

The Earth is Round

A drama based on Isaac Asimov's
How we found out that the Earth is Round"

By
V.S. Chakravarthy

(Commentator: Of man's millennial struggle to progressively understand that earth is round, - as described in a brilliant article by Isaac Asimov, - this drama is a recreation in light and sound.)

(Scene 1)



(Commentator: The sun is setting beyond a darkening sea. Waves are lapping on the sides of a boat carrying two fishermen, an uncle and his nephew. The uncle casts his net and waits for a catch while the nephew works on the oars. Suddenly the uncle nets in a lovely catch and breaks into song and dance...)

Uncle: Wow! What a catch!

It's time for yummy soup,
To go slurp-a-slurp;
A festival of palate,
Let's all celebrate!

(The uncle hands over a sac full of prawn to the nephew who happens to be staring into the infinite sky. Irritated the uncle says -)

Uncle: What are you staring at? Hold the sac!

(When uncle hands the sac on the right side, the nephew tries to reach it from the left. When it is handed on the left, he reaches out on the right. This hide-and-seek of hands goes on for a couple of times before the uncle is really irritated and shouts...)

Uncle: Hey! I said stop playing games and hold the sac!

Nephew: I don't want it. (disinterestedly)

Uncle: What do you want then? Gold fish?

Nephew: Oh, no!

Uncle: What else then, creepy crabs?

Nephew: Not at all.

Uncle: For god's sake, tell me, what else then?

Nephew: You know what I want? I want that! (pointing at the crimson horizon)

Uncle: What? Eagles? You can't eat eagles? Eagles are Lord Garuda's children. Shan't say you want to eat them.

Nephew: Mama! Please stop your incessant worship of the palate. What I want is that... (pointing) the Sun.

Uncle: What? You want the Sun? Have you lost your head? Slap yourself for such an absurd thought. Do you know who the Sun is? He is the Lord of the air, the Lord of the seas, Lord of the fish, and Lord even (kissing the sac) of these delicious prawns!

Nephew: No, Mama. I have been watching this gentleman for quite some time. Every morning he rises over the hills on the east. Like a boat crossing a lake, he crosses the sky the whole day. At night fall he jumps into the dark waters. Today let us quickly row to the spot where he dips into the waters and catch him. I pledge not to return home without the Sun tonight!

Uncle: My daughter told me many times that her husband's brains are not in their place. Now I see! Do you want to see the spot where the Sun dunks into the sea? Do you think he sits, with his hand on his cheek, waiting for you to come along?

Nephew: Then what do you think he will do?

Uncle: What do you mean 'what do you think he will do'? He just drowns and disappears.

Nephew: That's exactly what I want to know. What does he do after he drowns?

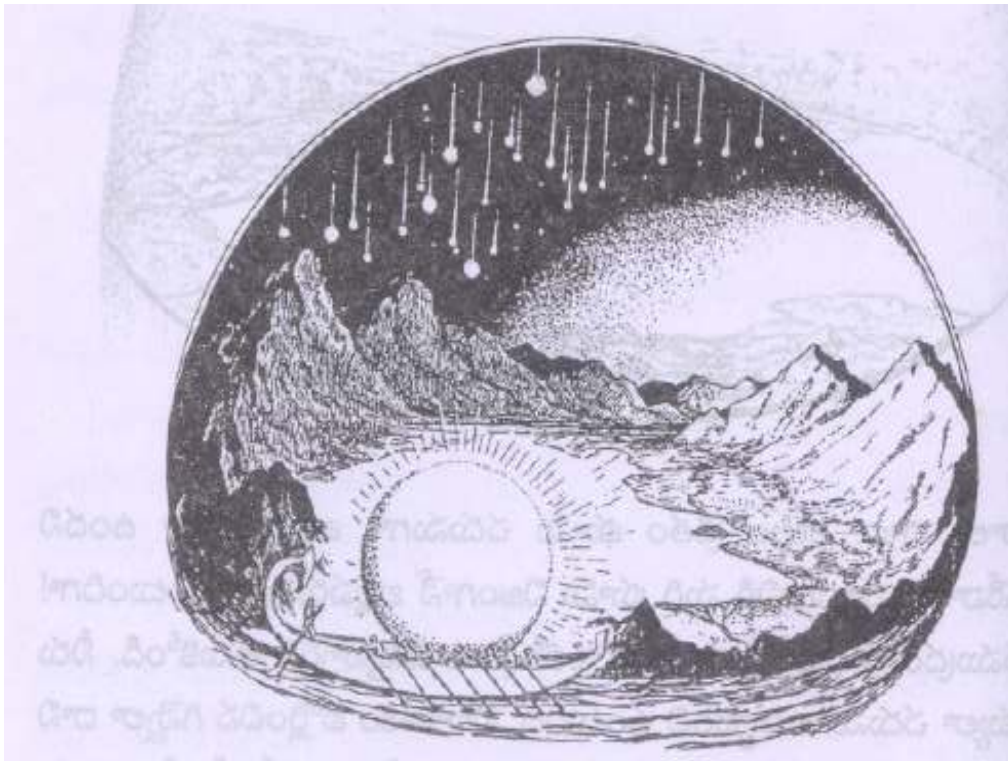
Uncle: What do you mean what does he do? He just goes home, eats his dinner, and goes to bed. What kind of stupid question is that?

