THE PRINCE IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF KAUTILYA AND MACHIAVELLI*

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I. Introductory

There are two names celebrated in history for an exposition of the theory of State-craft—Kautilya and Machiavelli. Kautilya, pandit and statesman, lived in the third century B.C. and was a contemporary of Chandragupta Maurya. Machiavelli, philosopher and statesman, was born in Florence in 1469 and he died in the same city in 1527. Kautilya is the author of Arthaśāstra which deals with all doctrines concerned with practical life, economics, administration and politics. It is primarily a treatise on government and Kautilya is only a teacher of political morals. Machiavelli is the author of the Prince which treats mainly of state-craft and lays down conditions that are necessary for the establishment and operation of the machinery of a strong state. Machiavelli believes in the true relation of history to politics and in discovering parallels in the history of classical antiquity that bore relation to existing conditions; his interest in the Prince was clearly determined by contemporary conditions.

Machiavelli and his times.—Machiavelli was in the fullest sense, a child of the times, and he was the first to sense the upheaval of the Renaissance which was turning out to be a new orientation of the occidental mind and a sweeping revolt in intellectual and political life. Mediaeval civilisation was striving for centuries to raise a ladder from the earth to the sky on which mankind could climb to paradise; the interest in scientific knowledge was little, and the people were content with a rudimentary organisation of political power and showed a marked antipathy to military or political organisation on a large scale.

The Renaissance, on the other hand, organised society, armed the States and destroyed the mystic anarchy and spiritual ascent to Heaven characteristic of the Middle Ages.¹ The geographical explorations of the

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period, scientific inventions, the spirit of adventure, the discovery of traces of an imposing political and military civilisation in the ruins of Greece and Rome precipitated the revolt. Freedom was the dominant note of the age, freedom from the limitations and restraints which had been imposed upon men’s thought and action by the scholastic method and dogma, freedom to revel in every species of activity which the untrammelled spirit of the ancients had suggested. There was the unification of authority in the absolute state, and the territorial sovereign took the place of the petty, ineffective, unintegrated authorities which divided jurisdiction under feudalism. It was an era of the strong man in both secular and ecclesiastical matters and of the establishment of the principle of the indivisibility of sovereign power. The Renaissance State was not a constitutional, much less a democratic, State.² It was not concerned with the rights of individuals at all. The idea of the time was governmental independence and not group development. Its essential quality was external sovereignty which implied a strong central authority maintaining itself at all costs with a view to strengthen the state against all its neighbours. The secularism of the state, its independence of the church and the omnicompetence of the central government over old privileges and private jurisdiction were the most outstanding features of this new type of state.³

Machiavelli was not merely conscious of these tendencies, but also was able to foresee certain of its consequences. He was the first to know that Italy was in danger, for nowhere was anarchy, demilitarisation, more impressive and more irremediable. Italy was an agglomeration of minor, obscure, isolated, incoherent societies in which there was neither the habit of obedience to constituted authority nor the reverence for religion, nor sense of common citizenship, nor impulse to co-operate for common interest. There were no real military forces and some states were tending towards consolidation, without legitimacy, without tradition, without leaders and without stable laws. Private depravity and political debasement, selfishness, violence, craft and corruption darkened and defiled the administration of sacred things; but these went with one of the most brilliant intellectual awakening in the history of the Western World.

Machiavelli felt that Italy must free herself in time from disintegrating tendencies; forces of disruption and disorder to be controlled; order and unity attained; and that people welded together under one supreme power which was to be a refuge against the distraction of conflicting allegiances and

² Dunning: *Political Theories, Ancient and Medieval*, p. 291.
against the insecurities and restrictions of a disordered society. Otherwise, the collapse of theocracy would spell death for Italy. Machiavelli denounced Papacy as a great national danger, as the primary cause of Italy's political and military weakness. He attacked Christianity as a religion of slaves and warned that Italy which dominated Europe intellectually should now arm in order to defend herself.

