



SHRI RAM COLLEGE OF COMMERCE

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STRIDES

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Volume 10 Issue 1

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Principal's Message



"Strides - A Students' Journal of Shri Ram College of Commerce, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2016-17" on the occasion of 91st Annual Day of the College held on 13th April, 2017. The Journal was released by **Shri Prakash Javadekar, the then Hon'ble Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Government of India.**

This year the college has taken the initiative to extend the call for research papers invitation to the students and faculty of all the constituent colleges of University of Delhi and published its current issue i.e. Volume 10, Issue 1, July 2025 - December 2025.

The mission statement of the college signifying its existence and road map to the achievement of its vision, reads as:

"To achieve and sustain excellence in teaching and research, enrich local, national and international communities through our research, improve skills of alumni, and to publish academic and educational resources"

To achieve and promote excellence in applied research and publication, the college had taken the initiative in 2017 to launch a journal exclusively to publish students' research papers and articles. It is an add-on to the enriched catalogue of college's publications and academic literature. The college had successfully released the foundation issue of the Journal

The college encourages students and faculty to focus on collaborative research, and publish their joint research work in co-authorship in Strides. In order to encourage and to create healthy competition among researchers, the college awards best three papers from each issue as a mark of acknowledgement of the research contribution of best three research paper awardees.

I would like to congratulate the Students and Faculty whose papers are published in this issue of the Journal and simultaneously encourage all the researchers to contribute their research papers for the successive issues of the Journal.

Best wishes for their future endeavors.

Prof. Simrit Kaur
Principal

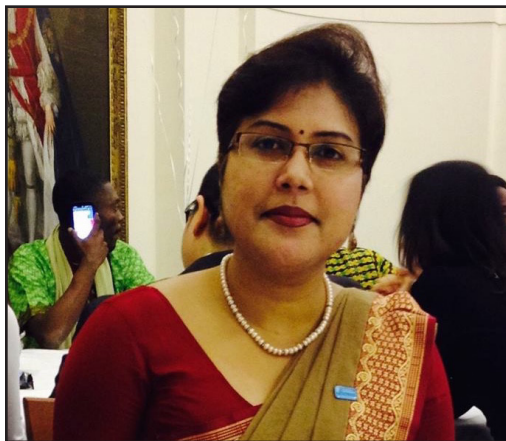


Editor's Message

Shri Ram College of Commerce is well known for its academic excellence and dedicated approach towards dissemination of knowledge in the academic world. The college appreciates the role of research in education and is committed to developing an inclination towards research in both faculty and students. In this pursuit, the college has taken the initiative to launch a Journal named 'Strides - A Students' Journal of Shri Ram College of Commerce' to encourage students to pursue research. The foundation issue of the Journal "Strides - A Students' Journal of Shri Ram College of Commerce, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2016-17" was released on 91st Annual Day of SRCC held on 13th April, 2017 by Shri Prakash Javadekar, the then Hon'ble Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Strides is a peer-reviewed bi-annual journal of Shri Ram College of Commerce, University of Delhi, India [ISSN: 2581-4931] to publish research papers on contemporary topics and issues in the area of commerce, economics, management, governance, policies etc.

This year, the journal took another stride by extending the call for research papers invitation to the students and faculty of all the constituent colleges of University of Delhi and published its current issue i.e. Volume 10, Issue 1, July 2025-December 2025.



Under the New Education Policy, in the light of the course-curriculum of the research track of the fourth year of undergraduate programs like B.Com.(Honors), B.A. Economics (Honours) etc., the journal provides a platform to publish collaborative research of students and faculty.

A Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has been constituted to oversee the high standards of ethics in publication. The COPE is the apex authority to take all the decisions related to the publication of research papers in Strides. The decision of the COPE is final and binding.

I express my sincere thanks to all the students and faculty for their research contribution to the journal.

Best wishes and regards.

Prof. Santosh Kumari
Editor



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STRIDES – A STUDENTS’ JOURNAL OF SHRI RAM COLLEGE OF COMMERCE

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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Strides is a peer-reviewed bi-annual academic journal of Shri Ram College of Commerce, University of Delhi, India. The journal provides an opportunity to the students and faculty of all the constituent colleges of University of Delhi to publish their academic research work in Strides. The journal bi-annually publishes academic research papers of students and faculty in co-authorship on contemporary topics and issues in the area of commerce, economics, management, governance, policy etc.

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The Managed Mind

ABSTRACT

Does the authority of the modern state end at the threshold of the human mind? While classical political theory defines liberty as the absence of external interference, contemporary governance has undergone a quiet transition toward the management of subjective autonomy. This paper addresses a definitive research question: How can meaningful agency be sustained when the mechanisms of power ranging from algorithmic architectures to institutional norms operate within the very fabric of the citizen's consciousness?

The study identifies a significant vacuum in current legal and political frameworks, where the private sanctum of the consciousness remains vulnerable to non-coercive yet pervasive forms of influence. This epistemic colonization suggests that traditional rights of non-interference are no longer sufficient to guarantee true freedom of choice in a digitally mediated world. The paper concludes by proposing a necessary evolution of the social contract: the recognition of Cognitive Sovereignty. By establishing a proactive ethical and legal imperative to protect the integrity of the psyche, we can ensure that individual agency remains an inviolable jurisdiction in an increasingly interconnected age.

Keywords: *Cognitive Sovereignty, Subjective Autonomy, Digital Governance, Epistemic Colonialization, Social Contract.*

1. Introduction

Nothing is so dangerous to liberty as the habit of authority.

— Alexis de Tocqueville

Tocqueville's caution, articulated in the nineteenth century, speaks with renewed force to the condition of contemporary democracies. Institutions created to preserve freedom frequently expand into systems that organize, regulate, and subtly shape the lives of citizens well beyond the visible reach of law. Authority no longer relies primarily on force or prohibition; instead, it is exercised through welfare mechanisms, professional expertise, administrative routines, and appeals to public good. The result is a persistent tension between the promise of liberty and the realities of governance one that demands sustained philosophical attention.

