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Mains Practice Question

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Q. Although many European powers aspired to establish their supremacy in India, only the British succeeded among them. Examine. (250 words).

14 Feb, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

Approach:

- Introduce by focusing on why European powers were interested in India.
- Name different European powers that came to India but could not succeed to establish supremacy.
- Elaborate reasons for the British success to establish their supremacy in India.

Introduction

- It was the immense wealth of India that attracted the Europeans to this country. The Europeans came to know about the vast wealth of India from the accounts of Marco Polo and some other sources. Originally, the European interest in India was primarily a commercial one.
- Though India had a very long history of trade relations with Europe, India's external trade was originally controlled by the Arab traders. However, for a long time Europeans failed to establish a direct trade relation with India as all the major land routes to this country were then controlled by the Arabs who constantly resisted the European merchants to enter into the Indian markets
- In the 15th century, Europe achieved great advancement in the art of ship building and navigation. Hence, there started an enthusiastic preparation all over Europe for a long and adventurous sea voyage to reach the unknown corners of the East.

Body

Many European powers aspired to establish their supremacy:

- **The Portuguese:** They were the first one to come to India. Their hold over the coastal areas and superiority in naval power helped them significantly. By the end of the 16th century, the Portuguese brought Goa, Daman, Diu, and Salsette and a vast area around the Indian coast line under their control.
- **The Dutch:** The main commercial interest of the Dutch lay not in India but in the Spice Islands of Indonesia. They had no dream of establishing an empire in India. They were satisfied with the huge profit earned through business.
- **The French:** Their dream was always challenged by their European neighbour, the British. Subsequently, both the European powers were locked in long wars for gaining political supremacy in India.

Reasons for the British success to establish their supremacy in India:

- **Carnatic wars and British conquest:** The Portuguese & the Dutch were not serious competitor to the English. The only real rival of the English was the French. The objective of the English to establish a complete monopoly of trade & commerce in India brought them into conflict with the French. Subsequent wars and British conquest was first step towards establishing their supremacy.
- **Vacuum of power:** There was a vacuum of power in India after the Mughal Empire got fractured falling under its own weight. Its various governors and rebel commanders established their superiority at different places and started fighting against each other. This gave the British the opportunity to establish their trading posts in India
- **Quality of leadership:** Robert Clive, Warren Hastings, Elphinstone, Munro etc. showed high quality of leadership. The British had also advantage of second line of leadership such as Sir Eyre Coote, Lord Lake, Arthur Wellesley etc. who fought for the cause and glory of their countrymen.
- **Strong Financial Backup:** The British had enough funds to pay its shareholders with good dividends that compelled them to finance the English wars in India. Moreover, the British trade added enormous wealth to England that led government to help them indirectly or directly through money, material and men.
- **Lack of National pride and unity:** This weakness of the Indian rulers was masterly used by British to engage them into fight among themselves.
- **Superior Arms and Military strategy:** Many Indian rulers imported European arms and employed European as military officers, but they could not devise military strategy like British.
- **Doctrine of Lapse** and **Subsidiary alliance** were effective tactics that were used by British to take over most of India.

Conclusion

By the middle of the nineteenth century AD, the British had firmly established their position in India. A large part of the country was under direct British rule. The areas that remained independent were indirectly under British influence. India was subjugated politically as well as economically. The economic exploitation of India was a result of its political subjugation.

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