



Prof. Reetika Kher

Title of the Talk: Aadhaar and Welfare: Pain without Gain

Brief Bio: Prof. Reetika Khera teaches economics at IIT Delhi. Prof. Khera's research is focused on development, especially in rural areas. Her primary research areas include, food security, health and nutrition, education and caste. In the past, she has been Associate Professor at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad, and Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi. She is a highly regarded scholar of evidenced-based policy research and has contributed greatly to public discussions around various policy initiatives in India.

Abstract for the Talk:

“Aadhaar and Welfare: Pain without Gain” Aadhaar, India’s unique identity system, was introduced in 2009 with the stated purpose of creating a more inclusive and efficient welfare system. Hundreds of millions of Indians were enrolled into the biometric database, with successive governments creating pressure by making it compulsory for social benefits. The talk will demonstrate how Aadhaar, contrary to government claims, *excludes* people entitled by right from welfare when made compulsory. Aadhaar was never really about welfare. The idea is to alert us to the dangers lurking in such expansive digital ID projects. I will try to explain how the project opens the doors to immense opportunities for government surveillance and commercial data-mining. For example, how profiling, made possible by Aadhaar, impinges on the fundamental Right to Privacy; or how surveillance leads to self-censorship and can choke free thought and expression.