Seminar-28

A. Title of the Seminar - Exploring the Concept of Power: A Brief Discussion on Machiavelli

B. Type of the Activity: Seminar on Western Political Thought

C. Organizing Department/Committee - Department of Political Science in Collaboration with IQAC, GGDC CHAPRA.

D. Date of the Activity: 23/03/2023

E. Number of Participants: 29

F. Name of Speakers and their affiliation: Sri Arindam Debnath, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Chakdaha College.

Rabindranagar, Palpara, Chakdaha, Nadia -741222.

G. Flyer:

H. Outcome of the Seminar:

The seminar was conducted successfully by the Department of Political Science, Government General Degree College, Chapra. The students participated in the same with great enthusiasm. They were acquainted with the following concepts and discussions from the seminar,

1. Relatively little is known for certain about Machiavelli's early life in comparison with many important figures of the Italian Renaissance (the following section draws on Capponi 2010; Vivanti 2013; Celenza 2015; Lee 2020) He was born 3 May 1469 in Florence and at a young

age became a pupil of a renowned Latin teacher, Paolo da Ronciglione. It is speculated that he attended the University of Florence, and even a cursory glance at his corpus reveals that he received an excellent humanist education. It is only with his entrance into public view, with his appointment in 1498 as the Second Chancellor of the Republic of Florence, however, that we begin to acquire a full and accurate picture of his life. For the next fourteen years, Machiavelli engaged in a flurry of diplomatic activity on behalf of Florence, traveling to the major centers of Italy as well as to the royal court of France and to the imperial curia of Maximilian.

2. The first of his writings in a more reflective vein was also ultimately the one most commonly associated with his name, The Prince. Penned at the end of 1513 (and perhaps early 1514), but only published posthumously in 1532, The Prince was composed in haste by an author who, among other things, sought to regain his status in Florentine political affairs. (Many of his colleagues in the previous republican government were quickly rehabilitated and returned to service under the Medici.) Originally written for presentation to Giuliano de'Medici (who may well have appreciated it), the dedication was changed, upon Giuliano's death, to Lorenzo de'Medici (the Younger), who almost certainly did not read it when it came into his hands in 1516. Meanwhile, Machiavelli's retirement from politics led him to other literary activities. He wrote verse, plays, and short prose, authored a study of The Art of War (published in 1521), and produced biographical and historical sketches. Most importantly, he composed his other major contribution to political thought, the Discourses on the Ten Books of Titus Livy, an exposition of the principles of republican rule masquerading as a commentary on the work of the famous historian of the Roman Republic. Unlike The Prince, the Discourses was written over a long period of time (commencing perhaps in 1514 or 1515 and completed in 1518 or 1519, although again only published posthumously in 1531). The book may have been shaped by informal discussions attended by Machiavelli among some of the leading Florentine intellectual and political figures under the sponsorship of Cosimo Rucellai. Near the end of his life, and probably as a result of the aid of well-connected friends whom he never stopped badgering for intervention, Machiavelli began to return to the favor of the Medici family. In 1520, he was commissioned by Cardinal Giulio de'Medici to compose a history of Florence (the so-called Florentine Histories), an assignment completed in 1525 and presented to the Cardinal, who had since ascended to the papal throne as Clement VII, in Rome. Other small tasks were forthcoming from the Medici government, but before the opportunity arose for him to return fully to public life, he died on 21 June 1527.

3. Traditionally, political philosophers of the past posited a special relationship between moral goodness and legitimate authority. Many authors (especially those who composed mirror-of-princes books or royal advice books during the Middle Ages and Renaissance) believed that the use of political power was only rightful if it was exercised by a ruler whose personal moral character was strictly virtuous. Thus rulers were counseled that if they wanted to succeed—that is, if they desired a long and peaceful reign and aimed to pass their office down to their heirs—they must be sure to behave in accordance with conventional ethical standards, that is, the virtues and piety. In a sense, it was thought that rulers did well when they did good; they earned the right to be obeyed and respected on account of their moral and religious rectitude.

4. Machiavelli criticized at length precisely this moralistic view of authority in his best-known treatise, The Prince. For Machiavelli, there is no moral basis on which to judge the difference between legitimate and illegitimate uses of power. Rather, authority and power are essentially coequal: whoever has power has the right to command; but goodness does not ensure power

and the ruler has no more authority on account of being good. Thus, in direct opposition to morally derived theories of politics, Machiavelli says that the only real concern in politics is the acquisition and maintenance of power (although he talks less about power per se than about "maintaining the state"). In this sense, Machiavelli presents a trenchant criticism of the concept of authority by arguing that the notion of legitimate rights of rulership adds nothing to the actual possession of power. The Prince purports to reflect the self-conscious political realism of an author who is fully aware—on the basis of direct experience in the service of the Florentine government—that goodness and right are not sufficient to win and maintain political supremacy. Machiavelli thus seeks to learn and teach the rules of political power. For him, it necessary for any successful ruler to know how to use power effectively. Only by means of its proper application, Machiavelli believes, can individuals be brought to obey and will the ruler be able to maintain the state in safety and security.

