

# Chapter 5

## Social Justice Through Aadhaar: An e-Policy Initiative

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**Abstract** The application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in various domains of governance is more than two decade old in India. India's orientation towards welfare driven polity based on socialist pattern of society has been further strengthened by the technological interventions in the form of e-Governance for policy formulation and policy implementation. India's development vision for all has not translated into reality as per the expected lines as the benefits of development have not been equitably shared by all. The distributive injustice has further aggravated the problem of poverty and inequality which has manifested itself in various forms including unemployment, hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Even after 69 years of India's independence fruits of planned development have not reached at the grass root level. It has become evident that a high rate of growth is not a substitute for genuine policy implementation that seeks to ensure equitable distribution of the gains of development. Therefore, there is a need for a public policy through an e-platform for ensuring equitable, fair, transparent, accessible, and participative approach towards development by realising the ethos of social justice. The technology itself can be a biggest leveller which can foster transparency, equity and enhance people's integration into developmental processes which is vital for strengthening the social justice. The Unique Identity of India UID-Aadhaar is an initiative taken by Government of India (G.O.I) under the overall administrative control and management of Planning Commission in the year 2009. Aadhaar has been entrusted with the massive task of ensuring genuine identity of all throughout the country, in order to establish the

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rightful claims of citizens for accessing the benefits of various governmental services and programmes. The ICT integration in Aadhaar promotes creation of a digital identity which will lead India towards the next level of transition in the sphere of governance. Aadhaar has gained acceptability in administrative functioning and gradually gaining popularity among the masses. It will be interesting to explore the utility and significance of Aadhaar in rolling out public services. The seeding Aadhaar card with various welfare schemes and subsidy programmes has been made to realise the ethos of social justice and equitable development of all through technology. The adoption of Aadhaar for delivering public services/ schemes to the people is a symbiotic process in which both people and government as stakeholders are mutually benefitted. The government gets benefitted in terms of curbing leakages in target/beneficiary identification and validation of people and for the people to avail the government services in a hassle free, transparent, quick, and simple manner through Aadhaar. Aadhaar has become the world's biggest biometric id programme with around 1 billion cards which have been rolled out so far, this clearly reflects substantial investment of policy inputs, capital, administrative will and peoples' participation in making Aadhaar a driving force in creating developmental opportunities, promoting equality and social justice for all.

**Keywords** Social justice · ICT · e-Governance · UID · Aadhaar · Supreme Court of India

## Introduction

### *Concept of Social Justice*

Plato (380 BC) said that justice was achieved when each person received goods they deserved based on their prescribed position in the social order (Grube 1974). Aristotle (384–322 BC) said that justice was a principle that ensured social order by regulating the distribution of benefits (Ross 1980). However, in Aristotle's view, equality and justice applied only to individuals who occupied the same stratum of the hierarchical social order. According to these ideas of social justice, unequals in the social hierarchy are to be treated unequally. These ideas did not challenge the social structures of society, but worked within them. Rousseau (1712–1778) and others who followed him in the “age of revolution” shaped the formation of modern institutions in the west with the view that the pursuit and realisation of social justice was linked to the preservation of individual liberty or freedom, achievement of equality (of rights, opportunities and outcomes) and establishment of common bonds of all humanity (Rousseau 1754).

Justice has been manifested in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, which talks about three kinds of Justice that is social, economic and political. In fact insightful observation reflects the logical sequencing mentioned in the preamble