Nephew: (remains silent for a moment) But then... how does the Sun pop out from there (pointing to the east), when he disappears there (pointing to the west)?

Uncle: So you insist on getting your answer here and now?

Nephew: But then you always boast of your deep knowledge of the ocean.

Uncle: But that was about the ocean, not the sun, you see? Actually, to tell you the truth, when I was small once I had exactly this doubt. Then I asked my grandfather. You know what he said? When the sun dunks there, there will be a boat waiting for him there. Not a tiny log like this, a massive one. The boat would then pick him up, briskly carry him through the night's secrecy, and leave him near those hills before dawn. That's when our day begins.



The boat that was believed to carry the sun through the night's secrecy from sunset to sunrise.

Nephew: Oh, really! (his face reflecting joy). Mama, then I have a small wish.

Uncle: And which is what?

Nephew: Why don't we stay back here tonight?

Uncle: What exactly for?

Nephew: You said the boat carries the sun along this route. Why don't we wait here stealthily and pounce on him when he comes this way?

Uncle: Holy prawn! (tearing his hair) What is this incurable sun-madness? (he continues) Oh, my innocent little nephew! I babble something and you take it all to heart. If a boat carried the blazing sun, won't it turn to ashes? Our elders babble something. One should listen politely and forget it soon.

Nephew: Oh? Then all that you told me all this while is just a fairytale?

Uncle: Not exactly. What my grandfather actually told me was...

Nephew: You are starting again. You said something else just a minute ago...

Uncle: Oh, this is a different grandfather. What he said is... do you remember the tiny white Mandara bush near our hut?

Nephew: Yes, of course.

Uncle: Doesn't it give fair, smiling blooms every morning?

Nephew: Yes, it does.

Uncle: And what happens to the blooms by the evening?

Nephew: They wither and fall.

Uncle: That's exactly what happens to the sun. At dawn, he blooms over the hills. By dusk, he withers and becomes a drop in the ocean. And that's the end of him, for the day.

Nephew: That's nice. Then tomorrow let us start early and catch him when he falls.

Uncle: Stop this nonsense for now! What I asked you is to catch the prawn, not the sun. First catch this sac. Let's head back home. The night is near.

Nephew: No, Mama. I am not going home tonight without the sun! (he says firmly)

Uncle: Foolish nephew! You are giving me a headache! It's just not possible because the sun is really not on the earth. He is in the sky far from the earth.

Nephew: You are changing the story again? Who told you *this*?

Uncle: My grandfather, as always.

Nephew: Hey, you just said you grandfather said something else.

Uncle: They are different.

Nephew: But I thought you had only two grandfathers in total.

Uncle: Oops! (biting his tongue) Let's sweep the whole team of grandfathers under the carpet for the moment, shall we? The truth is that the sun doesn't drown in the sea. He always remains far from the earth in the sky. In the evening he goes to the bottom, the other side of the earth and hides there.

Nephew: What? I can imagine a boat having a bottom! The earth has a bottom too?

Uncle: It very well has. Imagine this fish basket is the earth. We are like these fish in the center of the basket. Around us there is the sea. At the end of the sea we come to the edge of the world. The sun is far away from the fish basket...right there!

Nephew: Then, Mama, if we go to the edge of the world and peep over, will we able to see the sun at night?

Uncle: If you survive the travel to the edge of the world. It is so, so very far.

Nephew: How far? A mile?

Uncle: Mile? Ha! Try another guess?

