



LIST

LECTURES FOR INDIA'S
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

IDEAS • EVIDENCE • IMPACT

A CRISP FRIDAY KNOWLEDGE SERIES

SESSION TWO · A CRISP FRIDAY KNOWLEDGE SERIES

From Transparency to Accountability

The Bhilwara Principles and the making of a citizen-centric grievance redress law

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Editorial Note

This article has been prepared by CRISP from the address delivered by Shri Nikhil Dey to the CRISP team on 4 September 2026, the second session of the LIST — Lectures for India's Social Transformation series. It has been rendered in the speaker's own voice and organised for publication: oral repetition has been removed, the argument arranged thematically, and the discussion that followed the lecture folded into the relevant sections. No external claims have been added, and publication was authorised by the speaker during the session.

Abstract

Over four decades, India's rights-based movements have moved from demanding work with dignity, to demanding information about public money, to demanding accountability for public promises. This article traces that arc from the drought-relief struggles of 1980s Rajasthan, where the Right to Information movement began, and argues that transparency alone — indispensable as it is — does not guarantee that a citizen's grievance is ever resolved.

Drawing on the Bhilwara Principles, articulated not by lawyers but by young Dalit students in a village discussion, and on two draft laws — the Rajasthan Social Accountability Bill and the national Grievance Redress Bill, 2011 — it sets out a citizen-centric architecture for redress: a single-window entry point, a defined thirty-day process anchored by a Grievance Redress Officer, a fortnightly public hearing as a second and collective forum, and automatic escalation to independent district and state authorities holding the powers of a civil court.

It is sharply critical of digital systems that serve the convenience of managers rather than the needs of citizens, and argues for choice, plurality of channels, and human contact alongside technology. It closes with a constitutional argument drawn from B. R. Ambedkar — that political democracy cannot last without social democracy — and with an agenda for CRISP and the states it works with.

Keywords: *Right to Information; grievance redress; social accountability; Bhilwara Principles; public hearings; social audit; digital exclusion; constitutional democracy; MKSS*

Contents

1. Beginning in a Hut in Devdungrri	4
2. How the Right to Information Actually Began	4
2.1 From work, to wages, to records.....	4
2.2 “Hamara paisa, hamara hisab”	5
3. Why Information Was Not Enough	6
3.1 Dispersing power rather than concentrating it	7
4. The Bhilwara Principles	7
5. An Architecture for Grievance Redress	9
5.1 An application is not a grievance	10
5.2 Entry points and the Grievance Redress Officer	11
5.3 The public hearing as a second, collective forum.....	12
5.4 Escalation, appeal and enforcement.....	13
6. Linking Social Audit to Grievance Redress	13
7. Where the Framework Stands Today	14
8. Technology, Exclusion, and Whose Convenience It Serves	15
8.1 The cost of a “logical discrepancy”	15
8.2 Management information, not citizen information	16
8.3 Choice, not a single mandatory channel	16
9. Facilitation, Insiders and Outsiders	18
10. From Political Democracy to Social Democracy	18
11. An Agenda for CRISP	19
Conclusion: A Third Revolution in Governance?	20
About the Author	21
Source and Publication Note	21
Appendix A: Detailed Grievance Redress Process Flow.....	22

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Four decades, three demands.....	5
Figure 2. The Bhilwara Principles.....	8
Figure 3. An application is not a grievance.....	11
Figure 4. The accountability chain, end to end	10
Figure 5. The thirty-day clock	12
Figure 6. Where the framework stands today	15
Figure 7. The argument in numbers	6
Figure 8. Whose convenience does the system serve?.....	17
Figure 9. Closing the loop — social audit into grievance redress	14
Table 1. The six Bhilwara Principles.....	8
Table 2. Adoption of grievance redress mechanisms, by state	15
Appendix Figure. Detailed process flowchart	23



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From Transparency to Accountability: Nikhil Dey

1. Beginning in a Hut in Devdungri

I want to begin not with a framework but with a place. More than four decades ago, my colleagues and I began working out of a small hut in Devdungri, in Rajasthan. I mention it not out of sentiment but because it is a methodological point, and everything that follows in this article rests on it.

Policy for the social sector is too often made in rooms, by people with years of study and considerable analytical capacity, about the lives of people who are not present. Yet it is the poor themselves who feel a policy's failures on their skin. They know exactly what will work and what will not, and why. The constraint has never been their knowledge. It is their agency. Schemes leak on the way to the poor, and extraction continues even after a scheme reaches them, because the poor — unlike the better-off — have very little individual power to resist it.

The working assumption we carried into that first hut was a simple one: listen to people in their own language, understand their issues, and struggle alongside them rather than arrive with a solution from outside. Wherever you begin work in a community, the first thing people will tell you, unprompted and without being asked, is what works and what does not.

A citizen-centric approach does more than collect that feedback. It improves implementation, because those with a stake in a scheme will make it work better than those without one. Consider a government school. The engineer who builds it, the contractor who supplies it, and very often the teacher who teaches in it all send their own children elsewhere. Nobody in that chain has a stake in the outcome. That is not a failure of intention. It is a failure of design.

