

Water; narratives & parallel perception

The brief of *Idam- Parallel Narratives*, a multi-disciplinary workshop curated for architecture students.

“The grey winds, the cold winds are blowing
Where I go.
I hear the noise of many waters
Far below.
All day, all night, I hear them flowing
To and fro” - James Joyce

James Joyce, poetically expresses the relevance of water for the existence of life. Civilizations and settlements flourished along the waters that flowed. From genesis, human life and eco systems hold an indissoluble bond with water and still do. The city of Thiruvananthapuram, flourished along its waters. Its three rivers, lakes and the sea coast knitted a complex layer of human settlements over time. Its waters have played the role of boundaries, transit portals, nourished cultural idioms and sanctified the sacred entities. Since the Ays dynasty in the medieval period, this region has evolved with time to be the capital of a state. The waters that flow in and around this ancient city have been a mute witness to a continuous ebb and flow of human relations and perceptions.

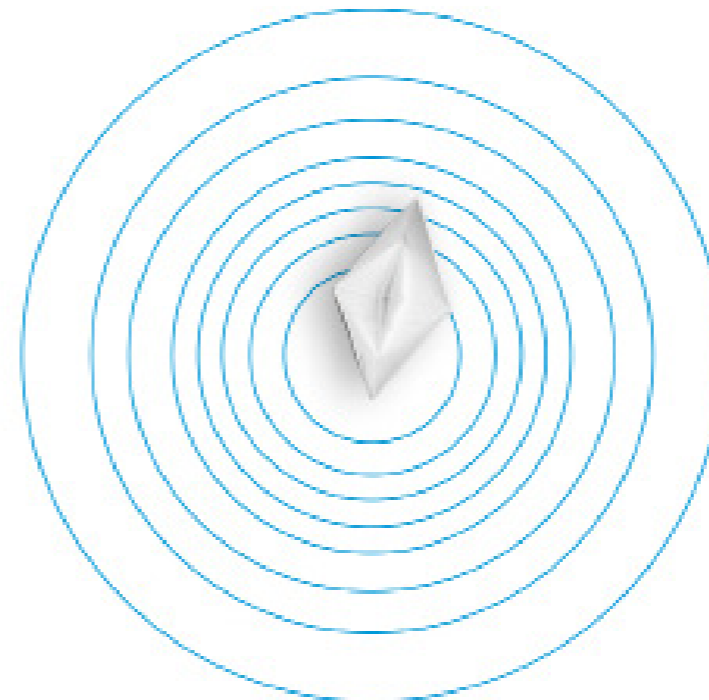
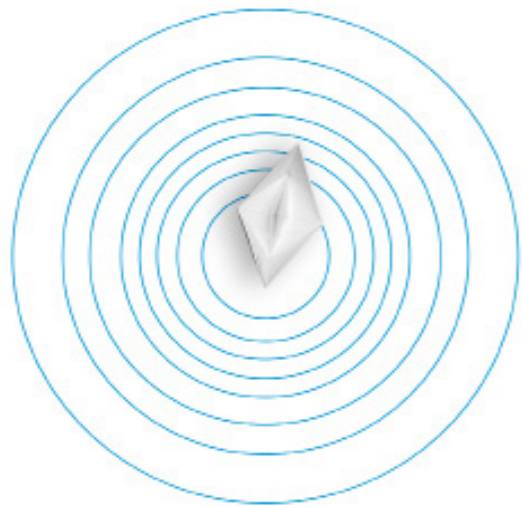
The perceptions about the city, Thiruvananthapuram, have always been in flux. Hence a singular narrative can never exist. Our ideas of ‘what a city is’, is linked to our perception of human relationships, its built landscape and water. Built over time, the city is a conglomerate of perceptions. Its relationship with its waters has seen changes over time. “ The city, however does not tell its past, it contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.” Italo Calvino, (*Invisible cities*). The artist, the writer, the historian, the resident, the traveler, the migrant would have their own narratives about what the city

and its waters mean to them. Here, its flowing waters have evoked narratives of love, memories and beauty as well as danger, death and deluge. Its waters have given rise to built spaces that possess unique sensory qualities with varied form, spatial organization and functional program.