Nephew: How about four?

Uncle: Not just one or two! It's lots and lots of miles.

Nephew: Has anyone ever gone to the edge of the world?

Uncle: There might have been some who have gone, but none who had returned.

Nephew: Not even your grandfather... I mean... grandfathers!

Uncle: Hey, I don't want to discuss my grandfathers again. Let get back home. It's late.

Nephew: Mama, I have a small wish. I would like to go to the edge of the world and just take a peep like that!

Uncle: Could you show me exactly how you would do that please?

Nephew: Like that! (He acts and shows. Taking this golden opportunity the Uncle pushes the Nephew into the sea.)

Nephew: Save me, Mama! Save me!

Uncle: Can't hear you my child! What are you saying?

Nephew: Save me, Mama, before a shark makes dinner out of my feet.

Uncle: Why, my dear nephew! You don't want the sun any more?

Nephew: Absolutely no!!!

Uncle: That sounds better.

(Heaves him on board. Nephew sits there quietly shivering).

Nephew: Mama... (whisperingly)

Uncle: What is this now?

Nephew: Brr! It feels cold. Don't you think it would be nice to have a bit of the sun at this time?

Uncle: Phew! God save my nephew! (sighs)

(end of scene 1)

(Commentator: At a time when such baseless, mindless ideas about sun and cosmos were in currency, a Greek philosopher started thinking deeply about this subject. His name was Anaximander. There he goes... rambling on the streets of Athens.

Watch out, revered Sir! Your feet are in the middle of a busy road, and your eyes are fixed on the stars!)

(A passing vehicle dashes into Anaximander who falls to the ground. The driver of the vehicle shouts at him.)

Driver: Is that you Anaximander? Don't you know you are not supposed to walk on a busy road with your head turned upwards? Any way, what are you looking for in the sky?

Anaxi: I am... aah (showing pain) ... looking for the stars.

Driver: I am sure you are seeing a lot of them now, with that bump on your head!

(Anaximander tries to get up by himself when a student of his rushes to lift him up.)

Parthios: Oh, my poor Master! You managed to get into an accident again?

Anaxi: Now I understand it all...

Parthios: Understand what, Master? That you shouldn't walk in the middle of the road?

Anaxi: No!

Parthios: Or, even if you do, not to walk in the middle of the road while gazing at the stars?

Anaxi: Oh, no!

Parthios: Then what is it that you have understood, my dear Sir?

Anaxi: The Cosmic Secret! (His face beaming with some far off light! He explains...)

Last night, as always, myself, and that idiot friend of yours, Demios, went to the beach, and sat there observing the stars. Then you know what happened?

(Commentator: A tiny flashback...)



(On the sea shore, under a tranquil moonlight sky...)

Anaxi: So, did you note it down?

Demios: Yeah.

Anaxi: What did you write?

Demios: The Constellation of the Seven Sages which rose at 7:11 pm is at the moment at an elevation of 111 degrees, 37 minutes.

Anaxi: Good. Where is Swati at this time?

Demios: She told me she will wait for me at the college until 8pm. She said if I don't show up by then even today, she will never look at my face again. Heaven knows where on earth she is right now!

Anaxi: (irritatedly) I am not talking about that Swati (pointing to the world). I am talking about that Swati (pointing to the heavens).

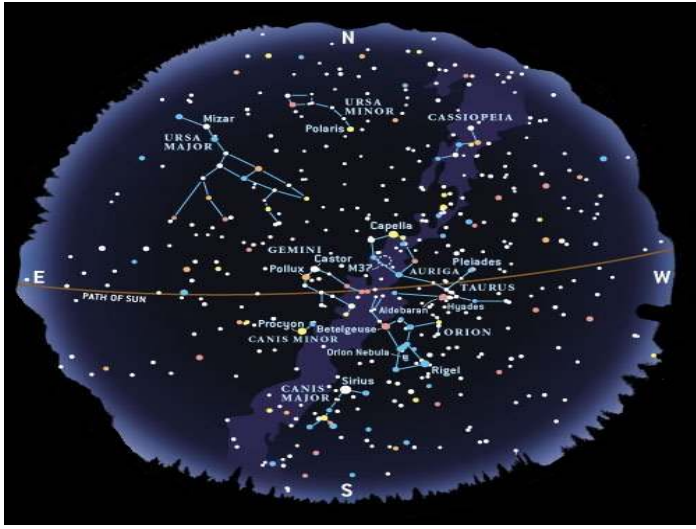
Demios: Oh! It had set at about 7:59 pm.

