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THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE IN CHANAKYA'S *ARTHASHASTRA* AND MACHIAVELLI'S *THE PRINCE*

Anil Kumar Vaddiraju*

Abstract

This paper aims to compare the understanding of human nature in Chanakya's Arthashastra and Machiavelli's The Prince from the perspective of the Comparative Political Theory. Both these political thinkers belong to varied continents of time and place. While Chanakya belonged to ancient India, Machiavelli belonged to the period of the Renaissance, but both have clear and lucid portrayal of human nature in their works, which is comparable. Both portray human nature as cynical. And both have at their heart the well-being of the state and the welfare of the people. And both use this concept of human nature to advise the prince/raja on matters of state craft. For both, the consolidation of the state and its maintenance are chief concerns. This leads both the thinkers to a stark 'realism' in thinking in terms of domestic and interstate relations. The ends in question for both are the strength of the states in question and the well-being of the people. While discussing this, one should keep in mind that Chanakya was not the first philosopher to advise the rajas. He built upon the ideas of others who came before him. The same is true of Machiavelli. In Machiavelli's time, it was a trend among many scholastic writers to write pietistic advice to Italian princes. What, however, distinguishes Chanakya in the Indian context and Machiavelli in the Italian context is that they radically break with their predecessors in advising the rajas/princes in terms of what is expedient according to the context.

Keywords: Chanakya, Arthashastra, Machiavelli, The Prince, Human nature, Comparative political theory

Introduction

This paper explores a subdiscipline of Political Science, namely Comparative Political Theory (CPT). As the editors of *the Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory* put it (Jenco, Idris and Thomas, 2020):

'Comparative political theory (CPT) began emerging in the 1990s in response to the intensifying disconnect between a Eurocentric academic discipline and the recognition that political challenges, questions, and aspirations exceeded "the West" (Euben 1997, 32; Dallmayr 1997). Working at the intersections of political theory and area studies, international politics, and comparative politics, CPT seeks to analyze normative claims, discursive structures and institutions, and expressions and formations of power in and from all parts of the world.'

And they go on to say:

We argue that the contributions CPT is best poised to make might very well be connective and (not surprisingly) comparative, rather than internally cumulative¹.

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This paper particularly covers two thinkers from two parts of the world: Machiavelli from Renaissance in Europe and Chanakya from ancient India. In the following, the first part deals with the introduction; the second part deals with Machiavelli's *The Prince*; the third part deals with Chanakya's *Arthashastra* and the fourth part deals with the contemporary relevance of the two texts and their comparison for governance. The purpose of comparative political philosophy is to illuminate, and not to provide nuts and bolts to public policy, though it might as well do so in the process. The purpose of politico-philosophical illumination is to help understand our own political condition today. The idea that all knowledge should serve a utilitarian purpose ('use value!') is a distinctly modern idea, which we cannot apply to all fields of thought, leave alone social and political thought. In this paper, we attempt to illumine the similarities and differences between the two thinkers from two different civilisations and time periods: Machiavelli from the 15th century Italy and Chanakya from ancient India. In the end we would reflect on the philosophy of Chanakya in the historical context of modern world and its modernity. The Comparative Political Theory as mentioned in the beginning: 'may draw attention to the fact that salient features of similarity and difference *arise through comparison rather than precede it*'. (Jenco, Idris and Thomas, 2020:7-8, emphasis in the original).

Before dwelling on the topic, we should consider the idea, often proposed by Marxist thinkers, that there is no fixed 'human nature'. By 'human nature', we mean nature of people in a social formation in an historical era or epoch (Sayers: 1998)². In one era it is religious; in another era it is acquisitive; and in the rosier era after the socialist revolution, it is hoped to be realised in all its full human potentiality and affective and solidaristic cordiality and humanity. Usually, it is considered in political theory that in pre-capitalist societies, the human nature is conservative, past-oriented and religious. And the nature of human beings in capitalist societies is supposed to be acquisitive, possessive, and individualistic. Thus, this fundamental character of human beings is supposed to change over long historical periods of time. Human nature is mutable and a product of historical time and place. It is changeable and varies with time. The time periods vary from an epoch to epoch and an era to era. Usually, the birth of the liberal capitalist society is considered to be characterised by the birth of individualistic characters that prioritise acquisition of commodities and possessive consumerist dispositions. This type of individual is also characterised, in contrast to individuals in the previous eras, with thin religious belief, and more oriented to worldly, that is, economic pursuits. It is also considered in political theory that economy always did not dominate the minds of the people, nor became a major mental and physical pre-occupation till the birth of the modern liberal individualist, possessive-acquisitive era. There were other aspects, such as religious systems that dominated the mentalities, world views and preoccupations of both the laity and the elite. That the birth of capitalism marks a

¹ The authors of this Introduction titled 'Comparison, Connectivity and Disconnection' also say: 'These kinds of conversations are necessary if CPT is to pursue its twin goals of deparochialising the Eurocentric nature of political theory while advancing substantive, and not merely reactive, research'. An example of reinterpreting the ancient Indian text of *Purusha Sukta* is provided in this book, the interpretation of the text being done by Gray (Gray:2020). And the editors of the Oxford Handbook go on to say:

'We submit that comparative political theory is best understood as the discursive space carved out by immanent/internal critiques of political theory's privileging of "the West" and its marginalisation of other archives—whether those archives are understood as constituted by traditions, practices, bodies of thought, or texts'.