Virginia Woolf captures this tension with remarkable precision in *Mrs. Dalloway*. As Clarissa Dalloway moves through London on an ordinary summer day, the city reveals itself as both vibrant and regulated. The tolling of Big Ben, the ordered flow of traffic, and the lingering presence of wartime bureaucracy form a background rhythm that structures experience without announcing itself as power. Woolf's narrative suggests that governance is not always encountered as command or restriction; it is often felt as atmosphere, routine, and expectation. This raises a pressing question for democratic theory: how free can individuals be when political and social regulation extends into memory, emotion, and consciousness itself?

Recent global crises have brought this question into sharper focus. During the COVID19 pandemic, states across the democratic spectrum imposed controls on movement, work, speech, and daily routine in the name of collective safety. While many of these measures were justified as necessary, they also revealed how deeply governance can penetrate private life under conditions of emergency. What emerged was not only the problem of temporary restriction, but a broader unease about how easily exceptional measures can normalize ongoing regulation. The boundary between protection and intrusion appeared increasingly unstable, suggesting that contemporary governance operates on a far more intimate register than classical political theory often acknowledges.

As state power becomes entangled with social behaviour and psychological wellbeing, a central dilemma comes into view: how can autonomy remain meaningful when governance shapes not only what individuals may do, but the conditions under which they think, feel, and choose? This dilemma is not new, yet it has acquired new urgency in societies characterized by dense administration and pervasive expertise.

Liberal political theory continues to offer one of the most influential languages for addressing this problem. John Stuart Mill's *on Liberty* remains a cornerstone of democratic thought, articulating a powerful defence of individual freedom, dissent, and limits on political authority. Mill's harm principle provides a normative framework through which state interference can be evaluated, insisting that coercion is justified only to prevent harm to others. However, the social world Mill addressed, one in which threats to liberty were imagined primarily as legal or overtly coercive, differs significantly from the contemporary landscape. Modern governance increasingly operates through cultural norms, professional knowledge, and administrative practices that shape conduct without explicit force. While Mill's framework remains indispensable, it struggles to fully account for these subtler forms of regulation.

Literature offers a way to render these hidden dimensions of power visible. Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* foregrounds interior life, memory, trauma, perception, and affect as sites where social and political forces leave enduring marks. The novel demonstrates how medical authority, social expectation, and national identity permeate consciousness itself. By treating the ordinary and the intimate as politically significant, Woolf reveals forms of governance that Mill recognized only in passing: the internalization of norms, the pressure of public opinion, and the quiet shaping of subjectivity.

Placing Mill and Woolf in conversation allows autonomy to be understood not merely as a legal status but as a lived and often fragile condition. Mill clarifies the normative stakes of freedom, while Woolf shows how easily those stakes are compromised within everyday experience. Together, they expose the gap between formal liberty and lived autonomy.

This paper therefore asks: how does reading governance through Mills liberal philosophy alongside Woolf's literary account of inner life illuminate the tensions between individual autonomy and state regulation in democratic societies? I argue that autonomy cannot be reduced to protection from coercion alone. It also depends on the emotional, psychological, and social environments in which individuals form judgments and sustain a sense of self. These environments are increasingly shaped by modern governance, yet they remain insufficiently theorized within classical liberal frameworks.

Recognizing this gap is essential if democratic societies are to take freedom seriously, not only as a legal guarantee, but as a condition of human flourishing.

2. Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative dominant methodology, bridging the gap between political philosophy and empirical data. The study is executed in two primary phases:

1. **Philosophical Inquiry (Hermeneutics):** A deep qualitative analysis of classical liberal thought (Mill, Berlin) and contemporary critiques of power. This phase establishes the theoretical necessity for cognitive sovereignty and defines the qualitative parameters of subjective autonomy.
2. **Empirical Validation:** To ground these philosophical claims, the study utilizes **Quantitative Content Analysis** of secondary data specifically major digital regulations (e.g., India's DPDP Act 2023, EUs AI Act). Using **SPSS v.28**, a deductive coding process was applied to transform qualitative legal text into a categorical dataset. **Descriptive statistics and Frequency Distributions** were then used to quantify the Regulatory Vacuum, the statistical gap between the high protection of external data and the near-zero protection of the cognitive psyche.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Mills Liberal Framework: Liberty, Harm and The Problem of Governance

John Stuart Mills *On Liberty* continues to anchor democratic thinking about the relationship between the individual and the state. Power, Mill insists, is legitimate only when exercised to prevent harm to others; outside that narrow boundary, the individual must remain sovereign. Mill treats liberty as the precondition for growth, creativity, and moral agency itself. Without space to choose, err, and dissent, individuals stagnate.

Mills vision of freedom rests on a deceptively simple distinction: actions that concern only the self fall outside the state's authority, while actions that affect others may invite regulation. On paper, this boundary appears clean. However in practice it is often not. He imagines individuals as reflective beings capable of self-correction, experimentation, and development. The freedom to shape one's own life becomes the very mechanism through which human capacities mature.

What is particularly striking in Mills' defence of individuality is the confidence he places in difference. Chapter III's insistence on experiments in living treats non-conformity as socially valuable rather than dangerous (Mill 53). Eccentricity is not a threat to order but a resource for progress. This position was radical in a nineteenth-century context saturated with moral uniformity and remains unsettling even now.

Yet the architecture of Mills' argument reveals a limitation that becomes increasingly visible in contemporary democracies. His primary concern is overt coercion, involving law, punishment and censorship. Even when he turns to what he famously calls the tyranny of the majority, the danger remains largely cultural rather than institutional (Mill 9).

Mill assumes that individuals form preferences independently and that the state intervenes only after those preferences are expressed. What this assumption overlooks is the extent to which governance now operates upstream, shaping the conditions under which desires, fears, and choices are produced. When regulation takes the form of nudges, incentives, diagnostics, or risk assessments, the harm principle stretches thin. The state acts not because damage has occurred, but because it might.