“If policy is based in people, then our story — if it means anything at all — means that people have the capacity to bring about that kind of change.”

2. How the Right to Information Actually Began

2.1 From work, to wages, to records

The Right to Information movement did not begin as a demand for the right to information. It began in the 1980s with drought-relief works in Rajasthan, where the tradition of providing public employment during a drought went back to the colonial period.

Demand for that work vastly exceeded its supply. A thousand people might ask for work and fifteen or twenty would receive it. The effect was to reduce labourers to supplicants — begging an official for work rather than claiming it as a right. That gap is the seed of what later became the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: the difference between a scheme that defines an entitlement on paper and one that actually delivers it, with a specific mechanism for the moment the guarantee fails, such as an unemployment allowance if work is not provided within fifteen days.

Even once labourers began to get work, they were frequently denied their statutory minimum wages. When they asked why, officials pointed to records showing that insufficient work had been done. The workers' response was direct and obvious: show us those records. They were told that the muster rolls and vouchers were official secrets and could not be shown.

That refusal is the precise point at which the demand for a right to information was born. It was not an abstract claim about open government. It was people wanting to see the record of their own money and their own accounts.

Four decades, three demands

The movement's arc: from the right to work, to the right to know, to the right to be answered.

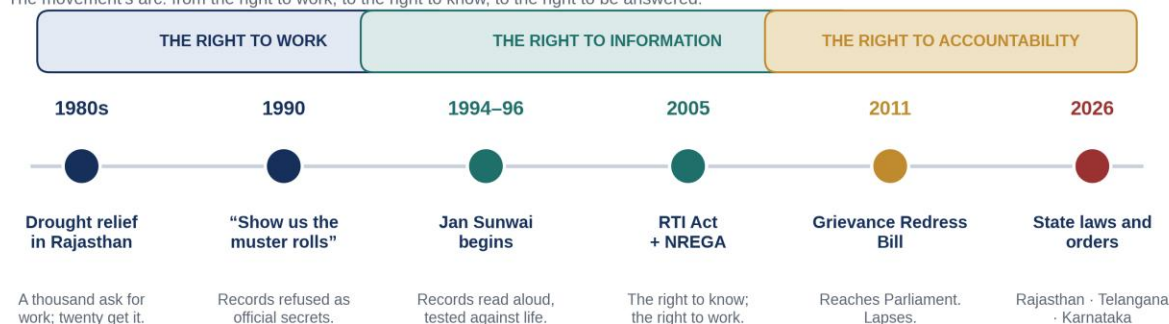


Figure 1. Each demand grew out of the unfinished business of the one before it.

Figure 1. Four decades, three demands — each grew out of the unfinished business of the one before it.

2.2 “Hamara paisa, hamara hisab”

The slogan that came to define the movement nationally is four words long: hamara paisa, hamara hisab — our money, our accounts. I have never found a technical explanation that communicates the logic of the movement as powerfully as those four words do. Every rupee of this republic is accountable to its citizens. Even the Comptroller and Auditor General, in the end, acts on their behalf.

A second slogan went further: the right to know is the right to live. Until then, the right to information had been treated primarily as a component of the freedom of expression under Article 19(1)(a). Communities argued something more elemental — that without knowing their wages, their ration entitlements, or the medicine stock at a public health centre, they simply could not survive on what they were owed.

The Delhi High Court, hearing a case on the disclosure of judicial assets, held that the Rajasthan movement had redefined the right to information not only in terms of Article 19(1)(a) but also of Article 14 and Article 21 — equality and life. The reasoning is worth pausing on: a citizen cannot know whether they have been treated equally without knowing what others have received.

Today between sixty and seventy lakh citizens use the RTI Act every year. I attribute that scale to a single fact. The demand originated with the poor and was sustained by them for fifteen years. The middle class benefited enormously once

the law was won, but in my experience it rarely has the endurance to sustain a fifteen-year struggle of its own.

The argument in numbers

Figures cited in the lecture — the scale of the demand, and the cost of the gap.



Figure 7. All figures as stated in the lecture of 4 September 2026.

Figure 7. The argument in numbers — all figures as stated in the lecture.

3. Why Information Was Not Enough

As RTI matured, we and allied movements developed the Jan Sunwai — the public hearing — where official records were read aloud and tested against people's lived experience. The effect was dramatic. Officials were publicly named. Some returned misappropriated money on the spot.

Two things followed. The state pushed back against this form of direct public exposure, and the practice was partly absorbed into the more institutionalised — and in places more compromised — mechanism of social audit. More fundamentally, departments asked to discipline their own officials for wrongdoing revealed in an audit developed what I can only describe as a very thick skin. No independent body existed to compel action. There was only a hierarchy, with every incentive to protect its own.

This produced a frustration that anyone who has used the RTI Act will recognise. You can surface dramatic, specific, undeniable evidence of wrongdoing, and nothing follows. Our answer was that transparency is a necessary first step but not a sufficient one. The objective was never transparency for its own sake, and certainly not out of some voyeuristic interest in how officials lead their lives. It was

transparency in the service of accountability. Grievance redress is RTI's natural sequel.

