

Is it correct to say that Machiavelli was an apostle of power politics? (2016)

(1) Introduction

Yes, it is correct to describe Niccolò Machiavelli as an advocate or proponent of power politics. His writings, particularly "The Prince", are often interpreted as promoting a pragmatic approach for acquiring, maintaining, and consolidating political power. Machiavelli's ideas emphasize the importance of effective leadership, realpolitik - politics based on practical rather than moral or ethical considerations and the willingness to use any means necessary to achieve political goals and aggressive policies.

(2) Power politics ~ An overview

Machiavelli was the first systematic writer of the theory of power politics in modern times. His concept of power politics is based on the force of state and its ability to pursue its goal and to protect its interests. He laid the foundation of secular state and overlooked

the principles of 'divine law' which was popular in medieval times. On Contrary to the Plato who said King has to rule according to morals and Ethics of Natural Laws, Machiavelli emphasizes on **END JUSTIFIES MEAN** that whatever mean either legal or illegal, moral or immoral may be applied for the interests of state.

### (3) Machiavelli ~ an apostle of power politics

Niccolo Machiavelli, a Renaissance era philosopher and diplomat, is often characterized as an advocate of power politics due to his influential work, "The Prince". It explores the pragmatic use of power and politics in the pursuit of political goals. This includes tactics such as deceit, manipulation and even cruelty when deemed necessary.

#### a) Interpretations of Machiavelli's Ideas Machiavelli's writings have

been interpreted in various ways. Some see him as a proponent of a ruthless and amoral approach to politics, where the pursuit of power takes precedence over ethical considerations. Others argue that he was a realist who recognized the harsh realities of political life during his time, where leaders often faced complex and challenging situations that required tough decisions.

"The authentic interpretation of Machiavelli is the whole of later history. We find everybody using Machiavelli and still denouncing him." (Historian, Politician - Lord Acton)

## i) Impact of prevailing conditions

Machiavelli is often referred to as the Child of his time. During his time, the Italian Peninsula was separated into a number of small independent states which fought wars continuously with each other. Distant from interior fights amongst these states there was a severe

Threat from France and Spain to the borders. Machiavelli wanted to unite these combatant states and make them strong enough to handle external powers through a robust monarch.

Thus, "The Prince" can not be understood without referring to the situations in which Prince was written.

## ii) Psychological egoism ~ Human Nature

Human beings, according to Machiavelli are very selfish, wicked, degenerate, power hungry, opportunists. He is anti-social and tries to encourage his own interests everytime. Behind everything which Machiavelli said was the assumption that human nature is essentially selfish. He frequently said that wise ruler should construct his policies on this assumptions. Security is only possible when government is strong as power & hungry people will generate chaotic situation for dominance. Whereas for Aristotle man is a social animal, so he favoured Polity. Similarly Rousseau favoured

general will, as for him, man has instinct of mutual help.

## b) Emphasis on Pragmatism

Machiavelli's "The Prince" places a strong emphasis on pragmatism in politics to pursue the national interests.

Pragmatism is a philosophical and practical approach that emphasizes the importance of practical approach consequences, utility, and the real world application of ideas and actions. It's often associated with the belief that the value of an idea or action be judged by its practical results rather than abstract principles or theories.

## Case Study:

Abraham Lincoln, the 16<sup>th</sup> President of USA, demonstrated pragmatism during the American Civil War, 5 lacs people died and around 10 lacs injured. The primary goal during the Civil War was to preserve the union and maintain the integrity of USA. Today, he is known as the HERO, no matter he was responsible for the dead of millions.

## c) Notion "End Justify Means"

Machiavelli famously states that "the ends justify the means" meaning that achieving one's goals is more important than the ~~morality~~ mode of methods used.

If Prince is successful in achieving the national interest, no one will question the righteousness of means. But if he sacrifices it for purity of means, no one will excuse him for this guilt.

### Case Study

Bombing campaign during the WWII, specifically the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

↳ Justification for the means:

The use of atomic bombs was seen as a way to compel Japan to surrender unconditionally, thus avoiding the prolonged war and anticipation of high casualties in USA.

In this historical examples the concept

that "Ends justify the means" is invoked to argue that the use of atomic bombs, despite their devastating consequences was justified by the goal of ending WWII. and avoiding a prolonged conflict.

#### d) Amoral nature of politics

Politics, in the opinion of Machiavelli, is inherently amoral. He contends that politics is superior business than morality and ethics. So the morality of actions in the political realm is secondary to achieving desired outcomes. He further said that political actions can not be judged by the parameters of ethics. A particular action may be ethically wrong but politically correct. Here, he introduced the concept of Dual Morality. Morality of Prince and common are two different things. Common man can sacrifice himself for his principles, but prince can not sacrifice the interest of his nation for his beliefs. As for Machiavelli, State is an end in itself and end justifies everything. So, the Prince

should adopt all kinds of measures, including ruthless or morally questionable tactics, to achieve and preserve that end.

