
ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study on minor cosmopolitanisms. It has taken for its site the region of Malabar and its period as extending from 1947, when India attained Independence, to 1977. It has focussed on the works of two exemplary figures, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1908-94) and CH Muhammad Koya (1928-83), and analysed them to obtain the modes of negotiation in which the newly emerged nation-state was made meaningful. I argue that this meaning-making was a cosmopolitan task which required both drawing the boundaries of the new dispensation as well as traversing it for resources that can afford novel communities. The focus here is on the responses of the Muslim/minor exemplary figure to the newer options of governmentality and sovereignty as obtained in the postcolonial situation.

The dissertation consists of five chapters of which the first is an introduction situating the study as well as mapping out its structure. The second chapter focuses exclusively on attempting a survey of the debates on cosmopolitanism and extends the discussion to arrive at a possible cosmopolitanism for the postcolonial condition. Chapters 3 and 4 are analysis chapters, and is followed by Conclusion.

'Minor cosmopolitanism' performs a double operation in this thesis. Firstly it brings out the minor nature of any cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is generally understood to
be a condition of non-constraint of culture or nationhood. Yet every version of cosmopolitanism is obtained under concrete historical circumstances including that of particular intellectual histories. Secondly, ‘minor cosmopolitanism’ also seeks to reveal the power operations which attests certain traditions of existence universal while casting others outside the register of ‘proper’ articulation. These other ways of existence are marked by their oppositional nature to the hegemonic. The ‘minor’ here becomes a mark of hypervisibility.

The dissertation progresses along the two tropes of mourning and mimicry. The term ‘mourning’ is owed to Sigmund Freud’s study on “Mourning and Melancholia” where mourning suggests the successful riddance of a dead (metaphorically or otherwise) person (or, the other) while melancholia signals the continued existence of the other in the self. I have used “impossibility of mourning” to suggest the ways of coming to terms with loss in the absence of any set precedence, where impossibility suggests a moment of sovereign decision where the present could be rearticulated as to impinge on the past. The aporistic quality as well its resolution by sovereign decision is informed by Jacques Derrida use of the term ‘impossibility’.

The concept of mimicry is employed by Jacques Lacan in his elaboration on gaze. The term consists in its performativity the dimension of travesty, camouflage and intimidation.

In the “Introduction” I indicate the historical changes in the political structure of Malabar and the need to study these changes as they were negotiated in the domain of culture. Malabar as an entity emerges as a distinct political geography when it was ceded to the British by Tipu Sultan in 1792. However the term Malabar is also indicative of the long
history of trade and other associations which the region had with other regions along the Indian ocean rim. The region is intricately connected to the Indian ocean rim, wedded to the common fate of the early Portuguese and Dutch explorations and attendant strife. Malabar acquired geographical fixity as a district in the Presidency of Malabar as part of British India. The region acquired political visibility in the annals of the Empire as a hotbed of Muslim fanaticism and agrarian strife, reaching a flashpoint in the Malabar Mappila rebellion of 1921. The region formed the major chunk of the proposed Moplastan in 1947. As part of independent India, and subsequent to the demand for linguistic states, Malabar was joined with the other Malayalam speaking regions of Cochin and Travancore to form the state of Kerala in 1956. These changes were shifting the concrete realities of the people of Malabar and the ramifications and concomitance of these definitions of the political self require study.

The thesis has undertaken to study the works of two exemplary personalities, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1908-1994) and CH Muhammad Koya (1928-1983) towards this end. Vaikom Muhammad Basheer is the most iconic of Muslim writers in Kerala and arguably of Malayali writers whose best work has been the narration, in refractions, of various episodes of his life itself. A settler in Malabar from the late ‘50s, Basheer’s led an early life of wanderings. CH Muhammad Koya is better known as the leading light of the Muslim League in Kerala who led the party to its most spectacular achievements. CH Muhammad Koya was also an exemplary writer conveying newer worlds to a defined audience. His speeches and writings continue to be cherished and thus present an excellent material for analysis of contemporary culture.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to surveying the various theories of cosmopolitanism. The term cosmopolitanism, though current in philosophy ever since the Greeks, attains a
normative condition in Immanuel Kant. Kant’s cosmopolitan right is the third among the
eights he deems essential for a peaceful world. Kant’s third right, the cosmopolitan right,
governs the relations between the state and the citizen of another state. The sole right that the
stranger has is to be treated with hospitality. The premise of the Kantian cosmopolitanism is
that the stranger too does belong to a state. In Kantian teleology, state is a condition arising
out of property regulations. These premises point towards the necessarily bound character of
Kantian cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, in the modern day when the modality of nation-
state is universal, Kantian cosmopolitan right has found its relevance. One of these is the
claim that Kantian cosmopolitanism calls for a universal settlement of property such that
there is no outside to the nation-state form and that every individual necessarily belongs to a
state.