3.1 Dispersing power rather than concentrating it

I want to draw a sharp distinction here between our approach and the Jan Lokpal movement that grew out of the same RTI community roughly a decade later, because the difference is one of first principles.

The Lokpal model concentrated investigative power — the authority to raid, arrest, confiscate and wiretap without warrant — in a small, centralised anti-corruption body answerable chiefly to itself. Our alternative sought to disperse power outward, to every citizen. RTI works by requiring the powerful to answer an individual citizen. That dilutes concentrated power rather than relocating it to a new elite institution.

Grievance redress was conceived to extend exactly that logic. Not a police-style investigating agency at the apex, but an enforceable right, held by each citizen, to have their own complaint investigated and acted upon.

4. The Bhilwara Principles

The six principles that now anchor our model for a social accountability law were not drafted by lawyers or policy analysts. When the national debate over the Jan Lokpal law was underway, we and allied campaigns went to communities and asked a direct question: what should an accountability law contain?

A group of young Dalit students in Bhilwara district was invited to a discussion on Ambedkar Jayanti, on the condition that they help define the law. They presented five principles. A sixth was added afterwards. These became known as the Bhilwara Principles.

Principle	Meaning	What it requires
1. Jankari	Access to information	Meaningful, actionable information about the entitlement in question — not information for its own sake, but what makes a wrong identifiable and actionable.

Principle	Meaning	What it requires
2. Sunwai	The right to be heard	A genuine hearing: an acknowledgement of the complaint, in the citizen's own words, with a dated receipt — not a generic assurance that it has been noted.
3. Karyawahi	Time-bound redress	A defined timeline ending in a speaking, appealable order — if the matter is resolved, say so; if not, say why not, in a form the citizen can contest.
4. Bhagidari	Participation	The citizen is present when a decision affecting their grievance is taken — not informed of it after the fact.
5. Suraksha	Protection	Protection for the complainant and for whistleblowers, who are frequently the first to face social boycott, pressure to compromise, or worse, once they complain.
6. Janta Ka Manch	An open, democratic platform	A public forum where officials, complainants and the accused meet, evidence is heard openly, and everyone is ultimately answerable to a collective of citizens.

Table 1. The six Bhilwara Principles, as articulated by grassroots communities in Bhilwara district.

The Bhilwara Principles

Six conditions, named by the community itself, for an accountability law that works.

1

Jankari
ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Actionable information about the entitlement — enough to make a wrong identifiable.

2

Sunwai
RIGHT TO BE HEARD

A real hearing: the complaint in the citizen's own words, with a dated receipt.

3

Karyawahi
TIME-BOUND REDRESS

A fixed timeline and a speaking, appealable order — resolved, or a reason that can be contested.

4

Bhagidari
PARTICIPATION

The citizen is present when the decision on their grievance is taken — not told afterwards.

5

Suraksha
PROTECTION

Cover for the complainant and the whistleblower, who face boycott and pressure the moment they speak.

6

Janta Ka Manch
AN OPEN PLATFORM

A public forum where official, complainant and accused meet, and all answer to a collective.

Figure 2. Five principles were set out by young Dalit students in Bhilwara district; the sixth was added afterwards.

Figure 2. The Bhilwara Principles, from complaint to open public platform.

None of these is an abstraction. Each responds to a specific, recurring failure that communities named themselves: a complaint acknowledged verbally but never recorded; a hearing granted in form but conducted entirely on the official's terms; an investigation concluded without the complainant present; and a complainant who, having spoken up, becomes the next target of retaliation.

The sixth principle, Janta Ka Manch, was the group's answer to a further question — how do you hold all of this together? It is this open, public platform that later became the fortnightly public hearing at the centre of the law we have proposed.

5. An Architecture for Grievance Redress

Building on those principles, we developed a detailed operational framework, embodied in two draft laws: the Rajasthan Social Accountability Bill, approved in principle by the state cabinet but never enacted, and the national Grievance Redress Bill, 2011, which reached Parliament, was examined by a standing committee, and came close to passage before lapsing.

Nikhil Dey · 4 September 2026

11

I would urge anyone working on this to read the 2011 standing committee report in full. What it shows is that the framework had broad political acceptance. Politicians are as frustrated as citizens when only a fraction of what has been promised actually materialises. The resistance came chiefly from the bureaucracy, whose own accountability the law would have fixed in writing — including in officials' job charts.

The accountability chain, end to end

Eight stages from a citizen's entry point to enforcement, compensation and closure.