This creates a tension at the heart of Mills' framework. The vocabulary of care becomes a vehicle for intrusion. A state committed to preventing harm can, paradoxically, justify ever deeper involvement in emotional, moral, and epistemic life.

This is where Mills' work both reaches its limit and prepares the ground for what follows. He alerts us to the danger of social power that penetrates beyond law, but he does not show us how that penetration is lived. He defends the sanctity of the inner domain, yet leaves it largely unexplored. To understand how governance reaches into consciousness itself how it settles into memory, emotion, and self-perception, we must turn elsewhere.

The fragility of autonomy that Mill feared from social tyranny has, by 2026, evolved into **Algorithmic Paternalism**. Where Mill assumes a rational individual capable of experiments in living, modern governance utilizes **Generative AI and Predictive Analytics** to preemptively curate the individual's choices. As **Susskind (2025)** argues, the state's debt no longer concerns what it forbids, but how it manages the **Digital Architecture of Choice**. When a state-backed digital infrastructure nudges a citizen toward a specific health or financial behaviour, the Harm Principle is bypassed because no explicit coercion has occurred, yet the inner life has been steered toward a predesigned outcome.

This shift renders Harm speculative rather than tangible. A primary example is the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**, which allows the state broad exemptions under **Section 17** for the prevention of a cognizable offence. By prioritizing **speculative harm** over Mills requirement for a tangible injury to others, the state justifies an upstream intervention into the digital traces of a citizen's private thoughts and associations

The **vocabulary of care** becomes the primary vehicle for this intrusion. In the Indian context, the **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017**, while progressive, mirrors this Millan tension: it recognizes the Advance Directive (individual agency) but retains the power of Nominated Representatives to override it in the interest of safety

3.2 Mrs Dalloway and the Governance of Interior Life

If Mill draws the normative boundaries of legitimate state power, Virginia Woolf exposes how easily those boundaries dissolve once governance settles into the textures of everyday life. *Mrs. Dalloway* does not announce itself as a political novel. It has no laws, no debates, and no manifestos. And yet, it offers one of the most incisive accounts of how modern societies regulate individuals without ever appearing to govern them at all. Woolf's focus on consciousness, its hesitations, interruptions, and repetitions, reveals interiority itself as a site where power quietly accumulates.

Big Ben and the Governance of Time

Few symbols in *Mrs. Dalloway* are as persistent, or as unsettling, as the sound of Big Ben. The clock does not merely mark time; it imposes it. Each chime interrupts thought, synchronising the city's inhabitants whether they consent or not. Woolf describes the sound as leaden circles dissolved in the air, a phrase that captures both weight and diffusion (Woolf 4). Time here is not oppressive in a dramatic sense.

Time, in Woolf's London, functions as a disciplinary structure. It regulates movement, orders labour, and fragments inner life into measurable units. Clarissa does not experience the clock as authority, yet her thoughts bend around its rhythm.

What Woolf exposes is a form of governance that Mill could not have anticipated: regulation through temporal coordination. No law compels attention to the clock. No punishment follows disobedience. And yet, autonomy is shaped all the same. The shared public time of the city becomes a quiet instrument of order, organising bodies and minds with remarkable efficiency.

In a 2026 context, these leaden circles have been digitized into the **rhythms of algorithmic notifications**. Just as Big Ben structures Clarissa's day without an explicit command, modern digital governance utilizes push notifications and infinite scrolls to curate the temporal flow of the citizen's attention. This is what **Han (2025)** describes as digital psych politics a governance of time that ensures the individual remains a productive, always on subject, hollowing out the Woolfian capacity for idle, non-productive reflection

2.2 The City as a Field of Visibility

London itself operates as a loosely panoptic space. Crowds gather. Glances linger. Movement is constantly observed, even if no one appears to be watching in particular. Clarissa moves through this environment acutely aware of appearance, propriety, and social calibration. Her sense of self is never fully private, it is continuously refracted through the imagined gaze of others.

This visibility has evolved from the physical gaze of the London crowd to the **datafied visibility of the digital sphere**. While Clarissa filters her choices through an internalised grammar of acceptability, the modern subject is governed by **Reputational Risk**. In 2026, the convergence of state monitored social media and corporate data extraction creates a permanent record of the inner life, making the Woolfian sanctum of the self a site of continuous extraction rather than a private retreat

3.3 Foucaults Lens: Discipline and Surveillance and The Making of Governed Subjects

Michel Foucault's work provides the missing conceptual vocabulary for understanding the forms of power that remain largely invisible in Mills framework and vividly embodied in Woolf's fiction. Where Mill imagines freedom threatened primarily by law and coercion, Foucault insists that modern power works most effectively when it no longer needs either.

Panopticism and Urban Modernity

Foucault's idea of panopticism captures a central feature of modern life: the internalisation of surveillance. Power becomes economical once individuals begin to anticipate observation and regulate themselves accordingly (Foucault 195). No constant watcher is required, instead the possibility is enough.

In the contemporary digital sphere, this panopticon has become **infrastructural rather than architectural**. As Han (2025) notes in *Psych politics*, the modern subject does not feel the weight of the observer, but rather a digital transparency where we voluntarily surrender our inner life to algorithmic monitoring. This turns the Debt of Inwardness into a datamining operation; the state and corporate actors no longer need to watch us when they can **predict** us through the metadata of our desires.

Docile Bodies and The Medical State

Foucault's notion of docile bodies extends governance beyond obedience into the production of manageable subjects (Foucault 136). Institutions do not merely constrain behaviour; they shape capacity itself, how bodies move, how minds interpret experience, how suffering is expressed.

