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Module - 04
Urban environmental social sciences frameworks
Lecture - 25
Urban Environmental History: South Asia (SAUEH)
Part I.B.: (More) Nuanced Narratives (SAEH)

Alright. So, good afternoon everyone. The this lecture is the second part of the South Asian environmental history, where you know I discussed earlier in my last lecture that I will be now talking about the More Nuanced Narrative in South Asian Environmental History.

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### **CONCEPTS COVERED/ ROUTE MAP**

- > beyond insularity to "historiographical integration" (Cole 201
- beyond reductionist dualisms
  - forest
  - water

Where you know historians or the historical scholarship has gone beyond insularity to kind of embrace historical integration. Where scholars have kind of you know they have borrowed from other fields and frameworks and you know cross fertilized approaches to kind of you know paint, this more nuanced narratives or picture. Now, one another major trend is looking beyond reduction is dualisms.

So, you know this particular understanding that the pre-colonial period, everything was fine and you know it absolutely kind of rested on environmental benign policies. And social was I mean so far as the social is concerned, there were a whole lot of there is a whole lot of cohesion. And on the other hand, the colonial period, it was absolutely ecologically disruptive and socially exploitative and pre-colonial was socially accommodative.

So, this kind of you know dualism actually it no more works for the historians and this is quite evident, in both the sub domains of forest history and water history within the larger domain of South Asian environmental history. And finally, when I end this lecture, I would discuss that why this urban neglect actually continued and then, for how long and then, why and how recently you know the scholars have quite become motivated to discuss the urban.

And what is the urban imperative of our present times that is kind of demanding urban environmental scholarship, you know to kind of bring to the fore complex a city nature interactions that shape, reshape urban nature.

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So, three works I would like to discuss so far as forest is concerned and by. So, I am quite influenced I must say by the by one article by Cole which has been published in South Asian Culture and History in 2016. And there she does a very I would say like significant, historiographical analysis of these recent works which I mean which to a great extent have embraced historical or historiographical integration.

So, the first one that I would like to discuss in this realm is by Ajay Skaria 'Hybrid Histories. And here, Ajay Skaria you know he kind of follows the subaltern methodology, where he traces the history you know of Western India by kind of looking into the Dangi oral narratives on land use, on forest use. And he shows that how the mosaic ecology of these Dangi communities or the Dangi people, Dang people I mean it is a complex assemblage of their cultural practices, their economic habits and their I mean philosophical, ethical and moral world views.

So, yes, this particular book is very significant in this sense because you know the kind of archive that or the kind of source material or the archival methodology that or rather the historical methodology that the Skaria you know has kind of deployed is quite unique in that sense and its beyond accessing colonial archive. The next work is by Sumit Guha, who actually kind of addresses the intersections between 'Environment and Ethnicity in India'.

And he has also looked into the hills and he talks about, he kind of blurs you know several sacrosanct binaries. So, for example, he says you know the for example, the Koli people living in the hills, he shows that how before the coming of the British and also, you know when the colonial regime already started, how the Marathas actually marginalized this Koli community.

And when they brought I mean martial races and mercenaries in the hills. And how the people in the hills, the tribal ethnic communities were already exploited and marginalized by several you know infrastructural developments or agricultural developments. And road constructions which were actually in I mean kind of introduced in the hills and which also marked the underdevelopment of led to the underdevelopment of hills as the cost of development of planes.

So, this was there you know and this has no connection; this is no connection to the colonial period. Of course, it has connection because you know during the colonial times, this exploitation became more intensified. But it is I mean to consider this precolonial period as a golden headed is also absolutely not true.

Then, another nuanced like narrative that comes out sharp in this particular book is that you know he says that the response to the British policies and the response to the pre

modern policies were also not universal you know and it varied across different ethnic groups.

While few people they actually embraced you know the change, other people they resisted. So, I mean there are multiple forms of interactions, forms and formats of interactions that actually took place I mean and there were also there was this clash and co-existence of the pastoral communities. And for example, communities who belong to I mean who were settled agriculturist.

So, I mean the argument that Sumit Guha provides is that why it is important to understand these multiple sets of or this wide in a array of processes and practices that existed parallelly and I again remember simultaneities you know something which I learnt from 'Urbanizing Nature' book, when I was try to trying to kind of know the recent developments in European urban environmental history. You remember the I mean lecture 23, I guess.