² For a detailed exposition of Marxist concept of human nature, refer to Sayers: 1998. Sayers defends the Marxist concept of human nature as both socially and historically evolving.

break, with those world views; that worldly achievement *here and now* becomes more important than the pre-occupation with the otherworldly matters. When such a phenomenon becomes a mass phenomenon, or a dominant phenomenon, we say that we entered a phase of modern liberal possessive-acquisitive individualist era. In such a world, individuals talk more about individual rights, property-worth and individual utility maximisation. The political theorist of that world is Thomas Hobbes, for example, who said that in such pursuit of individual self-interest, everyone becomes at war with each other. Therefore, the state is born, or its existence is justified, in terms of preventing such a social and political strife. This human condition, as described by Hobbes, is however, not a universal condition. Particularly, the Marxians argue that human nature is very sanguine and different from the cynical portrayal of the same provided by Thomas Hobbes. They do not endorse Hobbes, on the contrary, they argue that such cynical forms of human nature are historical, are to be historicised, and seen in the context of the larger totality of capitalism and the birth of liberal individualist society.

The second idea is that there is a fixed and eternal human nature that is constant across time and place. As long as the human beings are what they are, their nature will always be the same despite their different time and place. The former argument is made generally by Marxist scholars, who often forward a concept of human nature as a product of historical milieu. The second claim that there is a human nature, that is more or less the same, despite the historical contexts, is made by progenitors of liberal scholarship. The latter include scholars prominently from the Social Contractarian theory, such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. The Marxians in turn argued that Social Contractarians themselves are to be seen in their historical context. There is a third point, however, regarding human nature. That is the Indian, or more generally the Hindu, concept of human nature. According to the Hindu scriptures such as the *Gita*, there are three types of human nature: *sattvic*, *tamasic* and *rajasic*; and these are constant among human beings despite their time and place. Therefore, while some strands of Western political theory emphasise the historical and changing human nature, as in Marxism, some other, a certain kind of fixed human nature, such as in Social Contractarian Theory, the Indian tradition of thought, more particularly the Hindu tradition, emphasises a more or less constant human nature³. These introductory remarks regarding the views on human nature are essential before we consider two thinkers: Machiavelli and Chanakya, from enormously varied times and places. India and Italy; ancient India and early modern Europe.

This paper deals with the concept of human nature in Chanakya's *Arthashastra* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Both these political thinkers belong to varied continents of time and place. While Chanakya belonged to ancient India, Machiavelli belonged to the period of Renaissance, but both have clear and lucid portrayal of human nature in their works, which is comparable⁴. It is usually considered that Machiavelli is the first thinker to shift political thought from normative political thought

³ Machiavelli also mentions regarding the 'immutability of human nature', more on this in the following note.

⁴ In the context of this comparison, it should be well noted as Jenco, Idris and Thomas say:

'CPT facilitates the transgression of boundaries to the shared benefit of both sides, rather than shoring up knowledge as inhabiting one community or another'.

into a 'positive' one, that is, a science, which considers what *is* rather than what *ought* to be. Thus, inaugurating modern political theory in terms of separating facts from values. This task is also the one accomplished by Chanakya, to some extent. However, while the similarities are thus fruitful for comparison, the comparison of traditions in question ends here. From Machiavelli onwards, the Western canon takes an increasingly scientific turn. However, in India, that does not happen.

Hermeneutic interpretation basically implies interpreting texts in terms of their contexts. The texts and contexts form dialectical unity. Seen from this point of view, the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya belonged to the Mauryan period of ancient Indian history. The text elaborately deals with the social, political and moral context in which it is developed. The political context is that of a centralised state of Mauryan empire with elaborate bureaucratic structure of the state (Singh: 2011) This Kautilyan state had thirty-four departmental officials to look after the different wings of the state. While the state had an elaborate bureaucratic structure, the description of the state itself was that of *saptanga* state -a state with seven aspects. However, what is relevant to us, is that it was an elaborately developed bureaucratic state. This being the case, in the eyes of Kautilya, almost everyone in every stratum of society is suspect from the point of view of the interests of the state. Therefore, what Kautilya prominently elaborates is a political science of *dandaneeti*. That *dandaneeti* is the central precept of Kautilya in the rule of a state, points to the central assumption of human nature as something essentially prone to error, and therefore, suspect. What follows from this assumption is also an elaborate network of spies that Kautilya prescribes for governance/rule by the king. Since everyone in the state structure is suspect, and is fallible, what follows is an advice to keep all under watch. And also, this precept is followed by an elaborate jurisprudence of fines and punishments for each and every folly of each and every person.

