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A Critical Review of Statutory Bodies and Their Role in Industrial Grievance Settlement: Insights from Indian Manufacturing with Special Reference to the Nashik Region

Malkans Laxmikant Bhat

Ph.D Scholar, MET's Institute of Management,
Nashik Affiliated to Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune
Email: malkauns.bhat@rediffmail.com

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
Email: sangeetabirjepatil@gmail.com

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Abstract

Credible grievance and dispute-settlement institutions cannot be separated with industrial peace in manufacturing. This institutional landscape in India has traditionally been organised through statutory institutions that were established under the labour legislation, most notably the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, which created participative, conciliatory, and adjudicatory authorities to investigate and settle industrial disputes (Government of India, 1947). This paper provides a critical review of these statutory bodies and their operational logic with special reference to the manufacturing ecosystem of the Nashik region in Maharashtra. The analysis is based on a doctrinal and narrative review methodology, which synthesizes statutory texts, policy documents, and peer-reviewed/working-paper evidence on dispute-resolution performance, based on the variables of accessibility, timeliness, procedural fairness, and enforcement. The paper holds that the statutory machinery has a consistent design, moving towards internal grievance management to conciliation and adjudication, but its effective execution is limited by capacity limitations, procedural slowness, lack of representativeness, and the growing complexity of modern manufacturing labour forces. Empirical evidence indicates that conciliation may shorten the time taken for resolution and improve the settlement outcome compared to litigation under certain circumstances (Sapkal, 2015), but there is still a persistent delay and pendency in adjudication (Press Information Bureau, 2012). The paper also places these institutions in the context of the transition to the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, that incorporates the old laws and has been implemented since 21 November 2025 and raises concerns regarding the distributional balance between labour protection and managerial flexibility (Bhuta, 2022; Press Information Bureau, 2025).

Keywords: industrial disputes, grievance redressal, conciliation, labour courts, industrial tribunals, Industrial Relations Code, Nashik, manufacturing, Maharashtra

1. Introduction

Grievances in manufacturing arise at the intersection of managerial authority, shop-floor discipline, wage-setting, work allocation, safety, and employment security. In industrial relations theory and practice, the persistence of unresolved grievances tends to externalize conflict into strikes, lockouts, attrition, and litigation, thereby disrupting productivity and social peace. India's labour-law architecture addresses this risk by institutionalizing dispute-resolution stages internal committees, conciliation, and adjudication through statutory bodies whose composition and powers are defined by legislation (Government of India, 1947).

The Nashik region provides an instructive context for examining these institutions because it combines diversified manufacturing with agro-processing and industrial clusters across multiple MIDC and non-MIDC industrial areas. District-level secondary sources indicate that Nashik hosts major industrial areas such as Satpur, Ambad, Sinnar, Gonde, Igatpuri, Dindori, and Malegaon, alongside both large and small-scale manufacturing activity (Government of Maharashtra). Complementing this, district industrial profiles identify exportable outputs and cluster trajectories, including electrical assemblies, pumps, synthetic resin, grape wine, and pharmaceuticals, while noting infrastructure-led growth drivers such as the Mega Industrial Area at Sinnar and the MIDC Wine Park at Vinchur, Niphad (Development Commissioner [MSME]).

Against this background, this paper critically reviews statutory bodies involved in grievance settlement and industrial dispute resolution, asking how their legal design maps onto manufacturing realities and what limitations are documented in the literature. The discussion is especially timely because the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 consolidates and restructures aspects of the earlier framework and has been brought into force from 21 November 2025 (Government of India, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2025).

1.1. Methodology and Scope of the Review

This paper employs a doctrinal and narrative review approach. Doctrinally, it analyses statutory texts that constitute or mandate grievance and dispute-resolution bodies, notably the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 and the Maharashtra Recognition of Trade Unions and Prevention of Unfair Labour Practices Act, 1971, as well as the consolidating Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (Government of India, 1947; Government of Maharashtra, 1971; Government of India, 2020). Narratively, it synthesizes policy documents and secondary empirical studies that evaluate institutional performance, with particular attention to conciliation outcomes, adjudicatory delay, and procedural access (International Labour Organization, 2021; Press Information Bureau, 2012; Sapkal, 2015).

