COMMENT

I D E N T I T Y   B U S I N E S S

IT SEEMS WITH THE LAUNCH   of the 15th Census by the Office of the Registrar General of India on April the 1st 2010, the Indian State is poised to make its most audacious attempt to penetrate its body politic. It remains to be seen how this exercise will turn out. Will the union of personal identities of a billion plus individuals with the State be an enduring marriage? Just like so many previous attempts to give all legible Indians a legible mark of identification in the name of a voter card, a PAN card, a ration card, a driving license, a passport and a birth certificate have failed.

Central to this year's Census is the idea of attaching the biometric aspects of one's personal identity with a unique number.

Data collection including fingerprinting for the National Population Register has been launched alongside 2011 census exercise and under different status. This is no innocuous business. The relationship between the state and the people is set to change dramatically and irretrievably, and it appears to be happening without even a discussion about what it means. NATGRID (National Intelligence Grid) and UID (the Unique Identification Project) will enable 11 security and intelligence agencies including RAW, the IB, the Enforcement Directorate, the National Investigation Agency, CBI etc to access consolidated data from 21 categories of databases. All this is amied at making the police state perfect.

Thus a ready made surveillance apparatus could easily assist an owner to ascertain the identity of a person who has done wrong. Crime could be linked to fingerprint, fingerprint to database and database to a verifiable set of spatio-social co-ordinates.

As of now technology of identification cannot sort out the good guys from the bad guys. Therefore it turns everybody into a suspect.

For one thing, these are good times for identification industry. Big moolah is just beginning to enter the market. A smart card which is also a technology of identification is the real money spinner. With the introduction of seemingly irrefutable ideas like *Unique Identity*, the government of India is all set to emerge as a serious player in the identification game. All Private vendors, private chip manufacturing, private market research and private database management firms who are aligning with the Government are going in for a biggest kill that the market has seen in recent years.

Compared to just the cost of national identity card which is estimated at 1,50,000 crore rupees, a 1,800 crore market of so-called surveillance and security architecture with its state of the art cameras, motion sensors, razor wire fencing and so on, seem

like mere kitschy pieces of jewellery which is being doled out for public consumption. And the market for a national identity card is just a small fraction of the entire spectrum of emerging smart card industry in India. □□□   *[contributed]*