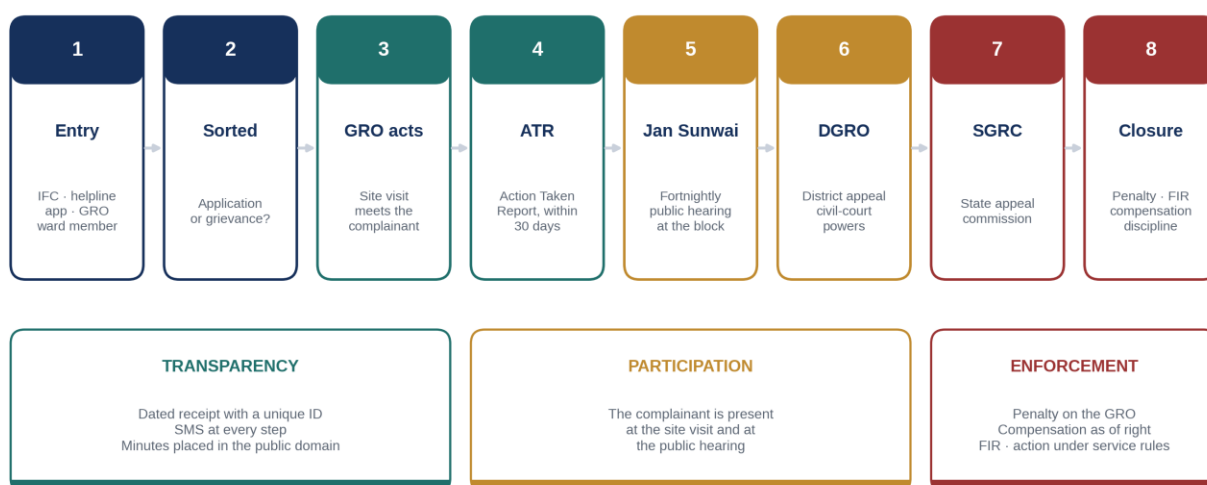


Figure 4. Every stage has a named officer, a deadline and a consequence for missing it.

Figure 4. The accountability chain — every stage has a named officer, a deadline and a consequence.

5.1 An application is not a grievance

The foundational distinction in the whole framework is between an application and a grievance, and it is the one most systems collapse.

An application is a request for a facility — a pension, a house, a plot of land. A grievance is the violation of something already promised: an entitlement under a law, scheme, policy, guideline or order. Applications join a waiting list and are assessed on eligibility. Grievances trigger an investigation with a fixed clock.

Conflating the two is among the most common and most damaging errors in how governments currently field citizen complaints. An aspiration is not the same thing as an entitlement already assured by the state, and a redress law is designed to enforce only the latter. Mix them, and the system drowns.

An application is not a grievance

The distinction on which the whole framework rests — and the one most systems collapse.



"You cannot meet everyone's aspirations. You can meet everyone's entitlements."

Figure 3. Conflating the two overwhelms any system built to enforce the second.

Figure 3. An application is not a grievance. Conflating the two overwhelms any system built to enforce the second.

"You cannot meet everyone's aspirations, but you can meet everyone's entitlements. That is why a grievance is defined as the violation of something you have assured — a law, a policy, a scheme, a guideline, an order. That is the actionable wrong."

5.2 Entry points and the Grievance Redress Officer

A citizen, or a group of citizens, may lodge an application or a grievance through several channels: an Information Facilitation Centre, a helpline, self-filing through an app or portal, a direct approach to a Grievance Redress Officer, or through an

elected representative — a ward member or panchayat member — who is also expected to double as an informal facilitation point.

Every submission receives a dated acknowledgement receipt bearing a unique identification number, the GRO's designation and contact details, the redressal timeline, and instructions for filing a first appeal. That receipt is not a formality. It is the instrument that converts a conversation into a claim.

The GRO is deliberately positioned as the supervisor immediately above the field-level functionary against whom a complaint is typically made — the tehsildar supervising a patwari, for instance. In Indian governance, almost everything above the field level is management, and management is insulated from direct accountability to citizens. Placing enforceable responsibility on the first supervisory tier was a deliberate design choice.

The GRO has thirty days to investigate, conduct a site visit, meet the complainant, and issue an Action Taken Report. Failure to act within that window, or a false or unsubstantiated report, exposes the GRO personally to penalty. It is a small sanction, but a consequential one — it is precisely what made the equivalent penalty on the Public Information Officer under RTI effective.

The thirty-day clock

What the State owes the citizen, and by when, once a grievance is filed.



Figure 5. The month is breathing room for the State to correct its own error — not a licence to delay.

Figure 5. The thirty-day clock — what the State owes the citizen, and by when.

5.3 The public hearing as a second, collective forum

A fortnightly, block-level public hearing, chaired by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate or equivalent and attended by all GROs and ward committee members, gives every complainant a second opportunity for redress.

This matters because the first opportunity is a one-on-one encounter with a GRO who may well be in collusion with the person complained against. The public hearing is an open forum where the GRO must present the Action Taken Report and the complainant can contest it. Complainants are informed at least forty-eight hours in advance, receive a physical copy of the report at the hearing, and all minutes are placed in the public domain.

Even where the SDM has no power to penalise, the hearing functions as a powerful forum of exposure. A pattern of ten complaints against the same ration dealer becomes visible to everyone present. So does an unresolved problem in one village that a neighbouring village has already solved.

5.4 Escalation, appeal and enforcement

If a grievance remains unresolved after thirty days, or the citizen is dissatisfied with the outcome, the process escalates automatically — the citizen does not have to fight for the escalation — to a District Grievance Redress Officer. This is an independent, full-time appellate authority with powers equivalent to a civil court: the ability to penalise the GRO or the official responsible for service delivery, to order an FIR, to order compensation to the aggrieved citizen, and to order disciplinary action under service conduct rules.

