



Azim Premji University Faculty Seminar

Topic: Reflections on Urban Ecologies: Governance of Land, Water and Informal Settlements in Chennai

Speaker: Karen Coelho

Date: January 20, 2015 (Tuesday)

Time: 2.00 pm to 3:30 pm

Venue: 10th Floor Auditorium, Pixel A, (Azim Premji University)

About the Topic

This talk draws on research-in-progress on histories of working class settlements along the Buckingham Canal in Chennai. The study examines how Chennai's urban form, its living and livelihood spaces, and its ecologies have been shaped by working class settlements and mobilities, providing a counter-narrative to dominant histories of Madras that have sketched the city's formation from statist or elitist standpoints.

Chennai's Buckingham Canal, an 150-year old engineered waterway running down the length of the city, provides in many ways a metonymic lens on the city's character and processes of transformation. But the canal has its own history to tell, a long and chequered history of construction, maintenance, neglect, and destruction. It speaks eloquently of the legacies of engineering and governance of both urban nature and urban socio-economic opportunity in Chennai/Madras.

The talk will outline the trajectory of state interventions over time (along with its metrics and frames) on the canal and on the settlements along its banks. It will track shifts in the state's relations with urban land, nature and the poor, yielding insights into the ways that political, economic or "developmental" calculations and rationales have produced spatial and social outcomes along the canal. It will also draw on ethnographic material and oral histories to elucidate how informal settlers have claimed land along the canal and built homes, livelihoods, communities and mobilities in and across the city.

About the Speaker

Karen Coelho is an Assistant Professor at the Madras Institute of Development Studies in Chennai, where she focuses her research on urban governance and reforms, urban civil society and collective action, urban poverty, the informal sector and shelter policy. Dr.Coelho received her Ph.D. in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of Arizona, Tucson in 2004 and has since been the recipient of the Richard Carley Hunt Fellowship, awarded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and an Independent Fellowship with SARAI, a programme of the Center for Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. Her recent publications include a co-edited book in 2013 called *Participolis: Consent and Contention in Neoliberal Urban India*, and several articles in the EPW and other journals. She serves on the editorial advisory board of the EPW's Review of Urban Affairs.