itself. The precedence has been given to social justice because no economic and political justice can be attained and sustained if the social justice is not materialised into reality. The Directive Principles of State Policy of Indian Constitution also indicate and promote the equitable society in various articles by resorting to create just and equitable society. It talks about social justice in terms of equity of opportunities and development. The social justice discourse further got momentum in the wake of uneven distribution of wealth coupled with fractured development and rising income inequalities. The technology has played a very important role in making human life better in general and Information Communication Technology in particular. The technological expansion and advancements are taking place at an unprecedented pace in the twenty-first century. No aspect of human life, be it personal or professional, community, social, commercial, financial, political, has remained untouched by the technological interventions. The application of technology in the sphere of governance is quite widely practised across the globe. ICT has been utilised in the form of e-Governance in the sphere of government to provide electronic delivery of services to citizens, enhancing participation of the citizens in governmental activities and processes by promoting the concept of e-Democracy. The social justice is at the heart of ethical politics and core of sovereignty. It embraces equality, equal access to resources, well-informed citizenry, fair distribution of public wealth and compliances with law. As the web connectivity is expanding, the interactive plateau for sharing the information regarding violation of human rights, deprivations, marginalisation, socio-economic injustice and other kinds of exploitations is getting echoed, thereby increasing the intensity of delivering social justice. In brief, some of the essential components of social justice are:-

- a. Equal access to opportunities and rights
- b. Fair system of law and due process
- c. Ability to take up opportunities and exercise rights
- d. Protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged people individual responsibility
- e. Individual capability (emphasises the personal characteristics that enable people to take advantage of opportunities)
- f. Recognition of human value and well-being

The role of Aadhaar card is significant in realising the various components of social justice as illustrated above especially in regard to equal access to opportunities and rights.

It is pertinent to mention that this policy initiative will prove to be an effective instrument of social justice and for bringing empowerment. Needless to say that empowerment is the prerequisite for attainment of social equality, a convincing precondition of social justice. The theoretical precept may convey the rationalistic point of view, but the realistic aspect is to distribute the fruits of development, empowerment and progress to everyone. Since Aadhaar scheme will form the key index of inclusiveness in coming era, the discrepancies could be easily surfaced. Once the identification of discrepancies is done, the action would follow, thus perpetuating the ethos of social justice through an e-policy initiative.

## ***Aadhaar an e-Policy Initiative Through E-Governance***

The World Bank has defined e-government as “government-owned or operated systems of information and communications technologies (ICTs) that transform relations with citizens, the private sector and/or other government agencies so as to promote citizen empowerment, improve service delivery, strengthen accountability, increase transparency, or improve government efficiency” (Panzardi et al. 2002).

As per the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) the ultimate objective of NeGP is to bring public services closer home to citizens, as articulated in the Vision Statement of NeGP (National e-Governance Plan 2006).

Make all Government services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets, and ensure efficiency, transparency, and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man (MEITY 2014).

Government of India formally launched its National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), in 2006. It comprises of 27 Mission Mode Projects encompassing 10 Central MMPs, 10 State MMPs and 7 Integrated MMPs. Thus, the initiatives in the arena of e-Governance have been of marathon magnitude. The e-interventions have resulted into the improvisation of quality of services, the cascading effect of which can be seen in the form of delivering social justice to its people.

There lies a sound logic and reasoning behind the efforts of government both Centre and States to stress for e-Governance as it provides ways to the cost cutting or curbing the rising administrative expenses, increased pace of service delivery along with reducing delays, bringing more transparency in the governmental operations. It was in this context that the Government of India took the step towards launching a scheme which was meant to correctly and perfectly target the intended beneficiaries of various governmental schemes and programmes to increase the effectiveness of various government-sponsored programmes and reduce the leakages of funds. This was also done in order to reduce the burgeoning subsidy burden of the Government especially in the social sector. This entire idea was materialised in the form of launching “Aadhaar” the brand name of unique identification number (UID).

## ***Background of Unique Identification Number (UID)***

The journey for the Aadhaar started by the creation of Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI) on 28 January 2009 as attached office under the Planning Commission of India. The project was initiated by the Planning Commission as an initiative that would provide the identification for each and every resident across the country and would be used as the basis for efficient delivery of welfare services to the people. The idea was also to use unique identification as a tool for effective monitoring of various programmes and schemes of government.

