Conclusion

This dissertation is on a period recent enough, a past nevertheless for many reasons. The migration to the countries of the Persian Gulf has altered the landscape of Malabar and has made the days of privation a distant memory for many. In the period that followed CH Muhammad Koya's demise Muslim League has made even more gains in the electoral scene under the spiritual leadership of Sayyid Mohammedali Shihab Tangal (1936-2009) with Kunhalikutty (1951-) as its most visible leader. Currently it holds an unprecedented 20 seats in the Kerala Legislative Assembly, its second best being 19 seats which it could secure in 1991. However, while the Muslim politics in Malabar had always been centred around the Muslim League, with breakaway factions adopting a name which would sound almost similar, the latest of them being Indian National League (which broke away from the parent body protesting the continued alliance with Congress after the demolition of Babari Masjid); the last decade has seen Muslim politics adopting newer names – names that signify the broad trends of minority politics on a pan-Indian level. Thus Solidarity Youth Movement, an organization which draws its bulk from among the Muslims, has aligned itself with ecological causes and localised protests mainly for environmental justice. The Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), another organization which enjoys visibility in Malabar, has been advocating a broad alliance of the oppressed, primarily a Dalit-Muslim alliance. In terms of electoral performance these organizations pose no threat to the League and have found themselves fighting for a distant fourth place. However, the success of these parties
has been in forming a pressure group on Muslim League in matters of policy, often regarding the fate and fortunes of the Muslim population.

Malappuram district too lives on in absolute geography as well as metaphors of belonging. The district finds itself expressed through the metonymies of Muslim, football, and “KL 10” (Vehicle registration code formerly used to denote vehicles registered in the district). There have been demands made by SDPI to partition the district into two, though as of now the demand cannot be said to have transformed into a popular movement. The last few years have seen an increased visibility for the category of Malabar as a specific geographic location. There have been discussions at least in some quarters on the discrimination the region faces as opposed to Travancore-Cochin. “Forum for Malabar Rights” brought out a document recently which highlights the infrastructural and cultural marginalization the region faces (Kunnakkavu, 2013). There is a hint of a suggestion for a separate state, like and especially in the wake of Telangana. The case for a separate state has been, again, suggested, in “Malabar Rajyam”, a visual documentary on the discrimination faced by the people of Malabar from the Kerala government, produced by Solidarity Youth Movement.

In the 1980s Basheer turned to a phase of memoirs, putting his own stories in context and recounting tales of youth, a trend that was initiated in 1973 with Ormayude Arakal. Basheer was, to borrow from Calvino, showing the world how he turned the whole universe of his travels into icons spilled across his stories, and was turning himself into an icon.

This dissertation has argued that any conception of minor cosmopolitanism has to necessarily take into account the asymmetry of the power relations between the two entities, the minor, or the stranger, and the state. In Kant this asymmetry was overcome by its premise that every individual necessarily belongs to a state. In the postcolonial situation a
minor subject finds himself an object of the nation, that is, it is on him that the nation should perform its self-legitimation. This performance has taken the form of pedagogy in which the particular is sought to be assimilated. At the same time, the minor subject in India also finds herself able to articulate a cultural difference. Both the assertion of cultural self as well as the pedagogy are instruments of governmentality which insists on the cultural difference as an artefact rather than have any real influence on the matters of the state. Assimilation of the minor subject would require relinquishing one’s identity altogether for the universality of citizenship or maintaining oneself as a receptor of governmental policies. This requires the minor subject to rearticulate her cultural distinctness as part of the nation itself, contributing to its history, diversity. The other option for the minor subject is to seek sovereignty. Neither of these options allow the minor subject to imagine herself except in the national frames.

I have defined minor cosmopolitanism as the bid on the part of the minor subject to a claim on the past that would express itself in languages other than that of nationalism. I have read these expressions as a response of the minor subject to the injunctions of either separatism or assimilation.

I have shown, through a reading of selected works from Vaikom Muhammad Basheer’s oeuvre, that Basheer expresses the melancholy of a lost community by incorporating the lost voice of history into the narratorial voice, such that the memories of the characters are transformed into the memories of the narrator. The cyclical structure of Basheer’s reform narratives supports such a reading. While the loss gives way to silence in the character, it begins the story for the narrator. I read the Sthalam narratives as Basheer’s decisive action in which the lost object is finally mourned, put to rest in a place. The
Sthalam narratives offer an alternate vision of a nation, one in which communities are formed of action rather than natal affiliations. The Sthalam narratives deploy the programmatic citizenship as a matter of masquerade. By projecting a community of marginal characters, Basheer undoes the hinge of pedagogy that characterises the performance of the postcolonial nation vis-à-vis its population.

CH Muhammad Koya has sought to respond to the postcolonial state by conflating religion and state. His writings seem to suggest his belief in the applicability of the Islamic utopia to the postcolony. CH Muhammad Koya belongs to a party, the Muslim League, which has found itself in the defensive for its role in the partition of India. However, one does not see in CH Muhammad Koya’s writings a melancholy for the lost Islamic state, but rather an effort to translate that loss into conscious action. What we have in the formation of Malappuram district is a forceful redirection of object cathexes, the finding of a new object of love. Malappuram is not a stand-in for an earlier community, but a new object onto which the earlier bond is transferred to, even condensed. One does not see in the district the shadow of a lost community of Muslims, but a new community concretized in space which deserves as much love. CH Muhammad Koya’s writing on the Muslim history of India is seen to fashion a Muslim self who can be the subject rather than the object of governmentality. Rather than opt for statehood or intensify one’s cultural homogeneity, CH Muhammad Koya’s response is to project individual action within the terms set by governmentality.

We have seen in our study cases in which the politics of dignity, when faced with the inevitability of the choice between sovereignty and governmentality, translates itself into the terms offered by the latter. Both these translations involve losses. While the losses in
choosing the path to statehood have been pointed out — losses of fuzzy identities, orality, heterogeneity, etc., my study focusses on the loss in the translation to governmentality — a language to speak about the past — and the ways in which the minor subject has sought to overcome this. Both CH Muhammad Koya and Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, two exemplary figures of the Muslim community in Malabar (and Kerala), have endeavoured to imagine communities in quite different ways. In CH the inability to speak about the past was overcome by narrating a past of governmentality. In Basheer it was by imagining a country of masquerades which dissolved the binaries to an unending and equivalent series of identities of performing the nation. CH tried to fashion a self which sees itself fit to govern, while Basheer tried to do away with any qualification that would be deemed necessary to govern.