

Facial recognition in India

Convenience, Safety, or Civil Rights Crisis

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Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) is swiftly becoming a crucial component of India's digital transformation. It examines distinct facial characteristics to recognize individuals, converting these features into biometric data that operates similarly to fingerprints. India has commenced the deployment of this technology in over 170 facial recognition projects, of which 20 are currently operational. These projects include the various sectors such as defense (20%), education (13%), energy (12%) and public infrastructure (10%). Based on the level of adoption, societal and operational impact, FRT in India is broadly classified into major and minor sectors, which include the government, private, and public sectors. Major sectors are driven by law enforcement, transportation, public surveillance, and digital governance, where adoption is widespread. In contrast to minor sectors, which are driven by education, healthcare, private sector, retail, and marketing, focused on convenience and automation, where adoption is emerging or experimental, with a smaller reach. This technology has both advantages as well as disadvantages, just like a coin has two sides. Let's take a closer look at its convenience, safety and civil rights crisis.

FRT allows fast and seamless access to devices, log in to banking apps, verify identity during online exams or video calls for a smoother experience. This ultimately reduces password fatigue. It also decreases risk of infection spread

by hands-free operation without the need to type, tap, swipe, or carry access cards. Many users appreciate the contactless nature of this technology, especially in a post-pandemic world where hygiene is a greater priority. Besides that, it is convenient in situations like driving, carrying groceries and wearing gloves. It also speeds up check-in processes at airports, events and hotels without showing any documents. This technology makes tracking attendance and working hours automatic, fast, and reliable, offering convenience in workplaces, schools and other environments. Employers and institutions can gain insights like identifying trends, improve scheduling and planning. It minimizes administrative burden by integrating easily with payroll systems which not only saves time but also lowers the human error. People suffering with medical issues like unconscious, elderly, non-verbal and language-limited can take the advantage of this contactless access system.

When it comes to safety aspect, Facial Recognition technology in India tries to implement safety environment to the people. This system, not only identifies the suspects but it can also send an instant alert to security teams. So it gives an added advantage for the police to track the suspects and criminals. Locating vulnerable groups like missing children, adults or disabled people is also possible in heavy crowds, aiding in preventing stampedes. Restricting the entry to sensitive areas like research labs, government offices, airports and defense zones has made easier. Unlike manual ID checks, facial recognition is so accurate that it limits mistakes that could bypass security. Apart from this, it also used in malls, metro stations, bus stations as an extra layer of security to prevent theft, harassment and vandalism. The advanced version of it can even support pattern recognition and behavior analysis. This integrated FRT along with AI CCTV, is widely deployed in high-risk areas or recurring threats based on previous incidents. The FRT plays a crucial role in post-incident tracking by accelerating integration, aids in forensic analysis and supports law enforcement in reconstructing events. Part of national initiatives like Nirbhaya Fund projects and Smart cities mission have come into limelight. Courts also use this seamless technology for verifying identities during trials, arrests and investigations. FRT enables doorbells and cameras to restrict access to the entry of outsiders. This has come to existence in urban areas. In educational and corporate sectors, hacking and unauthorized logins are minimized by incorporating FRT in online banking, e-learning platforms etc. Airports like Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Varanasi have started implementing Digi Yatra for airport and passenger security. In e-voting platforms or at physical polling

stations, facial technology helps to identify voter identity, ensures tamper-proof elections by prevention impersonation and duplicate voting. Now-a days schools are getting optimized to make sure safer child pick-up in schools. Some smart cars use it to recognize the driver and to prevent theft. Even in e-commerce and retail sector, its used for both secure delivery systems and e-commerce warehouses. In order to provide the safety for the nation, india's integrated check posts (ICPs) and major border crossings have also started. It has extended its role in medical field as well. Identifying genetic disorders could help in early diagnosis and better treatment outcomes.



While the facial technology offers convenience and safety to the people, it is equally important to explore the darker side of it as well i.e., its impact on civil rights. The most commonly faced issue is mass surveillance without consent. Right to privacy recognized by supreme court in 2017 was violated. Lack of legal framework regarding data collection, storage, or deletion is opening the doors for misuse, overreach and, or no accountability. According to some studies, this innovative technology can be biased towards minorities or marginalized groups, leading to religious, caste-based or regional profiling, which eventually leads to social injustice. Sometimes, facial recognition systems cause errors like misidentification of the innocents as suspects. FRT can be linked with Aadhar, CCTV, mobile numbers and also social media accounts. This enables mass profiling and prediction models, turning innocent civilians into datapoints for monitoring. Most facial scan systems like police use or smart city systems are implemented with little public disclosure. People don't even know who collects

the data and for how long it is stored and who it is shared with. This creates a dangerous lack of oversight. Also, the fear of being watched constantly may stop people from expressing opinions, threatens democratic rights like freedom of assembly and expression. Additionally, enforcement mechanisms are weak and exemptions for 'state security' are broad and vague. This allows government or private misuse without checks or redress. In malls, offices, schools and residential complexes, FRT is being adopted with no proper regulation. These systems can even sell the data violating privacy for profit. Even centralized databases are vulnerable to hacks or data breaches. India has seen multiple data leaks (like Aadhar), which raises concern about mass identity theft or fraud if Facial recognition databases are compromised. Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP Act) is the India's first data protection Act which enacted in 2023 but still doesn't ensure data security and transparency.

To conclude, the facial recognition technology is powerful tool that holds immense promise with equal risks as well. As our faces becomes data points, the line between visibility and vulnerability blurs. It is not just about regulation but also about preserving the dignity and autonomy of every citizen. On the positive side, FRT helps in reducing wait time, streamline access and digital governance goals. It also strengthens public safety helping authorities detect threats and law enforcement operations. But the same technology deployed without proper safeguard, raises main concerns. So its outcome depends on how it is used. The unregulated, expanding use of FRT in india poses a serious threat to constitutional rights including Right to privacy (Article 21), Right to freedom of speech and expression (Article 19), Right to equality (Article 14). There is an urgent need for strong data protection laws, public transparency, regular audit and independent oversight. To move forward responsibly, India must ensure that technology serves the people, not watches them.