

**Introduction to World Literature**  
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**Lecture 04**  
**The Lusiads**

Good morning everyone and welcome to today's session, today we look at this epic poem written in Portuguese language titled the Lusiads.

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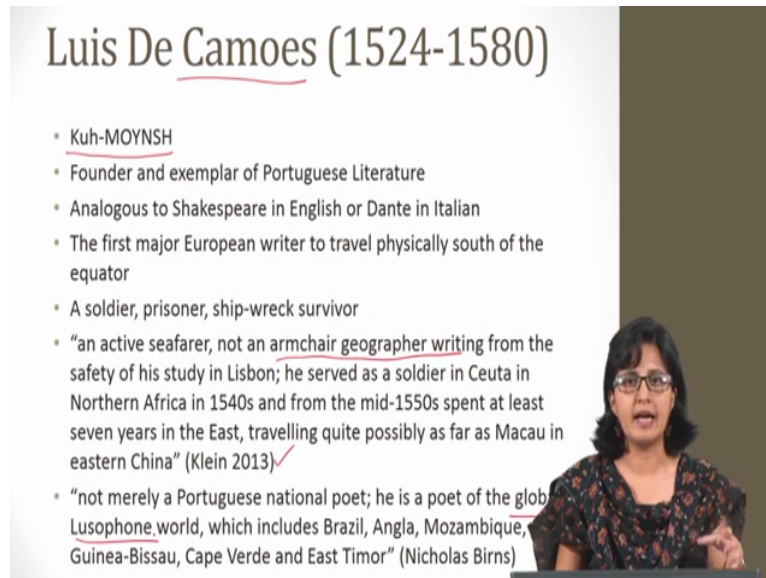


It is to give you a context and relevance of this discussion let me draw your attention to a newspaper report which appeared in 2009 in a leading national daily, it was titled Portuguese epic speaks of Kerala's past and I read you an excerpt from this news report, 74 years after Vasco da Gama's fleet weighed anchor at Kappad in Kozhikode on May 20 1498 a book that told the story of his voyage via southern Africa to India was printed in Portugal.

So this is a relevance of us discussing and this Portuguese epic today and we will also see how this is connected to our own history? And how this showcases they are continuing interconnections? and the interweaving of literature and culture is as we have been trying to contextualize them for this course on world literature and this sub a piece of news it also adds the epic poem will be of great interest to Malayalees, its descriptive passages tell us of the palace of the zamorin the poem has been translated into Konkani it is yet to be translated into Malayalam.

So the news is about a series of our lecture is which are in the context which are in which are highlighting the historical literary importance of this epic title the Lusiads.

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Luis De Camoes (1524-1580)

- Kuh-MOYNSH
- Founder and exemplar of Portuguese Literature
- Analogous to Shakespeare in English or Dante in Italian
- The first major European writer to travel physically south of the equator
- A soldier, prisoner, ship-wreck survivor
- “an active seafarer, not an armchair geographer writing from the safety of his study in Lisbon; he served as a soldier in Ceuta in Northern Africa in 1540s and from the mid-1550s spent at least seven years in the East, travelling quite possibly as far as Macau in eastern China” (Klein 2013)
- “not merely a Portuguese national poet; he is a poet of the global Lusophone world, which includes Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and East Timor” (Nicholas Birns)


So setting this context for you I move on to take you through a brief journey introducing this epic and its order and its historical relevance for you. This historical epic the Lusiads was written by Camões and this is how this name is pronounced Camoes, he lived from 1524 to 1580, soon after the expedition the successful voyage an expedition of Vasco da Gama.

Camoes is considered as a founder and exemplar of Portuguese literature he is analogous to Shakespeare and a for English literature or Dante for Italian literature and it said that he is a first major European writer to travel physically south of equator, he was a soldier, a prisoner, a ship-wreck survivor whatever he wrote about were based on his first-hand experiences, he is voyages and the recent studies on Camões his epic the Lusiads by Klein in 2013.