Machiavelli pleaded for the creation of one powerful national state in Italy founded on wise and just laws and capable of defending herself with a well organised national militia. He stood on the threshold of the modern world, for he foresaw the collapsing of the Empire and the Papacy and discerned that something new like a national state must take their place. The only remedy for political decay was the foundation of the state by force and to make it secure by good government.

*Kautilya and his times.—* Kautilya too was impressed with the importance of a strong state, for his period synchronised with the invasion of India by Alexander and the consequences of such an invasion. The expedition of Alexander had resulted in a vast increase of European knowledge of the East. The commercial relations of India with the West were strengthened and some degree of reciprocal influence was also exercised on each other by Greek and Indian art and literature. H. G. Wells says that three great structural ideas ruled the mind of contemporary mankind: a clear vision of man in relation to the things about him; service of one universal God of Righteousness whose temple is the whole world; the first germination of the idea of a world policy. Before the invasion of Alexander, India looked as if she had been meant by nature to remain aloof from the rest of the world and to develop her civilisation in isolation, untouched by the currents that stir humanity abroad. The religion of Buddha had come to stay and a theology had grown up about him with all its complications, with the result that the moral teachings of Buddha were almost hid from view and smothered beneath the glittering mass of metaphysical subtleties. Buddhism had gathered corruptions and variations from Brahminism and Hellenism alike, and these had tended to disintegrate Hindu Society producing moral inertness, laxity and antagonism to the deep-seated religious convictions of the people.

The invasion of Alexander had also weakened the small states and the free tribes of the Punjab and Sindh which had now rendered themselves to be willing victims of any ambitious power. The fear of another foreign

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invasion and the conviction that it would be impossible to withstand it without union probably made small principalities willing to accept the protection and supremacy of a strong kingdom and the ground was prepared for the growth of the first Indian Empire under Chandragupta, under the influence of his able preceptor Kautilya. Chandragupta effected a dynastic revolution, usurped the throne of Magadha and launched on a career of ceaseless conquests. A huge empire sprang into existence unifying the innumerable fragments of a distracted country. Gigantic world-wide religious movements were initiated a few years later by Chandragupta's grandson Asoka, and the affairs of secluded India were first brought into contact with those of the outside world. The whole world seemed stirring into new life, and the boundaries of men's horizons seemed immeasurably wider. The new conditions created by a clash of cultures helped to give the impression of an immense step forward in the progress of mankind.

Though history does not repeat itself yet there do arise from time to time curious parallels between one period and another. There are many points of similarity between the characteristics of Kautilya's India, the Italy of Machiavelli and our own century. The third century B.C. and the fifteenth century A.D. were periods of immense vitality coupled with complete unrestraint in the social life of the times paralleled only by the frankness of modern times. There is a certain resemblance between lawlessness, violence and callousness to the sanctity of human life and the apathy of the public conscience, and the modern capitalistic civilisation with its great material wealth and luxury with their attendant evils of a general lawlessness and license. The two periods, again, were characterised also by the breakdown of the long-established forms of democracy and the substitution of dictatorship, because the people were unable to bear the strain imposed by constant warfare and showed therefore a disposition to accept a despotism which would give them safety and material prosperity.

Modern states too, faced with an analogous situation, have welcomed dictatorship. Lack of food, lack of security for life and property, and lack of certainty as to the future have led to an extreme form of social neurosis or psychological unsettlement threatening the dissolution of society. The tendency thus is, for the larger part of mankind because they cannot accept responsibility for government, to regress inevitably to the simplest form of order by means of command and obedience, and to acquiesce in the force of a dictator as the only means available in their community for avoiding social chaos. Fatalism, a high death rate, illiteracy, un-authoritarian religion and the collapse of established morality, are the conditions into which the
modern war has introduced an abnormal instability and the result is that the mind of the nation swings toward strong government without desiring the suppression of criticism; and dictatorship is supported because strong government would be impossible under disputatious assemblies. Dictators arose then as they have arisen now and the brilliant analysis and appraisement of the conditions of the time by Kautilya and Machiavelli rouse the interest of the student of modern dictatorships to a study of Kautilya and Machiavelli's life and work.

