

Socio-Logic of the Capitalist World: A Reading of Machiavelli's *The Prince*

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The fingers of a hand with feathered sleeves holding the golden pommel of a sword, carved and designed for a man of authority and power, connotatively suggests that it is the closest tool to a man for immediate use to function, which can be further deliberated to understand his instantaneous need to operate, using it. The feathered sleeves may suggest the kingly stature of the man surrounded by the articles of flamboyance. It is the engaging grace of the hand and the unseen other half of the sword which invites curiosity. The hidden intentions and the upper view of the visual gives it a depth and takes it inside to see the depth of the sword which is unknown.

The cover page of Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1984), the Penguin Classics edition, assembles a visual composition to be read and reread for the text to communicate the ideas established in the written text, in the political treatise. Its intense close-up view focuses on the concentrated idea of *The Prince*, which establishes the guidelines and gives a framework for a Prince to come in power and maintain it. The basic premise of the text is based on attaining power to control the State. Therefore, the sword as a tool of grace in the hands of the Prince suggests his way of operate in the sphere of politics. Machiavelli gives a detailed account of the psychology of the Kings and the survival strategy of the rulers to stay in power. He systematically records the account about the interaction and negation of an individual with the collective psychology of the political rulers as well as the masses.

Finding its roots at the time of Renaissance, the Machiavellian argument is built on the independent unit of an individual who makes a choice beyond moral deliberations and restructures the paradigm of the political world. When human beings became the centre of everything, society went through the process of rebirth at various levels. A lot of faith was bestowed in human endeavours, and the limitless exploration and expedition became an integral part of the system to experience the shift in the outlook. Renaissance began from Florence, Italy, and therefore, the Renaissance spirit was experienced in Italy more intensely than any other country. Moral debates were in question, yet human beings started to exhaust every field of knowledge, having confidence in their capacity. Therefore, to make a choice without any imposition and fear gave agency to the being to be able to take the bridle of life in one's hand. Pico della Mirandola writes in his essay "The Dignity of Man" redefines the position of man as the

privileged one, “You, who are confined by no limits shall determine for yourself your own nature, in accordance with your own free will, in whose hands I have placed you” (2). He relocates the human potential and directs it towards curiosity and inquisitive nature of the human self.

Renaissance, when interpreted sans moral and ethical complexity, undergoes a praxis of Machiavellian ways which can lead to unidirectional rationality. The philosophical coordinates of human existence, when left loose, create a crude framework which lacks the elements working towards human cognition. Knowledge when not aligned with human cognition will fail to create wisdom. Hence, for the evolutionary movement of the human being, there comes a need to be inclusive. The strategic framework when recorded, creates a possibility of being an established norm for the society to function. The paper is an attempt to read the Machiavellian model as a norm of the capitalist world which seeped into the society through the interaction of the capitalist forces and started to define the way of life.

Not disregarding the merits of the historical context of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, this paper brings the socio-economic influences of the text on the contemporary corporate world; it reads the capitalist functioning in today’s time as a derivative of the Machiavellian paradigm, and studies Martin Scorsese’s *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) and Shyam Benegal’s *Kalyug* (1981). Literature and films, being the modes of representation of life, become a subject to reflect on the changing trajectory of human civilisation. Therefore, the above-mentioned films will become the binding thread for life and reflection for the paper.

The boundaries of the discourse of *The Prince*, which once contained its engagement within political domains, have expanded to penetrate the lives of the people. It no longer enjoys its limited space, because it has started to share the space with other fields of knowledge to be able to redefine the functioning of humanity at large. This paper is an attempt to understand the reach of the discourse in the economic domain, which has become the way of life in capitalist society. To understand this, one needs to gauge through the socio-economic conditions which form the basis of penetration and re-establishes human beings to be socio-political beings only and takes away the philosophical nectar of their fundamental existence. This paper reflects on the influences of Machiavelli on our contemporary corporate sector which regulates the market and hence controls not just the movement of the capital but also the movement of human desires.

