



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND  
TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES

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Public Lectures

# Coastal dosham: Grief, movements, blockage in coastal Kerala



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**TUESDAY, January 21st**

17:00 c.t. – 19:00 c.t

In the last decades, coastal communities in the South Indian state of Kerala have faced increasing floodings. Amid annual flooding events and chronic tidal floodings, people suffer the loss of landscapes, homes, and livelihoods. A warmer Arabian sea, altered oceanic currents, and obstructed backwater canals wreak havoc on the coast and on those dwelling by and living off the sea. These oceanic changes and coastal damages are a source of grief for many. Chellanam in the South of Kochi, a sliver of land between the Arabian sea and the Vembanad lake, has been particularly heavily hit. Coastal losses not only deeply affect residents' mental health and wellbeing; the sea and the landscape itself has become distressed. This paper reflects on ecological grief less as attachment to loss but rather as shared biomoral qualities. What does it mean to situate grief within affective landscapes of coastal loss? How to think wounding through movement and blockage? These questions are raised by my preliminary work on ecological grief as a shared and emplaced feeling amongst coastal communities, and grounded in my long-term engagement in Kerala with depression as a biomoral physiological state. In this talk, I begin to explore entangled individual, shared, and ecological coastal woundedness and wounding through the lens of coastal dosham. In Kerala, I argue, ecological grief is not only entangled with local socio-moral-material worlds; grief is also generative of ecological and social repair. I develop this argument in three steps. First, I describe elderly women's experiences of what one woman has called 'the trauma of the sea', and the way these experiences have sparked activism and protest seeking ecological, social and psychological repair. Second, I turn to the ways women and fellow coast dwellers sense and describe recent changes of coastal landscapes and oceanic flows and their damaging effects on, or rather entanglement with, mental and social wellbeing. Third, I delve into a community program that turns ecological grief and loss into a resource for data collection, art, and social repair.

**LOCATION:** CATS Seminar Building (4010), Lecture Hall (010.01.05), 1st Floor