

**Sociology and Resource Management**  
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**Module - 04**  
**Participatory Approaches to Resource Management in India**  
**Lecture - 19**  
**Critiques of decentralisation and participatory resource management**

Welcome back to the course on Sociology of Resource Management. So, we will continue with Module-4 and as you can see that our lecture today is on the Critique of decentralisation and participatory resource management. So, but before going to the critiques of decentralization, I would just like to very briefly say something about decentralisation.

So, all this while since the beginning of this particular module, you have been observing me talking about rights based legislations, reformistic legislations, participatory approaches and we have already covered a range of participatory legislations in the context of the forest drawing on my own field experiences as well as from other states in our country and something that you have seen all of you have seen had been the fact that in common almost all of these rights based policies talk about distribution of power.

So, they are talking about the fact that top-down approaches would not work - bureaucratic approaches which are designed from the top which are designed by the state is not very easy to be implemented in the particular, in particular local contexts without active support of the resource users.

For example, we were talking about the forest dependent communities and I also told you about the fact that during the 1970s and 1980s, due to the continuous processes of eviction and displacement of the tribal and the non-tribal communities from different parts of the forest due to legislations like the Wildlife Protection Act then the growing notification of the forests.

So, there was also growing antagonism between the communities and to the state and the bureaucratic officials and the primarily the forest department realized that there has to be some kind of power distribution, there has to be some kind of benefit sharing, there has

to be some kind of accountabilities devolved to the people who are depending on these resources for their livelihoods.

Now, the topic that we are doing today, that we would be discussing today decentralisation is exactly what I am talking about and as if I think many of you can make a sense of what exactly decentralisation is, from the very term itself that it is 'decentralisation' that is it is not centralisation, but it is the devolution of centralisation.

So, this is what exactly the meaning of the term is. So, any kind of decentralisation be it resource based systems be it other kinds of systems. So, it is not always necessary that decentralisation would apply to the forests or the rivers or the other kinds of resources, but decentralisation as a term can apply in, any in terms of any context, where there is a planned distribution of power from the higher levels of the authority to the lower levels.

Now, by telling this we also need to understand the fact that there can be different kinds of decentralisation. So, I would be talking about all of them, now decentralisation is not always of it does not always work in one direction that is from the higher level to the lower level. So, definitely there is a distribution of power from the higher level to the lower level, but we also need to know about the specific levels that from what level to which level rights are getting transferred, rights are getting devolved and why, what is the mechanism, why is it happening.

So, we also need to know about the different levels of power distribution that is power redistribution that is happening in the name of decentralisation.

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So, this forms the outline of today's presentation. So, first we would be talking about what decentralisation is and what are the benefits of decentralisation. We will then talk about the different types of decentralization as I was telling you and after this we will discuss briefly about the history of decentralisation in the Indian context and finally, we will try to look a bit critically into the process of decentralization.

And all of you by now have got some hint about the major critiques of decentralization, because I have already discussed with you drawing on multiple cases about the disadvantages and the limitations of implementing many of the rights-based policies. So, let us begin with this lecture.

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## What is decentralisation?

➤ In Yuliani's (2004) compilation we find many definitions of decentralisation:

"The term decentralisation is used to cover a broad range of transfers of the locus of decision making from central governments to regional, municipal or local governments." (Sayer et al.)

"Decentralisation is "the means to allow for the participation of people and local governments." (Morell).



So, what is decentralization? Now, I would be talking about different research papers again and I would be drawing on many of these works. So, according to the definition of decentralisation that is compiled by Yuliani, I would be sharing the paper with you. The term decentralisation is used to cover "a broad range of transfers of the locus of decision making from the central government to the regional, municipal or local government."

So, as I was telling you that we also need to know about the levels about the different levels of power transfer. So, this is exactly what Yuliani says in this paper that this term decentralisation actually is a holistic term which covers a broad range of power transfers from the central government, to the local level, to the regional level, to the supra local level, to the municipal level and different other kinds of levels.

So, there is another definition that is offered by Morell in the same paper by Yuliani. So, this definition is that decentralisation is "the means to allow for the participation of people and local governments." So, we can say and again I would be drawing from this paper that decentralisation basically stems from concerns regarding democratic governance.

