

# Urban Growth and Transformation of Port City – A Case of Kochi

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**Abstract** - In the year 1109 AD, the princely state of Cochin was established, marking the beginning of Kochi's historical journey. Over the centuries, Kochi has undergone significant metamorphosis and transformation, experiencing changes in its historical narrative, spatial layout, and environmental context. Particularly noteworthy is Fort Kochi, characterized by its charming ambience and colonial buildings that vividly narrate the tales of centuries-old cultural and commercial interactions with Western colonial powers. This area has left a lasting impression, contributing to Kochi's identity as the commercial capital of Kerala.

Studying Kochi becomes a means to comprehend the city's growth patterns and its physical expansion over time. The evolution of Kochi reflects not only its historical roots but also the dynamic shifts in its spatial and environmental dynamics, providing insights into the multifaceted development of this significant urban centre. Fuelled by rapid urbanization and an influx of entrepreneurs, Kochi has emerged as the thriving commercial epicentre of Kerala.

**Key Words:** Kochi, Periyar River, Urbanization, Cosmopolitan Industrial Parks, Economic Landscape

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cochin derived its name from the small Kochu branch of the Periyar River, which converges with the sea mouth of the Vembinad estuary. Geographically positioned between the Western Ghats to the east and the Arabian Sea to the west, the city has long been an alluring destination for travelers, traders, and seafarers. As the commercial capital of the region, Kochi stands out as one of the largest harbor cities, renowned for its role as a significant spice-trading hub. Distinguished among Indian cities, Kochi boasts connectivity to other parts through major transportation modes, including road, rail, air, and water. This strategic positioning has contributed to Kochi's reputation as a vital and accessible center for trade and commerce.



Figure -1 Location Map of Kochi

## 2. HISTORY

The natural harbor of Kochi owes its existence to a monumental flood in 1341, shaping the course of the city's evolution. Formerly known as Cochin, this port city has a vibrant and diverse history, serving as a crucial trading hub in ancient times. Traders gradually gravitated towards the natural harbor formed after the floods, fostering increased commerce with Chinese and Arab traders over the years. In the 16th century, the Portuguese established a fort, now declared a heritage zone to safeguard numerous historic structures.

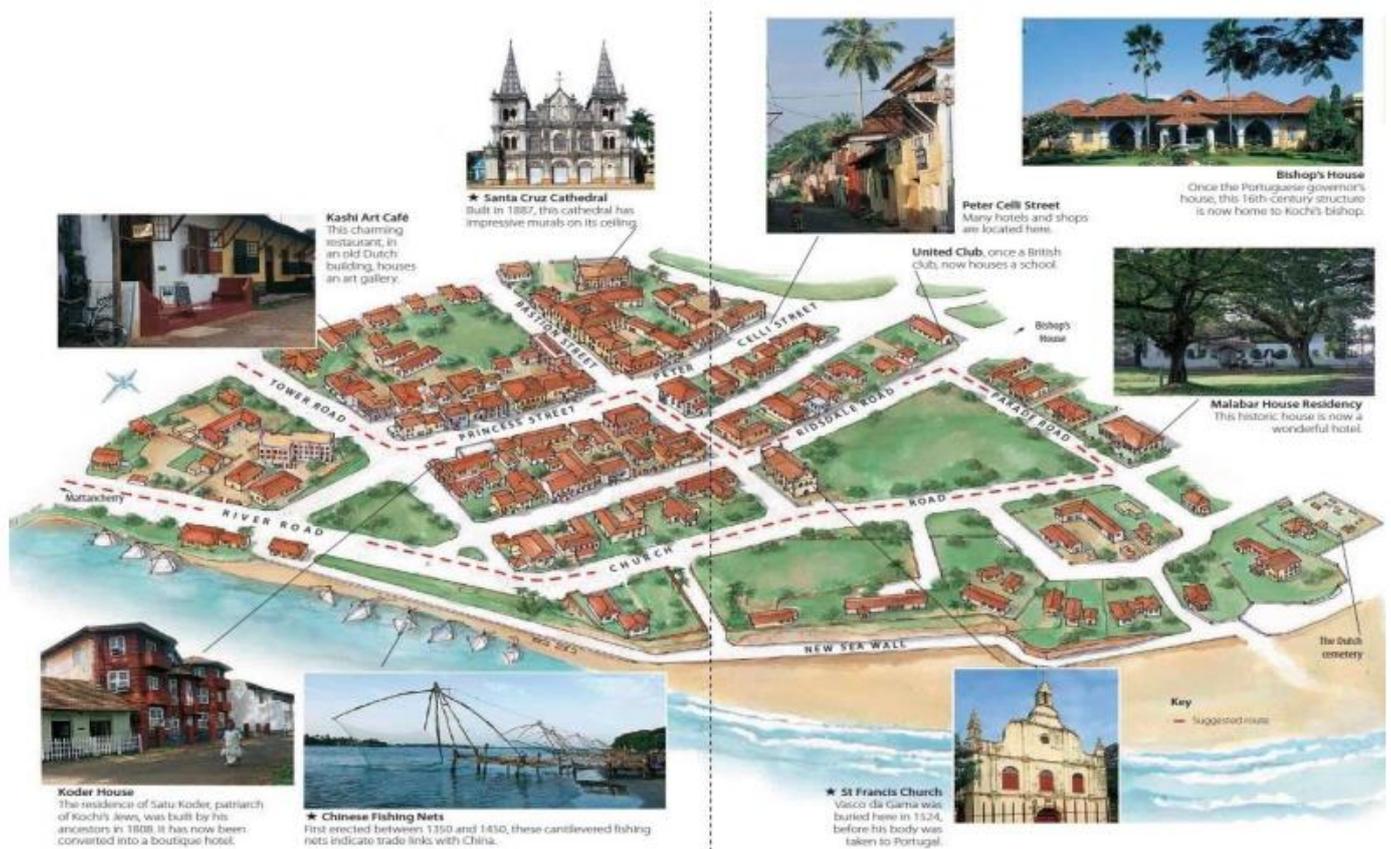
The term "Kochi" typically encompasses Fort Kochi, Mattanchery, mainland Ernakulam, northeast suburbs (Edapally, Kalamassery, and Kakkanad), and the southeast suburb of Tripunithura, along with a cluster of islands in Lake Vembanad.

