

Os Lusíads – The Portuguese Epic of Vasco da Gama's voyage to India

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Arms are my theme, and those matchless heroes
Who from Portugal's far western shores
By oceans where none had ventured
Voyaged to Taprobana and beyond,
Enduring hazards and assaults
Such as drew on more than human prowess
Among far distant peoples, to proclaim
A New Age and win undying fame;¹

These are the opening lines of the Portuguese epic *Os Lusíadas* or *The Lusíads* by Luis de Camões that was first published in 1572. It is regarded as the national epic of Portugal and is often compared with *Odyssey* of Homer, *Aeneid* of Virgil and *Argonautica* of Apollonius.² It is written in form of a narration – the narrator is Vasco da Gama himself. The epic is a description of the sea voyage that brought Vasco da Gama to Calicut in the Malabar coast of India in 1497, the main story being the journey from Sofala to Calicut and back. The particular voyage of Vasco to India was actually the culmination of a series of discoveries along the coast of Africa that had taken place over the century preceding 1497. The history of the previous discoveries are also narrated in the epic. The epic is titled *Os Lusíadas* because even though Vasco de Gama is the main figure of the epic, the collective hero is the people of Portugal – the 'sons of Lusus' – who have been able to achieve this great feat. Vasco is the unifying figure. The epic has been widely discussed and translated into many languages since the 17th century. Several discourses on the epic and both original and translated versions are available in hard as well as in soft copies.³

The discovery of the sea route to India by Vasco da Gama was of huge commercial significance and a matter of great national pride for Portugal. The epic reflects this pride and collective sentiment of the nation at that moment. The epic depicts it as a divine plan involving the Greek gods, who watched with interest the developments and some of them actually took sides either in favour or against the attempt. In reality, Vasco da Gama faced many obstacles in his voyage. Those obstacles and the dangers are described in details and presented as creation of Bacchus – a god himself, who wanted to hinder the completion of the journey.

The article traces the history of the discoveries preceding it, summarises the epic and points out its significance in the national history of Portugal. Since this is the story of the discovery of the sea route to India and it was the port of Calicut in the Malabar coast where Vasco da Gama

landed, it has become part of the history of India as well. The epic therefore holds significance for the history of India also.

The geographical discoveries and their significance for Portugal

The discovery of the sea route to India by Vasco de Gama at the end of the 15th century brought about a fundamental change in the world of commerce. It marked the inauguration of a new era in the history of Euro Asian contacts in general and trade between the two continents in particular. It was comparable, if not of greater significance than the discovery by Columbus. As a result of this revolution, the world of commerce was substantially affected and the coast of the Atlantic became emporium of the highly esteemed oriental spices. The trade of the Malabar coast formed the core of the trade in spices in this period and the Portuguese established their right at the dawn of the 16th century had international repercussions and the merchant communities of the world had to adjust themselves to the new milieu created by the commercial revolution.⁴

This achievement, significant as it was, did not happen in a day. It was the culmination of a series of discoveries spanning over almost a century. The Portuguese ambition to conquer the east had developed from the late 14th century from the reign of King Joao I. The two basic ambitions behind the Portuguese discoveries were 1. to capture North Africa from the Moslems and 2. to explore the coast of Africa as a means of reaching the east.

Infante Dom Henrique was the first major architect of Portuguese overseas expansion. The most mythological figure of the Portuguese expansion, he came to be known as Prince Henry 'the Navigator'. It is imagined that he was a man of science and renaissance culture supporting a school of astronomers and navigation. He created for himself a substantial commercial and political enterprise. An active slave trader, he managed sugar plantations in addition to his other varied ventures.⁵

The three decades before his death in 1460, are principally associated with the exploration of the Atlantic islands and of the African west coast. As early as 1426, Goncalo Velho, a member of the household of Dom Henrique, had sailed to an unidentified spot of the African coast, not far from Cape Bojador. Expeditions were made to Madeira in 1420. The period culminated with the first indistinct Portuguese sightings of the Cape Verde islands. The seven western islands of the Cape Verde archipelago were eventually discovered in 1462.

