Like many of the Camonians, Norwood H. Andrews, Jr. holds the view that Camões's "epic was nationalistic before all else" (61). It is commonly held that because Os Lusiadas is the national epic of Portugal, the nationality the epic sings is that of the poet's own nation. However, since Os Lusiadas is not mere history but history plotted through imagination, a reading of the epic as a literary source would reveal that its centres always shift and as a consequence the work yields multiple readings. It is rather problematic to decide once and for all that the work sings only the victorious. In a sense it seems absolutely fine to think that the Portuguese were the first European power to colonise India / Malabar. Reading Os Lusiadas makes one reconsider if not it was Malabar that first colonised Portugal (at least in terms of imagination) long before the Portuguese came to geographically colonise the western coast of India. Is it true to say the Portuguese colonized India which was for a long time to come a peninsula ruled by hundreds of kings and, therefore, was not a 'nation', then, in the strictest of terms? Had not Malabar itself when the Portuguese came, been already ruled by not less than four kings who always vied for supremacy for the long strip of the land called Malabar?
What is the nation Os Lusiadas realizes for its subject? Indeed, Camões was urged by a national calamity (ref. X: 145, 146) to create a national epic for Portugal as the best and the last remedy a poet could contribute to the country. To quote Landeg White,

In Camões’s single letter from Goa, which he labels ‘the mother of villains and stepmother of honest men’, there is already a strong whiff of what was later to be recognizable as the odour of an empire in decline. French and English warships were already marauding and the Dutch were about to join the scene. The point is important, for underlying the manifest heroes of The Lusiads there is a note of elegy, of absences and regret. It had all happened before Camões’s time.” (X)

Therefore, Camões chooses for his subject the saga of a country that discovered a sea route bypassing the Arab presence in the Persian Gulf, in order to reach the Indian peninsula for the purpose of trading in spices and thus to become competently (esp. with Venice) affluent. The thought to reach India held all the European nations captivated imaginatively / psychologically and all European powers that had the advantage of sea competed to send agents for the purpose. From such preparations Portugal gained in an unprecedented momentum from the time of João II (1481 – 95) (IV: 60).

Now, the East becomes the object of an obsessive national desire of Portugal. Such a longing is pervasive in Os Lusiadas as it is stated through the words of Jove: “Nas águas têm passado o duro inverno; /A gente vem perdida e trabalhada; / Já parece bem feito que lhe seja / Mostrada a nova
terra, que *deseja*” (I: 28, emphasis added). While it is ‘quest’ in I: 29, it is expressed as ‘search for another world’ (I: 38) and ‘news of India’ (I: 40). To the people of Mozambique the Portuguese introduce themselves as: "‘Os Portugueses somos do Ocidente, / Imos buscando as terras do Oriente /.../ E por mandado seu, buscando andamos / A terra Oriental que o Indo rega; /.../Buscando o Indo Idaspe e terra ardente’” (I: 50,52,55). Vasco da Gama informs the governor of the Mozambique Island: “‘Nem sou da terra, nem da geração / Das gentes enojosas de Turquia: / Mas sou da forte Europa belicosa, / Busco as terras da índia tão famosa’” (I: 64). Da Gama then requests him for pilots to guide his ships to India (I: 70) and then da Gama received a pilot from Mozambique “Para ir buscar o Indo desejado” (I: 95). The governor of the Mozambique Island gives da Gama a pilot and the Captain trusts the pilot, for it was a pleasure to hear the Muslim describing the Indian harbours (I: 97). What the Portuguese really sought India for is already expressed in the words of a Mohammedan from Mombasa:

‘E se buscando vás mercadoria
Que produze o aurifero Levante,
Canela, cravo, ardente especiaria,
Ou droga salutífera e prestante;
Ou se queres luzente pedraria,
O rubi fino, o rígido diamante,
Daqui levarás tudo tão sobejo
Com que faças o fim a teu desejo.’ (II: 4)
Jove assures Venus regarding da Gama as one intent on searching for India (II: 47) who in the company of the Portuguese men with superhuman powers (II: 55) comes in search of India of their single desire (II: 70). The envoy from da Gama’s ships tells the Sultan of Malindi that they come to reach India obeying the command of their king (II: 80). India (then meant more or less the Malabar Coast for the European interested in spice trade) was their yearned for destination (II: 89). The Sultan of Malindi was struck with the appearance of the Portuguese “Gente que de tão longe à índia vinha.” (II: 101)

Da Gama tells the Sultan of Malindi of a vision Manuel I had (IV: 66–75) in which India offers itself to be dominated by the Portuguese:

‘Eu sou o ilustre Ganges, que na terra

Celeste tenho o berço verdadeiro;

Estoutro é o Indo Rei que, nesta serra

Que vêis, seu nascimento tem primeiro.

Custar-te-emos contudo dura guerra;

Mas insistindo tu, por derradeiro,

Com não vistas vitórias, sem receio,

A quantas gentes vês, porás o freio.’ (IV: 74)

and the king is overwhelmed by “the thrill of discovery” / Acorda Emanuel c’um novo espanto / E grande alteração de pensamento” (IV: 75) and becoming “Manuel the fortunate”, he dispatches da Gama for the “great enterprise” (IV: 77) for the sake of “glory” and “fame” for the Portuguese (IV: 78).
Camões’s time had already proved that Manuel’s vision came to be, in the words of the Wise Man of Belém (o Velho do Restelo), ‘delusions’ / “Tanto enlevas a leve fantasia” (IV: 99), for the havoc was caused by men greedy of mere titles (IV: 101) and a restless greed for name (IV: 103). Despite the warning of the Old Man of Belém, the profound desire for India remained irresistible. On their way to Calicut, their single minded preoccupation was to find someone who would inform them of India. They seek a pilot for the purpose from the black naked people at Saint Helena Bay (V: 34), from the Africans at São Braz, near Mossel Bay (VI: 64), and from the gentle African community they met at the mouth of River Save (V: 68,69). However, from the next African community whom they met at the mouth of River Kwakwa they get ‘Good Signs’( Bons Sinais) (V: 78) about the land they sought (V: 75). Therefore, they rename the place as ‘St. Raphael’ / “o nome tem do belo / Guiador de Tobias a Gabelo” (V: 78). At last it is the pilot from Malindi who identifies Calicut:

