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**Urban Sociology**

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**Lecture No: 6**

**Indian Context and Informality: Cities and Slums**

Hello everyone, I welcome all of you back to the course on Urban Sociology. And today, we will continue with the second lecture on Contemporary Urban India. In today's lecture, we will cover urban informality in the Indian context. So, let us begin.

So, this is basically as you can see, will be the outline of today's lecture. First, we will try to theorize informality as to what urban informality exactly means, and why it is such a powerful and relevant context when we are talking about contemporary urban India and how particularly, is informality produced in several cities, particularly in the cities of the Global South, where their prominence is felt much more strongly.

Then, we will move on to discuss some cases of eviction related to slums and the other urban marginals like the street vendors, beggars, et cetera. We would then talk about a special case of the hawker's question. And finally, we would end the lecture with a brief understanding of how the urban informal population interact with the urban ecosystem, and with regard to their right to the city and rights to the nature.

Now, what do we mean by informality? Where did the word originate? Very interesting questions. Let us elaborate a bit on this. It was not until the early 1970s that the term informal sector became extremely popular. At that time, the International Labor Organization which is abbreviated as ILO was conducting substantial research on the labor market in a number of African countries. Keith Hart, an anthropologist, in 1973, published some major overarching work observing these growing trends of informality and was one of the researchers studying the situation in Accra, Ghana in 1971.

Unlike the organized marketplaces in England, where he grew up, where Hart grew up, he discovered that there were employees who travelled to the city from the nearby areas to offer primarily offered their skills as day laborers. Hart also found, in course of his research that there are four basic features of the informal sector that proved useful for employment in

developing countries. These were low levels of skill, easy entry, low paid employment, and largely immigrant workforce.

The perception was that the informal sector according to both Hart and ILO, seemed to be an extremely transitory one, it would vanish as these countries develop, which meant that the formal sector would grow and the informal sector would be absorbed.

In other words, as these countries develop and extend their formal sectors day laborers and workers in unregistered small industries will be incorporated as formal sector workers and street sellers may indeed be integrated into the organized retail sector. Since then, there has been a lot of scholarly engagement with the term informality. Scholars of urban informality have attempted to look closely into the formal-informal distinction as territorial formations like the slum and the city or as groups who provide informal labor or as forms of knowledge and practices.

For today's lecture again as the previous one, we would primarily focus on Ananya Roy's conceptualization of urban informality. If we recall from our previous class, then we can very well understand that informality is marked by a paradox, which is that much of the urban growth that we see in this decade is happening in the Third World, but urban theory itself is being produced by the First World. It leads us to the question that why we believe that the First World should always be the model and the Third World be considered as a problem. The biggest issue here is that we borrow planning practices from the developed nations and usually, they do not fit our context.

Thus, we are constantly trying to fit ourselves in a framework where we would forever remain a misfit, taking this as a point of departure. Roy interestingly writes that informality does not emerge from the lack of planning, but is a direct outcome of the mode of planning itself the ways in which planning happens or is administered. This means that planning itself produces the unplannable, and that the unplannable constitutes informality. Roy believes that this process places informality outside the formal order of urbanization.

There are generally two dominant views when it comes to informality. The first group talks about informality through a language of crisis, like Hall & Pfeiffer, who pay particular attention to informal hyper growth cities, where they express great concern about these exploding and swollen cities. A phenomenon that is not restricted to the global south, but now through migration, some cities of the developed world are being invaded by the developing world.

In contrast to this, we have another view that looks onto informality as a form of heroic entrepreneurship, where it is perceived that informal economy is people's way of

spontaneously and creatively responding to the states incapacity to satisfy the basic needs of the masses, primarily the impoverished marginalized masses. In this case, it is almost celebrated, but Roy actually tries to go beyond this dichotomy. Instead, she proposes that informality is an idiom of urbanization.

Now informality, I would say is not a separate or a distinctive sector. But rather it is a series of transactions that connect different economies different spaces to one another in cities like ours. Now, what does Ananya Roy exactly mean by this statement that informality is not a disjoint or a separate sector.