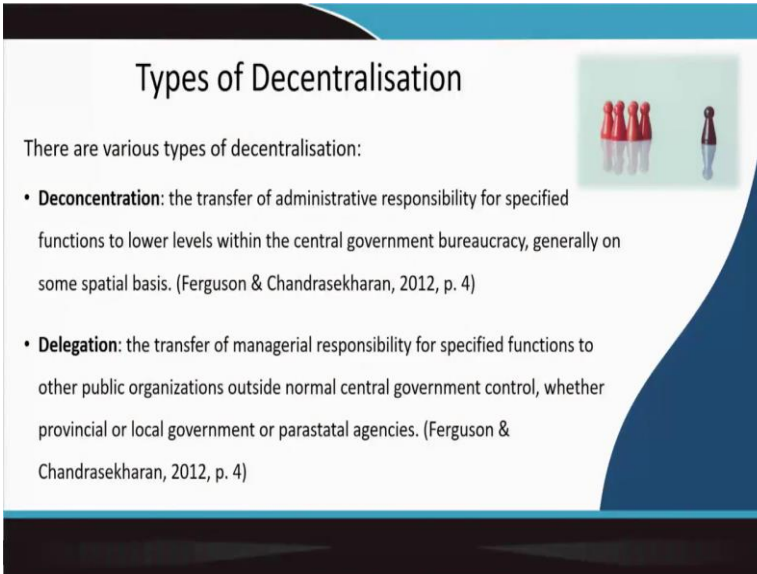
So, with the growing realization of the fact that governance has to be made much more equitable governance has to be made much more democratic, it is believed that decentralisation would be one of the most effective policies because it can ensure the provision of social services that meet the ends of the constituents in a given local, it

would draw on local knowledge, it would give interests at local level a stronger sense of ownership over projects and programming and it would make them much more sustainable.

It would enhance the public accountability of bureaucrats elected representatives and political institutions thus ensuring greater responsiveness in the government, it would promote local self-reliance and promote monitoring, evaluation planning at the local level and enhanced community participation in decision making.

So, these are some of the merits of decentralisation that along with democratic governance along with the fact that it aims towards the distribution of power, it also ensures that local knowledge can be used effectively and it also ensures that the different levels of the governance are accountable to the local people and they work in a proactive manner to address the concerns that are arising in particular locals.

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The slide is titled "Types of Decentralisation" and features a graphic of five red pins and one black pin on a light blue background. The text on the slide is as follows:

Types of Decentralisation

There are various types of decentralisation:

- **Deconcentration:** the transfer of administrative responsibility for specified functions to lower levels within the central government bureaucracy, generally on some spatial basis. (Ferguson & Chandrasekharan, 2012, p. 4)
- **Delegation:** the transfer of managerial responsibility for specified functions to other public organizations outside normal central government control, whether provincial or local government or parastatal agencies. (Ferguson & Chandrasekharan, 2012, p. 4)

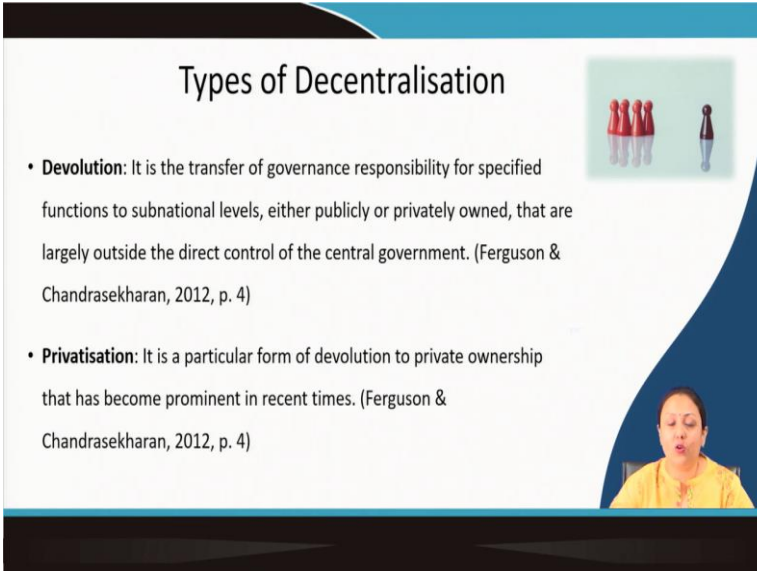
Now, let us take a look at the different types of decentralisation as I was talking about. Now, according to Ferguson and Chandrasekharan, there are various types of decentralisation. So, the first type is something that is referred to as the deconcentration. So, 'deconcentration' is the transfer of administrative responsibility for specified functions to lower levels within the central government bureaucracy, generally on some spatial basis.

