

## **Vasco da Gama.**

He was one of the famous explorers in history whose voyage led him to be credited with being the first European in the age of the discovery to 'discover' the sea route to India.

### **Background of the voyage**

In 1488, Bartholomew Dias had rounded the Cape of Africa and there was great excitement because it meant that soon the dream of reaching India would be achieved. In 1495, King Manuel ascended the throne. And he had an obsession to send a Portuguese fleet to India. This was to open the sea route to Asia and to beat the Moors or the Muslim merchants who had enjoyed a monopoly of trade with India. Vasco da Gama is believed that he was born in the year 1460 and his family belonged to minor nobility. They held various positions at the court. And he is supposed to have had experience in navigation. He was chosen because he had a reputation of determination and grit. King Manuel I appointed Vasco da Gama to achieve the dream of reaching India. Preparations began in full swing. Four ships were built for this voyage, two under the supervision of Bartholomeu Dias since he had prior knowledge of how to navigate the Seas of Africa. The names of the ship were the "São Gabriel," "São Rafael," "Berrio" and a supply ship. The voyage left from Lisbon in 1497. They encountered strong storms when they were going around the tip of the continent of Africa.

Along the way they made certain stops, one of them being Mozambique and Mombasa. The ruler of Malindi welcomed him. He took a pilot at Malindi and due to this in May 1498 he reached North of Calicut. The ruler of Calicut was the Zamorin. The objective of the voyage of Vasco da Gama was to make an alliance with an Indian ruler and to come up with a treaty on how to obtain spices. But unfortunately, the Zamorin did not sign a treaty with Vasco. This may have been because of the cheap presents that Vasco is supposed to have offered him. Also, it may have been because the Muslim merchants in Calicut may have influenced the Zamorin against Vasco. Due to this, Vasco da Gama had to leave Calicut and after three months he reached Malindi. He set up his last *padrão* in Mozambique in February. And finally, in September 1499, the São Gabriel commanded by Vasco da Gama landed back at Lisbon.

**Result of the first voyage:**

- Out of a crew of approximately 170, only 55 men are believed to have survived. King Manuel elated that Vasco da Gama had reached India granted him the title of 'Dom', an annual pension of 1000 Cruzados and an estate.
- However Vasco had failed in his main mission of securing a treaty with the ruler of Calicut. However, spices and the other goods that he obtained, demonstrated the potential of great profit in the future.
- Vasco da Gama was celebrated for opening the direct sea route to Asia.
- And eventually due to his efforts, Mozambique was colonized by the Portuguese Crown.

**Second voyage - Vasco da Gama.**

As the Zamorin had failed to sign an alliance with either Vasco da Gama or even Pedro Cabral later. King Manuel was determined to get his revenge against the Zamorin and to get him to submit. However, the Zamorin refused to submit to the Portuguese terms and he did not throw out the Muslim merchants or the Moors from Calicut, as Vasco had requested him. This led to a violent encounter in which Vasco de Gama bombarded Calicut for two days. Vasco da Gama left that area he went to the nearby areas of Cochin and Cannanore and loaded up with a huge quantity of spices. And finally, he kept a small number of ships to protect the Portuguese factories that he had established in these areas. Finally, Vasco arrived back in September 1503 in Portugal.

During the next two decades, Vasco da Gama lived a quiet life. Unfortunately, he fell out of favour with the King Manuel I. Vasco da Gama was extremely upset and he threatened the King that unless he was given due respect he would go to Spain. King Manuel was worried and he agreed to give Vasco a feudal title because he was worried that if Vasco went to Spain then he would tell them all the secrets about his voyages to India. And King Manuel I appointed him the first Count of Vidigueira.

**Third Voyage**

Finally, after the King Manuel's death, the newly crowned King, King John, III, looked for a fresh start and Vasco da Gama re-emerged as one of the main advisors to the King. King John III granted Vasco da Gama, the title of Viceroy. He was only the second Portuguese governor ever to

enjoy that title. Vasco da Gama arrived in India in September, but soon afterwards due to hard work and exhaustion, he became ill. And he died in the city of Cochin. He was buried there, but later on his body was taken back to Portugal.

### **Impact of Vasco's journey**

- He is recorded to be the first European in the age of the discovery to have discovered the sea route to India. His feat is celebrated as one of the greatest navigational feats of the period.
- Due to his voyage, it led to the establishment of the first European Seaborne empire in Asia.
- He discovered during the age of the discovery, the territory of Natal what is today in South Africa on Christmas Day.
- Due to his voyage, colonies were established in Mozambique that is in East Africa and finally due to his voyage, Portugal became one of the richest and powerful European nations.