Of course, *dandaneeti* serves welfare of the people. And welfare of the people is not possible without *dandaneeti*. *Dandaneeti* is, thus, equated with *rajaneeti*. Thus, Kautilya starts his theory of state with the premise that human nature is fallible, corrupt and mean. And therefore, the king should govern the people with elaborate rules of discipline and punishment, including torture, if need be. This may sound an exaggeration to some particularly those who consider the *Dharmashastras* and following the *dharma* according to *Dharmashastras* to be the rule in Kautilya's time. However, what appears to be true is that if the *dharmashastras* and following *dharma* was as common as is made out, the need for elaborate *dandaneeti* would not have arisen. Following *dharma*, particularly *varnashrama dharma*, may have been more common during Chanakya's time, than what it is now. However, the very underlying assumption of Kautilyan theory of politics seems to be that human beings tend to violate their *dharma* more often than are to be expected. And therefore, exists the need for equating *rajaneeti* with *dandaneeti* and a stringent code of law. Since the protection of *dharma* is the utmost duty of the king, the only way to uphold or, to strictly observe- the endogamous *varna* system and *varnashrama dharma*- is to uphold *dandaneeti*. The idea that the entire system worked on the strength of the hegemony of soft, ideological, moral and intellectual leadership of *Brahminical* philosophy, *Brahminism* in general, or the acceptance of *varnashrama dharma*, appears to have been done with caution by Kautilya himself.

Olivelle and McClish (Olivelle and McClish: 2012) for instance say it thus:

'The Arthashastra itself, however, uses another term to identify the expert tradition on statecraft: dandaniti, "administration (niti) of the staff (danda)." The term danda here refers to the staff or scepter wielded by the king as the symbol of his unique royal authority. As one of his royal accoutrements, the staff as a weapon represented the king's ability and willingness to use violence in ruling his kingdom. It represented his monopoly on the legitimate use of force.'

Arthashastra for instance says (as quoted by Olivelle and McClish):

What provides enterprise and security to [the various areas of human endeavor] is punishment (danda); its administration (niti) is Government (dandaniti).... On it depends the proper operation of the world. (1.4.3–4)⁵

Thus, therefore, Kautilya starts with cynicism regarding both human nature and following behaviour in society and societal matters—howsoever *dharmic* the society at his time was; and regarding the state – howsoever welfarist the state was during his time. The chief suspect of all in the process of governance is the elaborately structured bureaucracy. It controls power and resources and is susceptible to corruption. And therefore, Kautilyan theory emphasises more on *dandaneeti* and espionage. Monarchical states, howsoever loosely governed, howsoever welfare oriented, were authoritarian states, by modern standards.

Despite what we held above, for Kautilya, the morality of the state that follows from the underlying assumptions of human nature is straightforward. And the king, above all, should be a lenient *pater familias* for the entire society. This is not true for Machiavelli. With the same goals for statecraft, and with same cynical assumption of human nature, Machiavelli goes on to advocate complete expediency in matters of statecraft. A prince, for Machiavelli, should not be loved by his people, but feared. He should be both a lion and a fox as warranted by need. Prince should be sufficiently cruel to retain the obedience of people. His own personal morality should follow the principle of expediency in matters of vices. Appearances need not be for real. And what is real need not appear. Machiavelli is arguing these in the background of earlier pietistic and humanist recommendations made to the Italian princes (Skinner:1978, 1981). These recommendations to Italian princes were made prior to Machiavelli largely based on Christian theology. He breaks from that tradition and advocates blatant political realism. In his view, such a political realism or approach of expediency alone will save Florence and unify Italy of his day. The fundamental assumptions of Kautilya and Machiavelli towards human beings are the same; political ends and political realism too are similar. However, Machiavelli goes a step further in advocating moral expediency than Kautilya. Kautilya is still bound within the moral compass of

⁵ Olivelle, Patrick; McClish, Mark. *The Arthashastra: Selections from the Classic Indian Work on Statecraft* (Hackett Classics). Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.. Kindle Edition. Olivelle and Mc Clish say regarding the system of punishments that 'We might, then, think of *dandaniti* as the "governing through constructive coercion".'

Dharmashastras. Machiavelli is not⁶. Thus, ultimately, what both thinkers raise are the questions of ethics in governance and statecraft; both for the rulers as well as the ruled.

