

# Geographical Discoveries

Sea voyages and geographical explorations constitute important place among the epoch-making incidents of the world history. The incidents which have played the decisive role in heralding the modern age include these geographical discoveries as well. The scientific advancement and economic development especially the trade developments that began in the last phase of the middle age formed the background. The European countries played the leading role because of which they were able to dominate in the modern age. It is another issue that the countries such as Spain and Portugal which initiated the geographical exploration gradually lagged behind and other countries such as England, Holland, France and then Germany registered new success in the field of geographical discoveries.

We know that trade and commerce have been chief source of mutual contact from the days of early civilizations of the world. This trade took place through a specific route. These routes were often used between Europe and Asia even in the ancient and middle ages. However, there were several regions in the world which had human habitats but remained out of contact with the rest of the world. These included America, Africa, Australia and some other parts of Asia. Although in the 13th centuries the travelogues covering the journeys via India till China did make the Europeans aware of the prosperity of South-East Asia but with little impact. In due course, the large scale geographical explorations and the subsequent achievements paved the way for the modern age.

Marco Polo, a Portuguese traveller, in his travelogue has mentioned the prosperity of the Vijay Nagar empire and the grandeur of the court of Kubla Khan, the Chinese ruler.

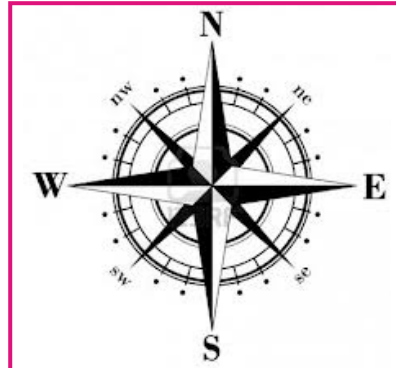
If we study the Mediaeval European history, we will find that it was a feudal age. In this age, neither the trade and commerce were dynamic nor was religion liberal or humane in nature. The knowledge about the earth was little and superstitious. Sea trade was also limited because of limited geographical knowledge. The people of the mediaeval period believed that the earth was flat and so if one went far away in the sea, there was fear of falling into infinity off the edges of the earth. Sea voyage was extremely painful and difficult. Ships were small and unsafe; they also depended much on the wind. People did not have compass or other direction-pointers. Hence, they were afraid of losing the sense of direction and thus wandering into the sea. The state did not give any grant for the sea voyage. In such adverse situations it was very difficult for the sailors and the merchants to cross the ocean like Atlantic.

### **Geographical explorations and discoveries: a background**

Meanwhile certain events and incidents were happening in Europe because of which Europe got ready to free itself from the mentality of the mediaeval age. When the European feudal lords got defeated by the emerging new powers of mid-Asia, the Arabs, in the religious war in the 11 - 12 centuries regarding the control over Jerusalem (situated in the modern Israel now), the European pride basking in the false aura of feudal pride and glory received a shattering jolt. But it had some positive results as well. During the very religious war, the Europeans came to realise that they needed to know all dimensions of the world. These events laid the foundation of the renaissance in Europe.

In the Mediaeval age, the Arabs and then the Turks founded the vast international empires. Till the five decades before the 15th century Qustuntunia was the route through which the trade between Europe and Asia took place. But after the Turkey's control over Qustuntunia in 1543, this route no longer remained a safe passage for the European merchants. For, the Turks had started collecting heavy taxes in lieu of the trade through this passage, compelling the Europeans to look for the alternative options.

Because of the new inventions made in this age the sea voyage and the development of the navy became easier. The Europeans learnt the knowledge of compass from the Arabs. Notch or slot system developed in place of the traditional system of making boats. As a result, big and strong ships came to be built. Telescope had also been invented and this helped immensely in the sea expeditions. The maps had greatly improved. Even astrolabe was very useful in this regard. The Portuguese made new type of fast moving ship Caravel.



**Compass**

With support from the new equipments and gadgets as well as their courage, the European sailors put their ships in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean sea. In this process, in 1488, the Portuguese merchant Bartolomeu Dias reached Cape of Good Hope, the extreme southern point of the South Africa, via the western Coast of Africa.