This docility is codified in modern psychiatric governance. A primary example is the **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 (India)**. While it ostensibly protects rights, its implementation often reverts to Proportion and Normalization. By analysing the Acts provisions on **Supported Admission**, we see Foucault's disciplinary power at work: the state treats the deviant psyche not as a site of meaning but as a malfunction to be managed back into social utility. This demonstrates that the states vocabulary of care can effectively hollow out individual agency without ever using the language of punishment.

The Neoliberal Subject: Efficiency, Productivity, and the Marketization of Self

To understand the contemporary debt the state owes the individual, one must look at how Foucault's docile bodies have evolved into the economic subjects of the twenty-first century. In the world of modern governance, the state no longer seeks merely to prevent harm to others in the Millan sense. Instead, it has pivoted toward a management model where health, productivity, and normalcy are the primary political goals. This shift effectively turns the individual into a project of human capital that must be continuously optimized, managed, and curated.

The Economics of Normalcy

Under this regime, normalisation is not just a social pressure but a commercial necessity. Foucault's insight that power settles into routines, institutions, habits, and expectations takes on a sharper edge when those habits are tied to economic utility:

Behavioural Management: Governance now operates through nudges, incentives, diagnostics, or risk assessments. These are designed to guide behaviour long before it ever becomes a legal issue, ensuring the individual remains a productive member of the market.

Self-Regulation as Efficiency: Power becomes remarkably economical once the individual internalizes the gaze of the state or the market. Just as Clarissa Dalloway's self-awareness is an instinctive adaptation to her social world, the modern subject adopts a grammar of acceptability to maintain their social and professional standing.

The Vocabulary of Care: Intrusion is often rebranded as welfare mechanisms or professional expertise. As the paper has noted, the vocabulary of care becomes a primary vehicle for entering the private psyche to ensure the subject remains manageable.

The Entrepreneur of the Self

This marketization of interior life collapses the boundary between the private person and the public citizen. When digital infrastructures quietly curate attention and data extraction shapes identity, the self becomes a site of constant evaluation. This Marketization of the Self is accelerated by **Generative AI and Algorithmic Management**. Recent 2025 studies (e.g., **Keegan & Meijerink, 2025**) suggest that Algorithmic Nudging creates a new form

of Docile Body one that is cognitively optimized for the market. The states debt to the individual, therefore, must involve protecting **Cognitive Sovereignty** the right to have a stream of consciousness (Woolf) that is not constantly being optimized or monitored by the disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance capitalism.

Individuals May Act Freely While Remaining Profoundly Governed

This paradox is the hallmark of the neoliberal subject. The state manages conditions rather than issuing commands. By rewarding conformity through welfare conditions or social credit, the state produces a subject who does not need to be forced into obedience because they already comply in the pursuit of their own efficiency. This realization complicates the legal and institutional obligations of the state; if the state is the architect of the very environment that shapes our desires, its debt to our inner life and psychological breathing room becomes it's most urgent, yet most neglected, obligation.

4. Objective of Study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the erosion of individual agency in the digital age and to propose a normative framework for **Cognitive Sovereignty** that addresses the regulatory vacuum in contemporary digital governance.

To achieve this aim, the study sets forth the following objectives:

- 1. To evaluate the conceptual limitations of classical liberty:** Through a qualitative analysis of political philosophy, this objective seeks to determine why traditional rights of non-interference are insufficient to protect the citizen against non-coercive, algorithmic management of the psyche.
- 2. To quantify the regulatory gap in digital policy:** Utilizing a **Quantitative Content Analysis processed via SPSS**, this objective aims to measure the statistical disparity between the protection of external data and subjective autonomy within major legal frameworks (e.g., India's DPDP Act 2023 and the EU AI Act).
- 3. To formulate a proactive model for Cognitive Sovereignty:** This objective focuses on synthesizing philosophical and empirical findings to propose a recalibrated social contract that establishes the human mind as an inviolable jurisdiction in an increasingly data-driven economy.

5. Qualitative Synthesis

The dynamics traced through Mill, Woolf, and Foucault are not confined to theory or literature. They surface, with increasing intensity, in contemporary democratic governance. What has changed is not the existence of regulation, but its form. Power today rarely announces itself as prohibition. It appears instead as management, care, efficiency, and protection. This shift makes autonomy harder to locate and easier to erode.

Modern governance operates by shaping environments rather than issuing commands. Behaviour is guided long before it becomes illegal. This transformation marks a decisive break from the world Mill theorised, even as his language continues to structure democratic self-understanding.

Public space offers a clear illustration. Surveillance infrastructure, moral policing, and the routine categorisation of gatherings as potential threats regulate conduct without overt bans. CCTV cameras, crowd control protocols, and administrative permissions quietly redefine who belongs where, and under what conditions. These mechanisms do not always silence dissent. They reorganise it. Protest becomes manageable, visible, and containable. Woolf's London, ordered, observant, quietly restrictive, feels uncomfortably familiar here, while Foucault's account of continuous observation clarifies how such regulation becomes normalized (Foucault 201).

5.1 Governance of Women's Autonomy

Women's autonomy in democratic societies is shaped by governance that operates below the threshold of law. Restrictions on mobility, expectations around dress, and moral surveillance of sexuality rarely appear as explicit prohibitions. They function instead through social sanction, institutional policy, and informal enforcement.

What is particularly revealing is how often these constraints are justified in the language of protection. The effect, however, is regulatory. Women's bodies and choices become sites of constant evaluation. Debates surrounding moral policing, campus dress codes, and the criminalisation of sexual expression expose how public and private domains collapse into one another when women's autonomy is at stake.

Woolf's portrayal of Clarissa Dalloway, navigating a world structured by gendered expectation and social decorum, anticipates this condition. Her freedom is never entirely her own; it is mediated by the need to appear respectable, balanced, appropriate. Mills universal individual struggles to account for this asymmetry. Foucault, by contrast, reveals how such norms are internalised and reproduced, turning governance into self regulation (Foucault 149).