Take for example, Dharavi, whose example we have also discussed before the slum dwellers in Dharavi, usually manufacture products for bigger firms, bigger brands in the global market. So, the slum here is not simply a local entity, it automatically becomes connected to the global economy via this very link that it produces products for the global market. And it thus does not operate in isolation, it is not separate from the global economy. What we have to remember here is that informality may even be a manifestation of global inequality and keeping this in mind Ananya Roy states that informality is actually a mode, a very mode of urbanization.

Here, mode actually means the form, it means a manner, it means a method and this complicates our whole understanding of informality as a concept. She believes that state power is reproduced through the capacity to construct and reconstruct the categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy, the latter being very popularly associated with the informal modes of production, particularly the global south.

Thus, informality is also a site where the state exercises its very power, its discipline. For example, the state this is a very common example the state may acquire public land by evicting slums, because they know that the land has a lot of value and then encourage informal housing practices of the elite like building larger gated communities.

The states is thus also tuned to the needs of the urban elite. And in this way, what is formal and what is informal is defined and redefined continuously to suit the very state's needs. What is formal and what is not, whose demand will be encouraged and whose voices will be left on heard who gets to live in the city and who does not every one of these things and every question is being produced by the state.

Now, let us look at some more examples to get some better clarity on this idea of informality. If we look on to Amita Baviskar's work on the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, then we find a similar situation unfolding. She writes how the project of making Delhi into a world class city is radically restructuring the city's landscapes. During the Commonwealth Games in

Delhi, some of you would be remembering, the state speedily tried to accomplish large scale social as well as spatial transformation of great economic and social value, which would have otherwise been more difficult to achieve.

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 due 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 is that there is a coming of the age of India as a superpower and Delhi as a world class city. And the symbolic value is that the games would boost local jobs and incomes and ultimately, people would welcome this kind of a socio-spatial transformation.

Now, for these games or these sorts of events to be successful, it means different infrastructural advancement as well. Maybe it means installing, in this particular case, new air conditioned stadiums, creating new games village complex to house athletes and officials expanding the means of transport and communication, expanding the Delhi airport, airport that we found during that time and several other infrastructural improvements.

Other than infrastructural changes, many things as she discusses in her paper needs to be removed needs to be changed for what she calls the greater interest of the city. Some examples she cites that before the games one lakh beggars were caught and tried in mobile courts and sentenced to special beggars homes, stray dogs were targeted, different kinds of visual embarrassments for the city.

Most commonly, the slums had to be kept out of sight, including the rundown colonies, which had to be hidden from the eyes of the international visitors. Vegetable vendors were removed without any kind of prior notice. Thus, this particular case of eviction is one of the ways in which the state exercised power. And in the course of repackaging the city, they define the shifting categories of what they consider to be legal or illegal at any given point of time.

In fact, according to Gautam Bhan, again, who has made very, very significant contributions to the understanding of Indian urbanization, Public interest litigation, filed by elite residents in Delhi High Courts have started to play a very important role in shaping urban environmental transformations. I think this is a very fact that Amita Baviskar also reiterates on many of her works.

Public interest litigations have the very 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

or flat. However, the state does not acknowledge its own failure to build what it calls low income or affordable housing something - that we discussed in the previous lecture as well.

Taking another example from another very important work. Asher Ghertner, in his essay on green evictions mentions how environmental pollution is constructed as a problem embodied by the slum dwellers in the city of Delhi, the Delhi High Court in 2002, took a complex ecological problem, such as the pollution of river Yamuna and simplified it to the visible presence of the slum settlements on the Yamuna river bed. Thus slum dwellers dread any high profile events - as it prompts authorities to clean up the city and rather, it is like cleaning them out.

Slum dwellers are well aware that they are menace, they are dirt, that the government does not want the world to see. It must be remembered, however, that it is not those slums that pollute, rather slums are usually located in dangerous, health threatening environment where the poor have no choice but to live in constant fear of disaster. Mike Davis, in his book, "The Planet of Slums" points out that slums actually start with the poor geology.

Let us look onto another case where we can exclude the category of street vendors and the struggles that they face in their everyday lives. The National Policy on Urban Street Vendors 2009 states that the hawkers or the street vendors are self-employed workers in the urban informal sector who offer their labor for selling goods and services without any permanent built up structure. City streets, sidewalks, overpasses, markets and pavements seem to be ideal spaces in the city, where we find the street vendors settling down for their sale, often in temporary, static or makeshift structures.