Machiavelli's *The Prince*: Moral Expediency as Virtue

In the following text, we deal with Machiavelli's *The Prince*. In *The Prince*, while there is advice on security and military matters in the early chapters of the text, the real portrayal of human nature and the nature of governance that the prince should adopt starts from chapters XVII to the XXVI. In chapter XVII, for example, explaining to the prince that it is better for him to be feared rather than loved, Machiavelli portrays the human nature thus:

'For one can generally say this about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, simulators and deceivers, avoiders of danger, and greedy for gain. While you work for their benefit, they are completely yours, offering you their blood, their property, their lives, and their sons, as I said above, when the need to do so is far away. But when it draws nearer to you, they turn away. The prince who relies entirely upon their words comes to ruin, finding himself stripped naked of other preparations.'(p.120)

And he goes on to say that men are a 'wretched lot', in the following paragraph:

'Men are less hesitant about injuring someone who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared, because love is held together by a chain of obligations that, since men are a wretched lot, is broken on every occasion for their own self-interest; but fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that will never abandon you.'(p.120)

One can go on elaborating this view of human nature in Machiavelli's multiplying examples. As Peter Bondanella writes, Machiavelli not only advised the princes about human nature, but also on to other aspects.

As Bondanella says:

'Machiavelli's overall advice to a new prince does, therefore, embrace all the aspects of interests—security, right, honour, and virtue...' (pp. 33)

In all the aforementioned aspects, 'security, right, honour and virtue', the obsession of Machiavelli is with the unreliable nature of men, both as rulers and as the ruled. And Machiavelli goes to any extent in advising the princes to rely on unequivocal force in dealing with such unreliability. Also, as regards every other aspect that Machiavelli deals in the use of force on people also, he has a contradictory advice: that a prince should use force, but in such a way that he is not hated by people. And what are the two aspects that he says that the prince should not harm in their rule? They are property and women of the subjects. Machiavelli clearly says that causing harm to property and women of the people will outrage their sense of honour and therefore the rulers are advised to abstain from that.

⁶ Jenco, Idris and Thomas (2020) for instance say in the *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory*: 'Comparative political theory has also helped political theorists demonstrate important distinctions within and across incommensurability, whether in the necessary and partial failures of translation or in the differences across conceptual grammars (Euben 2006; Jenco 2010b; Gordon 2014)'.

And regards virtue, Machiavelli has advised that it is of lasting significance. That *Fortuna*, or fortune, in rulers and men's lives is fickle, that no one enjoys a constant fortune. Therefore, Machiavelli advised everyone in general, and rulers in particular, to be prepared for storms in the time of political good weather. And also, one should not take good fortune for granted for all times. His most important advice to nations, rulers and people is that they should not take good fortune as is provided by God or providence to be permanent. They should exercise their own virtue in resisting the misfortune, as good fortune is only a temporary matter. Circumstances can always turn the tide against good fortune and those rulers who are unprepared may fall victim to the changed circumstances. What can resist the downfall of men and rulers in times of bad fortune are both prior preparedness and their constant virtue as practised by them and as is personified by their character.

The last chapter in the text of *The Prince* places the entire argument in its context –to unify Italy and make it a strong state. We need to understand Machiavelli's preoccupation with this in its historical context. At the time of the writing of *The Prince*, Europe in general and Italy in particular, was highly fragmented with multiple contending forces for power. Italy in particular was fragmented between city states, papal states, feudal states and principalities. In addition, Italy was also ravaged by constant invasions by the French and the Spanish and other European forces. Thus, Machiavelli's foremost preoccupation in the text is with a stable and strong state, ruled by a stable and strong ruler.

The text in the *Prince*, is written regarding statecraft from a ruler's perspective. As the title of the text itself speaks, it is written as an advice to princes as to how to hold on to rule, in the context of other adverse rulers, invasions, from the revolts of the people and from their own vices. The text does not deal with the question of accountability to people at all. Since it is from the above, the ruler's point of view, that Machiavelli is looking at statecraft, the question of accountability does not arise. Moreover, one would wonder whether the question of accountability to people did exist in pre-modern and pre-democratic, monarchist Europe. To ask the question as to whether Machiavelli deals with the question of accountability of rulers, in this text, is to impose our own conceptual categories to the text and its royalist, monarchist discourse. The concept of democratic accountability, that is the concept that the rulers are accountable to *demos*, came historically much later to the time of Machiavelli. The entire obsession of Machiavelli, at least in this text, is with the statecraft from above. If the prince becomes arbitrary towards people, there is no way to address the grievance. In fact, in the whole of the text, the advice to the rulers is to be as arbitrary and expedient as possible according to the circumstance, will and pleasure, in order to maintain the state, without however, appearing to be doing so. Machiavelli is certainly not a republican in *The Prince*, as he is in other texts such as *Discourses on Livy*, with which we do not deal in this paper⁷⁸.

⁷ Olivelle, Patrick; McClish, Mark. *The Arthashastra: Selections from the Classic Indian Work on Statecraft* (Hackett Classics). Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Kindle Edition.

