**Ingredients of Good Governance**

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Machiavelli, regarded as the father of nationalism, is usually perceived as a proponent of politics divorced from conventional morality and bringing forth all means in the quest for political power, even the most unscrupulous. There are many takers of that view and in most of the third world countries including Pakistan, morality has no place in the power game.

As against this perception, there is no dearth of people who see Machiavelli as a pragmatist who recognized the harsh realities of political life. In their estimation, he was the first person to acknowledge the true nature of “reasons of the state” and the place of “necessity” in politics. The concept of “reasons of state” promotes the narrative that the security and interests of the state take precedence over all other considerations. Similarly, it is held that “necessity” recognizes no laws and morality has no place when the interests of the state are at stake. Pakistan again is quintessential of the applicability of these views. The judiciary in Pakistan has been legitimizing the military coups by invoking the doctrine of necessity and the dictators have found cover under the self-defined interests and security of the state to derail democracy taking the country away from the course envisioned by its founding father.

In contrast to the foregoing views, some claim that Machiavelli did not subordinate moral standards to political ones maintaining that he was concerned both with what means and what ends were right. It is argued that his advocacy for the adoption of ruthless strategies was not to preserve power for its own sake but to create and maintain a strong state, the moral purpose of which was the good of the whole community. History is replete with examples where the politicians and the military dictators have used the slogan of the good of the whole community and maintaining the strong state as a justification for their actions, even though those steps proved disastrous in the end. The military dictators in Pakistan came with an ostensible plea and determination to eliminate the rampant corruption but lured by the attraction of wielding power became involved in dirty politics leaving the country in still greater mess in regards to corruption. Similarly, the politicians have also been using the farce of accountability to victimize their political opponents causing unfathomable damage to the political morality and the chances of putting in place a system of good governance.

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It is also said that Machiavelli never actually said that the ends justified the means. Instead, he showed how well-intentioned and morally good actions could have worse results than the supposedly immoral but bold and resolute actions. At times, force and violence, cruelty and deceit are justified as lesser evils. Machiavelli implied that the morality appropriate to politics was not the one based on ideals, but was a consequential morality where actions were judged according to the good consequences they promoted for the general good of society.

The case for consequential morality in political life rested on the claim that it was unrealistic and naïve to think that good ends could be achieved without resorting to dubious means. Politicians who keep their hands clean sometimes cause the evil of the status quo to continue or worse evil to result. In these circumstances, it would be self-indulgent, irresponsible and morally wrong to insist on doing the “right thing” regardless of how bad the consequences might be.

These arguments have taken a new lease of life in recent times with the rise of the phenomenon of terrorism if ever they needed one. In the face of terrorist attacks, upholding of absolute rules against torture and arbitrary detention, rights to a fair trial, freedom of conscience, thought and expression have been dismissed as naïve. Politicians and academics have justified infringing these rights as a lesser evil, necessary to protect national security. But those who oppose such violations are not the idealists from the other world. They are deeply suspicious and highly cynical about the veracity of the stated goals of the politicians and the justifiability of their true policy objectives. They question whether morally dirty decisions do serve the general interests or the common good. All too often private, corporate or commercial interests and controversial ideological ambitions masquerade as general interests in politics.

Those who are suspicious of the Machiavellian art of the politician also question the supposed “necessity” of the dirty means they use and find that such claims are often exaggerated, counterproductive or simply fraudulent. Suspending rights, using fraud, force and violence are rarely the best and only alternatives in politics, even if national security is at stake.

As is evident from the foregoing discourse there is no dearth of arguments for and against any issue. People can advance forceful arguments to justify their acts and others can condemn those actions with equally weightier arguments to prove them wrong. God forbid the atheists would give you innumerable arguments to negate the existence of God. But the reality is that there are certain touchstones developed by human societies with international acclaim to judge the veracity and justification for human conduct including the politicians and rulers.

The principle “majority is authority” is accepted and followed by the entire world in all domains of life, including the practice of statecraft and governance. Democracy is supported and practised by the majority of nations. People are accepted as sovereigns on whose behalf the state is governed by the chosen representatives as our constitution stipulates. Rule of law and the protection of fundamental human rights is regarded as indispensable ingredient of good governance. Any deviation and aberration in regards to these universally acknowledged and accepted norms are illegitimate, wrong and unjustifiable irrespective of the stakes involved.

Viewed from this perspective, it is painful to note that even after more than seventy years of independence, the state of Pakistan has failed to give good governance to its people. The blame is equally shared by the military dictators and the politicians, more so the latter who never ever made an honest effort to put the country on the path envisioned by its founding father who not only won freedom for us but also bequeathed his vision about the course that the country had to traverse. The PTI government is also not different from the previous governments in this respect. It has all the attributes of power politics devoid of morality.

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