

Assessing the Functioning of Statutory Labour Institutions in the Nashik Manufacturing Sector: A Systematic Review of Grievance Handling Mechanisms in India

Malkans Laxmikant Bhat

Ph.D Scholar, MET's Institute of Management, Nashik
Affiliated to Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune

Dr. Sangeeta Birje Patil

Ph.D Guide, Director, Abhinav Education Society's Institute of Management and Business Administration,
Akole Affiliated to Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune

Abstract

Statutory labour institutions in India are designed to prevent, process, and resolve workplace grievances through a layered architecture that includes enterprise-level bodies, executive conciliation, and adjudicatory forums. Yet persistent concerns remain regarding institutional capacity, procedural timeliness, and enforcement, particularly in manufacturing settings where contract labour, fragmented production, and power asymmetries complicate access to remedies. This paper conducts a systematic, document-based review of the statutory grievance-handling ecosystem relevant to manufacturing and then contextualises implications for the Nashik district of Maharashtra a diversified industrial region with major industrial areas and a large micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) base. Drawing on reporting standards for systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021; Moher et al., 2009) and evidence-synthesis methods (Tranfield et al., 2003), the review integrates legal instruments, performance audits, government statistics, and empirical research on dispute-resolution pathways. The synthesis identifies three recurring fault lines: weak institutionalisation of preventive mechanisms at the enterprise level, capacity and incentive constraints in conciliation, and adjudication-enforcement bottlenecks that erode the credibility of legal rights. The analysis further considers the policy discontinuity created by the nationwide commencement of the four labour codes from 21 November 2025 (Press Information Bureau, 2025a), and its contested reception among unions (Reuters, 2025; Associated Press, 2025). The paper concludes by proposing a district-focused evaluation framework for Nashik that treats institutional “functioning” as a composite of coverage, accessibility, timeliness, fairness, and enforceability across grievance stages, and argues for triangulating administrative records with worker- and employer-side qualitative evidence.

Keywords

Statutory labour institutions; grievance handling; industrial relations; manufacturing; conciliation; labour courts; Maharashtra; Nashik; labour codes.

I. Introduction

Grievance handling in manufacturing is not merely an organisational function but a governance problem situated at the intersection of legal rights, institutional capacity, and workplace power relations. In the Indian context, statutory labour institutions are expected to translate substantive rights relating to wages, conditions of work, unfair labour practices, and employment security into accessible procedures that prevent escalation and maintain industrial peace (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2007).

The legal architecture has historically relied on a multi-tier system. At the “preventive” end lie shop-floor and establishment-level institutions (notably works committees and grievance-settlement mechanisms), which seek to resolve conflicts before they crystallise into formal disputes. At the executive level, conciliation officers and associated machinery pursue mediated settlements. At the adjudicatory end, labour courts and tribunals provide binding decisions, while associated publication and enforcement mechanisms are expected to secure compliance. This architecture reflects a long-standing policy commitment to dispute resolution through a graded process that privileges settlement and industrial harmony over litigation (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008).

However, evidence accumulated across audits, government reports, and empirical studies suggests that the functioning of this system often diverges from its design: preventive bodies are frequently absent or inactive, conciliation can become routinised and delayed, and adjudication and enforcement can be protracted, thereby weakening the practical value of rights (Sapkal, 2015; Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008).

This paper focuses on two linked objectives. First, it systematically reviews the operation of statutory grievance-handling mechanisms relevant to manufacturing, with an emphasis on institutional performance attributes such as constitution, activity levels, timeliness, and enforceability. Second, it contextualises the review's implications for the Nashik manufacturing sector in Maharashtra, using district industrial-profile evidence to ground the analysis in an actual industrial geography (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). Nashik is an analytically salient site because it combines large industrial areas with dense MSME activity, producing a labour-market environment where many establishments may fall below thresholds that trigger certain statutory bodies, while still generating significant grievance volumes related to employment security, wages, and contractorised work.