The second type is that of 'delegation' that is the transfer of managerial responsibility for specified functions to other public organizations outside normal central government control, whether provincial or local government or parastatal agencies. So, you can very easily you can note the different levels.

So, while 'deconcentration' talks about the transfer of administrative responsibility to the lower levels of the central government itself or generally on the spatial basis. So, they can be the municipal levels, they can be the regional levels of governance, delegation on the other hand is the transfer of responsibility to public organizations, which are outside the ambit of the central government.

So, there as I was telling you, that there are different agencies and there are different levels and there are different ways in which power is getting devolved, power is getting distributed at lower levels and there is always so any kind of any type of decentralization that applies actually has a particular rational and the ways or it the ways in which decentralisation happens or the ways in which it takes a particular form actually has a very broad rational and objective that is attached to it.

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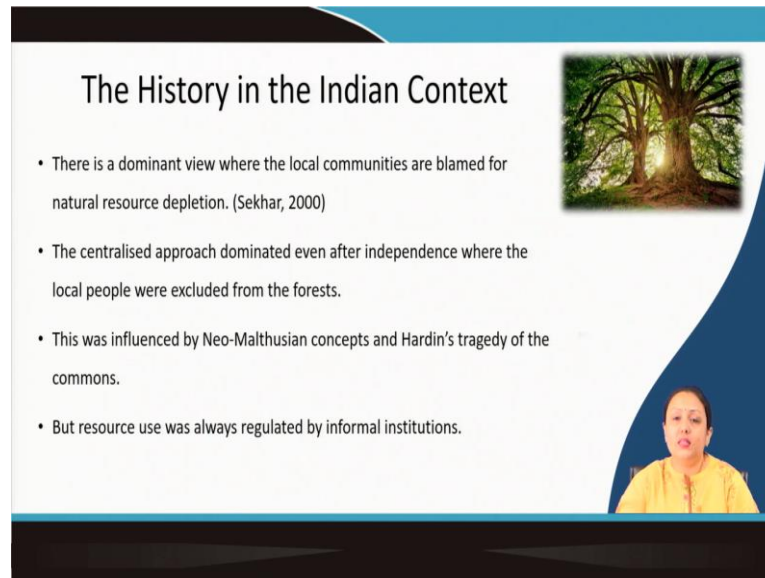
- **Devolution:** It is the transfer of governance responsibility for specified functions to subnational levels, either publicly or privately owned, that are largely outside the direct control of the central government. (Ferguson & Chandrasekharan, 2012, p. 4)
- **Privatisation:** It is a particular form of devolution to private ownership that has become prominent in recent times. (Ferguson & Chandrasekharan, 2012, p. 4)

In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman with her eyes closed, wearing a yellow top.

So, we will talk about some other types. So, the third is that of 'devolution' that is the transfer of governance responsibility for only for specified functions to the subnational levels, either publicly or privately owned, that are largely outside the direct control of the

central government. And lastly privatization, privatization is a particular form of devolution, to private ownership that has become prominent in the recent times.

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The History in the Indian Context

- There is a dominant view where the local communities are blamed for natural resource depletion. (Sekhar, 2000)
- The centralised approach dominated even after independence where the local people were excluded from the forests.
- This was influenced by Neo-Malthusian concepts and Hardin's tragedy of the commons.
- But resource use was always regulated by informal institutions.

The slide features a title 'The History in the Indian Context' at the top left. To the right of the title is a small image of a large, leafy tree. Below the title is a bulleted list of four points. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small inset video of a woman with dark hair, wearing a yellow top, speaking. The slide has a white background with a blue and black decorative border.

Let us now try to explore the history of decentralisation in the Indian context for, so that we can get a little more clarity on the matter. So, in India there was actually a very dominant view - that the local people are causing natural resource depletion as we have seen earlier also and they are also causing natural resource degradation. But this view is now being contested as a new approach, which advocates that decentralisation of natural resource management has actually emerged.

