Camões, the harbinger of national calamities

Aware of the Portuguese decline looming on the horizon, poet Luís de Camões transmitted a message of hope and appealed to the past glory as repeatable.

Edward Lourenço, the celebrated essayist, Sao nichlpent of Luso-Brazilian Camões Award in 1996, despite or because he wrote in his book O Labirinto da Saudade (1990) that the poem of Camaões was a fiction, a sed epic, a symphony and a requiem at the same time. Camões and his contemporary, friend and admirer, Diogo do Couto, chronicler and the first archivist of Portuguese India, were fully aware of the Portuguese decline looming on the horizon.

Both had sensed it much before the Portuguese could put the blame for the decline upon the Spanish occupation of Portugal. But each of them had his own way of seeking a solution for averting the national disaster. While Camões transmitted a message of hope and appealed to the past glory as repeatable, Couto was a pessimist, and saw no way out of the cancer of corruption that threatened with an impeding doom.

The Goan freedom fighters blew up the larger than life size statue of Camões in the neighbourhood of the See Cathedral of Goa when the Portuguese were commemorating the Fourth centenary of his death. It was not for the first time that Camões must have felt unwanted in Goa. If he decided to return to his country, that was probably motivated by his fear that his lewih background and his friendship with Garcia da Orta had made him a likely target of the Inquisition. Garcia da Orta had published his Coologia in Goa in 1563, and it carried the first published ode of Camões. Ota died in 1568 and the Inquisition burned his works in 1596. Later they exhumed his bones and buried them. In the meanwhile, Camões had curved away, Landeg White, an Englishman based in Madr (Portugal) since 1994, has translated The Lusiads into English, and was the national bard of Portuguese Discoveries. The plan included, among other things, placing a monument for Luis Vaz Camões, as a consecrated cultural symbol who had personal links with Goa and was the national bard of Portuguese Discoveries, historically, Camões turned out to be once again a harbinger of national disaster, expressed this time the Indian occupation of the Estado da India, unlikely to end with another “Restauracao.”

By way of an epilogue to this brief essay, I wish to call attention of my readers to an impressive recent publication by a Goan, Arvind Amre, a well-produced book entitled “O vaticinio do swarga (o que ‘Os Lusiadas’ significam?)” (2015). He seeks to situate the poetic style of Camões in Portuguese, but in six Cantos, which he seeks to supplement and compensate for the Lusitanio lies, bringing up-to-date the Portuguese imperial epics.

The canto of Arvind Amre, a retired professor of philology, resort to the rich Hindu mythology, which he found missing in the Lusitanio. The book appeals to a new poetic cultural encounter in his last canto of Hope (Camões discovered, pp 97-110) in which both Portugal and Goa can pursue their noble aspirations with mutual good wishes, buttressed by their respective cultural traditions. A production like this in Portuguese language by a Goan calls for a worthy response in Konkani by an ethnic Portuguese and friend of Goa.

Edinho Lourenço R.

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