Although this concept is not new, it was first utilised in 2006 when unique ID for below poverty line (BPL) families was approved by the Department of Information Technology, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Government of India. An Empowered Group of Ministers (EGOM) was constituted with the approval of Prime Minister on 4 December 2006 to collate the two schemes that is the National Population Register under the Citizenship Act 1955 and unique identification number project of Department of Information and Technology. The mandate of UID is to issue every resident a unique identification number linked to the biometric information. Which can be used to identify by linking demographic attributes with the biometric attributes like finger prints and Iris patterns.

### *The Mission and Uniqueness*

The role that the Authority *envisions* is to issue a unique identification number (UIDAI) that can have online verification and authentication in a cost-effective manner, which is capable enough to eliminate duplicate and fake identities. Unique identity of an individual which cannot be duplicated by others can be established by linking demographic with biometric. This is what has been achieved by rolling out Aadhaar and hence that corrupt practices are curbed and eliminated, as indicated in Fig. 5.1.

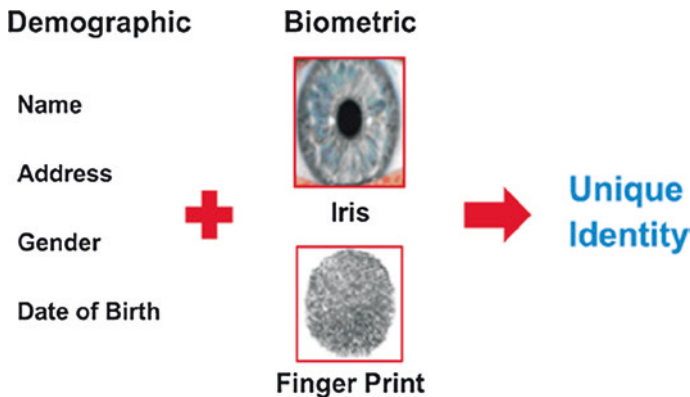


Fig. 5.1 Clubbing demographic and biometrics. Source UIDAI

## **UID Number = Demographic Attributes + Biometric Attributes**

### ***Online Verifiability***

The online verifiability is significant in facilitating the following dimensions of governance which in turn will guarantee the impartial, impressive and integrity-based system. The effect of this would be in terms of evolving a trust-based system. The major points can be summarised as follows:

1. Can be accessed anywhere in India with online verifiability.
2. Removal of duplicate and fake identities.
3. Authentication of the individual as the same and unique person anywhere and at any time.
4. Greater scalability of services with online authentication.
5. Reduced beneficiary exploitation due to reduced dependency on manual processes.
6. Increased efficiency to service delivery and reduced cost of beneficiary identification.
7. Almost paperless that is no requirement for physical copies of identity documents
8. Electronic audit trail can be created which will allow service agencies to audit their service delivery process more effectively.

### ***Aadhaar: The Foundation and Operating Model***

The UID has been referred as Aadhaar. The name Aadhaar itself means the foundation or support in Hindi language. The features of Aadhaar include

1. Guarantee of uniqueness
2. Online identity verification
3. Utilisation for accessing services and resources any time anywhere in the country
4. Provide the identity infrastructure for the financial inclusion

The Aadhaar Operating Model has been mentioned in Fig. 5.2.

### ***Applications of Aadhaar***

Aadhaar can be leveraged effectively across industry domains for improving service delivery to the people irrespective of service being delivered by government,