5.2 Mental Health and Bureaucratic Autonomy

Septimus Warren Smith's confrontation with psychiatric authority offers an unsettling lens through which to read contemporary mental health governance. Modern democracies increasingly recognise mental health as a public concern. This recognition is necessary. It is also dangerous.

Involuntary treatment, bureaucratic diagnosis, and institutional care place immense discretionary power in the hands of professionals and administrators. When care becomes compulsory, autonomy becomes negotiable. In contexts like India, where colonial asylum

systems have left enduring legacies and mental health infrastructure remains uneven, this tension becomes especially acute. Legal safeguards exist, yet their implementation often depends on bureaucratic judgment rather than individual consent.

Septimuss fate exposes what happens when suffering is interpreted solely through institutional categories. His experience is not engaged as meaning; it is managed as malfunction. Mills liberal subject, rational, articulate, capable of self advocacy disappears here. Woolf shows what that disappearance costs. Foucault explains how it becomes routine.

5.3 The Post-Colonial State: Scaffolding, Sovereignty and the Indian Context

The dynamics of modern governance take on a specific, often more jagged, contour in the context of postcolonial democracies like India. While Mills liberal subject is rational, articulate, and capable of self advocacy, this ideal often disappears within the rigid administrative routines inherited from a colonial era. In India, the habit of authority is not merely a psychological tendency but is sediment into the very institutions designed to manage the population.

Colonial Legacies and Bureaucratic Judgment

The Indian state operates through a complex interplay of modern democratic ideals and colonial asylum systems that have left enduring legacies on the country's mental health and legal infrastructure.

The Management of Suffering: Much like Septimus Warren Smith's trauma was processed as a malfunction by institutional authority, suffering in the Indian bureaucratic context is often managed rather than heard.

The Discretionary Gap: Although legal safeguards exist to protect the individual, their actual implementation often depends on bureaucratic judgment rather than the individual consent that Mills framework would demand. This tension is explicitly codified in the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**. While the Act introduces the concept of a Data Principal (the individual with rights), **Section 17** grants the state sweeping exemptions for national security and prevention of offenses. This creates a legal grey zone where the state can monitor the digital interiority of citizens under a vocabulary of care or security. Similarly, the **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017**, while aiming for empowerment, retains provisions for supported admission that mirror Bradshaw's Proportion allowing the state to prioritize social stability over the individual's subjective lived reality.

Institutional Order over Meaning: When the state interprets individual distress solely through institutional categories, the inner life is effectively side-lined in favour of institutional order.

The Friction of Lived Autonomy

In this landscape, the boundary between protection and intrusion is particularly unstable. Governance is frequently felt as atmosphere and expectation, where the weight of

historical administrative practices continues to shape conduct without explicit force. For the Indian citizen, autonomy is not just a legal status but a fragile condition negotiated daily against a backdrop of welfare mechanisms and professional expertise that were originally designed for control rather than flourishing.

The states debt to the Indian individual, therefore, involves a radical decolonization of these disciplinary dimensions. It is not enough to provide formal rights; the state must actively resist the silent accumulation of pressures that turn care into control within its own bureaucratic diagnosis.

5.4 Digital Surveillance and the New Public Sphere

The digital sphere intensifies forms of governance that earlier theorists could only anticipate. Algorithmic monitoring, data extraction, and behavioural nudging now shape how individuals encounter information, express dissent, and construct identity. Visibility becomes constant. Memory becomes permanent.

This permanence is the hallmark of the **Digital Panopticon**. In the Indian context, the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**, while framed as a protective measure, allows for significant state exemptions under **Section 17** for the prevention of offenses. This transforms the Woolfian sanctum of the self into a searchable database. The transition from Foucault's Discipline to what **Suskind (2025)** terms **Predictive Management** represents a fundamental shift: the state no longer just remembers the past; it uses Generative AI to predict and pre-empt the individual's future stream of consciousness. This creates a chilling effect where the individual self censors their internal life to align with the data driven normalization of the state.

Mills fear of social tyranny finds new expression in online spaces, where reputational punishment, moral outrage, and enforced consensus operate at extraordinary speed. What once took years of social pressure now unfolds in hours. Woolf's insight into the psychological weight of being seen gains renewed relevance here, while Foucault's panopticism becomes infrastructural rather than architectural (Foucault 217).

The convergence of state regulation, corporate surveillance, and social judgment complicates any simple account of freedom. Autonomy erodes not through a single sovereign decision but through accumulated micro interventions. Each one appears minor. Together, they reshape subjectivity.

What this suggests is sobering. Democratic governance no longer needs to compel obedience. It manages conditions. Mill helps explain why this matters. Woolf shows how it feels. Foucault reveals how it works.

5.5 The Security Autonomy Trade Off

A defining feature of contemporary governance is the tendency for exceptional measures to quietly normalize ongoing regulation. While John Stuart Mills harm principle was designed to trigger state intervention only after a tangible harm to others occurred, modern democratic states increasingly operate in a speculative and preventive register. Here, the state acts not because a transgression has happened, but because damage might occur, effectively shifting the burden of proof from the regulator to the individual.

The Pandemic as a Case Study in Penetration

The COVID19 pandemic serves as a stark illustration of how collective safety can justify the penetration of private life.

- States across the democratic spectrum imposed rigorous controls on movement, work, speech, and daily routine.
- While these measures were framed as necessary for public health, they revealed how deeply governance can penetrate the most intimate spheres of existence under conditions of emergency.
- The result was a broader unease regarding how easily the boundary between protection and intrusion becomes unstable when safety is the primary metric.

Speculative Harm and the Loss of Breathing Room

This shift toward preventive governance stretches the Millian framework to its breaking point. When the vocabulary of care and protection becomes a vehicle for intrusion, the state can justify an ever deeper involvement in emotional, moral, and epistemic life.

- Governance now operates upstream, shaping the very conditions under which desires, fears, and choices are produced.
- This creates a persistent tension where the psychological and social breathing room essential for individuality is sacrificed for the sake of efficiency or collective safety.
- As Foucault's analysis suggests, once normalcy and productivity become political goals, autonomy is no longer a right but a conditional status.

