

Machiavelli (1469 AD—1527 AD)

“Child of his times”



*Machiavelli belonged to the region which is presently known as Italy. He belonged to the time when medieval age was coming to an end and modern age was about to begin. Machiavelli is called as “**Child of Renaissance**”. Every thinker is the child of his times. This description suits to the Machiavelli the most. It was age of renaissance. Renaissance has led to the lot of changes in all aspects of life. Renaissance led to the growth of reason. Reason led to the growth of science. If medieval age is an age of religion (dark age), modern age is an age of science. Modern age led to the rolling back of religion, which means secularization of the society. In Machiavelli we see the separation of Church and State. Thus, he is originator of the concept of **European model of secularism**. Reason also led to the scientific revolution which in turn led to industrial revolution. Industrial revolution led to the rise of capitalism. Capitalism led to the rise of materialism, individualism, utilitarianism. Capitalism also led to the emergence of nationalism. In the works of Machiavelli, we find almost all features of a historical, cultural and intellectual contexts of his time.*

*Every thinker represents the interest of a particular section of the society. Machiavelli represents the interest of the **emerging bourgeoisie class**. Machiavelli was the champion of nationalism. The most famous work of Machiavelli is ‘**The Prince**’.*

Perspective of Machiavelli as a thinker.

- *Machiavelli is a realist.*
- *Machiavelli is materialist.*
- *Machiavelli is elitist.*

Machiavelli’s methodology

If Plato believes that King should have knowledge of philosophy, Machiavelli believes that prince should have the knowledge of human psychology and history. He has used empirical as well as empirical method.

Machiavelli's Purpose

Machiavelli belonged to the time when nation states had started emerging in Europe. Italy had not emerged as a nation state yet. It was divided among the five principalities. Italy was vulnerable to the external attacks. Machiavelli wanted the consolidation of Italy and emergence of Italy as a nation state. Italy was once the most advanced region, but during his times, it had become the most corrupt society. It was the seat of Roman Church. By that time, Church had also become a corrupt institution. There was impact of the corruption of Church on the people.

Machiavelli had a first hand experience of politics. He belonged to Florence, he served in different political offices. He even served as a diplomat. In the court of the king of France, he was addressed as "Mr. Nihilio", means Mr. Zero, thus indicating that he comes from a place which had no respect among the states in Europe. Being a great patriot, he wanted that his motherland should regain its glory. Machiavelli was extremely critical of the two sections Feudal lords and Church.

Introduction of THE PRINCE



THE PRINCE is known as the best book ever written in the field of statecraft. Statecraft is the management of power, since Machiavelli gives the power view of politics. If Plato deals with the philosophy of the state, Machiavelli deals with the art of politics. THE PRINCE contains set of instructions for any enterprising person, willing to come to power and consolidate

his power.

Instructions given by Machiavelli

On the nature of the profession.

*Since prince is entering in politics, prince must understand the type of profession politics is. **One who sacrifices, what is, for what ought to be, will not only ruin himself but will also bring destruction to his own people. How we live is far removed from how we ought to live. One who tries to find goodness in every profession, must necessarily come to grief. As we live with so many people who are not so good.***

In above statement, we can see the beginning of 'political realism'. Machiavelli introduces the nature of the profession to the prince and what qualities prince should possess to be successful in the profession.

Unlike Plato, whose philosopher king lives in the world of ideas, Machiavelli wants his prince to look at the things as they are rather than as they should be. According to him, if a prince sacrifices what is, for what ought to be, he will certainly harm not only himself, but also his own people.

According to Machiavelli, **Politics is not ethics**. Politics is uninspiring, yet it is the fact. In politics, prince will meet such people who are not good, hence prince should not try to find goodness in every profession. If prince will try to find goodness in politics, he is bound to be disappointed and may get hurt. Hence prince should know, how to be bad, rather than how to be good.

Critical Evaluation.

Machiavelli is one of the most criticized figures in the history of the western philosophy. It is irony that he was criticized for telling the truth. According to **Dunning**, it is a paradox that everyone is Machiavellian in politics but no one accepts himself to be one. According to Sabine, one of his major critic, **Machiavelli's thoughts are 'narrowly dated and narrowly located.'** Thus, according to Sabine, Machiavelli gives a very pessimistic view of politics because of his experience of the conditions prevailing in Italy during his time. Had he belonged to some other time and space, his views would have been different. It is true that Machiavelli's ideas were the product of his times but it would not be correct to say that Machiavelli's ideas lack universalism or transcendentalism.

