

New Histories of Kerala: Exploring the Dutch Archives

Masterclasses and Workshop for Young Researchers

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Cochin, Kerala

Organised by:

Institute for Social Sciences, Humanities and Oceanic Research (I-SHORE)

in collaboration with

SEA: A Boiling Vessel

Workshop

Historical research on Kerala has taken very interesting turns in the last two decades as scholars have started to explore new archives or read existing sources in new frameworks. This exciting development in writing history has foregrounded several neglected dimensions in the rich traditions of the region and has given voices to many forgotten or silenced groups, places, ideas, individuals and institutions. The new scholarship now deals with such diverse themes as cultural transformations, mobility and networks, gender, vernacular intelligentsia, slavery and forced labour, religious encounters, political economies, non-human animals and environment, to name but a few.

In this regard, the most elaborate collection of documents on Kerala's early modern history is kept in the Dutch archives and collections. Due to the prolonged effect of the British colonial rule on the Indian subcontinent, local and extra-local historians have mainly depended on the English sources and have overlooked the treasure trove of Dutch source materials produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although there are about a dozen books on the region's history on the basis of Dutch sources, they have not managed to study even one tenth of what is available in the archives of the Netherlands. This plethora of sources is a highly valuable treasure for any serious scholar interested on the Kerala's history and heritage.

Some of the major dilemmas in using the Dutch archives have been unfamiliarity with the language, archival system, and early modern palaeography. A few scholars from Kerala and India at large have managed to overcome these hurdles and have produced significant works. Now almost all the documents related to the VOC from diverse archives in the Netherlands and India have been digitalized and have been made accessible to anyone from anywhere in the world. Specifically on Kerala, the upcoming collaborative project "Cosmos Malabaricus" between the Dutch and Indian partner institutions aims to make the digitized archival sources on the region more accessible to Indian and international audience, especially to the people of Kerala. The project would train students and researchers from India and the Netherlands, develop the existing digital Dutch- and English-language inventories, transcribe, translate, edit and publish selected sources from the archives. The project also would contribute to capacity building in India, especially by training Indian archivists and historians and related scholars in the use of these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources for the purpose of further research and heritage making and more particularly in the wider context of Indian Ocean studies.

In line with these initiatives, the Institute for Social Sciences, Humanities and Oceanic Research (I-SHORE) in collaboration with SEA: A Boiling Vessel organises a one-day training program for PhD students and early career scholars interested in the topic. The workshop aims to be a platform for the young researchers to understand the possibilities of using Dutch

archives and potential new directions they can take to explore Kerala's past. In this workshop, the participants from Kerala and India at large can study from, and interact with, some of the leading experts on the Dutch archives on South Asia and South India.

Prof. Jos Gommans would give an introduction to the *Cosmos Malabaricus* as well as to the source publication series, *Dutch Sources of South Asia* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers). Dr. Lennart Bes would introduce students to the intricacies of the VOC archives and strategies to use them efficiently. Dr. Binu John Mailaparambil would talk about his personal experience of learning Dutch while hailing from Kerala and eventually mastering the early modern language and palaeography and publishing a book on the basis of the VOC sources. All the three speakers would also guide the participants in using specific source materials despite or because of their linguistic, palaeographical and codicological complexities.

If you are interested, please send a motivation letter (2 pages), synopsis of your PhD (maximum 5 pages), CV, and contact details of two potential referees to ishorekerala@gmail.com before December 31, 2022 at 4 pm Indian Standard Time. Preference will be given to candidates who are already working on "the Dutch period" in South Asian history or who possess some knowledge of Dutch language and historical research. However, these are not mandatory. The selected participants should pay Rs. 1000 as registration fee, unless you do not have sufficient resources.