It is noted he was an active seafarer not an armchair geographer writing from the safety of a study in Lisbon, he served as a soldier in Ceuta in northern Africa in 1540s and from the mid 1550 spent at least seven years in the East travelling quite possibly as far as Macau in eastern China and Nicholas Birns a find is about him that he is not merely a Portuguese national poet he is a poet of the global Lusophone world which includes Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and East Timor.

So this is the relevance and historical significance of this found Camões and his epic work the Lusiads

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**Luis de Camoes**

- That famous poet Luis de Camoes – who speaking in absolutes, was the prince of them all – was a tall man with broad shoulders and reddish hair. His face was freckled and he was blind in one eye. He was a man of sharp mind, clear judgment and rare wit. He was well-read in the humanities, well-versed in the sciences, skilled at arms, and valiant of spirit” (found in an anonymous 17<sup>th</sup> century memoir)

The slide features a woman with glasses and a patterned top in the bottom right corner, appearing to be the presenter.

Camões is not a poet who found fame only in recent time is even during his own time is and the centuries that followed thereafter, it has this enough evidence to believe that he was quite popular and he was a well acknowledged writer in an anonymous memoir from the 17th century, it is recorded about Camões. That famous poet Luis de Camoes who is speaking in absolutes was the prince of them all, was a tall man with broad shoulders and reddish hair, he is face was freckled and he was blind in one eye, he was a man of sharp mind, clear judgment and rare wit.

He was well read in the humanities, well-versed in the sciences, skilled at arms and valiant of spirit. So this is how a Camões is introduced in an anonymous Saint in century memoir and what we find in the lusiads the detail is and the graphic description is that we find in the lusiads they do stand testimony to the many things which have been written about Camões.

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Vasco da Gama's voyage and the discovery of new sea route:

"The defining moment of the beginning of modernity.  
It shrank the globe, thereafter yoking Asia inseparably with  
Western Europe. It pulled commerce out of the Mediterranean  
sea to the Atlantic ocean"



What is the main theme and the central crux of this epic the lusiads it is about Vasco da Gama is voyage and the discovery of new sea route and if you ask what the significance of this voyages da Gama is voyage it is described as a defining moment of the beginning of modernity it is said that the shrank the global thereafter yoking Asia inseparably with Western Europe.

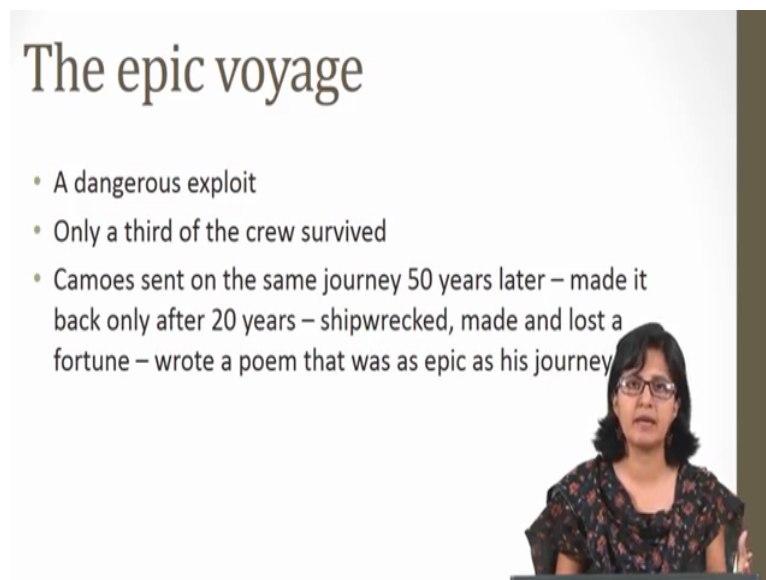
It pulled commerce out of the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, so that is a significance of this voice and by extension this epic the lusiads. It also acquires this status and relevance of situating itself within this moment of the beginning of modernity and when we look back at that epic today after centuries we begin to see how important the document is for us to understand the kind of initiatives taken the kind of enterprising spirit that Vasco da Gama and his crew had back in the 15 century.

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And this is what this iconic travel led to modernity this is roughly the route that Vasco de Gama and his crew took from Portugal to Calicut and this discovery as we know our history it was a momentous episode which totally rewrote the story of colonialism and the story of international trade.

