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* **IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI**

+ W.P.(C) 981/2026 & CM APPL. 4748/2026

SHLOK BHARDWAJ

....Petitioner

Through: Petitioner-In-Person

versus

UNION OF INDIA & ANR

.....Respondents

Through: Ms. Avshreya Pratap Singh Rudy,
Adv. ,CGSC with Mr. Ankit Khatri, Ms. Usha
Jamnal, Ms. Nyasa Sharma, Advs.

Mr. Sanjay Khanna, Ms. Pragya Bhushan, Ms.
Vilakshana Dayma, Ms. Anshu Kumari, Advs. for
NTA

CORAM:

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE JASMEET SINGH

ORDER

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27.01.2026

1. This is a writ petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India read with Section 151 of the CPC, 1908 seeking the following relief:

“(A) Issue appropriate writ/ direction/ order to Respondents to permit candidate Shivanjali Bhardwaj (Roll no. UP090100390 and Application no. 260310097331) to REAPPEAR in JEE Engineering Entrance Exam Session-I (preferably afternoon shift) which shall continue till 28.01.2026...”

2. When the matter came up for hearing on 22.01.2026, the learned Standing Counsel for the respondent No. 1 was requested to obtain instructions from respondent No. 2 regarding the averments made in the petition.

3. The brief facts of the case are that while appearing for the JEE Engineering Entrance Examination, the petitioner’s daughter’s Aadhaar



verification could not be completed at the examination centre despite her reporting on time. Owing to the failure of the verification process, her Aadhaar remained blocked for a considerable period, causing her severe mental stress and anxiety. The verification process was successfully completed only midway through the examination. It is further stated by the petitioner that several other candidates seated in the same examination room, i.e., Room B-4, faced an identical issue.

4. Mr. Khanna, learned standing counsel appearing for the respondent No. 2 has handed over a copy of the minutes of the Grievance Redressal Committee where it has been stated as under:

“Minutes of the Meeting (First Case)

A Grievance Redressal Meeting was held on 24 January 2026 at 11:00 AM at NTA office to hear the case regarding alleged disturbance during examination and biometric authentication process. The following members of the Grievance Redressal Committee and the Father of the candidate were present in the meeting:

Committee Members:

- 1. Prof. V.K. Jain, Former Vice Chancellor-Chairman*
- 2. Prof. G.B Reddy, (Retired), IIT Delhi*
- 3. Prof. H.C Gupta, Senior Advisor, NTA*

Complainant/ Petitioner:

- 1. Sh. Shlok Bhardwaj Father of the Candidate (Petitioner)*

Agencies:

- 1. TCS Team*
- 2. E&Y Team*



The father of the candidate submitted before the committee that:

1. The candidate reported repeated biometric authentication attempts by examination functionaries leading to disturbance during the examination, which, according to him, adversely affected the candidate's performance.

2. The candidate was disturbed multiple times during the examination for biometric verification and handprint authentication.

3. The candidate arrived at the examination centre at approximately 07:15-07:20 AM and was present at the biometric verification area. Initial biometric attempts were made but due to failure of biometric process candidates were made so many attempts for verification.

Some Video Evidences were Placed Before the Committee and the father of the Petitioner. The Committee was shown CCTV footage from multiple time stamps, beginning from the candidate's entry at the examination centre at around 07:20 AM. The footage demonstrated that:

Initial biometric verification attempts occurred before the commencement of the examination.

The candidate was seated at her desk by 08:53 AM, prior to the start of the examination.

No interruption or disturbance to the candidate was observed during the examination period until approximately 10:34 AM.



At 10:34 AM, the invigilator approached the candidate once for additional biometric authentication. The interaction lasted less than one minute, as per CCTV footage timestamps. No repeated or prolonged interaction between the invigilator and the candidate during the examination was observed.

It was also informed to the Committee that the candidate visited 68 questions during the examination. The candidate attempted 28 questions, indicating uninterrupted access to the examination system. The Committee was informed that the candidate was seated at her allotted desk by 08:53 AM, well before the commencement of the examination scheduled at 09:00 AM. Following are the observations made by the Committee that:

- 1. The biometric verification and authentication process followed was as per the existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) applicable to all candidates.*
- 2. The additional biometric authentication undertaken at 10:34 AM was part of the prescribed precautionary process and was not exclusive and the candidate was not denied from appearing in the examination, nor was she stopped or delayed beyond the standard procedures applied to other candidates to ensure the integrity of the examination process.*
- 3. No evidence was found from CCTV that the candidate was subjected to Repeated disturbance, undue pressure.*



The father of the petitioner appeared to agree with the observations made by the committee and humbly submitted and requested to record this that in future, "additional biometric may preferably be conducted after completion of the examination, to avoid any possible impact on candidate's concentration".