On contrary to this, Gandhi emphasise on purity of means. In his book "Hind Swaraj" he has written that "It is illogical to expect rose flowers by sowing the seeds of Babool." It means by immoral ways one cannot achieve good results. According to Gandhi "Politics without ethics and religion is a death trap." However, today 99% of countries doesnot follow ethics when it comes to the preservation and promotion of their national interests. A living example is killing of separatist activist in certain countries like Pakistan, India, Turkey and so on.

### e) <sup>force</sup> Dissecting use of <sup>force</sup> force Balance between virtu and moralty

Machiavelli advices the prince to possess the quality of "virtu" for the preservation of his state, position and power.



Virtu is a pragmatic approach to leadership that focuses on achieving desired outcomes rather than strictly adhering to moral considerations. Hence, virtu consists of qualities such as strength, effectiveness, cunning and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Further, prince is also advised to pretend to be good in the eyes of others to win their praise and loyalty. As elucidated in "The Prince":

"A prince should appear to be compassionate, faithful to his words, guileless and devout. And indeed he should be so, such that, But his disposition should be such that, if he needs to be opposite, he knows how."

## f) Di-secting use of force:

To sustain the power politics, according to Machiavelli, force is the ultimate principle. As force is the foundation stone of the state, therefore, people

should be terrified by the ruler. "It is better for the prince to be feared than to be loved" (The Prince).

In order to terrify the people, the prince should have a strong national army with patriotic sentiments. He is totally against the mercenary army because in hours of need they will not sacrifice their lives for the cause of state.

An Indian philosopher Kautilya in his book Arthashastra which means the art of State opined that: "A King must amass wealth to promote the welfare of the people and also maintain army." He used word Danda to refer to the armed forces. Hence, he is the Machiavelli of India.

### Practical implications:

After treaty of Westphalia, all states came into existence by force not on ethics and morality. For instance Bangladesh, Israel, Ukraine, USA and many others.

## g) Safe-guarding borders of State:

It is the duty of the ruler to defence the state. Machiavelli gave some advices to the prince to do so; which are given below

## i) Either expand or expire

Machiavelli was in favour of expansion foreign policy. He said that if you will not expand, you will be perished. Nowadays quote is attributed to Wilfred Trotter, a British surgeon; "Either you expand or perish". Suggesting that if you donot evolve you may face decline. Thus, for the real politic expansion is necessary.

vertical  
Example

In history along with many empires Ancient Egypt was one of them. There is no any history of their aggressive or expanding policy. They remained focused to preserve their cultural values. Over Resultantly, Egypt faced external invasions and internal divisions which contributed to its decline.

## ii) Conquered land ~ management

If prince had conquered land, he should rule directly only if the culture of the people of that land is similar to the culture of Prince. Otherwise, Prince should select some local person as his Lieutenant or Viceroy to govern there. Only in this way, Prince can continue his power politics in the newly conquered regions.

### Historical experience:

After 9/11 USA invaded Afghanistan, and established there an interim Afghan Government under President Hamid Karzai. USA had a hold on Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021 though it was conflicting but prevent the dominance of Taliban there.

## iii) Avoiding neutrality in Wars

If there is a war between two neighbour states, Machiavelli suggested, Prince must not be neutral. It is

better for the prince to take side of the weaker. Otherwise, the stronger will defeat the weaker one and later it may also attack on his state.

### History proving the Scenario:

In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, government of Pakistan predicting next target will be their territory, support Afghan Mujahideen. Mujahideen with the help of Pakistan and USA defeat Soviet Union. In this way, Pakistan saved its territory by Utilitarian Politics.

iv)

## Pre-emptive Strike Strategy:

If the prince feels that the enemy state is going to attack his state, Machiavelli opines, he should not wait and must take initiative and crush the enemy. Here, he gave the concept of pre-emptive strike for power politics. "The best way of defence is to offence" (Machiavelli: The Prince). Thus, the prince should be ready for war at any time.

### Historical example:

Israeli Air force's attack on Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian airfields at the outset of the six-Day war in 1967. The pre-emptive strike resulted in the destruction of a significant portion of Arab air forces, giving Israel air superiority. And in long-term Israel went on to occupy territories in Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights, West Bank and Gaza Strip.

## h) Conclusion

These references demonstrate that Machiavelli's political philosophy, as outlined in "The Prince" and his other writings, indeed aligns with the principles of power politics, where the acquisition and maintenance of political power take precedence over traditional, moral, or ethical considerations. His writings are a commentary on the realities of

politics and leadership. It is true that Machiavelli was "child of his time" but that does not mean his thoughts are lacking any universal and transcendental values.

It is irony that he is criticized for telling the realities of politics. Thus, apart from moral theories and fairytales, Machiavelli is the apostle of power politics in real and practical world.