Diogo Cao, in mid 1480s had advanced far down the African west coast. This prepared the ground to enter the Indian Ocean or rather to enter the trade to the vaguely defined Spice Islands. This was followed by the voyage of Bartolomeu Dias in 1487-88 to the Cape of Good Hope. This voyage was planned by King Dom Joao II as part of a large strategy. "The logic of the push down the African west coast was to judge the limits of the southward penetration of Islam and to see if allies could be found in Africa to attack the 'Moors' from the rear. This became mixed with a revived version of the late medieval legend Prester John who had been the object of widespread rumours from 1140s...."⁶ In early August 1487, Bartolomeu Dias, who was in all probability a professional mariner rather than a member of the nobility was sent out to explore beyond what had been found thus far by Diogo Cao. By early 1487 he passed the limits of Cao's expeditions, then rounded the tip of the African continent, passed the Mossul bay in South eastern Africa,

touched the Cape Recife and went as far as the Rio de Infante (Great Fish river). In mid May, on his return, he passed and sighted the Cape of Good Hope ⁷ and then took seven months to reach Lisbon in December 1488.

Vasco da Gama as a gentleman at court when Manoel became king in 1495 was chosen leader for an expedition to follow up Dias ' journey. With his brother Paul and Nicholas Coelho, he set sail on July 8 1497 with two three masted vessels - an old caraval and a larger stone ship.

Sailing south west by the Madeira and Canary Islands they passed the Cape Verde Islands and made first landfall near St Helen's Bay. At times becalmed, at times driven by storms , they rounded the Cape on November 20 after a four days struggle and in another 11days passed the great river where Dias had turned back. On Christmas day they touched a point they called Natal in honour of the festival. At Mozambique and Mombasa Gama met serious opposition from the Muslim settlers and traders who knew by the experience of their followers round the Mediterranean the consequences of letting Christian competitors into their markets and sources of supply. They did their best to hinder his progress. At Melinde, a little north of Mombasa, he was more fortunate and got a pilot for India. But it was the season of storms and the last 28 days of their perilous journey were difficult in the extreme. They had been nearly 11 months on the way when they reached Calicut on May 20, 1498.⁸

At Calicut, though the Raja (Samorim) was a Hindu, the Malabar traders were fanatical Moslems who showered open enmity on these Christian intenders who had circumvented their trade route via Aden, the Red Sea and Egypt. Da Gama was unable to found a factory but ran along the Malabar coast before returning home. This journey took another year and many grievous losses . Only 55 of the Admiral's companions remained when he finally cast anchor in Lisbon on August 29, 1499. He went to the church of Our Lady of Belem to offer thanks for safe return.

Map I
The route of Vasco da Gama's first voyage to and from India



Source -<https://www.google.co.in/search?q=map+of+vasco+da+gama+sea+route+to+india&dc=0&tbm=isch&imgil=kkdr8Y7ID8c4M%253A%253BL7gu5ekCWLex6M%253Bhttps%25253A%25>

In the subsequent years the Portuguese used the foothold in India to spread over their trading network in the South East and even in the Far East. Brazil was conquered before long. The Portuguese, as a result of this success became the first European nation to establish control over the trade in the waters of the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic and even in the Pacific. The achievement of Vasco da Gama laid the foundation of this maritime empire – the Estado da India of which Goa became the centre.

In the late 1480s, the king of Portugal was also repeatedly approached by Christopher Columbus, for support of his proposed plan to reach Asia from Europe. The idea was not found to be practical by the king. Had he accepted the proposal, the Portuguese crown would have had the credit of discovering America as well. ⁹

Significance of the discoveries

Since it was the Portuguese who had discovered the Cape route, they monopolised it and even asked the Pope to legitimise this arrangement. The result was that for a whole century, until this arrangement was successfully challenged by the Dutch and the English in the 1590s, the only merchant group engaged in trade between Europe and Asia along the all water route was the Portuguese. The very concept of monopoly over the Indian Ocean trade was a novel one.

King Manoel, delighted at the prospect of a Royal monopoly of Indian trade invented for himself the title “Lord of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India” and the Pope confirmed the title in 1502. Vasco da Gama was loaded with honours. Several expeditions followed to establish the Portuguese supremacy in the Malabar coast of India. Six months after Vasco’s return, Pedro Alvares Cabral sailed to follow up the exploit with 13 ships and 1200 soldiers. Driven west by storms, Cabral reached South America and took possession of Brazil before returning to the Cape and following da Gama’s route to Calicut. There he landed with his traders but they were at once murdered by the Moplas. So after using his canon on the town Cabral sailed North to Cannanore and south Cochin and established factories in those more amiable cities and returned home laden with pepper and other rare goods.