Anaxi: So what does it tell you?

Demios: You want to know what it tells me? It tells me that my stars are not in their right places.

Anaxi: Stars that rise earlier, set earlier. Stars that rise later, set later. They all seem to spend about the same time in the skies. Don't you see? Stars are moving in lock-step!

Demios: (nods his head as if he understood something)



Star-studded night sky

Anaxi: Now let us leave the stars alone for the moment. What about the sun and the moon? Sun rises in the east, and sets in the west everyday. Isn't it?

Demios: Well, if you insist!!!

Anaxi: What about the moon then?

Demios: Guess it is the same there too!

Anaxi: Stars too are rising and setting, exactly like the sun and the moon. So what do you feel about it?

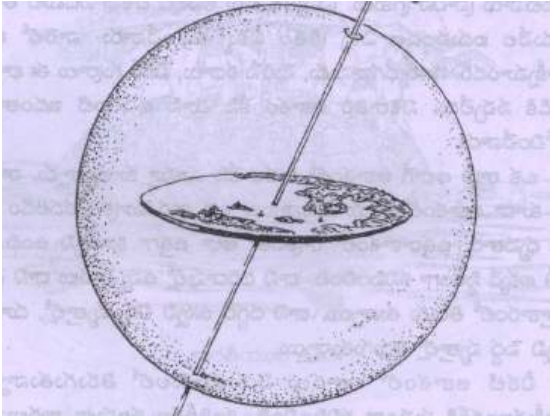
Demios: I just feel dizzy, Master! (trying to visualize the circling stars)

Anaxi: You said it, my child! All those heavenly objects seem to be moving as if they are mounted on a merry-go-round! Did you ever ride a merry-go-round?

Demios: Not really! Certainly not after I joined this college.

Anaxi: All those who are riding a merry-go-round keep moving, but the distances that separate them do not change. Those who are far from the centre move in larger circles. And those closer to the center move in smaller circles. And the pole in the center doesn't move. Likewise, some stars move in large trajectories, and some in smaller ones. The lonely star in the center, the pole star, doesn't move at all. That means...

The sun, the moon, and the stars are all mounted on this vast merry-go-round called the universe. Stars don't move separately. In fact they don't move at all. They are studded, like diamonds, on this vast dark cosmic globe. It is this globe that turns, that rotates. And that globe has an axis. Since the pole star sits on that axis, it doesn't move. Therefore, this universe is a globe, the universe is a vast globe! (he shouts as though he is announcing a great secret)



Demios: (That shout shakes the poor pupil out of his slumber). And my life is a vast void. (he mutters to himself. Then aloud to his Master) So, my Master! You now seem to have the answer to the problem that has been perplexing you for a long time.

Anaxi: Yes, my child! A secret that I have been searching for many years, is now revealed to me. It gives me great delight. Let's head back home.

Demios: (Springing to life) So, you mean, we are actually done for the day... er... the night I mean?

Anaxi: Yes, of course. (Just before walking out, he pauses and says). Just one thing. Can you write a report summarizing all the data you have taken this evening, please?

(Demios is about to tear his hair!)

Anaxi: (shouting from outside) If you cant find me in my office tomorrow, can you slip the report under my door, please?

(Demios, continues to pull his hair!)

(flashback ends)

Anaxi: So that's what has happened.

Parthios: So then, my Teacher, the universe is a vast, dark, rotating globe! The stars too, like spangles stuck on it, turn along with it!

Anaxi: Yes!

Parthios: Then I have a doubt. We know that the sun is a globe.