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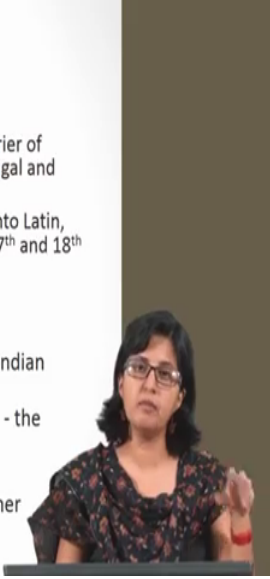
Bearing this in mind we begin to talk about the various ways in which the lusiads talk about this epic voyage, this epic voyage undertaken by Vasco da Gama and his crew in the 15th century it was a dangerous exploit to begin with and it said that only a third of the crew survived after this entire expedition and there is every reason to believe the account is which

are given in the lusiads because are order he command himself, he had also undertaken the same journey, he was internal exile 50 years later 50 years after Vasco da Gama is a momentous journey and he could come back only after 20 years, he was shipwrecked during this time, he made an lost fortune and eventually as a sum of this as a sum total of this experience he produced this boom which was as epic as his journey.

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## The Lusiads

- Began writing in mid-1560s; published in 1572
  - English translation in 1655 by Sir Richard Fanshawe, a courier of Charles I – the first major literary exchange between Portugal and England
  - More than 100 editions – translated more than 50 times into Latin, Italian, Dutch, French, Polish and other languages in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Regarded as Portugal's national epic
- Written when Camões was an exile in Macau
- The story of the Portuguese exploration of Africa and the Indian Ocean – narrated in the form of a traditional epic
- Chronicles Vasco da Gama's voyage around Africa to India - the discovery of the sea route (1479-1499)
  - Camões had spent far more time in Asia than in Africa -
- About real people who lived in the recent past – unlike other Renaissance epics
- Depiction of non-European people



The lusiads is an epic poem which Camões started writing in the mid-1560s and it was published in 1572. There are many English translations available to pay at least eight of them and the first translation was by Sir Richard Fanshawe. He was a courier of Charles the first, King Charles the first and this translation appear in 1655 and this even this translation of the lusiads from Portuguese to English.

It is seen as a first major literary exchange between Portugal and England and now in different languages we have more than hundred editions of this poem the lusiads. It has been translated more than 50 times in a different languages including Latin, Italian, Dutch, French, Polish and various other languages and these translations began to appear from the 17th and 18th centuries on words and off late we also find a lot of critical attention and historical attention being bestowed upon this epic.

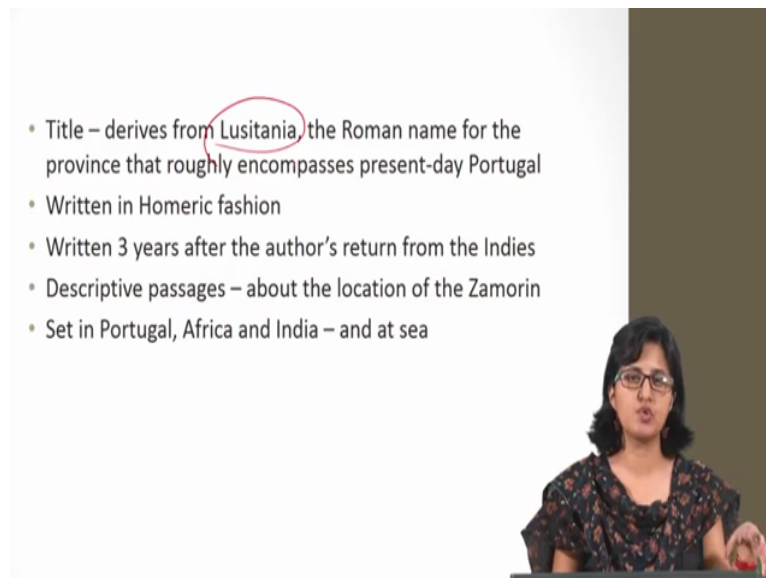
The lusiads is considered as the National epic of Portugal. It was written when Camões was an exile in Macau and this if you try to sum up the story of the lusiads, it is a plot the central theme of lusiads. It is a story of the Portuguese exploration of Africa and the Indian Ocean and this narrator in the form of a traditional epic and it is also one of the most modern recent

epic is available to us in terms of its dimension, in terms of its scope and in terms of the large canvas that it deals with.