On human nature: Universal Egoism

"Man is selfish, coward, fickle minded, ungrateful, fearful and avaricious."

Politics should be based on understanding of human nature. Since prince has to deal with humans, he must understand the human nature as it is rather than as prince think it should be.

Basis of Machiavelli's views on human nature.

According to Machiavelli, **history is the best guide to politics**. On the basis of observations from his times and as found in history, he gives his views on human nature. According to Machiavelli, **throughout human history human nature has remained constant**. The elemental characteristics of the human nature are:

- 1. Man is selfish by nature.**

Since man is selfish, man will always give primacy to his own interest, over the interest of the prince. Since man is selfish by nature, man is ungrateful by nature. Thus, man will forget the favors done to him by the prince, in case his interests demand so. Since man is selfish, man is fickle minded, it can easily change the sides.

Above analysis show that the prince cannot take the support of any person for granted. Prince should always be careful because anyone can betray him anytime.

2. Man is coward by nature.

Since man is coward by nature, man is also fearful by nature. Thus, man is insecure. Though the qualities like selfishness go against the interest of the prince, the qualities that man is coward and fearful can be manipulated by the prince to his own advantage. So long prince is able to convince that only prince can provide security of life, people will remain obliged to prince.

3. Avaricious (Extremely greedy)

*Man is materialist by nature. Man has a love for property. Hence if prince create conditions where people make money or earn property, then also they will remain loyal to prince. Machiavelli also suggests prince that **a 'wise prince' never confiscates he rather execute**. It means prince should never take the property of the other person. It is better to kill that person than to take his property. **"Man can forget the loss of his father, but will never forget the loss of his patrimony."** He also advices prince, not to touch the women of the citizens because men are possessive about their women.*

Critical Evaluation.

*According to Sabine, Machiavelli gives such a pessimistic view on human nature because of his own experiences in Italy of his time. According to Sabine, Machiavelli's ideas are **'narrowly dated and narrowly located.'** It is true that Machiavelli's description of human nature is 'one sided'. However it is very important for prince to know the dark aspect of human nature. Though Machiavelli has given the one sided view, no one can say that this one sided view is entirely wrong.*

Advice on Qualities of the prince.

"Prince should be clever like fox and brave like lion."

Prince must understand that politics is not a profession of goodness. Hence prince should know how to be bad than to be good. Prince should be clever like fox to understand the traps, he should be brave like lion to defend himself against wolfs.

Analysis.

Since the time of Plato, reason and courage are the qualities of the ruling class. There is a continuity in Plato, and Machiavelli. What Plato tells, in rather ambiguous sense, Machiavelli tells in explicit sense. Similar views were represented by Kautilya (Chanakya) regarding inter-state relations. According to Kautilya, **relations between states are like jungle where the strength of lion prevails**. In modern times all states need intelligence and defense to protect themselves.

Critical Evaluation.

According to Sabine, Machiavelli is narrowly dated and located. It is true that Machiavelli was child of his times, yet it would not be rational, if we ignore Machiavelli's advices. Machiavelli is a realist, who brings forth the reality of world of politics and his advices cannot be ignored.

On management of power. (How prince should rule.)

"It is better for prince to be feared than to be loved."

According to Machiavelli statecraft is the management of power. Prince should know the proper use of power. According to Machiavelli, prince should be '**a cold blooded man**'. He should not act with passions. His actions should be based on the calculated options. According to Machiavelli, **power has two dimensions, force and love**. According to him, prince should choose the option of force only after proper calculation. Force should not be the first option. However, prince has to ultimately rely on force. Force should not be the first option because it requires lot of resources and generate feeling of revenge. When prince decides to use force, he should use the force completely, to crush the enemy. Not leave him alive to take the revenge.

Advice on the role of Ethics in Politics : Dual Morality

"In politics end justify the means."

In politics, prince has to take not only correct, but also timely decisions. While taking decisions, he may face ethical dilemma. It may harm the national interest. Hence, he suggests that prince should not worry about ethics. **Politics is not ethics, political actions to be judged not by the standards of ethics or religion, but ethics of politics**. Action may be ethically wrong, but politically correct. The ethics of politics is ability of the prince to secure the national interest. If

prince has sacrificed ends for the purity of means, no one will excuse the prince. However, if prince has achieved his aims, none will question the means employed.

Critical Evaluation.