⁸ *Discourses on Livy* is largely a republican text, although there are elements of monarchical thought in this text too. What is more of concern to this article is the concept of human nature mentioned in the *Discourses on Livy*, wherein Machiavelli mentions that human nature is 'immutable'. This concept of immutability of human nature in Machiavelli is elaborated by J.C. Bondanella and Peter Bondanella in the following words:

'Machiavelli, however, held a far more pessimistic view of human nature than was typical of his humanist predecessors from the Quattrocento, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola or Leon Battista Alberti. Rather than believing that his fellow human beings were, as Pico put it, only a little lower than the angels and were capable,

Chanakya's *Arthashastra*: Dharma above *raja* and *purohita*

"A king who observes his duty of protecting his people justly and according to law will go to heaven, whereas one who does not protect them or inflicts unjust punishment will not." (pp 442)

"Because the king is the guardian of the right conduct of this world with its four *varnas* and four *ashramas*, he [alone] can enact and promulgate laws [to uphold them] when all traditional codes of conduct perish [through disuse or disobedience]." (pp 442)

Chanakya's *Arthashastra*⁹ is infinitely more elaborate and has richer text, both in terms of concepts and detail, and in treatment of the subject matter than *The Prince*. The scope of *Arthashastra* is far wider than *The Prince*. *Arthashastra* almost reads like a manual of statecraft for kings/rajās. However, there are similarities when compared to treating human nature. But prior to going into that, it is important to emphasise that Chanakya strictly operates within the framework of Hindu *dharma*; this may be called *vedic* or *sanatanic*, indeed both the *vedic* and *sanatanic* are Hindu during Chanakya's time: both in terms of *varna* classification and *varnashrama dharma*. The social order that the *raja* has to protect is that of *varna* social order and *varnashrama dharma*. The influence of *Ajivikas*, *Lokayatas*, Jainism and Buddhism appears to be very less on *Arthashastra*. The text goes on to elaborate the science of governance in largely what appears to be Hindu *varna* system terms. While the text is cynical about human nature, this is not owing to the influence of *Lokayatas*, *Ajivikas*, Jainism and Buddhism. In fact, none of the modern exponents of the text indeed discuss the influence of these philosophies on the text of *Arthashastra*. It is true that the text was written according to the Hinduism of its own time. Not, of course of our time. It was certainly not composed in terms of the concept of *Hindutva*, which is a much later concept. In fact, Trautmann (Trautmann: 2016) notes that during the time of *Arthashastra*, there was great deal of cosmopolitan trade in luxuries, particularly with Rome, Egypt and other Mediterranean countries for red coral and other precious gems. It was a period in which cosmopolitanism was the rule and nativist chauvinism, perhaps, was an exception. This is despite the

like Proteus, of changing their essence to become almost godlike, Machiavelli returned to a more traditionally Christian view of man as a selfish, egotistical animal controlled by an insatiable desire for material gain and moved only by self-interest. Easily fooled by appearances, man is not to be trusted unless such trust is based upon fear rather than love. This negative, pessimistic assessment of mankind, outlined brilliantly in the most famous passages of The Prince and never rejected in the Discourses on Livy, nevertheless paradoxically yields positive and optimistic conclusions in Machiavelli's thought. If human nature is fundamentally that evil state which has been fixed since the Fall of Man, the actions of mankind are also somewhat predictable and repetitious like the nature these actions reflect. As such actions occur over historical time, the careful observer may organize, study, and employ them as a guide to contemporary practice. This doctrine of imitation, so fundamental to Machiavelli and the entire range of Italian Renaissance culture, thus yields a primitive form of empirical political science based upon the concept of history as a vast reservoir of didactic models and guides. And the greatest of models could only be found, for a republican theorist, in the works of Livy'.

(Machiavelli, Niccolo; Julia Conaway Bondanella; Peter Bondanella. *Discourses on Livy* (Oxford World's Classics) (pp. xvii-xviii). OUP Oxford, Kindle edition.)

Machiavelli also says in the *Discourse on Livy* that 'Men [humans in general] live and die as they are born'. This is the 'immutability of human nature' as mentioned in the *Discourses on Livy*. Thus, each ancient individual figure serves the purpose of a didactic model taken from Livy's history, for Machiavelli.

⁹ The meaning of the term *Arthashastra* differs from interpreter to interpreter: Trautmann interprets the text as 'The Science of Wealth'. Mc Clish and Olivelle (2012) interpret the text as the 'Science of Success'. And Rangarajan's text largely focuses on administrative and political matters.

distinction often found in the period of the text, between 'Aryas' (people of Aryavarta) and *Mlechchas* (barbarians/outsideers).

This is in stark contrast to Machiavelli. By the time of Machiavelli's writing in the 15th century, the grip of Christianity over political thought was already waning. However, Machiavelli is credited with the title of being the first modern political thinker precisely because he breaks away from religion and religious thinking about political matters. For Chanakya, heaven and hell are still realities. As the following quotation makes it clear, the king who protects the people will go to heaven but the one who does not, will not.

