Aadhaar: Wrong Number, or Big Brother Calling?

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Aadhar, touted by its supporters as the ultimate tech solution to India's development problems, failed to bring the UPA back to power. Despite having trashed it from the Opposition benches, the BJP government is now rolling it out at an accelerated pace despite strong opposition from civil society groups and continuing concern about the technology and its social and ethical implications. This paper examines the official justifications for Aadhar from the perspective of those whose interests it claims to serve.

Experience on the ground suggests that the real attraction of Aadhar for this government lies in its potential as a tool for the promotion of the interlinked agendas of neoliberal globalisation and militarised nationalism. Disguised as "development", Aadhar is facilitating India's transition into a society where critics and dissenters are seen as enemies rather than as essential actors in democracy.

India has changed in this last one year – for better or for worse, depending on one's position on the political map. Old laws are being overhauled, old programmes are being junked, old institutions are being given the *coup de grace*, old icons are being cleared away from their pedestals and replaced with new idols, the rusty iron frame of the bureaucracy is being pulled apart, holiday lists and restaurant menus are being revised – everything, it seems, is being refurbished and repurposed in the pursuit of one man's all-consuming vision of development.

But the more some things change, the more one thing stays the same. Aadhaar, the magic number that was peddled by the previous government as

a wide-spectrum remedy for corruption, exclusion and poverty, is still with us. True, its self-proclaimed creator and his ambitions have disappeared into oblivion, starry airs and high-profile election campaign notwithstanding. But that seems inconsequential now, when the Modi Sarkar itself, with far less publicity and far more determination, is pushing through his incomplete agenda of converting every single Indian into a number in the world's largest biometric database.

As a matter of fact, the idea of Aadhaar is rooted in something far weightier than Nilekani's rosy vision of an IT-enabled India.[1] The proposal for a national identity card was first floated in 1999 by the Kargil Review Committee, set up to study national security in the aftermath of the Kargil war. The committee recommended issuing of special identity cards to Indian citizens living in border areas in order to distinguish them from illegal infiltrators. In May 2001, a Group of Ministers headed by the then Home Minister L. K. Advani, accepted and expanded this recommendation, suggesting that a "multi-purpose national identity card" be issued to every citizen.[2] In December 2003, the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2003 was introduced in the Lok Sabha by the Home Minister, with a clause empowering the central government to "compulsorily register every citizen of India and issue national identity card to him [*sic*]."

However, this history was more or less buried by the time Aadhaar was finally launched in 2009 by the Congress-led UPA government. The UPA's publicity pitch presented it as a "game-changer," a magical techno-fix whereby the hitherto excluded could claim their fair share of the fruits of development.[3] Rumblings to the contrary – concerns around security, privacy, profiling, data-creep, targeting – were dismissed as the carping of professional nay-sayers with little concern for the needs and priorities of the poor.[4]

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1   Nandan Nilekani, Imagining India (Penguin, 2009).

2   Group of Ministers' Report on "Reforming the National Security System", Press Information Bureau (May 23, 2001), *available at* http://pib.nic.in/archieve/lreleng/lyr2001/rmay2001/23052001/r2305200110.html (last accessed July 19, 2015).

3   Ex - Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Speech a function? to launch Aadhar-enabled services in Dudu, Rajasthan (26 May, 2014), *available at* http://www.myaadhaarcard.in/pm-speech.pdf (last accessed 27 July, 2015).

4   *See* for instance Bhamy Shenoy, *Nine reasons why we should support Aadhaar*, Churumuri Word Press (December 26, 2011) *available at* https://churumuri.wordpress.

The *modus operandi* is very different now. Gone are the days when grandiose announcements of Aadhaar-enabled service delivery by the powers-that-were were stymied and undermined by sceptical judges, lethargic bureaucrats and venal party cadres. Instead, what we have now is a steadily growing list of government services and functions that have been successfully coupled to Aadhaar in various parts of the country. Cooking gas subsidies,[5] house allotments,[6] school scholarships,[7] admission into remand homes and welfare homes,[8] passports,[9] "e-lockers" for archiving documents,[10] bank accounts under the Jan Dhan Yojana,[11] provident fund accounts,[12] pensions,[13] driving licences,[14]

com/2011/12/26/nine-reasons-why-we-should-support-aadhaar/ (last accessed July 25, 2015).

5   Dhaval Kulkarni, *Link your LPG connection to Aadhaar or bank a/c to keep getting subsidy*, Daily News & Analysis (January 2, 2015), *available at* http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report-link-your-lpg-connection-to-aadhaar-or-bank-ac-to-keep-getting-subsidy-2048799 (last accessed July 25, 2015).

6   *CHB to collect allottees' UID, Aadhar numbers*, THE TIMES OF INDIA (April 16, 2015), *available at* http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/CHB-to-collect-allottees-UID-Aadhar-numbers/articleshow/46939742.cms (last accessed July 25, 2015).

7   *State govt to transfer scholarship funds to students' accounts*, THE TRIBUNE (April 17, 2015), *available at* http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/state-govt-to-transfer-scholarship-funds-to-students-accounts/68619.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).

8   *Maharashtra government makes Aadhaar card compulsory for children in reform homes, despite SC order*, DNA (April 21, 2015), *available at* http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report-cm-maharashtra-government-makes-aadhaar-compulsory-for-children-in-reform-homes-despite-supreme-court-order-2079159 (last accessed July 25, 2015).

9   Abhishek Bhalla, *Centre to make Aadhaar cards mandatory for passports 'by end of the month'*, MAIL ONLINE INDIA (November 11, 2014), *available at* http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2829095/Centre-make-Aadhaar-cards-mandatory-passports-end-month.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).

10   *Mah develops Aadhar-linked e-locker*, I-GOVERNMENT (November 17, 2014), *available at* http://www.igovernment.in/news/1000723/mah-develops-aadhar-linked-e-locker (last accessed July 25, 2015).

11   Prakash Kamat, *Bank accounts opened under PMJDY will be Aadhar-linked*, THE HINDU (December 24, 2014), *available at* http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/bank-accounts-opened-under-pmjdy-will-be-aadharlinked/article6722087.ece (last accessed July 25, 2015).

12   *Poor Aadhar linkage hinders EPFO coverage*, THE HINDU BUSINESS LINE (March 24, 2015), *available at* http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/states/poor-aadhar-linkage-hinders-epfo-coverage/article7028722.ece (last accessed July 25, 2015).

13   *Aadhaar Card Must for Pensions*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS (October 10, 2014), *available at* http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/hyderabad/Aadhaar-Card-Must-for-Pensions/2014/10/10/article2470656.ece (last accessed July 25, 2015).

