
A CRITICAL STUDY OF WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT AND SHRIDHAR'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Abstract: This paper explores the notions of Sovereignty, the sovereign and state in the three volumes of Shridhar Murthy's aka Agni Shridhar's autobiography. Western thoughts till recently, opine that the state has no sovereign power and the latter is a feature of the ancient territories. The paper proves otherwise arguing that the sovereign forces and power do coexist in the modern state. Drawing upon Michel Foucault, Roberto Esposito and Giorgio Agamben, the paper is an attempt to understand the political natures of the modern state and how the sovereign figures alter the ideas of the laws.

Keywords: Sovereignty, Sovereign, State and Laws.

Introduction: The late nineteenth and early twentieth century political philosophy of France throws light on the foundations of political economy, power and the formation of state and territory. If this period discovers a revolutionary path in understanding the western history for over eighteen hundred years and it also provides space for the scholars to analyze the political histories of their continents. A wide range of scholars deeply immersed in the interdisciplinary studies bring forth their observations related to the transition of the political power from the sovereign to the state, territory and law. Michel Foucault sows the seed to reap a whole new political philosophy for the Europe that is later on developed by other philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari.

This paper makes an attempt to explain and evaluate the western political concepts of sovereignty in the context of *Dadagiriya Dinagalu* a three volume autobiography by Shridhar Murthy, a former editor of the Kannada weekly Agni. This autobiography provides spine chilling details of the murders, law, legality and the spread of anti-law forces across Karnataka and their influence upon the legal conditions of the state. *Dadagiriya....*as an autobiography reveals significant parts of Shridhar's life in the world of Bengaluru's crime universe. He starts as a Law graduate aspiring to become a civil servant. Accidentally, he knocks the doors of crime and succumbs to its labyrinths to an extent that he fails to distinguish between the worlds of crime and justice. He is accused of murdering, a dreaded criminal and made to spend many years in jail. His experiences question the idea of the state and its sovereignty, existence of law that protects the state and its citizens. The three volumes in which his life is unraveled tell us the paradox of the sovereign forces existing in the modern states and law and thereby create an enigma of sorts about the very idea of order and rule in the state.

“The Sovereign....” questions and explores the differences between the sovereign and state. Foucault thinks that the sovereign precedes the state. This paper argues that the state and the sovereign do coexist as a modern day phenomenon and these sovereign figures do exist questioning, resisting and supporting the state. This paper first explains the sovereign and sovereignty and then relates it to the autobiography of Shridhar Murthy.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the etymological root of the word to the Anglo-Norman *sovereynete* which means the “quality or condition of being sovereign” (OED). The words sovereign and sovereignty are related to Greek word *Kurios* which means lord, God or the supreme authority and confirmation. The etymological relations of the word sovereignty to *Kurios* are discussed by R G Mulgan in his book. He traces the meaning of the word sovereignty to power relations. Aristotle’s usage of the word determines how a group of subjects is related to an individual and in the ways in which the latter is responsible for the former.

Most of the arguments about authority, territory and sovereignty respond to Aristotle’s *Politics*. Contrary to the general claims of political philosophy, according to Agamben and Esposito, the state is not a different political entity from sovereignty. The basic function of the state and sovereignty is similar and that is locating life in the political domain and ensuring a good life to the subjects. What differentiates the state from the sovereign form of governance is that the state locates the domestic and private life of its subjects in the political domain. For Foucault, sovereignty represents a different form of governance which is in contrast to the state and its governance. Hence, sovereignty and its power functions stand counter to the state and its biopolitical mode of governance.

Foucault analyzes sovereignty as a form of governance which has limited role to play in the lives of its subjects. A sovereign is related to his subjects as the latter have rested their rights with him. His role, according to Foucault, is more about protecting his territory, the subjects and his throne (power). He punishes those who transgress his words and pose threat to his throne. But the modern state, according to Foucault is the result of the European Enlightenment, has more roles to play. Its role is not limited to security of the state but to ensure a good life to its subjects. He observes in his first volume of the *History of Sexuality* that the modern state emerges by politicizing life itself (*zoē*). If ancient forms of governance aim at the objectification of people, the modern state, Foucault says, the state subjectivizes its citizens. The sovereign was a sole representative of power and held the rights of his subjects but in the context of the modern state the power mechanism is not coercive and works in the form of “network”. The state deploys its power through various mechanisms and controls its subjects in terms of a population.

Foucault delineates how modern power is different from that of the sovereign’s. The modern state exerts power over the subjects only by considering them within the bounds of a territory. But the only way a subject is recognized by the state is as part of a population, and not as an individual.