Likewise, the right conduct for Chanakya is not expedient conduct by rulers as well as the ruled, the conduct according to their respective *dharma* is prescribed by the hierarchical social order. The Hindu religious *dharma* is the overarching and overwhelming principle within which both the ruler and the ruled should conduct themselves. This includes the Brahmins. The *purohita* is no exception to the rule. There are passages in the *Arthashastra* wherein the crimes of the *Brahmins* too are interrogated by the *raja* in the presence of his councillors and other *Brahmins*. The point is that both the *raja* and *purohita* are subject to the overarching *dharma*. No one is above the *dharma*. Rest all is a matter of elaborate detail, from sketching which Chanakya does not flinch. From rules of civil service to prisoners' welfare to rules of marital and sexual conduct, everything is mentioned in detail in the text, including how a husband should talk to his wife.

However, there are sections in the *Arthashastra*, particularly dealing with the bureaucracy of the state which reveal that Chanakya too did uphold a sceptical view of human nature. Consider for example the following from the *Arthashastra*:

'Just as it is impossible to know when a fish moving in water is drinking it, so it is impossible to find out when government servants in charge of undertakings misappropriate money.' (pp 320).

'Just as it is impossible not to taste honey or poison that one may find at the tip of one's tongue, so it is impossible for one dealing with government funds not to taste, a little bit, of the king's wealth.' (pp 320)

'It is possible to know even the path of birds flying in the sky but not the ways of government servants who hide their [dishonest] income'. (pp322).

Not only regarding the above, there is detailed description of the conduct of the king and his family, including all the palace intrigues, in the text. The important point is this: in *Arthashastra*, both the king and the people are subject to overarching *dharma*, while according to Machiavelli, in a historical context, there is no such *dharma* to which the rulers as well as the ruled are subject. For Chanakya, both the ruler and the ruled are accountable to a religious *dharma*, which has its provenance and bearings in the supernatural reality. For Machiavelli, such a supernatural *dharma* is already destroyed by the society by his time. Chanakya, owing to his historical context does not think beyond the *Hindu dharmic* historical context.

When it comes to the *Hindu dharma*, it is the hierarchical *chaturvarna* system consisting of *brahmin*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya*, and *shudra* castes. There is no mention of sub-castes or *jati* system which seems to be a later offshoot. Also, there is no mention of *ati-sudra* or the so-called outcaste people,

who later came to be described as *harijans*, and today are known as Dalits. There appears to be slavery in Chanakya's time and there is a detailed account of slavery and bonded labour in the *Arthashastra*.

Arthashastra is a text about a centralised bureaucratic state. The text does not deal with *Ganarajyas*, or decentralised people's republics. The text does deal with *Janapadas*, villages and village administration. But this is done as part of a larger empire. They are indeed largely self-governing but are vertically and hierarchically integrated into the larger kingdom. The entire focus is not on decentralisation, but on a centralised bureaucratic empire, hence, the focus on bureaucracy.

The major difference between Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Chanakya's *Arthashastra* is that the prince that Machiavelli intends to advise is at best amoral; whereas the king that Chanakya is intending to advise is bound by the rules of a larger *dharma* that governs the moral, physical, and even cosmic universe.

The major lesson to learn from both, for today, is that of the ethics of governance. There is relative absence of ethics of governance, other than the ethics of expediency in Machiavelli. Chanakya has written overwhelmingly within the Hindu religious ethics. If both have anything to teach for today, it would be ethics in governance. For Chanakya, *dharma* is above the king; for Machiavelli, prince is above all *dharma*.

Bygone *Rajas* and Transformed Dharma: The *Arthashastra* Today

To look for the relevance of these thinkers depends not only on their texts and how we read them. It also depends on today's context. It also depends on who is reading, when, where, to reiterate, the context of reading a text. We live in a context of modernity, wherein the ideas of equality, liberty and freedom are predominant. Modern governance is geared to meet these needs. This 'modernity' which championed the ideas and values of equality, liberty and freedom, justice and rights for individuals and the entire way of viewing society from the lens of individual, inalienable rights, originated in Europe. As we said in the beginning, Europe has, indeed, evolved since Machiavelli and the political ideas mentioned above and the ideas of democratic equality, liberty and freedom and justice had evolved in Europe too. This took place in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, concomitant with the development of enlightenment, development of modern science and scientific rationality, and eventually in terms of the political revolution in France in 1789, and the industrial revolution in Britain. Hobsbawm, for example, uses industrialisation as a barometer for being modern, and modernity. Machiavelli's political thought was only a beginning of the amoral, or ethically neutral ('value free'), political ideas and political rule. The evolution of Europe in the above-mentioned lines also meant that the scientific and organisational rationalities thus evolved overtime have strengthened Europe to conquer and colonise the non-European people and civilisations. And the story since Machiavelli is the story of the world history of progress, as well as colonisation. Now, therefore, it is both. There was certainly progress, associated with modern science, ideas of equality, liberty, justice and individual rights along with material, economic development (the modern science of political economy, and since then ever more sophisticated technical economics, is a product of Scottish Enlightenment); there was at the same time, on the other hand, colonisation and 'development of under development'. The progress part of the story of modernity is as important as the colonisation part of the story of modernity.