The conditions as obtained in the real world however require other interpretations of
the Kantian theory as asylum seekers, stateless persons, refugees, etc. are contemporary facts.
The neo-Kantians insist on the need and efficacy of law making to solve the condition of
statelessness in the world. In their lexicography cosmopolitanism suggest a move on the
part of those who can for those who cannot. In other words, cosmopolitanism is imbued with
morality for neo-Kantians who see it as a transcendence of one’s own particular social
location. The catchword here is solidarity.

The institutional nature of the neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism has drawn criticism from
those who would rather see repressive structures in the state. While solidarity still remains
the solution, the state has to be kept out of the picture and solidarities formed among
different movements for justice among disparate parts of the world. This new
cosmopolitanism has been termed “cosmopolitics”. The advocates of this position argue that
the necessarily exclusive nature of any definition impede any hope for an all-inclusive universality. Cosmopolitics has been a position first enunciated by Derrida, who, noting that the conditions specified by Kant are as yet unobtainable in Europe, turns to ethics via Emmanuel Levinas. The Levinasian concept of hospitality in which the self meets an Infinite Other, infinite and therefore undefinable Other, is transposed by Derrida to the real world of sans papiers, asylum seekers and economic migrants. Derrida sees the necessity of a rule of law to put into practice the practice of hospitality. Nevertheless, the law has to be decisionistic and not formulaic, for each stranger and situation is unique, and require unique solutions. The Levinasian ethics is a formulation of the world in which, contrary to Kant, forgiveness and not mutual antagonism is the primal condition of human existence. The cosmopolitics version of cosmopolitanism insists on the move away from juridico-legal formula and advocates a politics of singularities.

Derrida has brought forth the necessarily minor nature of Kantian cosmopolitanism. Kantian cosmopolitanism was not only shown to be premised on a particular understanding of human civilization, but also as a condition unobtainable in real terms. However, the mutuality involved in the Derridean (and Levinasian) forgiveness (and through it their concept of hospitality) undercuts its efficacy in that it does not pay heed to the unequal power relations between the two participants. At the same time, the notion of decision conveys the sense of uniqueness of contexts in which laws will have to be enacted. Psychoanalysis provides a framework in which these drawbacks of cosmopolitics could be addressed. Psychoanalysis points out the asymmetric nature of subject formation in which the yet-to-be subject is subjected to the specular regime. The decisionism involved in Derrida gives way in psychoanalysis to “pure act”. Pure act is however allied more with Kant’s categorical imperative. The singularity of the individual is his desire. The pure ethical act can be an act
of desire as well as an act of law (in the Kantian sense) in that desire itself can be law, since both of them are done for its own sake. The psychoanalysis' defence of Kant is therefore that Law need not be antagonistic to particularity, and that Kantian categorical imperative does not specify what to do, but only how to do. The acting subject has within him that which can reconfigure himself through the act, a transcendental substance that survive the change in law. Cosmopolitanism in psychoanalysis is this ability of discernment in the movement which can translate a particularity to universality, a condition which allows itself to mark its boundaries and not be subsumed by the universal. Cosmopolitanism in psychoanalysis is thus ironically an ability to occupy the empty universality in which the particularity of available claims to universalities can be exposed. It is not an act of erasure of particularities, but of marking them. This notion is particularly useful for our thesis for its suggestion of transformations in universalities and that of the fragmented social as is obtained in the postcolonial state under which particular communities can reconfigure politics in the pursuit of an ideal.

Chapter 3 engages with the works of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer. The endeavour of the chapter is to read these works for a minor critique of nationalism and suggestions of possible transcendence emanating from a grounding in the idea of nationalism itself. The key concept on which the works are investigated is that of realism.

Right from its advent to the contemporary period, realism has been associated with programmatic literature, one which can represent the present in its totality and can consolidate or transform it. Realism in India owes itself to the English novels of the nineteenth century. The project of realism has been closely allied with that of reformation. In the postcolonial context, realism drew the boundaries between the reformer and the
reformed within the state, the latter often belonging to the deprived classes and minorities. Realism performed the nation for the masses who had to be initiated into it. It is to this intellectual climate that Basheer made his entry. Basheer made himself visible as a minor writer in that he introduced a new style of writing infused with the demotic tongue, and introduced a new geography from within it into the Malayalam literature – that of the Muslim home. Basheer's own statements reveal his intention to perform the community for a literature which has either kept it out or represented it in poor light. The rest of the chapter is an investigation as to how this minority characteristic of his writing impinged on his use of realism and its implications on the performance of the nation.

As part of the analysis, the chapter first undertakes a reading of the two reform novels written by Basheer, Balyakalasakhi (1944) and 'Nuppuppakkoranandarnnu (1951). A structural analysis of the two novels reveals their isomorphic features. The cyclical nature of these two novels, in which the "I" of enunciation gives way to a collective enunciation in the end, is also shown to retrospectively lodge the collectivity within the singularity if the cyclical structure is allowed to fold back on its own in its logic of progression. This displacement suggests the impossibility of mourning. The author occupies the subject position of the 'unaltering' cosmos from which the changes cannot be mourned either for its triviality or because of the lack of terms that could describe the loss, which then has to be expressed in silence and stutter.

