

“Digital Authoritarianism in India: AI and the Erosion of Protest Rights”

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Abstract

In the modern democracy, artificial intelligence is not just a tool for progress but an instrument of curtailing rights and establishing political authority. This paper critically examines how AI-fed surveillance is restructuring the state-citizen correspondence. By fetching data from interdisciplinary theories and case studies like anti-CAA protests, the farmers' protest, the Agnipath protests, and crises in Kashmir and Manipur, this study throws light on digital authoritarian regimes within democratic setup.

This paper examines the tactics through which the Indian state uses data profiling, internet shutdowns, predictive policing, and face recognition technology to curb, and delegitimize dissent, particularly hampering vulnerable group identities. Moreover, it covers normalization of interference in private sphere legally. The study highlights the research gap in the literature, which frequently concentrates on authoritarian regimes or corporate monitoring while ignoring democracies like India where digital repression is emerging behind constitutional rhetoric. It does this by bridging critical theory with empirical occurrences and all adds to the discourse about civil rights, surveillance vs privacy issues and digital ethos.

Keywords: Digital Authoritarianism, AI surveillance, Protest rights, Democracy, Digital ethos.

1. Introduction

India's economy has grown significantly since the last decade and as per an analyst report by BBC India has surpassed the UK and can surpass Japan's GDP by [\(BBC,2024\)](#) . This economic growth has been accelerated by digitization backed by the support of the ruling party and the economy has benefited from India's yearly rise in internet usage. The increase in digital transactions in India, which currently comprise 46% of all digital transactions globally, is one note worthy examples [\(PIB,2025\)](#) India is strengthening its position as a digital giant with the highest internet transactions and the amazing infrastructure in the world.

However, despite all the rising dominance of economic power, India is among one of the democratic countries with a high tilt towards digital repressiveness. This research is done out of academic curiosity and a democratic necessity to document, critique, and resist the silent shrinking of protest spaces in the largest democracy in the world. The protest zones, where differences turn into discourse and power meets accountability, are an expression of democratic vitality. But these areas are being restricted, threatened and suppressed in the era of artificial intelligence via surveillance cameras, facial recognition software, metadata, and predictive policing.

Shoshana Zuboff [\(2019\)](#) in her seminal work ,gave the idea of "surveillance capitalism" in which people unknowingly become the targets of behavioral mutation and data becomes the new oil. Building on a similar idea, Steven Feldstein highlighted how governments use AI to suppress dissent and control public opinion in his book [\(The Rise of Digital Repression ,2021\)](#). However, these ideas often overlook an important aspect: democratic states like India, where AI-led monitoring is now silently changing the landscape of civil freedoms while coexisting with the rhetoric of constitutional rights.

India is growing as a paradox, being a vibrant democratic land yet increasingly embracing authoritarian ideas digitally by using spyware like Pegasus against activists to the installation of facial recognition at protest sites, and from collecting of biometric data under welfare programs to the real-time surveillance of online dissent According to reports from [Human Rights Watch](#) and [SFLC.in](#), these tools particularly target journalists, students, members of minority populations, and people participating in nonviolent resistance.

This essay addresses the ways in which artificial intelligence is being used as a weapon to undermine India's fundamental right to protest, particularly in relation to movements like the farmers' movement, the anti-CAA protests, the Agnipath protests, and the unrest in Kashmir and Manipur. It also discusses how citizens internalize authoritarianism, self-censor, and quiet solidarity due to fear of being monitored.

This study aims to close the gap between socio-political outcomes and technological evaluation. Although there are technological and legal criticisms of monitoring, this article creatively places the connection of identity politics, protest rights, and AI in a democratic setting. It argues that the Indian experience serves as a fresh warning to the world that digital authoritarianism may flourish in democracies not just despite them, but also because of them.

This study adds to the global discussion on AI ethics, protest rights, and democratic resilience in the digital age by mixing critical theory, real-world case studies, and policy critique. Therefore, decided to go into more detail on India's digital democracy dilemma as the problem arises because a huge portion of the democratic process involves the people's ability to express themselves politically but that is being curtailed.