A further appeal lies to a State Grievance Redress Commission, chaired in the Rajasthan draft by the Chief Minister, combining official members — including a Lokayukta-style appointee — with at least three non-official members drawn from civil society. The Commission holds overall responsibility for implementation of the framework, including the power to act against the district officers themselves.

I want to be clear about what the thirty-day period is for. It is not an obstacle placed in the citizen's way. It is breathing room deliberately built into the design: the state is given a month to correct its own error before liability attaches. But if a citizen has genuinely been wronged, compensation should follow as of right, not as a favour.

6. Linking Social Audit to Grievance Redress

A grievance and a social audit are different instruments, and the distinction is worth stating precisely. A grievance is an individual citizen's complaint, raised bottom-up, on any day, in any village. A social audit is the state, acting through an independent agency, systematically sweeping every panchayat on a scheduled — typically annual — cycle.

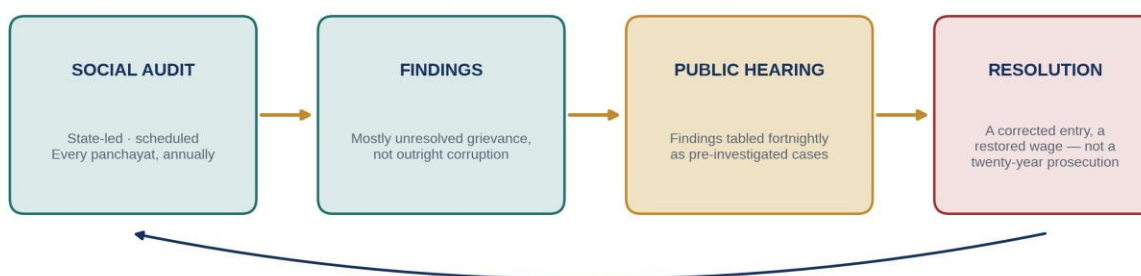
The two must be linked rather than run in parallel. The bulk of what a social audit uncovers is not outright corruption but ordinary, unresolved grievance. And citizens overwhelmingly prefer a corrected ration entry or a restored wage payment to a criminal prosecution that could take twenty years to conclude.

Social audit's most persistent weakness is the absence of guaranteed follow-up once a finding is made. My proposed remedy is procedural rather than legislative: findings from a social audit should be treated as pre-investigated grievances and fed directly into the fortnightly public-hearing process, with social audit personnel attending those hearings to support resolution.

That creates a form of concurrent social audit — continuous rather than annual — while ensuring that audit findings do not simply disappear into a report that nobody is obliged to act on.

Closing the loop: social audit into grievance redress

Audit findings should not end in a report. They should enter the process as pre-investigated grievances.



Concurrent audit — continuous, rather than a sweep once a year

Figure 9. Without guaranteed follow-up, an audit finding disappears into a report nobody is obliged to act on.

Figure 9. Closing the loop — audit findings enter the hearing as pre-investigated grievances.

7. Where the Framework Stands Today

Elements of this architecture are already in force in more than one Indian state, though a comprehensive law remains the missing piece nationally.

State / Level	Instrument	Status
Rajasthan	Right to Hearing Act	Provides for fortnightly public hearings. Implementation is the live question, and in my view the clearest opening for CRISP and partner organisations to contribute — whatever their sector, whether education, water or sanitation.
Telangana	State-wide Government Order following an Adilabad pilot	A pilot running more than two years in Adilabad district preceded a state-wide Government Order for fortnightly public hearings, announced by the Chief Minister.
Karnataka	New Department of Grievance Redress	A dedicated department — distinct from the general administrative reforms department — has been created for accountability and grievance redress, with orders issued for block-level public hearings.
National	Grievance Redress Bill, 2011 (lapsed)	Reached Parliament and a standing committee with broad political support, but was not enacted. The district and state authorities it proposed remain unadopted anywhere.

Table 2. Adoption of grievance redress mechanisms, by state, as described in the lecture.

Where the framework stands today

Pieces of the architecture are already law or executive order — no jurisdiction has yet adopted all of it.



Figure 6. Status as described in the lecture, September 2026.

Figure 6. Where the framework stands today, as described in the lecture, September 2026.

A state-level law offers both a testing ground and a model that other states can adapt. That is exactly what happened with RTI, where individual state laws preceded and ultimately strengthened the central Act. My own preference is for states to retain the capacity to legislate competitively, converging over time on a uniform national standard for grievance redress.

8. Technology, Exclusion, and Whose Convenience It Serves

8.1 The cost of a “logical discrepancy”

I am often asked about the role of digital tools, and I want to be pointed about it.

Eligible beneficiaries are being removed from welfare rolls through what digital systems label a logical discrepancy — a mismatched name, a transliteration error between Hindi and English scripts, or an age recorded a few years differently across two documents by an inattentive data-entry operator. A system built to catch fraud instead disqualifies real people through entirely mundane clerical variance, treating the same person, recorded slightly differently, as two different people.

