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Urban Sociology

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Lecture No: 9

Gentrification, migration, inequality

and urban social stratification in India

Welcome back to the course on urban sociology. So, today, we will continue with the second module only that is contemporary urban India. And within this module, today we will be discussing about gentrification, migration, inequality and urban social stratification in India and as you will be seeing gradually that all of these four issues or four topics that we aim to cover in this lecture are related and interlinked in several social ways.

So, we will first start by understanding the process of gentrification, so, we will go serially, and then we will be doing some examples, we will move on to how green gentrification is creating new forms of exclusion in the city. We will then discuss about migration, what it means and what are the different types of migration that we usually observe in urban societies. After this, we would gradually move on to residential segregation and inequalities in the city. Finally, we will talk about the case of sundown towns as a form of racial residential segregation in the United States of America.

So, let me introduce you to one, I presume new term this might be something that is completely new to many of you, gentrification. So, I will first introduce the concept followed by some very relevant examples of urban gentrification. So, first let us take it very simply that what do we exactly mean by gentrification? Now, let me tell you that as many of the terms that we use in sociology have very interesting origins, the credit of which goes back to many of the significant works of urban sociologists as we have discussed before as well.

So, gentrification as a term was first coined by the British sociologist Ruth Glass in the year 1964. So, as you can see that this is not while we have not heard much about this term, this is not a concept that is very new, it has been there for several decades now. And in this work primarily, so, when this term was first coined by Glass in 1964, she primarily observed and it is here that the meaning of gentrification is imbided in this particular observation. So, she

observed how the upheaval of certain neighbourhoods in London which was the area of study war taking place, by the middle class gentry from the countryside. So, broadly from this particular observation as you can all if you can note that if we put it in the most simple sense, then we can say that gentrification is a process of redevelopment, it is a process of restructuring.

Now, this can be done in many ways and this has several social implications, which I would try to come back see really too many of them, but, broadly we can see that it is a process whereby the character of a particular urban area, most likely, so, nowadays we see that it is usually a poor urban area is changed is transformed, as I was telling you that gentrification has to do with restructuring and redevelopment. So, in most of the cases we see the gentrification happens by transforming marginal areas in the city by wealthier people who are gradually moving in the cities, improvement of housing, attracting new business and in this entire process, what happens is that many of the erstwhile previous inhabitants of those particular areas are completely displaced.

Now, there are several implications and there are several impacts of this process. When such a change such an urban transformation happens through the process of gentrification, we might see that new employments are coming up. So, there may be as we can, many of us can see all around us that there may be new clubs, new places of entertainment, shopping malls, restaurants. But at the same time, we can also observe that the land value rises to such an extent that the older and I would say more vulnerable residents who used to previously inhabit these neighbourhoods are completely pushed out as these neighbourhoods become affordable only to the elite who are coming into that areas.

So, Moskowitz in fact, points out how the managerial class professionals in several places we see that they replace the artists and the punks in that particular area. And along with the physical restructuration process that we are talking about, the overall culture of the neighbourhood is also altered as a process of gentrification. And there are different newer forms of lifestyle that come to dominate that particular area. So, one very fitting example would be cases where we see that many of the smaller shops in a particular locality get replaced by the branded outlets, the shopping malls for example. And this is followed by economic displacement.

So, all kinds of displacement happen at a very, very rampant rate. And it is I would want to quote a particular excerpt from Glass' writing, where she mentioned that, "one by one, the working class quarters have been invaded by the middle class, the upper and the lower." She even mentions how the social character of the neighborhood will change. Gentrification heightens the worth of neighbourhoods, so much that the city becomes uninhabitable for the average population. And I believe that it is simply not displacement and cultural loss that we are talking about, but also a loss of the very place, if you remember, we had earlier talked about sense of place and place making. So, this loss of home the loss of place, also in a

certain way means a loss of the self, because as we have seen earlier, that the self, our self, our ways of life, are very, very integrally connected to the places that we inhabit.