The word capitalism derives its origin from the Latin word *caput* meaning ‘head,’ and hence it carries in itself the dynamics of power and control. In the guise of a free play market, capitalism actually offers a monopolistic market, letting the few control the capital flow and human drives. Similarly, the political

treatise of Machiavelli redefines the political world from the point of view of the Prince seeking power. His survival strategy is based on the premise of using and manipulating the weak and eliminating the stronger. Manipulating the psychology of others for retaining power is what the Machiavellian character does. To exercise power and also to be able to control and exploit the tools of power is what the political philosopher highlights in the text.

The premise of the political treatise functions devoid of any moral concerns. Machiavelli argues that the strategy works in the domain of the real world and is not the utopian idea with philosophical insights. His argument shows the contrast between the empirical world rooted in reality and the philosophical world of the pursuit of ideals. Unlike the theories of political philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, whose ideas on politics never eliminated the issues of morality, Machiavelli's *The Prince* reformed the political regimes by ratifying the immoral actions of a ruler with his ideas of an ideal leader in his attempt to portray Roman history. For him "Christian principles were admirable, but not applicable for politicians in certain circumstances, the idea that all human behaviour could be assessed in relation to one set of values was naive and utopian" (Introduction xxv).

As a pure strategy and a rational linear argument, he thrives on an immoral world of cruelty, injustice, self-serving shrewdness, and a world based on the calculative moves to attain and retain power. Machiavelli establishes the human being as a power-seeking animal who must adapt to the vices which he/she is bound to commit and further dehumanises the discourse of the political treatise. In the "Introduction", Tim Parks writes, "Machiavelli was to present leadership and nation-building as creative processes that should be judged not morally but aesthetically" (Introduction xxix). But the primary concern remains: is the idea of aesthetics devoid of the human element? Or can the discourse devoid of moral complexity contribute to the growth of human civilisation?

Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* divides the knowledge under politics into three categories, namely, theoretical, practical, and productive, which aim at contemplation, creation, and action, respectively. All three functions together make it a more scientific process whose praxis in the real world will find a direction for the materialisation of the theoretical world. He, therefore, brings the utopian world close to reality, not making it an ideational impossibility. He closely links the idea of human ethics with politics making it more inclusively complex working in the direction of civilisational growth. Aristotle establishes, "And on this account nothing but a good moral training can qualify a man to study what is noble and just—in a word, to study questions of Politics" (6). The one who enters into the world of justice has to be in love with justice and pursue the actions manifested in excellence as per Aristotle.

Ethics work under the collective human functioning of the society and therefore, its primacy in the evolution of human civilisation or its insignificance as directed by Machiavelli as two varied positions will create different choices to decide the trajectory for beings. For a ruler, Machiavelli writes:

...he mustn't be concerned about the bad reputation that comes with those negative qualities that are almost essential if he is to hold on to power. If you think about it, there'll always be something that looks morally right but would actually lead a ruler to disaster, and something else that looks wrong but will bring security and success. (61)

The choice to reject morality defines his position as a political philosopher. He eliminates the questions of reflection and introspection, as his argument is not bound by any obligation or responsibility of a governing agent. His ideas work in the domain of the Prince as a ruler who wants to rule to hold a position of privilege in the society. The choices holding ethical positions are outrightly rejected by Machiavelli as his presumptions fail to see the success of a ruler who is ethically bound to serve the subjects. Under the light of the above quote, the ruler does not function under challenging circumstances of human cognition as an engaging force, because one of the elements of responsibility is eliminated. The idea of success is defined in the attainment of unhindered power. The Machiavellian utopia is another dysfunctional model which shows no patterns of extrapolation as it lacks the elements of uncertainty and unpredictability, which is a part of any political functioning rooted in the subject of human beings. Causational assumptions of the Machiavellian model limit its dimensions and political discourse hence becomes devoid of its complexity when the other important coordinates of operation are ignored.

Similarly, the idea of a capitalist society is based on the economic development of a country. The idea of power operates through economy under capitalism. Competition, supply, demand and self-interest as per Adam Smith, the philosopher of economics, are the forces of a free market. The idea of a free market is seen as a guise under the play of monopoly. The demand and supply is actually regulated by the capitalist forces; therefore, these forces manipulate and reshape the consumer behaviour to earn profit, which is the ultimate objective. The paradigm shifts from social growth to making profit for self-interest changed the centre of humanity, aligning money with growth and success.

