

Concept Note and Call for Papers for

Kochi – A Palimpsest of Histories and Futures

An International Seminar

22nd and 23rd January, 2026

Concept Note

Hosted by Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Kochi, this two-day international seminar seeks to foreground the uniqueness of the city of Kochi, Kerala as a resilient cultural crossroads and urges critical attention to its layered geographies, both remembered and repressed. From its inception as a modest fishing settlement to its evolution into a prominent maritime centre, the historical trajectory of Kochi has consistently embodied a dynamism as fluid and transformative as the Arabian Sea upon whose shores it is situated. The urban fabric of Kochi presently constitutes a complex and nuanced tapestry of cultural negotiations and socio-spatial reconfigurations that are exceptional within the South Asian subcontinent. Each successive wave of migration and settlement has left indelible imprints upon the cityscape, thereby cultivating what Michel de Certeau terms a "practiced place"—an environment that continuously intertwines historical depth with contemporary realities.

Kochi uniquely represents a confluence of the historical and the mythic, manifest in its enduring colonial architectural heritage and the intangible collective memories preserved by its diverse populace. The city has persistently occupied a liminal position at the interface of local traditions and global influences, wherein indigenous epistemologies engage in dynamic contestation with, and resistance to, the enduring structures of what Aníbal Quijano conceptualizes as the "coloniality of power." This distinctive positionality renders Kochi a critical site for the examination of how maritime urban centres negotiate the tensions between tradition and modern transformation. Furthermore, the city's oceanic character engenders a state reminiscent of Zygmunt Bauman's notion of "liquid modernity"—a continual state of

flux wherein identities, territorial boundaries, and meanings are perpetually negotiated and reshaped by both literal and metaphorical tidal forces.

The 1341 flood reconfigured river mouths and the coastline—likely contributing to the formation/enlargement of Vypin island—and accelerated the decline of Muziris (Kodungallur/Cranganore) while enhancing Kochi's harbour. These changes helped shift regional trade networks toward Kochi over the subsequent centuries, especially after Portuguese intervention in the early sixteenth century. This historical precedent becomes particularly relevant in our contemporary moment of climate change, where coastal cities worldwide grapple with rising sea levels and the need for adaptive urban planning strategies that acknowledge environmental vulnerability as a constitutive element of urban life.

The cultural history of Kochi is as (or perhaps more) varied than its geographical and colonial history. Its enduring ethos of religious tolerance, economic interdependence, and civic literacy has fostered a remarkable cultural pluralism, even in the face of emerging communal tensions and the challenges posed by modernisation and unpredictable ecological change. This pluralism, however, should not be romanticized as harmonious multiculturalism; rather, it represents an ongoing process of negotiation, accommodation, and sometimes conflict among diverse communities with different stakes in the city's future. Kochi has always been a site of oceanic precarity, where indigenous epistemologies encounter, compete with and resist the enduring influence of global coloniality. We use "oceanic precarity" here to encompass both the material vulnerability of coastal populations to environmental forces and the epistemological uncertainty that emerges when local knowledge systems encounter global capitalist modernity.

Kochi's landscape bears traces of multiple temporalities, competing narratives, and contested memories. *Kochi – A Palimpsest of Histories and Futures*, seeks to address the city as a metaphorical palimpsest – tracing how the active interaction of historical influences show through despite attempts at erasure.

Call for Papers

We encourage papers that engage with cutting-edge theoretical frameworks in postcolonial studies, urban geography, memory studies, and cultural theory. Relevant topics might include (but are not limited to) the following:

- *The Making of a Maritime Hub:*
 - ❖ The impact of trade and migration on Kochi's socio-economic and cultural development.
 - ❖ The 1341 CE flood and its role in shaping Kochi's geographical and historical trajectory.
 - ❖ The influence of various colonial powers (Portuguese, Dutch, British) on Kochi's urban planning, architecture, and cultural landscape.
 - ❖ Drawing from Henri Lefebvre's production of space, Edward Soja's trialectics of spatiality, and Doreen Massey's progressive sense of place, we invite investigations into how Kochi's spaces are produced, contested, and reimagined through various social, economic, and political processes.
- *Identity and Cultural Pluralism:*
 - ❖ Narratives of religious tolerance and cohabitation, and their historical foundations.
 - ❖ The role of civic literacy in fostering Kochi's unique ethos.
 - ❖ Identity negotiations and diasporic memory, with a particular focus on communities like the Cochin Jews.
 - ❖ Critiques of simplistic notions of feudalism and explorations of diverse voices.
- *Contested Spaces and Memory:*
 - ❖ Fort Kochi as a symbolic and material site of layered histories, and the politics of memory embedded in its architecture and tourism.
 - ❖ The role of art biennales and museum spaces in re-inscribing global capital into local geographies, and concerns about gentrification and cultural displacement.
 - ❖ The "palimpsest" of Kochi's urban landscape, with its erased pasts, spectral presences, and cultural resistances.
 - ❖ The politicization of memory and forgetting in shaping Kochi's identity.