The timing of the inquiry is shaped by a major regulatory shift. On 21 November 2025, the Government of India announced the implementation of the four labour codes, including the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (Press Information Bureau, 2025a). The implementation has generated public contestation, including nationwide union protests shortly thereafter (Reuters, 2025; Associated Press, 2025). These developments raise urgent questions about continuity and change in grievance-handling institutions, and about how district-level industrial ecosystems such as Nashik will experience and operationalise new rules.

II. Nashik as a Manufacturing Context: Industrial Structure and Institutional Relevance

Nashik district is characterised by a mix of large public sector/government establishments and a substantial MSME base. The district industrial profile prepared within the MSME institutional ecosystem identifies major government organisations located in the district, including Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, an Air Force Station, the Artillery Centre, the Currency Note Press, the Indian Security Press, and the Eklahare Thermal Power Station (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). The presence of such establishments matters for grievance architecture because employment regimes may span central- and state-sphere jurisdictions and because large establishments tend to be more likely to trigger statutory thresholds for internal committees, standing orders, and formal dispute processing.

At the same time, the profile indicates a large MSME footprint and a significant number of registered enterprises and associated employment and investment. As of the profile's cumulative figures up to July 2012, the district recorded micro, small, and medium enterprise counts and corresponding employment and investment estimates, along with a separate count of large-scale projects with production commenced (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). While these figures are dated, they highlight a structural feature likely to persist: a "long tail" of smaller establishments operating alongside larger units. Such heterogeneity is institutionally consequential because statutory grievance bodies operate through threshold triggers. For example, preventive mechanisms historically associated with larger establishments such as works committees are less likely to cover the small-firm segment, while grievance redressal mechanisms framed at lower thresholds (and their practical substitutes) become more salient in MSME-dense industrial zones.

Nashik's industrial geography includes major industrial areas such as Satpur, Ambad, and Sinnar, with additional industrial areas in Dindori, Vinchur, and Peth, alongside proposed industrial areas and multiple cooperative industrial estates (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). The profile's listing of industrial areas underscores the spatial concentration of manufacturing employment and the likelihood that labour administration and dispute-processing institutions experience geographically clustered caseloads, often mediated through local labour offices, unions, and industry associations.

From a sectoral standpoint, the industrial profile enumerates manufacturing categories and provides a snapshot of enterprise distribution across industry types, including food products and beverages, and other manufacturing classifications (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). Combined with state-level industrial profiling outputs for Maharashtra (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai, 2014; Office of the Development Commissioner (MSME), 2017), this suggests that Nashik's manufacturing base spans agro-processing and other value chains where contract labour and seasonal labour can be prominent. Such labour-market features directly influence grievance incidence and the feasibility of internal resolution, especially when the immediate employer is a contractor rather than the principal employer a governance problem repeatedly emphasised in performance audits of contract labour regulation (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008).

III. Statutory Labour Institutions and Grievance Handling: Conceptual Framing

The statutory grievance-handling ecosystem can be conceptualised as a staged pathway with escalating formality: internal preventive/participatory bodies, executive mediation/conciliation, and adjudicatory settlement through specialised courts and tribunals (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2007). The effectiveness of such a system depends not only on the availability of forums but also on their functioning: whether they are constituted, whether they meet, whether their procedures are time-bound in practice, whether outcomes are enforceable, and whether weaker parties can access them without prohibitive costs or retaliation risks.

In manufacturing, grievance handling is shaped by organisational scale and employment segmentation. Larger establishments are more likely to have formal HR structures, recognised unions, and documentary compliance, enabling internal committees or structured grievance channels. Smaller establishments, prevalent in MSME clusters such as those identified for Nashik (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,), may rely on informal dispute processing, making statutory access points labour offices, conciliation, and courts more central when conflicts escalate.