Já a manhã clara dava nos outeiros
Por onde o Ganges murmurando soa,
Quando da celsa gávea os marinheiros
Enxergaram terra alta pela proa.
Já fora de tormenta, e dos primeiros
Mares, o temor vão do peito voa.
Disse alegre o piloto Melindano:

"Terra é de Calecu, se não me engano. (VI: 92, emphasis added)
Thus a century-old desire is accomplished: "'Esta é por certo a terra que buscais / Da verdadeira Índia, que aparece; / E se do mundo mais não desejais, / Vosso trabalho longo aqui fenece'" (VI: 93).

The contribution of the Portuguese is summed up by the poet while speaking of their return journey in IX: 13. Their joy consists in making known to the world what was once unknown. A nation's obsession in discovering the land of India has a sensuous dimension in the imagination of the poet. The Isle of Love (IX: 18 - X: 44) connotes this aspect in the imagination of the poet, for, the mariners are rewarded by a consummation of love with nymphs, analogous to the consummation of the longing for the discovery of an unknown land. A song of the nymph follows (X: 6–4) which celebrates in future tense the Portuguese achievements since the discovery. Then Tethys grants da Gama a vision of the universe (X: 75–142) which presents itself rather voyeuristically especially because: "Ásia começa aqui, que se apresenta / Em terras grande, em reinos opulenta." (X: 98). The East, though vanquished holds its presence in the imagination of the reader as highly desirable and will remain everlastingly in memory, through the epic memory created by Camões. For, almost all stanzas in this section (which is actually the climax of the poem) begin with the sensuous exhortations of 'look' and 'see'.

The historical subject of the poem may be said to be Portugal, but its aesthetic subject is India which is presented as highly desirable: "Mas vês o fermoso Indo, que daquela /Altura nace, junto à qual, também / Doutra altura
correndo o Gange vem? (X: 105). This, the Portuguese are going to possess at any cost (X: 132). Only towards the final part of the last canto (X: 138) they are directed to 'glance westwards', for only few instances of the Portuguese exploits in the West like Brazil survived; it is historically true that the West did not form part of Portuguese dreams, though Brazil fell into the fold only by chance.

The Lusitanians of da Gama's times as well as those conceived in Os Lusiadas have only one object to possess, namely the Orient, through the Malabar. Their purpose was not to colonise India if that word meant political occupation. Most of the historians would agree that the chief purpose remained always trade in spices. They did not have much to barter and hence, they had to procure things at cheap prices.

This commercial justification was further cemented by the myth that India was a pagan peninsula. They did not imagine India as—nor was it in those times—a single nation. But it belonged to Bacchus the god of wine—a symbolic way of imagining that, contrary to Portugal (supposedly the cradle of Christian faith!), India belonged to pagan faiths. Hence it was the fate that India willingly offers its neck to the yoke (I: 16) of the missionary and commercial labour of the Portuguese (I: 31). But in any postcolonial reading of Os Lusiadas, it should be remembered that India was not a nation but a peninsula of Kingdoms, peoples, lands, countries and nations. As da Gama tells the governor of the Mozambique Island: "Mas sou da forte Europa belicosa, / Busco as terras da india tão famosa" (I: 64). India meant the
warrior peoples of India / “Indianas gentes belicosas.” (I: 74, emphasis added). The situation is made further clear in II: 46: “Os Reis da índia, livres e seguros, / Vereis ao Rei potente sojugados; / E por eles, de tudo enfim senhores, / Serão dadas na terra leis melhores” (emphasis added). As the land is imagined in terms of the possession of Bacchus (I: 32), it formed part of the idea behind the action to convert the people of India, “Do Turco oriental, e do Gentio, / Que inda bebe o licor do santo rio” (I: 8).

Now, the religious justification of the colonization is made clear in Camões’s epic. Camões imagines that it was rather the happy fate of the Indian peoples to be occupied commercially, geographically (a post-Gama development), psychologically (by the use of counter myths and imagination) and religiously (attempts to convert if any). Such an idea of predestination is repeatedly overlaid in the words of Jove as addressed to his daughter Venus (II: 46 – 52). Since the Portuguese intention of ‘occupation’ had already been realized by the time of Camões, the poet’s words could be taken as an ideological justification. Even the kindness of the King of Malindi in providing the Portuguese with a guide – a kindness without which the Portuguese could not have reached India on 20 May 1498 – is justified and re-interpreted in favour of the Portuguese by perceiving it as forming part of a planned Destiny. Mercury, therefore, foretells da Gama of a benevolent guide as if set apart by the Divine Will (II: 63). Further, Camões makes Monsayeed, the interpreter – again a historical indispensability without whom the success part of the first Portuguese interaction with the Malabarıs
would not have been possible. Thus, Camões interprets the colonization as a fortunate turn of history for India, which was after all, according to the poet, a matter of Divine Will (II: 46).

