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Indian democracy at the age of algorithms: Public reasoning, pluralism, and democratic futures

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Abstract

This paper examines the future of Indian democracy through a sociological reinterpretation of democracy as public reasoning, situated within India's distinctive plural socio-cultural heritage and the emerging conditions of algorithmic modernity. Drawing on Amartya Sen's conception of democracy as an argumentative practice, the paper argues that India's democratic resilience has historically depended less on institutional design than on deeply rooted traditions of dialogue, heterodoxy, and public debate. These traditions have been sustained by India's long experience of social pluralism, marked by cultural, religious, linguistic, and intellectual diversity. However, the paper contends that contemporary algorithmic forms of governance and communication-characterized by opacity, datafication, and automated decision-making-pose new challenges to democratic public reasoning by reshaping trust, autonomy, and accountability. Using Anthony Elliott's analysis of algorithmic modernity, the paper critically explores how these transformations may both strain and reconfigure the social foundations of democracy. The study is theoretical and interpretive, contributing to debates on democracy beyond Western institutional models.

Keywords: Indian democracy, public reasoning, pluralism, argumentative tradition, algorithmic modernity, trust and public life

Introduction

The future of Indian democracy is increasingly debated at a moment when democratic practices across the world are being reshaped by rapid technological transformations, intensifying social divisions, and declining trust in public institutions. In India, these concerns intersect with a distinctive historical and cultural trajectory in which democracy has not merely been an imported institutional form but a lived practice grounded in public discussion, contestation, and plurality. Understanding the future of Indian democracy therefore requires moving beyond a narrow focus on electoral procedures and formal institutions, and instead examining the deeper social and cultural foundations that sustain democratic life. Amartya Sen's influential formulation of democracy as *public reasoning* provides a crucial starting point for such an inquiry. Sen argues that democracy cannot be reduced to periodic elections or constitutional design alone; rather, it rests on citizens' capacity to participate in open discussion, to speak and listen without fear, and to influence public choice through argument and dialogue (Sen, 2006 a, pp. 12-14) [17]. From this perspective, voting is only one moment in a broader communicative process that links public debate, collective reasoning, and political decision-making. Sen further challenges the view that democracy is a uniquely Western gift adopted by postcolonial societies, emphasizing instead that traditions of public discussion exist across cultures and historical contexts, and that India has been especially "fortunate" in sustaining a long and resilient argumentative tradition (Sen, 2006 a, pp. ix, 12-14) [17].

This argumentative heritage is inseparable from India's plural socio-cultural formation. Indian society has long been marked by profound diversity-of language, religion, caste, region, and worldview-producing what Andre Beteille describes as a "veritable feast of viewpoints" (Beteille, 2002, p. 30) [3]. Historical scholarship also highlights the presence of rationality, scepticism, and questioning across philosophical schools and popular traditions, from Buddhist and Jaina thought to heterodox currents such as *Charvaka* and later bhakti and Sufi poetry (Thapar, 2014, p. 227; Sen, 2006 a, p. 19) [19, 17]. Far from being an obstacle to democracy, this pluralism has historically fostered dialogue, accommodation, and debate, shaping a social environment in which heterodoxy and disagreement became normalized features of public life (Sen, 2006, pp. ix, 19) [18]. However, the conditions under which public reasoning operates today are being transformed

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by what Anthony Elliott describes as *algorithmic modernity*. Elliott argues that the expansion of AI-driven and automated systems is reshaping trust, autonomy, and social relations, with significant consequences for democratic institutions and public life (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196)^[8]. Algorithmic systems increasingly mediate communication, visibility, and participation, often in opaque ways that can erode trust, intensify inequalities, and fragment public discourse. From a sociological standpoint, AI is not merely a technical development but a political and cultural phenomenon that reconfigures how individuals relate to institutions, to one another, and to processes of collective decision-making (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196)^[8].