This lopsided movement changed the socio-economic structures of the society which, in turn, is seen as a new norm replacing the ideas of human evolution with human growth. As this works with little or no regulation, it gives freedom to the capitalist forces to access their liberty to operate and shape the socio-economic structures with the motive to earn profit. Nation-states building

their supremacy on the basis of economic possession entered into the world of economic war for power. V.B. Singh, in the essay “Adam Smith’s Theory of Economic Development” (1959), describes Adam Smith’s theory as not to give much importance to the idea of benevolence as a regulator of harmony. He highlights that law and magistracy are always on the side of the trader, which reflects that the trader has an extended freedom of operation. In Adam Smith’s view, the idea of natural philosophy which gives human beings the freedom to function. Categorical specialisation under the division of labour creates a world of freedom for the producer who could use the yardstick to measure and manipulate according to their own requirements. It also created a world of exclusivity with the idea of focused knowledge which redefined the idea of efficiency, making things categorical instead of inclusive and comprehensive.

The strategies are used by the capitalist to entrap the consumer. And in the garb of a consumer-centric working environment, corporate offers what it intends to offer and further controls the collective desire. It captivates the taste of the consumer and reduces the shelf life of the product forcing the consumer to be a part of the nexus offered. The political treatise of Machiavelli has become the treatise of the political economy today. To critically view the Machiavellian model, the paper has been divided into three sections which will specifically talk about the basis of the idea of power which thrives on pure rationality as a way of life, and it has taken the course of linear progression dramatically. The values of the Machiavellian model can be broadly seen under the following classified systems.

Quantifiable Expansion

Invading to conquer to acquire power on the basis of territorial augmentation empowers the Prince to access maximum control. This topographical expansion restrains the topological mooring of the Prince, and hence the measurable land control becomes a defining principle of quantifiable extensions. To possess and access control directs the ways towards the power-struck mappable elaboration of the Prince. “Move the money from your clients pocket to your pocket” (*The Wolf of Wall Street* 00:08:50-52). Maximisation of profit and holding maximum money using minimum time frame is the principle of the capitalist working which again, reiterates the quantifiable norms of expansion. Hence, we see that the idea of the unseen human expansion does not fit in the frames of both the models.

The fascinating idea of earning three million dollars in three hours in the film *The Wolf of Wall Street* puts a compulsion on the vulnerable stock brokers of Wall Street to extend their access to be able to suck the money out of their customers under the strategic working of employing the immoral ways of life.

Jordan Belfrot, along with Donnie Azof who befriends him, is lured by the amount of quick money his profession offers and they use their pump and dump scam to capture the speculative market. They are well-versed with the market's mechanism and further use it and manipulate it in order to control the money floating there. In today's capitalist world, the idea of money commands the lives of the people. Mark Hanna, a professional stock broker already working on Wall Street, lures Belfrot in the sex and drugs filled world of stockbrokers by enticing him in the money-making world when he convincingly tells him, "Where the money is to be reinvested and the client gets addicted to it and then give more and more and moving money to which will go into the pockets of investors. Client will think he is getting what will be true on papers but not in reality" (00:27:23-30).

For the corporate industry profit maximisation becomes the bottom line where they choose to overlook the other more humane aspects which add value to life. When this blinkered worldview governs life, people soon forget to enrich their existence by the ignored factors. Belfrot in the film *The Wolf of Wall Street* says, "I want you to go out there and I want you to ram Steve Madden stock down your client's throats until they fucking choke on it" (01:21:20-34). Considering money, the only and the ultimate factor for growth and happiness makes them untouched by the more profound factors of life. Ultimately, money becomes the socio-logic of the capitalist society empowering the corporate world and ultimately the politicians who are the hidden governing bodies of this empire. The economic terrain is driven by the American empire which stands at the centre as the market-driven force. Belfrot says in the film, "But of all the drugs and God's blue heaven, there is one that is my absolute favourite you see... Enough of this shit will make you invincible. Able to conquer the world and eviscerate your enemies" (00:03:50- 00:04:07). Money here becomes a tool for power. It is not money but the power one gains with money that requires attention.