Having said that the Portuguese did colonize the Indian Kingdoms, it should also be remarked that the Portuguese always addressed the Kings in India and also those they met on their way to India, with respect due to the sovereign of a venerable land. The idea is made clear in the words of the diplomat sent by da Gama to meet the King of Malindi. The Portuguese men acknowledge that, as a 'king', the King of Malindi himself would better know how the greatness of da Gama consists in his complete obedience to his King in Portugal (II: 83, 84). However, the colonial attitude of considering the East as 'the dark, unknown other' is evident in Camões's epic. In their second landfall which was at saint Helena Bay, north of Cape Town (V: 26), da Gama describes the African as totally uncivilized and as a 'brute': "Comêço-lhe a mostrar da rica pelo / De Colcos o gentil metal supremo, / A prata fina, a quente especiaria: / A nada disto o bruto se movia" V: 28, emphasis added).

Even the king of Malindi – the most benevolent ruler the Portuguese met – regrets that he is too far away from the abundance of Europe (VI: 1). He is, therefore, ready to sacrifice his body and soul and, even kingdom, to the Emperor of Portugal (V: 4). Whether or not, the King of Malindi historically said these words, it is clear from these words scripted by Camões what is the kind of welcome they expected from the kings in the Orient. The Catual of Samorin in Malabar – set aside the matter whether or not they were
historically uttered – is made to say the following words by way of justifying the colonization, even as part of Destiny; it is even a matter of glory to be vanquished by a people so illustrious as the Portuguese, as foretold by the Indian soothsayers:

‘E diz-lhe mais a mágica ciência
Que, para se evitar força tamanha,
Não valerá dos homens resistência,
Que contra o Céu não val da gente manha;
Mas também diz que a bélica excelência,
Nas armas e na paz, da gente estranha
Será tal, que será no mundo ouvido

_O vencedor, por glória do vencido._’ (VII: 56, emphasis added).

Such an idea of pre-destined divine plan in favour of the Portuguese (at the cost of the Orient) is visible in the song of the nymph in the final canto (X: 44). Whatever happened between the first voyage and Camões’s time is interpreted similarly (X: 66).

However, it is still fascinating that even after some seventy years of the first Portuguese arrival in Malabar – by which time the first signs of the beginning of the decline of the Portuguese empire were already appearing – Camões still chose the voyage to India as the subject of the epic. It means, among other things, that India still held on as a poetic and captivating subject in the imagination of the Portuguese national poet and, by extension, in the imagination of the nation itself. The entire poem may be said to be revolving
around this climactic stanza (VI: 92) where the Malindian pilot exclaims the sighting of the shores / Western Ghats of Malabar. But before the realization of this dream, there is a long history of preparation which is symbolically presented in the ‘predictions’ (of course, by the time of writing the epic they were no more dreams) dramatically told by Jove to his daughter. His words, thus, show that the places in India like Goa and Diu (II: 50, 51) captivated / colonized the minds of the Portuguese. But, Malabar was even a matter of obsession; the three most important kingdoms in Malabar crowd the single stanza:

‘Vereis a fortaleza sustentar-se
De Cananor, com pouca força e gente:
E vereis Calecu desbaratar-se,
Cidade populosa e tão potente:
E vereis em Cochin assinalar-se
Tanto um peito soberbo e insolente,
Que citara jamais cantou vitória,
Que assim mereça eterno nome e glória’. (II: 52, emphasis added)

As in their first and subsequent overseas possessions in Africa, the ideological justification meant a taming of paganism, now the Muslim and the Hindu merging into one reality called paganism for the Portuguese(“Levando o Idololatra, e o Mouro preso”) (II: 54).

History as understood by Camões confirms this Muslim–Hindu conspiracy though the initial welcome Malabar offered was not at all
disappointing (II: 93). The Muslims/Arabs had their reasons to conspire against the Portuguese. It was not just the backdrop of the long ‘holy’ wars fought between the Arabs and the Portuguese, but the contemporary question was more urgent, for by the arrival of the Portuguese the free trade route the Arabs hitherto enjoyed along the Malabar coast (referred to in IX: 1 – 4) was evidently threatened. But Monsayeed, himself a Muslim and one who knew ‘fluent Castilian’ gives rather a detailed account of the Malabar life to the envoy sent by da Gama on the day of their arrival (VII: 24 – 41). Monsayeed has been hospitable to da Gama’s envoy to house him with food and rest (VII: 27). Da Gama is given permission to disembark (VII: 43) who is welcomed by the crowd and by the king’s official Catual by embrace (VII: 44). Monsayed played the interpreter for them (VII: 46). Da Gama was first taken to a temple and then to Samorin who, but, informs da Gama that regarding a pact between two countries on such important matters as commerce and defense, he should first consult his counselors (VII: 64). As da Gama and his knights were taking rest at the palace, Catual learns from Monsayeed that there is a long-time enmity between the Arabs and the Portuguese (VII: 69–72). Catual now goes to Paulo da Gama’s ship to personally inspect if they are as war-like as reported by Monsayeed (VII: 72–73). From Paulo da Gama’s speech he learns that the Portuguese have come there with an intently glorious history of battles fought especially with the Muslims (VIII: 1 – 42).

Commercally and politically, Catual should have found the Portuguese arrival a threat to the Kingdom of Calicut. Whether it is
historically true no not, the next stage should be a warning emphatically signaled to the King. In the epic it is done by the King’s soothsayers and a Muslim priest (VIII: 45–51). King’s counselors are bribed (VIII: 52, 53) and Catuals, the Hindu governors, are influenced against the Portuguese (VIII: 56). Samorin who is by now alerted asks for a convincing gift which the Portuguese should have brought from their King (VIII: 61–63). Da Gama is, however, purposefully denied by Catual a safe and quick return to his ship (VIII: 78 – 80). Da Gama thinks of Muslim conspiracy behind this (VIII: 84). As da Gama understood that he was detained by Catual under some false pretext (though the King had given permission, VIII: 76 – 78), he sends word for Coelho’s boat to return to the ship anchored in the sea (VIII: 88). As the merchandise was brought ashore, da Gama was freed, but two of da Gama’s men were allowed to be on land for selling the goods. (VIII: 94–96). For many days, the two Portuguese men could not sell the wares, for there was further conspiracy as the Muslim traders hoped for the annual fleet from Mecca (in fact, Mocha) to arrive in Calicut and thus to annihilate the Portuguese competitors (IX: 1–4).