Methodology

This paper adopts a *theoretical and non-empirical research design*, drawing on qualitative conceptual analysis to examine the future of Indian democracy under conditions of algorithmic modernity. As Babbie emphasizes, theoretical inquiry is essential for clarifying concepts and interpreting emerging social processes that cannot yet be adequately captured through empirical measurement (Babbie, 2016)^[1]. Accordingly, the study engages in close and interpretive reading of key sociological and interdisciplinary texts on democracy, pluralism, and algorithmic governance. Following Becker's (1998) approach to sociological analysis, the paper connects classical ideas of public reasoning and social diversity with contemporary transformations in digitally mediated public life, focusing on relationships, tensions, and normative implications rather than hypothesis testing^[2]. The analysis proceeds by outlining democracy as public reasoning, examining India's plural socio-cultural foundations, and assessing the challenges posed by algorithmic mediation. This methodological approach enables a coherent sociological understanding of democratic change in an algorithmic age. The author also acknowledges the use of ChatGPT, an AI language model developed by OpenAI, as a supportive tool for improving clarity, organization, and academic expression during the drafting and revision of this manuscript. All arguments, interpretations, and conclusions remain the sole responsibility of the author.

Results and Discussion

Democracy, Public Reasoning, and Social Pluralism in India

Any meaningful reflection on the future of Indian democracy must begin with a careful clarification of what democracy signifies in the Indian context. Rather than treating democracy merely as a set of formal institutions-parliaments, elections, constitutions-Amartya Sen urges us to understand it as a broader social practice rooted in *public reasoning*. For Sen, democracy is inseparable from the capacity of ordinary people to engage in discussion, disagreement, and argument, and to influence collective decisions through these processes (Sen, 2006 a, pp. 12-14)^[17]. Voting, though crucial, is only one expression of this wider democratic culture; its effectiveness depends fundamentally on the prior existence of open public discussion, where citizens can speak and listen without fear (Sen, 2006 a, p. 14)^[17]. This understanding allows Sen to challenge two common but misleading assumptions about Indian democracy. The *first* is the belief that democracy arrived in India primarily as a colonial inheritance from the West. The *second* is the romantic counter-claim that India

possesses some unique cultural essence that makes it naturally democratic. Sen rejects both views, arguing instead that democracy everywhere draws nourishment from traditions of public discussion, and that India's experience is distinctive not because it is exceptional, but because it has sustained such traditions over a long historical span (Sen, 2006 a, pp. 12-14)^[17]. This argument shifts attention away from institutional mimicry and toward the social and cultural conditions that make democratic life viable.

Central to Sen's framework is the idea of an *argumentative tradition*. He notes that Indian society has long accommodated disagreement, debate, and heterodoxy across religious, philosophical, and cultural domains. From early philosophical scepticism to medieval religious poetry, public argument was not confined to elites or formal settings but circulated through multiple social spaces (Sen, 2006 a, pp. ix, 19)^[17]. This tradition did not eliminate hierarchy or conflict, but it normalized the act of questioning authority and engaging competing viewpoints. As Sen puts it, persistent argument has been an "important part of our public life," shaping both political culture and secular priorities in India (Sen, 2006 a, p. 12)^[17]. Indian pluralism, therefore, provides the social soil in which this argumentative ethos could take root. Andre Beteille's sociological reflections underline the extraordinary diversity of Indian society, marked by "distinct pursuits, vastly disparate convictions, [and] widely divergent customs" (Beteille, 2002, p. 30)^[3]. This diversity makes any singular account of Indian culture necessarily selective, yet it also explains why dialogue and negotiation have been recurring features of social life. The simultaneous presence of multiple value systems (Joseph, 2018, p. 217)^[13] has historically required forms of accommodation, coexistence, and mutual adjustment, even when these were fragile or incomplete.

