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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

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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

Eduardo Lourenço, the celebrated essayist, was recipient of Luso-Brazilian Camões Award in 1996, despite or because he wrote in his book O Labirinto da Saudade (1978) that the poem of Camões was a fiction, a sad 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 impending 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 Jewish background and his friendship with Garcia da Orta had made him a likely target of the Inquisition. Garcia da Orta had published his Colóquios in Goa in 1563, and it carried the first published ode of Camões.

Orta died in 1568 and the Inquisition burned his sister in 1569. Later they exhumed his bones and burned them. In the meanwhile, Camões had scooted away. Landeg White, an Englishman based in Mafra (Portugal) since 1994, has translated The Lusiads into English [http://landegwhite.com/books-translations/the-lusiads/]. He pursues a line of research aimed at proving that the Goan experience of Camões made a substantial impact upon his literary work.

According to a recent study by the Portuguese archeologist-historian Joaquim Rodrigues Santos [http://journal.eahn.org/articles/10.5334/ah.58/] the last Portuguese Governor of Goa had named a committee under the chairmanship of the Goan presidente of the High Court, José António Ismael Gracias (Jr.), to work out a project of rehabilitation of Goa. It was aimed at turning the old imperial capital into a monumental record of the Por-

tuguese colonial heritage. The project was to be completed in time to commemorate the 4th centenary of the death of St Francis Xavier in 1952, which would bring thousands of pilgrims to Goa.

The project was in keeping with the political agenda of the Estado Novo under Salazar's leadership. At a time when the nations were engulfed in the World War, the young Portuguese Estado Novo organised in Lisbon between July and December 1940 an Exhibition of the Portuguese World, to mark a double commemoration of the Centenary of the Foundation and Restoration of the Independence of Portugal, as the propagandistic apogee of the Portuguese colonial policy, presenting to the world the Portuguese imperialist mystique.

As stated by J.R. Santos in his article, "architectural heritage of Portuguese influence in India became a privileged instrument of ideological propaganda, used by the dictatorial regime as a physical and visual remarkable evidence of the ancestral Portuguese presence in India. Architecture was perhaps the most impressive symbol of the Portuguese rule in the Estado da India not only because of its visual impact, as a reminder of who built it, but also because it still could be used, felt, admired and touched." Hence, a perfect tool for perpetuating colonial presence on the eve of a real threat to its sovereignty in Goa, following the loss of Dadra and Nagar Haveli in 1954.

The last Portuguese Governor took up a redrafted project report submitted to him by the architect Naguesh Pissurlencar, who had

belonged to the Ismael Gracias committee, to plan the commemoration of the centenary of the death of Prince Henry in 1960. This Prince Navigator is linked with the history of the 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. Ironically, 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 "Restauração".

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, Ave Cleto Afonso, a well-produced book entitled "O vaticínio do swarga (o que 'Os Lusíadas' não canta)" (2013). He seeks to imitate the poetic style of Camões in Portuguese, but in six Cantos, wherein he tries to supplement and compensate for what The Lusiads lacks, bringing up-to-date the Portuguese imperial epic.

The cantos of Ave Cleto Afonso, a retired professor of philosophy, resort to the rich Hindu mythology, which he found missing in the Lusiads. The book appeals to a new postcolonial encounter in his last canto of Hope (Canto da Esperanças, pp 183-200) 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.