Now, warned by Monsayeed (IX: 5–7) and having known that the two factors were held captives as they tried to escape from the city, da Gama took some Malabari merchants (who came to the ships for trading precious stones) as hostages (IX: 9–10). Their family members are panicked and they pressurize Samorin who, therefore, set free the two Portuguese factors along with their merchandise (IX: 11–12). Now da Gama sails back to Portugal
with some joyous tidings from the Orient, some spices, Monsayeed and a few men whom da Gama seized from those sent by Samorin who come to deliver back the Portuguese factors (IX: 13 – 17).

There is hardly any doubt that *Os Lusíadas* is about the nation of the Portuguese. But while writing about his countrymen, Camões is also writing the history of other nations, primarily those denoted by the term India. *Os Lusíadas*, so to say, is not just history, but histories. In other words, even when one considers the central subject of the epic with regard to the nationhood represented in the epic, the centres seem to shift in constant motion to diverse directions, in the mind of the reader. Consequently, the place of importance given to the history of Malabar in the epic, as the reader understands, is almost parallel to that of Portugal itself.

The social and political life of the sixteenth century Malabar as *Os Lusíadas* has recorded, is worth delineating here in order to see how Camões poetically makes Malabar too, the centre of his epic narration. The epic poet concedes that Malabar existed from time immemorial and that, it is a land of many kings (VII: 32). While da Gama addresses Samorin, he equates Malabar with India (VII: 60). Malabar is geographically placed correctly in relation to other regions in Indian Peninsula and its geographical advantage is also a matter of Poet’s praise(VII: 21). In the poet’s words, Malabar is an enormous, celebrated land / “Um terreno muito grande e assaz famoso” (VII: 17). But Calicut is ‘the best of the best of the cities’ in Malabar: “De Calecu, onde eram moradores. / Para lá logo as proas se inclinaram, / Porque esta era
a cidade das melhores” (VII: 16), or beautiful and prosperous: “... de outras cidades, sem debate, / Calecu tem a ilustre dignidade” (VII: 22). In Monsayeed’s first account of Malabar to da Gama (while in his ship VII: 29), he praises Indians:

‘Deus por certo vos traz, porque pretende
Algum serviço seu por vós obrado;
Por isso só vos guia, e vos defende
Dos inimigos, do mar, do vento irado.
Sabei que estais na Índia, onde se estende
Diverso povo, rico e prosperado
De ouro luzente e fina pedraria,
Cheiro suave, ardente especiaria’. (VII: 31)

He proceeds then to describe Malabar and Calicut where they landed, in very high and favourable terms. Calicut has a “Samori, mais que todos digno e grande”(VII: 36) and Malabar coast is so affluent that it has ‘thousand other cities’ like Calicut awaiting the Portuguese (X: 106).

The King of Calicut was called Samorin who was the Emperor/“Imperador”, and the most powerful in the land (VII: 36). He loved and valued trees, beautiful landscape and gardens, and he lived in the city and countryside as well (VII: 50). His throne and gorgeous cloth of gold denoted that he was a venerable and prosperous king (VII: 57). Of matters of political and commercial importance, he consulted his counselors (VII: 64) which signified that he was not an autocrat. But, the fact that he was found to be
influenced by his counselors, exposes that he was also susceptible to prejudices and discriminations (VIII: 54, 55, 60, 61). As his kingdom overflowed with merchandise (VII: 61), his tendency was to wait for arrivals in goods and it is natural that he asked for precious gifts / “Que presentes me trazes valerosos”, da Gama should have brought befitting an emperor (VIII: 62). Actually if is the fear that he would lose a long standing and undisturbed trade with the Arabs that prevented him from entering a pact with a King whom he has never seen though his aversion to take such a tremendous risk is interpreted as ‘ignoble heart’ and ‘a burning greed’ (VIII: 59). That he had giant ‘fireships’(“Pela água levará serras de fogo”) and was often present at battlefields, cannot the denied (X: 17, 19, 28). There were also times when the Samorin took very important decisions independently, even against the will of his counselors (VIII: 76, 77; IX: 12).

‘Catual’ in Malabar could be considered the governor of Samorin, as he acted the representative of the King and hence could be considered second in power to the throne (VII: 44). He was in the direct charge of collecting information of commercial and political nature as he exhibits his authority in this regard when he gathers details from Monsayeed regarding the Portuguese (VII: 67, 68). He has also the authority to personally verify the happenings in the country. The Catual in Os Lusiadas goes to Paulo da Gama’s ship to study the new people personally, and even to examine their weapons (VII: 72, 73). It was a very responsible position the Catual held as far as the safety of the country was concerned. As for instance, the Catual in the epic learns from
Paulo da Gama's narration that the Portuguese were not just traders but were rather a warlike people especially in association with the Muslims (VIII: 2-42). As he understands that theirs was more or less a warship / “nau forte” (VIII: 44), he had to alert the King since the contemplated pact (VII: 60-63) would seriously affect the political and commercial peace which Calicut enjoyed hitherto, with the Arab traders. Catual was always escorted by Nair soldiers (VIII: 44) which indicate the extent of power he wielded and therefore, he often took the law in his hand. As a governor (VIII: 79) and being “O principal por quem se governavam” (VIII: 81), it is not surprising that the Catual could deny the boat to da Gama to return to his ship; this he did behind the knowledge of the Samorin and hand-in-hand with the Muslim traders (VIII: 80). This does not mean that he was above law, for he exhibits his fear of being punished by Samorin, if he acted against the king’s will (VIII: 91). Vested with power, it was possible that Catuals at times turned out to be spoiled by greed and would forfeit honour for the sake of bribery and material good (VIII: 92,94) and thus turn out to be “do cobiçoso / Regedor corrompido e pouco nobre” (VIII : 96).