Vasco’s second journey with 20 ships was to strengthen these two cities of Cannanore and Cochin. In 1503 Francisco and Affonso de Albuquerque with Antonio de Saldanha followed with three squadron of ships. Albuquerque was able to help the King of Cochin who was being attacked by Samorim for admitting the Portuguese and left behind him Duarte Pacheco who with less than 900 men utterly defeated the Samorim.

King Manoel, in order to found a strong colony sent Francisco Almeida in 1505 with 32 ships and 1500 soldiers. Almeida fortified Kilwa and Mombasa as ports of call for future expeditions and set up his Viceregal governments in Cochin where he waged war against the Muslim merchants along the Malabar coast. When his young son Lourenco was killed at Chaul in 1508 in course of a fight against an Egyptian fleet, Almeida avenged him by routing a large Muslim fleet off Diu in 1509. His successor Affonso de Albuquerque moved the capital to Goa which he took in 1510 and sent expeditions to the Spice Islands and occupied Malacca (1511) and Ormuz (1515) at the head of the Persian Gulf. Other Viceroys maintained or further extended Portuguese influence in the Indian Ocean and beyond. Dom Joao de Castro who ruled from 1545 to 1548 won one of the greatest Portuguese victories against the king of Gujarat. They had also occupied many city states

on the East African coast. Within just seventeen years of Vasco da Gama's voyage the Portuguese held and dominated all the most important sea routes and trading networks of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, and the South China.

The Portuguese established themselves at Macao near Canton in 1554 and arranged their trade to Japan after they were allowed to settle in Nagasaki in 1571. In that same year the Spaniard Legazpi had captured Manila and Spanish silver began to reach China Sea through Macao and the Portuguese. The Portuguese also built new lines of trade from North to South reaching the Moluccas from Macao.

The rich products that the Portuguese brought from the East reached by the *Carreira da India* – the term used by the Portuguese for the annual round voyage which their Indiamen made between Lisbon and Goa in the days of sail beginning with Vasco da Gama's epic voyage in 1497-99-

The round voyage between Lisbon and Goa took about a year and a half in the most favourable circumstances. An Italian Jesuit who made the outward passage in 1574 describes it as being 'without any doubt the greatest and most arduous of any that are known in the world'. The actual sailing time in each direction was usually some six or seven months, with the addition of a stay of about 4 months in Goa or Cochin to load the Indian pepper and textiles, Sinhalese cinnamon, Indonesian cloves and Chinese silks and porcelain which formed the bulk of the return cargoes during the 16th century.

During the 16th century, pepper, ginger, clove, cinnamon, mace, nutmegs and various types of textiles were the major items of Portuguese trade. Among these pepper and other spices were of prime importance. Apart from spices, textiles were of considerable importance, though primarily of utility within Asia as item of exchange for other commodities.

As per historical documents during the first decade of the 16th century, the Portuguese exported from Malabar about 25,000 to 30,000 quintals of spices of all sorts annually to Lisbon. Towards the end of the same decade, about 40,000 quintals of pepper were collected and exported to Portugal in one year from Cochin alone.¹⁰

The production of spices in Asia and demand for them in Europe roughly doubled during the second half of the 16th century and European prices had increased two to threefolds. Pepper was the principal spice, the other spices like cinnamon, clove, mace, nutmeg, ginger etc. these being collected from Southeast Asia. Ceylon was the bulk producer of the best variety of cinnamon over which the Portuguese were able to exercise an almost effective monopoly.

Textiles were purchased from Goa and Bengal mostly for the transoceanic trade as well as to carry them to Portugal. A meagre quantity of Indian clothes were exported in the early 16th century. The volume of its export increased considerably in the second half of the century.

After the occupation of Goa and other ports in the Malabar, the Portuguese were secure in India with their empire extending demographically and economically over the Indian Ocean in South and Southeast Asia but it also drained the country of many noble and devoted men many of whom succumbed to diseases and dangers of life in the East to bring back to Lisbon the benefit of their experience.

