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A Theoretical Analysis of Contemporary Relevance of Machiavellian Philosophy to the Prince

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ABSTRACT: Niccolò Machiavelli's political philosophy, especially his influential book 'The Prince', reflects sixteenth-century writings on human nature, power relations, and statecraft amidst the international political environment. As the father of contemporary political thinking, Machiavelli distinguished himself by establishing a realism approach that deviated from the idealism theories of his forebears by linking the fields of psychology and politics. Examples from modern times, such as China's geopolitical moves, Saudi Arabia's authoritarian achievements, and India's strategic diplomacy, showcases its continued relevance in both local and international affairs. Furthermore, it highlights Machiavellian thought's foresight in today's image-driven politics by reflecting on the significance of appearances and perception control in the digital era. Beyond the critical resplendence of the political concepts, the necessity for extended multidisciplinary research on Machiavelli's lesser-known works and their relevance to contemporary geopolitical issues, serves to be the further scope of this study. This research justifies the cause that Machiavellian realism should be used again as a strategic tool in modern governance, diplomacy, and policymaking because his ideas are still very relevant for maintaining political legitimacy, authority, and order in a complex world order.

KEYWORDS: Machiavelli, Political Realism, Statecraft, Virtù, Political Psychology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Politics and psychology are on the verge of vanquishing the global research framework and academics with its groundbreaking findings and facts which could help shape the geopolitical dynamics of nations. The dual discipline has mended research gaps through observations and computational data culminating over the years. With rising diplomatic tensions, border skirmishes and socio-economic upsurge, the status quo poses a flurry of burning questions- Are conflicts essential? Does it indicate a new world order? Political mindset is diversifying at a skyrocketing speed as a mark of awareness and consciousness. To ace diplomacy in a rapidly growing world, it is crucial to quest and analyse policy framework, approaching beyond the rudimentary denotation of external affairs and politics.

Niccolo Machiavelli, a philosopher from the sixteenth century is synonymous to the brimming unit of political psychology. Through his delineated philosophies, he had crafted a passage between the art of politics and the ultimate human psyche. He has been interpreted variedly ever since his literature surfaced in academic and intellectual circles primarily associated with his renowned work "the Prince" (published posthumously in 1532). During the medieval age, a term Machiavellianism coined by Pierre Bayle, became an infamous derogatory remark. There are about 400 references to the Florentine Secretary being introduced as "Machiavellian" or usage of the term "Machiavellianism" by the Elizabethans. Modern writers are criticised as the devil's disciple, or a preacher of evil.

Interestingly, this criticism has come into being without proper argumentation supplementing it. Critics have ignored an important aspect of the book. The Prince is an excellent example of the study of human behavior affecting the ever-evolving structure and formation of a state, i.e., Political Psychology. This can be established from the fact that prior to becoming a scholar, Machiavelli was the head of the second chancery handling foreign affairs in subject territories in Florence (Italy) in 1498. During his ambassadorship, he not only understood the different types of states but also the kinds of rulers needed for administering a specific state. He had applied an in-depth study of human behavior to prove this hypothesis. According to Machiavelli, human beings are selfish and self-centred to the core, they are only self-regarding, greedy and jealous. He assumed man as an irrational being guided by emotions rather than reason. In this

context, he advised that such a state should be governed under strict rules and regulations of a tyrant allowing the use of force and punitive measures to make them obey the sovereign.

The postmodern era is witnessing a political mindset that is diversifying at a skyrocketing speed for awareness and consciousness. Political leaders are applying various tools to make an appeal to populism, tools not too divergent from the Machiavellian handbooks. Therefore, there is a need for revival and re-analysis of his thoughts to ace diplomacy in a rapidly growing world and make conscious decisions to upkeep the world order, maintain cordial terms with the play-offs, and integrate it in the statecraft for maintenance of peace and security.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Machiavelli's Political Thought and Its Inspiration—Text Analysis Based on The Prince

Haokai, Z. (2022) provides a sophisticated reworking of Machiavelli's political philosophy, emphasizing its fundamental importance in the development of contemporary Political Science. By closely examining the text, the author refutes the simplistic idea that Machiavelli only promoted immoral pragmatism, contending that The Prince offers a cogent foundation for political realism-based statecraft.