Nairs were professional soldiers who were prepared to risk their lives in defense of their king (VII: 39). They are depicted as “a gente generosa / Dos Naires” (VIII: 44). They (Calicut Nairs) become ‘infernal’ for the Portuguese in canto X: 13, in the severe battle between Calicut, and the united forces of the Portuguese and the Cochin Nair soldiers. However, it is self-evident that the particular power hierarchy consisting of the Samorin, Catual
and Nair soldiers encouraged a strong democracy in Malabar (VII: 64), as the system persuaded the king to decentralize his power through the Catuals as well as king's courtiers / ministers (VII: 42). Of course, the power of democracy is sustained by the equal enlightenment of every element in the system, for democracy is most effective when it is understood in terms of responsibility rather than mere wielding of power. It meets with failure when the parties (including the king) allow themselves to be incited, influenced and prejudiced for the sake of self-interest and material good such as bribery (VIII: 52 – 56).

The Canto on Brahmins is worth quoting:

‘Brâmenes são os seus religiosos,
Nome antigo e de grande proeminência:
Observam os preceitos tão famosos
Dum que primeiro pôs nome à ciência:
Não matam coisa viva, e, temerosos,
Das carnes têm grandíssima abstinência;
Somente no venéreo ajuntamento
Têm mais licença e menos regimento. (VII: 40)

Brahmins were also powerful among the Hindus, since they were the priestly class who wore the threads of their office, the insignia of authority (X: 112, 113). In fact, whenever a new (foreign) dignitary came, he was first taken to a temple before he was accorded to the royal palace (VII: 46). Astrological observations and predictions were taken seriously (VII: 55, 56). But, as
Catual himself is an example, they completely abstained from alcohol (VII: 75). However, **different faiths** were treated on equal terms in Malabar as in Indian peninsula in general (VII: 17). The land had inhabitants with many strange names and novel customs / “Mas agora de nomes e de usança / Novos e vários são os habitants” (VII: 20), though primarily they all worshiped idols (VII: 32). But **caste system** was prevalent though ‘un-problematically’ since it was based on crafts which the particular communities practiced from generation to generation; and inter-caste marriage was not allowed (VII: 37, 38). Moreover, the Hindus in Malabar practiced **untouchability**, a custom that required an upper class Nair to undertake a thousand rites to purity him (VII: 38). The poet however, does not find anything particularly amiss with the practice, for the Jews also practiced untouchability with regard to the Samaritan people (VII: 39).

Calicut was then a very busy and prosperous city (VII: 31). There was immediate and active **response from the people** to any unusual event in the land. Their collective responsiveness is evident from the way they thronged the harbour to see the newcomers (the Portuguese sailors) to their land (VII: 23, 24, 42). Among the crowd were also **women** and children, a fact which signifies the freedom and equality women had in the society (VII: 42). This means that they were not just confined to their homes, but were allowed to come in the open along with men (VII: 49). There was no sexual disparity and one can see that women also came to the harbour to meet the foreigners (VII: 42). Peculiar to the practice in any known civilization of those times.
the women in Malabar practiced polyandry; but a woman’s men were not jealous among themselves: to quote Camões’s observation,

‘Gerais são as mulheres, mas somente
Para os da geração de seus maridos:
Ditosa condição, ditosa gente,
Que não são de ciúmes ofendidos!
Estes e outros costumes variamente
São pelos Malabares admitidos.
A terra é grossa em trato, em tudo aquilo
Que as ondas podem dar da China ao Nilo.’ (VII: 41)

The land was immensely prosperous as mercantile goods of all kinds from China to Egypt flowed to Malabar (VII: 41). The prosperous king’s courtroom is befittingly affluent: VII: 57. His ‘repose’ (VII: 57) and relaxation are perfect with his chewing of the betel leaf (VII: 58). Legend has it that, once upon a time, the entire Malabar was ruled by a single emperor whose conversion to Islam caused him to divide the land into small kingdoms like Cochin, Cannanore, Chale, Pepper Isle, Quilon, Cranganore and Calicut (VII: 32–36). Among them, Samorin’s kingdom was the most powerful as an “Imperador, que sobre os outros mande” (VII: 36) and Samorin’s kingdom accorded a befitting welcome to the Portuguese. Da Gama was embraced by Catual and was then taken to the city on a palanquin (VII: 44). He did not have to stand in front of the king who but waved him to be seated (VII: 58). Such equality in treatment showed the greatness and nobility of the king.
himself for, da Gama was given seat near the very royal couch (VII: 59). Thus, in matters of hospitality the king himself was the model. Since the king wanted some time to consult with his counselors, da Gama and his companions were requested to enjoy the comforts of his palace (VII: 66).

Samorin is outspoken, frank and honest in his dealings with the Portuguese. As the king was informed of the Portuguese as having dishonest designs, Samorin openly and most gently asks da Gama to prove themselves otherwise (VIII: 61 -63). Samorin is happy and contented with da Gama’s explanation (VIII: 65 – 75) and the Samorin shows that the King of Calicut had the authority to take decisions independently even of his ministers and informers: “Começa de julgar por enganados /Os Catuais corruptos, mal julgados” (VIII: 76). The King of Calicut is also one who had the heart to listen to the complaints of his subjects; people’s voice was of utmost importance to the king. When da Gama held captive of some noble merchants at his ship in retaliation to Catual’s role in delaying the return of da Gama’s men, people directly go to the king to complain. The king takes up the responsibility of the situation and even apologizes to the foreigners. It may be supposed that a king of such gentleness whose sentiments always went with people could not be found anywhere else in those times (IX: 11, 12).

