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Kautilya and Machiavelli Views on state and politics: A Comparative analysis

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Abstract:

Kautilya has often been compared with Nicolo Machiavelli, the modern Italian political thinker whose famous reflections are set forth in his three complimentary works: The Art of War, The Discourses on King and The Prince. Machiavelli occupies the enviable position of being the first modern political thinker or philosopher in European history, one who symbolised a revolution in political theory that reflected the Renaissance spirit. Kautilya on the other hand, inherited a long tradition of pre-existing Arthashastra school of thought, to which he had given a modernistic outlook and content. Both Kautilya and Machiavelli were concerned with acquisition, retention and perpetuation of political power. The latter provided an insight into the deplorable conditions prevailing in Italy during his times and advocated for its unification. Explaining the intellectual qualities of the king Kautilya sought for the expansion of the empire. But while advocating for mandala-politics, he was a regionalist rather than a nationalist. Through this paper I would like to highlight the major similarities and variances of Kautilya and Machiavelli works on state and politics

KEYWORDS

: Kautilya, Machiavelli, similarities, variances

INTRODUCTION;

Kautilya was the minister in the Kingdom of Chandragupta Maurya during 317 – 293 B.C. He has been considered as one of the shrewdest ministers of the times and has explained his views on State, War, Social Structures, Diplomacy, Ethics, Politics and Statecraft very clearly in his book called Arthashastra. The Mauryan Empire was larger than the later British India which expanded from the Indian Ocean to Himalayas and up to to Iran in the West. After Alexander left India, this was the most powerful kingdom in India and Kautilya was minister who advised the King. Fourth century B.C. was one of the most interesting periods in the history of India. It was during this period that India had one of its largest empires established. Out of a warring crowd of kings and princes of small states, Chandragupta was able to cobble up and create a united state of peace and prosperity and it became the famous Maurya Empire. Chanakya, a very shrewd, intelligent and strong-willed inmate, helped him in achieving all this. Chanakya was Emperor Chandragupta Maurya's guru, advisor and prime minister. Niccolò Machiavelli born in Italy, Italian Renaissance political philosopher and statesman, secretary of the Florentine republic, whose most famous work, The Prince brought him a reputation as an atheist and an immoral cynic was an Italian historian, politician, diplomat, philosopher, humanist and writer based in Florence during the Renaissance. He was for many years an official in the Florentine Republic, with

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responsibilities in diplomatic and military affairs. He was a founder of modern political science, and more specifically political ethics.

VARIANCES OF KAUTILYA AND MACHIAVELLI ON STATE AND POLITICS.

Between the range of subjects covered by Machiavelli's Prince and Kautilya's Arthashastra one can, no doubt trace general resemblances, but the two flow from radically different sources and imbibe opposite spirit and ideology. The prevalent conception about Kautilyan and Machiavellian traits is founded on the monumental error of viewing their thinking independently of their basic premise and postulates. The typically Indian conception of a synthetic philosophy, comprising all knowledge on diverse human affairs, stands in contrast with the Italian analytical and materialistic approach to social and political problems. Machiavelli's empirical method, founded on historical data, has no equivalent in Kautilya's casual references to classical antiquity. Machiavelli's application of history to point a moral is different from Kautilya's dependence on scriptures and conventional wisdom for reinforcing the traditional moral order. There are some differences of opinion on various issues raised by Kautilya and Machiavelli Which are as follows-

1. Firstly, The more fundamental difference lies in the objectives of the two sets of policies formulated by them. Machiavelli was motivated by a burning patriotism to see Italy rise again from the ashes into a modern nation for the deliverance of the unhappy land from decay. Kautilya, on the contrary, was aspired to ensure the security and stability of the kingdom so as to achieve Dharma on the globe. Kautilya's major preoccupation, unlike that of Machiavelli, was to foster and restore the ethical values of Indian system both in method and in principle.