The intent of this workshop is to decipher six narratives about the city of Thiruvananthapuram’s spatial relationship with its water. The six parallel narratives from six different disciplines would enhance our understanding of the role our water entities play with the perception of city.

This multidisciplinary engagement with spaces and water would generate six different representations/ tales /observations. The chosen disciplines- sociology, photography, theatre, literature, arts and animation have their own methodology, process and modes of representation of space. With a mentor from each of these disciplines, along with the assistance of an architect and a junior architect, students would explore the city of Thiruvananthapuram’s spatial relationship with its water. Six areas around water bodies within the city precinct have been selected for a deeper spatial insight.

1. Karamana river
2. Akkulam lake
3. Veli lake
4. Shanghumukham beach
5. Sree Varaham pond
6. Killi river

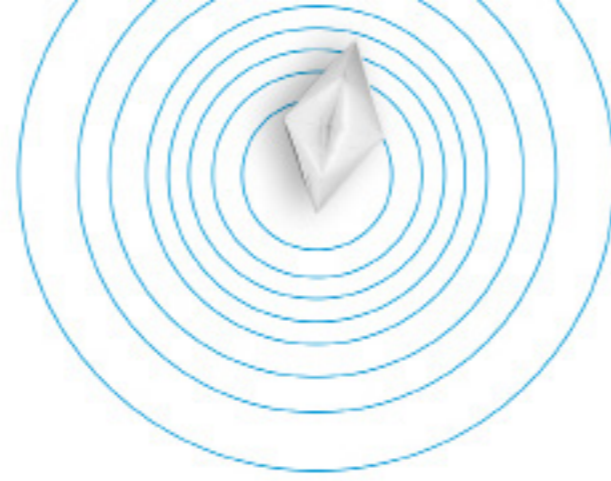


Karamana river along Brahmin street, Kar-
amana: The history of Trivandrum dates
back to a time when three rivers had to be
crossed to reach the city from Padmanab-
hapuram, the former capital. The city hav-
ing been outlined by waters in all cardinal
directions, the river Karamana demarcates
its eastern boundary, also influencing the
culture along its course. The Karamana Riv-
er being the most influential water body of
Trivandrum was once the city's front yard.

Shanghumugham: The beach Shanghu-
mugham adorns the city's western bound-
ary. It's a major public space for leisure
and reflection for the city dwellers. The be-
lief that the goddess abides near the sea
to protect the land is exemplified at the
Shanghumugham Devi temple, making
the beach equally religious in character.

Sreevaraham pond: The Sreevaraham pond
is part of The Sreevaraham Lakshmi Varaha
Temple, situated near to the famous Sree
Padmanabhaswamy Temple. Being one of
the largest temple ponds in the city, it plays
an important role in conservation of water.

Killi River along Puthenkotta Burial Grounds:
Killi River (also known as Killiyar) is a tributary
of the Karamana River which flows from the
more rural highlands outskirts of the city.
The Puthenkotta burial ground which is be-
lieved to be an aftermath of the curse of Rani
Umayamma is situated on a cliff on the banks
of Killi River. The relationship between death
and water and the present day contradicting
characteristics of the site is awe-striking.



One from the listed sites will be assigned to
each group, which can be visited on the first
day of the workshop. A brief reader for each
of these sites will be given to each group.
The perceptions about these waterscapes
and their myriad relationships with the city
are to be deciphered and explored. Inferenc-
es/ observations/ alternate narratives for the
selected site can be represented in a medi-
um best suited to the discipline. The intent is
to present six diverse yet parallel narratives
about the city's relationship with its waters. A
story, an installation, a painting, or drawings,
a design alternative, a short film, a street
play etc. can be the different tools for the rep-
resentation of the perceived idea, which will
be considered for discussion and debate.
Since the participants of the workshop are
students of architecture, an architectural ex-
pression of the idea shall also be presented.