It is generally held that Os Lusiadas is primarily a history of the Portuguese. But the reason for having attempted an account of the ‘history’ of Calicut / Malabar above, is to illustrate the point that in the narration of one history in a literary source, the interpolation of other histories into the text, is
a natural outcome. History in *Os Lusíadas* does not end with the story of the first Portuguese arrival at Malabar coast. Its subsequent history up to the time of the 'final draft' of the epic is said in the guise of a nymph’s song and further through a vision Tethys awards to Vasco da Gama. Here too, the other histories, of the other nations, are appended inseparably. As far as Indian peninsula is concerned among the references and allusions, are included Ganges, Indus (X: 33, 58, 66), Gujarat (X: 60), Goa (X: 42, 43, 67-72), Diu (X: 60 – 72) Cambay (X: 34, 60, 63, 64, 72), Daman (X: 63), Chaul (X: 60), Bassein, north of Bombay (X: 61), Malabar (X: 59), Bhatkal (X: 66), Ponnani (X: 55), Coulete (X: 55), Kutti Ali (X: 59), Calicut (X: 64) Chale, near Calicut (VII: 35, X: 61) Bacanore (X: 59) and Beadala, nearby coast of Cape Camorin (X: 63, 66).

One important factor many postcolonial readings forget is the fact that almost every country in the world was / has been a colony of another country some time in history. In other words, almost every country in the world had / has suffered the pangs of occupation by another nation. The case is not different, therefore, for Portugal itself as it was in the case of India. To read the meaning in reverse, one may even say that almost every country had / has been charged of occupying / intruding into another country – whatever be the name a particular nation’s history would like to term the event. It is interesting to note how in the epic imagination of Camões, the Lusitanians imagine themselves to be superior to the entire Europe and how they look at the other European nations with a desire of possession.
This imaginative proclivity to view Portugal as superior to all other European nations may be part of a strong nationalism. But such an imagination itself is kind of (if not the first step of) colonialism. From this context, it is easy to surmise that given conducive historical conditions, Portugal would have colonized (at least some) European civilizations, as it did with India, or even as the Arabs and the Spanish later colonized Portugal. In the poem, however, Portugal is viewed as superior to any other nation in Europe by which, as Camões would have thought, it would imply that Portugal is superior to any nation in the world.

Landeg White speaks of how such a vision would have entered the making of Camões's epic imagination:

It is no accident that this vision of Europe's significance, and of Portugal's place as the crown on the head of Europe, should have come to Camões in India... The intuition that has guided this present translation is as follows: during his years in Goa, Macau and Mozambique, Camões 'discovered' two things."

First, Portugal was emerging as a state and the people's loyalty to the nation transcended loyalty to the king. Such a nationalist spirit reached its climax with the restoration of Portuguese independence from Spain (1640). Second, in India, Camões must have become aware of the intellectual contribution which Portugal's first voyage tendered. So, politically and intellectually, Portugal shall be superior not only to the Arabic world but also to the European world.
In the first Canto itself, in Jove's speech he predicts that the Portuguese conquests will be comparable to those of the ancient world (I: 24). And to his daughter, he speaks of the superiority of the Portuguese even to the ancient world (II: 44). Camões makes the Sultan of Malindi to say that the achievements of the Portuguese are going to be matchless works/ "obras Portuguesas singulars" (II: 111). And in the final stanza of the canto II, King of Malindi suggests to say that the history of Portuguese would outshine even the fabulous world of myths (II: 113). Hence no doubt is left regarding the excellence of Portugal in Europe: "'Eis aqui, quase cume da cabeça / De Europa toda, o Reino Lusitano" (III: 20). In the following stanzas, da Gama speaks to the King of Malindi of the origin of Portugal from immemorial mythical times (III: 21 ff.).

Portugal now is greater than even Rome (III: 22). Da Gama continues to say how Portugal's King Afonso IV had to help the king of Castile to defend Spain at the request of the former's daughter who was the Spanish King Alfonso XI's queen (III: 99). Thus the Arabs were defeated at the Battle of the River Salado (1340), one of the three major battles of Os Lusiadas. Thus, Spain is interpreted to be greatly indebted to Portugal.

Adamastor, the embodiment of obstacles, describes the Portuguese as 'reckless people, bolder than any the world has known' (V: 41). None other than the Portuguese would have had such a determination to venture into the sea in search of an un-trodden path. Da Gama tells the king of Malindi:

'Corupto já e danado o mantimento.
Danoso e mau ao fraco corpo humano,
E além disso nenhum contentamento.
Que sequer da esperança fosse engano.
Crês tu que, se este nosso ajuntamento
De soldados não fora Lusitano,
Que durara ele tanto obediente

Por ventura a seu Rei e a seu regente?’ (V: 71)

Da Gama attributes the credit for the success of the voyage completely to his companions. They could have easily mutinied against him out of sheer desperation. But, “Daquela Portuguesa alta excelência / De lealdade firme, e obediência” kept them disciplined in all such difficult and trying situations (V: 72). Homer and Virgil have written poetry about mammoth voyages. But while those were all born of imagination, invention, fantasy and hyperbole (V: 86-89), what the Portuguese achieved was born of sheer action – a point which is true of Os Lusiadas itself: “Ousou algum a ver do mar profundo, /
Por mais versos que dele se escrevessem, / Do que eu vi, a poder de esforço e de arte, / E do que ainda hei de ver, a oitava parte?” (V: 86). However, Camões understands the need for poetry to immortalize the historical feats the Portuguese achieved under the leadership of da Gama (V: 94, 95).