Now, another observation by Neil Smith, who believed that gentrification could be explained by the rent gap theory, where the idea was that capital will go where the rate of potential return is created, for example, in this case, a place where building could be bought cheap and made more expensive in a short period of time. Many thought that gentrifiers maybe seeking art, emancipation from suburban norms, and a sense of discovery, others thought gentrifiers believed that inner cities was a place lacking control, something that we also read earlier in the concentric zone model and it was in need of a white, civilizing cultured force. Thus many theorists like this have tried to understand in several different ways, why the city so often and in so rampant manner, attempts to gentrify the different inner city area.

So, what are the reasons why cities, why the city planners would put so much of emphasis to gentrification in the first place? So, this is something that has engaged many of the urban theorists who had been studying about gentrification.

So, let us talk about some examples. Here I would be largely drawing on a paper by Professor D. Parthasarathy. So, he talks about this particular case many of you would be knowing about this that in India, there was an outbreak of fire some years back at two very upscale restaurants in the Kamala Mills area of Bombay and that claimed several lives as we had many of us had read in the newspaper during this time, but it was later found that there had been several arbitrary structural alterations in that particular erstwhile mill area and numerous faulty safety measures - presence of combustible materials which caused the fire to break out and this we, many of us know that Bombay historically had several mills, it was known as the Mill City.

And this particular mill compound, the Kamala Mills, which was formerly known as the Girangaon area in Mumbai. This operated several for several decades before the decline during the mid 1980s. And now, as we know that most of these mills are I think all of the mills are right now closed. And according to this particular paper by D. Parthasarathy, gentrification they say that create, this particular phenomenon of gentrification creates new spaces of capital accumulation, which are very directly linked to bourgeois modes of consumption, that are we see which are often disguised or masked by ideas of heritage, conservation, elite place making.

So, in the name of all of these, an area and erstwhile area completely gets gentrified. And in the particular case of the Kamala Mills accident, the authors show how service sector firms, information technology industries, media and advertising, finance and the creative sector occupied the mill compound and the factory buildings emerging as the fulcrum of new growth in these localities, shopping malls, restaurants, pubs, nightclubs, art galleries, high

end furniture stores, design shops, other kinds of entertainment hotspots, stood cheek by jowl and became the main mantra of the city branding process. This is exactly what they write in this paper.

And they further write that simultaneously the area also witnessed the growth of several gated residential complexes as real estate players moved into construct luxury housing in the newly available spaces. As the mill went from factory locks to living spaces, the middle classes came to the core of the city. And as they observe further that Mumbai's gentrification thus show certain signs of absolute commercial gentrification. The entrepreneurial local government and the Urban Development Authority facilitated the transformation of mill heritage structures largely for conspicuous consumption. And for inflating land prices, land values, even as the new spaces of work, consumption and culture completely excluded the traditional erstwhile working class of that area.

And, in effect, they mentioned the gentrified spaces of what was known as the Girangaon area previously became elite enclaves. And there is yet another observation from another paper by Wang and Yu Lau in 2009, where they talk about the rising new professional middle classes as well as the old and rich who can now fulfill their consumerist fantasies, which could previously only be experienced in certain global cities of the worlds like London, Paris, New York, et cetera Singapore. And commercial gentrification they quote that it is not simply about catering to aspirational lifestyles, nor can it be understood purely in terms of capital accumulation process where capital flows through different kinds of circuits that are more profitable.

But what is more important is the idea of power in this entire process of transformation, urban transformation that is known as gentrification. Power plays a very key role because those connected to the political authority, to the bureaucratic authority are able to foster this process of gentrification much more effectively and at ease by acquiring, modifying and using several spaces at their own will. And this process largely ignores the issues of risk and safety. And this kind of Bourgeois consumption patterns in architectural spaces, whose styles are largely borrowed from the global cities and superimposed on dilapidated architectural spaces result in high levels of risk for all sections of the urban population, not only for the displaced, but also for the gentrifiers.

Now, let us come to another variant of gentrification, something that we call the green gentrification. And we have seen that in several cases, valuation of, the valuation studies of ecosystem services, public health assessments, real estate projections are used by municipal decision makers, planners, investors, to promote a particularly prevailing view of urban greening interventions, which also partly I have discussed in the earlier lectures, the creation of new parks, new greenways, new green belts, and these are largely named or tagged as public goods and these are also considered to have widespread benefits for all kinds of residents.