Hawkers constitute an essentially and significantly contextual part of the urban landscape of India. Yet they are often threatened, dispossessed and evicted. Because street vending is often seen as a hazard to the middle-class residents who tend to believe that public spaces like streets, pavements and parks should look hygienic, spectacular and enhance the quality of life. They believe that city streets should undergo beautification and should be used for recreational purposes.

According to Emma Mawdsley, a systematic shaping of the urban environment by the middle classes through widespread public debates on environmental issues and strong representation in the media, politics, scientific establishment, NGOs, bureaucracy, environmental institutions and the legal system has led to the construction of an urban environmental activism with significant disregard to issues of social justice and inequalities. Such a disregard is all too common when it comes to the street vending places which are opposed not just because they lack legal status, but also because they affect the city's health, cleanliness and environment.

Thus, this environmental discourse has become the new language of eviction, we can think about the concept of Bourgeois environmentalism, provided by a Amita Baviskar about which we have spoken in the previous class. Let us take an example from Kolkata where public space had been much contested following an event of eviction that was commonly known as the operation sunshine that happened in 1996, which was the biggest drive in the city till date to clean the city of specific street vendors by evicting thousands of them who encroached landmark pavements of the city.

Ananya Roy in 2004 explains how Calcutta was being remade under the left rule to facilitate neoliberalism. In 1975. Operation Hawker organized by the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority were met with protests organized by the hawkers and the left, who were then an opposition party. But two years later, the official attitude of the left had effectively changed. The ruling party now believed that Calcutta had to be rebuilt as an investment friendly city.

When the hawkers realized that they had been abandoned by the left. They turned to opposition parties because they are fully aware of the fact that, without them electoral victory would not be possible. During Operation sunshine in Calcutta in 1996, 1997. According to Bandyopadhyay, the hawkers were able to resist eviction, with the help of the Hawker Sangram Committee, and were able to effectively mobilize themselves against eviction and reclaim the spaces in the city.

Sometimes what is at stake is not simply the right to the city, but also the right to nature, or the right to shade. In case of street vendors, we notice how these groups also interact with the environment in very interesting ways. Scholarly writings often overlook the relations that street vendors and hawkers have with the urban ecosystem. According to Sukanya, Sukanya Basu and Harini Nagendra green spaces in the city provide hawkers with spiritual, economic and cultural functions. Access to trees and availability of shade, make their strenuous livelihoods more bearable in the summer months. It is not very unusual to see a barber who sets up his saloon by attaching a mirror onto the trunk of a tree in the streets of Calcutta.

Street trees does help the vendors in many direct and indirect ways. Often trees are used to hang signs with sale prices to attract customers. The branches and the trunks are also used to display goods. Working in the same spot for years, they tend to develop an emotional connection with the trees. Some species of trees are considered lucky for business growth by these vendors. There is however, a hierarchy in place that prevents all the hawkers from having equal access to green spaces.

Mostly women and migrants cannot readily access these spaces. In fact, what is noticed is how there are more trees in high income group areas of the city as Basu's and Nagendra's studies show rather than the low-income group areas. This is primarily because greenery now

has an index of wealth. From eviction and disposition of vendors which puts their rights to the city at stake. We can also look at how their right to shade or write to nature is also threatened.

Due to redevelopment projects and gentrification street trees get enclosed with the walls of private property. This result in trees becoming rare resource and those with power are able to access them much more easily. Thus what we were able to explore are multiple forms of exclusion that are generally at play.

To conclude, let us go through some of the points that we discussed today. Roy's concept of informality as a mode of urbanization transcends the age-old dichotomy of the formal-informal and offers us a fresh perspective for understanding Third World urbanization.

Asher Ghertner and Amita Baviskar's accounts give us evidence of real time events that show how informality is perceived as an obstacle for the world class city making. The hawker's question in Kolkata shows us how public space has become a contested arena. And finally, we saw that urban ecosystem services are almost always overlooked when talking about informality.

These are the references that have been used in course of this lecture. Thank you all for joining and we will meet again in the next lecture which will be about Urban Development and Sustainability in India.