So, lecture 24 actually, where I talked about you know the recent advancement in European urban environmental history and these book called 'Urbanizing Nature' by Tim Soens and it calls about talks about simultaneities. And here also you know in Sumit Guha's book, the simultaneities and you know this different multiple forms, multiple formats of you know multiple responses become so evident again same sets of stimuli actually.

So, I think from this perspective, this book is quite quite significant. So, another book so far as forest is concerned is definitely the path breaking volume 'Modern Forest' by K. Sivaramakrishnan and, why this book is so important? Because I think it is a seminal contribution when South Asian environmental history took a kind of a revisionist. And in this book, I think K. Sivaramakrishnan, he talks about a he introduced a particular concept which calls the zone of anomaly ok.

So, the anomaly, I mean he introduces the idea of anomaly and what is this anomaly all about? So, he says that you know that in several areas, when different policies were kind of implemented. So, for example, take for the example, the scientific forestry introduced by you know Dietrich Brandis and then, the various forms of scientific forestry that make way to forests and which were actually implemented on this various tribes.

So, he says that you know these policies also, I mean they apart from shaping apart from shaping nature and native, they were also shaped by local specificities; you know local cultural practices, local you know economic specificities, local world views and it was a continuous and complex process of interaction. So, these complex interactive processes, he kind of try to explain, he tries to explain with this frame of what he says anomaly.

So, I think the I mean K. Sivaramakrishnan is very much attentive to the multiple ways through which you know this otherwise seemingly universal construct or discourse you know like scientific forestry was conditioned by specific or particular political, ecological, historical settings. So, from this perspective, this book is very significant. And what is so important about you know this new trend is that colonialism is kind of you know of course, understood as a period which crafted certain fundamental changes.

But it is not absolutely you know seen as a watershed or a landmark moment for environmental history. And this I mean this recent scholarship also I think to an extent I mean it absolutely not to an extent, absolutely discuss the declensionist teleologies which we which was which were prominent which we saw you know in the works which were published during the initial wave of South Asian environmental history. Yes, so, they are of course, micro-scalar analysis to frame more nuanced narrative.

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# D. Hardiman, Well Irrigation in Gujarat: Systems of Use, Hierarchies and Control, Economic and Political Weekly 33/25(1998): 1533-44 E. Shah, Telling Otherwise: A Historical Anthropology of Tank Irrigation E. Shah, Seeing Like a Subaltern: Historical Ethnography of Pre-modern and Modern

Now, coming to the field of water or sub domain of water. And this particular work by David Hardiman on yeah on well irrigation in Gujarat. So, David Hardiman actually she says that you know this commercialization and peasant indebtedness, it predated the colonial period. So, Paul Grino you know once he talked about the standard environmental narrative, where he you know kind of familiarize us with the three part chronology in South Asian environmental history; so, the pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary.

So, these recents, this recent scholarship water scholarship for that matter, it has absolutely kind of you know not on the blood; but kind of dismantled, it has dismantled this standard environmental narrative and the three part chronology. And it has a kind of shown that how you know lot of continuities, shape the water trajectory of the Indian subcontinent. So, this is a particular work by Hardiman, where Hardiman talks about how peasant indebtedness and commercialization actually predated you know the colonial hydrological regime.

In a similar vein, but in a different way or through different empirical evidences collected so far as this Western State of Rajasthan is concerned. Rosin discusses you know how complex groundwater irrigation structures and also drinking water supply structures like silt ponds, like reservoirs and you know L-shaped embankments these actually you know this pre modern technologies coincided not coincided like kind of coexisted. It continued along with the new hydrological arrangements which were introduced by the British.

So, it is not that you know the previous or the pre-colonial practices or irrigation mechanisms absolutely were replaced and they became deformed; but there is also history of the co-existence of the older techniques with the newer ones. So, this is something which Rosin kind of brought out in his article on Rajasthan. Then, we have of course, David Mosse, who deployed ethno historical method while discussing you know I mean water management system or water practices in South India.

And Mosse also shows that you know that water management in pre-colonial India, South India and so, he actually did ethnographic, he pursued ethnographic methodology. And he did case studies on two major sites which are very significant sites so far as tank irrigation is concerned.

So, he I mean the sites are Shiva Gangai and Ramanath districts of Tamil Nadu and Mosse shows that how you know before the coming of the British only, the tank

irrigation system was absolutely you know kind of imbricated and imbued with power dynamics and power equations.