A key analytic distinction concerns “preventive” institutions versus “curative” institutions. Preventive institutions aim to prevent disputes from escalating by facilitating dialogue and problem solving at the establishment level. Curative institutions intervene after escalation through mediated settlement or adjudication. In theory, preventive bodies reduce the burden on curative institutions and shorten dispute cycles. In practice, evidence suggests preventive bodies are often under-institutionalised, transferring the dispute load to conciliation and adjudication and thereby intensifying delay and enforcement problems (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008; Sapkal, 2015).

Finally, any contemporary assessment must include regulatory transition. The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 commenced as part of the labour codes package effective 21 November 2025 consolidates and amends the legal framework for trade unions, industrial disputes, and associated processes (Press Information Bureau, 2025a; Press Information Bureau, 2025b; PRS Legislative Research, 2020). The shift introduces interpretive uncertainty and implementation variation across states and sectors, and has already generated collective contestation (Reuters, 2025; Associated Press, 2025).

IV. Methods: Systematic Review Design and Evidence Base

This study adopts a systematic, document-based review approach oriented to institutional functioning. The review design follows established guidance on transparent reporting and evidence synthesis (Page et al., 2021; Moher et al., 2009) and draws on systematic review methodology in management and policy research where heterogeneous evidence types (statutes, audits, administrative reports, and empirical studies) are synthesised through structured protocols (Tranfield et al., 2003).

The corpus integrates four categories of sources. The first category comprises legal and quasi-legal texts that constitute or govern statutory labour institutions, including major central statutes and Maharashtra-specific industrial relations legislation (Government of India, 1947; Government of Maharashtra, 1946; Government of Maharashtra, 1971).

The second category includes performance audits and evaluative reports that directly assess institutional functioning in implementation settings, notably those produced by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, which provide systematic observations on constitution and activity of works committees, timeliness and success rates in conciliation, pendency at adjudication levels, and enforcement deficits (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2007; Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008).

The third category includes administrative and statistical publications that supply contextual information on labour governance and disputes. These include the Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour and Employment (Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2023) and industrial-disputes statistics compiled by the Labour Bureau (Labour Bureau, 2021, 2022) and broader labour statistics compendia (Labour Bureau, 2020).

The fourth category includes empirical and analytical studies of dispute-resolution processes, such as evidence on conciliation effectiveness and dispute resolution times (Sapkal, 2015) and research on labour judiciary delay dynamics (Verma, 1976).

To connect the national and state-level evidence to Nashik, the review incorporates district industrial profiling documents that provide institutional and industrial context for Nashik’s manufacturing landscape (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai, ; Government of Maharashtra, MAITRI, 2024).

Synthesis proceeded through thematic coding focused on “functioning” variables: institutional constitution (whether bodies exist as required), activity (meeting frequency, case handling), procedural timeliness (delays, pendency), outcomes (settlement rates, award implementation), and enforcement/monitoring capacity. The logic of this approach is that statutory design is not sufficient; institutional performance determines whether grievance mechanisms operate as meaningful access-to-justice channels.

V. Findings: Thematic Synthesis of Institutional Functioning

5.1 Preventive and Establishment-Level Mechanisms: Weak Institutionalisation and Limited Uptake

A consistent finding in audit evidence is the weak institutionalisation of preventive mechanisms especially works committees. In the performance audit context, works committees are described as statutory bodies intended to promote amity and good industrial relations in establishments meeting threshold requirements (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008). Yet audit observations document non-constitution of works committees in eligible units and weak monitoring of their functioning, including limited data collection on disputes settled (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2007).

This evidence points to an institutional paradox: mechanisms designed to reduce dispute load are precisely those that often remain inactive, thereby increasing reliance on external forums. For manufacturing sectors characterised by repeated, operational grievances overtime, work allocation, discipline, contract worker parity absence of functioning internal bodies increases the probability that grievances escalate to formal disputes, raising the costs of resolution for both workers and employers (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008).

For Nashik, the relevance of this finding is mediated by establishment size distribution. The district's industrial structure includes large units and government establishments alongside a substantial MSME base (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). Where establishment sizes fall below higher statutory thresholds for certain internal bodies, the institutional vacuum may be filled by informal arrangements, union intervention, or direct resort to labour administration. Conversely, in major industrial areas such as Satpur, Ambad, and Sinnar where plots and industrial infrastructure are concentrated larger establishments are likely present, raising the importance of verifying whether preventive bodies operate as intended (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,).

