

**Unit III : Machiavelli :**  
**Paper II: Western Political Thought,**  
**B. A. 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester, Political Science**

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**First on Paper Western Political Thought:** it studies the political ideas of ten European political philosophers, of Plato, Machiavelli, Marx, Lenin etc. Their ideas provided the foundation of the Political Science. Plato and other thinkers started the western intellectual tradition. They influenced the development of ideas and practices of State, democracy, political system, individual rights etc.

Niccolo Machiavelli was an Italian political philosopher, who lived at the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century. His important book is *the Prince*. He was influenced by conditions of Italy of his time, which were characterised by chaos, disunity and domination by the religion in the society and politics. Let us try to understand basic features of two ideas of Machiavelli:

**(1) Separation of Politics from Ethics and Religion**

Machiavelli developed modern concepts of religion and morality, which made him a modern political thinker. He attacked Church of his time, for their failure to provide moral inspiration to the people of Italy. However he was not anti-religion. For Machiavelli, if religion was not used responsibly, it could be disastrous. Religion was good, only if it produced; order, peace, fortune and success.

Machiavelli recognised the effects of religion and morals on social and political life. He thought that moral corruption in a people, made the good government impossible. He classified two standards of morality (morality is concerned with the principles of right and wrong or good and bad behaviour). One was for the ruler and another for the private citizens. The ruler was judged by the success in keeping and increasing his power. Since the ruler was not in the group, he was above the morality to be enforced within the society. On the other hand the private persons had their strength by their conduct in the society.

Machiavelli was not concerned about the good life and good society as did by Plato and others. But he thought that display of high moral standards and qualities in public life was important. He made a distinction between private and public conceptions of morality. He asserted that the public spirit was crucial to the stability of the State.

He admired the qualities like courage, self-assertiveness, ambition, intelligence, fame and strength. He rejected Christianity of his time for glorifying the qualities like renunciation, charity and patience under injustice. He criticised Christianity of his time for making men charitable and weak. For Machiavelli politics was ultimately and finally a constant struggle for power and domination. He justified the use of immoral means by the rulers, but only for the unity and interest of the State, not for the personal interest.

Machiavelli separated the private from the public sphere of morality. State had a morality of success. The private individual was to display the qualities in tune with the highest moral standards all the time. A ruler had to be compassionate, humane, loyal and honest. At the same time the ruler must use force, fraud, deception and cunning means. Higher moral standards would result into ruin, at the time of crisis, chaos and disorder. Machiavelli rejected the divine rights theory of the kings (idea that king was the representative of God and justification in the name of god by the king). The states came into existence by the will of God was wrong. For him power was divine.

According to Machiavelli the ruler must be capable of turning whatever the direction according to the circumstances. He rejected the traditional ethics and attempted to find out the alternate political ethics, which were suitable according to the situation. He attempted to establish the autonomy of politics from religion, moral and ethical considerations. At the same time, Machiavelli recognised that civilization and a good society meant high moral standards. He also accepted that a society's moral fabric was made or destroyed by its people. Politics was not a means to higher goods like justice or truth.

By separating religion from politics, he set the tunes for one of the main themes of modern time ---secularism (which is the principle of separation of State from religious institutions). It was secularization of thought and life. At the same time, he acknowledged the importance of religion as the cementing force in the society. He rejected the negative influence of religion on the politics and society. He focussed on the politics and power which alone could bring unity, progress and success in a state by the ruler.

## **(2) Machiavelli's Influence and Contribution**

Machiavelli took politics out of theology (theology is the study of the nature of God and religious belief). He subordinated moral principles to the necessities of political existence and people's welfare. He had not much interest in the non-political matters. His importance lies in providing secularization and politics free from moral consideration. Whatever interest he had in spiritual and religious matters, were from the political perspective. The later political thinkers focused on order and power issues of politics.

The first thinker to speak about the need to establish state in modern form was Machiavelli. He saw the forces shaping the modern nation state like nationalism, national security, territorial integrity and militarism. These forces were to safeguard and promote the interests of the state. The achievement of Machiavelli was in trying to establish a secular state ( a State having no official religion etc). His contribution was in attempting to develop scientific enquiry into, the nature and behaviour of the state. He advocated political realism, which made him to advise to the rulers to adopt any means including immoral ones.

Machiavelli could see the rise of science and capitalism. He was the first thinker to view and explain the power view of politics. Politics was for struggle for acquisition, maintenance and consolidation of political power. This power view of politics was further developed by Hobbes, Pareto, Robert Dahl, David Easton, Hans Morgenthau etc. Machiavelli thought that human nature remained permanent and constant. He never lost the faith in the importance of good society. He accepted the role of good society shaping human thought and action.

**Machiavelli was the first to study extensively the role of corruption in the political life. The goodness of heart and purity of life had little impact on the political life. For Machiavelli success, glory, liberty and virtue were the main elements of political success. This was his concept of political realism which was guided by practical experience. He justified the use of immoral means by the rulers for the interests of state, never for the personal reasons.**

**Conflict was permanent and universal according to Machiavelli. The social conflict was due to permanent struggle between common men and the powerful rich people. According to Machiavelli, if conflict was well managed, it could be a source of strength to the political process. In a virtuous state the conflict was conducted with the objective of common good, respect for law and authority. In such a state there was minimum use of force. It was necessary to combat social conflict and radical selfishness of human nature according to Machiavelli. The successful state depended on the strong military and rational legal system. Machiavelli founded modern military science. For him most political situations were manipulative.**

**Machiavelli was for civic republicanism (which stresses interconnection between individual freedom and civic participation for promotion of common good- a principle against autocratic government). He prescribed institutional and moralistic remedies to secure and protect the civic freedoms. A stable republic supported by patriotic citizens could prevent factionalism in the state and society. Patriotism (national pride feeling of love and service for one's country), could be sustained by the continuous participation of the citizens, in civic affairs and religion. Machiavelli emphasized the importance, of wise constitutional machinery with civic virtue and mixed constitutions. He defended the limited government, was convinced the importance of the rule of law.**

**To conclude, Machiavelli advocated the value free orientation of political science. His name is associated with immoral and political cynicism. Some considered him as the devil's agent for preaching evil means and to pursue political power. However Machiavelli was the first to develop a science of politics by identifying the essential elements of modern political theory. Gramsci praised the greatness of Machiavelli for separating politics from religion and ethics. Machiavelli introduced many modern ideas and concepts like secularism, secular State, public and private morality, rational legal system, civic republicanism, nationalism and power view of politics.**