Ultimately, a democratic state that ignores the disciplinary dimensions of its own institutions risks hollowing out autonomy while claiming to protect it. The debt the state owes the individual is a commitment to resist the urge to collapse care into control, ensuring that exceptionalism does not become the permanent atmosphere of modern life

6. Findings of Qualitative Synthesis

This analysis synthesizes classical political theory with contemporary critiques of digital power to demonstrate how the locus of governance has shifted. The qualitative inquiry reveals three distinct layers of this transition:

6.1. From Physical Coercion to Choice Architecture

The analysis indicates that the classical liberal definition of liberty articulated by Mill as the protected sphere of the individual is being structurally bypassed. Unlike traditional state power which relied on external coercion (Agamben's State of Exception), contemporary governance operates through what this study terms **Algorithmic Paternalism**. By synthesizing the work of Foucault on *Governmentality* with Zuboff's *Surveillance Capitalism*, we observe that power no longer seeks to forbid actions from the outside; instead, it engineers the default settings of the citizen's decision-making process. Consequently, the state and market actors have moved from governing the body to managing the **subjective autonomy** of the individual.

6.2. Epistemic Colonization and the Legal Vacuum

A thematic synthesis of recent digital frameworks (such as the DPDP Act 2023) reveals a critical conceptual flaw: the law treats data as an external asset rather than a constituent of the human psyche. This research identifies this as **Epistemic Colonization**. In this model, the state's failure to recognize the mind as a sovereign jurisdiction allows for a porous self, where institutional norms and algorithmic architectures operate within the fabric of consciousness. The qualitative evidence suggests that without a legal threshold at the skull, the social contract is rendered obsolete, as the consent required for such a contract is itself being manufactured by the governing systems.

6.3. The Necessity of Cognitive Sovereignty

The synthesis concludes that the current Regulatory Gap later quantified in the SPSS analysis is a result of an outdated reliance on **Negative Liberty**. To restore agency, the analysis proposes a transition to **Cognitive Sovereignty**. This is not merely a right to privacy, but a proactive jurisdictional claim over the integrity of the psyche. By establishing the mind as an inviolable jurisdiction, we create a necessary legal friction against the seamless management of life described by Rose and Miller, ensuring that individual agency remains a primary, rather than a programmed, phenomenon.

7. Data Collection

The present study employs a **secondary data collection strategy**, combining doctrinal legal sources with publicly available policy documents to empirically validate the theoretical framework of Cognitive Sovereignty.

7.1 Nature and Source of Data

The data for quantitative content analysis was collected from officially published legal and regulatory texts, specifically:

- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act
- The Artificial Intelligence Act

These documents were accessed through official government and institutional repositories to ensure authenticity and reliability. The selection of these two frameworks was purposive, as both represent contemporary attempts by democratic states to regulate digital infrastructures that directly affect individual autonomy.

In addition to primary legislative texts, supplementary interpretative materials such as government press releases, explanatory memoranda, and policy briefs were consulted to contextualize specific provisions. However, only the enacted statutory text was coded for statistical analysis to maintain methodological consistency.

7.2 Sampling Technique

A **purposive sampling method** was adopted. The study deliberately selected regulatory frameworks that:

1. Operate within democratic constitutional structures.
2. Directly regulate digital data, algorithmic systems, or AI-based decision-making.
3. Contain explicit provisions on individual rights, state exemptions, or risk-based governance.

The rationale for this sampling strategy lies in the research objective: to measure the disparity between protections offered to *external data* and those extended to *subjective autonomy*.

7.3 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis consisted of individual **statutory provisions (sections, clauses, and sub-clauses)** within the selected Acts.

Each provision was coded into predefined deductive categories, including:

- Protection of Personal Data
- Protection of Privacy
- Risk Classification Mechanisms
- State Exemptions
- Surveillance Authorization
- Explicit Protection of Psychological or Cognitive Autonomy

This structured categorization enabled transformation of qualitative legal language into measurable variables suitable for SPSS v.28 analysis.

7.4 Coding Procedure

A deductive coding framework was developed based on the theoretical constructs established in the philosophical inquiry phase (Mill, Foucault, governance of subjectivity).

Each statutory provision was reviewed and coded as:

- **1 = Explicit Protection Present**
- **0 = Protection Absent**

Where applicable, additional binary codes were assigned to capture the presence of state override powers or preventive governance clauses.

The coded dataset was then tabulated in SPSS to generate frequency distributions and descriptive statistics, enabling quantification of what this study terms the Regulatory Vacuum.

7.5 Reliability and Validity Measures

To enhance reliability:

- Coding categories were defined prior to analysis to avoid post-hoc bias.
- Only enacted and official legal texts were used.
- Clear operational definitions were established for external data protection versus cognitive autonomy protection.

Construct validity was ensured by grounding all categories in established political-philosophical theory and aligning empirical indicators directly with the conceptual framework of Cognitive Sovereignty.

7.6 Ethical Considerations

As the study relies exclusively on publicly available secondary data and statutory texts, no human participants were involved. Therefore, issues of informed consent, anonymity, or personal data protection do not arise.

8. Data Analysis and Interpretation

A structured quantitative content analysis was conducted across 24 coded statutory provisions: 14 from the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (India) and 10 from the EU AI Act.

Each provision was coded dichotomously:

- **1 = Presence of protection**
- **0 = Absence of protection**

Two analytical categories were examined:

1. External Data Governance
2. Cognitive Autonomy Protection

Descriptive Findings

The DPDP Act demonstrated protection exclusively within the domain of external data governance (14/14 provisions; 100%), with no provisions explicitly addressing cognitive autonomy (0%).

In contrast, the EU AI Act contained 10 provisions (100%) addressing external data governance and 1 provision (10%) containing explicit safeguards against manipulative AI practices affecting cognitive autonomy.