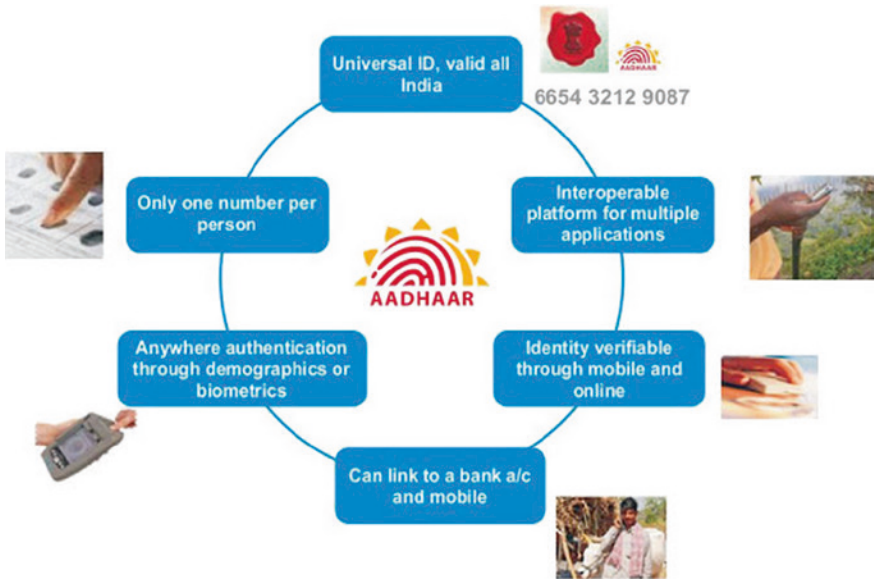


Fig. 5.2 Aadhaar Operating Model. Source UIDAI

public sector or private sector. Aadhaar is an IT-enabled identity solution which needs to be leveraged appropriately by service agencies along with required business reengineering and computerisation of their services through e-Governance and ICT initiatives.

1. Government Welfare Programs
2. LPG Distribution and Subsidy Management
3. Financial Inclusion and Electronic Payments
4. Telecom
5. Internet and E-Commerce
6. Aadhaar as Unifier
7. For criminal investigations.

However the ruling of Honourable Supreme Court of India dated 11th of August 2015 regarding Aadhaar not being mandatory is noteworthy. The court ruled that Aadhaar card will remain optional for availing various welfare schemes of the government. However, Aadhaar card will continue to be required for PDS and LPG distribution system. The court has allowed the use of details of Aadhaar card holders for criminal investigations. For detailed discussion pertaining to the social justice this paper has identified two major areas.

1. Government Welfare Programs for, e.g. Targeted Public Distribution System
2. Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) Distribution and Subsidy Management

### ***Aadhaar in Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)***

The welfare programs in India target millions of beneficiaries who depend on these programs, and these programs are often criticised for not having full impact due to delays, leakages, duplications and other delivery-related inefficiencies. Majority of welfare programs use physical identity documents and rely on manual processes for beneficiary identification. These practices result in lack of identity documents, existence of duplicate and fake beneficiaries preventing poor and marginalised people from accessing the benefits of TPDS programme (Planning Commission 2005). Use of Aadhaar to link beneficiaries with their Aadhaar numbers in beneficiary identification and approval process can address these issues. Applicant provides his/her Aadhaar number as part of the application which is saved in welfare programme database along with other application data. In addition, applicant authenticates his/her Aadhaar number through any chosen method (possibly fingerprint biometric) to confirm. The applicant name, address and date of birth provided in the application may also be verified against Aadhaar record with UIDAI through demographic authentication. As part of beneficiary approval step, the applicants Aadhaar number is matched against existing beneficiaries to ensure that the applicant is not an existing beneficiary.

### ***Aadhaar Utilisation for Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) Distribution and Subsidy Management***

Through Aadhaar-integrated delivery of all welfare programs, it will also allow the verification of beneficiary across different programs in case resident is not allowed to avail certain benefits simultaneously. Many welfare programs require the verification of beneficiary presence in different contexts. Some of the circumstances in which Aadhaar can be utilised are as follows: for subsidy-based welfare programs like LPG, it is important to ascertain whether the person receiving the benefit is indeed the intended beneficiary. Biometric-based Aadhaar authentication can be leveraged to achieve this verification for all scenarios as it confirms the presence and existence of the person. Based on the programme requirement, Aadhaar authentication can be implemented at the time of service delivery (e.g. TDPS).