*Machiavelli is often criticized for the above advice. He was specifically criticized by Gandhi who believed in purity of means. In his book Hind Swaraj, Gandhi says “It is illogical to believe that a rose flower will grow by sowing the seed of Babul.” Sabine also says that “Machiavelli’s views are narrowly dated and located.” Machiavelli is accused of preaching immorality, **Machiavelli is not immoral rather amoral**. He does not want prince to be immoral in personal life. He invents the **concept of dual morality** means the morality of a prince will be different from the common man*

Today the statement has become most defining element of Machiavellianism. In the history of western political philosophy, no other thinker has been as criticized as Machiavelli. Because the separation he makes between politics and ethics.

*Machiavelli was criticized by Gandhi, Gandhi called western civilization based on Machiavellianism as satanic. Gandhi emphasized on purity of means. In his book HIND SWARAJ Gandhi has written that “**It is illogical to expect Rose flower by sowing the seed of Babool.**” According to Gandhi, Politics without ethics and religion is like a ‘death trap.’*

Machiavelli on Religion.

Machiavelli is not against religion, he was against Church. He was against Church only because Church was corrupt at that time. Church was interfering in politics and was proving as an obstacle in achieving the national interest.

*Machiavelli believes religion can be useful for prince. Thus, **Machiavelli has utilitarian approach towards religion**. Religion is a disciplinary force which can be of great help to the prince. Many persons do not commit wrong things out of the fear of god. He suggests prince to appear religious in public, even if prince has no faith in religion. Thus, for Machiavelli religion should not use the prince, but prince should be in a position to use religion for the national interest.*

Was Machiavelli Immoral ?

No, he does not suggest prince to be immoral in the personal sphere, he only permits prince to ignore ethics, as far as national interest is concerned. Hence it is better to call Machiavelli amoral rather than immoral. He is indifferent to morality.

Other advices

Advice on foreign Policy

Machiavelli advises prince for **expansionist foreign policy**. He was the first person to suggest that prince should have the **army comprising of only the nationals**.

In case of conquered land, Machiavelli suggests that prince should **rule directly only if the culture of the people of that land is similar to the culture of the prince, otherwise prince should select some local person as his lieutenant / Viceroy**.

Advice on Fortune.

He defines fortune as **circumstances which are not under one's control**. He defines fortune in terms of bad luck. He suggests that even when prince has all the qualities, well versed in statecraft, yet there is no guarantee that he will be successful. Bad time can strike anyone, anywhere. When bad time comes, they come like **torrential rains or roaring river**. Wise prince will always do preparations like creating embankments, however still it can devastate the prince. **He suggests that the nature of fortune is like women, women embrace brave men**. Hence if prince will face these times with courage, he can convert bad times into favorable times. This shows that Machiavelli is realist but at the same time optimist.

'DISCOURCES'

In his book **THE PRINCE**, Machiavelli supports monarchy, whereas in his another book **DISCOURCES**, he supports republican form of govt. In society where people are corrupt, he suggests the rule of a prince, who rules with iron hand. Where people are virtuous, have civic sense, responsibility, there he recommends republic. According to Machiavelli, **wherever necessary monarchy, wherever possible republic, but in no situation oligarchy or aristocracy**. He does not prefer the rule of nobles or feudal lords. This also shows the impact of his times and Machiavelli as the scholar of emerging capitalist class. He considers feudal lords as parasite class. He advice prince that in case of conflict, between nobles and common man, prince should take the side of common man. Nobles will have aspiration for power and hence they are challenge to the king. Common man has limited aspirations, protection of life and property and hence they will not pose threat to the king.

Critical Evaluation of Machiavelli

“Machiavelli is narrowly dated and narrowly located.” – Sabine.

Machiavelli is one of the most criticized figure in the history of western philosophy. He is primarily criticized for his views on religion and ethics, specifically for his criticism of Church. Sabine believes that his pessimistic view on human nature, Church, politics, is because of the circumstances prevailing in Italy during his times. His views would have been different had he belonged to different time and space.

It is true that Machiavelli was ‘child of his times’. However it does not mean that his thoughts are lacking any universal and transcendental value. Machiavelli is not only one of the most criticized figures, he is also one of the most unfortunate figures. It is unfortunate that Machiavelli was criticized for telling the reality of politics. According to Dunning, it is an irony that everyone is Machiavellian in practice but no one accepts himself as Machiavellian. Even when Machiavelli’s ideas are one sided, however it is very important to understand this dark aspect of human nature and politics. Machiavelli’s thoughts are not only having practical importance but huge academic importance. He laid the foundation of political realism. His empirical method also led to the emergence of behavioural method in political science. We can see his influence on the philosophers like Hobbes and he is the intellectual precursor of realist school of international politics.