To conquer the economy to redefine the power structures is what we see in the above-mentioned lines. The Machiavellian ideas of invincibility and obliteration are the continuing forces of the capitalist world. Whereas in the film *Erin Brokovich* (2000) we observe Erin's understanding of expansion in direct contrast to the PG&E's unethical ways of earning money. Their use of Hexavalent chromium contaminated the drinking water which further caused terminal diseases to the Hinkley plaintiffs. The primary business ethics of PG&E involved deception, bribery, harm to the environment, and the idea of distrust. This case was the largest direct-action lawsuit in the history of the United States, which revealed their socio-economic functioning under the light of degenerated actions. This quantifiable expansion is measurable and so is the

expansion of Machiavellian power.

Human expansion is the unseen extrapolation of the being which adds to the evolutionary journey of civilisation growth. Che Guevara's journey of Latin America in the travelogue *The Motorcycle Diaries* can be mapped, but can we map the constantly evolving Self of the man who became a revolutionary? The changing consciousness cannot be mapped, nor can the thoughts, but the measurable land and money can be, by which one derives a sense of power. The modes of exercising power and deriving a sense of power need to be redefined for the unseen human expansion to be able to find its roads. From a dreamer to a man of action who shed himself of "I" to identify with the world waiting for him to be "we" is that unseen human expanse. The journey from "I" to "we" is of an untraceable human self who not only contributed in the field of leprosy under the identity of a doctor, but rose for humanity at large with his empathetic temperament. The song "Jeena Isi ka Naam hai" (1958), written by Shailendra, holds literary sensibility and reiterates the purpose of life and designs the civilisational fabric through his poetic rendition by Mukesh:

*Mitte jo pyaar k lie vo zindagi
Jalebahar k lie vo zindagi
Kisi ko ho na ho Hume to aitbar
Jeenaisi ka naam hai (13-16)*

Life of love, compassion, and empathy infuses the mundane working with the romance to delineate the consciously engaging human endeavours with humaneness for the unseen progression. The world of Machiavelli and capitalism works on the ideas of distrust and deceiving. Therefore, *aitbar* as a missing force in the above-mentioned works makes it a fragmented and a tumbled structure.

Political Morality in the Capitalist World

But since it is difficult for a ruler to be both feared and loved, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two must be lacking. For this can generally be said of men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, avoiders of danger, greedy for profit; and as long as you serve their welfare, they are entirely yours, offering you their blood, possessions, life and children...when the occasion to do so is not in sight; but when you are faced with it, they turn against you. And that Prince who lays his foundations on their promises alone, finding himself stripped of other preparations, falls to ruin... For men are less concerned with hurting someone who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared, because love is held by a link of obligation which, since men are wretched creatures, is

broken every time their own interests are at stake; but fear is held by a dread of punishment which will never leave you. (Machiavelli 31)

In the above lines, the Machiavellian morality re-establishes the ways of convenient vices. His argument is primarily based on the non-humane, separatist ethos. In the capitalist society, the means of production are used in a manner to generate profit to hold power, which is constant in the entire process of the working of any corporate firm. And Machiavelli talks about maximisation of political power to rule. Therefore, we see that exploitation is one of the consequences of profit-making and demands a specific morality. The modes of operation of capitalistic forces as represented in the films again show a human vice manifested in action. The film *Kalyug* by Shyam Benegal is an argument of Mahabharata under capitalist decadence. The scandalous battle between families of the two brothers leads to the fall of both the families. The fight to get the contract for the STS project worth 27 crores leads to a series of self-planted unfortunate circumstances. In one of the conversations between Dhanraj and Karna where they plan to strategise against their rival family so that the STS project is finally taken by their company, they say:

DHANRAJ : *Baat ban gai. Lockout ho gya.*

KARNA : *Good, Yani filhaal factory se humari machines jane ka Sawal nai uthta (1:12:00-07)*