**Compass**



**Vasco da Gama**

In 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered America. In 1498, Vasco da Gama, a courageous Portuguese sailor, reached Malabar coast of India (Calicut of Kerala). He was welcomed by the local ruler Zamorin. It is to be noted that Vasco da Gama's success owed also to some new resources. He met Abdul Majid, an Indian merchant, in the South Africa and with his help he could get the direct route to come to India. His success encouraged the Europeans. The goods brought by Vasco da Gama from India were sold at a price 26 times greater in the European markets. The discovery of America or the 'new world' by Columbus in 1492 was a novel achievement of the Europeans. However, Columbus mistook it as a part of the Indian subcontinent and called its inhabitants the 'Red Indians'. Later Amerigo Vespucci, a Spanish sailor, explored the new world comprehensively and called it a continent. This region came to be known as America after his name. In 1519 Magellan made the first circumnavigation of the earth in his ship and this confirmed the notion that all the oceans are interlinked. Later Colonel Cook also discovered Australia along with the islands of New Zealand. Sir John and Sebastian Cabot discovered the islands of Newfoundland. Different rulers of the European countries also played significant role in encouraging



**Columbus**

New world: The Europeans called the American continent the new world because before Columbus nobody knew about this part of the world.

geographical explorations and discoveries, the chief among them being the Portuguese Prince Henry the Navigator and the Spanish Queen Isabella. Thus by the 16th century, Europe had come to know the whole world.





## Results of Geographical explorations and Discoveries

The results of geographical explorations were important and far-reaching. People for the first time came to know a big part of the universe and people of different countries came in one another's contact. The different civilizations of Asia and Europe that used to live in isolation, came in one another's contact. The discoveries of the new countries promoted not only the trade with the new colonies but also provided them opportunity to spread their civilization, culture, religion and literature. However, the European colonisation emerged as its negative consequences. These European countries exploited their colonies for their developmental and physical needs. More light can be thrown on the results of the geographical explorations under the following heads.

### Results of Geographical explorations and Discoveries

- Impact on trade and commerce
- Development of colonial empires
- Development of commercialism
- Spread of Christianity and the western civilization
- Development of slave trade
- End of misconceptions and increase in the geographical knowledge

**1. Impact on trade and commerce:** The discovery of new countries and the new trade ties brought revolutionary changes in the European trade and commerce. European countries began to be more prosperous by exploiting their colonies economically. As a result, the European trade reached at its peak. This led to the development of currency system and then to cheque (hundi), debenture (rinpatra), trade credit. Trade no longer remained local; it began to take global form.

Before the exploration of the new countries trade was confined chiefly to the Mediterranean Ocean and Baltic Ocean, but now it spread to Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans. As a result, the cities such as Paris, London, Amsterdam, Antwerp, etc. became the chief centres of global trade and with this the monopoly of Italy over the European market came to an end. Instead, Spain, Portugal, Holland-England and France gained in influence. Later Spain and Portugal were so engrossed in handling their huge empire that they lost their very empire. The precious metals or goods imported from the new countries discovered by the European countries, especially the gold and silver imported from America, changed the very form of economy. As a result, the

European economy depended on silver for 80 years. This led to inflation. In the changed form of economy, commerce and trade became important and hence there was change in the class relation as well. Consequently, the merchant class became more influential than the feudal class.

### **3. Development of colonial empire**

After the geographical explorations the development of imperialism continued in the form of the founding of colonies and there was a fierce competition among the European countries in this regard. As a result, both the form and nature of trade underwent a change. Organised trade companies took over in place of the individual merchants. These companies tried to get special rights and other facilities. Such companies came into being in countries

such as England, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, France, etc. Some of these companies were sponsored by the tradesmen or merchants and others by the states. Later, colonies were founded in America, Africa, Australia and other groups of islands. In the beginning, Portugal and Spain were the leading colonisers but by the end of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th century, France also came into the race.

#### **Establishment of European companies in India**

- Arrival of Portugal-1498
- East India Company - 1600
- Dutch - 1602
- French - 1664
- Danish - 1616
- Swedish- 1731

### **3. Development of commercialism**

Modern capitalism came into being as a result of the discoveries of new countries and global extension of trade and commerce. In this system of economy bullion gained in importance. The value of gold drew the attention of the European countries and so there was the loot and storage of gold and silver at the international level. Spain was leading in finding the gold mines.

### **4. Spread of Christianity and the western civilization**

As mentioned earlier, geographical discoveries helped spread of civilization, culture, religion and literature of the European countries. New geographical discoveries gave a new lease of life to the spread of Christianity which had almost ceased after the failure of religious war. The religious campaigner of Christianity went to Africa, Asia and America to spread their religion. However, there was a negative consequence as well. Attempts were

made in these regions to force or allure by offering money for conversion and so there was protest against this forced conversion and cultural invasion. On the other hand, the wide spread of the religion lessened the power of the church. The knowledge gained through the geographical discoveries led to questioning against religion on several issues. Reasoning came to be used in religious matters as well. This formed the background of the religious reformation.

