

### **Machiavelli (1469-1527)**

Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli was born in Italy in 1469. He was a diplomat, political philosopher, musician, poet and playwright. He is known as the child of Renaissance. He was very much influenced by the intellectual traditions of his age. Since he was a high ranking government official, he had first-hand knowledge of state matters. Machiavelli was born in a very difficult period in Italian history. All the Italian City States were under attack from foreign powers like France, Spain and Holy Roman Empire. Even the Pope of Italy had his own army.

Renaissance is a special period in European History. In this period, people understood that it is possible to think freely. They realized that it is possible to think without the help of Church. They also realized that it is possible to think beyond church teachings. People believed that Nature must be viewed from the point of view of Reason. They started thinking that Nature should not be viewed from the point of view of Religion. Nature is not a matter of faith. It is a matter of Reason. Man must be able to think with the brain which God had given him. So it was a time of Freedom of Thought. Free thinking was supported in all matters of human life. It became possible to think free in all matters of life. So it became possible to think in the matters of Politics also. That means, it became possible to think about political matters without the help of religion. Thus, Political thinking became Secular. Machiavelli became a champion of free thinking in Political Thought.

Actually, Machiavelli lived in the end of medieval age and the beginning of Modern Age. With him, middle Ages came to an end and political philosophy entered a new phase. His thinking was modern. In the middle Ages, people thought mainly about Spirit, Salvation and God. The centre of human thought was God and the Church. But in the Renaissance period, Man became the centre of human thought. People began to think about what is good for Man; and not what is good for God. They began to concentrate on this world and not heaven and salvation. People wanted to improve their life. They wanted to enrich their personality. They wanted to enjoy the beauty of nature and this world. They stopped dreaming about the beauty of heaven.

As a result of free thinking, Nationalism and Individualism were born. Nationalism means a thinking that each person belongs to a particular Nationality. Thus Nationality is a part of the personality. Individualism means that the individual is the centre and not his religion or caste. Individual is identified as a single person and not as a member of a community or caste or religion. Individualism also taught that human thinking is not for the success of a religion or caste; but it is for the success of the individual. Thus Individualism and Nationalism meant national success and individual success. It means Power for the individual and the Nation and not his religion or caste. Individuals were united by their nationality and not by their religion or caste.

#### **Machiavelli and his times:**

Machiavelli lived during a period when much chaos and confusion prevailed in Italy. The country was in fragments. There were constant conflict between the Pope and the Emperor. Pope was more a disunifying factor rather than a unifying factor. There was no central authority to command the rule of the state. At the same time, feudalism was on a down-hill trend due to advancement in economic production. It was the period of Renaissance. In almost all fields of human thinking, there were freedom of speech and expression. Reason was taking charge of

faith. Reason and faith got separated from each other. Men wanted to separate his temporal life from that of spiritual life. Materialism was another characteristic of his times. Renaissance replaced spiritualism with materialism. Individual became the centre of human thought.

### **Method of Machiavelli:**

Machiavelli was a follower of Aristotle. Machiavelli started at the point in which Aristotle stopped. He freely used the various concepts of Aristotle. Machiavelli followed Reason. His method was based on scientific observation. He tried to learn from history and the past. It is called Historical Method. He studied contemporary politics. On the basis of it, he formed theories. He proved his theories on the basis of history. He based his thinking on truth and reality. It is called Realism. It is not based on philosophy. He was more interested in the actual working of the government. He was interested in the protection and preservation of the state. He was not worried about the excellence of the Constitution. He believed that there is no point in having an excellent Constitution, if it does not protect the State. He also viewed state affairs from the standpoint of the ruler. The ruled people were only secondary to Machiavelli. Above all, he said that there is only one sword to rule the nation. That is the sword of Secularism. He did not allow religion in politics. He did not want religion to rule the state.

### **Machiavelli on Human nature:**

According to Machiavelli, human nature is not good. But it is bad. According to him, man is “ungrateful, fickle/inconsistent, deceitful, cowardly and materialistic”. They are originally irrational. They do not think based on reason. They work according to their emotions. They are emotional beings. They are not rational beings. There is only one method to control them. It is through emotions. They can be controlled only through Fear. Fear is the dominating element in man. Therefore, a King or a Prince must make use of the Fear to control people. The people must fear a Prince. The Prince must represent fear.

Machiavelli’s concept of Human nature is given in his famous work ‘The Prince’. It can be summarised as follows:

1. Human nature is essentially not good. Man, by nature is selfish. He is self-centered. He is greedy. By nature, men love property and material objects than his own people and other human beings. Machiavelli said that people can forget their ancestors but not their property.
2. Man always remains unsatisfied because he is always greedy.
3. Human beings are always aggressive. He is interested in acquire more and more. His greed never ends.
4. By nature, human beings work against collective interests because he is selfish.
5. By nature human beings are ambitious. They get tired very fast of the old and seeks things new and things which caters to his fancy.
6. Human beings generally want liberty.

Machiavellian view on human nature is always criticized for its inability to see the other side of the picture. He had depicted only one side of human nature. It may be true that there may be bad elements in his behaviour. But that is not the final. There is always the other side. He failed to explore the human nature from its entirety.