With a motive to not let the cousin take the contract they tried to sabotage the working of their factory so that the contract remains with them. Human relations take a backseat and the greed to earn more and more money takes over. Also, the subcontext of Mahabharata gives a mythological in-depth to the plot. To protect their own working, they plant an impediment for the other company. This continues when Karna again says “*Production factories mein scandals kibooh jab government to milegi to unka STS project khatre mein padh jaega aur sath hi banking circles aur stock market mein unki prestige girjaegi*” (1:17:12-20). The political morality of Machiavelli demands the need to act pretentiously and work for one’s own profit-making process at the cost of the ethical commands of life. Revenge through murders, which ultimately lead to the ruin of both the families and the tragic state of Bharat and Dhanraj and deaths of all the other people involved in the game, created a space for unfair practices where the characters had different motivations outside the ethical code. The hijacking of the trucks loaded with products so that it doesn’t reach in time and then to secretly tell the police about the return of the trucks with the motive to gain the insurance claim money would bring bad reputation to Bharat and the family business.

The idea of morality is individual, whereas ethics deal with the collective human civilisational responsibility and growth, which are fundamental to human existence. Individual morality can lead to subjective choices, but ethically deliberated philosophical positions are embedded in the process of creation itself. Machiavelli sanctions the Prince to have the traits of a lion and a wolf at the same time and therefore allows cruel means to take shape in politics. He writes: “The reader should bear in mind that there are two ways of doing a battle: using the laws and animal force. But since playing by the law often proves inadequate, it makes sense to resort to force as well” (69). Hence it approves of the animalistic behaviour on the part of the public figure of the Prince. Machiavelli goes to the extent of saying:

Fortune varies but men go on regardless. When their approach suits the times they're successful, and when it doesn't they're not. My opinion on the matter is this: it's better to be impulsive than cautious; fortune is female and if you want to stay on top of her you have to slap and thrust. You'll see she's more likely to yield that way than to men who go about her coldly. And being a woman she likes her men young, because they're not so cagey, they're wilder and more daring when they master her. (101)

Similarly, the capitalists in the film *The Wolf of Wall Street* are able to attain their aimed goals, while they function in the sex and drug-filled environment. Issues of human dignity aligned with the ideas of gender debates are portrayed elaborately in the film. The ill-treatment towards the sales assistant, Daniel Harrison, whom he pays \$10,000 to shave her head before the office staff portrays his pleasure-deriving principles based on the cruelty of his actions. The treatment of women in the film and the Machiavellian discourse is highly debatable. Beyond gender is human dignity which gives the right to every being to live a life of respect. Denying that to anyone causes a sense of dissatisfaction and also unhappy human existence.

Vertical Movement of Regressive Progression

The conclusive and definitive argument of Machiavelli takes all the probable combinations as per his understanding of the design. According to Machiavelli, morality is not for the rulers to deliberate upon, but it is for the masses who function on it. Creating these hierarchies, he fails to think of horizontal stretching of the fabric of the political argument. Spatially or temporally, the Machiavellian paradigm will function in the independent units of these two domains. It will, therefore, never function in the space of spatio-temporal complexity. Hence, the aesthetic design of the model which needs to consider the uncertainty principle that contributes to the evolutionary process of theories, thoughts, and actions is

absent from the framework. Hence, it lacks the evolution of an aesthetic design of the collective civilization.

The framework shows the structural skeleton, whereas the idea of design is an evolved term contributing to the aesthetics of creation. With human elements missing in the discourse and reiteration on the strategic and unidirectionally linear argument, the Machiavellian and capitalist discourses are devoid of the aesthetic pleasure of literary sensibility and sensitivity. According to him, “Morality was for ordinary people and not the rulers. “Political leaders are above law” (Introduction xvi). Rejecting a particular section of the society, Machiavelli writes from the point of view of the ruler only. His positional value takes away the people from different strata of the society and his idea of growth is individual which fails to bring different sections together. Machiavelli gives man the power to survive in its full capacity against the idea of fortune which becomes a hindrance in human endeavours.

