

# **Magadh Mahila College**

**Patna University, Patna**

**HISTORY**

**B.A. – I**

**PAPER – II**

**Geographical Discoveries**

**Unit – 3**

**Topic: - Important of Geographical Discoveries**

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## Important of Geographical Discoveries

The successes achieved by Diaz, Vasco da Gama and Columbus provided great inspiration to the explorers, navigators and sailors of Spain, Portugal, France and England. Till 1498 the Vasco da Gama route i.e. the ocean-route to India was the only solid geographical discovery. The westward route to the East was only half-discovered because till then the Europeans did not have any idea of the Pacific Ocean. On the basis of the inferences of Ptolemy and Marco Polo, it was believed that the East could be reached after crossing the Atlantic 3000 nautical miles. This was a wrong assumption because the real distance is 10,000 nautical miles. Moreover, one has to cross the big land mass of the North American continent. The interesting point is that even after Gama's successful expedition to India, Columbus clung to the belief that by reaching North America and West Indies he would land on the Indian soil.

Now the voyages to the American continents began with greater enthusiasm, because the new World offered not only riches, but also vast lands to conquer and colonise. From 1493 keen contest began between the Spaniards and the Portuguese for having the greater sphere of influence in these areas, particularly South America. England too joined the race, but only in North America.

Anticipating a fierce clash between Spain and Portugal, the Pope proclaimed the BULL of DEMARCATION in 1493. By this an imaginary line from north to south was drawn up dividing South America. The areas west of the line were allotted to Spain, While those in the east were given too Portugal. But Portugal was not satisfied and the TREATY of TORDESILLAS was signed in 1494 between the two countries by which the said imaginary line was shifted further westward.

It was again Columbus who paced up the race. He took three more expeditions to the American continent and West Indies, but failed to find access to the East, though his discovery of the New World itself was a precious legacy. On his second expedition (1493), he discovered Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and Jamaica. On his third expedition (1498) he landed in Venezuela. He reached the coast of Honduras on his last expedition in 1502.

Meanwhile, JOHN CABOT, an explorer from Genoa, who was promoted by Henry VII and financed by the merchants of Bristol, began in 1497 from Bristol his westward voyage in search of the route to the East. He reached the island of Newfoundland. In his second attempt (1498) he reached the shores of North America. This was an immensely significant discovery as England would put her claim over the North American continent on the ground of Cabot's expedition. Thus, for an unbelievably meagre sum of £ 10 and a title, England gained control over the entire territory along the Atlantic coast of North America. Under England's protection, thirteen American colonies later grew up in this territory.

The next historic discovery came up in 1500. PEDRO CABRAL, a Portuguese navigator, commanding a big fleet, crossed the Atlantic in the south-west direction and reached the coast of Brazil in South America. On the basis of the Treaty of Tordesillas, he claimed the vast and new territory of Brazil for Portugal.

The Spanish adventurers continued with westward expeditions hoping to reach the East eventually. But they mostly ended up in the American continent. The lust for wealth inspired them to penetrate deep into the interiors of the New World. They certainly had an edge over the Portuguese in the scramble for these territories. A landmark success was achieved by the Spanish conquistador, VASCO DA BALBOA. He led a group of 190 Spaniards and reached the southernmost part of South America. He earned the goodwill of the local Red Indian inhabitants and with their help his team was able to cross the Isthmus of Panama (lying between the two American continents) in the historic march of 1513. On 25 September 1513, Balboa climbed on the summit of a hill from which he saw a vast ocean, unknown to the Europeans. He was excited to see the calm and unending ocean. He was so much charmed by its calmness that he named it the PACIFIC OCEAN. The discovery of the Pacific marked the beginning of the process of the exploration of the largest single portion of the world's surface.

The next momentous discovery was very much a follow-up of Balboa's exploration and is credited to another great Spanish 'Conquistador, FERDINAND MAGELLAN. He can be regarded as the first explorer to reach the East though the

Atlantic-Pacific route. Magellan believed that it was possible to sail around South America just as Diaz had rounded Africa and then moving towards the East crossing the Pacific. He began his long voyage with seven vessels and more than 100 sailors in 1519, and planned to reach the 'spice island' Molucca in the East. He crossed the Atlantic to reach the southernmost tip of South America, and then crossed a strait to reach the Pacific. The crossing of the strait was a dangerous and nerve-wrecking experience. The discovery of this strait, named after him as the MAGELLAN STRAIT, was itself a momentous feat. The strait served as the outlet to the Pacific till the construction of the Panama Canal. Yet the greater achievement was that he crossed the Pacific to reach Philippine in the Far East 10 1520 So, he created history by crossing both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the second ocean-route to the East was thus discovered.

The discovery of the Atlantic-Pacific route to the East and Magellan's voyage also revealed some significant facts. It proved roundness of the earth, revolutionised ideas of relative proportion of land and water and clearly brought forth the truth that the American continents are different from Asia.

The French also did not lag behind. Two French explorers, CARTIER and CHAMPLAIN showed the way with their voyages to the Canadian region of North America. Lured by fur trade, the French controlled the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes region. The French dominance over Canada continued till 1763.

So far as other expeditions are concerned, those were mainly concerned with the conquest and annexation of South American territories as much as possible. Yet another Spanish conquistador, HERONANDO CORTES, was a typical Spanish explorer-greedy for gold and other riches, ruthless and took delight in killing. He crossed the Atlantic to reach Cuba 1st from Cuba went to Mexico. The wealth and prosperity of the Aztec Empire of Mexico was akin to the mythology 10 the Spanish tradition. He reached Mexico With 600 soldiers and good consignment of gunpowder. He ousted the Aztec Emperor, Montezuma, with force and fraudulence during' 520- 21, destroyed the Aztec Empire, and established Spanish rule in Mexico.

The next Spanish conquistador to leave his mark in history was FRANCISCO PIZARRO, conqueror of Peru. The Inca Empire of Peru, like that of Aztec in Mexico, was well-known for its riches and fortune in folklore and juvenile tales of Spain. Pizarro was an experienced explorer and was known for helping Balboa in the discovery of the Pacific Ocean. In 1532 he entered Peru and met the Inca king, Atahualpa. Feigning as friend, he was cruel and deceitful he killed Atahualpa. Thus, he established Spanish rule in Peru through force and fraudulence.

### Suggested Readings:-

1. Meenakshi Phukan : Rise of Modern West
2. G. Clark : Early Modern Europe
3. Raghbir Dayal : Modern European History
4. Jain and Mathur : World History (1500 – 1950)
5. G.M. Trevelyan : Social History of England
6. Parthsarathi Gupta (ed.) : आधुनिक पश्चिम का उदय
7. लाल बहादुर वर्मा : आधुनिक यूरोप का इतिहास

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