The “special reference” to Nashik is operationalized not through primary field data, but through contextualization using district industrial profiles and state/nodal-agency descriptions of industrial infrastructure and cluster composition (Development Commissioner [MSME], ; MSME-DI Mumbai, 2017; Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation). This allows the paper to connect statutory design to a plausible manufacturing cluster ecology while remaining within a review-based design.

1.2. Conceptualising Statutory Bodies in Industrial Grievance Settlement

In the context of industrial relations, “statutory bodies” refer to institutions whose creation, composition, powers, and duties arise from legislation (and related subordinate rules), rather than from purely voluntary workplace policy. The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 illustrates this logic by explicitly providing for authorities such as Works Committees, Conciliation Officers, Boards of Conciliation, Courts of Inquiry, Labour Courts, and Tribunals, and by later mandating internal grievance redressal machinery (Government of India, 1947).

Analytically, these bodies can be understood as occupying three institutional “levels.” First are shop-floor participative bodies that seek to resolve issues close to the point of production, exemplified by Works Committees and Grievance Redressal Committees (Government of India, 1947). Second are conciliatory bodies that facilitate negotiated settlement through state-appointed or government-notified intermediaries, most notably conciliation officers whose statutory duty is to investigate and induce amicable settlement “without delay” (Government of India, 1947). Third are adjudicatory bodies Labour Courts and Industrial Tribunals that render binding decisions when settlement fails, functioning as specialized judicial forums constituted by notification (Government of India, 1947).

A critical review of these bodies requires evaluative criteria beyond mere legality. The International Labour Organization's work on access to labour justice foregrounds procedural elements such as accessibility, clarity of procedures, reasonable time, and the practical ability of parties to pursue claims (International Labour Organization, 2021). These criteria are especially relevant in manufacturing settings where workers may face information constraints and where employers may face operational pressures requiring timely resolution.

2. Statutory Bodies and Grievance Settlement Under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947

2.1. Works Committees and the Participative Ideal

The Works Committee represents a classic statutory attempt to institutionalize bipartite dialogue within the

establishment. Section 3 of the Industrial Disputes Act provides that where an industrial establishment employs (or has employed) one hundred or more workmen in the preceding twelve months, the appropriate government may require the employer to constitute a Works Committee with representatives of employers and workmen, ensuring that worker representatives are not fewer than employer representatives and are chosen in consultation with the registered trade union, if any (Government of India, 1947). The statutory duty of the Works Committee is to promote amity and good relations and to endeavour to compose “material difference of opinion” on matters of common interest (Government of India, 1947).

In design terms, the Works Committee embodies a preventive model of grievance settlement: it aims to reduce escalation by normalizing joint discussion. Critically, however, its effectiveness depends on representativeness and perceived legitimacy, which in turn are shaped by union density, multi-unionism, and the extent to which committee deliberations can influence managerial decisions. While the Act establishes the committee’s purpose and composition, it does not itself guarantee organizational incentives for meaningful problem-solving beyond legal compliance (Government of India, 1947).

2.2. Grievance Redressal Committees and Individual Disputes

A more direct statutory response to individual grievances is provided through grievance redressal machinery. Section 9C mandates that every industrial establishment employing twenty or more workmen must have one or more Grievance Redressal Committees for disputes arising out of individual grievances (Government of India, 1947). The committee must have equal representation from employer and workmen; its chairperson rotates annually between employer and worker representatives; and membership is capped at six, with a stated preference for women’s representation where practicable (Government of India, 1947). The provision also embeds timelines, indicating that proceedings may be completed within thirty days from receipt of a written application, with an employer-level appeal to be disposed of within one month (Government of India, 1947).

The legislative basis for this mechanism is linked to the Industrial Disputes (Amendment) Act, 2010, which substituted Chapter IIB to introduce grievance redressal machinery as a statutory step within the industrial dispute-resolution ecosystem (Government of India, 2010).

