

Contributions of Machiavelli

Machiavelli lived in Renaissance Italy and was greatly influenced by the new spirit of Renaissance. The intellectual awakening injected rational scientific approach in every sphere of human life, renaissance replaced the faith by reason. Italy was the leader of Renaissance, the most modern and urbanized country of Europe.

Machiavelli arguably had the greatest influence from the Renaissance period. However, his most notable mark on history would be his book, “The Prince” which describes how a leader can gain and maintain power.

According to Machiavelli power of the state is the end of the state i.e. every state must aim at maximizing its power. The failure of the state in this enterprise will throw it into great turmoil. Consequently he confined his attention to the means best suited to the acquisition, retention and expansion of power.

Machiavelli state is highest form of human association. It is indispensable for the promotion of human welfare. State is to be worshipped even by sacrificing the individual for the interest of the state. Political statesman plays important role in organizing state, and providing it with safety and security. Hence the major theme of his book “Prince” is the process of acquiring power.

The central theme of Machiavelli’s political ideas is power. He highlighted power as an essential ingredient of politics. For acquiring political power a ruler can use any type of Means. He said all politics is power politics. He said the sole aim of the Prince was to make the country strong and united, establish peace and order and expel the foreign invader. To achieve this end any means would be satisfactory.

Because the state must preserve itself before it promotes the welfare of its people. For preserving and safeguarding itself all means adopted by the state are justified by Machiavelli. According to him in politics, one is guided by the harsh realities of political life which is a struggle for power and survival. Prince should always give priority to power. Morality and ethics have different spheres. It cannot be mingled with the reason of the state. To a prince power of state is of supreme importance. He assumed that state is highest form of human association.

According to him there is vital difference between the ruler and the citizens. He insisted that morality is essential for people. Only moral citizens willingly obey laws of the state and sacrifice their lives for their nation. But morality is not necessary for the ruler. He is the creator of law and morality hence he is above the both. A ruler has primary duty of preserving the state. He may use instruments of lie, conspiracy, killings, etc. for the state. He said absolute morality is neither possible nor desirable in politics.

The state has some primary objectives and responsibilities like protection of life, maintenance of law and order and looking after wellbeing of its members. Hence state must have adequate means at its disposal. State is sovereign, autonomous and non-religious: Machiavelli said the state is superior to all associations in the human society. In fact sovereign state enjoys absolute power over all individuals and institutions.

Machiavelli said morality is not necessary for the ruler. He is creator of law and morality hence prince is above the both. A ruler has primary duty of preserving the state. For this purpose he may use instruments of lie, conspiracy, killings and massacre etc. Because absolute morality is neither possible nor desirable in politics. He insisted that morality is essential for people. Only moral citizens willingly obey laws of the state and sacrifice their

lives for their nation. It cultivate patriotic spirit. Thus Machiavelli prescribes double standard of morality.

He also recommended constant military preparedness for the preservation of the state. Prince should organize a strong army to meet any internal and external threat to his power. Strong and regular army was must for a state for its own defense. The citizens must be trained for army service and there should be compulsory military training for all able persons.

Prince should try to win popularity, goodwill and affection of his people. He should keep his subjects materially contented by not taxing them. The prince should not interfere in age old customs and traditions of his people because by nature people are conservative. He should keep a watchful eye on his dissidents. A prince must have council of wise men and not of flatterers.

Power and wealth are its central concepts of his philosophy. Morality and idealism became less important. According to Machiavelli politics and power are instruments for strengthening and unifying a state. The sole aim of the prince is to be an expert in managing and organizing a war. Because it is the only way of increasing power. Power is the only reason of the state. Thus Machiavelli justified utility of war.

Views on religion and secularism

Machiavelli has been seen as a controversial figure throughout history. He completely divorced religion from politics and tried to subordinate religion to the state and gave the state non-religious character. He believed that politics is an independent activity with its own principles and laws. One area in particular that was seen as controversial was his views on religion, especially Christianity because the worst aspect of the period during which

Machiavelli lived was the rampant corruption and selfishness among the Italian rulers and the church officials.

Machiavelli also considered that the institution of Papacy brought decline and destruction to the magnificence of Rome. Pope claimed superiority over all the princes. State (civil authority) was merely the police department of the church. The feudalism and the church not only destroyed the identity and importance of the state, but the state was considered subordinate. But Machiavelli completely divorced religion from politics. He broke the medieval tradition that the political authority is under the control of church. He made the state totally independent of the church by saying that the state has its own rules of conduct to follow, state is highest, supreme and autonomous. He said the state is superior to all associations in the human society.

Machiavelli regularly stated that he saw religion as man-made and that religion was used to create rules for morality. He felt in his home country that Christianity made men weak and inactive. Moral and religious considerations cannot bind the prince. He is above and outside the morality. He can use religion to realize his ends. Religion cannot influence politics and the church cannot control the state. Hence he suggested the separation between religion, morality and politics. In political matters the king will have the last word to say and all other centres must submit to political power.

According to him moral code of individual prescribed by the church cannot provide guidelines to the ruler. He advised his prince to sacrifice honesty, morality, religion for the benefit, or, more generally, for the cause of the state. It would never be regarded prudence on the part of the prince if he sacrifices the interest of the republic at the altar of honesty and religion.

According to him religion is necessary for unity and integrity of the people within the state. Common religion creates a sense of unity among people. Religious rites, beliefs establish social harmony. Decline of respect for religion among the people is a sign of ruin for the state. Machiavelli said religion cannot influence politics and the church cannot control the state. In fact the sovereign state enjoys absolute power over all individuals and institutions. As such the church is subordinate to the state. Thus Machiavelli separated religion from politics and paved way for emergence of the secular state.

It is important to note that though Machiavelli was anti-church and anti-clergy, but he was not anti-religion. He measured religion as essential not only for man's social life but also for the health of the state. He was not against the religion and morality. According to Machiavelli state is the highest form of social organisation and the most necessary of all institutions. He said politics is an independent activity with its own principles and laws. State is non-religious and secular. It has its own rules of conduct to follow.

According to him religion was a social force; it played a crucial role because it appealed to the self-centredness of man through its principle of reward and punishment, thereby inducing proper behaviour and good conduct that was necessary for the well-being of a society.

Hence Machiavelli strongly advocated a separation between politics and religion and stated that without this separation the state could not reach its goal. Hence Machiavelli is credited for laying the foundation of secular state.

Machiavelli is considered as the father of modern political theory and political science. Apart from conjecturing about the state, he also given meaning to the concept of sovereignty. Machiavelli's position was in providing an outlook that accepted both secularisation and a

moralisation of politics. The absence of religious arguments in Machiavelli led the theorists who followed to challenging issues like order and power in strictly political terms. Thus Machiavelli was the first who gave the idea of secularism. Hence Machiavelli was the first rationalist or realist in the history of political thought.