Niccolò Machiavelli on Power

Holler, M.J. (n.d.) analyses how Machiavelli's writings form a cohesive plan aiming at unifying Italy under a princely authority to stable republican administration by extensively scrutinizing both The Prince and Discourses on Livy. The author observed a balanced use of force and cruelty adopted by leaders, avoiding needless brutality while gaining the support of the populace through organizations like citizen militias. This duality is consistent with Machiavelli's larger realism philosophy, which disentangles political effectiveness from ethical considerations.

The Originality of Machiavelli: In Against the Current Context

Berlin, I. (1972) presented Machiavelli as a revolutionary who established a politically independent moral realm. Discussions about *raison d'état* and the use of fear as a political tool demonstrate Machiavelli's separation of politics from religion and ethics, which is supported by this. Machiavelli's dramatic shift from medieval idealism to modern realism is better understood thanks to Berlin's theory.

The Machiavellian Cosmos

Parel, A. J. (1992) explored Machiavelli's metaphysical ramifications, especially his preference for practical statecraft over religious teleology. This endorses the applicability of secular governing models in places like Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan where religion still dominates public affairs, and it aligns with the reviewed paper's emphasis on Machiavelli's psychological realism and rejection of divine rule.

Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters

Najemy, J. M. (1993) Machiavelli's commitment with power as a lived experience rather than just academic doctrine is highlighted in this research study. This enhances the focus of the reviewed work on Machiavelli's actual diplomatic experience in Florence, which provides empirical support for his predictions about human nature and government and grounds his writings in direct political observation.

III. THE MACHIAVELLIAN BLANKET: PHILOSOPHIES THAT OUTLIVED TIME

Niccolo Machiavelli wrote 'The Prince' as a political treatise in 1513. The text contains guidelines outlined by the writer for carrying out streamlined administration of the empire. Machiavellian thoughts have surfed the waves of time.

1. Virtù

Virtù is an Italian word meaning "virtue" or "power". Interestingly, in the book, "The Prince," Machiavelli has used the term extensively however, presenting a flexible disposition of the same, 'as fortune and circumstances dictate'. According to Machiavelli, a ruler of virtù is bound to be successful in application of power because he can win over his opponents gracefully and leave a lasting impact.

The forefathers of Indian foreign policy have applied virtue to secure India's position at the global stage in every situation. Whether it was the decision to stay Non-aligned during the Cold War with the intent of receiving foreign aid, or introducing pragmatism with the initiation of LPG reforms, or the use of strategic autonomy to balance relations with USA, Russia and China, virtue has been quintessential. Machiavelli draws significance to virtue by the lion and fox analogy- "The lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves."

2. Lo Stato

'Lo Stato' means the state or status in Italian. In "The Prince", Machiavelli has talked about principalities and how a prudent monarch shall keep them integrated. According to him, the ruler's primary responsibility is the preservation of his territory. Territorial integrity is maintained by defending the state against both internal factors, like civil revolts, communal outrage as well as external disturbances arising from neighbouring or enemy states.

China has been strengthening its territorial integrity through consistent cartographic aggression with India, the string of pearls, its debt trap diplomacy captivating small underdeveloped nations, as well as claims in the South China Sea, justifying the theory of means and ends. Another instance is the indiscriminate disturbance between Israel and Palestinians in which the use of advanced weaponry has aggravated the issue leaving no room for table talks. Israeli PM Netanyahu has vowed to erase the existence of the Hamas, however, military operations are erasing the trace of Palestinians, as well.