2. Historical Background

Technological advancement or digitalization has been the most revolutionary creation of mankind, which has brought a revolution into the lives of individuals. It has made a lot of things possible, which could not even be imagined or achieved before, such as communication anywhere around the globe. It has modernized every field, whether it belongs to the tertiary, secondary, or primary sector. The benefits for healthcare education, government services, and private services have grown and are now accessible to everyone. There are countless advantages of technological advancement, and due to that, it is considered the best gift that mankind ever had, which is an inseparable part of anyone's life today. Due to increasing digitalization worldwide, even India has had a remarkable evolutionary trend of digitalization since its inception in The 1950s, i.e., after independence when the early computer was invented. However, the period from 1980s to 1990s is considered the starting point of digitalization in India. Rajiv Gandhi is considered a key figure in the digital revolution, for during his tenure, there were initiatives like increasing IT education, creating the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) in 1984 under Sam Pitroda to develop indigenous telecom technologies, increasing the number of PCOS phones, establishing software technology

parks in 1991, and others. Such initiatives have contributed to India being one of the largest digital ecosystems globally. Introduction of advanced technologies like AR, VR, AI, IoT, and others in the third generation in the 21st century resulted in rapid digital progress and development in these countries.

This move was intended to improve welfare, efficiency, transparency, and citizen inclusion. In India, the first step towards advancement was taken when the Aadhar initiative was launched in 2009, which introduced biometric verification and provided unique identification for citizens, serving as a foundation for authentication in welfare programs, banking, and public services. Later, this initiative was integrated into the Jan Dhan Yojana program, which became known as the Jam Trinity. It reached one of the main landmarks of being the country with the highest penetration of mobile phones, and this led to an increased consumption of data making India the largest consumer of mobile data. The 1st of July 2025 marks the 10-year anniversary of Digital India program, which brought in modern digital infrastructure, better services flow, improved model of governance, and digital empowerment. The main purpose of the Aadhar Act, which came to be in 2016, is to boost interoperability and link it to the Digital Public Infrastructure¹, and to provide welfare programs directly to the people. DPI made possible the launch of government websites and applications such as Digi Locker, E Kranti, newly working UPI apps, which make it easier to conduct online transactions. All of these technological advancements had a positive impact on human lives and contributed to the reduction of paperwork and search for documents and saving time and increased access to healthcare, education, government schemes, etc., but there are some disadvantages too. Politics has made all of these advances into increased digital authoritarianism and democratic backsliding². It has brought out its negative potential because the technologies that have been used as tools for progress are being misused in terms of surveillance and censorship as well as restricting the privacy of citizens. This creates an alarming situation because it threatens democracy and changes the relation dynamics between the States and their people too. There can be various ways of using power against others, but when this happens through technological methods, it becomes digital authoritarianism. It has become a global concern since the citizens have started complaining that the data collected by the government was not only restricted to welfare purposes but was also used for surveillance against their wishes. There could be various

¹ Government of India, Digital India Programme, Ministry of Information and Technology.

² Usha Ramanathan, Aadhar and Surveillance State, Economics and Political Weekly, Vol.49, No.43(2014).

ways in which the government exercises control over citizens in a digital manner, thus violating the democratic norms on account of accountability, transparency, etc. This, in turn, results in democratic backsliding. Democratic backsliding is not just about exercising authority; instead, it is carried out through legal and procedural means within the system. According to Freedom House, in 2026, India ranked as a partly free nation with a score of 66 out of 100³, with an expectation that this figure will decline even more in 2027. In recent years, India has been one of the top nations in terms of the number of Internet shutdowns, as well as issues concerning encryption of data on WhatsApp and the Indian government, Twitter and the Indian government, spyware known as Pegasus, and sharing of personal data with private firms under the guise of interoperability, thus posing the threat of increasing digital authoritarianism.