Fort Kochi exudes a charming atmosphere with colonial buildings narrating tales of centuries-old cultural and commercial interactions with Western colonial powers. Its history unfolds a captivating narrative of invasions and influences, with the Portuguese in 1500, the Dutch in 1663, and the British in the 18th century leaving enduring imprints on the region. The grace and antiquity of Fort Kochi are attributed to its venerable buildings and places of worship, each bearing witness to the deep-seated colonial impact on the city's geography and culture.



Fig -2: Plan of Kochi, 1341

Fort Kochi has a quaint ambience and the colonial buildings, telling the tales of centuries old cultural and commercial interaction with the colonial powers of the West, makes a big impression



**-3: Fort Kochi**

The captivating history of Fort Kochi unfolds as various European powers, including the Portuguese in 1500, the Dutch in 1663, and the British in the 18th century, engaged in a complex interplay of invasion, control, looting, and simultaneous enrichment of the locale. The enduring charm and vintage ambiance of Fort Kochi find their roots in the ancient buildings and places of worship that grace the area. Throughout its historical timeline, Fort Kochi witnessed the prolonged presence of three colonial powers, each leaving an indelible mark on the geography and culture of the region, while also making noteworthy contributions to the realms of art and architecture. It is through the aged structures that the profound influence of colonial history becomes most apparent in Fort Kochi.

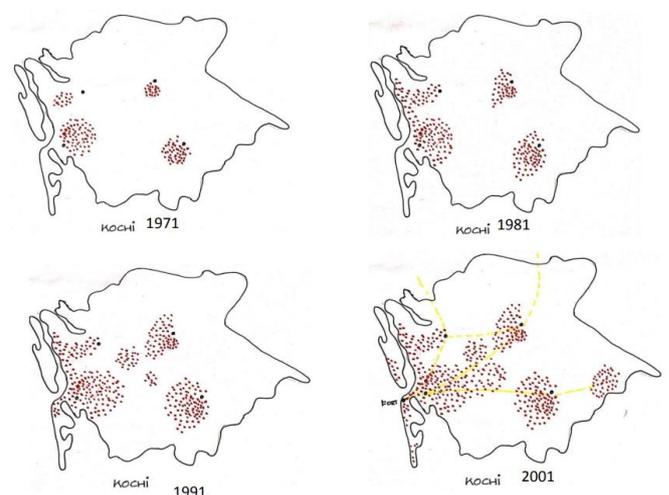
**3. EVOLUTION AS PIVOTAL PORT CITY**

Until the 14th century, Kochi existed as a modest village, relatively secluded from external influences. The city's trajectory towards becoming a significant port is attributed to the transformative flood in the Periyar River in 1341, altering its fate. Historically, Mahodayapuram, centered around the port of Muziris, held prominence as the trade hub. However, the aftermath of the flood saw traders gradually shifting their focus towards the natural harbor formed in the Kochi region. By the year 1440, Kochi expanded its boundaries to encompass an approximate circumference of five miles around Mattancherry. This expansion marked the burgeoning trade ties with Chinese and Arab merchants over the ensuing years.

