

# Can the Algorithm Speak for India? Bias, Representation and Postcolonial Power in Algorithmic Texts

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## Abstract

Due to expeditious augmentation in algorithmic and AI-generated texts, language production has drastically relocated from human authorship to mechanised systems, in terms of knowledge generation, representation, and cultural authority. Generally understood as aloof and non-aligned, algorithmic texts actively take part in the formation of histories, identity, society and how it should be comprehended by the masses. This research article studies mechanised textuality through the prism of postcolonial theory, with particular reference to India. This paper elucidates how the algorithmic texts influence and reproduce colonial and postcolonial sense of representation, implying the concepts of subalternity and epistemic violence by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Michel Foucault's concept of power and knowledge, and Ranajit Guha's views on elite historiography. When it comes to India, algorithmic discourse often favours Anglophone, elite, urban and upper-class narratives while pushing the marginalized voices framed by caste, class, religion, gender, and language to the periphery. This study sheds light on the fact that digital technologies nurture the long-standing ideologies of the older regime and extend that dominance to the present. Therefore, it is wise to consume algorithmic discourses as cultural and literary texts instead of purely technical artefacts. The paper also urges how these mechanised systems reinforce the idea of epistemic violence by not giving space to non-elite voices. It even raises ethical concerns for representation, power, and knowledge in post-colonial societies like India.

**Keywords:** subaltern, algorithm, postcolonial, representation, digitalization, ideology

## Introduction:

Due to a significant surge in technical advancement, contemporary society is witnessing an anomalous reliance on algorithmic systems to produce, regiment, and disseminate texts. In every walk of life, be it news briefing and translations to ingenious writing, pedagogical apparatus, and academic support, algorithmic texts have invaded territories conventionally monitored by human authorship. Despite their puissance to shape public discourse and understanding, these texts are often labelled as efficacious, impartial, and objective- immune to surmounting human prejudices and ideological limitations.

This paper confronts such a dichotomy by contending that algorithmic texts must be studied as the byproduct of power structures, especially within postcolonial contexts. At first glance, AI texts look

innocent and nonaligned with historical, cultural, and ideological forces. Rigorous scrutiny of such texts illuminates the fact that they are fed on immense corpora of human-generated archives, shaped by power relations. As Michel Foucault asserts, "power and knowledge directly imply one another" (Foucault 27). For Foucault, discourse is a system that propagates knowledge and reigns over truth. Such is the case with mechanised systems, which not only assess the information for cultural, historical, and public purposes but also vigorously pitch in the production of meaning.

The paper poses a simple yet thought-provoking question: Can the algorithm speak for India? More critically, it aims to dissect whose India is represented in algorithmic texts and whose voices remain unheard or distorted. Do these automated systems aptly showcase the complexities of subaltern India related to caste, communal strains, linguistic plurality, and gender-stereotypes?

This study examines algorithmic discourse through the lens of postcolonial theory and literary studies, analysing bias, representation, and power in algorithmic writings, and contending that they perpetuate epistemic inequalities and invalidate subaltern experiences.

### **Text's role as Cultural Artefacts:**

The domain of literary studies treats narratives as cultural artefacts, deeply embedded in historical, political, and discursive conditions. Roland Barthes' postulation of the "death of the author" focuses more on the self-referential power of language, therefore negating the authorial intention. Algorithmic discourse has shifted it further by eliminating human authorship. Interestingly, the absence of a human author does not entitle it to be liberated from ideology. Algorithms depend on the existing oeuvres, which are enforced by dominant knowledge structures. As Safiya Umoja Noble said, "algorithms are not neutral... they reflect the values of the societies that build them" (Noble 1).

From a Foucauldian lens, algorithmic texts function as discursive formations. They dictate what can be said, thought, and understood to achieve legitimacy. For Foucault, discourse is "the thing for which and by which there is struggle" (Foucault 216). Therefore, algorithmic texts must be studied as sovereign sites where power is exercised and contested. When such discourses are practised on postcolonial societies like India, they echo the elite perspective and intensify subaltern silence.

### **Representing "India": Algorithmic Discourse and Digital Orientalism:**

The mechanised portrayal of India often presents a set of recurring narratives heavily dominated by Western, colonial-era perspectives: a rapidly developing digital economy, a place of ancient spirituality, diversity, excessive conventionality, and poverty. Though true to an extent, these representations are terribly selective and render apolitical.

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism seems climactic here as he elaborates, "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 3). In the era of digitalisation, Orientalism includes not only colonial authority and Western intellectuals, but it is also reproduced through datasets, heavily influenced by Anglophone elitism, and institutionally sanctioned texts. To disguise India as a homogeneous entity, Algorithmic discourse frequently erodes internal conflicts of casteism, class, sexualism, and religion. Digital Orientalism showcases these conflicts in the guise of cultural descriptions and narratives of harmony or development, thereby curbing dominant ideologies.

To dive deep, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's quintessential essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" provocatively claims, "The subaltern cannot speak", which does not indicate literal muteness but systematic exclusion. Their voices render unintelligible because Western knowledge systems reinforce

epistemic violence by not writing about the non-elite experience. The case further worsens because algorithmic discourse feeds on the carcass of digital archives ruled by elite ideology.