2. Secondly, Kautilya's essentially spiritual disposition and Machiavelli's essentially secular material makeup stand out against each other. Though both believed and prescribed to the rulers the rules of the game of politics, the use of religion for political ends, their grounds for doing so, as also their concepts of power and goals, were mutually exclusive.

3. Thirdly, Kautilya also does not wholly subscribe to the view of Machiavelli that man is born bad and has no inherent virtue in him. That he is a "compound of weakness, folly and knavery, intended by nature to be the dupe of the cunning and the prey of the despotic". On the contrary. Kautilya admits that man has altruistic and good qualities alongside some selfish and bad traits. He, thus, does not endorse the view of Machiavelli that man is thoroughly bad and wholly selfish. To him, a man, apart from being selfish and leaning is altogether rational and is, therefore, advised to follow a code of conduct on Dharma and to adopt immoral means to deal with cunning.

4. Fourthly, Kautilya stressed that the State was an organism on which depended the happiness of the society and its individual members. This moral base of the State was repeatedly denied by Machiavelli, for his mission was to free politics from its slavery to theology and isolating the phenomenon of politics, so as to study them wholly without reference to the facts of moral existence.

5. Fifthly, There is fundamental difference between the kingship of Kautilya and Machiavelli. As for Machiavelli, he left the personal and private character of the Prince of his upbringing out of sight, and treated him as the personification of the State, wherein the private individual is inevitably merged in the politician. On the other hand, Kautilya's characterisation of the king was by self-control, wisdom, discipline and noble conduct. What is most significant is Kautilya's priority to Dharma over Danda. While Machiavelli argues, "it is not necessary for a prince really to have virtues, but it is very necessary to seem to have them", Kautilya, King's departure from moral norms was a temporary expedient for the sake of those moral norms. The king was expected to be a virtuous person in thought, word and deed. If he had to be cruel by necessity, it was to make virtuous life possible for all.

6. Sixthly, So far as the ultimate objective of the State is concerned, Machiavelli did not think much of the populace, the welfare of the less privileged did not bother him, as these concerned Kautilya. The majority of citizens to Machiavelli were content with the security of person and property that the State provided them. He glorified the State and stressed the over-riding claim of the State to the loyalty of the individual. He would not concede that man had any right over and against the State. Man attained his optimum development through subordinating himself to the society, held Machiavelli, and that the State provided a political framework essential to the development of mankind. On the other hand, to Kautilya, the State was

subordinated to the society which it did not create, but which it existed to secure. The highest office of the State is, thus an aggregate of the people whose welfare is an end in itself. Political power is the means to attain such an end.

7. Seventhly, The Kautilyan maxim: Prajaa Sukhe Sukham Rajyah, Prajanam cha Hiteh Hitam (in the welfare and happiness of the people lies the king's welfare and happiness), is indicative of his emphasis on the equation of welfare Vs. power. Machiavelli insists that a good ruler is one who achieves the good of the people by fair or foul means, Kautilya demands that a good ruler should be a good man, besides being a good ruler. Kautilya, therefore, was the spokesman of Udayana, the establishment of righteousness on earth, and aspired for Vaarta, enhancement to trade and commerce.

HUMAN NATURE:

Both Kautilya and Machiavelli were quite pessimistic in their approach to human nature. It seems that the former treated men with contempt as they were unreliable and entrust wrongly. Hence they should not be taken into confidence. He, however, made "no categorical statement regarding the corruptibility of human nature in general". Machiavelli, on the other hand, categorically said that people were ungrateful, fickle, deceitful avaricious, vicious, evil, mean, corrupt and unreliable. He, therefore, suggested that there should be strong political force to restrain the deviant behaviour of the people. Force and fraud were welcome measures as they checked their psychological aberration. He upheld a more pervert conception of human nature than Kautilya. He considered men to be greedy, selfish and cruel. They understood only the language of force. Kautilya now here made a generalized statement about the weakness or perversity, or selfishness of man.