From a critical perspective, Section 9C is significant for three reasons. First, it moves individual grievances into a quasi-judicial internal forum that is not purely managerial. Second, it acknowledges time as a justice-relevant variable by imposing procedural timelines.

Third, it clarifies that the existence of a grievance committee does not extinguish the right to raise an industrial dispute under the Act (Government of India, 1947). These design features suggest a legislative intent to combine procedural access with non-exclusivity, though their realization depends on awareness, internal capacity, and good-faith participation.

2.3. Conciliation Officers and State-Facilitated Settlement

Conciliation is central to India’s statutory philosophy of industrial dispute settlement. The Industrial Disputes Act provides for conciliation officers as statutory authorities (Government of India, 1947). Their duties, captured in Section 12, require that where an industrial dispute exists or is apprehended, the conciliation officer may hold conciliation proceedings, and in public utility services must do so when notice has been given; the officer must investigate the dispute “without delay” and take steps to induce a fair and amicable settlement (Government of India, 1947). If settlement is reached, a report and memorandum are sent to the government; if not, a detailed “failure” report sets out steps taken and reasons for failure (Government of India, 1947).

Empirical literature provides nuanced support for conciliation’s potential efficiency. Using tribunal-level dispute data, Sapkal (2015) reports that disputes settled in mandatory conciliation can take less time than those appealed in labour courts and that mandatory conciliation may improve settlement rates and reduce disparities in final payments relative to litigation, though these effects vary by period and context (Sapkal, 2015). These findings complicate simplistic narratives that view conciliation as merely a prelude to adjudication; instead, they suggest that where designed and implemented with credible process, conciliation can be a substantively meaningful settlement institution.

2.4. Labour Courts and Tribunals: Adjudication as a Backstop

When internal mechanisms and conciliation fail, adjudication becomes the statutory backstop. Under Section 7, the appropriate government may constitute Labour Courts by notification for adjudication of disputes relating to matters in the Second Schedule, with a Labour Court consisting of a single presiding officer appointed by the government (Government of India, 1947). The Act also provides for Tribunals and National Tribunals for broader categories of disputes (Government of India, 1947).

However, the adjudicatory channel is frequently criticized for delay. An official statement on labour courts and tribunals identifies causes of pendency that include inadequate numbers of courts, delays in filing written statements, repeated adjournments, and

procedural non-compliance by parties, among other institutional constraints (Press Information Bureau, 2012). This diagnosis underscores a key tension: adjudication supplies authoritative outcomes but can be undermined by slow timelines, thereby weakening its deterrent and restorative functions.

2.5. Digitisation and Administrative Monitoring: The SAMADHAN Platform

A contemporary development in India's grievance settlement ecosystem is the use of digital platforms for monitoring and disposal of industrial disputes and related claims. The Ministry of Labour and Employment describes SAMADHAN as a digital initiative intended to make processes more user-friendly, transparent, and efficient through online documentation and centralized monitoring; it is positioned as a single platform through which workmen, management, and trade unions may raise a range of employment-related grievances and disputes (Ministry of Labour & Employment,).

From a critical standpoint, digitisation can improve traceability and reduce information asymmetries, particularly in geographically dispersed industrial clusters. Yet, it may also reproduce digital divides and does not, by itself, resolve the underlying capacity constraints of conciliation and adjudication. Consequently, SAMADHAN is best interpreted as an administrative enhancement layered upon statutory institutions rather than a substitute for them (Government of India, 1947).

3. Maharashtra and the Nashik Region: Industrial Context and Statutory Layering

3.1. Nashik as a Manufacturing-Agro-Processing Cluster

Secondary district sources portray Nashik as hosting multiple industrial areas and a mix of large and small-scale industries, reflecting a spatially distributed manufacturing geography (Government of Maharashtra,). District industrial profiling highlights major exportable items including electrical assemblies, electronic controllers, electrical pumps, synthetic resin, grape wine, and pharmaceuticals, thereby indicating the coexistence of engineering/electrical manufacturing and value-added agro-based processing (Development Commissioner [MSME]).