The same applies to Aadhaar-linked verification for pensions. Although Aadhaar was formally described as voluntary, it functions as mandatory, because no welfare benefit is delivered without it. In Rajasthan, roughly twenty per cent of about one crore pensioners must each year re-establish through digital means that they are still alive. A system capable of identifying that someone on a ration list has reached the age of sixty should enrol them for a pension automatically. Instead, we require the citizen to prove their eligibility afresh, and repeatedly.

8.2 Management information, not citizen information

My central criticism is structural rather than technical. Our digital systems are built to serve the convenience of managers — joint secretaries and secretaries who can see aggregate figures for an entire state on a single dashboard — rather than the needs of the citizen at the other end of the transaction.

Take facial recognition used to record attendance for public works. It verifies that a photograph was taken. It does not verify that any work was done. It produces an illusion of accountability while doing nothing whatsoever to confirm the outcome.

And when you reduce people to digits in a database, you allow decisions to be made at a distance, without the modicum of restraint that most officials would exercise if the actual human being were standing in front of them.

“Our digital systems are for management. Put it in the hands of the people. Let them decide what they want. Let them take an alternative route.”

8.3 Choice, not a single mandatory channel

My corrective is plurality, not the rejection of technology. Citizens should be able to choose between a phone call, a self-filing app, or a handwritten complaint submitted and receipted in person. And even if the great majority use a digital channel, preserving the physical option matters disproportionately for the minority who need it. That minority is precisely the population a redress law exists to serve.

I would also caution against the parallel trend of replacing frontline functionaries with common service centres. This shifts the burden of initiating a claim from an official's duty onto the citizen's own initiative — the same shift we see in enumeration processes, where the citizen, not the state, now bears the consequence of a missed form — while leaving senior bureaucratic layers untouched by any equivalent accountability. I have suggested, only half in jest, that bureaucrats should be required to personally visit citizens excluded from pension rolls by such processes, so that they see the effect of their own systems directly.

Whose convenience does the system serve?

Digital administration, as built, answers upward. The corrective is choice, not rejection.

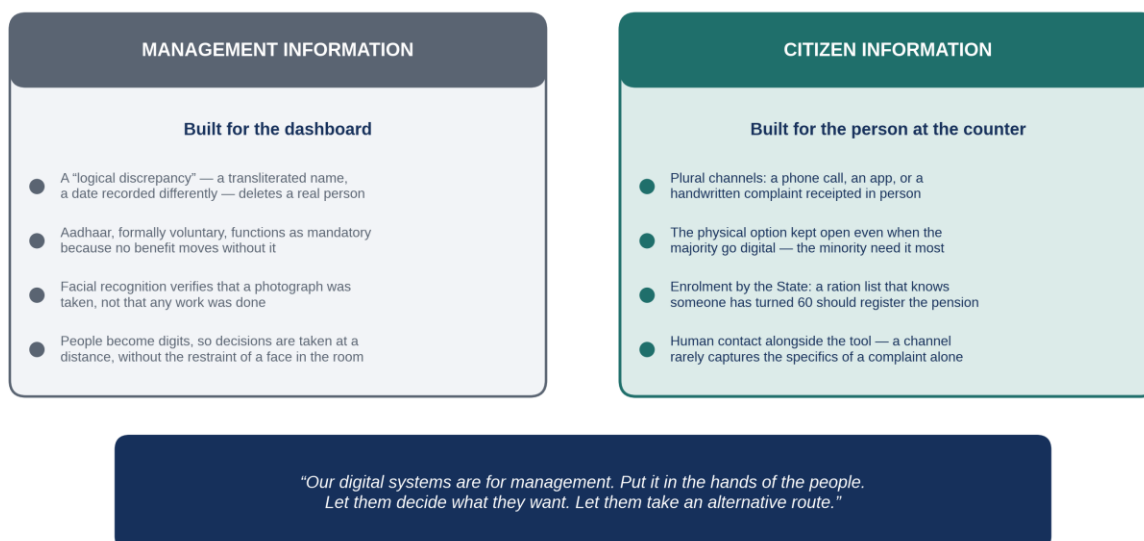


Figure 8. Technology is one channel among several — not a replacement for all the others.

Figure 8. Whose convenience does the system serve? Technology is one channel among several.

FROM THE DISCUSSION

A CRISP colleague who had interned with MKSS described encountering disabled individuals in remote areas unable to complete facial-recognition verification for months at a time. Another, working in Telangana, offered a complementary observation: WhatsApp-based grievance channels have substantially improved reach, but technology alone often fails to capture the specifics of a complaint without accompanying person-to-person contact. Both bear out the same point — digital tools are best treated as one channel among several, never as a replacement for all the others.

9. Facilitation, Insiders and Outsiders

I was asked how a facilitator — someone from outside a community, mediating and helping articulate its demands — avoids overtaking the very movement they support. It is a fair question, and I would distinguish our position from that of a typical externally funded organisation.

Of the MKSS membership, only two or three of us — Aruna Roy and myself, at the founding — were originally outsiders to the area. The organisation deliberately does not accept government, foundation or foreign funding, relying instead on local members who contribute time, money and personal risk. That financial independence is what allows accountability to run toward the community itself rather than toward a distant funder. An externally salaried facilitator, however well-intentioned, ultimately answers to whoever provides the funding.

