



Mains Practice Question

Q. "Wherever the art of medicine is loved, there is also a love of humanity." Analyse this statement in light of India's pharmaceutical capabilities and responsibilities amid the novel coronavirus pandemic across the world.

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Approach:

- Discuss India's position in the global pharmaceuticals sector.
- Mention the issues involved like rising demand for medicines, the moral obligation of India and challenges.
- Mention India's response to the global crisis.
- Conclude the answer with advantages associated.

Introduction

Indian Pharmaceuticals Sector

- India is a prominent and rapidly growing presence in global pharmaceuticals. It is the largest provider of generic medicines globally, occupying a 20% share in global supply by volume, and also supplies 50% of global demand for vaccines.
 - India is the source of 60,000 generic brands across 60 therapeutic categories and manufactures more than 500 different Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs).
- India ranks 3rd worldwide for production by volume and 13th by value, thereby accounting for around 10% of world's production by volume and 1.5% by value.

Body

Issues Involved

- **Pandemic Outspread:** The entire world is facing Coronavirus Pandemic spread and most of the developed countries are struggling to contain it.
- **Rising demand for medicines:** recently India has been requested by the US and around 30 countries including Brazil and several SAARC nations for a supply of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ).
 - HCQ is an **anti-parasitic medication** that has been available since the 1940s. It has been used to treat malaria.
 - According to the price and drug availability watchdog, the **National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority (NPPA)**, India has a production capacity of 40 metric tonnes, which means 20 crore tablets of 200 mg per month.
- **Moral obligation of India:** the utilitarian principle i.e "the greatest benefit to the greatest number", says it is the responsibility of any nation to support the other nation for a humanitarian cause.
- **Challenges for India:** despite being a leading supplier of high-quality medicines to several countries, Indian pharmaceutical industry is highly dependent on China for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) i.e. pharmaceutical raw materials.
 - Any distortion in API import would lead to a shortfall of essential medicine supply in India.

India's Response

- **Recent Initiatives:** India has relaxed the ban on the export of **hydroxychloroquine**. It has stated that it would supply drugs to countries that needed it the most, and to neighbours who were dependent on India's capabilities.
- **Pragmatic approach:** India's approach should be calculative and based on the '**quid pro quo**'; especially with the developed nation who are having their expertise in manufacturing ventilators and other essential equipment.
 - Being a major economic player in the South-Asian region, India is morally obliged to support the under-developed SAARC nations in their fight against the pandemic.

Conclusion

- India's decision to selectively allow export is a welcome step as India would be recognised as a globally responsible stakeholder in the fight against the pandemic and reaffirms India's designation of pharmacy to the world.
- This will indeed strengthen **India's soft power strategy** it has pursued so assiduously since the 1990s and it will also re-establish the age-old concept of '**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**', the world is one family, which gives India an identity different from all other countries.

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