Its chronicle is Vasco da Gama's voyage around Africa to India and a discovery of this new sea route. This was between 1479 and 1499 and Camões incidentally had also spent far more time than Vasco da Gama himself. Vasco da Gama himself died in a, and Camões himself had spent far more time in Asia than in Africa, so his account is also of that graphic quality when he talks about his experiences in Asia.

And the *Lusiads* is about real people who lived in the recent past and this is unlike other Renaissance epics which relied a lot on fantasy, which relied on reliving myth and folk tales and legend. Here we have a closer to life account because it is also loosely based on a Camões experience. It is also one of the earliest modern epics to depict non-European people especially when we talk about the kind of works which are produced from a predominantly European setting.

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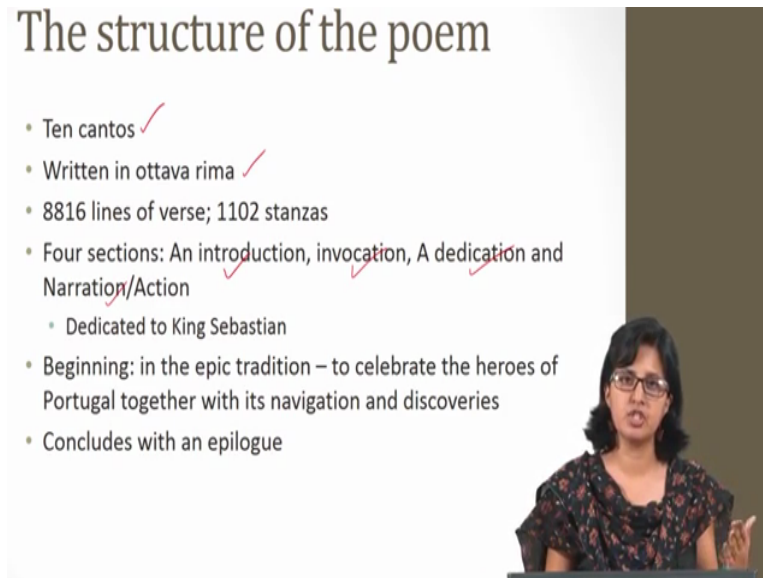
- Title – derives from Lusitania, the Roman name for the province that roughly encompasses present-day Portugal
- Written in Homeric fashion
- Written 3 years after the author's return from the Indies
- Descriptive passages – about the location of the Zamorin
- Set in Portugal, Africa and India – and at sea

The title of the *Lusiads* derives from the term Lusitania, which was a Roman name used for a province that now roughly encompasses the present-day Portugal. It is written in Homeric fashion and this was written three years after the author's return from the Indies. There are a lot of descriptive passages which tell us about the location of the Zamorin and you also get to know a lot about the details through the lens of this author, Camões.



It is setting the canvas is really expansive it is set in Portugal, Africa and India and of course at sea and the protagonist of this epic, the hero of this epic is not Vasco da Gama but Portugal, but Portugal as a nation Portugal as a nation which highly enterprising ability and the spirit to send out people on voyage. So this term is also very befitting to this national epic which now is considered almost a source of supreme national pride.

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The structure of the poem

- Ten cantos ✓
- Written in ottava rima ✓
- 8816 lines of verse; 1102 stanzas
- Four sections: An introduction, invocation, A dedication and Narration/Action ✓
  - Dedicated to King Sebastian ✓
- Beginning: in the epic tradition – to celebrate the heroes of Portugal together with its navigation and discoveries ✓
- Concludes with an epilogue

The structure of the poem befits an epic there are ten cantos written in ottava rima, there 8816 line is of verse and 1102 stanzas. It is divided into four section is there is an introduction, an invocation a dedication followed by Narration or action followed by the actual epic and this is dedicated to King Sebastian who is also a patron of art and literature of those times and the outset of the epic in the beginning, it begin is in the epic tradition we are told right at the outset that the intention is to celebrate the heroes of Portugal together with it is navigation and discovery.