### **The Prince:**

Machiavelli’s book ‘Prince’ is not an academic work. It is not a book of Political Science also. But it is a book of practical politics. It says that State is the highest form of human

organisations. It is above all other human organisations. It is unavoidable for the welfare of people. It is ruled by a Prince who is rational. He is brutal also. A Prince must have the qualities of a lion in organizing attacks. He should have the qualities of a fox in diplomatic matters. He is not hated. He should be only feared. He must be free from emotional disturbances. But he must take advantage of emotional disturbance of people. He is a calculating opportunist. He must oppose evil by evil. He must be ready to sin for the sake of the state. Dishonesty is the best policy for the Prince.

The fundamental principle of the Prince is that the State is the highest association. It reflects the national character. Nobody is above the state. The law of the state expresses the character of the state. A successful Prince should always try to make himself popular among the people. He should be like a father figure to all his subjects. He must command the respect of the citizens. He must ensure economic prosperity of the subjects. He must plant spies all over. Any dissention against him should be taken into consideration seriously. Conspirators should be thoroughly punished. There shall be strict law and order in his state.

According to Machiavelli, the Prince is above laws. He is above all codes and conducts. He need not watch for the morality and immorality of his actions. He is bothered only about the end results. The means is not an issue for him. While selecting the officials, the Prince should be careful to avoid flatterers. This is the greatest challenge to a Prince. To differentiate between those who flatter and those who present facts is difficult. He must also take steps to keep the royal matters as secret.

A Prince must take the advice of wise people around him. He should not listen to all alike. A successful Prince must abstain from personal property and women. These two things can take away his interest in the administration of the state. He must be able to sin for the unity and integrity of the state. A Prince must realize the importance of a strong army for the state. No nation can survive without a powerful army. He can only do so if enough finance is available to him. But the real strength of the army resides in the patriotism of people.

A Prince must also be able to exploit the religious feelings of the people for the safety and security of the nation. He must also be able to get the sympathy of the people. A Prince must be able to obtain the opinion of his people on various matters. He must create a feeling in men that the rule is for them. He must make use of various methods of propaganda to spread the message. He must appear very cooperative to his friends. He must also realize that there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies.

### **Separation of Politics from Ethics and Religion:**

Machiavelli was different from Plato, Aristotle and Medieval thinkers. According to him, the state was not a means to an end. But the State is an end in itself. It is not a means of promoting social welfare. The end is the State. It justified the means. Interests of the state justified everything. Interest of the State justified all wrong actions. State actions cannot be judged by individuals. There is a double standard for the State and the people. The state has no ethics. It is non-ethical. The state is not a moral being. It is not immoral also. But we can say that the State is non-moral. The non-moral State is ruled by a non-moral Prince. He is a despot. But he is an enlightened despot.

Machiavelli believed in Secularism. To Machiavelli, the Church is only a department or section of the state. The Church is not independent of the State. The Church has a place within the state. The place of Church is not above or beside the State. Religion is only a social

force which is working within the state. Religion cannot be above the State. Ethics also is like this. Ethics cannot be above the State. It is a force working within the State.

### **Assessment of Machiavelli:**

According to Machiavelli, “a state must either expand or expire”. If a State does not expand, it will expire or cease to exist. Roman state is the best example. Its policy of expansion is ideal. It can be seen that Machiavelli had very strict idea about the State. The State should be powerful without any principles or ethics. “Machiavellianism” had become a by word for “unscrupulousness”. It is about how to preserve a State. He was a Political Realist and not a Political Philosopher. His concept of State is based on reality and not on principles. His State theory is about practical politics and not about principles of politics.

Machiavelli totally separated religion from politics. He stood for a Secular state. He rejected Papacy and Holy Roman Empire. He thought of a Nation State with its own population, territory, sovereignty and its own government.

The contribution of Machiavelli to the Science of Politics can be summarised as follows:-

1. **European Chanakya:** Machiavelli can be considered as a European Chanakya. Though not adept and brilliant as Chanakya, Machiavelli could live up to his age and expectations in Europe.
2. **Nationalism:** Machiavelli can be considered as a symbol of nationalism. The emerging nationalist feelings of Europe found a theorist in him.
3. **Foundation of State:** As according to Machiavelli, the foundation of the State is not divine intervention. But it is embedded In the nature of people.
4. **Secularism:** The principles of Machiavelli were targeted towards the creation of a secular society. He wanted to separate religion from politics.
5. **Public and Private Morality:** In Machiavelli, there is a distinction between public and private morality.
6. **Negating ‘Natural Law’:** Machiavelli refuted the principle of natural law. According to him, law is the positive code created by a ruler. There is nothing like natural or eternal or divine law.
7. **Concept of Sovereignty:** According to Machiavelli, sovereignty is both internal and external in character. This concept went well with the concept of nationalism.
8. **Historical Method:** Machiavelli is known for the introduction of Historical Methods in the art and science of Politics.
9. **Psychological Method:** Machiavelli is also known for employing psychological methods in the governance of the state.
10. **Concept of Nation-State:** A state based on nationalism was the pioneering concept by Machiavelli which is being followed even today.

### **Conclusion:**

Machiavelli was a true child of renaissance. He assimilated the political aspirations of his times and converted into a coherent and acceptable theory paving the way towards a Nation state system based on secularism and individualism. His concepts and principles may not be always plausible; but no one can deny his role in the particular juncture in the transformation of the European world. He filled a great gap in the theory and practice of politics in Europe.