5.2 Conciliation Machinery: Design Centrality, Capacity Constraints, and Mixed Effectiveness

Conciliation is a central pillar of India's industrial dispute resolution system, operating as an executive mechanism intended to achieve amicable settlement. Performance audit evidence indicates that conciliation functioning can be undermined by delays, low success rates, and non-participation by parties. In Delhi, the performance audit reported delays in commencement and completion of conciliation proceedings, low settlement success rates at the conciliation level, and failures attributable in part to management non-attendance even where attendance-enforcement powers exist (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008).

At the Union and state interface, the CAG's national-level performance audit on implementation of the Industrial Disputes Act and the Contract Labour Act frames conciliation machinery as a core implementation component and documents gaps in constitution and monitoring of industrial relations institutions, including works committees, and wider weaknesses in enforcement for contract labour regulation (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2007).

Empirical research complicates an overly pessimistic view. Using evidence from labour disputes, Sapkal (2015) argues that conciliation can be pivotal and may be associated with lower resolution time relative to labour court appeals, with improvements in settlement outcomes under mandatory conciliation regimes (Sapkal, 2015). This suggests that conciliation's effectiveness is contingent rather than uniformly low: it may depend on institutional incentives, mandatory versus optional pathways, and procedural discipline, as well as on the surrounding enforcement environment that shapes parties' bargaining positions.

For the Nashik manufacturing sector, where industrial geography concentrates enterprises in industrial estates and cooperative estates, conciliation may be a key gateway institution. The Nashik profile indicates multiple concentrated industrial areas and cooperative industrial estates, implying repeated interactions among local labour officials, employers, and worker representatives (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). In such settings, conciliatory outcomes may depend heavily on local institutional capacity, including staffing, scheduling, and the credibility of subsequent enforcement.

5.3 Adjudication and Enforcement: Pendency, Delay, and Weak Award Implementation

A prominent institutional performance problem is delay at adjudication and weaknesses in award implementation. The Delhi audit reported substantial pendency at the adjudication level and noted delays in publication and implementation of awards, including low implementation rates and weak monitoring (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008). The findings highlight a broader institutional chain problem: even when adjudicatory bodies produce decisions, delayed publication and weak implementation undermine the practical resolution of grievances.

Historical empirical inquiry into labour judiciary delays also underscores the persistence of the delay problem. Verma's (1976) empirical investigation of labour judiciary delay illustrates that delay has long been recognised as a structural issue, implying deep-rooted procedural and administrative constraints rather than merely episodic dysfunction (Verma, 1976).

Adjudication delay and weak enforcement feed back into earlier stages of the grievance pathway. When parties anticipate that labour-court resolution will be slow or awards difficult to enforce, they may either avoid formal mechanisms or adopt strategic positions that reduce settlement probabilities. Conversely, stronger enforcement credibility can make conciliation more effective by altering parties' expectations and fallback options (Sapkal, 2015).

For Nashik, the industrial profile's indication of substantial MSME turnover and exports in the early 2010s points to a manufacturing ecosystem where production continuity and transaction reliability are economically salient (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). Delay in grievance resolution can therefore impose indirect costs on production schedules, labour retention, and reputational risk in supply chains. Yet district-

level evidence on adjudication timelines and award implementation is scarce in the accessible literature, reinforcing the need for district-specific institutional performance measurement.

5.4 Contract Labour Governance as a Grievance Multiplier in Manufacturing

Manufacturing grievances often intersect with contract labour arrangements, generating disputes over wages, parity, continuity, and responsibility attribution. The Delhi performance audit found weak enforcement of the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, including inadequate verification of registration and licensing and insufficient, unplanned inspections with limited follow-up (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008). Such enforcement gaps plausibly increase grievance incidence by reducing compliance incentives and leaving contract workers with fewer effective internal channels.

