In Kochi, one of the fastest growing cities in the Indian state of Kerala, public perceptions of the superiority of municipally supplied water fuels a widespread preference for the centralized system. This piped water, transported via lengthy networks, is quickly supplanting longstanding decentralized models of water management with the result that sustainable water practices are disappearing just when environmentalists claim that they are most needed to offset periodic droughts and the demands of a growing population. This talk argues that behind the demand driven shift to a centralized water system is a politics of water quality, or a quality politics, that plays a significant role in the transformation of Kochi’s water supply system. As is further argued, this quality politics is a chief driver of the urban political ecology of water management in cities such as Kochi because it significantly influences how people value urban infrastructures. By drawing on over 50 semi-structured interviews and 3 months of ethnographic fieldwork, my study demonstrates that residents who formerly recharged and used well water now claim that such groundwater is saline, contaminated by septic discharge, and altogether too “dirty” for direct consumption. This leads to the slow erosion of urban recharge wells; as their social value is lost, they are being paved over with potentially grave consequences for the groundwater supply. Municipally supplied “corporation” water, as it is commonly called, is contrastingly praised as a cleaner and purer option. This perception, however, is not substantiated by several water quality reports; bacteria, trace metals, and chemicals have been observed, revealing public health concerns. To show pathways towards a more sustainable means of development, this talk adds to the existing scholarship by highlighting the efforts of water activists who are working to revive well water recharge and straight-to-tank rainwater harvesting practices within the city while re-educating others about the value of such infrastructures. Their work offers an increasingly prominent counterweight to the quality politics that are leading to the transformation of Kochi’s water supply, and to the sustainability of the urban water system. These insights are relevant to the theme of Water, Sanitation, and Health.