Historical scholarship further complicates simplistic readings of Indian tradition as either irrational or uncritical. Romila Thapar reminds us that rationality and scepticism were integral to early Indian thought, visible not only in philosophical schools such as Carvaka, Buddhism, and Jainism, but also in popular literature and narrative traditions (Thapar, 2014, p. 227)^[19]. Questioning, doubt, and debate were not marginal deviations but recognizable cultural practices. This inheritance of critical engagement forms an often-overlooked backdrop to modern democratic reasoning in India. At the same time, pluralism in India has never been free of tension. Beteille cautions that caste and religion continue to exert powerful influence in Indian politics, sometimes deepening social divisions rather than fostering dialogue (Beteille, 2002, p. 30)^[3]. Sen similarly acknowledges that democracy in India remains imperfect and flawed, yet insists that the resources for addressing these flaws lie not outside society but within its argumentative capacities (Sen, 2006 a, p. 12)^[17]. The endurance of democracy in India-even through moments of crisis such as the Emergency of the 1970s-illustrates how public reasoning can serve as a corrective force when institutional guarantees are threatened (Sen, 2006 a, p. 12)^[17].

Taken together, Sen's concept of public reasoning and sociological accounts of Indian pluralism point toward a view of democracy as a lived, culturally embedded process rather than a static institutional arrangement. Democracy survives not simply because laws exist, but because people recognize disagreement as legitimate, tolerate heterodoxy,

and accept dialogue as a mode of resolving conflict. This does not imply harmony or consensus; rather, it highlights the productive role of argument in sustaining democratic life. These conceptual foundations are crucial for evaluating contemporary challenges to Indian democracy. If democracy depends on public reasoning nurtured by pluralism, then transformations that alter how people communicate, debate, and form judgments will inevitably affect democratic practice. The next section therefore turns to the changing conditions of public reasoning in an era increasingly shaped by algorithmic mediation, examining how new forms of power and communication interact with India's long-standing democratic traditions.

Indian Pluralism and Diversity as Social Conditions of Democracy

Indian democracy has unfolded within a social landscape marked by extraordinary diversity, not only in demographic terms but also in modes of thought, belief, and social organization (Oommen, 2006, p. 33) ^[15]. As Beteille (2006, p. 21) ^[4] wrote:

“...the Indian tradition was not only the most pluralistic known to human history, it was also the most hierarchical...Just as the accommodation of diversity did not go with equality, it also did not go with individual freedom...The challenge today is to maintain the diversity and the spirit of accommodation inherited from the past while repudiating hierarchy and creating more space for individual freedom.”

Any attempt to understand democracy in India must therefore take pluralism seriously-not as a normative slogan, but as a lived social condition that shapes how democratic practices emerge, endure, and are contested. Far from being a recent development, diversity has been a constitutive feature of Indian society over long historical periods, influencing patterns of coexistence, conflict, and negotiation that continue to define public life.

Sociological accounts emphasize that India is not a single cultural or social unit but a complex mosaic of communities, traditions, and identities (Sanyal, 2012, p. 34) ^[16]. Popular estimates suggest that it has covered a span of five thousand years since the period of its first known civilization, and in the process of its evolution, Indian society has acquired a composite culture, characterized by stable patterns of pluralism (Dube, 1990, p. 1) ^[7]. Andre Beteille describes India as an “immensely diverse country” characterized by divergent customs, convictions, and viewpoints, where any cultural or political analysis inevitably involves selective emphasis (Beteille, 2002, p. 30) ^[3]. This diversity operates at multiple levels-language, caste, religion, region, and occupation-making uniformity neither possible nor historically desirable. Democracy in such a context cannot rely on homogeneity or shared cultural assumptions; instead, it must function through mechanisms that allow differences to be articulated, debated, and managed within a common political framework.