- ❖ Engaging with the work of scholars like Andreas Huyssen, José Muñoz, and Ann Cvetkovich, papers might explore how collective memory operates in Kochi's urban landscape, how traumatic histories are negotiated and transmitted, and how forgetting functions as both loss and liberation.
- *Historiographical Interventions:*
 - ❖ Critiques of how Kochi's cultural memory is shaped, silenced, and spatially negotiated through colonial and postcolonial lenses.
 - ❖ Interrogations of dominant historical discourses that marginalize subaltern narratives.
 - ❖ The "reductive binaries" of "core/centre" and "periphery/margin" and their inscription with power relations.
 - ❖ The role of historiography in both constructing and destabilizing identity, especially concerning symbolic and material erasures of certain communities.
 - ❖ Building on the insights of scholars like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Walter D. Mignolo, and Ramón Grosfoguel, we welcome analyses of how colonial legacies persist in contemporary Kochi and how decolonial practices might emerge within and against these structures.
- *Kochi in the Global Context:*
 - ❖ Kochi's urban development projects and their reinforcement of uneven geographies and cultural hierarchies.
 - ❖ The displacement of marginalized communities, symbolic cleansing of native histories, and rebranding of urban space for global consumption as forms of structural violence.
 - ❖ The homogenization of Kochi's past into sanitized heritage narratives that cater to cosmopolitan aesthetics and global tourism.
 - ❖ The Kochi-Muziris Biennale as a site of spatial and symbolic reconstitution, and its ambivalent role in celebrating and commodifying Kochi's layered pasts.
 - ❖ The ethics of curation in the context of neoliberal transformations and global art circuits, urging resistance to spectacle and embracing historical accountability.
- *Environmental Humanities and Blue Humanities:*

- ❖ Explorations of Kochi's maritime identity
- ❖ Engagements with recent work in blue humanities, oceanic studies, and environmental justice
- ❖ Exploring the city's relationship with water—both as resource and threat—and a shaper of its cultural and political life.

We particularly encourage interdisciplinary approaches that engage with theories of space, memory, representation, postcolonial urbanism, and performance studies. This seminar offers a vital platform to critically reimagine Kochi not as a static heritage site but as a dynamic terrain of negotiation, remembrance, and critical reflection.

Submission Guidelines (Abstracts)

Abstracts of papers of no more than 300 words, along with a brief biographical note (150 words), should be submitted by 5th January 2026.

Participants are requested to send the abstracts based on their original and unpublished research articles related to the above-mentioned topics (or other relevant themes). The names, affiliations, mobile number, email address and full mailing address of all authors must be mentioned. The abstracts should conform to the latest **MLA style** of documentation.

There will be provision to present the papers through online mode for those participants who cannot attend the seminar in person.

Send your abstracts to english@shcollege.ac.in by 5th January 2026.

Abstracts will be reviewed by the selection committee and selected presenters will be notified by 10th January, 2026.

Full papers will be due by 15th January 2026.

Selected papers will be published in a reputed peer-reviewed research journal.

A detailed brochure listing plenary speakers will be circulated later.

Points to remember

1. Abstracts should be submitted as an attachment to email with 'Submission of Abstract' typed in the subject field

2. The attachment should include abstract in 150 words, name/s of author/s, affiliation of author/s, and email ID/s should be complete and final
3. Use Microsoft Word, Times New Roman, 12 pts
4. Title: less than 15 words, first letter of each word in upper case (capital) and, 12 pts in bold
5. Abstract should be a continuous expository narrative, not a list of points or PowerPoint presentation
6. Avoid using any advanced word features like lines separating footnotes and titles, background or font color, highlighting and embossing
7. The draft should be thoroughly checked and proofread before submission.

Important Dates

<i>Submission of Abstracts:</i>	<i>5th January 2026</i>
<i>Intimation of Selected Papers:</i>	<i>10th January 2026</i>
<i>Submission of Full Papers:</i>	<i>15th January 2026</i>
<i>Dates of the Seminar:</i>	<i>22nd and 23rd January 2026</i>

About the Seminar

Organized by the Department of English, Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Thevara, Kochi, *Kochi – A Palimpsest of Histories and Futures* will feature eminent scholars, historians, cultural commentators, critics, writers, and artists who will explore the diverse dimensions of Kochi. Sacred Heart College, established in 1944, is a premier institute of higher education in Kochi, ranked 48th in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF - 2024) and acclaimed as the best arts and science college in the state of Kerala by The Week and India Today in 2025. In addition to scholarly presentations, the seminar will include live performances of locally rooted art forms from Kochi's coastal communities, such as Chavittunadakam (a Latin Christian dance-drama that emerged under Portuguese influence and later indigenized).

Contact Us

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