The national-level performance audit likewise situates contract labour governance alongside industrial disputes machinery and frames both as interdependent components of labour administration (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2007). This is analytically important because many “individual grievances” in manufacturing termination, wage deductions, non-payment of statutory benefits may be legally routed through dispute mechanisms that presume identifiable employer responsibility. In contractorised settings, that responsibility can be contested, complicating conciliation and adjudication and increasing resolution time.

In districts like Nashik, with multiple industrial estates and a large MSME base (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,), contract labour arrangements may be common due to cost pressures and production variability. Even without current district-level administrative data on contract labour prevalence, the combination of industrial clustering and MSME density makes the contract labour enforcement function a critical component of grievance-handling effectiveness.

5.5 Maharashtra’s Distinct Industrial Relations Institutions and their Interface with Central Law

Maharashtra has a distinctive institutional landscape shaped by state-specific industrial relations legislation, including the Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946 and the Maharashtra Recognition of Trade Unions and Prevention of Unfair Labour Practices Act, 1971 (Government of Maharashtra, 1946, 1971). These legal frameworks create specific forums and procedures for union recognition and unfair labour practice adjudication, which can function as alternative or parallel pathways for certain grievance categories, especially those involving union rights, victimisation, and employer unfair practices.

For Nashik, which contains major industrial areas such as Satpur and Ambad and multiple cooperative industrial estates (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,), Maharashtra’s institutional regime is not a background variable but a structuring condition: grievances may be channelled through state-specific unfair labour practice frameworks or through central industrial dispute pathways depending on the legal classification of the dispute and the forum’s jurisdiction. This institutional plurality complicates assessment because “functioning” cannot be reduced to a single institution; it must be evaluated across the actual pathways workers and employers use.

5.6 Policy Transition: Commencement of Labour Codes and Contestation, 21 November 2025

Any assessment of statutory labour institutions in late 2025 must address the regulatory transition introduced by the commencement of the labour codes. The Government of India’s press communication of 21 November 2025 announced implementation of the Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Code on Social Security, 2020, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 with effect from 21 November 2025 (Press Information Bureau, 2025a). The accompanying official narrative frames the codes as a modernising consolidation of labour laws, intended to rationalise compliance and promote social justice and industrial harmony (Press Information Bureau, 2025a; Press Information Bureau, 2025b).

However, public reception has not been uniform. Reuters reported coordinated protests by major trade unions against the rollout shortly after implementation, with unions objecting to perceived reductions in job security and collective bargaining protections (Reuters, 2025). Associated Press similarly reported nationwide protests on 26 November 2025, emphasising union claims that the new regime favours employers and weakens strike and union rights (Associated Press, 2025).

This contestation matters for institutional functioning in two ways. First, it influences compliance incentives and strategic bargaining, shaping whether disputes are channelled toward settlement or confrontation. Second, it raises the probability of transitional uncertainty at the local level, where labour departments must operationalise new rules while workplaces renegotiate expectations. In Maharashtra, the labour department’s publications indicate ongoing engagement with draft rules and legal texts connected to the new regime (Maharashtra Labour Department, 2025).

VI. Discussion: Implications for Assessing Institutional Functioning in Nashik Manufacturing

The systematic synthesis suggests that the practical functioning of statutory labour institutions hinges on institutionalisation, capacity, and enforceability. Translating these findings into a Nashik-focused assessment requires attention to district industrial structure, threshold effects, and the interaction between Maharashtra's state-specific industrial relations regime and central legal frameworks.

First, the Nashik industrial profile's evidence of concentrated industrial areas and cooperative estates provides a concrete basis for a district-level institutional mapping approach (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). Such a map would identify which statutory forums are accessible to workers in each industrial cluster, which labour offices handle conciliation, and which adjudicatory forums receive disputes originating in the district. The presence of large government establishments and large-scale units suggests that high-threshold internal mechanisms could be relevant for a segment of the workforce, while the large MSME segment raises the possibility that many workers rely on external statutory institutions rather than internal committees.