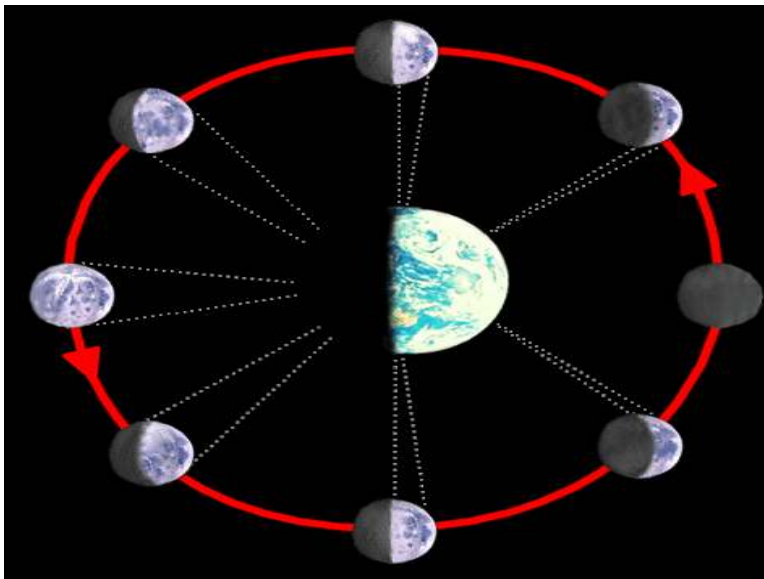
Anaxi: A massive fire-ball.

Parthios: But then what about the moon? Sometimes it looks like a ball and sometimes like a crescent.

Anaxi: Really the moon too is a globe. It just appears like that.

Parthios: How come?

Anaxi: The moon has no light of its own. When the sun's light falls on it, he shines and make us smile. Determined by the direction in which the sunlight falls on the moon, and the direction from which we look at the moon, the moon sometimes looks like a full glowing sphere, and sometimes like a crescent. And other times it disappears altogether.



Phases of the moon

Commentator: When the earth lies between the sun and the moon, the moon appears as the full moon. When the moon is on the side (to us) on which the sun too lies, we won't be able to see the moon at night. That is the new moon.

Commentator: Following such a line of logic Anaximander concluded that the sun and moon are globes. The cosmos too he imagined to be a vast globe. But when it comes to the shape of the earth he couldn't make up his mind.

There was another genius, who not only believed that the earth is round, but estimated the diameter of the earth by performing a brilliant experiment. His name is Eratosthenes. Being a life-long bachelor, he had all the time in the world to amuse himself with unearthly experiments.

(Eratosthenes enters with a measuring tape and a stick in hand. He appears to be measuring something in the room.)

Era: Hey! Where are you? (shouts for the servant)

Servant: I am coming!

Era: Can you run a small errand for me please?

Servant: Will certainly do. But... (looking anxiously at the measuring tape in his master's hand) last time you had asked me to measure the circumference of Alexandria with that very same measuring tape. After that episode I was down with sunstroke for a week.

Era: Oh, this is a very simple chore. You just need to plant this stick in the ground.

Servant: Appears to be the beginning of some sort of wedding preparation. Glad to know at last that your thoughts turn towards companionship.

Era: Oh, no! Nothing of that sort. (blushing a little)

Servant: Well, then is it for hoisting some sort of a flag?

Era: Will you do what I tell you, or shall I bury *you* in place of the stick?

Servant: Sorry Master! But then don't you always teach: "One must do all that one does, with an attitude of critical questioning"?

Era: Ah! Enough of making me eat my own words smart fellow!

Servant: Right then, I take leave.

Era: Where are you going?

Servant: To plant this stick in the backyard. Or, shall I plant in the front yard, goes well with the wedding bells (snickers).

Era: Will you listen to my instruction completely before rushing into action? You need to plant this stick in Siene.

Servant: And which scene is that? The first one or the last?

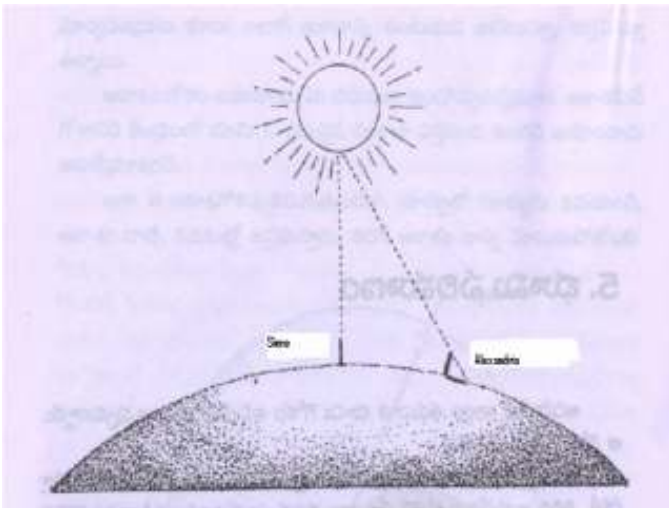
Era: Siene! The city of Siene I mean!

Servant: (shocked) Gracious Master! The city of Siene is 500 miles from here. You want me to go all the way there, plant this stick and quickly run back up to home? Can you kindly shed some light on why on earth you have embarked on such a grand mission?

Era: I need to perform a small experiment. With the experiment we will come to know whether the earth is round or flat.

Servant: Your speech at times seems strange to me Sir! Can't you see, with eyes open wide, that the earth is flat like a pancake?

Era: Well, let's see about that. Proceed now with speed to Siene. Plant this stick and measure its shadow exactly at 12 noon. Come back with your observations.



(Commentator: Imagine planting two sticks, equally long, 500 miles away from each other. Suppose further that the sun is right on top of one of them at a given time; such a stick does not cast any shadow. But the other stick, assuming the earth is round, will cast a small shadow. From the length of that shadow, it is possible to estimate the diameter of the earth. Eratoesthenes did just that and estimated that the earth's diameter to be 8000

miles. The modern estimate is 7,900 miles which is amazingly close to the estimate by Eratosthenes.)

Commentator: It is one thing to write poetry, or do geometry on earth's shape. And it is very different thing to stake one's life on the idea of earth's roundedness, and take on great nameless oceans. There was a hero who did exactly that. His name was Christopher Columbus.

(Columbus' home. Someone knocks on the door. Knock...knock... knock. Columbus opens the door and sees the Minister of Spain at the doorstep.)

Columbus: Oh, Mr. Minister! Welcome! What brings you to this navigator's home?

Minister: Ah! At last I found you after scores of fruitless visits. Once they said you had been to Portugal, another time it was Italy, later it was some ocean whose name you were not sure of yourself! Anyhow, I am glad to see you after such a long time.

Columbus: You seem to have taken a lot of trouble. Is there harmony in the royal affairs?

Minister: Harmony? There isn't much left to talk about! The King and the Queen are neck deep in war with those Moors all the time. And the Moors are hard nuts that refuse to crack. The treasury is hitting rock bottom. In earlier ages we had flourishing trade with India and China. Now the Silk routes are blocked and the Turks are ready to clobber us, should we pass that way. Nobody knows a way out of this mess.

Can you bring some water to drink, please!

Columbus: Diego! (he shouts for his son) Can you bring a glass of water for the Minister, my child!

(Diego pops out from behind the curtains briefly, makes a face at the minister, and disappears.)

Columbus: I apologize Mr. Minister. My son is...

Minister: ... a bit of a cheek. I understand.

Columbus: Let me go fetch some water.

(Columbus goes in. The tired old man puts his white wig on the table to wipe some sweat off his forehead. Suddenly, Diego pops in, snatches the hair and dashes away like a hare.)

Minister: Hey! My hair! My blessed, bleached hair! Son, can you please return my hair?

(In the mean time Columbus returns with a glass of water and is shocked to see the minister chasing Diego around in the living room.)

Columbus: Diego! You are not supposed to run around gripping the minister's hair like that. Return it to him, now!

Diego: Of course I won't! I plan to make a cosy home for my parrot with this thing.

(Columbus joins the chase while the tired minister drops out. Columbus and Diego keep running around a large table. Minister quietly slips out leaving hope of recovering his wig. As the father and the son keep circling the table, suddenly Columbus switches direction rushes in the opposite direction and catches his son. He pauses for a moment to review the strategy he followed to succeed in his present mission. Something flashes in his mind...)

Columbus: Eureka! I found the route to India!

(He looks around for the minister, who was no where to be seen. The father and the son rush right away to the palace.)

(Royal Palace)

Glory to Queen Isabella!
Glory to King Ferdinand!

(Just then Columbus rushes into the royal court. Diego follows him at the heel.)

Columbus: Mr. Minister! Mr. Minister! You know what? I found the way to India. Let me explain. Why don't you stand right here. Diego! Come here. Stand here right next to the honorable minister. ...

(The Queen who was watching all this had enough of it.)

Queen: Who is this idiot, playing indoor games in the midst of a solemn royal assembly? Someone restrain him!

Minister: (alarmed) Oh, blessed Queen! He is not a mad man. He is a great navigator named Columbus. It appears he had suddenly thought of a route to India. His explanation happens to be a bit too explicit.

Queen: What need is there to discover a route to India? We have the Silk routes of yore. But if you traveled by those routes, paying taxes in every petty state and province, you will return home empty-pocketed.

Columbus: That's why I say there is a different route.

Queen: And which is what?

Columbus: If you can set my hands free for a moment.

Queen: Free him!

Columbus: Now imagine I am Spain.

King: (deeply hurt) Hey! *I* am Spain!

(The Queen glowers at him.)

King: Uh! Oh! *She* is Spain!

Queen: You may continue, Columbus.

Columbus: Imagine likewise that he (pulling in a sentry standing there) is France; and he is Turkey; this one here is Arabia and this one is Kandahar. Diego! Step this way please and become India. Now if earth is flat, India (pointing is Diego) is quite far from Spain. But the earth is round. Therefore, what was quite far on a flat earth may turn out to be quite close on a round earth. It may be so close that if you stretched your arm you may reach out to its shores.

Queen: But how exactly would you travel there, Columbus?

Columbus: One has to travel westwards on the great Ocean.

Minister: Traveling across the great Ocean! Do you actually hope to return home alive?

A member of the court: If you traveled over the great Ocean, the country you would reach is hell, not India!

King: That's what I was told too! Ships that travel on the great Ocean westwards, my governess told me, would reach the end of world and fall into the great Void.

Columbus: If you dared westwards, one who is bold will find gold. And the fearful will come home tearful. If we could just cross a small stretch of sea, we will be able to discover affluent lands like India and Cathay.

There is no other hell than this immobilizing stupidity. There is no other void than this absence of vision.

Queen: But the navigators of yore had always hugged close to the shores and never dared to take on the great Ocean.

Columbus: If no one took that first difficult step, mankind wouldn't have arrived this far, O' Queen! I know there is no use talking reason to cowards. Pray, allow me to leave, great Queen! (prepares to leave)

Queen: Halt Columbus! I shall support your voyages! Prepare to sail!

Columbus: Thank you, gracious Queen! Thank you!

(Commentator: In August 1492, Columbus sets off with three ships – Santa Maria, Nina and Pinta. Their ships did not tumble in the great Void. On 12th October they found a new land which Columbus mistook to be India. That delusion did not leave him all his life. What Columbus had found is an archipelago that is now known as the West Indies. Drawing help from Columbus' discoveries another navigator voyaged beyond the Indies and discovered the American continent.



At a time when no one was sure how large earth is, and how it looked like, Columbus staked his life on the belief that earth is round, and based his expeditions on that belief. We cannot say that his voyages proved that belief. We can perhaps say that his voyages gave that belief an extension of life.

Columbus' voyages could not prove earth's roundedness decisively. There was another great navigator who set off on that mission. His name was Magellan.)

(Royal Court of King Charles-V, King of Spain)

Charles: We have no more access to the land route to India – the Silk roads. In his search for India, Columbus found some new, strange lands. Vasco da Gama discovered a way around Africa to India. But according to the treaty of Tordesillas, the Portuguese have

exclusive rights over those routes. I believe you have other plans. Can you explain, Magellan?

Magellan: True, O King! What Columbus had discovered is not India. It is an archipelago named West Indies. Beyond them there is the continent of America discovered by Amerigo Vespusi. And yonder there is a great Ocean only vaguely seen by Balboa. Beyond the Ocean lie the lands of prosperity – India, Cathay and others.

Charles: But how do you plan to travel that far?

Magellan: One should initially start off on the path that Columbus took but go further. One must cross the Atlantic and travel southwards along the eastern coast of South America. There, at the southern tip of that great continent, one must turn westwards and voyage over the vast Ocean. On the other side we will arrive at the Spice Islands. The Spice islands are affluent. Trade with these lands brings Spain good fortune.

Charles: Bravo, Magellan! Take five ships and commence! Return home triumphant!



(On September 20, 1519, Magellan had set off with a fleet of 5 ships and 270 men. On December 13 an unknown shore was sighted.)

A Sailor: Master! I can see India! I can see India!

Magellan: That can't be true. Step on the shore and enquire, will you please?

Sailor: Hey, you, over there! Is this India?

Someone ashore: No, this is Rio de Janeiro.



Modern Rio de Janeiro

(The sailor returns disappointed ...)

Sailor: We have traveled a long way over the unrelenting sea. We still haven't reached India (sigh!). Never mind, Master! Let us just stay back here. I like this place.

Magellan: Can't help agreeing with you for the moment. The crew seems exhausted. Let us rest here for some days before we proceed.

(The crew stayed there for a couple of months and even built a camp called 'San Julian.' With great difficulty Magellan succeeded in reminding the crew of their ultimate goal and set them back on the path. The voyage was resumed. But this time the resistance precipitated into a rebellion. Captains of two ships were caught while escaping with their ships.)

Sailor: Master! Master! I caught these two culprits defecting. Punish them, teach them the lesson they must learn!

Magellan: (Addressing the first of the defectors) Why have you done this Sebastian? Don't you know that this voyage, this expedition is a battle? Do you know the rightful punishment for one who turns his back on the battlefield?

Sebastian: I beg your pardon, Magellan. At one weak moment, I joined hands with wrong minds. This error will not repeat. I pray for forgiveness.

Magellan: You, Gaspar! Why have you done this?

Gaspar: Expedition! Battle! Ha! This is no expedition, this is no battle either! This is a suicide, a mass suicide. If we continue like this, one day we will all die an unclean death in these merciless waters. To believe that if you traveled westwards for years on end, you arrive on the eastern lands! Fanciest notion I have ever heard! Magellan! All this is a deep, absurd delusion that has lodged in your head. Why are you risking the lives of so many on such a fancied idea?

(Turning to others) Don't believe a word of what this fool says! If we go on further, we will arrive, not on Indian shores, but at the edge of the world. Our ships will plunge into

the bottomless Void. Let us leave this madman to his fate and return to our lands, our homes, our families. Let us free ourselves from this oceanic prison here and now!



Ships falling off the edge of the world

(Sebastian was granted pardon. Gaspar was executed. The voyage continues. After some time...)

Sailor: Master! Master! The world's end is here! The world's end is here!

Magellan: Oh, (smiling) that's not world's end! We have just entered the great ocean beyond the Americas. Oh! It is so deep and tranquil, full of liquid peace! Let us name it the Pacific Ocean!

Sailor: Master! (in a sorry voice) New lands are coming our way and are left behind. New oceans are coming our way and are left behind. I can't take this anymore! Tell me one thing for sure! Are we going to sight the Indian lands before my end?

Magellan: (trying to cheer him up) We are almost there. What lies beyond this ocean is India.

(The sailor faints. After a few months a new shore was sighted.)

Magellan: This place is probably India. Why don't you step out on the shores and find out.

Sailor: It is needless Master! I swear that this place is not India.

Magellan: How could you say with such certainty?

Sailor: You have shown us around the whole wide world. You have shown us every named nation except India. One tiny step and perhaps we will find ourselves back home, back in Spain. So what all this tells me is that: there is no such thing as India. I should have thought of this before we embarked on this foredoomed voyage. My granny used to tell me that in India they used to sell gems on the roadside like berries. Little did I realize

then that they were mere fairytales meant to put little children to sleep. And our blessed King too was taken in by those tales, sponsored you, gave you able men and sturdy ships, to search for a land that never existed on earth. Now I see it all!

Magellan: Ha! You are letting your imagination loose. Go over and enquire please!

(On enquiry, it was found that the new land is a cluster of islands part of what is now known as Philippines. The crew, exhausted and battered, stayed there for a few months. Magellan was forced to get involved himself in quarrels among some local tribes. Those quarrels ultimately led to his sad end. The sailors who heard of their master's demise were devastated.)

Sailor: Oh, Master! Dear Master! This cannot be! This cannot be. I pained you with my impatience about the long wait in reaching India. I pained you with my disbelief in India's existence. Truly, even now I do not know if India exists. But I know for sure that you could not have erred. But now that you are no more amongst us, who will lead us on to India, to Spain's welfare and good fortune?

(Commentator: Magellan's crew dropped the idea of searching for India and headed straight back to Spain. Exactly three years after they began they reached Spain. What started as a crew of 270, returned as a team of 18. Magellan's voyage may have failed to find India. But it was the first practical verification that the earth is indeed round.



The earth seen from moon's surface

Thus, the great voyages of yore proved that earth is round. But it was only indirect evidence. For a direct demonstration, we had to wait for the advent of the Space Age,

which began in the twentieth century. Until then man was only used to gazing at the stars above in wonder and awe. But now man could rise into the skies and look below and around. The earth could be seen from there, gleaming like a blue moon in the infinite Space. Proponents of a flat earth do walk on earth today. But, if we can trust our vision, and rely on reason, our beautiful earth is round indeed.)