Historically, scholarship in India reinforces the depth of this plural social formation. Romila Thapar notes that early Indian intellectual traditions were marked by rationality, scepticism, and sustained questioning, extending beyond elite philosophical schools into popular literature and everyday cultural expressions (Thapar, 2014, p. 227) ^[19]. The presence of Buddhist, Jaina, materialist, and later bhakti and Sufi traditions points to a long-standing acceptance of heterodoxy. This acceptance did not imply the absence of

hierarchy or domination, but it did create social spaces in which alternative viewpoints could circulate and contest dominant norms. Amartya Sen situates this pluralism at the heart of India's democratic capacity. He argues that the simultaneous flourishing of different convictions and viewpoints has historically drawn upon an implicit acceptance of dialogue and heterodoxy, making argument a routine part of social life (Sen, 2006 a, p. ix) ^[17]. In this sense, pluralism is not merely a backdrop to democracy but one of its enabling conditions. Public reasoning becomes possible precisely because society does not insist on unanimity; disagreement is expected, and persuasion rather than coercion becomes the preferred mode of resolving differences (Sen, 2006 a, pp. 12-14) ^[17]. Importantly, Sen cautions against romanticizing pluralism as inherently benign. Diversity can generate democratic energy, but it can also harden into rigid identities and exclusionary politics (Sen, 2006 b, 160) ^[18]. Beteille observes that caste and religion have not declined in political significance; rather, they continue to shape electoral mobilization and public discourse, sometimes intensifying social boundaries instead of softening them (Beteille, 2002, p. 30) ^[3]. These tensions reveal that pluralism alone does not guarantee democratic outcomes. What matters is how diversity is negotiated-whether through dialogue and public reasoning or through silencing and polarization.

Yet India's democratic history provides evidence that pluralism, when combined with argumentative traditions, can act as a stabilizing force. Sen points to moments such as the popular rejection of authoritarian measures during the Emergency of the 1970s as instances where democratic commitment was reaffirmed through public judgment rather than elite intervention (Sen, 2006 a, p. 12) ^[17]. Such episodes illustrate how democratic resilience draws strength from a culture that values debate and collective reasoning, even amid deep social divisions. Pluralism also complicates simplistic comparisons between Indian democracy and Western liberal models. In societies shaped by WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) cultural assumptions, democracy often presupposes a relatively uniform civic identity. India's experience suggests a different trajectory, where democratic life must accommodate multiple moral worlds and overlapping loyalties premised in a different kind of *cultural unconscious* (Kakar, 2024, p. 33) ^[14]. This makes public reasoning not an optional supplement but a necessity, as democratic coexistence depends on continual negotiation among diverse social actors.

Seen from this perspective, Indian pluralism functions as both a challenge and a resource for democracy. It challenges democratic governance by producing competing claims, inequalities, and conflicts that resist easy resolution. At the same time, it equips democracy with a repertoire of argumentative practices-debate, critique, and dialogue-that can channel conflict into institutional and public forums. Democracy, then, is sustained not despite diversity but through the social skills developed in response to it. Understanding pluralism as a social condition of democracy is especially important in the contemporary moment, when new forms of mediation increasingly shape how differences are expressed and perceived. If pluralism historically fostered dialogue through face-to-face interaction, cultural exchange, and shared public spaces, emerging technological transformations may alter these dynamics in profound ways. Therefore, we may turn now to these transformations,

examining how algorithmic modernity reshapes public reasoning, trust, and democratic interaction in India.

Algorithmic Modernity and Its Democratic Implications

The conditions under which democratic public reasoning operates are undergoing significant transformation in what Anthony Elliott describes as *algorithmic modernity*. This term refers not simply to the spread of new technologies, but to a broader social reorganization in which automated, data-driven systems increasingly mediate communication, decision-making, and social interaction. From a sociological standpoint, Elliott insists that artificial intelligence and algorithmic systems should not be understood as neutral tools. Rather, they are deeply embedded in social, cultural, political, and ethical contexts, reshaping the very texture of public life (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196)^[8]. A central concern in Elliott's analysis is the changing nature of trust. Democratic societies rely on trust-among citizens, between citizens and institutions, and in shared processes of decision-making. Algorithmic systems, however, often operate in opaque ways that are difficult for ordinary users to scrutinize or challenge. Elliott argues that the expansion of AI-enabled technologies may curtail individual autonomy and privacy, damage trust in public institutions, and exacerbate existing social divisions and inequalities (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196)^[8]. When decisions affecting welfare, visibility, or opportunity are increasingly delegated to automated systems, the space for public questioning and accountability becomes narrower.