So Vasco da Gama is heroism is also situated within this a national narrative and it also concludes with an epilogue in a typical epic fashion.



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## Summary

- Da Gama's ships are underway in the Indian Ocean, sailing up the coast of East Africa
- The gods of Greco-Roman mythology gather to discuss the fate of the expedition – competition between them to promote or foil the expedition
- Vasco da Gama and his crew are introduced in Canto 1 'midway on the ocean' off the east African coast just south of Mozambique
- The opening aboard a ship - A conscious allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid*
- "Arms are my theme, and those matchless heroes" –the opening lines



Reading the lusiads is more like an experience nevertheless I try to summarize some of the key points which are part of the lusiads when the epic begins we get to know that Vasco da Gama is ship is are underway in the Indian Ocean, they are sailing up the coast of East Africa and there is also a rather extraordinary sailing of Greek god is the god is made together. There is a council and there are these god is of Greek or Roman mythology they gather to discuss the fate of the expedition, so they have these different opinion is about the future the outcome of this expedition that is led by Vasco da Gama and there is also a competition going on between these Greek or Roman god is to promote or foil the expedition.


And we are introduced to Vasco da Gama and his crew in Canto 1 when they are midway of the ocean and they are just off the east African coast just south of Mozambique. So it does not begin at the beginning when they set out on sale from Portugal but it begins in the middle of narration in media air Midway of the ocean. The opening is also a Buddhist ship and this is a conscious allusion to Virgil's Aeneid which are the epic which on lovely find Camões also tends to emit it and even emulate and the opening lines go like this Arms of my theme and those matchless heroes.

So it pretty much sum is up the central theme of this epic that it is about the matchless heroes of Portugal and the theme revolves around arm is which includes not just the physical arm is not just a physical tool is and weapon is that they have but it also includes the courage spirit and the enterprising initiatives that this Portuguese crew possesses.

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## An outline

- Canto 1: the proposition to write da Gama's voyage – dedication – invocation – the narrative begins in media res
- Canto 2: conflict between Venus and Bacchus. Arrives in Africa
- Canto 3: da Gama narrates the history of Portugal to the King of Melinde
- Canto 4: Recitation of Portuguese history continues
- Canto 5: Lisbon – flashback – da Gama's departure, details of the voyage – the dearth of worthy poets in the world
- Canto 6: Storm at sea – da Gama prays, delivered by Venus
- Canto 7: Arrival at Calicut – introduced to Indian customs and culture
- Canto 8: Recounting Portuguese heroes
- Canto 9: Isle of Love is given to Portuguese
- Canto 10: Celebration banquet. Exhorting King Sebastian to do great things



I try to give you an outline based on each of the cantos, in canto 1 we are introduced to this proposition to ride da Gama is voyage it is part of the dedication as well and there is an invocation followed by the narrative which begins in the middle of narration, canto 2 feature is a conflict between the god is especially between Venus and Bacchus and it is also the time when da Gama is crew arrives in Africa in, canto 3 are we Vasco de Gama himself has made to narrate is the history of Portugal to the king of Melinde and this is after arriving in Africa and if you look at the map of the voyage which was shown earlier the beginning of the narration it happen is somewhere around here.

And in canto 4 we find that the Recitation of the Portuguese history continues in canto 5 is more like a flashback where taken back to Lisbon but where he is about to set out on this epic

journey, we are giving details of Vasco da Gama's departure, the details of his voyage and canto 5 also has this interesting discussion where Camões is lamenting the dearth of worthy poets in the world.

In canto six there is a Storm at sea we find Vasco de Gama praying to the god is and he is delivered by Venus throughout this narration we find that the Greek or Roman god is they have a significant role to play here and this viewing enough mythical element is into this otherwise historical story is something which is interested the critics always, in cantos 7 we find Vasco de Gama arriving at Calicut he is introduced to Indian customs and culture he is also meeting the Zamorin who is not easy to please.