SIMILARITIES

With the vast difference in the Italian and Indian historical, geographical and cultural situations, some subjects and themes of the Prince and the Arthashastra are, nevertheless, common. There are some similarities of opinion on various issues raised by Kautilya and Machiavelli Which are as follows- 1. Firstly, For instance, the acquisition, preservation, and expansion of the State. Both realistically analyse the methods by which a king may rise to supreme power and maintain it against all odds. In both, we find the duality of treatment of the feelings and susceptibilities of men and the tendency to legitimise force and fraud in the interest of the State. For, both the authors, the of the State, vis-a-vis the interest of a person is paramount. Both of them held the belief that, through a proper and critical study of history, one could deduce not only the causes of maladies of society, but also the cures thereof. Imbued with an enduring value, these precepts have validity, not only for the writer's contemporary time, but for the future too.

2. Secondly, There is another close affinity between the ancient Indian thinker and the modern Italian thinker. Both of them approach the common political problems in the same spirit and temper. Kautilya belonged to the Arthashastra school which looked at the political phenomenon without linking them in any way with divine agency or revelation. The approach was thus religious and rational. The Modern Italian thinker affected a break with the medieval way of thinking and reasoning and adopted the empirical or historical method of investigation and emancipated the State from the bondage to ecclesiastical authorities.

3. Thirdly, In the field of real politics, there is much that is common between Kautilya and Machiavelli. Kautilya is aware that the Swami (king) can hardly feel secure in a State where persons shorn of power by him are still alive and well. Similar insistence was that of Machiavelli while cautioning the Prince against any possible conspiracy and scandle. Both Kautilya and Machiavelli advised the ruler to be merciless, cruel and unscrupulous while suppressing internal disruptions and external aggressions. The former provided different kinds sanctions which coercive in nature and punishments prescribed by him were stringent and cruel. But Machiavelli, while elaborating the theme of the art of war, did not mention cruel techniques like blinding through the use of poisonous powders for attaining political goal. Kautilya surpassed Machiavelli and left him for behind while sanctioning several barbarous and cruel measures for attaining success. No ethical code supports Kautilya's methods for swimming success. For the sake of the country's security all kinds of measures including violence and fraud were welcome and they could not be considered as reprehensible. This is whale both Kautilya and Machiavelli advocated. To them, end justified the means.

CONCLUSION

Kautilya's work comes from his myths and beliefs where as Machiavelli mainly writes based on his experiences and examples from history. One of benefits of Kautilya's work is that this imagination has given his work a robust structure and can last over a period of time. In addition Machiavelli's work can be considered as one of the possible subsets of Kautilya's statecraft. The weakness of Kautilya's work is that it is not empirical and is not time tested. Yes, some of his writings were used by his King Maurya but they were denounced by King Ashoka as wicked and cunning. In addition the language that Machiavelli uses is very learned while Kautilya uses terse statements which make the point. In general Kautilya has been criticized for being harsh and crude in dealing with spies and espionage and this language differential only vouches for it even more. In my opinion, Machiavelli was a shrewd man and did not want to explicitly write down that was implicitly known. , Kautilya, in contrast to Machiavelli, is not prepared to subordinate ethics to politics. His schematic diversion into Machiavellian mode is a minor feature of his total conceptual make up. Thus, the tenor of his thought is both markedly different and fundamentally opposite to that of Machiavelli. Some scholars agree that there is a fundamental dichotomy between Machiavelli's prince and Kautilya's swami in that while the former is above conventional morality, the latter eschews sensual excesses, that is, gramyasukha or gramyadharmas, and remains accountable to the precepts rajadharma at all times. One of the most influential exponents of this view, Dr. Nag, observes: "In ethical concepts Kautilya is far removed from Machiavelli with whom he was been compared in a superficial manner". Nag's contention is emphatically endorsed by his distinguished disciple, Dr. Chunder, and by professor Dikshitar on the other hand according to the authors of Ancient India and Indian Civilization, "Kautilya does not set out to find a rajadharma, defining the ideal of the sovereign, .but provides the King with practical directions, exactly like Machiavelli's Prince."

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