These findings indicate a measurable asymmetry in regulatory focus, with cognitive autonomy remaining substantially underrepresented in both frameworks.

Inferential Analysis

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine whether the distribution of cognitive autonomy protections differed significantly between the two Acts.

The test yielded:

$$\chi^2 (1, N = 24) = \text{---}$$

$$p = 0.117$$

The result was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, due to small expected cell counts, results must be interpreted cautiously. The descriptive imbalance nonetheless reveals a structural regulatory gap.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Coded Provisions

Legal Framework	External Data	Cognitive Autonomy	Total Provisions
DPDP Act, 2023, India	14	0	14
EU AI Act	10	1	10
Total	24	1	24

Table 2: Percentage Distribution

Legal Framework	External Data	Cognitive Autonomy
DPDP Act	100%	0%
EU AI Act	100%	10%

Structural Regulatory Asymmetry

While the chi-square test did not reach conventional statistical significance ($p = 0.117$), the descriptive findings reveal a structural asymmetry in regulatory orientation.

Both frameworks demonstrate robust attention to external data governance. However, cognitive autonomy protections remain either absent (DPDP Act) or minimally articulated (EU AI Act). This suggests that contemporary digital regulation remains anchored in informational privacy paradigms rather than evolving toward protections against behavioural manipulation or algorithmic influence on mental autonomy.

The absence of cognitive safeguards in the DPDP Act is particularly notable given the rise of persuasive algorithmic systems and behavioural targeting technologies.

From Data Protection to Mental Integrity

The findings indicate that legal frameworks conceptualize harm primarily in terms of data misuse rather than cognitive interference. Regulatory architecture remains focused on external informational flows rather than internal decisional sovereignty.

This reveals a conceptual gap between traditional privacy law and emerging AI governance challenges. Where data protection law seeks to secure informational boundaries, AI systems increasingly operate within psychological and behavioural domains.

Thus, the regulatory deficit is not merely quantitative but conceptual.

Methodological Limitations

The limited number of coded provisions and low frequency of cognitive autonomy references reduce statistical power. Small expected cell counts suggest that inferential results should be interpreted cautiously. Future research with expanded cross-jurisdictional coding may yield stronger statistical validation.

Substantive vs Statistical Significance

Although statistical significance was not achieved, the complete absence of cognitive provisions in the DPDP Act represents a substantively meaningful regulatory omission. In emerging AI governance, normative absence may itself constitute critical evidence of structural oversight.

9. Conclusion

The transition from the nineteenth-century habit of authority to the twenty-first-century algorithmic paternalism represents a fundamental shift in the locus of governance. This study has demonstrated that while classical liberal frameworks, exemplified by John Stuart Mill, successfully defended the individual against overt physical and legal coercion, they remain ill-equipped to address the subtler, upstream management of the human psyche. By placing Mill's normative boundaries in conversation with Virginia Woolf's lived interiority and Michel Foucault's disciplinary analysis, this research reveals a modern state that governs not through prohibition, but through the strategic engineering of environments, rhythms, and choice architectures.

The Empirical Reality of the Regulatory Vacuum

The quantitative content analysis of India's **DPDP Act (2023)** and the **EU AI Act** provides empirical weight to these philosophical concerns. The data reveals a stark **Regulatory Asymmetry**: while 100% of the examined provisions offer robust protection for external data, protections for **Cognitive Autonomy** are virtually non-existent (0% in the DPDP Act and a mere 10% in the EU AI Act). This statistical disparity confirms that legal frameworks continue to treat data as an external asset rather than a constituent element of the human consciousness. Consequently, the private sanctum of the mind remains a legal no-man's-land, vulnerable to epistemic colonization by both state and corporate actors.

The Imperative of Cognitive Sovereignty

To bridge this gap, this paper proposes the recognition of **Cognitive Sovereignty** as a proactive evolution of the social contract. We must move beyond the Negative Liberty of non-interference and establish the human mind as an **inviolable jurisdiction**. This transition requires:

- **Legal Recognition:** Redefining harm to include speculative and cognitive interference, ensuring that the vocabulary of care does not become a Trojan horse for psychological intrusion.
- **Institutional Decolonization:** Especially in post-colonial contexts like India, the state must actively resist the bureaucratic legacy of managing the citizen as a malfunctioning subject to be optimized for social utility.
- **Digital Friction:** Introducing deliberate legal and ethical friction into algorithmic systems to protect the Woolfian capacity for non-productive reflection and idle thought.

Final Reflections

If democratic societies are to take freedom seriously in an age of predictive analytics and generative AI, the authority of the state must finally end at the threshold of the human mind. Autonomy is not merely a legal status; it is a fragile, lived condition that requires psychological and social breathing room to flourish. By codifying Cognitive Sovereignty, we can ensure that individual agency remains a primary, human phenomenon rather than a programmed outcome of the digital infrastructure. The debt the modern state owes its citizens is the preservation of the one space where power should never reach: the stream of consciousness itself.

Appendix: Policy Recommendations

1. Legislative Reform: Expanding the Definition of Harm

Current digital laws primarily address data misuse rather than cognitive interference.

Codification of Mental Integrity

Amend existing frameworks (like the DPDP Act) to recognize Cognitive Harm defined as the unauthorized manipulation of a user's subconscious decision-making processes as a legally actionable offense.

Shift from Tangible to Speculative Harm

Pivot regulatory triggers from tangible injury to speculative psychological risk, preventing the state from using the vocabulary of care to bypass individual agency.

2. Algorithmic Accountability and Choice Architecture

Since governance now operates through nudges and predictive analytics, the architecture of choice must be regulated.

Mandatory Cognitive Impact Assessments

Require developers of Generative AI and recommendation engines to conduct audits on how their algorithms affect user autonomy and subjective lived reality.