5. Machiavelli's political theory, then, excludes issues of moral authority and legitimacy from consideration in the discussion of political decision-making and political judgment. Nowhere does this come out more clearly than in his treatment of the relationship between law and force. Machiavelli acknowledges that good laws and good arms constitute the dual foundations of a well-ordered political system. But he immediately adds that since coercion creates legality, he will concentrate his attention on force. He says, "Since there cannot be good laws without good arms, I will not consider laws but speak of arms" (Prince CW 47). In other words, valid law rests entirely upon the threat of coercive force; authority is impossible for Machiavelli as a right apart from the power to enforce it. Machiavelli is led to conclude that fear is always preferable to affection in subjects, just as violence and deception are superior to legality in effectively controlling them.

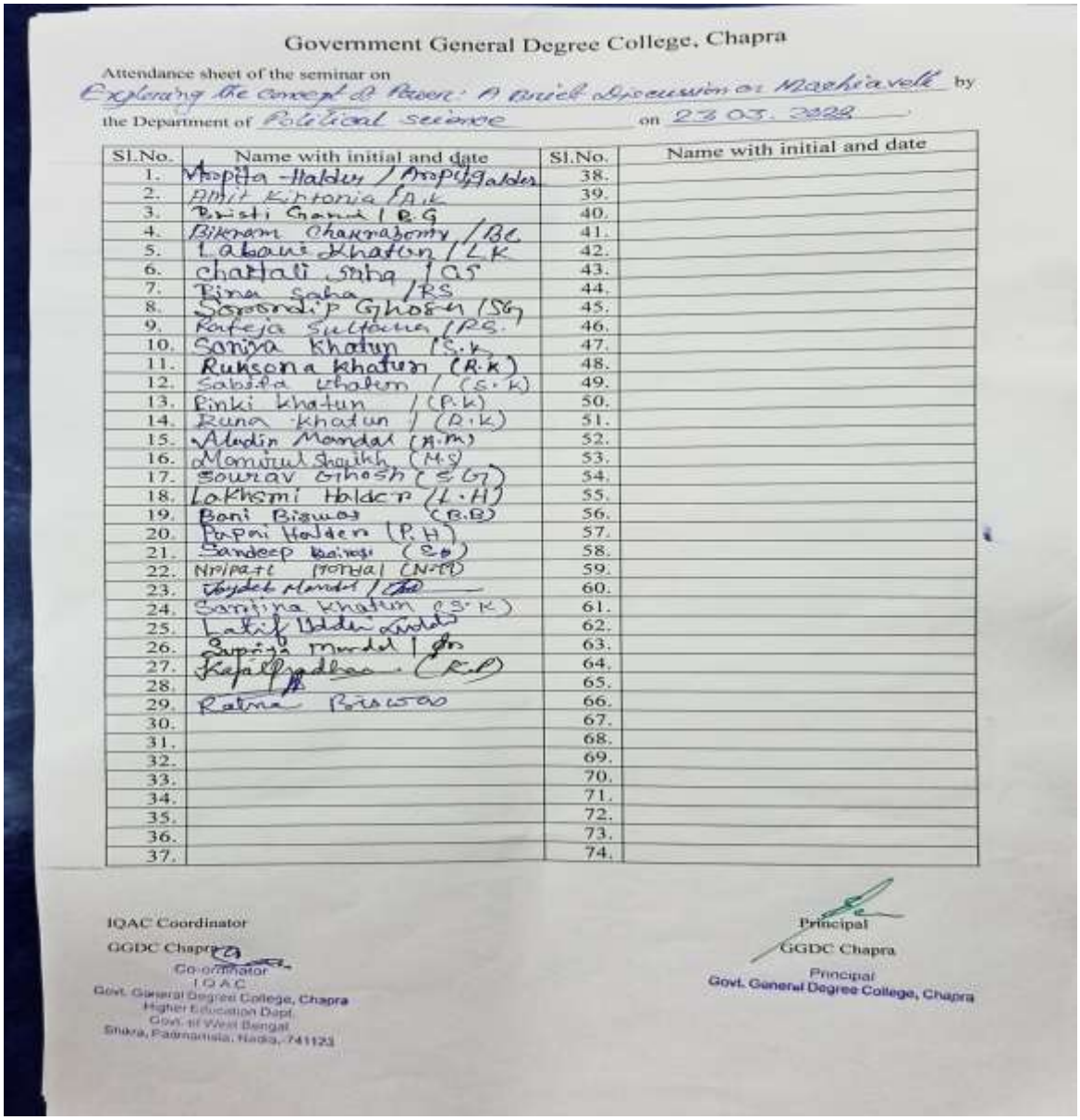
6. Machiavelli cannot really be said to have a theory of obligation separate from the imposition of power; people obey only because they fear the consequences of not doing so, whether the loss of life or of privileges. And of course, power alone cannot bind one, inasmuch as obligation is voluntary and assumes that one can meaningfully do otherwise. Someone can choose not to obey only if he possesses the power to resist the ruler or is prepared to risk the consequences of the state's superiority of coercive force.

