

Contested knowledge: science, media, and democracy in Kerala

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Abstrak

Contested Knowledge argues that the structural coupling between science and media in the context of risk politics has led to the creation of a scientific public sphere in the state of Kerala, India, and regional newspapers have become the most prominent site of public deliberation over science since the late 1990s. This new form of public engagement with science radically differed from its earlier form nurtured by the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP), the largest peoples science movement in India. The book discusses this shift and the resultant transformations of the scientific-citizen public of Kerala by examining three public controversies over science deliberated in the regional dailies in the early 2000s. Public deliberations during the controversies over clinical trials in the Regional Cancer Centre (RCC), Thiruvananthapuram, a series of micro-earthquakes and well collapses, and the strange phenomenon of coloured rain are analysed to understand how risks were perceived, knowledge claims were contested, disciplinary rigidities were dismantled and trust in science and the credibility of scientific institutions were re-negotiated. The book thus explores how the public contestation of knowledge staged by the mass media contributes to deepening democracy by re-instilling politics into science. Democratization of science under the agency of the scientific-citizen publics, the book suggests, is nonetheless limited as it fails to account for alternative forms of engagement offered by multiple publics. The book contends that the theory of deliberative democracy is inadequate to capture the multiplicity of public engagement with science.