**Machiavelli in our neighbourhood**

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One of the most maligned thinkers in history is Niccole Machiavelli, an Italian aristocrat who became infamous for his political views by writing a book by the name of “The Prince” about 500 years ago. While discussing the classical history of early Ancient Rome, he presents a series of lessons on how a republic should be managed and groomed.His cardinal point was that he emancipated politics from theology and moral philosophy. Machiavelli is simply a “realist” or “pragmatist” as we understand him today, who states that moral values in reality do not greatly affect the decisions that political leaders make. It may be surprising for many to know that Machiavelli was not the first to propound this thought. About 1500 years before him, a Hindu juristChankiya had taught a similar thesis. He gave a secondary place to morality in politics, and put strategy as the primary instrument.

Machiavellian thought travelled from Europe and spread into the entire world. Politics everywhere is practiced more or less on Machiavellian principles which instead of letting the country run according to law, morality or ethics, insist that strategies of the protagonists should be such which could keep them perpetually in power. To achieve this end, the ruler may resort to those strategies which remove all obstacles in the full enjoyment of their power. They may do so by making their own self-made laws. And all these tactics prescribed by Machiavelli were diligently employed by our past rulers which kept them in power for a long time.

Pakistan in its brief history has seen three military coups by General Ayub Khan, General Zia and Gen. Musharraf which were staged in the true Machiavellian spirit of keeping their protagonists in power and under protection of the doctrine of necessity. So Machiavellian spirit of our rulers have played havoc in our country right from its birth.  In Pakistan, politics has no strict bond with ethics, and our newspapers are replete with news where we do not see any connection of politics with morality. The cardinal principle of Machiavelli is that “the end justifies the means” which means that by employing all illegal or un-ethical rules, if one manages to seize power and stay there and enjoy its fruits, it is fine with his politics.Military dictators have pretended to protect the democratic system while the democratic leaders often tended to nourish the latter.

At the time of inception of Pakistan, there was no healthy political culture. Most of the political parties were being run in an authoritarian and arbitrary fashion. Following the spirit of Machiavelli a bogey was raised that there were grave dangers to the security of state. Thus on the pretext of ‘saving the state,’ all extra-constitutional steps were taken and elected representatives were asked to go home. The issue of national security was deliberately cultivated by Military dictators, so that the civilian population should be made to believe that the country can only be ruled by the military rulers to save them from internal threats and external aggression.

***Morality was not denied but was subordinated to politics and, therefore, Machiavelli, is not immoral but un-moral in his polities***

To Machiavelli, the state was not a means to an end but was an end in itself. Before him, politics had a strict bond with ethics, in theory, if not in practice.He believed that public necessity knows no law. State actions were not to be judged by individual ethics. Machiavelli prescribes a double standard of conduct for the ruler and for the individual citizens on the basis of which the ruler is a creator of law whose moral obligations must ultimately be sustained by law. A ruler can tell a liein the supreme interest of the state whereas an individual cannot. Reasons of state must outweigh any ethical considerations. These were the Machiavellian principles and practices by which the Prince (ruler) could entrench himself in power for a long time.

According to Machiavelli’s logic, there is no absolute good or evil. That is good which serves the interests of the individuals and of the community and which brings security. With him, the end justifies the means, for which he may be called as “founder of utilitarian ethics”. Citizen acts for himself; the state acts for all and therefore the same principles of conduct do not apply to both. It was always wrong for an individual to tell a lie but sometimes necessary and good for the ruler to do so in the interest of the state. The state has no ethics. It is a non-ethical entity.

Public interests were the most potent of all motives for political action. Public standards of action were different from private standards. Public conduct is neither inherently good, nor bad. It is good if its results are good. A good citizen may be one with whom patriotism is the only moral law. Citizen acts for himself; the state acts for all and therefore the same principles of conduct do not apply to both. The state is neither moral nor immoral but is non-moral. It is not a moral entity like the individual and, therefore, individual ethics do not apply to it. With Machiavelli “ends always justified the means.” When a military ruler comes into power, he scrapes the Constitution and gives his own self- made Provisional Constitution Order which facilitates him to remain in power. By this gimmick he fulfillshis desire to keep himself in power for as long as he can. Thus remaining in power he fulfills his desire and all the means he had adopted to reach his goal become justified.

Coming back to our recent politics, PTI Chairman Imran Khan entered politics by raising the slogan of ‘change.’ But finding this goal difficult to achieve,he instantly fell prey to the preaching of Machiavelli. From an advocate of democratic values, he became a radical revolutionary. He has foisted all the blame on the Sharif family for accumulating a huge debt which prevents PTI from reforming the society. In its pre-election campaign the PTI justified to adopt any political strategy. Therefore, to make NS step down, it joined hands with PAT to hold a long march. It staged a 126-day sit-in in Islamabad and even attacked Parliament and other premier state buildings.. It demanded a resignation from the serving PM on the basis of unsubstantiated allegations and also by all visible means also tried to convince the so-called Third Umpire to intervene. All these tactics had no room for ethics or religionbut were justified as per the principles enunciated in the “The Prince.”

Machiavelli had little place for ethics, or for religion in the system of his  political philosophy. Aristotle had already distinguished ethics from politics but had not separated the two whereas Machiavelli brought about a complete divorce between them.Morality was not denied but was subordinated to politics and, therefore, Machiavelli, is not immoral but un-moral in his polities, which means that he had no scruples with morality, in so far the strategies of the ruler kept him in power.