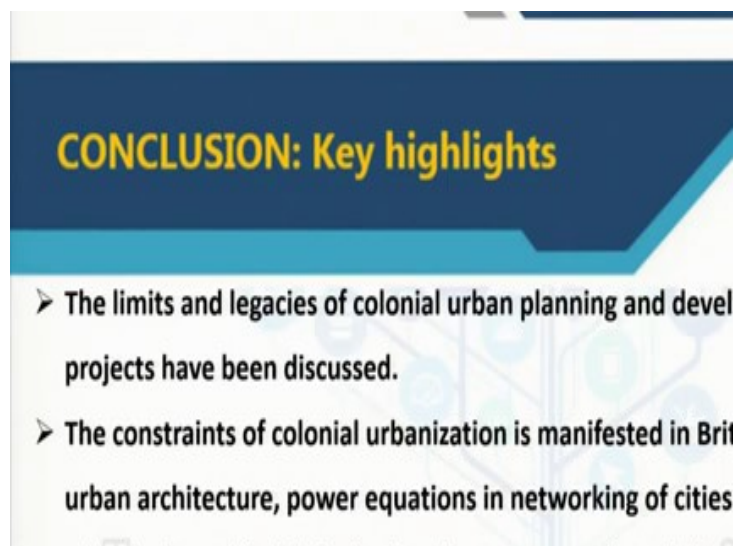
So, yes in this lecture we had covered or we discussed the limits and legacies of colonial urban planning and development projects. And the constraints of colonial urbanization is manifested in British plans, urban architecture, power equations in networking of cities and the vicissitudes evident in techno legal processes and regulations.

So, in a previous lecture, we discussed the technological processes and regulations. And in this lecture, we had discussed the limitations and the challenges you know that remained associated with these techno legal processes and regulations.

So finally, you know the irony of urban improvement and it is enduring legacies it is still till date it has an irreversible impact on the South Asian urban environmental fabric. And in our next lecture, when we discuss contemporary urbanization; first we will talk about the you know the urbanization processes and the various plans and agendas and missions in the immediate post independent period during the Nehru and regime.

And then, we move on to the more recent plans like JNNURM and the most recent you know smart city program. We will see that how you know the limits that we have discussed now in this lecture, how you know some of the challenges, some of the inadequacies, some of the exclusions and you know major severe exclusions and the problems continue till date. And we have not been able to a great extent address some of these so called you know deep rooted irreversible challenges and constraints.

So thank you, and please go through all the references.