But a major question that arises here is the fact that is the so-called green city actually delivering its process of broad based environmental health, social and economic benefits or is it causing newer environmental disparities and green mirages. Urban greening efforts, according to another paper are increasingly creating new dynamics of exclusion, polarization, segregation, and invisibility. And despite multiple claims about the public good, these interventions take place to the detriment of most of the socially and racially marginalized urban groups whose lands and landscapes are appropriated to the creation of a 'green gap' in property markets.

So, all these green infrastructures that we see, for example, the parks, the new urban parks, who are the new urban parks really for, let us think about this question, who are the real recipients and the real beneficiaries of these new and restored green amenities, infrastructures in the city? We largely see and several studies the references of which have been shared in the end of this lecture, we largely see that these new spaces, new parks are mostly targeted to the white, to the socially and economically privileged residents and tourists.

Rather than creating inclusive spaces, this green transformation, this green gentrification has also led to multiple displacement events, it has actually intensified the displacement of local businesses and residents, by using apparently apolitical terms and the rhetoric around urban sustainability, urban greening initiatives and participatory green planning processes - these studies ignore how many of these studies which are actually mostly focusing on greening and ecosystem services there are actually a large range of such studies are actually ignoring how racial disparities, social hierarchies and environmental privilege intersect in new urban greening projects. A single concept of green cannot make urbanization sustainable as we have earlier seen in the very definitive definition of sustainable development that we largely need the intersection of those three critical pillars.

So, along with the environmental, the economic and the social are also equally important. And we need to recognize the critical junctures and the interventions between these three pillars. So, we see that many inhabitants of the low-income neighbourhoods are losing community assets as a result of green infrastructure projects for the so called bigger public good. And this type of urban growth creates new ecological enclaves of blue and green spaces, as well as other exclusionary geographies. The local and global elites are actually using it as a political instrument. The sustainability debate here as we see is largely politicized.

Now, we will come to the second topic, which is I would say in a way related to the earlier discussion on gentrification as well as the following topics that we would be doing. So, this is largely the idea of migration with which I think most of us, the urban scholars and the students who are studying the city they are familiar with. So, we can see that migration and settlements are interrelated aspects of the social and cultural life of the people. It is defined as

the shift in the place of residence for some length of time and this shift, this very process of transition can be because of different factors, we will try to do some of the, I would say, non-conventional issues or non-conventional types of migration, because we mostly understand we mostly try to relate migration with economic issues, and there can be different kinds of migration, it can be rural to urban, rural to rural and even urban to urban, it can be voluntary, it can be involuntary.

So, it is because we need to understand the voluntary and involuntary, we also have to have some idea about the push and pull factors in migration. And both, we can see that both the place of origin and that of the destination is an essential is a very, very essential aspect of the migration studies.

So, as I was telling you, that, we often as I was trying to explain that we have often in many of the studies in economics, we have seen primarily that migration is largely related to economic factors that because of poverty and because of growing incidences of job loss, lack of employment opportunities, migration is becoming much more rampant and it can be seen from the rural to the urban, but while this is a, while economic factors are extremely important, I would say to understand the process of migration, many sociologists who have actually studied the issue of migration from several angles and they have done fieldwork in multiple areas of India, they have also tried to use other kinds of sociological lenses to understand this very concept of migration and particularly, what can be the other kinds of migration, what can be the other kinds of factors which influence the process of migration apart from those of the economic factors.

So, I remember and I would like to quote from one particular paper that was written by Alpa Shah and it was published in Contributions to Indian sociology, this paper is called the 'Labor of love, seasonal migration from Jharkhand to the Brick Kilns of other states in India", this paper would also be shared with you where the author actually tries to address this issue. And she actually says, and I would quote from her work that, "seasonal casual labor migration in India has been largely and conventionally understood as a result of extreme poverty, where we see that many villagers are forced to become migrants for the driver six months" - six or eight months to subsist to support their family to merely survive.