### ***Social Dynamics***

It would be pertinent to explore the impact of this e-intervention on the social dynamics which will be undergoing a massive reorientation in terms of outreach, mobilisation and participation through this e-initiative. This programme will transform the way in which government benefits are delivered to our people



who have been marginalised due to complex social system that prevails in India. This requires processing and digitising data, enrolling in Aadhaar, opening bank accounts and seeding these accounts. Hence, the focus is on reengineering the governmental processes. This schemes as pointed out earlier will make a new headway in terms of efficiency, transparency, propriety, in beneficiary identification and changing the entire social scenario. This is instrumental in being an e-policy initiative especially in India where self-created social constructs, corrupt practices; administrative apathy, arbitrariness and inefficiency inhibit the processes of development.

### ***Algorithm***

The above analysis is based on certain theoretical precepts but which have been applied in limited regions the following statements can be drawn leading to algorithm which can give some direction for implementing this policy. A simple algorithm can be developed by identifying the categories of beneficiaries and authentication process by Aadhaar server. The algorithm diagram is shown in Fig. 5.3.

- Step 1: Start process for C-1 Consumers PDS
- Step 2: Enter Aadhaar input information
- Step 3: Consumer authentication check via C.I.D.R
- Step 4: If authentication successful, then service delivered
- Step 5: Else service rejected for consumer
- Step 6: End of process
- Step 7: Start process for C-2 Consumers LPG subsidy
- Step 8: Repeat Step 2 to Step 6.

The diagram explains via simple algorithm that various kinds of entitlement holders, be it PDS consumers or LPG subsidy government schemes, can access their different entitlements by using Aadhaar at the respective points. The C-1 stands for Consumers of PDS, and C-2 stands for Consumers of LPG subsidy. From there onwards the Aadhaar-based information is scrutinised and processed so that the duplicacy and discrepancy can be prevented through Central Identities Data Repository (C.I.D.R). Authentication leads to two kinds of responses one that is yes and the other is no. In case of yes, the delivery of expected service is achieved, and in case of no, the authentication provides negative result the process is redirected towards the start. Hence, it explains in a simple way that if manual manipulations are prevented and discrimination can be avoided through technological progression not only the benefits of various governmental schemes would accrue to the stakeholders in a time bound and reliable manner but also the self-constructed complexities retarding the inclusive development would be abolished up to a great extent, thereby ensuring social justice to its citizens.