And in canto 8 there is again a recounting of Portuguese hero is remember this was written primarily to extol the spirit of Portuguese adventure, so the hero of this epic is Portugal itself. So every now and then whenever an opportunity present is itself we find Camões resorting to various means of recounting and retelling Portuguese history glorifying its achievements.

In canto 9 we find this episode where Isle of love is given to Portuguese and the final Canto, Canto 10 is a celebration banquet. It also Exhorting King Sebastian to do great things it is said that the monarchs in Portugal they were extremely supportive of these expeditions and voyages and they also had encouraged Portuguese literature their presentation of Portuguese history, Portuguese art in multiple ways.

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The slide is titled "The thrill and adventure" in a serif font. Below the title, there are three bullet points: "• Vasco da Gama's story of sailing from point A Lisbon to point B India", "• But does not know where point B is until he sets sail!", and "• No locus of control – hence, Jupiter and Venus to look after them". A red curved arrow points from "point A Lisbon" to "point B India". The word "where" in the second bullet point is circled in red. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset of a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned top, who appears to be presenting the slide.

### The thrill and adventure

- Vasco da Gama's story of sailing from point A Lisbon to point B India
- But does not know where point B is until he sets sail!
- No locus of control – hence, Jupiter and Venus to look after them

We find Camões focusing on the thrill and adventure of this journey. In this narration from canto 1 to canto 10 in spite of the many detail is which are woven and the thrill and adventure of the voyage is not missed out at all. In terms of a storyline this is about Vasco de Gama story of sailing from point A which is Lisbon to point B which is India but the charm the thrill and adventure it lies in the fact that Vasco de Gama does not know where point B is until he said sail he reaches there by a happy accident and also by a lot of planning and adventurous spirit but there was no sense of where the point B is until he said sail and actually reaches there.

There is no locus of control in this real historical event which is why when it is being made into a an epic form Jupiter and Venus are introduced these God figures are introduced as figures who would control who would look after the heroes they would also operate as these central locus of control. So thing is do not if you are out of control or things do not appear uncertain to the reader.

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Themes

- Portugal's destiny to conquer primitive cultures and spread their modern, Western and Christian values
- The 'sea' as a poetic, historical and social space
- "the poet's historico-imaginative engagement with the ocean"
- The first modern epic which extolled discovery, religious conversion, trade and empire (George Monteiro)

Within this dominant theme of Portuguese navigation and Portuguese exploration and the celebration of Portuguese heroes namely Vasco da Gama, we find multiple minor theme is which also are try to extol this theme of Portuguese spirit, one of them is the celebration of Portuguese destiny to conquer primitive cultures and spread their modern, Western and Christian values.

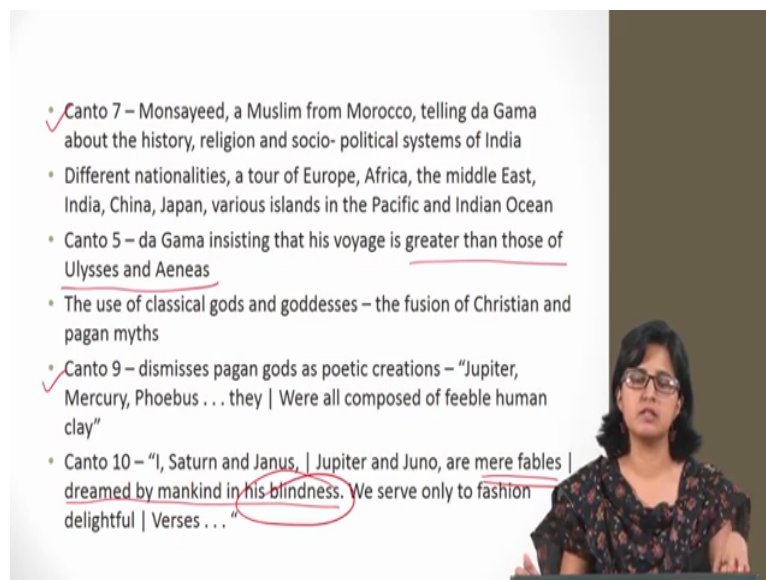
We find a number of episode is where these kind is of aims and purpose is do come out. The sea is also seen as a poetic, historical and social space at the same time. It is not something

the sea is not a space a sight which is introduced into this epic because it is fascinating by itself. In the context of in the real historical context of this epic and this voyage we find that the sea operates as a historical and social space.