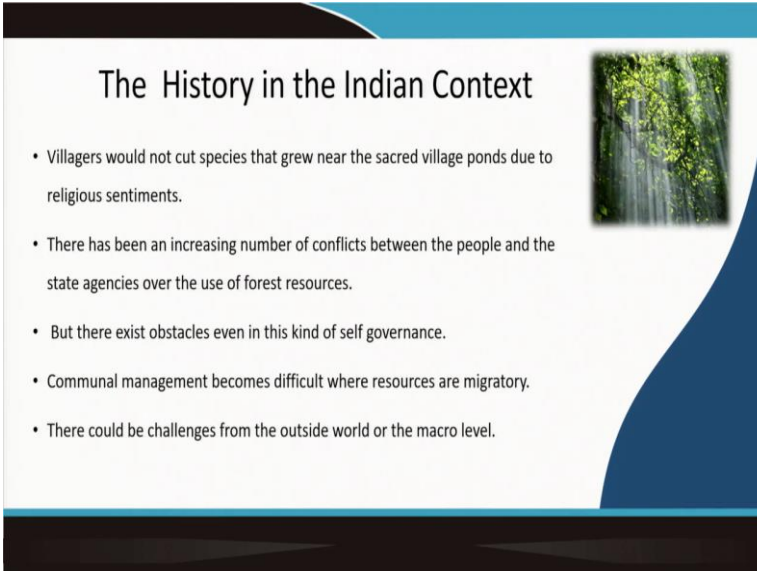
The centralised approach dominated natural resource management in India during the colonial times and even after independence the government adopted the same approach. This approach is one which basically excludes the local people from resource management or resource governance. And we have also seen that in the colonial period different kinds of restrictions were imposed on the community management of resources as it was believed to be harmful to the environment.

These restrictions were mostly influenced by the Neo-Malthusian concepts and the 'tragedy of the commons' which we spoke about earlier in this course and these concepts and theories actually legitimized the belief that the local people are the cause of resource depletion. There were penalties on pre filling establishment of game reserves and a ban on forest burning for shifting cultivation or pasture regeneration.

Now, in India we have to remember that most of these communities are dependent on the forests. So, for example, if we look back at the tragedy of the commons theory, we find that the rational individual behavior leads to the resources over exploitation under conditions where private rights are absent, but we have to remember that several rural communities in India had their own traditional institutions, which used to regulate the resource use, exactly the way we were talking about the community based resource management paradigm in the earlier lecture.


And that is why we have also discussed earlier that Hardin's theory is not universally applicable and also in this context Hardin's theory fails - it recommends privatization of the commons or state control of resources as solution to the commons dilemma.

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The History in the Indian Context

- Villagers would not cut species that grew near the sacred village ponds due to religious sentiments.
- There has been an increasing number of conflicts between the people and the state agencies over the use of forest resources.
- But there exist obstacles even in this kind of self governance.
- Communal management becomes difficult where resources are migratory.
- There could be challenges from the outside world or the macro level.



Now, we find an example in India where tree species such as pipal growing on the bunds of the sacred village ponds. So, in Sekhar's study which we have actually introduced earlier the areas that were protected and worshipped by the villagers would never be cut by the villagers except for use of fodder for using dry for collecting dry fuel wood mainly because religious sentiments have been attached to nature in this particular area.

And another example we find in the Aravalli hills, where there are clusters of forest vegetation that are preserved for religious purposes and the local institutions work here because they are based on social authority and beliefs and according to the local beliefs failure to comply with the rules may bring misfortune to the individual.

