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# UNIT 6 BEGINNING OF MODERN AGE — GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERIES

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## 6.2 INTRODUCTION

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The modern age is said to have begun with the Renaissance movement in Europe. With the Renaissance movement old beliefs and institutions began to disappear. The scientific spirit of the Renaissance resulted in a number of discoveries and inventions.

The most significant discoveries of this period were geographical. These discoveries helped in the growth of trade and the imperial expansion of European powers. In this unit an attempt is made to make you aware of the various characteristics of the modern age and the importance of geographical discoveries in bringing about the modern age. The unit also discusses the objectives and strategies of teaching this topic in the classroom.

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## 6.3 OBJECTIVES

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At the end of this unit, you will be able to :

- explain various aspects of geographical discoveries;
- identify the major concepts, terms and teaching points required to be taught to students;
- identify the specific objectives and behavioural outcomes connected with the concepts and terms;
- choose appropriate and effective instructional strategies to achieve the expected behavioural changes;

- develop the skill to prepare and use appropriate teaching aids like maps, charts and diagrams;
- guide and organise student activities like discussion, debate, etc., and
- prepare evaluation items to test the behavioural outcomes and achievement.

## 6.3 CONTENT

### 6.3.1 What is the Modern Age ?

For the sake of convenience, world history is broadly divided into the Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods. This division is based on certain characteristic features of each of these periods. The modern age is generally accepted to have begun by the 14th century. Some of the characteristic features of the modern age are scientific development, nation states, interdependence of nations, industrial development, cultural exchanges, trade contacts, urbanisation, decline of feudalism etc.

The beginning of the modern age is associated with the movement known as the Renaissance. The Renaissance movement took place in Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries. This movement helped in developing the scientific spirit. A number of scientific discoveries were made by Renaissance scientists and adventurers. The most significant of these discoveries are geographical.

### 6.3.2 Meaning of Geographical Discoveries

The knowledge of the Europeans about the world was very limited. During the middle ages they knew of India, China, Arabia and the northern coast of Africa. Some of the early travellers like Marco Polo, who visited China and Japan, gave Europeans a detailed account of the eastern lands. This aroused the interest of the Europeans about the East. The merchants of Italy began to take an active part in trade with countries in the East. Italian cities began to prosper as a result of this trade. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Turks blocked the trade routes to the Eastern countries. This made the Europeans think of an alternative route to the East. These attempts resulted in the discovery of lands hitherto unknown. These discoveries are called geographical discoveries.

### 6.3.3 Events which helped Geographical Discoveries

The Renaissance spirit of curiosity, discovery and adventurism motivated the Europeans to undertake geographical discoveries. The Renaissance movement provided to sailors a better knowledge of geography. The prosperity of Italian towns was the envy of the rest of Europe. This prosperity had been occasioned by Italy's monopoly of the eastern trade. Other European countries were eager to take part in this trade and break the Italian monopoly. The conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by the Turks cut off the trade link between Europe and Asia. This made their search for an alternative route to Asia a more serious effort. The compass and the astrolabe, which are essential navigational instruments for long journeys across the oceans, had become known. Astronomical tables were developed and the art of mapping, which is essential for sailors, was developing fast. These factors encouraged the efforts for geographical discoveries.

### 6.3.4 Henry the Navigator and Bartholomew Diaz

Prince Henry of Portugal was a great patron of navigation. Though not a sailor himself, he had great interest in navigation. This had earned him the title "Navigator". He had got prepared maps of coastal Africa through sailors who sailed in those areas. He was hopeful of a sea route to India via the western coast of Africa. After his death there was no serious effort to discover any new route.

It was in 1486 that another sailor, Bartholomew Diaz, tried to sail south along the western coast of Africa. He could not travel beyond the southern tip of Africa because of adverse currents. He called this the cape of Storms. But his king, John II of Portugal, called it the Cape of Good Hope.

### Check Your Progress

Notes : a) Space is given below for your answers.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1. Name the title which was given to Prince Henry of Portugal.

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2. Who prepared maps of coastal Africa ?

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3. Who tried to sail south along the western coast of Africa ?

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### 6.3.5 Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus, an Italian sailor, believed that the far east could be reached more quickly and easily by sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean. His belief was based on the theory that the earth is a spherical body. He got financial support from Queen Isabella of Spain and started his voyage in 1492 with 88 sailors and three ships. He kept sailing in unknown seas till he reached a land which he believed was India. Later it was discovered that this was not India but an altogether a new land. It was called the West Indies. Later it was Amerigo Vespucci who discovered the mainland of America. The new land was named after him.