The same logic shaped our approach to policy design. RTI deliberately avoided creating special powers for NGOs or facilitators, on the grounds that doing so would concentrate voice in the same way a press monopoly does. Instead, every citizen was given an equal, unmediated right to ask questions of the state. The facilitator's task is to give better voice to people who are otherwise unheard — not to substitute the movement's judgement with the facilitator's own.

On the related worry that a movement's internal disagreements might fragment it: democracy does not require that every voice be agreed with, only that it be heard.

Space must be deliberately built for the most marginalised to speak. That is the underlying logic of reservation, and of the Gram Sabha as an institution.

It is also the logic of constitutional design. The basic structure doctrine exists precisely so that a majoritarian consensus in Parliament cannot strip away the dignity or the rights that make a plural, unequal society workable as one nation. That same boundary must inform how a grievance mechanism gives space to dissenting or minority complaints, rather than only to the loudest or best-organised ones.

10. From Political Democracy to Social Democracy

I want to close by returning to Dr B. R. Ambedkar's address to the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949. His warning was that India was entering a life of contradictions: political equality — one person, one vote — established alongside a persistent social and economic inequality which, left unaddressed, would eventually threaten the entire democratic and developmental structure built upon it.

“We must not be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy... Liberty, equality and fraternity... form a union in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative.”

— B. R. Ambedkar, Constituent Assembly, 25 November 1949

I read this passage as the philosophical ground for grievance redress itself. An open democratic platform, like the Gram Sabha, must be built so that the most marginalised person receives, if anything, more space to be heard than the powerful. A single voice speaking truthfully for justice must weigh more heavily than the numerical strength of those seeking to suppress it.

That is the constitutional idea of fraternity — the dignity of the individual underwriting the unity of the nation — translated into an operating principle for a grievance mechanism: protection for the person who steps forward, and a public forum in which their claim cannot simply be outvoted or ignored.

11. An Agenda for CRISP

The lecture and the discussion that followed it point toward a practical agenda for CRISP's own work across states and sectors.

- Read the 2011 Parliamentary standing committee report on the National Grievance Redress Bill, to understand the legislative framework in full — including the district- and state-level authorities that have not yet been adopted anywhere.
- Separate applications from grievances explicitly in any redress mechanism CRISP designs or advises on. An aspiration for a facility is not the same as the violation of an assured entitlement, and conflating the two overwhelms any system meant to enforce the latter.
- Engage with implementation in Rajasthan, Telangana and Karnataka, where the instruments already exist and the binding constraint is practice rather than law. This is where an organisation like CRISP can contribute most directly, whatever the sector it works in.
- Treat social audit findings as pre-investigated grievances wherever CRISP supports audit systems, and design the handover into the public hearing rather than leaving follow-up to chance.
- Support the campaign individually as well as institutionally. I would ask colleagues to stay in touch with the movement's ongoing efforts and to engage with them in their own capacity, alongside whatever institutional collaboration follows.

Conclusion: A Third Revolution in Governance?

In closing remarks from the floor, colleagues at CRISP characterised this proposal as a potential third revolution in Indian governance, following NREGA and RTI —

a shift toward addressing grievances at the point where they arise, before they spill into the street or onto a public platform of protest.

My own framing is more circumspect, though no less committed. Fifteen years were spent winning RTI, and even those of us closest to that struggle called its eventual passage a miracle. The grievance redress campaign has now run for sixteen years without a comparable breakthrough, through political climates both more and less favourable.

The source of resistance lies specifically in the bureaucracy rather than in the political class. A grievance redress law came close to passage in 2014 partly because, set against the Lokpal Bill under discussion at the same time, it appeared to political actors as the less disruptive of the two proposals.

The formulation I have offered to sceptical officials over years of advocacy is this: in most offices, four people do the work and forty do not — and the four who work rarely have any incentive, or any mechanism, to hold the forty accountable. A citizen-driven system of accountability does not depend on finding an unusually good or unusually motivated official. It is built to work even in the most indifferent administrative environment, because it places the power to compel action in the hands of the very person the system exists to serve.

“You cannot have a perfect system. But every step forward is critically important — because it applies across the board, and because the people we are speaking of have very little space of their own in which to fight for what are, after all, their rights.”

About the Author

Shri Nikhil Dey is a founding member of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), a grassroots organisation based in Rajasthan that has played a foundational role in strengthening citizen participation and accountability in Indian governance. Full-time with MKSS since 1990, his work has remained rooted in grassroots struggles for land rights, minimum wages and access to government entitlements.

He has been closely associated with some of India's most significant rights-based movements, including the campaigns for the Right to Information, the Right to Work and the Right to Food, and with the National Campaign for People's Right to Information. He was also involved with the Government of Rajasthan's Jan Soochna programme, which sought to operationalise the proactive disclosure of government information without requiring individual RTI applications.

Source and Publication Note

Prepared from the transcript and meeting notes of the second LIST — Lectures for India's Social Transformation session, held online on 4 September 2026, together with the speaker's accompanying slide deck on the Bhilwara Principles and the proposed accountability framework.