But drive on a particular field work from a very remote village in Jharkhand and a Brick Kiln in West Bengal. The author argues that many of these migrants do not understand their movement In economic terms alone, because drawing on the study, she actually observes that many of this brick kiln workers see those spaces as temporary spaces of freedom to escape maybe different kinds of problems back home, maybe to explore new places, maybe to gain independence, gain independence from parents, from the neighbours or maybe there can be also other reasons which might be prohibited in their own native places maybe to live out prohibited amorous relationships as the author says.

So, these apart from the other issues apart from the economic factors, we can also see that these non-economic factors are equally important for several workers for several people to migrate from one place to another particularly in the case of rural to urban migration, I would say and being a sociologist, being an urban sociologist, I would prompt many of you when we discuss about such a contemporary issue like migration, I would actually prompt many of you to look much closely into the problem and try to identify these extra economic factors which are equally contributing maybe aspirational factors issues of freedom as I was quoting from the works of Alpa Shah, how important these factors are, these sociological factors are and how they play out in the context of understanding migration.

So, I will again discuss another very, in a very in a nutshell, I would discuss another paper by Amita Baviskar, where she talks about these issues the very issue of residential segregation and inequality. And in this particular paper, she actually says that, as we have seen that cities are now taking over most of the countryside areas, how articulations around the environmental issues, how the environmental politics actually is articulated and who are the particular actors whose voices are heard and how we are contributing to being urban dwellers, how we are actually contributing to the larger discourse of environmental justice in the cities.

So, for instance, she starts the account in this particular paper of she talks about a city with two contrasting views, a senior manager is seen living in a luxury apartment and a domestic worker living in a shack across the particular wall of that apartment. And within these two contrasting spaces, how ideas or how environmental concerns are articulated and how these two classes which are very distinct from each other are shaping the particular understandings on environmental concerns. And here, I will not be going into the details, because I will be sending the paper - but one thing that she talks about and she tries to point out at large is the vocabulary of civic rights, what kinds of civic rights are significant to construe an environmental concern?

So, what kinds of debates are considered to be environmental? And who are the players, who are the actors whose voices are being heard? What is environmental nuisance? How are definitions of environmental nuisance articulated and who are the people who because of these discourses on environmental nuisance are constantly subjected to a fear of losing their habitat and losing their homes. And these sections many of these sections work very closely and they are drawn together in very fascinating ways on this very large question on environments and at the same time, they are also segregated.

Let us also talk about racial segregation. And this is another very interesting idea. Let us look at the instance of sundown towns as an example of racial segregation. Sundown towns are also known as gray towns or sunset towns, which are all white municipalities or neighborhoods in the United States. The term came from the signs posted that colored people have to leave by sundown. So, they practice a form of racial segregation by excluding

non-whites by discriminatory local laws, intimidation and constant violence. According to the sociologist Loewen, he says and I quote, "something has been left out of the broad history of race in America, as it is usually taught."

During 1890 and 1968, 1890 to 1968, there were thousands of sundown towns that systematically excluded African-Americans from living within their borders, located mostly outside the traditional south, these towns employed legal formalities, race riots, policemen, brakes, fires and guns to produce homogeneously Caucasian communities and some of them continue such unsavoury practices to this day.

Loewen's eye opening history traces the sundown towns development and delineates the extent to which state governments and the federal government openly favoured white supremacy from the 1930s through the 1960s and helped to create and maintain all white communities through their landing and ensuring policies while African-Americans never lost the sight to vote in the north. They did lose the right to live in town after town country after country, Loewen points out. The expulsion forced African-Americans into urban ghettos and continues to have ramifications on the lives of the whites, black and the social system at large.

Let us conclude this lecture by looking at some of the points that we have covered today. Gentrification is the process of movement of the middle-class gentry from the countryside to the inner-city working-class areas. Green gentrification is leading to new geographies of exclusion. Migration can be of different types and is not motivated by economic factors alone. Our account of residential segregation in India shows how communities are at once segregated and again in close proximity. Sundown towns systematically excluded African-Americans to maintain an all-white population.

So, these are the references that have been covered in the lecture. Thank you for joining the class and we will meet again in the next lecture, which would be the last lecture of the module that is recent developments and emerging theories in urban sociology. Thank you.