Situated along the Arabian Sea, Kochi's port facilitated increased commerce with both Chinese and Arab entities, contributing to the city's economic and cultural evolution. The

presence of migrant communities, including Jews, Konkans, and Kutchi Muslims, further enriched Kochi's cosmopolitan ambiance. This diversity is evident in the coexistence of churches, Agraharams, mosques, a synagogue, and colonial-era buildings, reflecting a vibrant historical and harmonious present.

Once confined to a small area between Lake Vembanad and Chittoor Road, Ernakulam underwent remarkable growth in size and development. The metamorphosis from a sleepy town, previously the royal capital hosting the Durbar Hall for the king's cabinet, into a bustling metropolis was swift and astonishing. With the rapid pace of urbanization and an influx of businessmen, Kochi has now emerged as the bustling commercial hub of Kerala, embodying a dynamic blend of rich history and contemporary development.



**Fig -4: Growth pattern of Kochi**

Kochi has positioned itself as one of the rapidly advancing second-tier metropolises, experiencing notable progress through the establishment of industrial parks. Over the last ten years, the city has undergone transformative changes fueled by urbanization and the influx of various industries, resulting in a significant upswing in construction and real estate activities. These industrial parks, characterized by state-of-the-art facilities, cater comprehensively to a spectrum of sectors including IT, tourism, engineering, garment production, food processing, and rubber manufacturing.

The peripheral areas of the city, in conjunction with major industrial suburbs, have seen an unprecedented surge in growth, contributing significantly to the overall urbanization of the coastal region. This exponential expansion signifies Kochi's dynamic economic landscape and its proactive role in fostering diverse industrial sectors. The city's strategic focus on creating modern infrastructural hubs aligns with its vision for a multifaceted and robust industrial ecosystem, enhancing its stature as a flourishing urban center on the ascent.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Kochi's strategic positioning along the vast Arabian Sea has been instrumental in fostering connections with nations across Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. This maritime connectivity has positioned the port and the city as a pivotal center for trade and commerce, opening avenues for emerging tourist activities like cruise tourism and yachting. The establishment of the International Marina stands testament to Kochi's proactive approach in exploring the potential of these evolving tourism trends.

The advent of 'globalization at the sea' has propelled cruise tourism to the forefront, and Kochi has adeptly capitalized on the economic opportunities presented by this burgeoning market. To meet the demands of this industry, cruise terminal facilities have been established, ensuring the seamless docking of cruise ships and providing comfortable accommodations for tourists.

Looking ahead, Kochi is poised to witness a surge in the construction of apartments and flats, reflecting the present trajectory. The return of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) populations has generated substantial demand for residential spaces. Simultaneously, executives from within the state and other parts of the country are eager to establish their presence in Kerala's most vibrant and thriving locale. This dual demand is likely to fuel a significant increase in real estate development, further solidifying Kochi's status as a dynamic urban hub with a promising future.

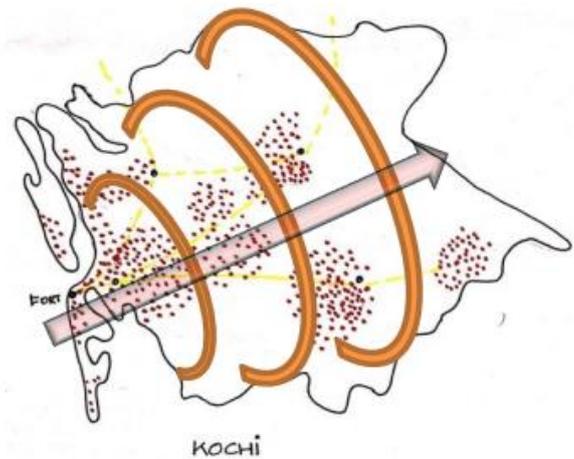


Fig -5: Urban growth is perpendicular to the sea

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to convey my sincere appreciation to my Parents for their unwavering support, my Co-author for their valuable contribution, and The Director for their encouragement throughout this endeavor. Gratitude extends to my students and cherished friends whose unwavering support and inspiration fueled the research. The collective contributions of each individual, along with their belief in me, are deeply acknowledged. Your encouragement has been instrumental, and I am profoundly grateful for the collaborative effort and shared commitment that made this journey possible.

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