Findings of the Committee:

1. Based on the CCTV footage and the log details provided by the TCS there is no evidence to suggest that the candidate was subjected to any undue pressure or activity which deviated from the guidelines of conducting the exam as laid down in the IB.

2. NTA and the agency have answered query regarding his concerns with documentary evidences like CCTV footage at various time intervals (Annexure). Repeatedly the father of the candidate stressed upon the desirability of revisiting the requirement of taking "Handprints" for those candidates whose Adhar is not verified at the biometric registration desk before the commencement of the exam. This will be put up for consideration by the competent authority, if deemed appropriate.

In this context, the father/ petitioner has submitted "In case of the candidates who failed to get their Aadhar Authentication validation this exercise should be undertaken after the commencement of examination by mentioning it in the IB."



The committee also observed that the candidate was approached by the invigilator for less than a minute only regarding the recording of handprints.

From the CCTV footage presented by TCS, there is no evidence to suggest that candidate was harassed or put to any undue pressure.

In the end, Committee concluded that based on the CCTV evidence reviewed from 07:20 AM onwards, Examination system logs and attempt of Questions that no procedural irregularity or deviation from established guidelines occurred in the present case. The Committee finds no evidence to support the claim that the candidate was disturbed repeatedly or that her examination performance was adversely affected due to actions of invigilator. The grievance raised by the candidate is therefore not substantiated and disposed of.

However, the Committee notes the suggestion made by the petitioner regarding post- examination biometric verification and records the same for consideration by the competent authority, if deemed appropriate.”

5. On the basis of the aforesaid Minutes of Meeting (MoM), it is stated that the Committee observed that the candidate visited 68 questions and attempted 28 questions, which, according to the Committee, indicates uninterrupted access to the examination system. Accordingly, it is the submission of Mr. Khanna that there was no interruption during the



examination, that biometric verification is an essential component of the examination process to prevent impersonation or use of dummy candidates, and that the issue already stands settled by a judgment of the learned Division Bench in *National Testing Agency v. Satya Nishth & Ors*, LPA 490/2025.

6. It is further stated that both the Information Brochure as well as the Admit Card categorically instruct candidates not to block their Aadhaar.

7. In support of the aforesaid submissions, reliance is placed on the judgment of the learned Division Bench in *Satya Nishth (supra)*, more particularly on the following paragraphs:

“52. Thus, there is no controversy that holding of re-examination for the writ petitioners, is no longer an available option in the facts and circumstances of the present cases.

...

55. There is also a larger issue that concerns the Court viz. the chaotic consequences of extending ‘marks improvisation’ for individual delays in biometric authentication for reasons not attributable to the testing agency. Such an approach would open the floodgates to claims by candidates who experienced even minor technical delays in biometric authentication.

...

58. Moreover, biometric verifications are part of the mandatory security process, which ensure the integrity of the examination by preventing impersonation. Granting



marks for delays in the process of biometric verification, that too for no fault of the appellant, would not be a justifiable course to follow.

59. It has been rightly pointed out by the learned counsel for the appellant that NEET is a single, all India Merit Based Examination with lakhs of aspirants/examinees. Granting even fractional 'grace marks' disrupts the inter se rankings, thereby impacting admission allotment across the country. The impugned judgment in the present case directs as under:-

“To ensure that the revised rank of the petitioner does not upset the ranks of other candidates, the petitioner shall be assigned supernumerary rank. Illustratively, if the revised rank of the petitioner is falling between the rank 1000 and 1001, he may be assigned rank 1000A”.

60. The concept of “supernumerary rank” has no basis in the extant examination regulations. The insertion of a supernumerary rank, though intended to safeguard the rights of other candidates, in substance alters the inter-se-merit between candidates. Counselling and seat allocation in NEET (UG) functions on a rigid rank regime. Inserting an additional rank, even with a suffix, would affect the inter-se cut off thresholds and the allocation sequence, thereby impacting the rights of other candidates. The assumption that assigning a supernumerary rank does not disturb the existing merit structure, is tenuous. In the case of the writ



petitioner in W.P.(C) 8483/2025 (subject matter of LPA 490/2025) it can be seen that on implementation of the directions contained in the impugned judgment, the marks of the writ petitioner increase from 529 to 540. The NEET All India rank increases from 24986 to 17595.5. In effect, the writ petitioner is placed ahead of thousands of other candidates (vis-a-vis his original rank).

61. Undoubtedly, with the benefit of hindsight, it can be stated that it may have been prudent for the writ petitioners to arrive at the examination venue at the reporting time mentioned on the admit card so that the technical glitches regarding their biometric authentication could have been resolved prior to commencement of the examination. Equally, it may have been prudent for the officials at the examination centre to refrain from interrupting the examinees / writ petitioners during the course of the examination and instead wait till 05:00 PM (prescribed time for completion of the examination) before resuming the biometric authentication exercise. However, at this stage, it would be imprudent to seek to 'calculate' the extent of time lost in individual cases, through visual impression gathered by perusing the CCTV coverage, and then proceeding to work out "improvisation marks / grace marks".