14   *No Aadhaar, no driving licence or registration*, THE TIMES OF INDIA (October 05, 2014),

insurance policies,[15] loan waivers[16] and even entry passes for the Kerala Chief Minister's mass contact programme[17] - all these can be claimed by flashing an Aadhaar card.

One does not know whether the ethical, technical and operational glitches that blocked the UPA from implementing Aadhaar have been addressed and resolved. There doesn't seem to be much conversation about them anymore. As far as we know, the concerns set out in the first leaflet circulated by the "Say No to UID" Campaign in 2009[18] still stand.

The Campaign had pointed out that the UIDAI – set up through an executive order as a project of the Planning Commission – did not have a legal mandate for collection of personal data and biometrics. This is still the situation: the National Identification Authority of India Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 2010, but was rejected in 2011 by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance chaired by Yashwant Sinha of BJP with a recommendation of "back to the drawing board".[19]

The Campaign had also raised questions regarding privacy and data protection. Apart from the technical issues involved in safeguarding a database of

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available at http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/visakhapatnam/No-Aadhaar-no-driving-licence-or-registration/articleshow/44385865.cms (last accessed July 25, 2015).

15   C.L. Baradhwaj, *Easier insurance with Aadhar*, THE HINDU BUSINESS LINE (January 11, 2015), *available at* http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/features/investment-world/beyond-stocks/easier-insurance-with-aadhar/article6777882.ece (last accessed July 25, 2015).

16   *No Aadhaar cards, no loan waiver*, THE DECCAN CHRONICLE (November 03, 2014), *available at* http://www.deccanchronicle.com/141103/nation-current-affairs/article/no-aadhaar-cards-no-loan-waiver (last accessed July 25, 2015).

17   *Mass Contact: Only Aadhar Cards Needed*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS (March 26, 2015), *available at* http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/Mass-Contact-Only-Aadhar-Cards-Needed/2015/03/26/article2730376.ece (last accessed July 25, 2015).

18   Kalyani Menon-Sen, *Eight reasons why you should oppose Unique Identification: Stop UID Campaign*, KAFILA (October 04, 2010), *available at* http://kafila.org/2010/10/04/eight-reasons-why-you-should-oppose-the-uid-stop-uid-campaign/ (last accessed July 25, 2015).

19   *Blow to Aadhaar project as Bill is rejected*, THE HINDU (December 08, 2011), *available at* http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/blow-to-aadhaar-project-as-bill-is-rejected/article2698907.ece (last accessed July 25, 2015).

a billion plus, the Campaign also alerted the public to the on-going dilution of existing safeguards. For instance, the UIDAI is allowed to provide personal data in cases where "national security" is invoked. Earlier, such a disclosure required an order from the Union Home Secretary or a State Home Secretary. Now, all it needs is advice from any officer above the rank of Joint Secretary. Moreover, there is no provision to penalise misuse of data obtained under this provision.

Even at that early stage, the Campaign warned that the use of biometric identifiers like fingerprints and iris scans could lead to invalid data and "false positives" for millions of Indians – those whose hands and fingers are worn out from a lifetime of hard labour, or those whose corneas have been scarred by glaucoma, injuries or infections. Activists also demonstrated how fingerprint scanners and iris scanners can be deceived and "spoofed" – false fingerprints can be created using latex and adhesives and coloured contact lenses can blur and obscure iris patterns.[20]

Most alarming of all was the fact that the proposed Bill did not contain any mechanisms for credible and independent oversight of the UIDAI. The Campaign pointed out that this would increase the risk of "functionality creep" – the government would be able to add features and additional data to the Aadhaar database without informing or taking the consent of citizens and without re-evaluating the effects on privacy in each instance. The Campaign pointed to the manner in which "national security" was being repeatedly and successfully invoked to defend "encounter killings" and other extra-constitutional actions by the police and armed forces, and warned that this had created an enabling environment for abuse of the UID database to serve undemocratic, illegal and unethical purposes.

Despite the fact that all these concerns remain as valid as when they were first raised – no convincing answers having been offered either by the UPA government or the Modi Sarkar – the government seems determined to go ahead with its grand plans for Aadhar. As this article goes to press, a pilot project has been launched in Bengaluru to give the district police access to databases of the National Population Register, Aadhaar and the Crime and Criminal Tracking

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20   Rahul S, *Cheap Tech To Fake Fingerprint Shown Against UID In India*, Onlygizmos (January 25, 2011), *available at* http://onlygizmos.com/cheap-tech-to-fake-fingerprint-shown-against-uid-in-india/2011/01/ (last accessed July 25, 2015).

Network System (CCTNS) to enable online verification of identity, address and criminal record of those applying for passports.[21]

Bypassing Legality

Objections and critiques to Aadhaar are being taken very seriously by the Supreme Court, where more than a dozen cases challenging the legal and constitutional validity of Aadhaar have been clubbed together and will be heard by a three-judge bench in July 2015. Many of the arguments made by the petitioners in these case – the absence of legislative sanction, the violation of the right to privacy, and the possibility of abuse – echo those made by the Campaign. One group of petitioners have raised the issue of lacunae in implementation that could allow undocumented persons to enrol.[22]

While the writ has not yet been disposed of,[23] the Supreme Court has issued three separate orders, most recently in March 2015, that specifically forbid the government from making Aadhaar mandatory for any service.[24] The Court has warned that officers who disregard these orders will be held in contempt and taken to task.

These orders have not stopped the government from declaring its intention of converting all existing welfare schemes into direct cash transfers. According to UIDAI officials, most beneficiaries of government schemes already have both an Aadhaar card and an Aadhaar-enabled bank account under the Jan-DhanYojana.

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21   *Online Police Verification for Passport to Start in November,* NDTV (July 26, 2015), *available at* http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/online-police-verification-for-passport-to-start-in-november-1200711?utm_source=ndtv&utm_medium=top-stories-widget&utm_campaign=story-9-http%3a%2f%2fwww.ndtv.com%2findia-news%2fonline-police-verification-for-passport-to-start-in-november-1200711 (last accessed July 27, 2015).

22   Details of each of the petitions can be seen at http://cis-india.org/internet-governance/blog/the-aadhaar-case.

23   The status of the clubbed petitions can be tracked at http://courtnic.nic.in/supremecourt/casestatus_new/caseno_new_alt.asp.