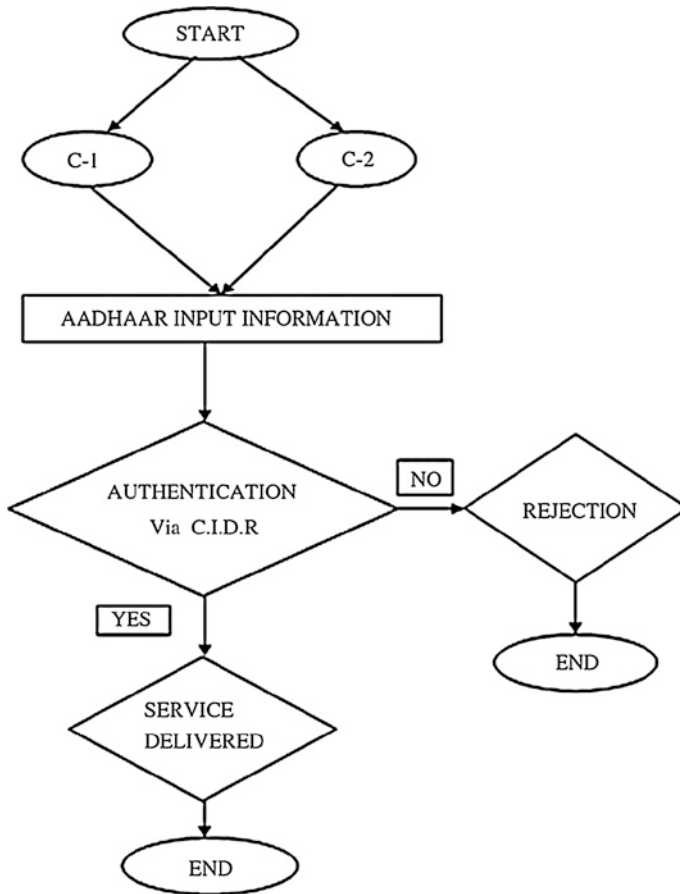


Fig. 5.3 Aadhaar algorithm developed by Anurag

### *Theoretical Framework and Development of the Hypotheses*

The hypothesis was constructed to explore the people’s perceptions in regard to Aadhaar. For the purpose of this study, the directional hypothesis has been used. This is stated as below:

**H** Application of Aadhaar card has enhanced the level of efficiency, transparency and accountability in delivery of public services.

For extracting the responses from the respondents, a questionnaire was prepared containing 10 questions contained in set-A. An interview schedule and mailed questionnaire were utilised to extract responses from the people aged between 18 and 70 years. The respondents were selected through Stratified Random Sampling and their educational and professional background was also

**Table 5.1** The binary questions

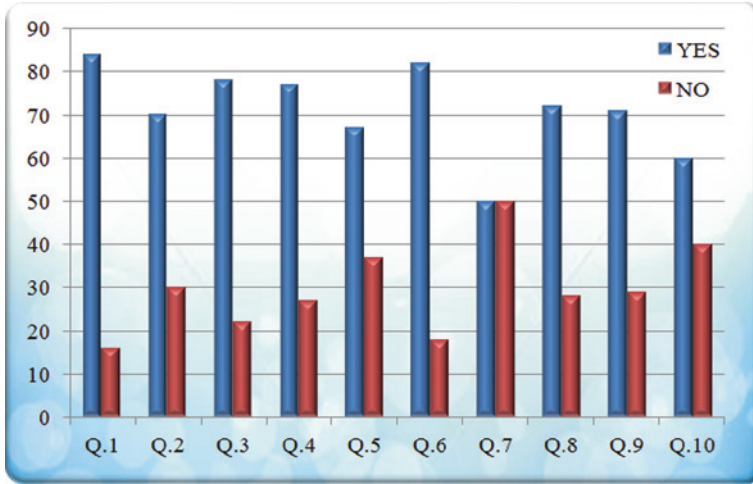
Question	Yes	No
1 Do you know about Aadhaar Card Scheme?	84	16
2 Do you feel that Aadhaar infringes upon your privacy? (intentionally feeding wrong information)?	70	30
3 Do you find that Aadhaar seeding helps in targeting beneficiary?	78	22
4 Do you feel that Aadhaar should be made mandatory for all government-sponsored schemes?	77	23
5 Do you feel that Aadhaar scheme is a burden on public exchequer	67	33
6 Do you feel that Aadhaar generates greater transparency into the governmental system?	82	18
7 Do you feel that Aadhaar is a game changer in the delivery of social services schemes?	50	50
8 Do you feel that decentralised rolling of Aadhaar cards through private players is a compromise on your privacy?	72	28
9 Do you find that Aadhaar helps in Know Your Customer?	71	29
10 Do you feel that Aadhaar has lowered the corruption levels?	60	40

Source: research survey instituted by Anurag

considered as criteria in identifying the sample in order to make it more representative. The selection of the respondents was done on the basis of stratified random sampling in the city of Ahmedabad (Gujarat). Ahmedabad has over 6.5 million population and is the seventh largest city of India. The total sample size for extracting the responses was 120 (20 respondents each from the six zones of Ahmedabad city). However the actual sample size that could be obtained from sample survey was 100 instead of 120 as proposed. The following are binary questions with the responses of the people as given in Table 5.1 and represented in Fig. 5.4.