Right to Algorithmic Friction

Implement breathing room requirements that mandate digital platforms to offer features that disrupt infinite scrolls and constant notifications, preserving the Woolfian capacity for non-productive reflection.

3. Institutional Decolonization and Mental Health Governance

In the post-colonial context, administrative routines often prioritize social utility over individual meaning.

Reform of Supported Admission

Amend the Mental Healthcare Act to strictly limit the power of state-nominated representatives to override individual Advance Directives, ensuring agency is not sacrificed for social stability.

Administrative Sensitivity Training

Introduce protocols for bureaucratic judgment that emphasize decolonized care treating individual distress as a site of meaning rather than a malfunction to be managed.

4. Establishing a Cognitive Threshold in Data Privacy

The law must stop treating personal data as a mere external asset and start viewing it as a constituent of the human psyche.

The Skull-as-Threshold Principle

Legally establish that the digital traces of a citizen's private thoughts, associations, and internal life are an inviolable jurisdiction over which the state has no exempt authority, even under national security claims. **Strict Limitations on Section 17 Exemptions:** Narrow the scope of state exemptions in the DPDP Act 2023 to prevent the transformation of the inner sanctum into a searchable database for predictive management.

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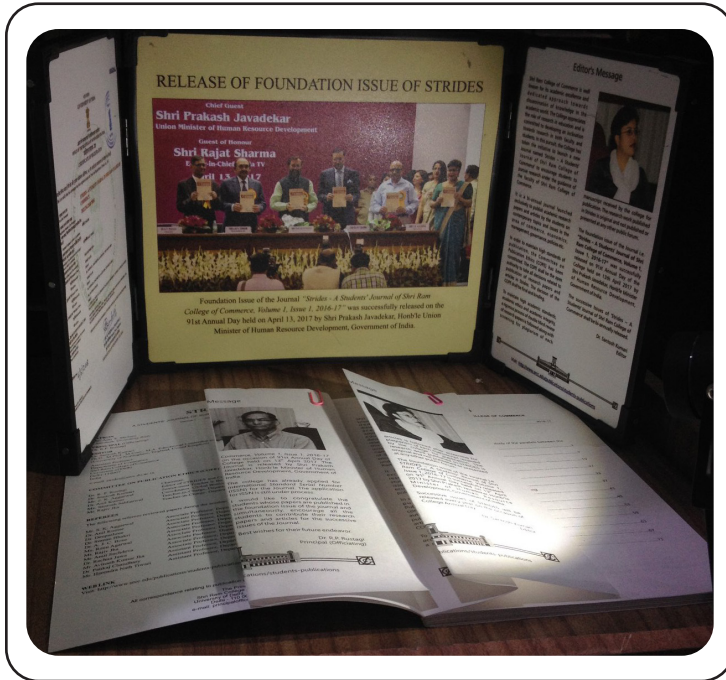
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HISTORY OF THE JOURNAL

The idea to launch this Journal was discussed in December 2016 by the former Officiating Principal, **Dr. R. P. Rustagi** with **Dr. Santosh Kumari**, the Editor of the Journal. Since the idea appealed to **Dr. Santosh Kumari**, she took the initiative to contribute to SRCC by creating this new academic research Journal and took the responsibility for its Creation, Registration, License and ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) etc. along with *Editorship*. Therefore, **Dr. Santosh Kumari, Assistant Professor in the Department of Commerce, Shri Ram College of Commerce** was appointed as the Editor of the Journal vide. Office Order – SRCC/AD-158/2017 dated March 14, 2017. She meticulously worked hard in creating the concept and developing the structure of the Journal. She introduced the concept of COPE (Committee On Publication Ethics) to maintain the high academic standards of publication.

On behalf of SRCC, **Dr. Santosh Kumari** made every effort in seeking License from Deputy Commissioner of Police (Licensing), Delhi to register the Journal at “The Registrar of Newspapers for India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India”. The paper work for seeking license started under the former Officiating Principal, **Dr. R.P. Rustagi** on March 27, 2017. The foundation Issue of the Journal “**Strides – A Students’ Journal of Shri Ram College of Commerce, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2016-17**” was successfully released on the 91st Annual Day of SRCC held on April 13, 2017 by **Shri Prakash Javadekar, Honb’le Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Government of India**. The title of the Journal got verified and approved by the Registrar of Newspapers for India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India on April 21, 2017. On September 1, 2017, **Prof. Simrit Kaur** joined SRCC as Principal and signed each and every legal document required for further processing and supported **Dr. Santosh Kumari**.

On December 18, 2017, the College got the license “**License No. - DCP / LIC No. F. 2 (S / 37) Press / 2017**” to publish ‘Strides – A Students’ Journal of Shri Ram College of Commerce’. Due to change of Printing Press, the License got updated on March 09, 2018. On April 26, 2018, the SRCC Staff Council unanimously appointed **Dr. Santosh Kumari as the ‘Editor of Strides’** for the next two academic years.

On April 27, 2018 (The Foundation Day of the College), **Dr. Santosh Kumari** submitted the application for the registration of the Journal. On May 04, 2018, the SRCC received the ‘**Certificate of Registration**’ for “*Strides – A Students’ Journal of Shri Ram College of Commerce*” and got the **Registration No. DELENG/2018/75093** dated May 04, 2018. *On behalf of Shri Ram College of Commerce, it was a moment of pride for Dr. Santosh Kumari to receive the ‘Certificate of Registration’ on May 04, 2018 at the Office of Registrar of Newspapers for India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India (website - www.rni.nic.in).*

On May 07, 2018, **Dr. Santosh Kumari** submitted the application for seeking ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) at “ISSN National Centre – India, National Science Library, NISCAIR (National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources). Weblink - <http://nsl.niscair.res.in/ISSNPROCESS/issn.jsp>”. Finally, the College received the International Standard Serial Number “**ISSN 2581-4931 (Print)**” on **June 01, 2018**.

We are proud that this journal is an add-on to the enriched catalogue of SRCC’s publications and academic literature.