24   Usha Ramanathan, *Three Supreme Court Orders Later, What's the Deal with Aadhaar?,* Yahoo News (April 13, 2015), *available at* https://in.news.yahoo.com/three-supreme-court-orders-later--what-s-the-deal-with-aadhaar-094316180.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).

The deadline for reaching 100 percent coverage is June 2015.[25]

For all intents and purposes, the possession of an Aadhaar card is being treated as a mandatory requirement for a growing list of services and entitlements. It is only when challenged by well- informed individuals that officials grudgingly admit that Aadhaar can be bypassed. Even well - heeled urban professionals find it hard to believe that they can simply write "not applicable" in the space for the Aadhaar number on official forms.

Further, the SC orders have not prevented the government from selling Aadhaar as a ticket to everything from a free house to a government job. The people who are lining up to register are not particularly excited by the notion of being tagged with a unique number or being part of the world's largest biometric database – it is the card they want. This is true across the class divide – while the poor are concerned with welfare benefits, the middle-class hopes that the mere possession of an Aadhaar card will make it easier to get a bank loan, apply for a passport, get a driving licence or cast a vote.

The Rationale for Aadhar: Empty Claims?

We do not know how many of the more than 833 million individuals[26] who already have an Aadhaar card have actually used it or have found it useful. Going by the fact that the second phase of Aadhaar registration was initiated without any evaluation of the first phase, there is little likelihood of usage data being systematically collected. We only have stories and images – a beaming old woman in Tripura pressing her fingers to a micro-ATM to collect her pension;[27] another bunch of happy pensioners in Jharkhand, celebrating the fact that they

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25 Chetan Chouhan, *Modi govt wants to scrap UPA-era poverty line, move to Aadhaar matrix*, The Hindustan Times (May 03, 2015), *available at* http://www.hindustantimes. com/india-news/centre-may-eliminate-poverty-line-to-go-for-aadhar-based-formula/ article1-1343353.aspx (last accessed July 25, 2015).

26 Total enrolments as of May 04, 2015 according to the UIDAI website, *available at* https://portal.uidai.gov.in/uidwebportal/enrolmentStatusShow.do.

27 *Aadhar-enabled micro-ATM delivers money to villagers*, The Economic Times (October 18, 2012), *available at* http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-10-18/ news/34555541_1_aadhar-payment-system-pension (last accessed July 25, 2015).

no longer have to endure a long bus ride to collect their money;[28] a UIDAI official proudly narrating how the Rajasthan police identified a kidnap victim through her fingerprints on the Aadhar database.[29]

But there are also other stories. Ranjana Sonawane, the first Indian to get an Aadhaar number, packing her card away in disgust because it has not changed anything in her life.[30] A furious ex-army man in Alwar whose ration card has been invalidated while the promised cash has not come into his account.[31] Angry parents in Delhi who were told at the last minute that their children would not be admitted to primary schools if they did not produce an income certificate, which they cannot get without an Aadhar card.[32] Aadhar cards belonging to residents of working-class neighbourhoods in Chandigarh dumped in garbage bins.[33] An "unknown citizen" in Bangalore who spent a whole day standing in a queue for registration, only to be told at the end that the registration process would take another six months.[34]

Are these just teething troubles, only to be expected in the initial stages of

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28   Santosh Kiro, *Aadhaar brings pension home*, Inclusive Media for Change (February 10, 2012), *available at* http://www.im4change.org/success-stories/aadhaar-brings-pension-home-by-santosh-k-kiro-13125.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).

29   *UIDAI to share data with police for investigations*, The Hindu (February 06, 2013), *available at* http://www.thehindu.com/news/states/karnataka/uidai-to-share-data-with-police-for-investigations/article4383068.ece (last accessed July 25, 2015).

30   Pravin Nair, *First Aadhaar Card Owner Struggles for a Living,* The Hindustan Times (April 20, 2014), *available at* http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/first-aadhaar-card-owner-struggles-to-eke-out-a-living/article1-1210239.aspx (last accessed August 03, 2015).

31   *India's welfare system fails, poor don't get money*, The News (October 25, 2012), *available at* http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-3-139351-Indias-welfare-system-fails-poor-dont-get-money (last accessed July 25, 2015).

32   Pallavi Polanki, *Delhi admissions: How Aadhaar has put EWS candidates in a spot*, Firstpost (January 02, 2013, *available at* http://www.firstpost.com/india/delhi-admissions-how-aadhaar-has-put-ews-candidates-in-a-spot-576456.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).

33   Aarti Kapur, *Aadhaar cards dumped with vendors*, The Tribune (March 04, 2013), *available at* http://www.tribuneindia.com/2013/20130305/cth1.htm (last accessed July 25, 2015).

34   Ashwin Rammohan, *Unknown Citizens' Aadhaar Agony,* Outlook India (April 28, 2015), *available at* http://www.outlookindia.com/article/unknown-citizens-aadhar-agony/294168 (last accessed August 03, 2015).

such a huge enterprise? Or are they pointers to the dangerously flawed assumptions behind the project? Are opponents of the project distorting facts and exaggerating the potential risks?[35] Or are the cases that have been admitted in the Supreme Court an indication that there are valid grounds for challenging the legality and utility of the scheme?[36]

There is practically no rigorous documentation of the ground-level experiences of Aadhaar pilots that can confirm whether Aadhaar is actually delivering what it promises. Instead, we are asked to blindly accept the three pillars of the faith – first, that Aadhaar will ensure access to entitlements; second, that Aadhaar-enabled payments and cash transfers will plug leakages and reduce wasteful expenditure; and third, that Aadhaar will empower the poorest by giving them an identity.

In the absence of any significant data on how Aadhaar is playing out on the ground today, those who would like to subject these propositions to the test of reality must perforce turn to the experiences of Aadhaar pilots rolled out by the previous regime.

Mission Convergence in Delhi: Lessons on Inclusion

The decision by the Delhi government to go all out on Aadhaar enabled public service delivery was a logical progression of *Bhagidari,* Sheila Dixit's flagship initiative for citizens' participation in governance, globally recognised as a good practice and is generally credited with ensuring Ms. Dixit's return to power for a record three terms.

Launched in 2008, Mission Convergence, (otherwise known as *Samajik Suvidha Sangam*) aims at providing a comprehensive package of services and benefits to the poorest and most vulnerable families in the National Capital Region. The programme is implemented through the network of community-level women's groups organised under *Stree Shakti,* the women's empowerment

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35   *See* for instance, UID and Civil Society, *available at* http://www.thinkuid.org/SubPage. aspx?n=132.