Second, evidence of weak constitution and monitoring of preventive bodies in audit settings (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2007, 2008) implies that a Nashik study should not assume internal committees operate merely because law provides for them. Instead, institutional functioning should be measured directly, through establishment-level verification of committee constitution, meeting frequency, grievance intake and disposal practices, representation (including gender representation), and the relationship between internal resolutions and escalation patterns.

Third, conciliation emerges as both a bottleneck and an opportunity. Audit evidence highlights delay and low settlement success in some jurisdictions (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008), while empirical evidence suggests conciliation can improve outcomes relative to litigation under certain conditions (Sapkal, 2015). For Nashik, where industrial clustering implies repeated interaction among actors, the key analytic question becomes whether local conciliation practice has stabilised norms that increase settlement credibility, or whether it reproduces the delays and non-attendance patterns observed elsewhere. This is particularly important for MSME-dense areas where adjudication may be costly and where disputes may involve contract labour arrangements.

Fourth, adjudication and enforcement problems imply that "functioning" must include post-decision compliance. The Delhi audit's evidence of delayed publication and low implementation rates (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2008) and the persistence of delay concerns in earlier empirical work (Verma, 1976) suggest that grievance resolution cannot be equated with issuance of awards. For Nashik, an institutionally meaningful metric would examine not only dispute filing and disposal but also time to implementation, use of recovery processes, and the incidence of non-compliance. Without such measurement, institutional assessments risk overstating effectiveness.

Fifth, Maharashtra's state-specific institutional regime necessitates pathway-sensitive evaluation. The Bombay Industrial Relations Act, 1946 and the Maharashtra Recognition of Trade Unions and Prevention of Unfair Labour Practices Act, 1971 define additional grievance and dispute routes that may be particularly salient in unionised manufacturing settings, and in cases involving unfair labour practices (Government of Maharashtra, 1946, 1971). A Nashik assessment should therefore trace "the life of a grievance" across possible routes, rather than treating central industrial dispute institutions as the sole statutory channel.

Finally, the 2025 labour-code commencement introduces a moving institutional target. The official policy framing emphasises simplification and harmonisation (Press Information Bureau, 2025a, 2025b), while protest reporting suggests heightened contestation and possible implementation delays or uneven adoption in practice (Reuters, 2025; Associated Press, 2025). For Nashik, this implies that any assessment conducted during transition should explicitly document which rules are operational locally and how workplaces interpret compliance obligations, especially in industrial estates dominated by MSMEs that may have limited legal-administrative capacity.

VII. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the statutory grievance-handling ecosystem relevant to manufacturing in India and situated its implications for the Nashik manufacturing sector. The synthesis indicates that institutional "functioning" is undermined when preventive bodies are not constituted or monitored, when conciliation is delayed or lacks credible participation incentives, and when adjudication and enforcement suffer from pendency and low implementation. At the same time, evidence suggests conciliation can be an effective resolution pathway when institutional design and enforcement credibility align (Sapkal, 2015), underscoring that institutional failure is not inevitable but contingent.

For Nashik, the industrial profile demonstrates a dense industrial geography with major industrial areas and a substantial MSME base (MSME-Development Institute, Mumbai,). This structure makes threshold effects, contract labour governance, and local labour administration capacity particularly important. The 2025 labour-code

transition further heightens the need for district-level empirical assessment that tracks how institutions operate “on the ground” during regulatory change (Press Information Bureau, 2025a; Reuters, 2025).

Future research oriented to Nashik should therefore treat statutory labour institutions as an interacting system rather than isolated forums. A robust evaluation will likely require triangulation of administrative case records, establishment-level compliance verification, and qualitative evidence from workers, unions, labour officials, and employers, with attention to gendered access and contract labour dynamics. Such district-level evidence is essential if statutory grievance mechanisms are to function not only as formal legal structures but as credible, time-bound, and enforceable institutions of industrial justice.

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