II. Some Similarities between the Two Philosophers

Both Kautilya and Machiavelli have admiration for power and efficiency in man. Machiavelli glorified the state and emphasised the right of the state to the loyalty of the individual. Man has no right against the State; rather man reaches his greatest height in subordinating himself to the community, for Machiavelli believed that the state was necessary to the development of mankind. Kautilya too glorified the state and regarded the King as morally and legally the foundation and source and the embodiment of all sovereign authority. As all other footprints vanish in the footprints of the elephant, so all dharma disappears in the rajadharma. The four important objects of government are to obtain a kingdom, to preserve that which has been acquired, to increase that which has been acquired and to have a proper enjoyment of that which has been acquired. To this end, six kinds of policy are advocated with the result that war and conquest are among the primary duties of the sovereign who in pursuit of territory and statesmanship may get the formalities aright and ignore the moralities. Kautilya gives sanction to all kinds of trickery in order to make men believe that the king was omniscient and that he worked continually in partnership with the gods. The acme of political success was achieved when a king could boast that he was able to bind the princes with fetters of cleverness and play with them at his pleasure. He says 'He who shoots an arrow kills but one at best but he who has clever thoughts kills even the babe within its mother's body'. It is clear from this that both, while conscious of a broad philosophic basis for their doctrines, confine themselves entirely to questions of immediate practical concern. The principles of practical policy for given conditions are substantially identical in the minds of the two philosophers. Kautilya like Machiavelli relaxes the rigidity of political canons in accordance with the change of circumstances and the suitability of political conditions. The ideal of both is a state whose ends are expansion and attainment of widespread dominion. It is not merely the necessity
of the existence of the state, but a state pledged to expansion, because human affairs are in constant flux and motion: that is the first principle of their philosophy.

Both had a pessimistic view of the world. According to Machiavelli the world neither grows better nor worse, it is always the same. All the things that have been, may be again. The good and evil are even identical. Men are looked upon as purely selfish and are actuated always by impulses in which social virtues have no part. Men are ungrateful, deceitful, fickle, cowardly and avaricious, made good only by necessity, and consequently a monarch should inspire fear rather than love, for fear holds men indefinitely, controls the simple-minded, and deceives men who judge usually by appearances. Machiavelli is in the fullest sense a student of practical politics and he seeks to determine the workings of a real and not of an ideal political life. Though there is not the same insistence on the baseness and the fickleness of mankind in his other writings, Machiavelli suggests that the character of the state will depend on the number of individuals in it who wish for good or bad. The good will prevail in the state and through the state, because man as an individual is selfish, and as a member of the state he is unselfish. He says 7 "it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, voluble dissemblers anxious to avoid danger and covetous of gain; men forget more easily the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony". Machiavelli states that it would lead men to ruin by conforming to a perfect standard of goodness in a society where bad men usually predominate; and he considers like Hobbes that the only escape from such a society is to found a strong state whose function is to restrain mankind from evil influences and raise men from that level. 8 As the state will raise man from his conception of an individual good to the higher one of a common good, the state shall be justified in removing dangerous persons by any means which it chooses to employ. Machiavelli objected to half measures, because he believed them to be ineffectual, and he invested the state with absolute authority because a calculating self-interest serves for a practical standard of conduct, as men have endless desires whose satisfaction constitutes the mainspring of all human action. 9

Like Machiavelli, Kautilya too, believes in the sinfulness of mankind and seems to entertain a pessimistic outlook on human nature. His depressing philosophy of life embodies itself in an equally depressing philosophy