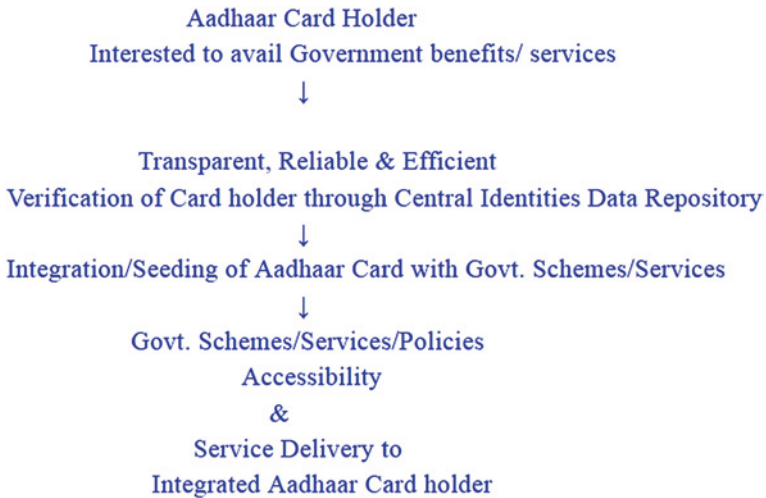
### *Discussion and Analysis*

- To the first question the response was 84 saying yes and 16 saying negatively. The difference between the responses appears very sharp, so it can be assumed that people are aware of Aadhaar Card Scheme.
- To the second question the response has been 70 in yes and 30 in negative. This reflects a clear-cut division that Aadhaar infringes upon people’s privacy.
- To the third question the responses are 78 in positive and 22 in negative. Aadhaar seeding helps in targeting beneficiary. The reasons could be that Aadhaar information corresponds to the beneficiary identification. And that has been felt by the common people.



**Fig. 5.4** Bar graph representation of binary questions. *Source* research survey instituted by Anurag

- To the fourth question the responses are largely positive where the 77 have responded affirmatively and 23 negatively. This reflects that Aadhaar scheme appears to be a burden on public exchequer as per common perception.
- To the fifth question which addresses the question of accuracy shows that 67 are going for affirmative response and 33 are denying this accuracy. This reflects that Aadhaar promotes transparency into the governmental system by minimising the paper work, avoiding duplications and complicated identity documentation.
- To the sixth question the responses are one sided where 82 responses are registered in the positive category. This suggests that people at large have been given the facility to register their grievances online. The convenience in registering complains could be attributed to e-Governance actually which has facilitated the registration process.
- The seventh question response figure is almost as 50 saying yes and 50 saying no. The perfect 50–50 suggests that opinion of the people is divided. Aadhaar is a game changer in the delivery of social service schemes. Logical explanation inherent in this is that despite Aadhaar being a must for availing benefits of social security schemes it has not been integrated, and popularised effectively.
- To the eighth question it has one-sided response where 72 responded in yes category and 28 in negative that suggest that people trust more to the government agencies than private players in maintaining their privacy in regard to Aadhaar card roll out.
- To the ninth question again the contradictory responses registered where 71 saying yes and 29 saying negative. It is reflected that Aadhaar helps in Know Your



**Fig. 5.5** Flow chart of aadhaar enabled service delivery

Customer. The improvement in customer identification has been a major factor contributing towards this overwhelmingly affirmative response.

- The tenth question deals with the fact that Aadhaar has lowered the corruption levels the responses are 60 in positive and 40 in negative. This has been substantiated by earlier responses which have also suggested that Aadhaar-based technological intervention has brought greater transparency, reduced arbitrariness and corruption (Fig. 5.5).