Machiavellian certainty rejects fortune against *virtu*. In the “Introduction” to the text, Tim Parks says “The modern, positivist attitude, where thought and analysis serve in so far as they produce decisive action, rather than abstract concepts, lies at the heart of *The Prince*” (“Introduction” xv). Deductive reasoning has led to an inferential progression. The exactness of information and detailed concretisation of the known has attuned the human mind for precision. Dependency on the seen world is an admirable endeavour to venture into the minutest of the attributes of nature, and on the other hand, it has taken the poetic imagination of artistic yearning for abstractions of universal significance away from human comprehension. It has built confidence for progression but has reduced the field of evolution of human civilisation. The mystery of the unseen is comprehensive and needs the imagination to be deciphered. Obsession with exactness, therefore, takes away the romance of holistic nature.

Machiavelli says, “War is just when there’s no alternative and arms are sacred when they are your only hope” (23). In the film *Corporate* (2006) by Madhur Bhandarkar, launching the toxic drink was the only alternative to hold the market. But then the question comes how far can we consider the efficacy of the above statement? The industry works towards sustaining the liquid flow of money in a unidirectional manner, therefore, homogenising the process and simplifying it. From the eyes of the two company workers, we get to know how the people in power live and how they feed themselves with the unfair means of earning the luxuries of life. During one of the conversations one of them says:

Sala Company k paise se har do mahine mein London ja rehta hai. Our aapne to Lonavla k bhai lalle hai... ye fab VP, CEO’S, Executives, ye say haina company k paise se jalve karte

hai. Aur ye shanna har 6 mahine mei apni secretary badalta hai. Kya hai apne desh me in biwi nahi badal sakte, is lie ye secretary badalta hai. (1:38:50-1:39:13)

Feeding on the money of the common people, the top-notch exploits the subjects. In *Kalyug*, the company workers ignite under a strategy by Dhanraj, and the leader of the worker's union, who in the garb of protecting the rights of the workers, carves out a way for his own motives. He befools the workers for earning money and makes a deal with the company to materialise his own motives. He tells Bharat "*Lekin workers ko ye yakeen dilana hoga k management se bonus ki baat chal rai hai*" (1:16:13-18). In the hands of the company and also the middleman, the workers suffer. Their innocence is used by others to keep their pace with money and the competitive world of the imperialist forces. They are exploited under a fake attack planned to set their anger on fire so that the company faces anarchy and their production stops.

Capitalism advocates self-governed societies with voluntary institutions opposing the hierarchical organisation in the conduct of human relations which is distorted as inequality is an inevitable consequence of economic growth in a capitalist economy. The resulting concentration of wealth can destabilise democratic societies and it undermines the ideals of social justice upon which they are built. There are times when the surplus produced needs to be allocated to the right consumers and to materialise the purpose when the need is not there in the market, a capitalist creates the need by exploiting the subjects. This prompts the following reflection from *The Prince*, "that many people reckon that when the opportunity presents itself a smart ruler will shrewdly provoke hostility so that he can then increase his reputation by crushing it" (55).

The saddened state of human existence today can be seen in the form of colours in Pablo Picasso's *The Weeping Woman* (1937), which represents the collective suffering of humanity. The "still sad music of humanity" resonates the narrative of the collected water stuck in a pond, longing to meet the river and flow eternally ("Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" 93). The helpless hand with a handkerchief in the mouth shows the anxious being. The bright, vibrant yellow, blue, red and green are in direct contrast to the black and white inner face. The inner face shows the core of the human being in the form of a mouth which is infected and pale. If we continue to adopt the unempathetic ways of life as functionary forces of human civilisation, the complex philosophical being will be in a doomed state of unseen anarchy which will become a metaphor of distortion for the human state.

It is not always action in its physicality that is needed. Hamlet's inaction in the state of crisis was an act of a cognitive being who travelled through the

crevices of hardships. Action without a beautiful idea of a cognitive mind will make the world full of Iagos and Bosolas. The capitalist corporate is working like a *rehat*, a Persian wheel which sucks the water from one side and drains out to the other side. Capital under corporate and power under imperial forces conjoined at the top to suck up the fundamentals of a human being leaves the common humanity parched. Perhaps, the aesthetics of ethics will weave in the threads of humanity for society to drape the fabric of collective evolution.

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