36   Prabhu Mallikarjunan, *Aadhaar Cases pending in courts*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS (March 31, 2013), *available at* http://newindianexpress.com/cities/bangalore/article1524002. ece (last accessed July 25, 2015).

component of *Bhagidari,* supported by over 100 local centres *(Samajik Suvidha Kendra)* that function as nodes for access to a bundle of services.

Mission Convergence is notable for its expanded understanding of poverty as more than mere income deprivation. The definition of poverty adopted by the Mission is based on a comprehensive set of socio-economic parameters.[37] This is a conscious strategy for inclusion of groups whose social identity, occupation, and place of living made them vulnerable regardless of their income levels. The Mission Convergence database, built up through door-to-door surveys, thus provides a far more comprehensive and detailed picture of the situation of the poor in Delhi than any official statistics.

Even before Aadhaar came on the scene, Mission Convergence was preparing to issue to its clients (usually the "senior-most" woman from each identified household) a biometric smart card that would allow her to access benefits under various schemes without having to fill out separate forms and submit documentation to different departments. It would also allow the concerned department to verify the identity and check the eligibility of the claimant by matching her biometrics and with the socio-economic information extracted from the project database.[38]

The process of issuing smart cards began in 2009. The job of taking photographs, fingerprints and iris scans was contracted out to private companies.[39] *Stree Shakti* staff was responsible for mobilising women for enrolment but in the event, most of their time and energy were taken up in trouble-shooting. The IT companies who were contracted for the enrolment were less concerned with rigour and accuracy than with completing as many enrolments as possible in a short time. Blurred photographs and incomplete fingerprints were hurriedly scanned into the database instead of being deleted and retaken. The iris scanners were prone to malfunction; in most cases, the person was simply labelled "blind". Printers

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37   *See*, Samajik Suvidha Sangam, *available at* http://www.missionconvergence.org/survey. html.

38   Information about Mission Convergence, *available at* http://www.missionconvergence. org/.

39   Selection of System Integrator for Establishment & Maintenance of the IT Solution for Mission Convergence, Government of NCT Delhi (December 2008), *available at* http://www.delhi.gov.in/DoIT/DoIT_AR/Volume1.pdf.

and lamination machines did not work properly. Power failures and breaks in connectivity meant that women who had taken a day off from their work to come and register were asked to come back on another day. Despite efforts by the *Stree Shakti* team to resolve these issues, enrolment slowed down, falling from 100,000 in the first phase to just 4,000 in the second.[40]

Independent observers have corroborated these accounts. A team that was evaluating the communication and advocacy strategy for the health insurance initiative under Mission Convergence noted how women had to make repeated trips to the enrolment centres because the government employees responsible for verifying their papers had not turned up for work or would arbitrarily turn them away.[41]

One does not need to be a gender expert to realise that a time-consuming registration process and disorganised implementation are likely to exclude all those for whom time is a precious resource and who can ill afford to lose a day's wage: self-employed women, domestic workers, women with small children or elderly people to care for, women who are the sole earners in their families, women who do shift work in factories. Ironically, these are the very groups who are excluded from most schemes and whose situation Aadhaar is expected to address.

In October 2010 (just four days after the national launch of the UID), Mission Convergence became a partner for enrolments of marginalised groups in Delhi.[42] In the initial round, registration centres were set up on demand – in the homes of local MLAs, in mosques and temples, in the offices of Residents' Welfare Associations, in banks and post offices.[43] The registration process was chaotic

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40 Interview with Girija Kumari Sahu, Coordinator, Stree Shakti District Resource Centre South Zone (October 2012).

41 Jishnu Das and Jessica Lieno, *Evaluating the RSBY: Lessons from an experimental information campaign*, 46(32) Economic and Political Weekly 85-94 (August 06, 2011).

42 Social Inclusion and Aadhaar (April 30, 2012), *available at* http://uidai.gov.in/images/concept_paper_social_inclusion.pdf.

43 The official list includes venues such as "Mahavir Pehelwankaghar" (Centre No. 36), "Ram Mandir Daramshala" (Centre No. 34) and "Harijan Chaupal" (Centre No. 41) *available at* http://www.myaadhaarcard.in/aadhaar-centre-2/list-of-authorised-aadhaar-enrollment-centres-in-delhi/(last accessed August 03, 2015).

and once again, the firms contracted to collect the biometrics proved to be less than rigorous. There were even complaints about centres being opened by some contractors without the knowledge or permission of the District Commissioner. In response to these issues, several registration centers were closed down and others relocated to the offices of the District Commissioners.[44]

In December 2012, the Delhi Government launched the *Annashree Yojana,* the first cash-transfer food security scheme in the country.[45] Under this scheme, households that fall in the "vulnerable" and "very vulnerable" categories but do not have a BPL ration card are eligible for a cash transfer of Rs.600/- per month for purchasing food-grains from the market. The scheme requires beneficiaries to open an Aadhar-enabled bank account. Three months after the launch, only 32,000 of the 200,000 eligible families were receiving benefits. The reason was said to be the unwillingness of the Department of Food and Civil Supplies to accept the expanded vulnerability criteria used by Mission Convergence.[46] Problems with the banking partners were also reported – women who turned up at the bank with only their Aadhar cards and tried to open accounts were asked to produce additional documents – voter cards, ration cards or electricity bills – as proofs of identity.[47]

The Annashree experience is a depressing reminder that tamper-proofing the beneficiary identification system by itself is not enough to ensure access to benefits. The initial vision of Mission Convergence as the single window for women to access all social sector schemes died an early death in the face of resistance from MLAs and Municipal Councillors for whom distributing largesse through

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44   Interview with Girija Kumari Sahu, Coordinator, Stree Shakti District Resource Centre South Zone (October 2012).

45   *Dilli Annashree Yojana to Start on Dec. 15*, E-Gov, *available at* http://egov.eletsonline. com/2012/12/dilli-annashree-yojana-to-start-on-15-dec/ (last accessed July 25, 2015).

46   Atul Mathur, *Govt's food security scheme fails to impress with numbers*, The Hindustan Times (March 07, 2013), *available at* http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/newdelhi/ Govt-s-food-security-scheme-fails-to-impress-with-numbers/Article1-1022364.aspx (last accessed July 25, 2015).