## Conclusion

The responses of binary questions authenticate the hypothesis that application of Aadhaar card has brought greater efficiency, transparency and participation in delivering public services. India being a developing country and making strides for faster and more inclusive development has to rely more and more on the technological inputs like ICT to improve the governance process and strengthening the administrative good practices. In a developing country like India where the backwardness and inequality prevail and social justice has yet to materialise in the concrete terms, therefore reliance on government supported and sponsored schemes and programmes becomes much more crucial. In order to ensure that governmental interventions are quantitatively and qualitatively available to the people the ICT has been leveraged as a potent tool. Corruption, delay, nepotism, favouritism are some of the common problems plaguing the implementation of various social welfare schemes in India. Beneficiary identification has been a major problem

for providing entitlements to various schemes and programmes. Issues like ghost beneficiaries, fraudulent or fake beneficiaries are quite common while disbursing the fruits of social sector schemes aimed at bringing inclusiveness and promoting social justice.

Another issue pertains to the claims made for such benefits by the genuine and deserving people who should enjoy the social safety net find it extremely difficult to establish their identity because of tedious, time consuming and corrupt process of obtaining such documentation. Aadhaar can with all its features and advantages solve this complex problem in a very transparent and convenient way by eliminating the unnecessary human intervention and arbitrariness. India can usher into a new era of digital governance by making the best use of limited capital and skilled workforce for promoting the socio-economic justice and curbing the delay, corruption and arbitrariness in the administrative functioning has appeared in China Daily stating, China has improved the way it deals with corruption and is increasingly using technology to combat graft, but experts say preventing the technology from being abused must also be taken into consideration. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences published a report on China's rule of law, stating that the country's disciplinary authorities at every level have developed and applied technology to their anti-corruption work, such as online approval platforms and bribery record systems (China Daily 2013). Having one of the largest technical support pool and IT prowess India is poised to take giant strides in realising the goals of social justice as enshrined in the Constitution of India. Any change in the existing practices of governance has element of apprehension and confusion which is true far Aadhaar also but the possibility of misuse appears less as supported by Aadhaar study. As per the study "Role of Biometric Technology in Aadhaar Enrollment" conducted by UIDAI in 2012 regarding the *Reliability of Biometrics* methods the data revealed that the failure to enrol at 0 %, biometric failure 0.14 %, false rejection 0.057 %, false acceptance 0.0352 % (UIDAI 2012).

The governmental intervention in the social sector is needed in order to alleviate poverty, bringing inclusiveness and leading to empowerment of the people specially of impoverished and the deprived. Aadhaar can be a significant tool in the hands of Governmental agencies for distributing the fruits of growth and development by eliminating corruption, arbitrariness, delays, wastages, leakages and fraudulent practices. Aadhaar-based technology mechanisms helps in identifying the target beneficiary for availing various benefits and economic rights extended by government. Aadhaar enhances the accuracy of factual data by avoiding duplicity, overlapping and through a centralised coordinated set of commands/protocols and operative mechanisms that assist in achieving procedural fairness in the government service delivery beneficiaries. The responses pertaining to the questionnaire also substantiates and justify the hypothesis of the sample survey of this study.

The Supreme Court of India was concerned about the infringement of people's privacy as the court opined that no personal information of Aadhaar card holder should be shared or disclosed and the right to privacy is one of the basic inherent tenets of right to life and personal liberty belonging to Article 21 of the

Indian Constitution (Rajagopal Krishnadas 2015). Therefore, the individual's privacy should be respected and honoured while implementing Aadhaar Card based schemes and programmes.

Amid the concerns raised by Supreme Court of India for making Aadhaar card optional and not mandatory in availing the benefits of government sponsored programmes, which resulted in government taking the legislative route by piloting "The Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Bill, 2016". With the passage of this bill the attempt has been made to address the concerns of judiciary and allaying the fears of the people in regard to privacy infringement.

Aadhaar is not a citizenship card but it really helps citizens to assert socio-economic rights. In India the underprivileged sections have largely been at the receiving end in terms of accessing government welfare schemes and programmes and exercising their rights as dignified citizens of India. Aadhaar can act as fulcrum for leveraging the opportunities extended by government to the citizens through fair, transparent, rapid, and accountable operative mechanisms routed through technological integration. This would further promote Aadhaar as an instrument of socio-economic justice and empowering people by leveraging e-governance platform.

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