This has direct implications for democracy understood as public reasoning. As Sen emphasizes, democratic participation depends on the ability to speak, listen, argue, and influence public choice without fear (Sen, 2006 a, pp. 12-14)^[17]. Algorithmic mediation can subtly undermine these capacities by filtering information, prioritizing certain voices over others, and shaping what counts as relevant or visible in public discourse. Elliott notes that algorithmic power reorganizes time and space, distributing actions and interactions across digital environments where responsibility is diffused and causal chains are difficult to trace (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196)^[8]. In such conditions, citizens may find it harder to identify who is accountable for decisions, let alone contest them through reasoned debate. Another democratic risk highlighted by Elliott concerns inequality. Algorithmic systems often rely on large-scale data extraction and predictive models that can reinforce existing social hierarchies. While these systems promise efficiency and innovation, they may also deepen exclusion by embedding biases into seemingly objective processes. Elliott warns that AI-driven governance can intensify social divisions, producing new forms of marginalization that are less visible but no less consequential (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196)^[8]. From the perspective of Indian democracy, this is particularly significant, given a social context already shaped by caste, class, and religious inequalities.

Algorithmic modernity also alters how individuals relate to the public sphere. Elliott describes AI as an "unsettling" phenomenon-one that simultaneously generates remarkable possibilities and profound anxieties (Elliott, 2023, and de Vries and Schinkel, 2019)^[9, 6]. Automated systems increasingly mediate everyday interactions, from communication to access to services, reshaping how people experience presence, participation, and recognition. Trust becomes a fragile resource, as individuals must rely on systems they do not fully understand. When trust erodes,

democratic engagement risks becoming thinner, more fragmented, and more reactive. Importantly, Elliott does not frame algorithmic modernity as a deterministic or uniformly negative process. He emphasizes that there is "everything to play for" in how societies choose to engage ethically and politically with AI technologies (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196)^[8]. The consequences of algorithmic expansion depend on the values and normative principles that guide their development and use. This insight resonates strongly with Sen's insistence that democracy is sustained through collective reasoning about shared priorities. If algorithmic systems are introduced without public deliberation, they may hollow out democratic practices; if subjected to public reasoning, they may be shaped in ways that support democratic goals.

For India, the encounter between algorithmic modernity and democracy unfolds within a distinctive social landscape. A society historically accustomed to debate, heterodoxy, and pluralism may possess cultural resources that help resist the depoliticizing effects of automated governance. At the same time, algorithmic mediation risks bypassing these traditions by shifting decision-making away from deliberative spaces into technical infrastructures. The challenge, then, is not simply technological adaptation but democratic translation: ensuring that new forms of power remain accessible to public scrutiny and contestation. Seen through Elliott's framework, algorithmic modernity poses a fundamental question for Indian democracy: can public reasoning survive when political and social life is increasingly organized through systems that operate beyond ordinary comprehension? This question does not admit an easy answer. What it does suggest, however, is that the future of democracy in India will depend on how effectively its longstanding traditions of argument, critique, and dialogue can be mobilized to interrogate and govern algorithmic power. The following discussion brings these strands together, examining whether India's plural and argumentative heritage can serve as a democratic resource in navigating the uncertainties of an algorithmic age.

