

In Pataudi, just Aadhaar is not enough

Surabhi

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I for identity Ramavtar, a farmer, gets his retina scanned at an Aadhaar center in Pataudi Ramesh Sharma

Ramesh Sharma

While most in this Haryana town have the ID card, banking challenges remain

Situated along the NH48, Pataudi and its surrounding villages seem almost idyllic and a poster child for the government's ambitious biometric identification scheme — Aadhaar. Just about everyone seems to have had Aadhaar numbers for at least a couple of years. In Pataudi's busy Hailei Mandi area, scores of Aadhaar centres have sprung up and compete for business.

"I did this work in Allahabad, but in 2014 decided to move to Pataudi," said Pawan Yadav, who runs one such centre. It's certainly made life easier for people in the area, who earlier had to travel for an hour to Bhiwadi or Manesar for getting an Aadhaar card. According to him, most people in the area have Aadhaar cards and the centres largely do registration of births or correction of data.

"We got Aadhaar cards made in 2014, when camps were organised in all villages by the government," said Ram Avtar, a farmer in Lokra, which is about five kilometres from Pataudi.

The mandatory requirement of Aadhaar card for food subsidy is also not much of a concern for most. "The point of sale machine came in November last year. Most families already have Aadhaar so providing it for ration should not be a problem," said Om Vir Singh, who runs the ration shop in Lokri village.

He estimates that there are about 71 families that are covered by the Antyodaya Anna Yojana, which provides subsidised food for the poorest, in the village with a population of about 2,800.

It's largely the men and children who go to the public distribution shops in rural Haryana. "I have an Aadhaar card but I don't know much about getting ration. I stay at home and the children or my husband gets it," said Hira Devi.

Banking challenges

But dig a little deeper and you get to know that all's not well. Poor power supply and erratic internet connectivity, and inadequate banking facilities bog down efforts to provide not just Aadhaar but also other financial inclusion services.

"There is no internet connectivity. I have a back-up inverter as we get electricity for about three hours every day," said Sandeep Kumar, who runs the Common Service Centre (CSC) in Lokri. Part of the ambitious Digital India initiative, CSCs are expected to provide government e-service such as Aadhaar and PAN cards, electoral services and housing schemes; and other services like rail ticketing and mobile recharge.

Kumar, who also works as a banking correspondent, says that while everyone in the village has Aadhaar cards and most of them receive some subsidy benefits from the government, accessing the payments from their bank accounts is a challenge.

"About 50 per cent of the villagers have bank accounts but there is only bank branch nearby in Lokra village, which is manned by three people. It's not easy if you want to deposit or withdraw money," said Kumar.

But Lokri is better placed than other villages as it has Kumar and his CSC. "There are over 100 villages in this area. But less than 10 of them would actually have the designated CSCs. The rest are in Pataudi as it is more of a commercial hub. People have to travel at least one hour if they want any service," said Dinesh Kumar, who is a life insurance agent.

Pull or push factor

Most villagers are unsure of Aadhaar's benefits and don't seem very concerned about issues like the security of their biometrics.

Their attitude is perhaps best summed up by farmer Vidyanand, who travelled from Pahari village to Pataudi to change his birth date in the Aadhaar card. "If the government wants it, we have to get it made. But it means loss of work and pay, and a 20-km travel."

He is however, happy to receive his monthly rations and horticulture facilities and seeds by providing his biometric identification.

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