

# Algorithmic Governance and the Architectures of Exclusion: A Study of Bio-Politics in Contemporary Indian Speculative Fiction

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## Abstract

This paper explores the chilling intersection of digital governance and social stratification in contemporary Indian Speculative Fiction. It investigates the emergence of “Digitised Sovereignty” in contemporary Indian Speculative Fiction specifically focusing on Prayaag Akbar’s ‘Leila’ (2017) and Lavanya Lakshminarayan’s ‘Analog/Virtual’ (2020). Michel Foucault’s paradigm of bio-politics synthesizing here with Ruha Benjamin’s concept of “New Jim Code” – recontextualized as a “New Caste Code”, this study argue that Indian Speculative Fiction maps a critical transition from physical state discipline to an automated and algorithmic governance. This study describes the term “Techno – Casteism” as a process by which modern data-driven architectures codify historical Brahminical preoccupations with ‘Purity’ and ‘Productivity’ into unassailable code. Through an analysis of the “sector walls” in Leila and the “Social productivity bell curve” in Analog/Virtual, the paper reveals how this fictional dystopias function as ‘architectures of exclusion’. These systems do not merely manage population, they automate social stratification, effectively creating a high-tech discrimination of traditional Indian hierarchies. Ultimately this study positioned speculative fiction as a vital tool of resistance to challenge the invisible violence of digital segregation. This intervention emphasizes the urgency of scrutinizing the ‘Code’ to prevent the permanent erasure of marginalized section.

**Keywords:** Indian Speculative Fiction, Techno – Casteism, Bio-Politics, Algorithmic Governance, Digital Exclusion, New caste Code.

## Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Indian Landscape is increasingly defined as “Surveillance Capitalism” within a state-led “Digital Sovereignty”. From the biometric ubiquity of Aadhaar to the “Smart City” missions, The Indian state has moved toward a model of governance where the citizen is primarily a data point. This shift marks a departure from traditional sovereignty. Power is no longer merely exercised through physical laws but through the logic of the algorithm. However as Ruha Benjamin’s notes that “Imagined objectivity of algorithm often mask and accelerates traditional forms of discriminations.

This paper argues that contemporary Indian Speculative Fiction serves as a “diagnostic of the

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present”. The concept rooted in Foucault’s assertion that literature can perform an autopsy of contemporary power structure. While global speculative fiction often focuses on Western anxieties of AI, Indian Speculative Fiction grounds this anxieties in the local realities of caste communalism and neoliberal productivity.

In this new paradigm the ‘Body’ of flesh and blood is subsumed by its ‘Data Double’. A digital profile constructed from lineage, consumption pattern now determines the physical right to reside, work and even breathe. The central thesis of the study is that we are witnessing the emergence of a “New Caste Code”. Here digital architectures of exclusion replace the physical barrier of the past, making discrimination invisible, automated therefore significantly harder to dismantle.

### **Literature Review**

Current scholarship on Indian speculative fiction has traditionally focused on postcolonial narrative and the reimagining of mythic history. However this study identifies a critical gap - the intersection of biopolitics and digital infrastructure. Scholar like Suparno Banerjee and Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay have established speculative fiction as a tool for cognitive estrangement in the Global South. This paper builds on their work by shifting focus from mythic tropes to the techno-bureaucratic reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Further more the study engages with Michel Foucault’s theory of ‘governmentality’. While Foucault studied the physical clinic and prison, this research extends his theories to the digital panopticon. By diving deep into Ruha Benjamin’s ‘Race After Technology’(2019). Who exposed how algorithms automate racial bias in U.S, this review argues a similar investigation of Techno – Casteism in India. The specific gap in this paper fills the analysis of how Indian speculative fiction visualizes the “Aadhaar – state” as a new form of social policy – a scenario where policy is dictated by biometric profiles rather than human rights

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative, text based analytical methodology rooted in critical discourse analysis and literary theory to interrogate the socio technical imaginaries of the Indian near future. The methodological framework is designed to bridge the gap between speculative aesthetics and material political realities through a multi layered investigative process.

Primary Text Selection: Two seminal works Prayaag Akbar’s ‘Leila’ and Lavanya Lakshminarayan’s were selected because they represent the architectural aspect of algorithmic governance. Physical and communal architectural segregation and data driven social credit system has seen in the text more minutely. While Leila provides a critic of biometric border-making, Analog/Virtual offers a landscape for analyzing hyper capitalist social stratification.