In his first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault uses the word “deduction” (Foucault 138) to encapsulate the function of sovereignty. Foucault postulates a form of ruling that relies on exercising control over the subjects’ economic, social and political activities. One of the important functions of the sovereign is to decide on the life and death situations of those who have

transgressed the sovereign rules and considered to be a threat to his existence. The power over life and death of his subjects rests with the sovereign. The sovereign exercises his power by pardoning or taking the lives of the condemned subjects.

Corporal punishment was one of the techniques that always displayed the power of sovereignty. Foucault places the sovereign form system of punishment in contrast to the development of the prison system in the sixteenth century Europe. His analysis brings out the differences in the intention of governance between a sovereign and a state. The Body had no meaning except being an object for a sovereign whereas for a state it is the domain where politics and life meet. Hence, modern democracies concentrate on individuals in order to build a healthy population.

Disciplinary and security mechanisms are central to the power functions of sovereignty and state. The western historical, political and social causes led to the declension of the sovereignty and the emergence of the state and this transformation has its impact on the mechanisms of governance. There is no way of thinking about the mechanisms without considering the history of sovereignty and the state because they serve to secure the integrity of the state and its sovereignty.

Michel Foucault writes at length on disciplinary and security mechanisms and observes that they depend on the nature of sovereignty and the state. In general both are techniques of power and its manifestation is visible in the lives of the subjects. As techniques these mechanisms go on reproducing the intent of the sovereign and the state. The mechanisms concentrate on the lives of the subjects and are deployed on the bodies of the subjects. The nature of the technique is also dependent on the mode of governance. For example, the sovereign employed disciplinary techniques since his power was limited to grant life or death. On the other hand, the state uses the combination of the two mechanisms as its focus is a large mass called population.

The sovereign's function is to decide on the life and death of the subjects and his role becomes prominent in any situation that poses a threat to his principality. He is responsible for his subjects and territory. Hence, the lives of the subjects are always in the hands of the sovereign and the latter's function as Foucault says is to "take life or let live" (241).

The sovereign function operates with the help of a mechanism called discipline. The main 'object' of this technique is the body and it functions towards making human beings more efficient, yet subservient to the authority. Briefly, discipline as a mechanism operates to make human beings docile so as to increase their utility for the needs of the state. The disciplinary mechanisms adopt strict regimes directed at the body. It requires an enclosed space for its operation where the subjects feel alienated from the normal conditions of society. Certain mechanisms are imposed on the body and the subjects are made to practice the method repeatedly. The adoption of the disciplinary mechanism depends on maintaining timetables and recurring patterns which creates a linearity of time and action. A series of actions are created to politically intervene into the lives of the people. Discipline excludes those who fail to comply with its set standards of normalcy. Both mechanisms proliferate these norms and they become societal values unacknowledged by laws but that demand human beings to comply with them.

The politics of sovereignty is deployed on the human body because it considers beings as passive agents to be ascribed values by the authorities. All the measures that the technique adopts not only try to increase the economic efficiency and productivity of human beings but also try to reduce the costs of the state.

On the other hand, security mechanisms without supplanting disciplinary techniques, by permeating the latter, take on a new form. This new mechanism concentrates on human beings not as individuals but in terms of population. Human beings as a species become very important for this mechanism. Security therefore functions as a disciplinary mechanism but at a different level. It aims at normalizing the society not by imposition but by making human beings themselves conscious of who they are.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault gives an historical account of how disciplinary mechanisms manifest themselves within the political structure of the society. Foucault's book explores the penal forms changed from the context of sovereignty to the modern state. According to him the aims, goals and intentions of the sovereign's penal measures are different from that of the states'. In the context of sovereignty, the penal forms concentrated the body and they were very much related to corporeal suffering. And the penal forms of the sovereign aimed to take revenge against the subjects who challenge his power and transgressed the laws. The corporeal punishments were often awarded to the convicts in the public in order to assert sovereignty. Foucault uses the word "theatricality" to analyze the penal form of the sovereign form of governance. The suspect is subjected to certain forms of corporeal punishments in a public space. The executioner is the representative of the sovereign's power and tries to establish the truth that the suspect has violated the sovereign's law. An audience always constituted an important part of the punishment. Penal forms of the sovereign had two intentions—the public display of torture (the torture was defined as pain inflicted on the body of the condemned) and to display the authority of the sovereign. Foucault observes that torture was like a test to the convict where he was freed if he successfully resists it.