Among some of the most pressing problems facing governments across the world are issues pertaining to regulating the digital ecosystem of information which has outgrown the imagination of even the most prescient constitutional theorists of past generations. It is not just that the speed at which information travels is exponential, but that the capacity for speaking to a mass audience is no longer restricted to a select few channels in control of a powerful clique. As opposed to the classic saying “only those who own one have freedom of the press,” it is now possible for a regular individual to use a basic account on a major platform and reach out to audiences in millions, with the ability to express either their views or grievances to the most powerful institutions. This wonderful growth in expressibility comes at the price of an even greater concentration of power over mass communications tools in the hands of just a few international tech companies. Though these companies operate on a global scale, they have been known for an extremely narrow view of how they deal with online freedom of expression, one steeped entirely in American ideals of free speech, including American First Amendment principles. Although they are deeply entrenched into the developing world, local actors in countries such as Myanmar or the Philippines have had difficulty getting any attention from Facebook in particular due to the company’s profound impacts on political dialogue. Without a concerted effort on the part of the major players to consider such impacts, the shift of an increasing amount of our existence to the online environment has opened up unprecedented possibilities for surveillance, manipulation, and ultimately control. A hundred years ago, most communication was transitory in

³ Freedom in the World, Freedom House Index, 2026

nature. Not even the most tyrannical monarch had any real chance of controlling what his subjects might have whispered about him in the market square. In today's world, most significant interactions now involve an element of being online, which means that governments that rule the infrastructure and services used for online communication may effectively have control over virtually everything that we talk about, from the elected leaders who govern us to what we eat for dinner each night. There has been much discussion regarding the danger inherent in the huge tech corporations and their damaging business practices.

Nevertheless, not taking into account the above problems connected with the surveillance economy, the danger connected with the government using such technologies to control its population is objectively more threatening than the one created by any commercial enterprise, as the government has much more coercive power than any commercial firm. A new type of tyranny has appeared, which implies that rulers use communication channels in the private sector and even seize the media companies when necessary in order to consolidate their power. This article analyzes the current actions undertaken by the Indian government to regulate the Internet in the context of an emerging hybrid form of despotic rule to predict the effect of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 on freedom of speech in India. Although some parts of the 2021 rules may be justified from the perspective of addressing certain shortcomings regarding accountability connected with monopolization in the private sector, the entire set of regulations is constructed in a way that will enable the government to control the power of such media companies to exert pressure on political discussions in India.

3.Objective of Study

- To critically analyse the approaches by which the Indian government monitor, censor, and curb the right to protest via AI.
- To examine both explicit and implicit ways of suppression of protest rights.
- To critically examine how new digital legislations affect civil liberties, especially the freedoms of assembly and expression.

4. Methodology

This paper highlights the impact of AI tools used as a weapon against protest rights in India using a qualitative research method. It stresses on five noteworthy protest movements in India like, the Manipur crisis, the Farmers' Protest, the Agnipath protest, the Anti-CAA unrest, and the post-370 Kashmir unrest. These examples help in understanding how the state uses AI-enabled surveillance, digital data targeting, frequent internet shutdowns, policing prediction, and facial recognition systems, to identify, suppress, or predict opposition.

The paper includes secondary sources such as, court decisions, government official statements, data by NCRB, and reports from associations like Human Rights Watch (2023), Amnesty International (2021), and SFLC.in (2022).

This research methodology tries to highlight issues of using digital tools in democracies that may fuel silent authoritarian actions and undermining constitutional rights like protest and free speech by merging critical theory with real-world case studies.

5. Literature Review

A growing literature on digital authoritarianism reflects the global concern about the relationship between technology, governance, and civil liberties.

1. Shoshana Zuboff's [The Age of Surveillance Capitalism](#) (2019), is a seminal work in this field that stresses on how data extraction and behavioural manipulation is changing the power dynamics in tech era. Zuboff highlights how government and businesses changed personal data into commodity and uses it as an instrument of establishing hegemony and undermining the democratic principles.

2. Steven Feldstein's [The Rise of Digital Repression: How Technology is Reshaping Power, Politics, and Resistance](#) (2021), stresses on

Increase use of artificial intelligence, facial recognition, and social media monitoring to control dissent in authoritarian states. His idea provides a comparative idea but gave limited attention to democratic states like India.