47   Surabhi Agarwal and Joel Rebello, *Banks reluctant to use Aadhaar numbers to open accounts*, Live Mint (October 23, 2012), *available at* http://www.livemint.com/Politics/ hFzU1sN7aTH0WlDsBNlO3K/Banks-reluctant-to-use-Aadhaar-numbers-to-open- accounts.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).

government schemes is a key strategy for building political power and influence.[48] The patrician Chief Minister of Delhi whose public image was far removed from these sleazy operations, was nevertheless well aware that her re-election depends on the carefully calibrated mixture of patronage and threat employed by the grassroot workers of her party to control their "vote banks". With the Assembly elections only months away, the task of identifying beneficiaries for the scheme was given to MLAs[49] who had the skills needed to convert the Annashree scheme into votes: they are said to have asked the Chief Minister to give them 2000 forms each.[50]

The link-up with Mission Convergence has been showcased by Aadhar as a source of "valuable lessons on inclusion".[51] It could as well be cited as an example of precisely the opposite – a demonstration of how a programme designed to expand inclusion can play out in a way that excludes the majority of those whose needs it purports to serve.

Direct Cash Transfers: Saving Money or Buying Votes?

The idea of Aadhaar as a mechanism that can plug leakages in the system and cut down wastage has a powerful resonance for the average citizen who is concerned about corruption and inefficiency. Ironically for an initiative that seeks credibility through the language of inclusion, what Aadhaar actually tries to do is exclude those who are deemed to be undeserving of social benefits.

Here is a sample of the kind of argument that is offered to buttress the claim that Aadhaar can save money for the government by plugging leakages and eliminating corrupt middlemen:

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48 The Gender Resource Centre: *Suvidha Kendras of Mission Convergence, available at* http://www.itforchange.net/sites/default/files/ITfC/MC_fieldnotes.pdf.

49 Ambika Pandit, *MLAs to get key roles for Annshree Yojana*, THE TIMES OF INDIA (March 06, 2013), *available at* http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-03-06/delhi/37499057_1_mlas-beneficiaries-bank-account (last accessed July 25, 2015).

50 Atul Mathur, *Govt's food security scheme fails to impress with numbers*, THE HINDUSTAN TIMES (March 07, 2013), *available at* http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/newdelhi/Govt-s-food-security-scheme-fails-to-impress-with-numbers/Article1-1022364.aspx (last accessed July 25, 2015).

51 Social Inclusion and Aadhaar (April 30, 2012), *available at* http://uidai.gov.in/images/concept_paper_social_inclusion.pdf.

In Kotkasim, there has been a very successful experiment carried out in direct transfer of cash subsidy to people who have the entitlement to get subsidised kerosene. Three months subsidy was transferred in advance to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries and then they had to buy kerosene at market prices from authorised PDS shops. The ration shop (PDS) owners also had to lift the kerosene at market prices. The arbitrage for adulteration, siphoning off and selling in the open market, etc., was gone. In four months the off-take of kerosene came down by 87%. Imagine the savings in misdirected subsidies that is possible throughout the state and the country. India does not need more outlays in entitlement programs, but it needs better governance and better deliveries.[52]

While no one would dispute the fact that there is corruption in the system, there is also evidence that at least some of the shrinkage in demand for kerosene in Kotkasim is due to factors other than elimination of ghost beneficiaries and disempowerment of corrupt dealers. Many people who used to buy kerosene against their ration cards did not have bank accounts and were unable to get the subsidy.[53] Other reports suggest that people have stopped buying kerosene altogether and have switched to other fuels, because buying kerosene at the market price of around Rs.45/- (instead of the erstwhile subsidised price of Rs.15.25/-) is not an attractive option, especially when cash transfers into their accounts are erratic and irregular.[54] Villagers also point out that many genuine beneficiaries got weeded out because they did not respond to the announcement of the cash transfer pilot from the district administration. In some cases at least, these may be people who have gone to other states for seasonal work.[55]

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52   Anirudha Dutta, *Beyond the Numbers: A Positive Story from India*, FORBES (November 07, 2012), *available at* forbesindia.com/blog/beyond-the-numbers/a-positive-story-from-india/ (last accessed July 25, 2015).

53   Reetika Khera, *Cash for Vote?*, 30(5) FRONTLINE March 09-22, 2013 *available at* http://www.flonnet.com/fl3005/stories/20130322300509800.htm (last accessed July 27, 2015).

54   *Aadhaar: Still not the knight in digital armour*, DECCAN HERALD (October 29, 2012), *available at* http://www.deccanherald.com/content/288441/aadhaar-still-not-knight-digital.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).

55   Bharat Bhatti and Madhulika Khanna, *Neither effective nor equitable*, THE HINDU (December 04, 2012), *available at* http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/neither-effective-nor-equitable/article4161139.ece (last accessed August 12, 2015).

It would seem from the above that the supposed saving in government expenditure has been effected not only by the elimination of "ghost beneficiaries" but by the exclusion of genuine beneficiaries who are very much alive. By this logic, the unspent subsidy amount under the Annashree scheme may well be claimed by the Delhi government as a "saving"!

It is equally obvious that Aadhaar-enabled pilots such as Kotkasim are not really meant to test out the feasibility of replacing subsidies with cash transfers. The decision to go ahead with cash transfers has clearly already been taken – on political rather than economic grounds. Pruning the subsidy bill may be the stated agenda, but no less attractive is the vote-getting potential of putting cash into millions of bank accounts in the 2014 parliamentary polls.[56]

The Annashree scheme in Delhi similarly reflects the haste to go ahead with cash transfers even without any evidence of their positive impact. The scheme is a watered-down version of a pilot project said to be based on a 2009 study by SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) that covered 150 households in one Delhi *basti* and found that 60 percent of the women surveyed supported cash transfers.[57] These findings run directly counter to the findings of a study conducted by the *Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan,* a coalition of 30 Delhi NGOs covering a much larger sample (4005 households) where 90 percent of the respondents were opposed to cash transfers.[58]

Apart from the small number of respondents, the conclusions drawn in the SEWA study are questionable to say the least. For instance, the report states that those who supported cash transfers "tend(s) to be cautious, and have many questions regarding whether this would work any better than the present system.

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56   M.Rajshekhar, *How Congress may use cash transfers as the main weapon in the 2014 elections*, THE ECONOMIC TIMES (October 30, 2012), *available at* http://economictimes. indiatimes.com/news/politics/nation/how-congress-may-use-cash-transfers-as-the-main-weapon-in-the-2014-elections/articleshow/17013537.cms (last accessed July 25, 2015).

57   *Do poor people in Delhi want to change from PDS to cash transfers?*, SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION, BHARAT (October 2009), *available at* http://www.sewabharat. org/Delhi%20cash%20transfers%20english.pdf.

58   Rozi Roti AdhikarAbhiyan, Delhi: Survey on preference between PDS and Cash Transfers in Delhi (August 01, 2011), *available at* http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/reports-documents/survey-preference-between-pds-and-cash-transfers-delhi.