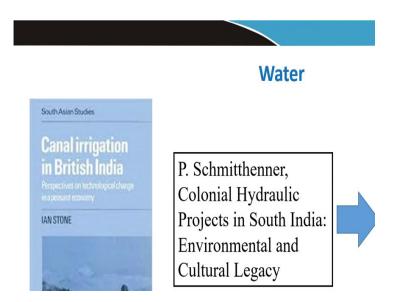
And so, he kind of he has discussed the several phases of this South Indian or more specifically, Tamil Nadu tank irrigation system from the phase of you know emergence to expansion to consolidation to intensification to decadence and decline. And across all these phases, across all these stages, how you know power, hierarchies, social hierarchies you know at the village level and beyond village level kind of dictated you know access to water.

E. Shah, Shah, so she of course, if she adds more nuances to Mosse's studies or Mosse's explorations relating to South India. And E. Shah Shah's like empirical point of reference is Karnataka.

And she pursued historical ethnography and she kind of you know she traced data and information from historical memory you know from different alternative sources like songs, legions, folklores etcetera. And she shows that how you know this historical memory corroborates to hydrological vulnerabilities, technological I mean irregularities and also like social anxieties.

So, hydrological irregularities, technological vulnerability and social anxieties so far as like water practices in pre-colonial Karnataka was concerned. So, again, this idea of like this pre-colonial equilibrium versus colonial hydrology so far as you know this water sector is concerned actually that it actually does not hold ground has absolutely been I think validated by these recent scholarship in water literature.

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So, with this, then again, I will discuss three very important books on water. But again before that, I will just very quickly also discuss these two works, which kind of you know this works they have these two scholars Schmitthenner and Ian Stone, their take is absolutely different rather they you know talk about the advantages. The advantages of the beneficial sides, the beneficial aspects of colonial hydrology or you know rather I would not use colonial hydrology because again, colonial hydrology is already imbued with the catastrophic experiences of South Asia.

But you know these scholars, they have a different take so far as the South Asian colonial water experience is concerned. So, for example, Ian Stone you know he kind of countered Elizabeth Whitcomb by showing that how the canal projects in North-West frontier province infiltrated and infused the region with a kind of like economic dynamism and social innovation.

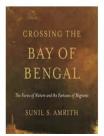
On the other hand, Schmitthenner says and through his like case studies on different hydraulic projects in South India, he shows that how like the hydraulic projects in North India were far more disruptive than the projects which were actually pursued in the Deltascapes of Godavari or Kaveri.

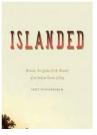
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...integration environmental with other histories, finding new ways and pl people and environment together construct history (Cole 2016: 213).







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So, now, I will discuss you know this three major works; I mean transcultural, transnational, you know global which I mean they can be regarded global and transnational narratives. Because and these works really you know kind of they not only have integrated other frameworks from other fields; but also, these are really like I mean kind of they have deployed like global approaches.

So, the particular fact with which I started that you know the recent advances in advancements in South Asian environmental history shows that you know the scholarship is has now gone beyond insularity. I think this proposition which I made will get absolutely validated, when I will discuss this three major works you know so far as the water history or not only water history, but you know the I mean the history of the delta, the history of sea, the history of ocean, I mean marine history, inland history and everything you know fused together.

So, everything has been discussed together and we will definitely now discuss how the sea or the delta or for that matter island you know have been kind of used as analytic spaces to provide a large scale kind of an understanding about you know society environment interactions. So, the first book by Iftekhar Iqbal is called 'The Bengal Delta' and like very briefly I would like to say that this particular book, it kind of it interlinks.

I mean it strongly establishes the connection or the links between agrarian history between history of science technology, between the history of colonial state formation and also, environmental history. And Iftekhar Iqbal shows that you know that again the literal fluidity you know of 'The Bengal Delta', it kind of I mean it has to be understood in terms of the various kind of responses, it elicited and the way I mean different processes that I mean that was shaped, when colonial infrastructural projects were actually implemented.

So, I think the concept of anomaly that we get to know from the from K. Sivaramakrishnan's work also you know kind of holds ground so far as this particular book is concerned. So, it shows that how different classes, intermediaries, various processes, different kinds of things all together you know they were shaped, when you know these colonial interventions were actually made. And how these processes, how these changes, how these responses also influence, dictated and shaped colonial you know interventions to a great extent.

