



past for a positive future



THE URBANISATION OF BACKWATERS

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF THE COCHIN HARBOUR PROJECT

Speaker

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Chair

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The Urbanisation of Backwaters

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The talk revisits the field of historical research that focuses on colonial Indian Ocean port cities. By using urbanisation as the key term to understand the production of maritime landscape, this presentation attempts to revise the established notion of considering the colonial port city as spatially bounded ‘colonial enclaves.’ Instead of limiting the frame of analysis of urbanisation to the spatially bounded settlement space of the city, this study problematises the coherent city-hinterland divide. In the context of Cochin, this discussion argues that the maritime-urban process involved interconnected and simultaneous social and environmental transformations not merely in the coastal region, but also the extended non-urban landscapes. The discussion in the context of the Cochin and the *Vembanadu kayal* illustrates that what we consider as the backwaters or hinterland was key to the process of urbanisation under colonial capitalism.



Dr. JUSTIN MATHEW

Justin Mathew is Assistant Professor at Hansraj College, University of Delhi. His research focuses on critical urban theory and historical geography of urbanisation in the colonial context. His doctoral dissertation titled “Geographies of Accumulation: Nature, Infrastructure, and the Urbanisation of Cochin, c. 1860-1945” perceives the development of the port city of Cochin since the mid-nineteenth century as a process embedded in the dynamics of capitalist accumulation. His writing and teaching focus on the issues related to colonialism and ecological histories.

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