

Flows, Socials & Critique of Everyday life: A study of Urbanisation of Kochi, Kerala

Abstract

This study examines the urbanisation of Kochi by analysing the specific cases of right to housing, right to land and right to liveable place. Rather than the experience of a subject, the research explores the way- how, where, when, why- different subjects interact, confront, compete, co-operate, struggle, form relations and networks in their everyday life, amidst the entangled senses, spaces and socials. The research tries to bring in the question of the right to the city, the right of citizens to access, occupy, use and produce the city.

Beginning with a case study of the housing problem in Mattancherry, where the development of modern city in Kerala is kick-started, the research critiques the discourse of cosmopolitanism and examines the political practice of inhabitants and the state intervention for slum rehabilitation. The flow of the poor and the water towards the west and the flow of capital towards the east of Kochi, post-liberalisation of the 1990s especially after the real estate boom in the early 2000s, reveals the geography and economy of dispossession induced by the real estate mafia and the state facilitated by international finance. This research also examines the struggle against real estate mafia in the context of small-scale land grabbing in Vallarpadam & Kakkanad, which will shed light on the workings of local real estate mafia and their entanglement with the financial flow, state and mega projects.

Kochi's urbanization marked by the entwinement of social, spatial, and sensory marginalization is also archipelagic, scattered across coast, canals, islands, wetlands, and transport nodes. These 'rurban' margins—where rural livelihoods, urban expansion, ecological vulnerability, and infrastructural neglect coalesce—are neither fully urban nor fully rural. They are marked by hybrid rhythms: rising sea level, tidal cycles, seasonal labor, partial infrastructure/service access, and intermittent governance.

The research linking political economy to socio-ecology, trac(k)ing the enmeshed flow of water, people, capital and labour, draws also on other ways of experiencing and knowing through drawings and photographs. By engaging with the sensory, the visual, and the narrative knowledge born of lived experience, the thesis challenges the dominance of textual and technocratic ways of knowing the city.

The crises of the coast, wetlands, and urban slums are interconnected outcomes of an entanglement of caste, class, unregulated urbanization, and the climate crisis. This research contributes to urban studies by developing the concept of archipelagic urbanism to interpret

the fragmented accumulation and marginality increasingly shaped by climate change, remittance capital, speculation, infrastructural expansion and unregulated urbanisation.