To come to our point: to read the ancient text of *Arthashastra* in modern times, we need to recollect this history. The ideas of modernity, mentioned above, do militate against the ideas of, for example, the hierarchical system of caste. The Hindu hierarchy of caste *dharma* and the entire question of religious *dharma* itself is under question. This may, indeed, be a difficult question for oriental societies, both Hindu and Islamic. Modern societies, formed of individuals and constitutive of institutions founded on modern principles find the question of religious *dharma* difficult to deal with.

Therefore, modern democracy militates against monarchic rule, unless it is a constitutional monarchy; modern notions of social equality and historical justice, militate against caste as a historically given, hierarchical social order; and modern notions of gender equality militate against pre-modern notions of androcentric family and society. Thus, therefore, we need to be cautious, and extremely careful, with what we are taking from the texts of the past and what is that we are leaving out? Therefore, what is living and what is dead in the text of *Arthashastra* that speaks to our modern political and moral condition?

There are two other problems with *Arthashastra* as a philosophical text. One, in the modern world, the ancient *dharma* is replaced by rule of law, that is, rule by *modern law* and *equality before law*. The latter which follows modern precepts such as individual rights, right to equality, and above all, rule of law and equality before law. Second problem with reading *Arthashastra* is, the modern societies—including Indian society—are extremely complex multi-cultural societies. However, the practice of modern democracy has to be deliberative, and this involves horizontal negotiation of differences between social groups rather than hierarchical dispersal of orders. We have already pointed to the problems associated with social hierarchy; thus, these are, problems within mono-cultural societies. Reading a text written in strictly Hindu India, in times post-Islamic and post-colonial, is fraught with difficulties. Thus, *Arthashastra* only addresses the problems of a predominantly mono-cultural society: the Hindu society—the text's problem is with political and social order and economic welfare within caste-Hindu society, whereas in multi-cultural societies, we would also certainly have more complex social, political and economic problems than those portrayed in the *Arthashastra*.

What is more interesting is, writing in ancient India, Chanakya makes the point reminiscent of Marx in the 19th century. That *artha* is the basis of *dharma* as well as *kama*—interestingly this materialist text makes no explicit mention of the pursuit of *moksha*! Therefore, one of the living ideas of *Arthashastra* is that of economy and economic well-being for the welfare of the society. Society is an economic entity, but it is not *only that*!

Can we find democracy in *Arthashastra*? It is true that the king does not rule alone, according to Chanakya. He is advised to have councillors and council of ministers and decision-making is not done unilaterally by the king. There is sufficient dispersal of power within the council of ministers and the large bureaucracy that he describes. However, this is unlike a modern democracy based on universal franchise. The council of ministers or councillors cannot change the king periodically. It is a hereditary monarchical system with *kshatriyas* being the kings and the other, prominently perhaps, brahmins being the advisors to the king. The modern democracy is different though the ancient Indian system may have had elements of democratic decision-making. This, however, does not make the king accountable to people; he is accountable to his *dharma*-- of protecting the people and looking after their welfare. It

is the *dharma* of the people to follow their respective roles in the statecraft; this includes people with a clear duty to obey the king.

There is indeed an extraordinarily elaborate chapter on dissent, revolts and rebellion in the text. This is extraordinary and clearly shows that these were not a new phenomenon in India, and that the royal authority was indeed challenged, if not frequently. And Chanakya equally elaborately writes about the ways to deal with dissent, revolt, and rebellion. The methods are *sama*, *dana*, *bheda* and finally, *dandaneeti* should be applied.

This does not mean the king or the state should harass people. For example, Rangarajan notes the following regarding the state and king in his commentary on *Arthashastra*:

'Power conflicts among members of the royal family [are] worse than civil strife among the people; a decadent king is worse than a decadent people; a favourite queen or mistress of the king causes more damage than a wayward prince; a haughty and rebellious chief destroys life and property more than a rebellious guild. The harassment of an administrator is worse than that of a revenue collector and profiteering traders are worse than corrupt customs officials. It is better to let fallow land be used as pasture than let it be seized by noblemen. Protecting people from robbers is less important than subduing remote forest tribes because the tribes can challenge the authority of the king. A harassing army, even one's own, should be subdued by destroying its leaders. The first preference in relief works is to one's own people. At all times, courageous and wise chiefs should be cherished'. (pp 146-147).