### 6.3.6 Vasco-de-Gama

Vasco-de-Gama was commissioned in 1497 by the King of Portugal to proceed farther than the Cape of Good Hope. After travelling for ten months and 12 days along the West and East coasts of Africa and then across the Arabian Sea, he reached Calicut in 1498. With this Vasco-de-Gama discovered the sea route to India. He returned home with spices and precious stones. The value of goods he could carry was estimated to be sixty times more than the cost of his expedition. With this discovery the Portuguese became the masters of the eastern trade.

### 6.3.7 Magellan

Magellan was another Portuguese who undertook another great voyage during the period 1519 to 1522. He travelled along the coast of South America and reached its southern tip. This strait is named after Magellan. From there he entered into a new ocean which he called the Pacific Ocean. Travelling across, he reached the islands which are today known as the Philippines. He was killed there. But his sailors continued their journey across the India Ocean and reached back to Europe. Thus they got the credit for sailing round the world. The process of geographical exploration started by these people continued for some more time.

### 6.3.8 Effects of the Geographical Discoveries

The geographical discoveries had far reaching consequences for the entire world.

- i) With the discovery of the sea route to India, Italian control of the eastern trade ended. The Portuguese, for a while, were able to establish their monopoly over the European trade with Asia. But soon they were supplanted by the British, the Dutch and the French.
- ii) The discovery of trade routes and new lands opened up new potential for trade. A large number of articles were imported into Europe. Also goods manufactured in Europe found markets elsewhere. Increased trade brought prosperity to the countries of Europe.
- iii) Explorers and traders were followed by the missionaries. Many of the explorers firmly believed that their main aim was to carry the knowledge of "His Son" and to spread the gospel to the four corners of the world. Geographical discoveries, therefore, led to the spread of Christianity.
- iv) Almost all countries which took part in geographical explorations also wanted to establish their political authority over the newly explored areas. They established their colonies in Asia, Africa and America. The race for colonies led to wars among European powers.
- v) Colonialism led to the destruction of some of the native civilization of America. Two Examples are the Inca and Aztec civilizations. The natives were subjected to exploitation and slavery. The slave trade developed. The prosperity of the European powers had a direct link with the slave trade.
- vi) The establishment of plantations, particularly of cotton, sugarcane and tobacco, became a significant development of this period. They produced large quantities of these crops employing the slave labour.

#### Check Your Progress

Notes : a) Space is given below for your answers.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

4. Who discovered the West Indies ?

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5. Who discovered the mainland of America ?

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6. Who discovered the sea route to India ?

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7. Who discovered the Philippines and was killed there ?

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## 6.4 INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Instructional strategy for this unit includes instructional objectives, teaching-learning activities and evaluation of students performance.

### 6.4.1 Instructional Objectives

Students will be able to :

- recognise the features of the modern age;
- distinguish between the modern age from the earlier periods;
- recognise the importance of the Renaissance movement and geographical discoveries in bringing about the modern age;
- analyse the reasons for the European interest in geographical explorations;
- describe the role of the Renaissance knowledge in making geographical discoveries possible;
- name the important explorers and recognise their discoveries;
- mark the routes followed by the great explorers on the map of the world;
- appreciate the adventurous spirit of the explorers;
- analyse the effects of geographical explorations;
- see the relationship between European prosperity and the slave trade;
- describe the impact of colonialism on the life of the people in the colonies.

### 6.4.2 Teaching-Learning Activities

#### i) What is the modern age ?

Your main task here is to make your students understand the concept of the modern age and to list the characteristic features of this modern age.

You could start a discussion on the topic of periodisation in history. Start asking questions on the following pattern. The history of the world is generally divided into three periods. What are these periods ? On what basis are these periods classified? When does the modern period start ? In what way do we consider the period after the 14th century AD different ? etc.

You may have to resort to narration more frequently. Each characteristic feature of the modern age may be explained in comparison to the medieval period. You may adopt the discussion method as and when convenient.

Scientific development is an important feature of the modern age. To teach it you could follow the following pattern of discussion.

Can you name the means of transportation available to us today ? Did the people who lived a few centuries ago have these facilities ? What has helped in developing these means of transportation ? Students may come out with the answer that science has contributed to the advancement of transportation. Then proceed - what was the state of science during the medieval period ? This discussion would result in your students concluding that scientific development is an important feature of the modern age.

