

● BIOMETRIC DATA SECURITY

How you can secure your Aadhaar details

The lock feature on the Aadhaar website allows you to secure your biometric details. Once locked, not only will you be unable to use any of Aadhaar-linked services, your biometrics will not be accepted at any service centre until you unlock it

ISHAAN GERA

WHILE IT IS true that many have complained about Aadhaar being unsafe or open to hacking attempts, given that the database is accessible to private agencies, there are ways one can protect the biometric information without relying on the government for help.

Quite readily available on the Aadhaar website, there is a facility by which one can lock the biometric details to prevent unauthorised access. Once locked, not only will the service be unavailable to anybody, no organisation will be able to unlock it. And only when you unlock it would anyone be able to access any biometric details.

The ultimate key

Registration of Aadhaar entailed people

giving their biometrics to UIDAI. While the government has found many uses for these—it is being used for PDS, eKYC, registrations and most recently payments—many complained about the data being unsafe as private agencies handled many services. But there is a fix for this.

You can easily lock or unlock your details for use by registering on the UIDAI website. But first you have to register your mobile number with UIDAI, and link it with Aadhaar. While many had provided biometrics for Aadhaar, there still exist a few who did not register their mobile numbers with the authority. Once the mobile number is linked with Aadhaar—this can only be done from UIDAI enrollment centre—one needs to access the UIDAI website (uidai.gov.in) and login using Aadhaar number.

The agency will send a one-time password to your mobile, as is customary with most payments, which will allow access to your Aadhaar details. Upon accessing those details you can use the tab for locking and unlocking Aadhaar information.

A click on the checkbox (Enable Aadhaar Lock) will allow locking of Aadhaar information. Thereafter, not only will this unlock the service (this is a temporary solution and lasts for 20 minutes), there is a disable lock feature on Aadhaar also.

Locked for good

The locking feature doesn't allow any of the service centres to use your biometric details, thus locking you out of the entire



ILLUSTRATION: SHYAM

UIDAI network. You will be unable to use any of the services and even your biometric details will not be accepted at any of the service centres, unless you unlock it.

Once in the unlock mode, you can access it for 20 minutes after which the service would be locked again keeping everybody out of the system. Basically,

the feature narrows the window of opportunity for hackers to just 20 minutes. So, if you have some concerns about people accessing your details, they would not be able to do so beyond the 20-minute window in this case.

Key solution

Although Aadhaar locking provides an option to secure your data, there are some drawbacks to the service pertaining to efficiency of the system. The OTP feature, at times, is not as fast as you would want it to be, for you to enable or disable the service using the uidai.gov.in website. Also, such a utility would make more sense if there was a mobile app connected to the system, with a shorter window of unlocking the details.

Earlier some banks were allowing this feature for use of debit cards, where the app would allow you to enable purchases for a short time. If UIDAI can achieve something similar it would make life much simpler, as one would receive the OTP and unlock the Aadhaar for 5-10 minutes before it is locked again.

But the biggest drawback stems from the government's disinclination to promote this feature. Like many of its offerings, the government has not marketed this feature enough, allowing people to criticise Aadhaar on account of safety. A major step towards securing Aadhaar can come from a public information system geared towards explaining people the merits and process of using this feature.