Thematic coding and close reading: The research utilizes a biopolitical framework to identify triggers of exclusion within the narratives. The research performed a thematic coding of the text, specifically tracking recurring motifs of ‘Purity’ and ‘Productivity’. This involves a power reading where specific dialogues and descriptive passages such as the operation of the

‘Skimmers’ are analyzed to reveal how to technology is used to define the pure from the impure.

Comparative analysis and contextualization: The methodology involves a comparative reading of fictional events against real world Indian policy shifts such as the Smart Cities Mission and biometric surveillance. The implementation of ‘Aadhaar’ and the deployment of NRC has mirrored the policy shifting in the Indian Governance. By cross-referencing fictional dystopias with actual state initiative, the study adopt and interdisciplinary stance that views literature as a diagnostic tool for contemporary governance.

Analytical Synthesis: Finally the study synthesizes these findings to propose the framework of Techno-Casteism. This step involves a sociological reading of literature where text is treated not merely as a work of imagination but as a primary source of understanding technological anxiety of the 21<sup>st</sup> century India. By examining the social productivity ‘Bell Curve’ with historical caste discrepancies, the methodology uncovers how modern code functions as a high-tech reincarnation of ancient social policing. This approach ensures that the analysis is grounded in both literary analysis and urgent socio-political critique.

### **Theoretical Framework : Bio-politics and the “New Caste Code”**

Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘Biopower’ – the power to “Make live and let die” provides the foundation for this study. In the traditional Foucauldian sense, the state manages populations through health, hygiene and discipline. However in the speculative future of Akbar and LakshmiNarayan the biopower has taken and algorithmic turn.

Governance is no longer just about the physical surveillance of the body but about the data driven. As the algorithm sorts citizens based on ‘purity’ in Leila or ‘merit’ in Analog/Virtual, it engages in a form of Necropolitics. By flagging certain individuals as ‘impure’ the algorithm effectively marks them for social and eventually physical erasure. This is what the term Techno – Casteism; the digital reincarnation of Brahminical hierarchies.

Furthermore this framework draws on Shoshana Zuboff’s concept “Instrumentarian Power” but re-contextualizes it within the Indian postcolonial state. Unlike western models of surveillance that focus on consumer behaviour, the Indian ‘Algorithmic Turn’ focuses on identity. The significant of this theoretical lens lies in its ability to expose how neutral code replicates the Brahminical obsession with boundaries and pollution. This is not a shift away from history but a hi-tech reincarnation of it. Here the database become new ‘Shastra’ and the programmer becomes the silent enforcer of an automated hierarchy.

### **The Digital Ghetto: Biometric Borders in ‘Leila’**

Prayaag Akbar’s **Leila** presents a near future New Delhi, Where 60ft walls divide communities. While the walls are physical, the “architectures of exclusion” are digital. The “Skimmers” and “Council” surveillance systems in the novel act as the biopolitical agents of the state. The obsession with ‘purity’ is enforced through biometric verification that prevents inter-community contamination. In this world the purity is no longer a subjective belief but a database decision. The ‘skimmer’ does not just check identity rather it checks compliance and lineage. The wall is the physical manifestation of an exclusionary logic that has already been

decided by the database. This section argues that ‘Leila’ visualizes a world where body is stripped of agency and becomes a mere recipient of algorithmic judgement.

The protagonist Shalini’s journey through the sectors reveals how the biometric scan functions as a digital judge. When a Skimmer is applied to a citizen it extract a purity score that determines the right to physical movement. This process effectively turns the human body into a readable barcode for the state. The wall is therefore merely the physical barrier for an exclusionary logic by the database. By digitizing ‘purity’ the state removes the messy, human element of prejudice and replaces it with the software interface. By this process the state makes the segregation as an objective mathematical necessity rather than a human rights violation.

### **The Meritocratic Panopticon: Analog/Virtual**

In Lakshminarayan’s Analog/Virtual, the city of Apex is governed by the “Bell Curve”. The city is bifurcated into the ‘Virtuals’ (those with high productivity scores) and the ‘Analog’ (those relegated to the outskirts). This system represents a hyper capitalist biopolitics. In Apex the right to breathe clean air or access medical care is algorithmically tied to social credit. This narrative exposes the fallacy of “Meritocracy” in the digital age. Productivity becomes the new ritual. Those who fail the algorithms performance metrics are literally pushed out of the infrastructure of the city. They are denied the basic biological necessities of life.