On the other hand the 40% of respondents who opposed the cash benefit system, opposed it strongly and with conviction."[59] The conclusion drawn is that the support for cash transfers became muted because the opponents were more vociferous and dominated the group. A significant segment (17.5 percent) of women who supported cash transfers did so because they were very poor and needed cash for their other daily needs. Those who opposed cash transfers were apprehensive that the money would be used for expenses other than food, and the amount would not keep pace with inflation. Despite these ambiguities, the study is taken as a strong justification for cash transfers.

In normal circumstances, a study as small as this one and with such weak findings would not be considered strong enough to justify a pilot, let alone a policy change on an issue as serious as food security. One is therefore forced to conclude that the real intention of the study was to justify a decision that had already been made.

Similarly, the decision by the UPA to move to a cash transfer of subsidies for kerosene and cooking gas nation-wide by July 2013 was taken despite objections from oil companies. Officials at a meeting in October 2012 are reported to have highlighted some key "missing links": not everyone had an Aadhaar card; not everyone had a bank account; banks were not willing to open Aadhaar-enabled accounts and the oil companies had not succeeded in exorcising all the "ghosts" from their consumer databases.[60]

The roll-out of the LPG subsidy in 20 districts had to be pushed back by a month because of "unsatisfactory levels" of enrolment and the problems in linking Aadhaar with bank accounts.[61] Several national banks have reportedly refused

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59   *Do poor people in Delhi want to change from PDS to Cash Transfers?*, SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION, BHARAT (October 2009), *available at* http://www.sewabharat. org/Delhi%20cash%20transfers%20english.pdf.

60   Siddharth, *By July, cash transfers for cooking gas*, THE ECONOMIC TIMES (October 19, 2012), *available at* http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-10-19/ news/34584598_1_aadhaar-number-cash-transfers-aadhaar-enrolments (last accessed July 25, 2015).

61   Subodh Ghildiyal & Mahendra Singh, *Cash transfer put off by at least 3 months*, THE TIMES OF INDIA (April 03, 2013), *available at* http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes. com/2013-04-03/india/38247884_1_aadhaar-enrolment-aadhaar-numbers-dbt (last accessed July 25, 2015).

to bear any liability for fraudulent transactions in Aadhaar-enabled accounts, since Aadhaar details have not been verified by the government, but by third-party private operators to whom the process has been outsourced.[62] So much for inclusion!

Who's Looking for Identity?

But access and inclusion are merely the functional elements of the Aadhaar story. The more emotive script is that Aadhaar gives an identity to millions of faceless, voiceless, document-less people in the country. The identity may only be a number, and the benefits may not flow automatically – still, the thought of millions of people standing up straight and proudly flashing their Aadhaar cards is one that brings a lump to the throat of the patriotic Indian, even without the national anthem playing in the background.

It seems almost churlish to question and critique such a noble idea, or to ask what value a numeric identity, however unique, will add to the lives of those millions of supposedly invisible Indians.

It is not only the RSS that opposes the idea of Aadhaar being handed out to all residents of India regardless of their nationality or citizenship – this issue has also been raised by some of the petitioners before the Supreme Court. The Aadhaar roll-out in Assam and the North-Eastern states was aborted because of concerns that Aadhaar would legitimise "illegal Bangladeshis" masquerading as Bengali-speaking Indians. Instead, the decision was taken to link Aadhaar to the National Population Register in all the North-Eastern states except Tripura (where one presumes that Bangladeshis blend in because everyone speaks Bengali anyway).

The issue of legitimacy is not one that is restricted only to the North East. To give just one example, the language that is claimed (or ascribed) as the mother-tongue can make or break legitimacy for the working poor in different parts of the country. Bengali-speakers in Delhi,[63]

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62 Nitin Sethi, *Banks 'distrust' Aadhar for cash transfer scheme rollout*, The Times of India (April 05, 2013), *available at* http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Banks-distrust-Aadhar-for-cash-transfer-scheme-rollout/articleshow/19391556.cms (last accessed July 25, 2015).

63 *Nearly 7,000 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants held in Delhi in past 5 years*, The Times of India (December 16, 2012), *available at* http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-12-16/india/35850162_1_illegal-bangladeshi-immigrants-frro-rti-query (last accessed July 25, 2015).

Nepali-speakers in Bangalore,[64] Hindi-speakers in Mumbai,[65] Urdu-speakers in Gujarat[66] have all faced the threat of being "illegalised" at various points in our recent history. If a unique identity was indeed a guarantee of portable legitimacy, the Aadhaar enrolment centres would have to work 24x7 to keep up with the rush.

The issue of identity can be a fraught one for many working-class women in big cities. In Delhi resettlement colonies for instance, one encounters Muslim women whose saris and accents proclaim their Bengali-ness, but who pretend not to understand when spoken to in Bangla.[67] Middle-class housewives in Chittaranjan Park joke about how their Bengali housemaids call themselves by Hindu names but slip up in a dozen ways – forgetting to touch their hands to their foreheads in an automatic *pranam* when they pass by the *puja* room, finding clumsy excuses to avoid their usual cup of tea during Ramzan, not taking days off for *Bhaiphota* or *Sankranti*. These stories are usually accompanied with indulgent laughter from the ladies, but the *faux* Bimalas and Kamalas know that their jobs are directly linked to the need of their employers for cheap and docile labour, as well as their own willingness and ability to assume an identity that is socially acceptable.[68]

Would an Aadhaar card make life easier for women on the cusp of two dangerous identities – Bangladeshi and Muslim – and serve as a guarantee of legitimacy? Or would it have to be hidden like a guilty secret, brought out only in safe situations, among one's own? How easy or difficult would it be for a Bengali-speaking Muslim woman to fake a Hindu identity and have it legitimised through an Aadhaar card? Would it be worth the trouble?

Going by previous experience, legitimacy is not conferred by identity documents. Few of the migrant workers in Delhi are entirely un-documented.

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64   Mahesh Acharya, *Nepalis in India heave sigh of relief*, KATHMANDU POST (August 18, 2012), *available at* http://www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2012/08/17/top-story/nepalis-in-india-heave-sigh-of-relief/238502.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).

65   Anti-Bihari Sentiment: Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, *available at* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Bihari_sentiment.

66   Shivam Vij, *Seeing Pakistan from Juhapura: ZahirJanmohamed*, KAFILA (December 28, 2012), *available at* http://kafila.org/2012/12/28/seeing-pakistan-from-juhapura-zahir-janmohamed/ (last accessed July 25, 2015).