The Lusíads narrates the glory and the pride that the Portuguese felt as a result of this achievement. Since this success came after a series of discoveries Camões placed the achievement of Vasco in this broader context of Portuguese history of discoveries and narrated the entire history of Portuguese achievements in two cantos of the epic. In fact, this achievement of 1497 as depicted in the epic, is not of Vasco alone but of the Portuguese nation as a whole who had achieved so much in the past. The heroes of the epic are the Lusíads – the sons of Lusus or in other words the Portuguese. The orientation of the author is revealed in the beginning of the epic only in Jupiter's speech in the Council of the gods. In this the Portuguese are presented as a people predestined by fate to accomplish great deeds. Jupiter says that this is indicated by their history itself because after emerging victorious against the Moors and Castilians the small nation had gone to discover new worlds. At the end of the poem, Camões writes that the fear expressed by Bacchus – that the Portuguese would become gods has been confirmed. Bacchus had tried to put up obstacles to Vasco's success in different manners and all the difficulties that Vasco faced in course of the journey were, in fact, created by Bacchus. Hurdles created by Bacchus came in form of sea storms and it was by conquering one such severe storm – the Adamaster¹¹ – that Vasco finally broke all the hurdles on the way to his final achievement. Camões dramatises the significance of the voyage as an event transcending history that redefined the course of human affairs in the divine plan.¹²

Yet the glory proved to be shortlived. By the time of Camões, in the third quarter of the sixteenth century, the seaborne empire had already passed its pinnacle of glory. Though cities were still being added to the empire, the king was already faced with difficulty to maintain what he had gained. The Portuguese crown did not have enough resources to maintain an overseas fleet nor Portugal the manpower for colonial administration. Trade required not just military control but the goods and bullion to purchase silk and spices from the east, and the hope that the empire could finance itself with the profits of the goldmines of south east Africa proved illusory. ...The French and the English, along with the Dutch had already begun to pose a challenge. With the national pride was intertwined a despair for not being able to hold on to the glory Landeg White, who had translated the epic in 1997, observed a note of elegy of absence and regret underlying the heroics of the *Lusíads*. It had all happened before the poets's time.¹³

A short description of the contents of the ten cantos of the epic

Structurally the poem is divided into 10 cantos with a variable number of stanzas (on average 1102). It is made up of 4 sections. They are –

1. The Introduction with presentation of the theme and the heroes
2. The Invocation i.e. a prayer to the Tagodos, the nymphs of the river Tejo.
3. A dedication to Don Sebastiao followed by the narration which is the epic itself
4. An Epilogue.

The most important part of the *Lusíads* is Vasco's arrival in India. As mentioned earlier, the events, in the conception of Camões were predestined by the gods in their conference in the beginning of the poem. The gods themselves were divided in their loyalty – some were in favour and some against the possibility of the success of Vasco da Gama in reaching India. In fact, immediately

after the dedication section and the homage to Virgil and Homer, the epic portrays the gods of Greece watching over the voyage Vasco da Gama had undertaken. As in *Odyssey* and *Aeneas*, the gods had divided loyalties. Venus favoured the Portuguese and was opposed to Bacchus who was associated with the East and resented the encroachment on his territory. We encounter Vasco's voyage in *medias res* as they had already rounded the Cape of Good Hope. At the urging of Bacchus who was disguised as a Moor, the local Muslims plotted to attack the explorer and his crew.

The second canto is an extension of the first in the sense that in this also Bacchus fooled Vasco by creating a fake altar which Vasco took to be that of the Christians. In fact, he even thought that there were Christians among the Muslims. Thus the explorers were lured into an ambush but successfully survived with the aid of Venus. Venus pleaded with her father Jove who predicted great future for the Portuguese in the East. The fleet lands at Melindi where it is welcomed by a friendly Sultan.

In the Canto III Vasco da Gama starts a narration of the History of Portugal. He enumerates the deeds of the First Dynasty kings from Dom Affonso Henriques to Dom Fernando. The same narration continues in the Canto IV and brings down the history of Portugal upto the moment Vasco da Gama sails for India in the reign of Dom Manoel I.