There are stories of the nation and stories of colonialism and stories of trade which get written and rewritten by way of the sea route and it also operates as a social space as we would see from the details given in the epic and also from the many historical detail is that we can gather and some of the critics have spoken about the poet Camões historco-imaginative engagement with the ocean and this is very significant because this is in the form of an epic, it is relatively modern, it engages with the sea which continue is which was always a sight of fascination for poets and writers but it is also situated within this historical space of modernity.

George Monteiro therefore rightfully comments that this is the first modern epic with extolled discovery, religious conversion, trade and empire. We do have the figure is of God and certain supernatural element is happening in the context of this epic but we cannot come across another modern epic which brings together their narrative of modernity within this narrative form.

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The slide contains a list of bullet points with red checkmarks and red underlines. The text on the slide is as follows:

- Canto 7 – Monsayeed, a Muslim from Morocco, telling da Gama about the history, religion and socio-political systems of India
- Different nationalities, a tour of Europe, Africa, the middle East, India, China, Japan, various islands in the Pacific and Indian Ocean
- Canto 5 – da Gama insisting that his voyage is greater than those of Ulysses and Aeneas
- The use of classical gods and goddesses – the fusion of Christian and pagan myths
- Canto 9 – dismisses pagan gods as poetic creations – “Jupiter, Mercury, Phoebus . . . they | Were all composed of feeble human clay”
- Canto 10 – “I, Saturn and Janus, | Jupiter and Juno, are mere fables | dreamed by mankind in his blindness. We serve only to fashion delightful | Verses . . .”

In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned top, speaking.

Within these larger themes of modernity and Portuguese nationalism we do find certain minor episodes which also need to be attended to in canto 7 we are introduced to a Muslim from Morocco his name is came on sight he tells Vasco de Gama about the history religion and social political systems of India. we in through out to this narration we get introduced to

different nationalities, different cultures it is more or less like a tour of Europe, Africa the Middle East, India, China and Japan and various islands of the Pacific and Indian Ocean as mentioned earlier.

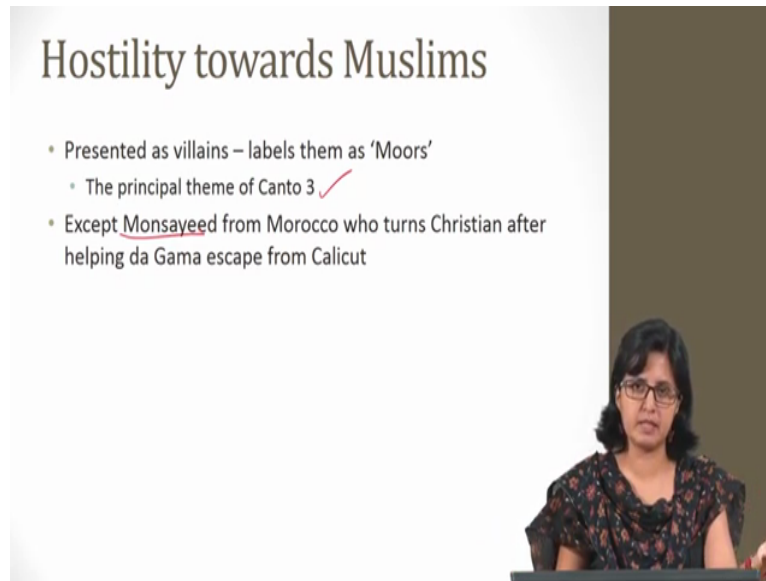
The expanse and scope of this epic in that sense is amazing in canto 5 we find Vasco de Gama insisting that his voyage is a greater than – those of Ulysses and Aeneas and this is also a way in which Camões indirectly trying to tell us that his epic the *lusiads*. It is going to be greater than these ancient classic epics. We find the use of classical gods and goddesses but the theme is not entirely pagan, so we find a fusion of the Christian and pagan myths which is also again another way in which this epic fits itself within this narrative of modernity.

