Shaping digital destiny

Apex court’s verdict removes misapprehensions on Aadhaar, will cleanse system of fakes and duplicates, ensure that services reach intended beneficiaries

Ajay Bhushan Pandey

AFTER SIX YEARS of litigation which included 36 days of hearing — next only to Narayand and Bhandari case in 1973 — the Supreme Court’s five-judge Constitution Bench has given a landmark judgment declaring Aadhaar as constitutional. Aadhaar has the distinction of being the world’s largest biometric unique identity programme for empowering 1.3 billion people. But debates on it also brought up to light issues concerning personal liberty, privacy and data protection. So we must first understand the circumstances under which the programme was started.

After more than six decades of independence, 60 per cent of India’s 1.2 billion people did not have a basic identity document. By and large, traditional documents were used and they became untraceable when a person crossed the boundaries of the home state. For example, a ration card issued in Tamil Nadu wouldn’t be recognized in Delhi. That was perhaps why a majority of the country’s population did not have a bank account. The first question to anyone who wanted to avail a service — open a bank account, apply for ration card or voter ID card, buy land or take a loan for a small business or agriculture — was get one’s identity. The judgement in line with last year’s landmark privacy judgement and will set at rest many debates, apprehensions and controversies around Aadhaar.

Aadhaar will not only bring transparency in governance but will also cleanse the delivery system of fakes and duplicates and check impersonation in multiple areas such as examination and recruitment. It will help to curb tax evasion, money laundering, shell companies and benami transactions and bring in financial discipline and greater tax compliance. It will continue to help in tracing missing children with their loved near and dear ones. In that spirit, Bollywood would have to abandon its oft-repeated scripts — like twins getting separated.

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