In the next section of the chapter, Basheer's Sthalam narratives, a collection of novellas and short stories are analysed to indicate the definitive resolution of the mourning of the lost community. The farcical nature of Basheer's sthalam (place) is shown to be a critique of the binaries which realism effected as a rhetorical strategy. The place is populated
by characters marked for their peculiarity, criminality, and liminality. The place however has the trappings of a nation, with its glorious past, its relics, its rhetoric of “one people”, and its other – the intruder/foreigner. Its position in the world history is assured in its lexicography. Yet the functions of this nation are drawn out to be acts of impersonation, an exercise in trickery to keep oneself out of the scopic drive of the law. Citizenship is thus presented as an act of mimicry, performing a doubling of existence, such that the reformer and the to-be-reformed coalesce into the same, each nullifying the other. What ensues is the absence of an internal other which lends consistency to the project of citizenship. The lack of a principle of organization of the actions in The Place, its randomness, its riotous pomposity in its paper-thinness, is therefore an inversion of the problematic in which postcolonial nation-state was conceived of. Rather than becoming an abstraction, the citizen was itself the result of another zone of actions, a zone in which personal relations offered simultaneity of actions and communal identification. The minor here is non-existent not because he ceases to be the particular, but because it is only the particular which exists.

The Basheerian style of the Sthalam narratives invites us to think beyond the success or defeat of the different discordant discourses within a text. It is, on the other hand, a questioning of the gaze of judgement itself. Its strength is in its distanciation, in its abstinence from performing through its style a position to look from. The narrator and the narrated fuse and repel. It is the inability to be subsumed that characterises this politics. Basheer’s Sthalam utopia can be seen as the resolution of the question of lost community, the stutters and silences giving way to the eloquence of multiple particularities.

In Chapter 4 we focus on the works of CH Muhammad Koya, juxtaposing it with the political transformations of that period in which CH Muhammad Koya’s party played a
major role. The first work analysed in this chapter is a travel writing *Ente Hajj Yatra* (1959), a book immensely popular and important for its generic innovation.

Travel writings have been implicated in building the rhetorical ammunition for a cognitive mapping of the regions of the empire. Colonialism deems certain cultures travelling and certain others to be travelled to. Travel writings effect a hierarchy of positions in which the travelling self is the knowing subject. However, the assertion of a travelling self can also be an act of resistance on the part of the postcolonial subject. CH Muhammad Koya occupies a variety of enunciatory positions in his travel writing such that the transcendence of the postcolonial subject who hails from unprivileged background is asserted. The assertion of the garb of the transcendental traveller is to recover the category of the individual, thus escaping the communal logic of consensus. It is an enactment of selfhood. At the same time the pilgrimage also involves another layer of meeting with the Infinite Other. The transcendental I and the Infinite Other are in a dialectical relationship the effect of which is laid out for politics of the world rather than spirituality.

The Islamic utopia, where concepts could align with territories and people, is a past utopia. The journey to utopia is a journey to the past, at once one's own, but also never attainable. The past has to be lived through, but the past refuses to vacate itslodgings. Mourning gives way to its impossibility; and seeks decision. In the specific context of CH Muhammad Koya, this aporia is resolved through the decision of concretization of memories. Travelling is shown to be a resolution of the impossibility of mourning in two different ways, that it involves a sovereign decision of translating the face-to-face with the Other into real terms, and that it involves a concretization of spaces of historical memory such that the past can give way to the new. In this resolution, CH Muhammad Koya jettisons the market idea of religiosity, with its image of scale, for radical ethics.
The indeterminacy of CH's utopia has to be refracted through other metaphors. Juxtaposed with the concretization of Makkah as an absolute space on the map, is read the formation of Malappuram district in Kerala, in which historical memory had to be translated into a language of governmentality. Within the legislative assembly one could clearly see the hegemony of the language of postcolonial state as it has constituted itself — that any pre-existing cultural solidarity should express itself in a language of economy; that any problem could pose itself only insofar as it can articulate an economic solution to that problem.

In the last section of Chapter 4, two works by CH Muhammad Koya, *Mughal Bhranakaalam Kathakaliloode* and *Nabiyum Sahabimaarum* is analysed and shown to fashion a sovereign self. The fractional nature of the polity in Kerala gives way to a peculiar form of coalitional politics where numerical minorities enjoyed an ambiguous relation to power, one which did not necessarily keep them out of power. CH Muhammad Koya's works under discussion are shown to engender an impersonating self, a self which subjects governmentality to a logic of sovereignty, functioning within an alternative universality resulting from the logic of difference in which individual upkeep was accorded key importance.

Chapter 4 is followed by Conclusion.