3. Mishi Choudhary and Gurshabad Grover's [Reclaiming Privacy: A Toolkit for the Indian Digital Citizen](#) (2021), it uses legal and rights-based frameworks to critically

evaluate India's internet bans and digital surveillance, exposing the lack of protections and transparency. Few studies have looked at India's unique protest scene or connected AI-based surveillance to civil disobedience traditions and constitutional protest rights, even if these studies collectively highlight the threat presented by state-sponsored digital technologies

Thus, this study fills research gap by merging protest politics with AI surveillance with Indian lens. It provides human rights focused idea by adding grassroots picture to global debates that is often dominated by institutional or tech perspective. This study offers a lens to understand how AI can be used to erode rights promised to be protected by democratic states.

6. Empirical Insights and Evaluation

1. Anti-CAA demonstration: Facial Recognition and the Criminalization of Dissent

The Anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) demonstrations__ (2019-2020) particularly in Shaheen Bagh, the Delhi and Uttar Pradesh police used facial recognition technology (FRT) to recognize and monitor protesters. The Police used the AI software of Innefu Labs, that can do body and gait analysis. Demonstrators' faces were assessed to a database of more than 550,000 people using this AI technology, raising questions about potential improper arrests and privacy erosion. [\(Reuter\)](#) moreover ,fearing police punishment, anti-CAA student activists avoided participating online [\(Hindustan Times, 2020\)](#) and the usage of AI-led drones by Delhi Police above Jamia Millia Islamia during the Anti-CAA protests was described as turning public spaces into "open-air prisons" by activists [\(The Economic Times, 2019\)](#).

Therefore, social media scraping, drone surveillance, and live CCTV integrations all work together to suppress disagreement before it even arises.

The use of FRT in protest areas highlights Shoshana Zuboff's [\(2019\)](#) idea of "surveillance capitalism", where private data is commodified and used to suppress individuals. The unclear data protection laws in India increases the problems, as there is little safeguard against the arbitrary use of such AI-enabled tools, Mishi Chaudhry also highlighted that, "surveillance technologies become tools of arbitrary control rather than legitimate security measures without strong privacy protections." [\(Forbes](#)

[2020](#)).

Farmers' Demonstrations: Predictive Policing and Digital Monitoring-To examine and crush opposition during the Farmers' demonstration in 2020–2021, the Indian leaders used AI surveillance as a tool to detect and arrest those supposed to be instigators of protest, demonstrators' online footprints were analysed, and social media handles were examined thoroughly. This idea connects with Steven Feldstein's [\(2021\)](#) study of digital repression, where governments use technology to crush opposition in advance as he outlined, “predictive policing tools shift the balance toward pre-emptive governance, criminalizing citizens based on algorithmic probability rather than actual conduct.” This was obvious when digital sentiment examination and metadata collection were used to identify protest hotspots zones and capture "troublemakers" before any real problem arises.

The government's narrative characterized protesters as "anti-national," using sentiment analysis through AI to track public opinion and opposition voices. This approach is problematic as it questioned the demonstrators' legitimacy and instilled fear among people to voice their disagreements, which suppresses right to free expression. Citizens who opposed the government on this issue risked of being sent behind bars, with some cases showing that visas and passports of protesters were suspended by the government [\(Human Rights Watch, 2024\)](#). To prevent the demonstrations, the government resorted to violent measures even used tear gas and rubber bullets [\(Al Jazeera, 2024\)](#).