What is the relevance of this comparison for twenty-first century governance? The twenty-first century began with the dissipation of political dreams and utopias. Socialism is still having some steam; but actually existing socialism is active in disproving that. Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm:1994) has shown how the USSR and its bureaucratic state ended up in the phenomenon of *nomenklatura* nightmare. The earlier utopias have been extremely disillusioning vis-à-vis the states they have spawned. However, still, nation-state as an organisation is constant across societies. So, the imperative of people's welfare is constant. In such contexts, we may remember the point made in the beginning that Kautilya and Machiavelli, both had at their heart welfare of people and the strengths of their states to protect them. Combining the welfare of the people with welfare of the states requires elements of statecraft that can be learned from both Kautilya and Machiavelli. Therefore, understanding their moral, philosophical assumptions of human nature may be relevant for the tasks of contemporary governance. For, it can throw light on the morass of corruption in social and political affairs which so strangely is constant across societies, states and times. Further, it provide advice in getting rid of it in the interest of welfare to society.

Finally, after finding all the limitations and difficulties with ancient *dharma*, we need to reflect on the 'pathology of modernity' and the need for some *dharma*, or rules guiding the practical reason and behaviour of rulers, individuals, and social groups and people. Social co-existence is presupposed on such overarching rules. This is particularly the case with modernity; wherein the demands of unlimited economic accumulation, consumption, and individual utility maximisation, severely undermine social cohesion. Also, there are increasing cultural conflicts emanating not only from the flawed rules of economic redistribution, but also of cultural non-recognition. Economic redistribution, or the lack of the same, is extremely significant in modern societies; but in no way does it exhaust the ethical problems

that capitalist modernity brings in its wake. Max Weber who theorised modernity, ended up a pessimist. Durkheim attempted to find solutions to 'anomie'; and Marx to alienation (both of workers and capitalists in a capitalist system, even though the conditions of the latter are better off). It would not be an exaggeration to say that modernity in its capitalist-economic, bureaucratic-organisational and liberal-political forms engenders, or often is likely to result in a social crisis. The question, however, is not whether there is a crisis with modernity; the question is whether ancient dharma can help solve such questions. On the other hand, the modern *dharma*, of legal-rational rules, organisational disciplines and unconstrained economic accumulation and consumption too needs solutions. Thus, answers to the 'pathology of modernity' need a continuous questioning, evaluating and re-evaluating both the received traditions and received modernity.

Despite all the points, Chanakya remains one of the greatest political thinkers the world has produced. The scope, the breadth and the comprehensiveness with which Chanakya deals with his subject matter is simply outstanding. What is so significant is that the modern concept of equality before law – equality before a super arching *dharma*—both for the ruled and rulers – was developed by Chanakya way back in 3rd century BC. The Western thought began to grapple with this only in the modern period. Also, the focus on the significance of economy and economic well-being for the people and states is something that was noted by Kautilya way before the Western theorists recognised the same (Trautmann: 2016). Thus, we should legitimately reclaim the thought of Chanakya and not that of sceptical, amoral thought of Machiavelli.

That said, we should also consider the most challenged aspect of the ancient Indian thought in general and that of Chanakya in particular. That is the *Chaturvarna* system as it formed in the thought and practice in ancient India, and later gradually crystalised in terms of today's caste system. Caste and patriarchal hierarchies are integral parts of the inegalitarian ancient Indian thought and social/political system. Despite the challenge from Buddhism, and Jainism at that time, which continues to challenge caste till today, the political thought of the ancient period has *varna* and patriarchy as the organising principles. These are the two most challenged aspects of the thought today. The modern egalitarian mindset finds them odious. Gray (2020), for instance, shows how to read the pre-modern ancient text such as *Purushasukta* in terms of egalitarian purposes. What Gray's (Gray: 2020) exercise demonstrates is that pre-modern Indian texts should not be dismissed out of consideration by modern social science scholars, rather, it should be read and re-read with modern egalitarian intents as purpose. Otherwise, the burden of the past thought and practice can never be undone for future generations.

Both these thinkers, as mentioned before, developed the thinking on statecraft depending on and as against the thought of the preceding thinkers. They shift the political thought from idealist to a realist version. In the context of Machiavelli from Christian morality to an amoral thought (Skinner:1978, 1981) and in the case of Chanakya from the thinking of earlier predominantly *Brahmanical* religious orientation to more pragmatic thought on governance. Chanakya places *dharma* and king above the *Brahmins* and *Brahmanical* hierarchy. Both do preach expediency in the face of circumstances; however, Machiavelli goes a step further. While for Chanakya, the expediency preached is largely within the matrix of the then prevailing *Vedic/Sanatana/Hindu* dharma. Both the texts, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, by its very title, and Chanakya's *The Arthashastra*, as Trautmann, Mc Clish and Olivelle and Rangarajan's

note, are indeed, primarily royalist texts. As such, they speak, eloquently as they do, about governance from above.

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