Canto V is a description of the journey of the Armada from Lisbon to Melindi. During the voyage the sailors see maritime whirlwind and face a variety of dangers and obstacles such as the hostility of the natives, the fury of a monster in the episode of the great Adamastor¹⁴ and the disease and death caused by scurvy. The crossing of the Cape of Good Hope by subduing the monster Adanaster is one of the most dramatic achievements of the voyage to India. It was written with the motive to show how difficult the voyage actually was for the portuguese soldiers. The following stanzas of canto V describes the ferocity of the challenge put up by the monster,

Stanza 39

Even as I spoke, an immense shape
Materialised in the night air,
Grotesque and of enormous stature,
With heavy jaws and an unkempt beard,
Scowling from shrunken, hollow eyes,
Its complexion earthy and pale,
Its hair grizzled and matted with clay,
Its mouth coal black, teeth yellow and decay.

Stanza 40

So towered in its limbs, I swear
You could believe it a second
Column of Rhodes, that giant
Of the ancient world's seventh wonders
It spoke with a coarse, gravelly voice
Blooming from the oceans's depths,

Our hair was on end, our flesh shuddering,
Mine and everyone's, to hear and behold the thing.

Stanza 41

It addressed us; 'O reckless people,
Bolder than any the world has known,
As stubborn in your countless,
Cruel wars as in vainglorious quests,
Because you have breached what is forbidden,
Daring to cross such remote seas,
Where I alone for so long have prevailed
And no ship, large or small, has ever sailed,

Stanza 42

Because you have desecrated nature's
Secrets and the mysteries of the deep,
Where no human, however noble
Or immortal his worth, should trespass,
Hear from me now what retribution
Fate prescribes for your insolence,
Whether ocean-borne, or along the shores
You will subjugate with your dreadful wars,.....

In the canto VI Bacchus once again creates trouble for Vasco when he sails from Melinde to Calicut. Bacchus, seeing the Portuguese were about to reach India asked Neptune for help. Neptune convened a Council of Maritime gods whose decision was to support Bacchus and unleash powerful winds to sink the armada. A storm stroked and Vasco da Gama seeing the near destruction of the caravals prayed to his own gods. It is Venus who helped the Portuguese by sending the nymphs to seduce the winds and calm them down. After the storm the armada sighted Calicut. And Vasco da Gama thanked the gods. The following lines from of this canto describe the dramatic moment of the sight of Indian coast at Calicut.

Stanza 92

At this, bright dawn broke in those heights
Where the river Ganges has its source,
As the sailors, aloft at the mast head,
Saw mountains glimmering before the prow.
Now, after the storm and the long,
Pioneer voyage, their fears subsided.
Then cheerfully said their Malindian pilot,
'That land ahead is surely Calicut!¹⁵

And this continues in stanza 93.-

'This is the land you had been seeking,
This is India rising before you;

Unless you desire yet more of the world,
Your long Task is accomplished.'
Rejoicing to see he knew the country,
Da Gama contained himself no longer
But knelt on deck, arms raised towards the sky,
And gave his heartfelt thanks to God on high.¹⁶

Canto VII is a description of the arrival of the Portuguese fleet at the Indian city of Calicut. It also contains description of the first meeting between the Samorim and the Portuguese.

In Canto VIII Bacchus once again creates problem for Vasco. He appears in a vision to a Muslim priest in Samorim's court and convinces him that the explorers are a threat. The priest spreads the warning prompting Samorim to confront Vasco on his intentions. Vasco insists that the Portuguese are traders. The king then demands proof from his ships but Vasco faces trouble at different stages and is even held as prisoner. He manages to get free but only after agreeing to have all the goods on the ships brought to shore to be sold.

Canto IX continues to describe the trouble that Vasco de Gama had to face until he managed to escape from Calicut. To reward the explorers for their efforts, Venus prepared an island for them to rest. This is the beginning of the episode of the Isle of Love which continues in the Canto X. In this canto Tethys who is the lover of Vasco prophesied the future of Portuguese exploration and conquest and many such events. Finally Tethys guides Gama to a summit and reveals to him a vision of how the universe operates. The tour continues with glimpses of the land of Africa and Asia. The legends of apostle St Thomas in India and voyage of Megalhaes are also narrated.

Stanza 144 of the canto X describes Vasco da Gama's homecoming.

So behold them ploughing the calm sea,
With friendly winds, not a hint of a storm,
Until their homeland, the country long
Yearned for, rose before their sight.
They entered the pleasant Tagus, and gave
Their country and their honoured king
The prize for which they sailed at his command,
Placing still greater titles in his hands.¹⁷

The epic concludes with some advices to young king Sebastiao to carry the crusade against Islam to Morocco.