The sovereign's penal forms were not only the ways of punishing the suspect but a way of knowing the truth. But the penal forms significantly changed during the course of time for many reasons. The public display of torture was intended to assert the sovereign's power but the suspect became a heroic figure. The subjects (audience) of the public display of punishment, as Foucault observes, often tried to free the suspect. These changes led the sovereign to introduce different forms of investigation and punishment. There was also much opposition to the public display of punishment and a demand to introduce humane form of punishment.

Foucault's analysis is highly relevant to understand any political economy's condition in terms of punishment and crime. He has also thrown light on the changes that occurred in the penal forms over the centuries. Contrary to these views, Shridhar's autobiography proves that even in the modern state the penal forms are a little primitive and also sovereign forces do exist thus blurring the boundaries of lawfulness and lawlessness.

Shridhar's autobiography encompasses his confessions to everything that he did in his life for over three decades. To summarize his early life and his tryst with the anti social elements, Shridhar hails

from a humble background in the rural sides of Bengaluru. His family depends on agriculture for a living with a few of his relatives to be working in the various local government offices. He pursues law and later on shifts to Delhi with an aspiration to become a civil servant. His dreams are marred by when he fails to clear the mains exams and returns to Bengaluru only to know that his brother was beaten up by an anti social element called Kotwal. This incident angers Shridhar and having a very impressionistic mind he decides to knock every legal way to punish the culprit but his efforts go in vain. He teams up with several anti social elements and other commoners who are affected by Kotwal to end his life.

This marks the entry of Shridhar into the underworld and the world of anti social elements. He finds a suitable rival in Jayaraj, and joins hands with several others and murders Kotwal. After this heinous crime, Shridhar is on the run till the police arrest all of them. He spends two years in jail and then released due to the lack of evidence. This crime doesn't end Shridhar's life in the underworld and he continues to involve in criminal activities like blackmailing, kidnapping and threatening people. Jayaraj is later killed by rival groups and slowly Shridhar joins hands with Muttappa Rai, another anti social element who ruled the underworld forces for a longer period of time after the death of Jayaraj.

Shridhar's tryst with the underworld opens the doors to the politics of Karnataka and there he meets several of the politicians and helps them in handling several issues. Shridhar after spending several years in the underworld reforms by starting a Kannada weekly Agni that gets highest circulation for several years. What accompanied Shridhar in his journey through the allies of the underworld is his reading habit. Now, apart from running the paper and online channels, he writes on the literary history of Karnataka and Quantum Physics.

The above paragraphs narrate his life linearly but his life spans in the three volumes of the autobiography. His life has dealt with law, crime, criminals, the police and politicians. Narrated experiences raise several questions in the readers' mind and also help to understand the observations done by several western philosophers. Shridhar's narration throws a lot of challenges to the laws. The described events are unlawful yet do not come under the purview of the legality. At the same time, the volumes are full of several sovereign figures that try to control and alter the rules of the state.

Shridhar gives an account of the disciplinary mechanisms that are deployed by the state in the societies to normalize citizens according to the rules. In fact he studies law which is in itself a mechanism to make people succumb to the rules and laws. But, the same state has prisons which are in the name of imposing disciplines but in Shridhar's account they are the store houses of evil forces,

Most importantly, a judgment lies on the investigation of the evidence....During the investigation, an evidence gets its validation only when the witness reiterates the incidence that way it has been recorded in the charge sheet. If he denies the recorded statements, the charge sheet of the police loses its relevance. It helps the accused (68).

and he clearly states that the right and wrong are proved by the statements given by the witnesses and the statements may not be truthful. He spends pages after pages to describe how law itself

denies justice to victims. In fact, despite confessing to murdering the dreaded criminal Shridhar himself is not subjected to severe punishment.

Shridhar has spent time with underworld figures, first with Kotwal, then Jayaraj and Muttappa Rai all having close affinities with politics and illegal activities. These three represent the sovereign figures of the ancient territories. Kotwal during his times controlled half of Bengaluru's illegal activities with the support of politicians and a few from the police force. His activities run parallel to the state's administration and as Foucault says he exercised the "right to decide upon life" (Foucault 65). He is killed by Shridhar with the help of other anti social elements only to become the sovereigns. Kotwal, who himself a sovereign figure is killed by other sovereign figures to exercise the right over life and death. For several years, with Jayaraj, Shridhar exercises the power to end life and escape the shackles of legal rules.

Presence of these sovereign figures always alters the function of the state and also challenges the existence of law. Hence, the sovereign is also a modern state phenomenon always in tussle with the state.

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