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Chapter : 1

Establishment of British Rule in India :

(Factors behind British success against Indian powers - Mysore, Maratha Confederacy and the Punjab as major powers in resistance : Policy of subsidiary alliance and Doctrine of Lapse)

The Beginning of British Rule in India

About the same time that the English had begun to settle in North America, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, they had also begun to turn their interest to the opposite side of the world. Released by the defeat of the Spanish Armada from the threat to the peace and security of their own islands, and having no strength left, for the moment, to be tempted to seize some of Spain's empire from her, they turned instinctively to trade and adventure, and equally instinctively, began to look for both in the east as well as the west.

England's contact with India may be said to have begun when, in 1583, a certain Ralph Fitch, with three companions, set out for the Far East by the overland route. So many years passed without any news of them that they were given up for lost. Then one day in 1591 Ralph Fitch came home again, and the tale he had to tell would have shamed Scheherazade.

By way of the Euphrates and the Persian Gulf, he had come at last to Goa, where the Portuguese had long ago staked a claim. Arrested as a spy, he had been cast into prison there, and had only been released by the intervention of an English Jesuit resident. He had then visited the court of the Mogul at Agra, and the story he told of the riches of this country caused great excitement in the city of London.

Such great excitement, in fact, that before 1591 passed into 1592, the City merchants had despatched three vessels to do trade with the Far East. Only one survived, and reached Malaya, where it took on a cargo of pepper and spices of a resale value of one million pounds.

On the way home, she was swept by contrary winds across the Atlantic to Hispaniola and Labrador. In 1593, battered, with half her rigging missing and a mere handful of survivors, who had put off their Captain, James Lancaster, they knew not where, she limped into Plymouth. It was not until the following year that a French vessel put Captain Lancaster ashore at Rye.

Despite the hazards this expedition had encountered, it had nevertheless proved an important point-such voyages to the Far East were feasible.