So, how colonial intervention shaped the space and how the spatial variables or the spatial attributes in turn shaped colonial interventions. So, this is basically a composite story of this enmeshed interactions. So, the next book is; so, first let me discuss 'Islanded' and then, I will discuss Sunil Amrit's book, so 'Islanded'; so, this book by Shiva Sundaram is basically on the history of Sri Lanka.

It is a very fascinating, it is a very interesting book, where you know Shiva Sundaram, I mean engages with the story of the colonial production of Sri Lanka as an Island, isolated from the mainland and complete by itself. And then, he talks about and traces several processes like migration, trade, finance, scholarship, knowledge systems etcetera. And he shows that you know why it is important to understand or rather like locate this or situate, you know the story of island within the larger ambit of ocean studies.

But then, he also says that you know oceanic history to a great extent traces macro processes. So, this work is different in that sense, it basically it is an engaging tale of the micro scalar processes, you know micro scalar processes which help us understand the formation you know of the Islanded country of Sri Lanka. And so, is he also kind of situates it as a border between land and sea.

And he also he rejects the idea of dialogical exchange between the state and society or colonizer, colonized. But he says why and he argues it, demonstrates why you know the local needs to be contextualized within the larger networks of global transformations. And he shows that how again you know the colonial ideas and colonial understandings also got in touch or were in contact with the indigenous ideas.

So, for example, how the British botanist came in touch with the kandyan botanist and how that shaped you know the poli the botanical understanding or the botanical construct of I mean and botanical practices in Sri Lanka. And also, like for example, how these indigenous ideas also through this the colonizers refined could refine the distinction between highland and low land, temperate, tropics etcetera.

So, this is a very significant book I guess which I mean on island and on the island and on the multiple processes that actually kind of puts or contextualize island within the larger history of I mean networks of global transformation. So, the last book that I would like to discuss here is by Sunil Amrit. Sunil Amrit's 2015 book called 'Crossing The Bay of Bengal' and here, Amrit actually uses sea, the sea as the analytic space. And he discusses how you know the sea played a role in human history and how that history in turn shaped the fate of the sea.

So, it will be quite too much if you know we say that human actions, you know played an important played a significant role in the metabolic balance of the Bay of Bengal. But then, I think it will not be an exaggeration, if we try to understand the small interactions that actually you know kind of contributed to the metabolic balance or imbalance of the Bay of Bengal.

So, this is an alternative way of looking into this whole thing, where you know Sunil Amrit, he discusses various phenomena across different parts of the world and establishes interconnections you know between these complex processes. So, for example, he talks about migration. He says you know the period of the steam engine I mean there was also like global economic depression during this time.

And like if we understand colonialism and colonial state craft, then of course, we can see famines and famines, due to famines you know the people started migrating. And this migrant some of the migrants they also for example, they started working in the Malaysian plantations and whole lot of other things going on in Burma then. And then, these plantations actually churned out from here this automobile revolution churned out.

And then these also then kind of decided the colonial fate of South Asia or the global South for that matter and then, again, its cyclical implications on several things. So, it is a very well written reach you know transnational history that succinctly kind of connects different dots. So, for example, it talks about the opening up of the Suez Canal and the ray of Suez Canal really well and how this extended the economic and environmental reach of the sea for the inland.

So, fascinating today is actually you know which enable us to understand that I mean why it is important to also I mean to discard human agency. But at the same time, also be wise to understand and put weightage on this human role or human actions that kind of I mean that shaped or that dictated marine history for that matter. And again marine history absolutely interlinked to the inland for that matter.

So, I think this is this book is and the different concepts use here and reach of the book and like I mean the methodology adopted, I think this is very significant in terms of you know historical viability and it is very very coherent. So, this is a path breaking volume, I would say which you know which definitely you know permit other genres of history and is a typical example of how scholars actually have gone beyond insularity.

And how they have integrated several fields even within history to write comprehensive history across a temporal scales, across spatial scales so far as environmental history of you know South Asia is concerned.