In canto 9 we also find this predominant Christian outlook of Camões getting a highlighted though he uses the gods and goddesses for the purpose of this epic for the narrative purpose for the plot purpose we find him dismissing these pagan gods as poetic creations, this happen is in our canto 9 there is this verse Jupiter, Mercury, Phoebus they were all composed of feeble human clay, he is conscious of the fact that these are creation is by humans and he is using them as a poetic device and that Camões find is it necessary to articulate this necessary to underscore this and highlight it also speaks volumes about the kind of value system and the kind of belief system within which he himself is situated.

In our canto 10 we have another verse I, Saturn and Janus, Jupiter and Juno are mere fables dreamed by mankind in his blindness. We serve only to fashion delightful verses. He is introducing gods and goddesses and the (( ))(22:33) and the ancient classical myths in the context of the epic but he is also telling the reader that these are poetic devices and from the beginning they have only the status of fables they are dreamed by mankind in blindness and this is in stark contrast with the light that Christianity is supposedly bringing in and we do find our Christian values being highlighted visa vis the pagan belief systems unless mentioned earlier.

This is also seen as one of the ways in which Portugal as a nation they reach out to the rest of the world in terms of sharing their belief system and their value system.

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The slide features a title 'Hostility towards Muslims' in a large, dark font. Below the title is a bulleted list of points. The first point is 'Presented as villains – labels them as ‘Moors’', with a sub-point 'The principal theme of Canto 3' marked with a red checkmark. The second point is 'Except Monsayeed from Morocco who turns Christian after helping da Gama escape from Calicut'. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned top, looking towards the camera.

## Hostility towards Muslims

- Presented as villains – labels them as ‘Moors’
  - The principal theme of Canto 3 ✓
- Except Monsayeed from Morocco who turns Christian after helping da Gama escape from Calicut

Some are critics have noticed that it is hard to find the hostility towards Muslims which is evident in this epic. The Muslim characters are presented as villains they are labelled as Moors and even the principal theme of canto 3 there is only one Muslim character which is presented in a favourable light that has Monsayeed he is the one who is introducing the Indian custom and cultures to Vasco da Gama but there is a flip side to this positive portrayal of Monsayeed.

Here is someone who turns Christian after helping Vasco de Gama escape from Calicut, so one does not know whether the, this presentation of Monsayeed in a favourable light is because of his impending conversion to Christianity.



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**A Humanist Epic**

- Infusing Vasco da Gama's voyage with a mythological significance – befitting the event – also exemplary of the new European literary movements
- “He is a humanist even in his contradictions, in his association of a Pagan mythology with a Christian outlook, in his conflicting feelings about war and empire, in his love of home and his desire for adventure, in his appreciation of pleasure.”

The slide features a video inset in the bottom right corner showing a woman with glasses and a patterned top speaking.

As we wrap up this discussion, it is important to note that we can possibly read the *Lusiads* as a humanist epic which is what makes it enduring to us even after centuries of its original writing and publication and this has been seen as a humanist for specific reasons because this is an epic which infuses Vasco da Gama's voyage with the mythological significance and it also befits that supreme event which rewrote the story of modernity and looking at it from a literary perspective we find that it is also exemplary of the new European literary movements which were in place during the time when Camões was writing.

As we wind up I leave you with this excerpt from one of the critical commentaries he is a humanist even in his contradictions, in his association of a pagan mythology with the Christian outlook, in his conflicting feelings about war and empire, in his love of home and his desire for adventure, in his appreciation of pleasure. The *Lusiads* thus clearly qualifies as a modern epic which has the traits of humanism and it also has the capacity too.

Please I hope this lecture has been an encouragement for you to go and look up at least some excerpts of this epic work titled the *Lusiads*. That is all we have for today, I thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.