The violent approaches of government were not only seen in the real world but also digitally. There is proof that India has adopted digital autocracy over its people to disrupt demonstrations in the country. One of the strong examples is when the Indian government asked X (earlier twitter) to block handles that tweeted in support of farmers' protests [\(Al Jazeera, 2024\)](#). This was later confirmed by the X representative, who stated,

"The government has issued orders requiring X to act on specific accounts and posts, subject to potential penalties including significant fines and imprisonment" [\(@GlobalAffairs, 2024\)](#)

The ministry of electronics and information technology (Meity) finalized its emergency blocking orders against 177 social media accounts and links related to the farmers' protests on Monday to maintain “public order”.[\(The Hindu\)](#)

2.The Agnipath Movement: Youth Suppression and Artificial Monitoring-Dissent against the Agnipath scheme in 2022, which were mostly organized by youth aspiring to join the military, were quickly suppressed by digital surveillance by locating and capturing demonstrators, authorities kept an eye on social media by using AI as an instrument to assess and predict possible chaos. This active policing approach highlights new trend aligning with artificial governance, in which data analysis to make judgments and suppress opposition is the key idea. The repression of these protests highlights an increasing tendency of using AI for narrative control and dissent suppression, especially among youth which shows democratic backsliding, in which democratic institutions are undermined through secret and frequently legal means. “This digital targeting not only discouraged participation in protest but also created an environment of fear, where exercise of our civil liberties became equivalent with risking personal safety, job security, or liberty.”([Chaudhry,2021](#))

3.Pegasus Spyware: “The Pegasus Project lays bare how NSO’s spyware is a weapon of choice for repressive governments seeking to silence journalists, attack activists and crush dissent, placing countless lives in peril.” (Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of [Amnesty International](#)). Pegasus was created by the Israeli company NSO Group, and it excels in reading emails and messages that are encrypted and can even turn on cameras and microphones without the user's idea. Amnesty International and The Washington Post's investigations clarified that a well-known Indian journalists Siddharth Varadarajan and Anand Mangnale were among the targeted people of this spyware.The usage of Pegasus spyware blurs the distinction between surveillance, suppression opposition and enhancing national security.

“The Pegasus Project revelations must act as a catalyst for change. The surveillance industry must no longer be afforded a laissez-faire approach from governments with a personal stake in using this technology to commit human rights violations.” (Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of [Amnesty International](#)). It emphasizes the desperate need of laws to curb the use intrusive technologies and protect citizens' right to privacy.

4.Manipur and Kashmir conflict zones- In conflict zones like Kashmir and Manipur, the AI enabled monitoring has been significantly intense. After the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, Kashmir experienced frequent internet shutdowns and increased usage of surveillance methods. Similarly, Manipur civil unrest was crushed by frequent internet shutdowns, it was like digital cutting of tongue and curtailing freedom of

speech and protest rights. Moreover, these measures have prevented the flow of information and chained citizens' ability to organize, associate and protest. The use of such methods in conflict zones raises serious issues about human rights violations and the suppression of civil liberties as in Kashmir, natives were forced into self-censorship, with activists warning that “every click is recorded, every movement traced.” ([Human Rights Watch,2022](#)). It also highlights the desperate need of accountability measures to prevent the abuse of digital technologies in sensitive regions.

The frequent use of AI enabled suppression of dissent has significant psychological effects as it instils a fear of being tracked and that may lead to self-censorship, eroding the fundamental democratic right to free speech and expression. This "chilling effect" strategically targets marginalized groups, who are often the primary victims of surveillance and crushes their dissent. These case studies show a concerning lens of society where AI technologies are not neutral instruments; rather used as weapons to suppress public dissent that is one of fundamental principles of democracy. India's democratic norms could be undermined from within by secret, digital repression rather than clear dictatorship in the absence of strong data protection laws and accountability measures.

7. Suppression of Protest Rights and the Weaponisation of Technology

Despite being viewed as an expression of democracy and inclusive development, digital technology is increasingly being used as a tool for controlling behavior, opposition censorship, and state-led spying in India thus, expanding the model of ‘digital authoritarianism’. This trend toward digital authoritarianism has been strengthened more by recent legislation. [The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023](#), focused at protecting privacy, contains vast exceptions for the government, allowing those in power to access personal data without proper judicial scrutiny ([Internet Freedom Foundation, 2023](#)). Moreover, end-to-end encryption services like on WhatsApp and Signal are broken by the IT ([Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code](#)) Rules, 2021, which allows experts to identify the "first originator" of messages. Moreover, the proposed Indian Telecommunication Bill, 2023 expands executive control over communications by granting the state a greater power

to spy on communications on the basis of vague justifications like "public emergency". These laws are obstacles to exercise our right to free speech and subtly erodes the right to anonymity by installing a mass surveillance approach under the veil of legitimacy. Indian journalist Arfa Khanum Sherwani highlighted that "the government does not need to arrest every dissenter when it can intimidate them into silence" (Sherwani, 2022, Tweet).