### The "urban neglect"

- 'The urban environment is neglected by activists, and p scholars as well' (Guha 2005: 41).
- Industrialisation and urbanisation were of less importance administration and, therefore, received less attention comparison to agriculture and forestry. Scholarly research determined by the availability of sources seems to have be in the shelf corridors and reading rooms of colonial arch discursively buttressing the percention of (India) as a positive point of the percention of (India) as a positive point of the percention of the percentio

So, but apart from you know this rich advancement, the urban neglect continued. I remember reading a piece by Guha, where Guha, so I think the title of the article is what 'What's next for environmental history'. And this was published in environmental history anniversary volume; so, 1995, it was first published. So, this one is 2005, where Guha laments about you know this urban neglect in South Asian environmental history. He says that urban environment is neglected by activists and predictably by scholars as well.

So, no urban environmentalism and hence, no urban scholarship, urban historical scholarship and so, he actually talks about this urban neglect. Michael Mann, he also talks about this urban neglect and he tries to provide the reason that why this urban neglect is actually there, so it continued for a long time.

So, he says that you know there is that this dearth of source material, dearth of colonial archive. So, industrialization, urbanization were of less importance to the colonial administration and therefore, received less attention from it in comparison to agriculture and forestry.

I think he echoes John, J. R. Mcneill, who also says the same thing in his historiography of environmental history. And Michael Mann says the scholarly research is heavily determined by the available resources; of course, I mean for historian sources as the most

important thing. So, and this seems to have been come tapped trapped in the shelf corridors and reading rooms of colonial aircrafts.

Therefore, discursively buttressing the perception of India as a principally rural landscape. So, I will differ and I will definitely, I definitely disagree with Mann's point of view. Because now when historians have started writing urban environmental history of South Asian of South Asia, we see that the colonial archive is actually very very rich. And this, I will be able to validate when I discuss the several works, the prison works, the emerging scholarship on South Asian urban environmental history in my next two lectures.

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### The "urban imperative"

- the sustainability battle would be either won or lost in cities
- India soon will have the largest urban population in the wor than we ought to about the history of ecological conditions on the resources of the hinterland...we will soon have fine, of cities of modern India (Guha 2005)
- > SAUEH deeper understanding of the urban environmental

Final slide, so far as this particular presentation is concerned that then how and why this the urban has now become you know imperative? Because of course, we are I mean whether you accept agree with this terminology or not urbanocene, but there is no doubt about the fact that we are in the era of planetary urbanization. And all of us know about this shifting geography of organization, how global south you know it has become urbanized and it will become more urbanized in the near future.

And there was this when I read the data from the world urbanization prospects 2007, 2008 sorry and it talked about that how 2008, 07 is a landmark here because for the first time, the urban population actually surpassed the rural population. So, it gave a data that you know during that time like 2008, like 20 cities whose urban population was more

than 10 million. Out of these 20 cities like I think the 16 cities were in Global south, out of this 11 cities in Asia and 5 cities in South Asia and 3 cities in India.

So, one can understand why you know Indian historians, now really look into or rather incorporate the urban within the framework of environmental history and why they want to why they should actually be dedicating their time to the urban contours, the urban context, mapping city nature interactions. And as the sustainability battle would be either won or lost in cities of the developing world. So, we have a certain kind of a moral responsibility to this as well.

So, India, soon will have the largest urban population in the world; yet, we know far less than we ought to about the history of ecological conditions within cities or their claims on their resources of the hinterland, flows urban metabolism. So, we will soon have fine detailed studies of the cities of modern India. So, Guha was hopeful and I am happy to share and announce that this hope has also seen light.

And this hope has been actually transcended into reality which and I will be able to confirm and attest this in my next two lectures. So, South Asian urban environmental history has or rather can provide a deeper understanding of the urban environmental predicament and this is what this emerging domain is doing right now. So, with this, I think the in the next two lectures, I will be discussing and exposing you to the recent scholarship on South Asian urban environmental history.

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## **CONCLUSION: Key highlights**

- > expansion of the ambit of SAEH
- > more integrated frameworks and nuanced narratives
- > continued urban neglect

So, go through some of these references and yeah, in the conclusion, I would repeat the key highlights of this presentation. So, in this presentation, we discussed the more nuanced narratives on relating to South Asian environmental history.

So, we have seen how the this South Asian environmental history has actually expanded. Its purview the scholarship has now become more transnational, transcultural, global. And it has been able to kind of discard the teleological declensionist teleologist on one hand and also, the insular approach on the other. And, but still urban neglect continued.

And finally, we have also discussed that what kind of motivated the historians to plunge into the urban frontier and what is the urban imperative for South Asia and how best the historians are navigating within the field, this would be something which we will be taking up in our next lecture.

Thank you.