Now Bacchus is alarmed, for: “Via estar todo o Céu determinado / De fazer de Lisboa nova Roma” (VI: 7). Thus, Portugal, as the poem advances, outshines every European country one by one. In Fernão Veloso’s story (VI: 41 – 66) of the Twelve of England (VI: 42), twelve Portuguese knights defeat
the English equivalents to preserve the honour of English women (VI: 66). There is also a history of a Portuguese knight defeating a German knight (VI: 69). As the reader reaches the ninth Canto he is 'convinced' that Portugal alone, of all the countries, is entitled to discover and possess the still-unmapped continents (IX: 86). This is how Portugal triumphs over Rome and illustrious Greece in history (X: 19), for in Tethy's presentation of the vision of the universe to da Gama (X: 75–142), the entire universe, East as well as the West, is brought down to be at the disposal of the Lusitanians (X: 138). The poet wishes to believe that it was part of this grand design, that the Portuguese colonized Brazil (X: 140). However, in the concluding stanzas of the last Canto, the poet regrets that his country has suffered a jolt (X: 145) and, the poet makes a last appeal to his King to whom the poem is dedicated:

E não sei por que influxo de Destino
Não tem um ledo orgulho e geral gosto,
Que os ânimos levanta de contino
A ter pera trabalhos ledo o rosto.
Por isso vós, ó Rei, que por divino
Conselho estais no régio sólio posto,

Olhai que sois (e vede as outras gentes)
Senhor só de vassalos excelentes. (X: 146)

It is true that Os Lusiadas is written from a Portuguese perspective. This does not imply that the work consists of the history of Portugal alone.
As we have already seen, Os Lusiadas consists of history of Indian peninsula, of Malabar, and of various Western countries. Talking about histories inscribed in Os Lusiadas, it is quite interesting to see how Os Lusiadas looks at the history of Saint Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ, whose arrival in Malabar is a matter of contention which, at least, indirectly and emotionally affect the validity of the Catholic identity of Saint Thomas Christians in Malabar.

In this sixteenth century epic which surely bears testimony to the attitude of at least a major section of the Portuguese towards the issue, the first reference to Saint Thomas is made when the narration speaks of the sailing of the fleet by São Tomé island (V: 12). But a more convincing means of validating the historical identity of Saint Thomas Christians can be identified in the poem, in the author's act of attributing historicity to the missionary work of St. Thomas in India. Here is an example for the freedom a literary source has in its ability to 'record' the history of nations and peoples who are suppressed and are, therefore, left with no evidence of their own history.

Through Tethy's words, the poet describes how St. Thomas crushed Bacchus / paganism in Mylapore, near Madras, the site of the Saint's last days (X: 109). The miracle Saint Thomas worked there by pulling ashore a log of immense weight from the sea, (X: III), caused but the enmity of the Brahmins. The next miracle he did on the Indian soil was to resurrect the son of a Brahmin who was an enemy to the Saint (X: 113–115). Consequently, the
king with many others received baptism, though many of the Brahmins remained hostile. The result was the martyrdom of Saint Thomas to whom the Portuguese seek ardent intercession:

‘Choraram-te, Tomé, o Gange e o Indo;
Chorou-te toda a terra que pisaste;
Mais te choram as almas que vestindo
Se iam da santa Fé que lhe ensinaste.
Mas os Anjos do Céu, cantando e rindo,
Te recebem na glória que ganhaste.
Pedimos-te que a Deus ajuda peças
Com que os teus Lusitanos favoreças.’ (X: 118)

Thus, we understand that Portugal is not always at the centre of the history inscribed in Os Lusiadas. In fact, there many moments the reader feels that the case of the Portuguese is represented to be on the wane. Again the backdrop is historical. In the words of Landeg White,

Yet by the time Camões arrived in Goa, on the only one of four ships to survive that year’s outward voyage, it was all beginning to unravel.... In Camões’s single letter home from Goa, which he labels ‘the mother of villains and stepmother of honest men’, there is already a strong whiff of what was later to be recognizable as the odour of an empire in decline. French and English warships were already marauding and the Dutch were about to join the scene. The point is important, for underlying the manifest heroics of The Lusiadas there is
a note of *elegy*, of absences and *regret*. It had all happened before Camões's time. (x, emphasis added)

The final stanzas of *Os Lusiadas* (X: 145 – 156) are devoted to express these poignant anxieties of his regarding the nation. Camões concludes with an address to King Sebastião, again notable for its anxiety over the state of the nation, drawing a sharp juxtaposition of the unhappy situation of the overseas empire and that of the Portuguese at home, giving the young King some sound advice, and offering his own services as *warrior and as poet*. Thus the elegiac note pervading the entire poem was difficult to be removed, since along with the contemporary fate of the nation, as William J. Entwistle remarks, Camões, too, "...had the pessimism of intense longings, unfulfilled and incapable of fulfillment, the mood the Portuguese call *saudade*" (87, emphasis added).

While Portuguese victories are sung, an anxiety is always played at the background to the effect that Portugal is a *little kingdom* and that its defenders / the soldiers are only ‘handful’ in number: "Porque uns poucos a terra lhe detêm./ Em sangue Português, juram, descritos, / De banhar os bigodes retorcidos" (X: 68). This means that Camões does not romanticize Portugal blindly, even if he chose to treat her history at an epic range and scale. Even while the history of Portugal reaches the scale of grand narration, he states that the country is only a ‘small empire’ (I: 6). Moreover, the poet chastises many of its *kings* and pronounces some of them as *political or even moral failures*. The very first King of Portugal, though his feats were epoch-
making, erred at last and suffered defeat at Thessaly for a grave sin he committed against his mother (III: 33, 69, 73). With Sancho II the royal negligence was so extreme that he was ruled by some of his subjects (III: 91–93). There were many more similar failures in the royal line in Portugal.