67   Author's unpublished notes of conversations with women in Bawana resettlement colony.

68   Author's personal notes from conversations with domestic workers in Delhi and Gurgaon.

They can produce ration cards, school certificates, letters from local MLAs, even voter cards to prove that they have been living (and more importantly, working) in Delhi for decades.[69] These documents have not saved them from being repeatedly deported on the grounds of being Bangladeshis, through the Narasimha Rao regime's "Operation Pushback" in 1992 and "Operation Flush-Out" in 1993, and most recently, Sheila Dixit's clean-up drive before the Commonwealth games in 2010.[70]

Ironically, being forcibly pushed across the border by the BSF has not served to establish their Bangladeshi credentials on the other side of the line: several of the deportees of 1992 were held in detention camps for years since the Government of Bangladesh suspected them of being Bengali-speaking Indian Muslims trying to sneak into Bangladesh![71]

Then, as now, it is their labour rather than their constitutional rights as Indian citizens that provides the working poor with some semblance of security if not complete legitimacy (at least in normal times). For most migrant workers, even this fragile security is conditional on their remaining in the grey zone between legality and illegality. Living in "unauthorised" *bastis* or squatter settlements; working for employers who duck both taxes and wages; setting up clandestine factories using hazardous materials; selling goods of dubious provenance on roads and pavements; operating unlicensed vehicles; putting their children to work – in most of these situations, survival for the working poor depends not on a verifiable and watertight identity, but on the ability to duck under the surface of the law or slip into the cracks and crevices of the system and become invisible at short notice.[72]

Legitimacy usually comes from attaching oneself to a *jajman* of whatever hue – an employer who might pay less than minimum wages but whose wealth

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69 *See* for instance, Interviews with Residents of Bawana Resettlement Colony in Kalyani Menon-Sen and Gautam Bhan, Swept Off The Map: Surviving Eviction and Resettlement in Delhi (Yoda Press, 2009).

70 Dipika Dasgupta, *Delhi's beggars to be deported for Commonwealth Games*, Meri News (October 15, 2009), *available at* http://www.merinews.com/article/delhis-beggars-to-be-deported-for-commonwealth-games/15786330.shtml (last accessed July 25, 2015).

71 Sujata Ramachandran, *Operation Pushback: Sangh Parivar, State, Slums and Surreptitious Bangladeshis in New Delhi,* 38(7) Economic and Political Weekly 637-647 (February 15-21, 2003).

72 *See* for instance, Aman Sethi, A Free Man (Random House India, 2011) and Katherine Boo, Behind the Beautiful Forevers (Granta Publications, 2012), both works of narrative reportage describing the realities of life for the urban poor.

and political clout are respected by the local police constable, or a local politician who might let his goons loose once in a while but values the vote if not the person; caste leaders who enforce adherence to patriarchal codes, but also feel responsible for those who accept their authority.[73]

Aadhaar registrations in urban *bastis* are more often than not carried out under the benign supervision of one or other of these patrons who continue to play their traditional roles as gatekeepers to legitimacy.[74] Old-fashioned paper certificate or new-fangled Aadhaar card, the mechanism is the same. Having all the documents is not a guarantee of getting a card, just as lack of documentation is not necessarily a barrier to getting one.

There are other aspects of reality that the official line on Aadhaar does not acknowledge, for instance the fact that in the eyes of most people, the working poor, particularly migrants, are criminals by default. The theory that migrants are responsible for crime in the city is widely held and is regularly trotted out by the police and the administration as an explanation for rising crime rates.[75] Domestic workers and their families are routinely hauled in for questioning on robberies in the areas where they work. The Delhi Police is not hampered by political correctness in stating their views on "the servant class".

> *A large number of immigrant servants and floating laboures, chowkidars, plumbers, electricians and other casual labourers come to Delhi/New Delhi in search of employment. Crime committed by this class of population in Delhi constitutes a big problem…Some of them are of dubious, character and have previous convictions. The employers in many cases have no idea about the man's character…. It would help the local police greatly*

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73   *See* for instance, Jha, Saumitra, Vijayendra Rao and Michael Woodcock, *Governance in the Gullies,* 35(2) WORLD DEVELOPMENT 230-246 (2007).

74   Author's unpublished notes from visits to Aadhaar enrolment centres in working-class neighbourhoods and resettlement colonies in Delhi and Gurgaon.

75   *Migration a problem in checking crime in Delhi: Sheila Dikshit*, NDTV (January 22, 2012), *available at* http://www.ndtv.com/article/cities/migration-a-problem-in-checking-crime-in-delhi-sheila-dikshit-169481 (last accessed July 25, 2015).

> *if previous convicts, suspects and other shady characters among such private employees are spotted.*[76]

A former Police Commissioner of Delhi, a qualified sociologist, claimed to have conducted a research study and collected data showing that certain migrant settlements are "crime zones".[77] It is no secret that whenever a serious crime is committed in Delhi, police round up young men from the nearby *bastis* and carry out what are referred to in official documents as "sustained interrogations" that yield confessions even if some of the accused do not survive the experience.[78]

The Delhi Police has been lambasted by the higher courts for their clumsy attempts to concoct evidence in supposed "terror cases".[79] In such situations, they would surely welcome the idea of mandatory Aadhaar registration for their list of "potential offenders" (a disproportionate number of whom seem to be Muslims and migrants). For instance, fingerprints retrieved from the database could come in handy in filling any inconvenient gaps in the evidence and establishing the presence of the accused at a crime scene. Whether such measures will reduce crime in the city is of course another matter.

The Residents' Association in the author's neighbourhood in Gurgaon has already made it mandatory for all domestic workers to have an Aadhaar card. This, it is felt, will be a cheaper and more reliable way of control and surveillance than the cumbersome police verification process. It is also believed that the mere act of recording fingerprints will act as a kind of vaccine against any criminal tendencies. Most people would agree that having one's fingerprints taken and eyes scanned (for instance, while standing at the immigration counter in the

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76   Servant Verification Scheme, Delhi Police, *available at* http://www.delhipolice.nic.in/home/servant.htm.

77   Aneesha Mathur, *44 'high crime zones' in city to come under CCTV surveillance*, The Indian Express (March 21, 2015), *available at* http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/44-high-crime-zones-in-city-to-come-under-cctv-surveillance/#sthash.QYwGwtwo.dpuf (last accessed July 27, 2015).