Camoës, the poet

Camoës was born in a noble family originally from Galicia and distantly related to Vasco da Gama. His father was a sea captain who died at Goa after being shipwrecked on a voyage to India. He grew up in Portugal, studied in the university of Coimbra and became a good scholar with good knowledge of Latin, Spanish and Italian. At the same time he mixed with young aristocrats of his age and got involved with various ladies in the court. As a result of these he was once banished from Lisbon. He also gained a practical knowledge of warfare and developed hatred for the Moors. A typical impetuous swordsman, he got involved in a brawl and was thrown into prison.

Ultimately he was released on condition that he would enter the King's service in India. He sailed in March 1553 and did not return for next 17 years.

Like many more adventurous Portuguese who sailed to India in search of both adventure as well as fortune, Camoes himself had experienced the voyage to India and life in Goa and in the Far East. While in the East he had gone through both the ups and downs of life and had even risked his life in course of storms and natural calamities in the sea. Description of such sea storms therefore becomes so vital in this poem and provides the intimate touches.

After arriving in Goa Camoes sailed out for the coast of Malabar and places in Red Sea, Malacca, Molucca and also Macao. He was relieved of his bond in 1559 and sailed out for Lisbon.

While coming to Goa he was faced with some disaster as three out of four ships had sunk on his way back from Macao in 1559. He too was shipwrecked. Tghis personal experience of the hardships of long sea voyages enabled him to provide personal touches to his description of the sea storms in course of the voyage of Vasco da Gama. After this he experienced many more hardships including imprisonment and debt. Unable to repay his debts he remained stranded in Mozambique for two years. Lastly his friend Heitor de Silveira and historian Diogo de Couto enabled him to finish the journey back to Lisbon.

Os Lusíadas was published in 1572. The king gave him a small pension on which he spent the last two years of his life in comparative obscurity. He died of plague in June 1580.

Like the *Odyssey*, the *Argonautica* and the *Aenid* had *The Lusíads* described sea journeys but to be more specific, Camoes took Virgil as his model. Like Aeneas, Da Gama traveled to found a colony which should carry the civilization of his people into a distant, unknown land. By calling his poem *Os Lusíadas* the sons of Lusus (mythical companion of Bacchus) the poet announced his classical intentions. The *Lusíadas* is an epic of a small people of a small country whose exploits helped to form the first seaborne empire and opened up the East to soldiers, traders and missionaries. Even though its hero is Vasco da Gama and its primary topic the story of his first voyage from Lisbon to Calicut, Camoens has narrated the whole history of Portugal since it freed itself from the Moors until his own time. In the poem Gama is seen as one contributor to National greatness. Camoes even hoped that the heroism and the virtuous deeds would be repeated and the Portuguese would be able to bring Christianity and civilisation to the rich land of the East.

It was not very long that Portugal lost its independence. King Sebastiao who dreamt of conquering North Africa for cause of his religion, invaded Morocco in 1578. He and his men were defeated and slain at Alcacer Kebir. All but 100 of his army of 20,000 were destroyed or enslaved. Camoes wrote to a friend 'All will see that so dear to me was my country. I was content to die not only in it but with it'.¹⁸ Two years later in 1580 Philip II of Spain assumed the Crown and for 60 years Portugal remained under Spanish Crown. Camoes breathed his last little before that and was spared the misery of seeing the country lose its independence.

The country dipped into a long period of ignominy and its supremacy over the Indian Ocean trade too was lost before long but *Os Lusíadas* remained as the national epic and the first great modern heroic poem of Portugal in the classical manner that captured the spirit and sentiment of the period.