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7 John Morley: Miscellanies, p. 22.
8 Foreign Affairs, 1937, p. 571; Villari: Machiavelli, p. 70.
of politics. Government, according to him, exists merely as an institution of correction (danda) to restrain the natural turbulence and depravity of man. The institution of spies is the subject-matter of many chapters in Arthaśāstra. A chapter on Rajaputrarakshana deals about the ways by which the king is advised to protect himself from his own sons who are ‘like crabs inclined to devour their begetters’. The princes have to be kept away from temptations by being employed on the frontiers or anywhere, away from the capital, and thus deprived of the opportunity for insurrection. A whole chapter is devoted to the construction of women’s apartments in the royal palace and the measures to be taken to protect the king from the danger of being poisoned or assassinated. Kautilya speaks also of the corruption of officials and enjoins the king not to trust them. “As it is not possible if you have honey or poison on your tongue not to taste it, so it is for a king’s official in the finance department, impossible not to taste at least something of the king’s money.” Again, “as with fish moving in water, it is impossible to know when they are drinking water, so it is impossible with government officials to know when they take money for themselves.” Kautilya says that men and officials are to be used as instruments of espionage and tempted by love, fear, greed, ambition and even by the obligation of religion, before they are entrusted with responsible work.

III. An Essential Point of Difference between the Two Philosophers

There is one marked difference between the Indian and the Italian author. According to Kautilya Kingship and Dharma are closely related, and the king is regarded as a fountain of justice ‘Dharmapravartaka’. It is the king’s responsibility to maintain Dharma and to protect his subjects with justice, for its observance will lead him to Heaven. “Svadharmaṁ svargāya prajā dharmena rakṣituh.” Kautilya ia a confirmed believer in the moral order of the Universe, in the supremacy of Dharma over Artha, and in the State being created by divine ordination to preserve Dharma.

Machiavelli consciously maintains the separation of politics from ethics and religion probably because it corresponds more closely to the facts of human existence. Though he does not deny the excellence of the moral virtues, he does not consider them as indispensable conditions of political existence, and on the other hand, systematically seeks to isolate the phenomena of politics from moral life and to study them wholly without reference to facts of moral existence. He gives to politics an assured and scientific basis and treats them as having a proper and distinct value of their own entirely apart from their moral value. Success is the supreme law of politics and expediency is justified in place of the moral law.
Governance is a problem of strength and skill and not of ethics and law and it is to be judged not by intentions, but by the fruits of its policy. The striving for power and possession is a primordial instinct as strong in the individual as in the community. But man also has to reckon with morality and law. Between Kratos and Ethos, between the craving for power and the intruding sense of moral responsibility, between the instinctive and the spiritual, there is a middle zone called *Raison D’ État* or reason of state. Machiavelli says in the *Prince* “The experience of our own time has shown that those princes have achieved great things who made small account of good faith and who understood by cunning to circumvent the intelligence of others, and that in the end they got the better of those whose actions were dictated by loyalty and good faith. You must know therefore, that there are two ways of carrying on a contest, the one by law, the other by force. The first is reached by men, the other by animals; and as the first is inefficient it becomes necessary to resort to the second. A prince should know how to employ the nature of men and that of the beast as well ... A prince should be a fox to know the traps and snares; and a lion to be able to frighten the wolves; for those who simply hold to the nature of the lion do not understand their business. A sagacious prince then cannot and should not fulfil his pledges when their observance is contrary to his interest and when the causes that induced him to pledge his faith no longer exist.” This is to give sanction to craft and duplicity and to the prevalence of expediency over truth, whenever it is a question of aggrandising the state or preserving it. Machiavelli does not recognise any moral law, and sanctifies the duties of a statesman engaged in the development of the good of the state, though his acts are morally reprehensible.

The final satisfaction for a man in a state may be security of person or private property. Machiavelli offers materialistic individualism as an explanation of the love of independence and self-government. He had faith in a free Republic as the highest type of government, because it gives a chance of material gain to a majority of people, and independence is desired because wealth multiplies most in states that are not subject to others. According to Machiavelli, it is not the intellectual and moral uplifting of the country that smoothens the way to self-realisation but material prosperity that is the conscious basis of political life.¹⁰ Machiavelli wanted to see man’s lot made easier and better and the only instrument or force that could ameliorate the lot of humanity was the strong state. Consequently, he was for the subordination of the individual to the state and not for a balance

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between the interest of the individual and the interest of the community. He believed in the overriding of egoism by the state. Erskine Muir says ‘Machiavelli never justified private advantage; he aimed at the common good and the facts of his career prove the truth of this’. The state rises above individual selfishness. Representing mankind at its best, it should not retain its position by force and should not let its component parts to be coerced. Passion and Reason are limited in his state to attain its two ends—Power and Justice. The problem of Machiavelli was the reconciliation of this dualism of power and justice which always clash at any moment but whose union would be perfection long dreamt of.

(a) The Prince in Machiavelli’s System.—So general was the weakness and disintegration of states in Machiavelli’s time that he pleads for the achievement of unity and strength at whatever cost to the individual. Whether monarchies or republics, Machiavelli considered that the secret of the ruin and distraction of the state was weakness of will, want of fortitude, force and resolution, and therefore clear intelligence, backed by unsparing will, unflinching energy, remorseless vigour, the brain to plan and the hand to strike, must constitute the salvation of states. Calculation, courage, fit means for resolute ends, human force—only these can rebuild a world in ruins. Machiavelli was a hero worshipper and could not avoid a sense of pleasure in any manifestation of the ability to reach a desired end with clear-cut and indisputable success.

A strong ruler might override faction and in his urge to power might by force create a strong state. He points out in the last chapter of the Prince that there was still a possibility in his time for the formation of a new strong state. ‘Our country, left almost without life, still waits for one to heal her bruises, to put an end to devastation and plunder’. He draws in the Prince the quality of the man required to save Italy from impending disaster. The ruler’s business is to save the state. He cannot practise all virtues. The man of action is essentially conscienceless. Machiavelli takes his stand on reality and does not appeal to ethics or philosophy. He praises not the saint, but the patriot, and the laws of the patriot are logical laws and not moral laws; the end being accepted, it must be realised whatever the means. The voice of history has sounded across the centuries that the lives of men centre round their country and community, and the moral force doing away with individual selfishness will be the nation. “Praised be those who loved their country rather than the

11 D. Erskine Muir: Machiavelli and His Times, p. 258.
12 Discourse, I, 36.
safety of their souls." The prince should be on his guard against all vices; he should scrupulously abstain from every vice that might endanger his government. Of the two ways of carrying on the fight, one by law and the other by force, he may have to resort to the second, if the first is not enough. Machiavelli says "We should wish to be both feared and loved, but since love and fear can hardly exist together, if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved."

It is well for the Prince "to appear merciful, faithful and religious", and Machiavelli in one of his Discourses says that tenderness and humanity have sometimes a much greater effect upon the minds of men than any sort of violence that can be used......and whole provinces have often been subdued by one act of compassion or generosity". But if it suits his purpose, the ruler has to go to work against faith, against charity, against humanity and against religion; reasons of state must override the moral law in special circumstances as when the safety of the country is jeopardised, and then, no regard need be paid to justice or injustice, to pity or severity, to glory or shame. Everything must be disregarded save that course which will save the state's life and maintain her independence. If there is an exhortation to the ruler to establish power by force it is because Machiavelli is so much animated by feelings of patriotism that he suggests desperate remedies for desperate diseases.

Machiavelli was convinced that the Prince should form the first model but his rule would be necessarily of short duration if he did not construct the state on the solid foundation of good laws and good arms. "A wise ruler should devise such means that his people may feel the need of the state and they will always be faithful to him; the ruler shall be on a friendly footing with his people, since otherwise he will have no resources in adversity. The best fortress you can have is in being loved by your subjects. If they hate you, no fortress will save you; the ruler must be discreet enough to avoid the infamy of vices that would deprive him of his government". Machiavelli placed trust in the people and like Aristotle held that the multitude in the long run are the best judges and though they may go wrong about generalities, they are usually right as regards particulars. The people are less ungrateful than a prince. Machiavelli asserts that a hereditary ruler or usurper can have no safety unless he founds himself on popular favour and goodwill. The ruler must be the instrument of his people's welfare, and once

15 Thomson: (Trans.) Discourses, II, 16.