Public Reasoning, Pluralism, and Democracy in an Algorithmic Age

Bringing together the ideas of public reasoning, social pluralism, and algorithmic modernity allows for a deeper understanding of the challenges and possibilities facing Indian democracy today. At the heart of this synthesis lies a simple but demanding proposition: democracy survives not merely through institutions or technologies, but through socially embedded practices of reasoning, dialogue, and contestation. When these practices weaken, democratic forms may persist while democratic substance erodes. Amartya Sen's conception of democracy as public reasoning remains especially relevant in this context. His insistence that democracy depends on citizens' ability to participate in open discussion-to speak, listen, argue, and influence public choices without fear-shifts attention away from procedural minimalism toward everyday democratic life (Sen, 2006a, pp. 12-14)^[17]. This view helps explain why Indian democracy has shown resilience despite poverty, inequality, and social fragmentation. It has drawn strength from a long-standing argumentative tradition in which disagreement is not treated as a threat but as a normal feature of collective life (Sen, 2006a, p. ix)^[17].

Indian pluralism provides the social infrastructure that makes such public reasoning possible. As sociological and

historical accounts show, diversity in India has never been merely demographic; it has involved the coexistence of multiple moral worlds, belief systems, and ways of life (Beteille, 2002, p. 30; Thapar, 2014, p. 227) [3, 19]. This multiplicity has generated tension and hierarchy, but it has also fostered habits of negotiation and dialogue. Democracy, in this sense, has not emerged despite diversity but through sustained engagement with it. The acceptance of heterodoxy-visible in philosophical debate, religious traditions, and popular culture-has helped normalize the idea that no single viewpoint can claim absolute authority (Sen, 2006a, p. 19) [17]. Algorithmic modernity, however, unsettles these democratic foundations in subtle yet profound ways. In contemporary India, the expansion of AI-enabled surveillance and data-driven governance has begun to reshape the relationship between the state, citizens, and the public sphere. Advances in predictive analytics and machine learning have facilitated new forms of automated monitoring, behavioural assessment, and opinion tracking across digital platforms. During electoral cycles, algorithmic systems and automated social media accounts have amplified political messaging and circulated misinformation at unprecedented speed, complicating democratic deliberation. At the policy level, algorithmic “nudging” has been deployed in domains such as welfare delivery, health, and employment, often without adequate public debate. More critically, large-scale data infrastructures have enabled continuous observation of citizens’ activities and expressions, raising concerns about privacy, dissent, and democratic accountability (Elliott, 2022, p. 77) [8].

Anthony Elliott’s broader analysis highlights how such developments reconfigure trust, autonomy, and institutional responsibility under conditions of algorithmic governance (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196) [8]. When decision-making becomes opaque and mediated through complex technological systems-or what Giddens (1990, p. 94) [11] describes as *system trust*, where reliance on expert systems replaces direct understanding-citizens may find it increasingly difficult to question outcomes or assign responsibility. This shift risks undermining public reasoning by replacing dialogue with prediction and participation with passive consumption. The democratic implications of this transformation are particularly significant in a plural society like India. Algorithmic systems tend to simplify social complexity by translating lived experience into standardized data categories, thereby flattening difference and potentially reinforcing existing inequalities (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196) [8]. For a democracy that depends on negotiation across difference, such tendencies threaten the communicative spaces in which pluralism is continually worked out. Yet the Indian experience also suggests that algorithmic modernity does not inevitably lead to democratic decline. Elliott emphasizes that the social consequences of AI depend on the normative principles guiding its design and deployment (Elliott, 2022, p. 196) [8], an insight that resonates strongly with Sen’s emphasis on collective reasoning as a means of shaping public priorities.