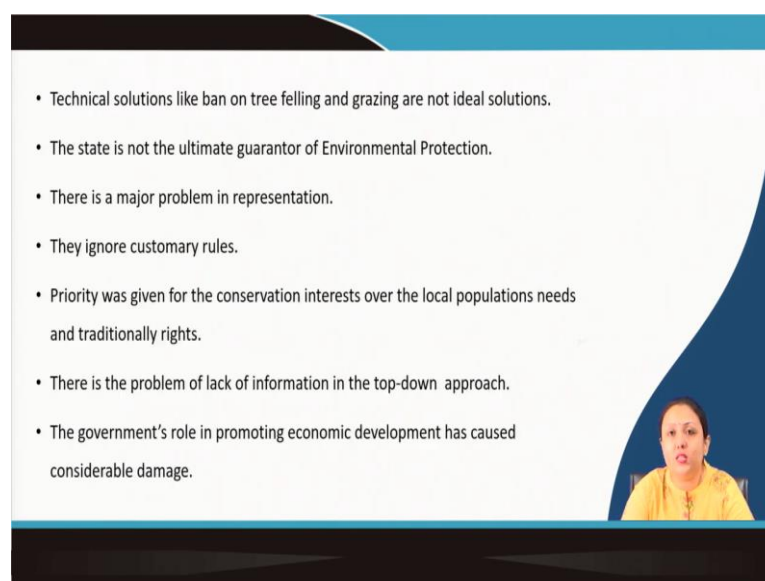


However, state management is based on a flawed premise or a lack of understanding of these people their practices and the socio ecological interdependencies. In addition to this, we find the increasing number of conflicts reported between people and the state agencies over the use of forest resources. There have been considerable difficulty in obtaining diverse information related to the resources and their users. This is because in several situations the local institutions are better informed than the central authorities about the local ecological system.

On the other hand, obstacles do exist even in this kind of self-governance in the ways of managing the commons. For example, communal management may be impractical where resources are migratory or overlap or of overlapping jurisdictions as in the case of wildlife resources or fisheries. And this sets limits to communal management where claims such as the special rights of the people who depend on a particular resource conflict with those who are the new migrants in the area.

There could also be new challenges from the outside world or macro level systems which lead to privatization of common property and the generation of community management at the micro level. Community based resource management system also finds it problematic to operate effectively in the face of expanding co modification of nature where extraction of raw materials for national economic development is a priority.

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- Technical solutions like ban on tree felling and grazing are not ideal solutions.
- The state is not the ultimate guarantor of Environmental Protection.
- There is a major problem in representation.
- They ignore customary rules.
- Priority was given for the conservation interests over the local populations needs and traditionally rights.
- There is the problem of lack of information in the top-down approach.
- The government's role in promoting economic development has caused considerable damage.

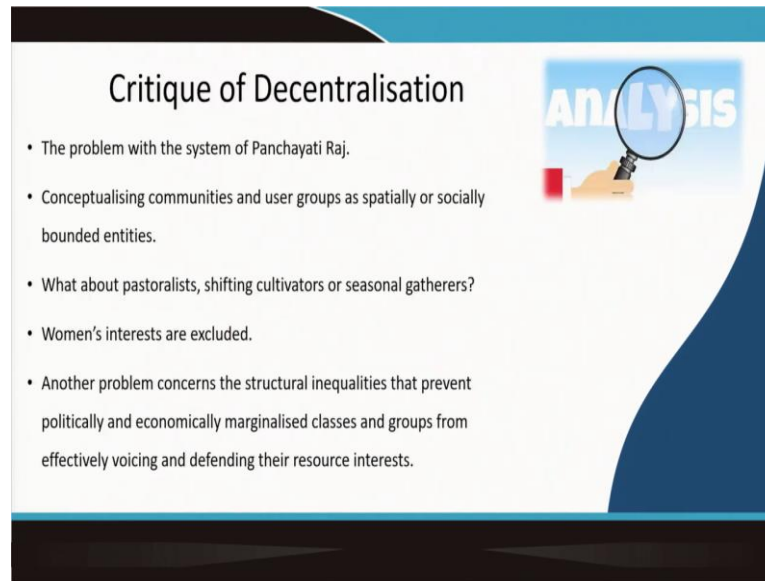
So, in, we already spoke about the fact that in post-independence India the national government had chosen a centralized management of resources and the any kind of local use of resources was defined as wasteful and there were purely technical solutions such as a ban on tree felling, grazing and physical pencils were applied to check the resource use.

And as a result of this it has actually caused more damage to the forests by disrupting the traditional management and converting the common property regions into open access. And there had always been several problems that had actually come up when the implementing policies and questions of social equity and environmental justice had been very complex and very difficult to address. And even in joint forest management we find that the participatory role is not very clear.

The real question here is: will the local community really be involved in decision making? So, we have already seen that in the case of joint forest management policy, the state defines the rules and the terms of partnership and in the case of the village protection, village forest protection committees we may find vested interests of the rural elite to dominate and often this group might not include the actual resource users.