Even the voyage which is the central history of the epic is not a mythically spotless achievement. Da Gama himself is “Cheio dentro de dúvida e receio, / Que apenas nos meus olhos ponho o freio” (IV: 87) as he embarks on the voyage. There is great ‘uncertainty’ regarding the journey (IV: 89) which is apprehensively termed a doubtful voyage/ “um caminho duvidoso” (IV: 91). The Old Man at Belém (IV: 94-104) is an antidote to any height or amount of ‘romanticisation’ of the Portuguese enterprise that might seem to have claimed in the epic. About the invention of ‘O Velho do Restelo’ by Camões, Landeg White comments:

the deeply moving episode of the Old Man of Belém, denouncing the whole enterprise, reflects opposition in Portugal to King Manuels’ overseas policy. It is a vision which mocks the whole imperial thrust of The Lusiads with all its religious, philosophical, and adventurous trappings, and which haunts us throughout the epic in its recurring episodes of elegy or pastoral. (242)

As far as a central subject of the epic – “wisdom” - is concerned, the Old Man is a telling representation, for “C'um saber só de experiências feito, / Tais palavras tirou do experto peito” (IV: 94). The centrality of the epic, which is Portugal constructed on grand scale, is shaken thoroughly at the
following words of the Old Man; consequently, poetic ‘contradictions’ are created which in turn give space to multiple readings and alternative histories:

- ‘Ó glória de mandar! Ó vã cobiça
Desta vaidade, a quem chamamos Fama!
Ó fraudulent0 gosto, que se atïca
C'uma aura popular, que honra se chama!
Que castigo tamanho e que justiça
Fazes no peito vão que muito te ama!
Que mortes, que perigos, que tormentas,
Que crueldades neles experimentas!’ (IV: 95)

In the words of the Old Man, behind the whole venture of da Gama and his men, it is sin (IV: 98) and restlessness (IV: 103) and ambition (IV: 104). Further, the sad stories of Inês de Castro (canto III), execution of Rui Dias (X: 46, 47) and the intrigue of Lopo Vaz de Sampaio against Pedro de Mascarenhas (1526) are some of the demoralizing moments in Portugal’s history which are nevertheless recorded by Camões. No wonder that the poet is thoroughly disenchanted towards the close of his epic of Portugal (X: 145, 146).

In this context it shall be remembered that the Portuguese were not free from certain grave historical blunders though most of the historians are of opinion that at least the first Portuguese voyage was more on the peaceful and defensive vein. The first of such blunders, as is recorded in Os Lusiadas, is Paulo da Gama’s presentation of his nation as basically of a warring and
aggressive country, especially with the Muslim Arabs with whom Malabar, on
the other hand, had long ‘enjoyed’ a peaceful and comfortable trade (VIII: 1–
42). As a result, for Catual and the Nairs who accompanied him, theirs was
more of a ‘warship’ (VIII: 44). For the subsequent events that took place at
Malabar Coast, it is difficult to find fault solely with an assumed Muslim
conspiracy. That Vasco da Gama had only the most trumpery presents to
offer the Samorin (VIII: 62), strengthened the Samorin’s suspicion that the
new arrivals were either exiles or pirates / “desterrados...Ou se piratas” (VIII:
63). There were provocations from Malabar side and then attempts of
retaliation from the Portuguese side, too. But in the final leave-taking what
the Portuguese did cannot at any level be justified especially in the context
that they were intent on visiting the Malabar Coast again in future. As we
read in IX: 12, while all the Portuguese detainees were returned by Samorin
even overruling the hostile Muslims, da Gama hastily sailed from Calicut with
“Leva alguns Malabares, que tomou / Por força, dos que o Samorim mandara”
(IX: 14) Ultimately da Gama had labored in vain (IX: 13) and Camões who
saw the next fifty or so years of the development of the Portuguese overseas
empire was fully qualified to make his observation in a critical stance in
IX:13; and what he has observed for the rest of history is summed up in canto
X: 10–73.

In other words, the idealization of the nation of Portugal in Os
Lusiadas is not so exclusive that it banishes the history of every other nation.
Thus the need to sing the honour of Portugal in the highest pitch possible
emerged from the situation that at least by the time of writing the epic, Portugal appeared very much dishonourable while many other countries like Malindi continued to progress as ‘honourable’ (II: 63). Portugal’s history is impossible to be inscribed poetically without a reference to innumerable other nations; though some are friendly and others unfriendly, they are referred to in da Gama’s self-introduction to the King of Malindi, Paulo da Gama’s interpretation of history from banner paintings, nymph’s song at the feast on the return voyage and Tethy’s presentation of the vision of the entire universe to da Gama.

To see the entire Portuguese enterprise from the perspective of the particular age it was staged, one should concede that the Portuguese were also partaking the great epistemological quest which was itself part of the Renaissance project of discovering the unknown. The Portuguese in fact, voyaged to Taprobana and beyond / “Passaram ainda além da Taprobana,” (I: 1). The Greek name Taprobana which Camões identifies with Ceylon in X: 51 and 107, stands for the Eastern limit of the known world, while India was a central metaphor for the unknown.

That Camões’s work depicts not only the history of Portugal but rather histories of many regions renders the work a unique epic that combines the experience of reading history with that of literature without ever challenging the organic unity of the poem, thanks to the verisimilitude it creates. According to many readers like, João de Andrade Corvo, it only adds to the beauty of Os Lusiadas that it paints the poetic as well as the realistic picture
of the remote regions of the Orient. In the words of Corvo, “Uma das causas
do enlevo que nos arrebata o espírito ao lêr o maravilhoso poema de Camões,
é, sem dúvida, o encontrarmos n’ella a mais poetica e ao mesmo tempo a mais
verdadeira e viva pintura da natureza que das remotas regiões do oriente,
sem tem feito” (1, emphasis added). No wonder that, true to the nature of
being a literary source, Os Lusiadas sings the histories of the vanquished
without which a presentation of the history of the victorious, as well, would
have been impossible.