#### Activity

1. How would you teach the other features of the modern age i.e. urbanization; industrialization; decline of feudalism and internationalism ?

Again start a discussion on the causes that led to the developments in science and through students' response enable them to conclude that the Renaissance movement was the beginning of scientific development and the modern age.

2. Suggest a student activity to enable them to appreciate the role of the Renaissance in scientific development.

**ii) Meaning of geographical discoveries**

As discussed elsewhere, here too the best approach could be to develop the concept of geographical discoveries through discussion. Let us see how we can organise a discussion:

Start asking -

How much of the world was known to the people of Asia in the ancient period? Did the Europeans know about Asians and Africans? What parts of these continents were known to them? Why was the entire world not known to the people of Asia or Europe? When did the people of Europe get interested in knowing about far off lands? What do you call these discoveries? etc. This kind of question-answer session would make the learning a participatory activities and effective.

**Activity**

3. Suggest an alternate method to develop the concept of geographical discovery.

**iii) Events which helped the geographical discoveries**

Use a map of the world showing the medieval trade routes between Asia and Europe. Your objective here is to make students understand the factors behind Italian prosperity and her monopoly over the Asian trade. Follow the earlier pattern of discussion.

**Activity**

4. Write the development questions which you would ask your students in the above context.

Narrate that in 1453 the Turks captured Constantinople from the Byzantine rulers. Highlight the importance of Constantinople in medieval trade. Also make the students recognise the difference between Muslim Turks and Christian Byzantine. Thereafter discuss the possible impacts of this conquest on European trade. You could follow the pattern as under :

Name the eastern countries with which Europeans traded. What were the goods which the Europeans were badly in need of? What difficulties they must have experienced in their eastern trade with the fall of Constantinople? If you were an European, say, of the 15th century and not allowed to get things through Constantinople, what alternatives would you have? What technical skills do you think you would have needed?

With these questions you could make your students conclude that they needed a better knowledge of geography, maps, good ships and instruments for finding direction etc. You could also show pictures or models of the Mariner's compass and the astrolabe and explain their utility to sailors. You may also emphasise that the spirit of adventure was another basic human trait which was responsible for geographical explorations.

**Activity**

5. How would you make your students recognise the importance of the spirit of adventure in geographical explorations?

**iv) Henry the Navigator and Bartholomew Diaz**

You may need pictures of these explorers, the map of the world and books containing the biographical accounts of these explorers. While teaching biographical accounts, the normal technique a teacher would adopt is the story telling method. The other technique you could adopt is asking the students to read and collect information about the personality concerned and then discuss it in the class. If some films are available they could also be used.

**Activity**

6. What home assignment would you give to your students to appreciate the role of these early explorers in the geographical discoveries of the modern age?

#### v) Christopher Columbus

As discussed in the earlier paragraph, you may follow any method convenient to you. In fact a lot of written material is available about the biographical details of Columbus. You could make those books available to your students and make them learn about Columbus through the project method too. You could divide the class into four groups. Each of the groups may be given a separate task.

#### Example

- a) Early life of Columbus.
- b) Difficulties faced by Columbus during his voyage.
- c) Preparing a map.
- d) Importance of his discovery.

The students may be asked to present their work to the class.

#### Activity

7. Write down any four test items which you would use after the project.

#### vi) Vasco-de-Gama

Have the world map with routes of voyages marked on it. After a brief discussion about the discoveries of both Diaz and Columbus you could introduce the other important explorer, Vasco-de-Gama. Make students show Portugal on the map. Through narration make the students know of his discovery. Also show the route he followed from Portugal to India. You could introduce an element of drama by making the students enact the meeting Vasco-de-Gama had with Zamorin, the king of Calicut. For this purpose you should first ask your students to write their own dialogues.

#### vii) Magellan

In the preceding sections we have discussed the different approaches to teaching biographical accounts. You could adopt any one of them to teach about Magellan to your students.

#### Activity

8. Which technique would you adopt to teach about Magellan's discovery? Give reasons for your choice.

#### viii) Effects of geographical discoveries

While dealing with the effects of geographical discoveries your main aim must be to make students think in an analytical way. This could be achieved best by adopting the discussion method.