### **5. Development of the slave trade**

The value of human labour in the trade-commerce, developed as a result of geographical discoveries, encouraged slave trade. The natives of the newly discovered countries such as America, Africa and Australia began to be sold in the European market. In the beginning, the slave trade was at the individual level but by the end of the 16th century it assumed the form of a formal trade. These slaves were used to cut jungles, do farming, make roads, fuel the ships and other tough works. They were also subjected to inhuman and barbaric torture. Thus, it proved to be a negative consequence of the geographical discoveries; the undeveloped, naïve and weak native people were exploited by the so-called civilised and developed ones.

### **6. End of misconceptions and increase in the geographical knowledge**

Geographical discoveries helped in doing away with misconception in connection with geographical knowledge. As a result people began to question the concepts spread by the church. Later it proved a major factor of the religious reformation movement. The discovery of the new hemisphere gave the unprecedented knowledge about the pettiness of Europe and the importance of the world and goaded the people for new inventions and discoveries. Its message is very evident in the Spanish coin '*Samne aur bhi hai*'.

The increased sea activities provided opportunities for the development of different equipment/ gadgets such as maps, compasses, conduct of stars (Nakshatra pranali) used in sea voyages. As a result there emerged a host of scholars and professional scientists associated with these disciplines. Later, this class played a significant role in reformation.

#### **Other results**

- Emergence of new cities in Europe especially Italy
- Increase in the importance of the Mediterranean ocean
- Development of capitalism, commercialism and imperialism
- Increase in navigation activities



## 7. Other results

Due to geographical discoveries inter-continental exchange of different new crops took place. For example, goods like mocha, tea, sugarcane, maize(mecca), potato, tobacco, indigo etc. entered into Europe and from there goods like tea, coffee, tobacco, potato etc. entered into India.

Thus, it can be claimed that the geographical discoveries brought out a new look of the world. There was a change in the thought process and the scientific thought became acceptable, Religious superstition began to be dispelled. On the other hand, commerce and imperialism developed with the discovery of new territories and new routes or passages. This europeanised the whole world.

### Exercise

Each of the questions given below has four options indicated by a, b, c & d. Of the four options, one is correct or the most suitable. While answering the questions, please write the option indicators a, b, c, or d against each question as the case may be.

#### I. Objective questions

1. Vasco da Gama was a traveler from -  
(a) Spain (b) Portugal (c) England (d) America
2. From whom did the Europeans learn the use of compass?  
(a) India (b) Rome (c) the Arabs (d) China
3. Who discovered Cape of good hope?  
(a) Spain (b) Portugal (c) England (d) America
4. In which year was America discovered?  
(A) 1453 (b) 1492 (c) 1498 (d) 1519
5. In which year was Qustuntunia destroyed?  
(a) 1420 (b) 1453 (c) 1510 (d) 1498
6. Who was the first traveller to make the first circumnavigation of the earth?  
(a) Magellan (b) Captain cook  
(c) Vasco da Gama (d) Marco Polo

II. Tick (✓) before the correct statement and cross (x) before the wrong one.

1. The native inhabitants of India are called Red Indians.
2. The discovery of the Cape of Good hope paved the way to reach India.
3. India is situated on the eastern coast of Atlantic Ocean.
4. Marco Polo discovered India.
5. Jerusalem is in modern Israel.
6. Lisbon was a very big centre of slave trade
7. Amerigu discovered the new world extensively.

III. Answer the following questions in one sentence.

1. Which merchant/ tradesman helped Vasco da Gama in reaching India?
2. Who discovered Newfoundland?
3. What is the name given to the fast moving ship made by the Europeans?
4. Which is the southernmost point of the south Africa?
5. Why did the religious war between the Christians and the Muslims take place in 11-12<sup>th</sup> century?
6. Who captured Kustuntunia in 1453?
7. Near which Ocean are Portugal and Spain situated?

IV. Short answer questions (Answer these questions in not less than 30 words and not more than 50 words.

1. Why is the mediaeval age of Europe called the Dark Age or the Age of Darkness?
2. What role did scientific gadgets play in geographical discoveries?
3. How did geographical discoveries affect trade-commerce?
4. How did geographical discoveries dispel misconceptions?
5. How did geographical discoveries bring change in the world map?

V. Long answer Questions (Answer these questions in not more than 200 words.)

1. What is meant by geographical discoveries? How did it reduce the distance within the world?
2. Explain the reasons of geographical discoveries?
3. Write the newly discovered lands on the world map and tell how will you have traded with India if you had been in Europe before the geographical discoveries?
4. What do you understand by the Dark age? How did geographical discoveries help in getting out of the Dark Age?
5. Describe the results of the geographical discoveries? What impact did it leave on the world?