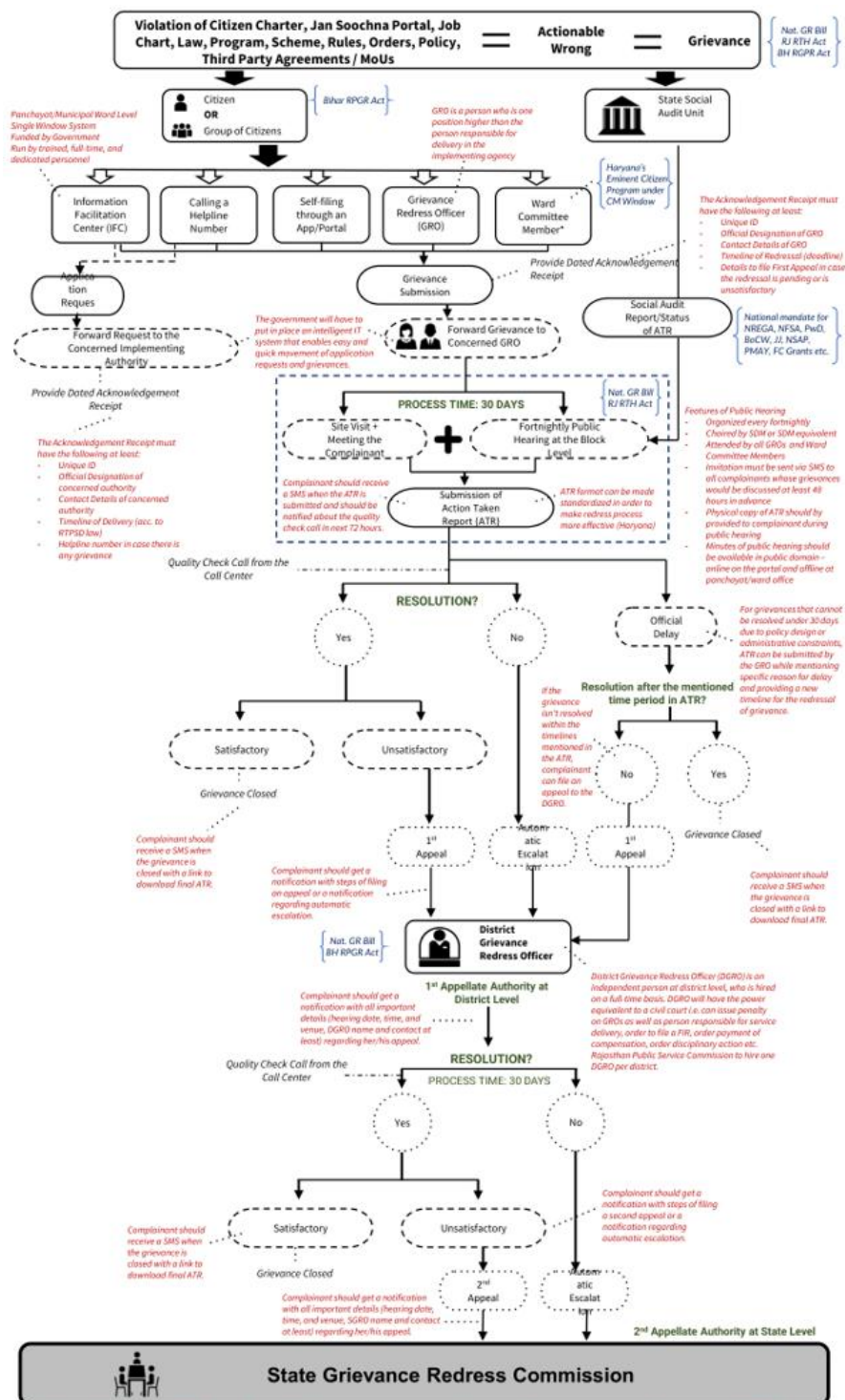
The text has been substantively edited for clarity, coherence and publication, and rendered in the first person with the speaker's authorisation. Proper names, organisational titles and programme references have been normalised where the intended reference was clear. Uncertain or incidental oral material — technical checks, cross-talk, connectivity interruptions — has been omitted. No external claims have been added.

Figures 1 to 9 were prepared by CRISP from the content of the lecture. The appendix flowchart reproduces the speaker's own process map.

Appendix A: Detailed Grievance Redress Process Flow

The diagram overleaf reproduces the speaker's process map in full, showing entry points, the thirty-day investigation window of the Grievance Redress Officer, the fortnightly public hearing, the two tiers of appeal — the District Grievance Redress Officer and the State Grievance Redress Commission — and the notification and closure steps at each stage.

Annotations in the original indicate the enabling legal instruments, including national and state Right to Information provisions and Right to Public Grievance Redress Act provisions, together with design notes drawn from existing state models such as Haryana's Eminent Citizen Programme and Bihar's RPGA.



ENTIRE ARCHITECTURE TO BE FINANCED BY ALLOCATION OF 1 PERCENT OF THE ANNUAL BUDGET OF SELECT SCHEMES.



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Appendix Figure. Detailed process flowchart, from citizen entry to the State Grievance Redress Commission — the entire architecture to be financed by an allocation of one per cent of the annual budget of select schemes.