3. Fear over Love

In the book's Chapter-XVII, Machiavelli gives another piece of advice to the Prince, a rather peculiar one, when he says that an ideal situation would be one where the Prince is both loved and feared by the subjects. As long as the ruler keeps taking decisions in favour of the subjects, they will love him, though, when he takes a decision that only benefits the state and not its inhabitants, they'll grow to dislike the monarch, brewing internal rebellion.

In the contemporary time, force and coercion are not the thumb rule of governance. However, certain state practices confirm the existence of the above mentioned advice by Machiavelli. In the Middle Eastern country of Saudi Arabia, people are ruled under Absolute Monarchy. The country forbids political parties, criminalises opposition and curtails the socio-political rights of the people. Despite this, Saudi Arabia is considered one of the advanced nations of the world. In 2022 and 2023, the OECD ranked Saudi Arabia's economy as the fastest-growing in the G20. Even in terms of human development, it is ranked 35th out of 191 countries by the UNDP in 2022.

4. Showmanship

"The masses are more taken by appearances than by reality, and in the conduct of a ruler, appearances often matter more than the truth." Machiavelli has highlighted the importance of the Prince's personality and influence on the subjects. Again drawing from his study of human psychology, he argues that the Prince must not only be effective but also appear effective.

Political leaders and campaigners often use persuasive measures to win over people's minds to this day. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the incumbent President of Turkey has grown into a political giant and has been leading the nation for 20 years. He championed Islamist causes, even mediated Russia-Ukraine table talks in the earlier stages of the conflict despite Turkey being a NATO member. Another leader who shall be quoted in the given context is the Chinese President, Xi Jinping. He has been projected as the strongest pillar of the Chinese government.

5. Populism

Populism is the art of appealing to the people and drawing their support in the sovereign's favour. Machiavelli implicitly stressed the gravity of populism through his advice in his book by arguing that the Prince must provoke people's emotions and try to connect with them through psychological acts. In Chapter-IX of The Prince, Machiavelli writes, "The people are always more ready to follow a prince who is generous to them, or who gives them hope of future benefits."

Indian Prime Minister Shree Narendra Modi who has been in power for a decade since 2014. His eloquent oratory skills have made him distinct from any of his predecessors. His leadership skills have not only enhanced internal party

democracy but also presented his election manifesto effectively. His impact led to the emergence of the phrases, “Modi ki leher” (Modi’s wave). His notable ground work, encompassing common men and low wage workers, celebration of festivals and participation in rituals with varied religious heads, “Mann Ki Baat”, engagement with youth, social workers, among others has fetched him the support of the young and old alike along with loyal following from the women of both urban and rural areas.

6. The Conundrum of Raison d'État

Machiavelli hits the stage of political realism when he advises the prince to radiate the philosophy of ‘reason of state’. He emphasised that the prince must put the state's security and stability in precedence even at the price of morality or conventional ethical ideals.

This ideological segment successfully broke the glass ceiling when German Chancellor Olaf Scholz delivered a controversial stance during the Israel-Palestine territorial conflict. He reiterated that "the security of the State of Israel is the *raison d'état* of Germany" in response to the Gaza crisis.

Fetching resonance with the concept, the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan accepted the stringent hijab norms for women set by the Iranian government. As of January 2025, the international endorsement for Iran's mandatory hijab law is still unclear, with few countries explicitly expressing support. The conventional case of Mahsa Amini, a twenty-two year old Kurdish-Iranian lady who passed away in unforeseen circumstances under the Guidance Patrol’s arrest, for reportedly failing to wear the hijab in compliance with the government's regulations, still raises eyebrows indicating brutality against humanity.

7. Maintaining a Strong Military

Machiavelli believed, "The backbone of a state is its military strength." To defend the state and establish its authority, a robust, devoted, and well-trained military is indispensable. He distinctively cautioned that, "Mercenaries and auxiliaries are useless and dangerous," thus native army must be established whose mutual interest fulfil security and defence prowess of the nation.