To develop the understanding that geographical discoveries reduced the importance of Italian cities in the Asian trade, you could follow the following pattern:

- What was the reason for the Italian prosperity?
- Did the other European countries accept Italian monopoly? Why?
- Why were the European countries interested in finding out a new sea route?
- What might have happened to the Italian trade after Vasco-de-Gama's discovery of the new sea route?
- Which countries do you think might have dominated the Asian trade? Why?

With these development questions you will be able to develop the required understandings.

As a result of geographical discoveries new lands were discovered. Trade contacts were established between these lands and Europe.

- What effect do you think these developments had over the volume of trade ?
- What effect do you think would it have on the wealth of European countries ?
- Europeans could get new goods as a result of these contacts. Can you name them ?

Today, Christianity is a major world religion. How did this religion spread throughout the world ? With this initial introduction you may narrate the missionary activities in the context of geographical discoveries.

The geographical discoveries were supported by the governments and rulers of European countries. Why do you think they gave their support ? What do you think they wanted to remain apart from trade ? Why did they establish their colonies ? What do you think was the effect of colonisation on the colonies ?

**Activity**

9. How would you develop the understanding that there was a direct relationship between European prosperity and the slave trade ?

**6.4.3 Evaluation**

- When did the modern period start ?
- What are the main features that distinguish the modern age from the medieval age ?
- Name the two events which brought about the modern age?
- Why were the Europeans interested in geographical discoveries ?
- How did the Renaissance help in geographical discoveries ?
- Make a list of geographical explorers and the places discovered by them together with the year of discovery.
- On an outline map of the world mark the routes followed by Magellan, Columbus, Vasco-de-Gama and Bartholomew Diaz.
- Draw a time-line of the 15th and 16th centuries and mark the following events on it.
  - Discovery of the West Indies by Columbus.
  - Vasco-de-Gama's reaching Calicut.
  - Magellan's journey around the world.
- Describe the effects of geographical discoveries.
- What is the slave trade ? Why did Europeans follow it ?
- Name the two ancient civilizations of America destroyed by the Europeans.
- How did colonialism affect the people of the colonies ?
- Match the names in column 'A' with events in column 'B'.

**A**

- a) Columbus
- b) Vasco-de-Gama
- c) Magellan
- d) Bartholomew Diaz

**B**

- Sea route to India.
- Travel around the world.
- First person to reach the southern tip of Africa.
- Discovery of the West Indies.

- Fill in the blanks :

- a) Instruments like the astrolabe and ..... helped in undertaking sea voyage.
- b) The ancient civilizations of ..... and ..... in America were destroyed by the European.
- c) Turks conquered Constantinople in ..... and blocked the east-west trade.



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## 6.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have learnt in detail the major concepts and teaching points related to beginning of modern age and geographical discoveries. You also learnt about the selection of appropriate teaching strategies to teach the various contents presented in this unit and preparation of test items for these contents. The methods discussed here are not the only possible methods. There could be many alternatives which you might think of and devise for transacting these contents.

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## 6.6 UNIT-END ACTIVITIES

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Make a list of the teaching aids you would need to teach this unit. Also prepare test items you would use at the end of this unit.

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## 6.7 POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

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- What care should be taken while organising the content we presented in this unit? Why is chronological sequence important in teaching of historical topics?

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## 6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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1. Navigator
2. Prince Henry of Portugal
3. Bartholomew Diaz
4. Christopher Columbus
5. Amerigo Vespucci
6. Vasco-de-Gama
7. Magellan

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## 6.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Aggarwal, J.C. (1983) : *Teaching of History*, Vikas Publishing House Ltd., New Delhi.

NCERT. (1996) : *Story of Civilization Part-I*, National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi.

The geographical discoveries had a profound impact on the economic, political and social conditions in most parts of the world. The most important among them are: There was a tremendous improvement in the trade and industry in Europe. It began to reach beyond the Oceans. The expansion of trade provided a stimulus to the development of ship-building industry. Larger quantities of goods had to be carried in bigger ships. A study of modern cartography should begin with Ptolemy – the Ptolemy of the Renaissance. No less than thirty editions of his work were printed before 1570, and of these twenty-six contain about 700 old Ptolemy maps and about 400 tabulae novae. These geographical discoveries gave Europe a host of new interests, or subjects of thought. This alone implies that the new subjects competed successfully with the old and that the old interests became less prominent. And one of the evident facts in medieval thought was the almost exclusive theological interest. Unit-6.pdf. 459.91 kB. Adobe PDF.