Notes and References :

1. Camoes Luis Vaz de , *The Lusiads*, translated by Landeg White, Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 3.
2. All these three epics are accounts of some voyages. *Odessey* is one of the two major ancient Greek epic poems composed around 8th century B.C by Homer. It is part of a sequel to *Iliad*, the other work ascribed to Homer. Its focus is the journey of Odysseus (known as Ulyseus in Roman myth) , the king of Ithaca after the fall of Troy. *Aenid* is the Latin epic poem written by Virgil between 29-19 B.C. It tells the legendary story of Aeneas, a Trojan who travelled to Italy where he became the ancestor of Romans. Finally *Argonautica* is a Greek epic written by Apollonius Rhodius in the 3rd century B.C. it tells the myth of the voyage of Jaron and the Argonauts to retrieve the *golden fleece* from Colchis. It exerted a profuse impact on Latin poetry and inspired even Virgil for his Roman epic *Aenid*.
3. To give just two examples - Manoel de Faria e Sousa wrote a commentary about the work in the 17th century which was ublished after his death. The work was originally written in Spanish and was eventuallybtranslated into Portuguese in the 19th century. One early translated version (“Englished“) that is easily available is that by Richard Francis Burton. It was further edited by his wife Isabel Burten and was published by Tinsley Brothers from Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.. Several modern translations of the epic are also available. The edition brought out by Oxford University Press as a part of its series on Oxford World’s Classics has been consulted for the present article.
4. Mathew, K.S., *Portuguese trade with India in the sixteenth century*, manohar, new delhi, 1983, p.200
5. For a detailed history of the discoveries and the objectives behind those, see Subrahmanyam Sanjay, *The career and legend of Vasco da Gama*, Cambridge University Press, First South Asian edition, by Foundation Books Pvt. Ltd, 1997, reprint 2004, Chapter 2 ‘The heritage of Santiago’, pp. 76-164
6. According to medieval legend, Prester John was a Christian king who ruled over Asian land. The story started around the time of the Crusades. A report written in 1145 called Prester John a mighty priest and king who defeated Persian Muslims and planned to help the crusaders to free Jerusalem. 20 years later a letter, supooesdly written by him circulated in Europe in which he described his kingdom as a paradise on earth. He also promised to defeat the Muslims and recapture the holy places. In 1177 Pope Alexandser III sent a group to locate him but they were unsuccessful . Over the next few 100 years many explorers and missionaries searched for him as they travelled throughout Asia. In the 1400s a Portuguese traveller claimed to have found his kingdom in the present day Ethipea in Africa. www.mythencyclopedia.co./Pa-Pr/Prester-John.html
7. It was originally called the Cape of Storms by Bartolomeu Dias in 1488. It was later remaned by King Joao II of Portugal the Cape of Good Hope because of the great optimism engendered by the opening of a sea route to India and the East.
8. Description of Vasco da Gama’s voyage id given by Subrahmanyam op cit, chapter III ‘ To Calicut and back’, pp. 164 - 234
9. Columbus approached King Joao II of Portugal for three ships and one year time to sail out to Atlantic and search for a western route to the Orient. He also requested to be made the Governor of the land that he would discover. The proposal wasa rejected by the King sand his advisors. He made a second request in 1488 to be turned down again. He approached Genoa and Venice and explored the possibility of getting a support from Henry VII of England as well. Ultimately it was in 1492 that he succeeded with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. He underetook four voyages in 1492, 1493, 1498 and 1502 between Spain and the Americas. He had proposed to reach the East Indies, South and Southeast Asia by sailing westwards. This did not happen. In his first voyage he reached the New World instead of

- Japan. In course of the three more voyages he visited Greater and Lesser Antilles as well as the Caribbean Coast of Venezuela and Central America.
10. Ahmad Afzal. *Indo Portuguese trade in seventeenth century (1600-1663)*, Gian Publishing House, New Delhi 1991, p.14. For a detailed history of the Portuguese commercial activities in India, the trade and its organisation see Mathew K.S. op cit. and Praksh Om, *European commercial enterprise in pre-colonial India, (The New Cambridge History of India)*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1998, Chapter II "the Portuguese in India 1500-1640", pp.23-71
 11. A giant of Greek mythology, banished to the Cape of Good Hope. He appeared in form of a storm cloud to Vasco and threatened to ruin anyone who would attempt to pass the Cape and penetrate the Indian Ocean which was his domain. Adamaster represented the dangers the Portuguese sailors faced when to round the Cape of Storms as it was originally called.
 12. White Landeg, *Luis vaz Camoes, The Lusiads*, (translated with an introduction and Notes by Landeg White), Oxford University Press, Oxford World's Classic, UK, 1997, 'Introduction', p.xiii.
 13. Ibid. 'Introduction', p.x
 14. ibid, p.137
 15. Ibid.
 16. ibid, p. 225
 17. White, op cit, p. x