These legislation empowers the state to suppress dissent during mass mobilizations and protests, as in CAA protest , Farmers' protest , Kashmir and Manipur unrest or anywhere in country the state can use artificial technologies to curb opposition or to break the cycle by creating a 'bubble of behavioural manipulation' of people aligning with Shoshana Zuboff's concept of 'behavioral instrumentation', it is clear that data collected from surveillance can being used as an instrument to predict and avoid protest in addition to being collected for punitive actions. To create a techno-political environment where dissent can be algorithmically predicted and neutralized before it materializes, predictive policing methods and risk evaluation frameworks get supplied with behavioral data from citizens, which is collected through Aadhaar, social media activities, mobile communications, and financial transactions. The effects of can be highlighted by grassroots reality, Aasif Sultan, a Kashmiri journalist, was arrested in 2018 on grounds of having ties to militancy and is still being held without solid proof. This indicates large trend in which interactions and digital footprints are criminalized without following the proper procedures ([Committee to Protect Journalists, 2024](#)). Moreover, during 2022 Agnipath protests against the new military recruitment scheme, mining protestors' digital communications and histories to blacklist candidates from government opportunities in addition to arresting them also stresses on autocracy and suppression of views against government. This is similar with the Panopticon model, which claims that constant visibility leads to internalize self-censorship by people and thus reducing the need for obvious control.

The state's strategy of narrative control extends even to media where instances of raids on News Click, an independent digital news source, citing anti-terror laws have been found where legal and tech tools were used to crush journalism ([CNN](#)). Furthermore, Maharashtra's government propose to use AI to examine media coverage and categorize stories as "positive" or "negative" underscores its intention to influence public opinion. ([Committee to Protect Journalists](#))

Additionally, dissent crushing can be seen through frequent internet shutdown which prevents the information flow during unrest. India is accounted for one of the highest internet shutdowns since 2014 to present (around 854) and these shutdowns have become strategic tools of curbing protest rights ([SFLC.in](#)). Thus, the new system highlights what Larry Diamond calls as "stealth authoritarianism"-the maintenance of formal democratic institutions while eroding the basic liberties that promises the democratic existence ([Diamond,2019](#)). The mask of legitimacy around digital interventions marks their collective impact, which is the emergence of an authoritarian state via digital means in which rights are conditional, opposition is pathologized, and citizenship itself is suppressed to a performance of obedience.

The universal monitoring state that is becoming a norm changes the citizen-state relationship for everyone, not only political opponents, or activists. Unchecked growth of surveillance tools coupled with a lack of strong data protection and transparency measures run the risk of establishing a permanent state of exception where accountability is inverted—the citizen is being examined while the state is being opaque, as Mishi Choudhary cautions. ([Chaudhry](#)).

India's digital revolution was initially celebrated as a force to fuel democracy; however, the current scenario reveals a problematic inversion. Technology is no longer a tool for empowerment, but of control; not to include citizens in governing process, but to exclude. In absence of any legislative safeguards, active judicial interventions, and a reassertion of constitutional value, India's future is at risk of slipping into a state which will be shaped less by democratic discussions and ideas and more by the silent, algorithmic architectures of control that Zuboff so vehemently warns against: "instrumentarian power that shapes behaviour without awareness, thus without resistance."

In this changing context, digital authoritarianism in India is not a hypothetical threat but rather an emerging reality that has been inscribed in legislation, integrated into technology, and accepted by practice.

8. Conclusion

The Indian government's use of artificial intelligence to erode protest rights highlights danger to the health of its democracy. Suppression via explicit measures like mass surveillance, predictive policing, and data-driven suppression of opposition, and implicit approaches promoting behavioral manipulation and self-censorship, and narrowing the

healthy space for active citizen engagement and opposition. This twofold attack creates a polity where citizens are becoming passive consumers rather than active participants in governance. Zuboff ([2019](#)) vehemently warns, "If democracy sleeps through this technological coup d'état, it may never awaken." The scenario of India reveals that, instead of being neutral, digital technologies have become tools of authoritarian control disguised as efficient and modernized. The loss of Protest rights is not accidental consequence of digitization but a conscious adjustment of the state-citizen relationship. If unregulated, this change has the potential to solidify into a new normal in which democratic discourse is replaced by surveillance and dissent is viewed as abnormal.

India can restore its the democratic principles that is under threat due to technological authoritarianism is by means of active civic engagement, legislative protections, and collective vigilance. The implementation of independent judicial review over surveillance methods, the adoption of a transparent and citizen-centric data protection law, promotion of digital literacy that enables citizens to assert their rights, and the inclusion of international human rights standards into domestic governance methods to reverse this trend. Being the largest democracy in the world, India has seen one of the highest penetration of mobile phones as well as other forms of digital services. India is a highly diversified country having large economic and social gaps and digitalization bridging those gaps by connecting the far-flung areas of the country. With time, rapid digitalization turned into the instrument of digital surveillance along with the welfare of people. These policies have become so radical that they are aimed more at regenerating rather than serving the purpose of improving civil liberties of the citizens. The Theoretical framework in this context suggests that digitalization will serve as a catalyst in democratic backsliding process when embedded in the system. Electoral democracy will remain present, but the outcome will show democratic practices getting eroded with the elimination of real possibilities of raising voice against the government. Aadhar act along with the mission creep associated with mass surveillance outside welfare delivery has crossed the threshold of constitutional morality. Shutdown of internet in various regions of the country, Pegasus spyware and blocking of critics on digital platforms is clear evidence of the emergence of soft authoritarianism in the country. Digitalization can indirectly lead to polarization in the country leading to democratic backsliding. By creating polarization, it will influence behavior of the citizens and predict their actions with fear. It means that people will have no option except self-censorship. According to global standards and international institutions, it is seen as institutional crisis of the world's largest democracy and called as dying of democracy. Controlling media using indirect

methods shows censorship in the country. Through algorithm and artificial intelligence driven social media, there has been spread of fake notions and relative notions among the people and distract from real emergency situations. From the above discussion, it is clear that inclusion efforts by the government schemes has created two exclusions in practice. However, it is possible to fight against such hegemonic activities and save democracy of India. Independent social media platforms, blockchains, journals, and MCS, in addition to opposition, are able to counteract the hidden agendas of the government forcing it to act in a responsible way. There are other success stories of similar initiatives in the global south, such as Aadhar. There are examples India can take inspiration from, such as Estonia, with their X-RD system, which enables citizens to know who accesses their data. By creating such a model, and not relying on a centralized data collection approach as India, Uruguay managed to create an inclusive digital model, supported by effective democratic institutions. In India, we have seen some setbacks in enforcing the country's landmark judicial decisions; however, as the legal framework of India evolves with digitalization and digital literacy, these gaps can be filled. India is facing a situation, when it can either pass the test and become a republic or be unable to withstand this test, as the question is raised regarding how the technology will be used - either to challenge those who rule the country or to control the country's regime. The fight against digital authoritarianism is more related to our resilience than anything else. While technologies are hacking our minds, we should be resilient enough to avoid self-censorship, social banishment, and cascading mass action. In order to reach this degree of resistance, studies should take a look under the hood of the dynamics between technology and policies and see what digital authoritarianism actually looks like; and while studying the society's social structure, we should be able to understand what individual behavior means in social cooperation, and thus create digital humanism that would not allow machines to suppress our freedoms. Finally, digital authoritarianism cannot exist under pluralism, multiculturalism, and ethics. This is definitely the time to restore our human values!

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