The “Bell Curve” functions as a hi-tech reincarnation of the ancient Varna system. There one’s position in the social hierarchy is determined by their merit and their legacy and merit, which is itself a proxy for inherited privilege. If a citizen’s productivity score drops below a certain threshold then the system automatically triggers a demotion that leading to the physical relocation to the toxic ‘Commons’. This constant state of algorithmic anxiety ensures a self-policing population as the ‘Virtuals’ strive to maintain their status through exhaustive labour. The novel thus demonstrates that when physical efficiency becomes the metric of basic rights for the government, the most vulnerable members of the society are the first to be deleted by the machine.

### **Discussion: From Fictional Dystopia to “Smart” Reality**

“Architectures of exclusion” depicted in Leila and Analog/Virtual are not mere exercises in fiction only; they serve as hyper extensions of contemporary Indian techno politics. As an Indian we currently witnessing a historic transition where the physical border replaced by the digital citizenship. This shift represents a move from physical territorial state to the database state. The transition from physical border to digital firewall of citizenship is already visible in the deployment of the National Register of Citizen (NRC) and the Aadhaar biometric system. In the real-world frameworks as in Akbar’s “Sector 4” the absence of a digital footprint or the presence of wrong data can lead to the suspension of civil rights. This marks a shifting Indian sovereignty where the state no longer just polices the physical body, but governs through the management of the database. Thus effectively deciding who is a legitimate citizen based on their data legibility.

The Indian “Smart City Mission” emphasizes efficiency through total surveillance. However as seen in both novels this efficiency is often a mask for biopolitical control. The significance of this study lies in the identification of Techno-Casteism. It’s a process by which technology replicates the historical labour of social policing in the contemporary urban landscape we see this as the integrated command and control centres which mirror the council’s panoptic gaze in Leila. These centres consolidate data from facial recognition cameras and biometric database to manage urban populations. Yet they continuously create digital parameter that exclude those without requisite data wealth.

In the specific context of West Bengal the stark boundary between the surveillance – heavy infrastructure of Kolkata Rajar Hat Newtown. Its immediate pre urban fringes act as a manifestation of the “Bell Curve”. Here the right to premium urban infrastructure, recycled air, high speed connectivity is algorithmically and economically tied to one’s perceived ‘Virtual’ value.

The ‘exclusion’ is no longer a loud or violent act rather it is a quiet rejection by a software interface. This shift makes resistance significantly more difficult as the ‘Judge’ is an invisible line of code rather than a human officer. By analyzing these fictional dystopias the study create a critical analysis to challenge the neutrality of our own digital infrastructure. This research highlights that without radical transparency the ‘Smart City’ risks becoming a hi-tech barrier that automates ancient discriminations. Thus turning the dream of a digital future into a recurring nightmare of the past.

### **Conclusion**

This study wants to highlight that contemporary Indian speculative fiction functions as a vital tool for the digital turn in Indian governance through the analysis of the mentioned novel we see the emergence of a Techno Casteism – A system where data driven sovereignty replaces traditional state mechanisms to maintain historical hierarchies of exclusion. The significance of this research lies in its ability strip away the code of modern algorithms. It reveals how they function as hi-tech reincarnations of Brahminical preoccupations with purity, pollution and productivity. By mapping the ‘Sector Walls’ and ‘Bell Curve’ of fiction into the material realities of the Smart City Mission and Aadhaar, this paper provides a necessary vocabulary for discussing the invisible violence of digital segregation.

The significance of this work extends to the field of Postcolonial Digital Humanities. It challenges the Euro centric focus of global speculative fiction studies by rooting technological anxiety in the specific South Asian socio-politics. The “Architectures of Exclusion” identified here are not just imaginative constructs rather they are diagnostic of a contemporary Indian data driven reality. This research argues that the algorithm has become the new ‘Judiciary System’, and invisible line of code that executes social deletion without the possibility of human appeal. Ultimately, this paper serves as an ethical intervention suggesting that the ‘New Caste Code’ is not an inevitable by product of progress but a design choice that can be challenged. By highlighting the human cost of this smart infrastructure the study demands that we look beyond the technological efficiency to recognize the ancient prejudices being automated beneath the surface.

However these novels also offer a glimmer of resistance. The role of speculative fiction is to provide the cognitive estrangement necessary for us to see our present clearly. By showing us the end game of algorithmic governance, speculative fiction empowers the reader to question the “Code”. For the Indian politics to remain democratic in the digital age, the “Code” must be scrutinized with the same rigor as the law. The future of Indian democracy may well depend on our ability to dismantle these digital wall before they become impenetrable. The ultimate significance of this study is to call for a technological scrutiny, a demand for transparency and digital justice in an era where the software is increasingly designed to exclude the most vulnerable

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