...

63. Consequently, the directions in the impugned order to the effect that the writ petitioners be awarded 'grace marks'



by applying ‘normalization formula’ laid down in Disha Panchal (supra), and the other consequential directions, are set aside.

64. However, the appellant is directed to streamline the biometric processes for the conduct of future examinations. Further, this Court agrees with the directions contained in paragraph 66 of the judgment in W.P.(C) 8483/2025 (subject matter of LPA 490/2025) to the effect that it would be apposite for the NTA to constitute a Grievance Redressal Framework to examine the complaints / grievances of candidates, in the first instance, in a time bound manner.”

8. I have heard the submissions of the parties and perused the materials on record.

9. In the present case, there is no dispute that the petitioner’s daughter was unable to verify Biometrics before the commencement of the exam. At 10:34 AM the invigilator again approached the candidate for additional Biometrics verification that is (during the period of examination, as the exam had started at 9:00 AM).

10. The taking of an examination is not scientific formula, a candidate has to be comfortable both in mind and the available environment to perform at his/her best. Such examinations test not merely knowledge, but also the candidate’s ability to apply that knowledge under conditions of intense time pressure and mental focus. A candidate is required to maintain concentration over the entire duration of the examination, and this necessarily presupposes a calm mental state and a stable, non-disruptive examination environment. Any deviation from these conditions, particularly those involving technical



issues, such as lack of, biometric verification, which can lead to disqualification, has the potential to materially impair a candidate's performance.

11. In the present matter, the petitioner's daughter was placed in a situation of continuous apprehension arising from the repeated failure of biometric verification. The legitimate fear of being declared ineligible, disqualified, or removed from the examination hall cannot be regarded as trivial or hypothetical and would have further disrupted her concentration and rhythm, especially in a time-bound examination where each minute is of significance.

12. I am of the view, that the lack of verification would inevitably and adversely affect the psyche of any reasonable candidate. The resulting anxiety and loss of composure would directly impact decision-making, speed, and accuracy while answering questions. The mere fact that the petitioner continued to attempt questions thereafter cannot, by itself, lead to the conclusion that no prejudice was caused. Performance under stress cannot be equated with performance under normal and fair examination conditions.

13. Therefore, the prejudice suffered by the petitioner cannot be dismissed as insignificant. The fairness of an examination process lies not only in affording physical access to the examination system, but also in ensuring that candidates are not subjected to avoidable procedural uncertainties that undermine their mental equilibrium.

14. The judgment of the Hon'ble Division Bench in *Satya Nishth* (*supra*), is distinguishable as in that case the candidate was asking for grace marks. Additionally, in paragraph 52 the Division Bench has observed that



the holding of the re-examination was no longer an available option as the examination had already concluded.

15. Admittedly, in the present case, there is one cycle of examination which is to happen on 28.01.2026.

16. The observations made by the Grievance Redressal Committee are based on scientific and technical points, which to my mind, is not the correct way to assess the difficulties faced by the candidates during the examination.

17. Whether the Aadhaar was blocked by the candidate or not is a question which will be adjudicated once the counter affidavit is filed by the respondent No. 2.

18. At this juncture, Mr. Khanna, states that session 2 is listed in April and the candidate can participate in that session. I am unable to agree as 3 months is a valuable period of time and it is disheartening for a candidate who has prepared for a long time to have 3 months hiatus.

19. Additionally, if the petitioner is permitted to appear tomorrow she would have another chance to better her score in April, 2026.

20. Mr. Khanna, however opposes the same, and states that by permitting the petitioner to appear tomorrow, the petitioner would be given an extra chance which would be prejudicial to the other candidates.

21. I am unable to agree as the chance on 22.01.2026 is no chance in the true sense of the term. The petitioner is not being conferred any advantage beyond what was originally available to her; rather, she is only being restored to the position she would have occupied had the examination process on the earlier occasion been conducted in a fair and uninterrupted manner.



22. For the time being, without prejudice, the petitioner shall be permitted to participate in the examination to be held tomorrow and the result will be subject to the further order as maybe passed in the present writ petition.
23. Let the counter affidavit be filed within 4 weeks from today.
24. The minutes of meeting handed over in Court today are taken on record.
25. The present order is being passed in the peculiar facts of the case and shall not be treated as a precedent.
26. List on 27.02.2026.
27. Dasti under signature of the Court Master.

JASMEET SINGH, J

JANUARY 27, 2026/AS