7. Machiavelli's argument in The Prince is thus designed to demonstrate that politics can only properly be defined in terms of the effective employment of coercive power, what Yes Winter (2018) has termed "the orders of violence." Authority as a right to command has no independent status. He substantiates this assertion by reference to the observable realities—historical and contemporary—of political affairs and public life as well as by arguments revealing the self-interested tendencies of all human conduct. For Machiavelli it is meaningless and futile to speak of any claim to the authority to command detached from the possession of superior political power. The ruler who lives by his supposed rights alone will surely wither and die by those same rights, because in the rough-and-tumble of political conflict those who prefer power to authority are more likely to succeed. Without exception the authority of states and their laws will never be acknowledged when they are not supported by a show of power which renders obedience inescapable.

8. Machiavelli presents to his readers a vision of political rule allegedly purged of extraneous moralizing influences and fully aware of the foundations of politics in the effective exercise of power. The methods for achieving obedience are varied and depend heavily upon the foresight

that the prince exercises. Hence, the successful ruler needs special training. The term that best captures Machiavelli's vision of skill that must be learned in order to engage successfully in power politics is virtù. While the Italian word would normally be translated into English as "virtue", and would ordinarily convey the conventional connotation of moral goodness, Machiavelli obviously means something very different when he refers to the virtù of the prince. In particular, Machiavelli employs the concept of virtù to refer to the range of personal qualities that the prince will find it necessary to acquire in order to "maintain his state" and to "achieve great things", the two standard markers of power for him. This makes it brutally clear there can be no equivalence between the conventional virtues and Machiavellian virtù. Machiavelli's sense of what it is to be a person of virtù can thus be summarized by his recommendation that the prince above all else must possess a "flexible disposition". That ruler is best suited for office, on Machiavelli's account, who is capable of varying her/his conduct from good to evil and back again "as fortune and circumstances dictate".

I. Attendance of the Seminar:



Government General Degree College, Chapra

Attendance sheet of the seminar on Exploring the concept of Power: A brief discussion on Machiavelli by the Department of Political science on 23.03.2022

Sl.No.	Name with initial and date	Sl.No.	Name with initial and date
1.	Prapita Halder / Prapita Halder	38.	
2.	Amit Kirtonia / A.K	39.	
3.	Bristi Ganai / B.G	40.	
4.	Bikram Chakraborty / BC	41.	
5.	Labani Khatun / L.K	42.	
6.	Chaitali Saha / CS	43.	
7.	Rina Saha / RS	44.	
8.	Sayoni Ghosh / SG	45.	
9.	Rafeja Sultana / RS	46.	
10.	Sanjna Khatun / S.K	47.	
11.	Ruksona Khatun (R.K)	48.	
12.	Sabiha Khatun / (S.K)	49.	
13.	Pinki Khatun / (P.K)	50.	
14.	Runa Khatun / (R.K)	51.	
15.	Aludin Mondal (A.M)	52.	
16.	Mamirul Sheikh (M.S)	53.	
17.	Sourav Ghosh (S.G)	54.	
18.	Lakhsmi Halder (L.H)	55.	
19.	Boni Biswas (B.B)	56.	
20.	Papai Halder (P.H)	57.	
21.	Sandeep Bairagi (S.B)	58.	
22.	Nripati Mohal (N.M)	59.	
23.	Sayded Mandal /	60.	
24.	Sanjina Khatun (S.K)	61.	
25.	Latif Halder	62.	
26.	Supriya Mandal /	63.	
27.	Kajal Sadhan (K.S)	64.	
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29.	Ratna Biswas	66.	
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J . Photographs of the Programme: