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# Landmark in the Evolution of Geographical Thought-An Analysis

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***Abstract*: This paper presents an overview of Landmark in the evolution of geographical thought-an analysis.**

***Keywords*: Contributions of Greeks and Romans, geography, geographical concepts, prehistorical ideas.**

## 1. Introduction

The impact of explorations on geographical concepts is very essential to know the vast components of Geography as a core subject. The rise of any a discipline to maturity is always marked by philosophical conflicts of ideas and ideologies. Geography is a longer genealogy than any other sciences. The earliest records of man's interest in the nature of the physical world around him contain observations and speculations of geographical type. Before the rise of Hellenic culture, geography was regarded as the knowledge of tropical features, mountains, rivers and places of one's own country and its boundaries. Later on, maritime trade and commercial relations provided a store of geographical information. It has been acknowledged that the Greeks were the pioneers in many branches of knowledge. There period is known as the 'Golden Age of Greece'. The Greeks possessed philosophical and scientific aptitude, versatility of intellect, inquisitive nature and comprehensive mind. They not only extended the horizon of geography from the Aegean Sea to Spain and Gual, but also focused their attention about the numerous references on mountains, delta-building, winds, change of weather, rain earthquakes and their causes, volcanoes and transformation in the topographic features.

After the Greeks, the political power passed into the hands of the Romans. The Romans' major contributions were mainly to historical and regional geography. The geographical treatise written by Strabo is not only the most important geographical work that has come down to us from the classical period, but also unquestionably one of the most important works ever produced by the scholars of antiquity. So far as the geographical knowledge of Gaul (France) and Iberia (Spain) is concerned, these parts were well known to the Romans. In fact, they constructed many roads through these countries to improve accessibility and to provide easy means of transport and communications with the North-West Europe and the British Isles. So far as the western coast of Africa is concerned, the Romans, especially their traders, were quite familiar with the coast of Mauretania (Morocco and Algeria). The World Map prepared by Ptolemy revealed exaggerated size of the land Hemisphere. The Black Sea and the Sea of Azov are shown in distorted form. The Caspian Sea is shown as an inland lake. Whatever the defects in the great works of Ptolemy are, we must bear in mind that the construction of such a scientific map on projection in the absence of the reliable data and observed information was not an easy task. It was because of his efforts that the New World (North and South America) and the continents of Australia and Antarctica were discovered by the explorers of the 15th and the 18th centuries after a lapse of more than 13 and 16 hundred years, respectively.

Indian geography has a long history. In fact, various geographical concepts have been developing in our country since the dawn of Indian civilization. Some valuable geographical information is contained in Hindu mythology, philosophy, epics, history and sacred laws. Chronologically, the Vaidikas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the works of Buddhists and Jains, and the Puranas are the main sources of ancient Indian Geographical concepts. The ancient Indian scholars had accurate knowledge of topography, physiographic, flora, fauna, natural resources, agriculture and other socio-economic activities of India and adjoining countries. The ancient Indian geography hinges on religion. Every physical phenomenon, every major or spectacular landmark on the Earth's surface has a religious background for Indians. The Universe has been described as Brahmand in the ancient Indian Literature. Unlike the modern scientists, the ancient Indian astronomers believed in a geocentric universe.

The astronomers of the Puranic period established nine planets: the Sun, the Moon, the Mars, the Mercury, the Jupiter, the Venus, the Saturn, the Rahu and the Ketu. The astronomers in Ancient India were also conscious of the causes of eclipses. The concept of Prithvi (Earth) is the most basic concept in the study of geography. The Earth is an oblate spheroid slightly flattened at the Poles; its equatorial diameter measures are 12.757 kms, and its Polar diameter is 12.713 km. These dimensions were based on crude estimates. The real facts about

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the Earth as known today are that its volume is 260,000,000,000, the equatorial circumference 24,902 miles and meridinal circumference 24,860 miles and its estimated age according to the latest researches is at least 4,500 million years. In the Puranic literature, the entire country from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari is designated by a single name Bharatvarsa (India). The vedas, epics and puranas have mentioned a series of mountains in Bharatvarsa. Here, it is to be noted that the Chinese contribution to geography also remarkable. Their contribution to geography can be observed between 200 and 1500 AD. Among the most important contributions to Chinese astronomy and cartography were Chang Heng(A.D.78-139). Some primitive geographical notions were inherited by Arabs from Jews and Christians. The Arab geographical literature came into the world in 800 A.D. The explorations, discoveries, scientific inventions, and scholarly works of the Arabs provided a new and more realistic picture of the Arab world. After the great age of discovery, two leading German scholars, ViZ., Alexander Von Humboldt and Carl Ritter made valuable contributions to the field of basic sciences, humanities and arts.

## 2. Conclusion

Thus, a philosophical foundation to the subject of geography was given by Immanuel Kant, while Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and Carl Ritter (1779-1859) developed the subject as an independent branch of knowledge. From the middle of the 19th century up to the contemporary period, there occurred many philosophical changes in the definition, concepts and approaches of the discipline. The major concepts and methodologies were, however, developed by the Germans, followed by the French, British, and American and Soviet scientists.

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