In the Indian context, epistemic violence is quite evident in the algorithmic image of caste, which is often termed as an ancient social hierarchy to justify recent atrocities rather than systems of violence by authority. Dr B. R. Ambedkar's assertion, "Caste is not a division of labour; it is a division of labourers", aptly reflects this understanding. Everyday caste mishaps like manual scavenging, honour killings, educational exclusion, and digital discrimination are pushed to the edge, which render them mute as well as systematically unheard.

This algorithmic mediation of Indian historiography is harshly criticised by Ranjit Guha, by arguing, "The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism" (Guha 1). Guha contends that national history marginalised the subaltern and peasants' experiences while prioritising elite leadership. Algorithmic texts cater to the elite perspectives by reproducing policy documents, academic publications, and mainstream journalism, while excluding subaltern archives such as oral histories, protest literature, and Dalit autobiographies.

The literary oeuvre of writers such as Omprakash Valmiki, Aravind Adiga, Baburao Bagul, Bama, and Baby Kamble is underrepresented in algorithmic corpora, despite their focus on marginalized sections of society. Consequently, algorithmic representations of India mirror what Guha identifies as the exclusion of "the politics of the people" from authoritative knowledge systems.

### **Language, English, and Algorithmic Linguistic Hierarchies in India:**

Language exudes a strong impression in postcolonial power. In the Indian context, English has been associated with elite status and institutional authority. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's observation is strikingly accurate: "The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised" (Thiong'o 16).

In the wake of the English language's global reach, all the crucial tasks are carried out in it. Therefore, algorithmic systems also prefer English-language data, accompanied by a handful of standardised Indian languages. Numerous regional languages, such as Punjabi, Maithili, Marathi, Haryanvi, etc., are rendered strategically peripheral. The masses are focusing more on the inculcation of English, which is distancing them from their native roots. The very soul of subaltern expression, oral traditions and folk narratives, remains largely invisible and selectively ignored to accentuate elite ideology.

### **Gender, Algorithmic Representation, and the Postcolonial Indian Woman:**

As a woman, it is difficult to be heard in a male-dominated society, where each aspect of society acts according to his will. Algorithmic representations of Indian Women showcase them as men wanted them to be. They are often portrayed as meek, fragile, devoid of individuality, and traditional. Their mechanised representations echo a sense of struggle between two extremes: the empowered, learned urban and the subjugated prey of tradition. This bipartite reverberates colonial tropes identified by Spivak, where the postcolonial woman is "saved" by modernity but never allowed epistemic agency. Spivak writes, "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 297).

Algorithmic discourses have modified this trope instead of dismantling it. It has shifted women from the tribal, labour class, and rural backgrounds to the edge, where they are scarcely viewed as speaking subjects. Their woeful cries of atrocities like labour, gendered violence, and resistance are expurgated through media reports, legal and NGO discourses. Conversely, an algorithmic compendium of women's

issues in India often gyrate around the jurisdictional amendments, urban feminism, and the empowerment of middle-class narratives. As a result, the narratives of ASHA workers, house helpers, agrarian women, and factory workers remain distant and unheard. This corroborates what Chandra Talpade Mohanty posits: the formation of the “Third World woman” as a singular, uniform figure (Under Western Eyes) through the erasure of difference and resistance.

### **Algorithmic Governance, Digital India, and Data Colonialism:**

Every country is utilising its digital resources for global outreach, and this aspect becomes crucial for developing countries as well. India has also taken some initiatives, like Digital India, Aadhaar, and online welfare platforms, to embrace digital governance. These digital initiatives play a pivotal role in mediating citizenship. On the surface, these systems are framed as panoramic and coherent, but often end in structural exclusion. Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias envisage this procedure as data colonialism: “Colonialism did not end; it was transformed into a new form of appropriation” (Couldry and Mejias 7).

In India, digital governance and algorithmic executive systems recurrently eliminate those without stable access to technology, like itinerant labourers, poor rustic people, aged people, and the illiterate. Though India often celebrates its technological advancement in algorithmic corpora, these omissions are scarcely acknowledged.

### **Algorithmic Canon Formation and Indian English Literature:**

Due to the advancement of technology, most of the people are availing and are influenced by recommendations from online platforms. These algorithmic patterns attack the literary visibility of the masses and therefore contribute to the canon formation. Search tools, recommendation systems, and AI-produced compendiums figure out which Indian texts to be read, cited, and acquainted with.

Indian writers such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie are heavily featured by recurring recommendations, therefore, giving little or no space to Dalit, Adivasi, and regional authors. The masses get exposure to a handful of canonical writers, which reflects what Pierre Bourdieu posits as the cultural capital ingrained in the literary setup. Thus, Mechanised systems actively participate in the formation of what could be stated as digital canonization, intensifying elite literary arrays under the disguise of receptiveness.

As Foucault asserts, “Each society has its regime of truth” (Foucault 131). Identically, algorithmic systems are expeditiously acquiring a central position in that regime.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, this paper gives critical insights into how the post-colonial societies are represented and carries the older ideologies into the present with the help of algorithmic discourse. In the wake of digitalization, it is not possible to avoid dependency on technological outputs. They have the tendency to solidify ideological beliefs rather than dismantle them. The algorithm does not speak for India; it speaks for the powerful and elite strata of society, rendering the subaltern systematically invisible. Elite ideology is being reinforced in everyday life, and algorithmic discourses are just consuming this data whereby privileging ideological dominance. This epistemic violence is so ingrained that, without active participation, it is impossible to get rid of it.

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