The state of North Korea, idyllically ‘a republic’ is a present-day example of Machiavellian principles wherein internal conflicts are settled within the demographic ambit through deployment of strong military who writes off public dissent or demonstrations through the means of coercion. Another facet of maintaining a customised army covers resource allocation and drafting war strategies, much reflective of the People's Liberation Army of China, who has made significant investments in home-grown military manufacturing and produced cutting-edge weapons.

8. Disintegration of Politics from Religion

Machiavelli quotes a holy grail for the rulers to establish a long-standing prominence in the global sphere. It was proclaimed that rulers might use religion as a tool to further their political objectives and create obfuscation in the social dynamics.

Likewise, when a group called Boko Haram emerged in the year 2002 in Nigeria, it caused catastrophic conditions with an aim to establish the Islamic Caliphate, slamming the Western education and perspectives. The gang has caused widespread bloodshed in West Africa and is notorious for its bombings, mass executions, and kidnappings. Beyond the ordinary, the group incorporated the divine mandate and rhetoric to justify with conviction the evolving socio-political unrest, used manipulative tactics and coercion, and urged to demolish the administrative units for seeking authority, at the union.

9. Wise Counsel

The ruler must meticulously select advisors who are adept in the respective field, neutral in decision-making, astute and assertive and possess a deeper understanding of the demographics. However, the ruler must beware of the flattery and solely focus on constructive criticism. An understated exemplar could be traced in different countries across the globe which deploys trained and rugged, National Security Units, Research and Analysis Wing, Inter-Services Intelligence, Counter-terrorism units to counter the unforeseen exceptions in real-time. These agencies act as a council, work in unison and secure the territorial sovereignty of the state, serving as a distinct mark of how Machiavelli’s proposition of a counsel continues to serve the interests of many.

10. Pragmatism

Machiavelli's works, particularly 'The Prince' and 'Discourses on Livy', are firmly grounded in pragmatism, which holds that acts ought to be assessed according to how well they accomplish real-world goals rather, how closely they conform to impersonal moral or ethical standards. Russia's notion of 'Realpolitik' still relies heavily on his counsel. Its dichotomy is branched in two instances, endorsing Syrian Bashar al-Assad in defending its Tartus naval base, maintaining its sway in the Middle East, and opposing Western domination and restraining Ukraine's entry in the 'North Atlantic Treaty Organization' to secure its zone of influence in the face of sanctions and international censure.

IV. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER SCOPE

Machiavellian principles continue to serve as a tangible benchmark to explore the nuances of geopolitics and its transitional patterns. Notwithstanding the vast ocean of philosophies propagated on a whole, this study seeks to explore the possibilities granted to the Prince (the mightiest of all), through the realms of some published works, namely, 'The Prince' and 'the Discourses on the Ten Books of Titus Livy'.

The limitation of this study circles out the need for further analysis of Machiavelli's theories on varied disciplines and his authored works. Moreover, extended avenues including women, economy, art of war, international affairs and policy making, establishment of an ideal institution, among others leaves further ground for research and development.

V. ROADMAP AHEAD

Machiavelli's deep understanding of human behaviour resulted in elaborate advice to his Prince on various fronts like power, authority, and statecraft. His political thought offers a timeless guidance on the realities of political survival and effectiveness. By analysing real-world examples of leaders who have unconsciously adhered to Machiavellian principles, the study recognised that his strategies are enduring in handling the complex and dynamic global situations. Additionally, Machiavelli's reflections on the utility of appearances in politics remain strikingly relevant today. In an era dominated by social media, optics, and public perception management, leaders meticulously craft their images to convey strength, competence, and relative alliance. Political success often hinges as much on narrative control as on policy execution. The cultivation of public trust through well-orchestrated performances has become a cornerstone of modern leadership, underscoring the prescience of the ancient philosophy.

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