78   *See* for instance, PUDR Report *Dead Men's Tales: Deaths in Police Custody, Delhi 2000*, PUCL Bulletin (October 1981), *available at* http://www.pucl.org/from-archives/81oct/deaths.htm.

79   Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar, *Delhi Police underbelly exposed*, The Hindu (September 18, 2012), *available at* http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/delhi-police-underbelly-exposed/article3910004.ece (last accessed July 25, 2015).

US or a European country) generates a vague sense of apprehension and guilt even in the minds of law-abiding individuals, more so if some aspect of identity (such as nationality, religious affiliation or skin colour) is associated with a real or imagined vulnerability.

The experience of migrant workers in Delhi and the National Capital Region suggests that vulnerability is condoned or even encouraged in the move towards a "flexible" workforce. An increasing percentage of the industrial workforce are hired through labour contractors, often with no written contracts and no claim to benefits, who can be hired and fired as needed with no adverse consequences.[80]

The few people who have tried to get an Aadhaar card have done so because they have been told that it will make it easier for them to admit their children to municipal schools. The process has proved to be impossible to navigate. Identity documents such as ration cards and driving licences issued in other States are not accepted. What is needed are the usual "local address proofs" – a rent receipt, an electricity bill, a voter ID card, a letter from the landlord or employer – which are impossible to come by.

It is not only frustration with the process that deters workers from enrolling for Aadhaar. "What use is this Aadhaar card?" says one young man who works in the Maruti Suzuki factory.

> *It's just meant to make it easier for factory owners to foist false cases on workers, and to track us if we walk out of our jobs. It's not going to get us any benefits – it won't get us cheap rations, or a house, or a higher salary. I'd rather get a driving licence.*[81]

Moditva and Aadhar: Made for Each Other?

Ironically, but not surprisingly, the BJP, which was in the forefront of the attack on Aadhar in the bad old days, is silent as the scheme rolls out on the fast-

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80   *See* for instance, Reports on Industrial Units in Gurgaon (June 3, 2014), *available at* gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/ (last accessed July 25, 2015).

81   Author's notes from a conversation with residents of worker's tenement in Kapashera, March 2013.

track.[82] The Prime Minister's own contemptuous dismissal of Aadhar as "a political gimmick"[83] is forgotten as he presides over an Aadhar-enabling frenzy that engulfs everything from attendance at government offices[84] to the national poverty line.[85]

Erstwhile internal critics now see Aadhar in the context of the Modi Sarkar's development vision, carefully calibrated as it is to appeal to his three main constituencies: the corporate sector, the Sangh Parivar and the urban middle-class. Aadhar is a good fit with this vision, and has been enthusiastically embraced and promoted by the Prime Minister – so much so that its UPA origins are no longer mentioned even on the UIDAI website. What activists have critiqued as its weaknesses are its strengths when deployed in the service of saffron neoliberalism: as the previous sections of this paper show, it can be used to identify and exclude "outsiders" and the undeserving poor; it can be used to target and criminalise "bad citizens" and dissenters; it brings a huge population into the net of commercial banking; it is a cheap mechanism for surveillance, control and intimidation; and most of all, it is a reliable long-term source of revenue for the corporations that have invested heavily in bringing this government to power.

At one level, Modi's espousal of Aadhar can be seen as an essential ingredient of his image as India's most techno-savvy mass leader. His large presence on social media and his adept use of communications technologies are the somewhat flimsy basis for his claims to being a techno-magician who can transform India into a "digital society and knowledge economy". However, a closer look at the latest vehicle for achieving this dream, the "Digital India" programme reveals a dangerous lack of detail camouflaged by mysterious alliterative *mantra*s like "IT+IT=IT".[86]

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82   *See* for instance, *BJP attacks Aadhaar scheme, says it violates right to privacy*, FIRSTPOST (October 22, 2014), *available at* http://www.firstpost.com/politics/bjp-attacks-aadhaar-scheme-says-it-violates-right-to-privacy-1186861.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).

83   Sakshi Kuchroo, *Modi slams Nilekani over Aadhar project*, JAGRAN POST (April 09, 2014), *available at* http://post.jagran.com/Modi-slams-Nilekani-over-Aadhar-project-1397018450 (last accessed July 25, 2015).

84   FAQs on Biometric Attendance System, *available at* attendance.gov.in/faq/public_faq.

85   Chetan Chouhan, *Modi govt wants to scrap UPA-era poverty line, move to Aadhaar matrix*, THE HINDUSTAN TIMES (May 03, 2015), *available at* http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/centre-may-eliminate-poverty-line-to-go-for-aadhar-based-formula/article1-1343353.aspx (last accessed July 25, 2015).

86   Digital India: A Programme to Transform India into a Digitally Empowered Society and Knowledge Economy, *available at* http://deity.gov.in/sites/upload_files/dit/files/

Digital India certainly meets the Prime Minister's criteria for "*dhamakedaar* ideas" that he can bless with his personal endorsement. The so-called "pillars" of this programme read like a laundry-list of tech-fixes - broadband highways, public internet access programme, electronic delivery of services, e-governance, information for all, IT for Jobs and "early harvest". Tucked discreetly into this cornucopia is a proposal for "Government business process re-engineering using IT to improve transactions through use of online repositories, integration of services and platforms such as UIDAI, payment gateways, mobile platforms and EDI (Electronic Data Interchange), an electronic communication system that provides standards for exchanging data via any electronic means and electronic databases."

Activists are horrified at the implications of the government's proposal for cloud storage and EDI for linking databases. Essentially, using commercial platforms and commercial cloud storage to build and store databases puts private information of all kinds – passport details, bank details, tax returns, investment records, medical and legal records, electoral rolls and online communications – into the public domain and makes it vulnerable to misuse not only by the government but by corporations. These proposals are in direct contravention of the recommendations made by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology in February 2014 on cyber-crime, cyber-security and right to privacy. As one commentator puts it, "the only thing that is guaranteed in the cyber-world is that no online database is ever secure."[87]

Perhaps the Prime Minister, focused as he is on pushing through his grand development vision misses some of these finer details. Or maybe the implementation of his vision actually demands a selective suspension of the faculties – blindness to ethical issues and criminal violations of Constitutional rights, deafness to inconvenient critiques and to voices from the margins, an intolerance of dissent and an inability to register a mismatch between vision and reality.

Digital%20India.pdf.

[87] *See* for instance, Gopal Krishna, *Is Narendra Modi right in going back to Aadhaar?* MONEY LIFE (August 27, 2014), *available at* http://www.moneylife.in/article/new-government-is-going-back-to-aadhaar/38576.html (last accessed July 25, 2015).