So, whose interests are actually being represented? But this is again a question that is time and again being asked and also it again prompts us to ask that whether the policy has not taken into consideration the major differences that may exist between the villages and the constraints involved in group organization and there is, obviously, a major weakness in the context of representation of women in many of the village forest protection committee.

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The slide features a title 'Critique of Decentralisation' at the top left. To the right is a graphic with the word 'ANALYSIS' in large blue letters, a magnifying glass over it, and a hand holding a red pencil. Below the title is a list of five bullet points. The slide has a blue and white background with a dark blue curved shape on the right side.

### Critique of Decentralisation

- The problem with the system of Panchayati Raj.
- Conceptualising communities and user groups as spatially or socially bounded entities.
- What about pastoralists, shifting cultivators or seasonal gatherers?
- Women's interests are excluded.
- Another problem concerns the structural inequalities that prevent politically and economically marginalised classes and groups from effectively voicing and defending their resource interests.

Now, let us try to look into some of the major problems of decentralisation. Now, we find in India that there has been considerable pressure which has been exerted by various people people's movements in NGOs for both decentralised management of natural resources and increased people's participation.

And in the recent years we had find, that the administration has actually initiated decentralisation of natural resource management by establishing some guidelines for devoting decision making powers and central government funds to the lower administrative levels.

However, due to economic globalization what we find is the opening up of local economies and local natural resource management in parts of the country that has now become geared towards commercialization without attention to the needs of the poor as well as the needs to protect the natural resources. There is no doubt that the weaker user groups tend to be disadvantaged in the conflicts regarding resource allocation.

And in an attempt to creating a more market friendly economic framework the state have been encouraging a greater role for the private sector and thus allowing resource management regimes in various areas to be oriented towards specific user categories of particular environmental resources. For example, in several parts of India, poor resource users have been losing their customary access to village commons as these areas have been given away to commercial farming cooperatives for pasture cultivation.

In many states apart from that bureaucrats and members of legislative bodies have thwarted the devolution of adequate resources powers and authorities to elected local government or Panchayati Raj institutions. Aside from this the constructive implementation of both the Panchayati Raj and the sectoral natural resource management forms of decentralisation have been frustrated by the political strife between central and state government, out of the fear of different kinds of squabbles that might ensue some Indian panchayats have even appeared to be reluctant in engaging in community-based forest management.

Several authors have also stressed that only technical paradigms in and of themselves, which may leave a strong imprint on the current prevailing approaches towards decentralised and participatory natural resource management. Then again, we have already talked about bureaucratic reification which occurs by placing communities and user groups which are conceptualised as spatially and socially bounded entities in conservation and resource management.

There are also different kinds of harmful implications so, for instance we have seen that in several cases of in the case of joint forest management for instance while these kinds of policies - decentralised policies have been receiving enormous funding and financial support from the global monetary organizations, we can see that the marginal classes the politically and the economically marginalized classes may be different gender groups and then the marginalized castes they always remain out of the ambit of these kinds of decentralized policies.

And while in the recent years we have found that there have been several very ambitious documents and policy prescriptions on the ways in which decentralisation actually works but in the ground realities in many cases are actually different than what is being projected because, while I personally feel that while decentralisation can be extremely effective if it is implemented in a equitable and the systemic manner; the recent political reasons and different kinds of resistance from multiple interest groups towards the proper implementation of decentralised policies have actually limited the very very rich potential of the decentralised policies in the ambit of resource management.

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**Conclusion**

- ✓ Decentralisation refers to the transfer of power from the central to the local levels.
- ✓ Decentralisation can be of different types : devolution, deconcentration, delegation and privatisation.
- ✓ For decentralisation of resource management to be successful, we need well organised local bodies and civil society groups capable of articulating the diversity of local interests, particularly of marginalised categories.

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So, let us quickly summarize all that was discussed in today's lecture.

Decentralisation refers to the transfer of power from the central to the local levels. Decentralisation can be of different types; devolution, deconcentration, delegation and privatization. For decentralisation of resource management to be successful, we need well organised local bodies and civil society groups capable of articulating the diversity of local interests, particularly of the marginalized categories.

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**References**

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So, I have used a large pool of references while delivering this lecture and all of my lecture contents can be found in this list of references from which I have actually drawn the material. So, I would again suggest all of you to go through these very very important papers on decentralization, so that you can get holistic idea on how decentralisation operates and what can be the ways in which decentralisation can be made much more effective.

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