The central tension, then, lies between two modes of organizing social life: one rooted in dialogue, argument, and plural reasoning; the other increasingly governed by automated systems that operate beyond ordinary comprehension. Indian democracy stands at this intersection. Its rich heritage of public reasoning offers cultural and institutional resources for resisting the depoliticizing tendencies of algorithmic governance, but

these resources cannot be taken for granted. They must be actively cultivated and defended in new technological contexts. The future of Indian democracy will depend less on technological adoption itself and more on whether algorithmic power can be brought within the reach of public reasoning. Democracy, understood sociologically, remains an ongoing practice-one that, in an algorithmic age, must renew India’s long tradition of argument not only about political values, but also about the technologies increasingly shaping collective life.

Seen from a constitutional perspective, the challenges posed by algorithmic governance strike at the core normative commitments of Indian democracy. The right to privacy, affirmed by the Supreme Court as intrinsic to dignity, autonomy, and freedom of thought, establishes clear limits on intrusive data collection and pervasive surveillance by both state and corporate actors (*Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India*, 2017) [12]. Equally central is the guarantee of freedom of speech and expression, which sustains the conditions for public reasoning by protecting dissent, critique, and communicative participation under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India [5]. When algorithmic systems filter visibility, shape political messaging, or discipline expression through opaque moderation and surveillance, they risk narrowing the constitutional space within which democratic argument can occur. Read together, these constitutional protections reinforce the sociological insight that democracy depends not only on technological efficiency but on safeguarding the communicative freedoms that enable citizens to reason publicly, contest authority, and hold power accountable in an algorithmic age.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the future of Indian democracy cannot be adequately understood through institutional or procedural indicators alone. Rather, it must be examined through a sociological lens that foregrounds public reasoning, social pluralism, and the transformed conditions of collective life under algorithmic modernity. Drawing on Amartya Sen’s conception of democracy as an ongoing practice of public discussion and interactive reasoning, the analysis has emphasized that democratic vitality depends fundamentally on citizens’ capacity to question authority, debate alternatives, and influence collective decisions without fear or exclusion (Sen, 2006a, pp. 12-14) [17]. While elections and constitutional frameworks remain indispensable, their democratic substance is sustained by a broader communicative culture embedded in everyday social life. India’s historical experience of pluralism provides crucial support for this democratic orientation. Sociological and historical accounts demonstrate that diversity, heterodoxy, and scepticism have long shaped Indian traditions of debate across philosophical, religious, and cultural domains (Sen, 2006a, pp. ix, 19; Thapar, 2014, p. 227) [17, 19]. Although marked by hierarchy and conflict, this plural social order has cultivated practices of negotiation and accommodation that remain central to democratic coexistence (Beteille, 2002, p. 30) [3]. Indian democracy has thus derived resilience not from uniformity, but from its capacity to manage difference through argument and dialogue.

At the same time, the paper has shown that algorithmic modernity introduces new and serious challenges to these democratic foundations. As Anthony Elliott observes, AI-

driven and automated systems are reshaping trust, autonomy, and institutional accountability in ways that risk eroding public reasoning and deepening social divisions (Elliott, 2022, pp. 188-196)^[8]. When political and social life is increasingly mediated by opaque technological infrastructures, opportunities for democratic scrutiny and collective deliberation may be diminished. For a plural society like India, such tendencies are especially consequential, as algorithmic simplification can flatten difference and marginalize already vulnerable groups (Ganesh & Moss, 2022)^[10]. Yet this encounter need not be understood in fatalistic terms. Elliott's assertion that there is "everything to play for" underscores the importance of normative choices and democratic engagement in shaping technological futures (Elliott, 2022, p. 196)^[8]. Read alongside Sen's emphasis on public reasoning, this suggests that the democratic challenge of the algorithmic age is not merely technical, but deeply social and cultural. In conclusion, the resilience of Indian democracy in the coming decades will depend on whether its traditions of pluralism and argument can be renewed under altered conditions of mediation and power. Democracy, understood sociologically, remains an unfinished project-one that must continually reinterpret its inherited practices in response to new forms of authority. Sustaining public reasoning in an algorithmic age is therefore not only a political necessity, but a sociological imperative.

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