In MSME-focused mapping, Nashik is associated with activities such as onion and grape dehydration, fruit processing, wineries, grape processing, textiles, and ancillary manufacturing, reinforcing the characterization of a hybrid industrial district where manufacturing is intertwined with agrarian value chains (MSME-DI Mumbai, 2017). Such industrial heterogeneity can generate diverse grievance profiles, from standing-order discipline and wage claims to contract labour and seasonal workforce disputes and

increases the need for adaptable grievance institutions that can operate across firm sizes and labour-market segments.

3.2. MIDC and Industrial Infrastructure as Governance Context

The Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) is described as a nodal investment promotion agency under the Government of Maharashtra that provides industrial infrastructure such as land, roads, water supply, drainage, and street lighting (Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation). While MIDC is not a grievance-settlement body, its infrastructural role matters for grievance settlement because industrial estates shape employer concentration, labour mobility, and the feasibility of shared institutional capacity in industrial belts. In Nashik, the district profile's emphasis on industrial areas and MIDC-led projects such as a Wine Park further demonstrates how industrial development policy and labour governance co-evolve (Development Commissioner [MSME]; Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation).

3.3. The Maharashtra-Specific Statutory Layer: MRTU & PULP

Maharashtra's industrial relations landscape includes state legislation that structures trade union recognition and unfair labour practice adjudication. The Maharashtra Recognition of Trade Unions and Prevention of Unfair Labour Practices Act establish an "independent machinery" of courts to accord recognition and enforce provisions relating to unfair practices (Government of Maharashtra, 1971). The Act provides for an Industrial Court that, inter alia, is empowered in relation to union recognition and exercises superintendence over Labour Courts, including issuing rules to secure expeditious disposal of cases (Government of Maharashtra, 1971).

For Nashik-based manufacturing, this state-layered statutory framework is salient because it affects collective bargaining structures, union recognition dynamics, and the available forums for unfair labour practice disputes, potentially interacting with central-law machinery under the Industrial Disputes Act/Industrial Relations Code. The result is a multi-institutional environment that can expand remedial options but also increase procedural complexity for parties navigating grievance escalation.

4. Critical Evaluation: What Works, What Fails, and Why

4.1. Accessibility and Representativeness

The statutory design of Works Committees and Grievance Redressal Committees presupposes meaningful worker representation and credible deliberation. The Industrial Disputes Act provides for worker representation in Works Committees,

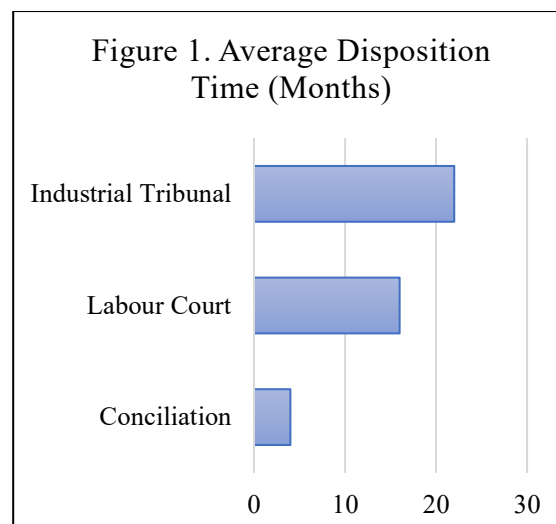
including consultation with registered trade unions in selecting worker representatives, while Section 9C imposes equal representation in Grievance Redressal Committees (Government of India, 1947). Nonetheless, the Act's formal representational rules cannot alone guarantee substantive representativeness in contexts where contract labour, labour turnover, or fragmented union structures weaken collective voice. In Nashik's diversified industrial landscape where clusters span agro-processing and manufacturing, and where MSME ecosystems coexist with large units this representational challenge may be acute, particularly in smaller establishments where formal committees exist but grievance capacity is limited (Development Commissioner [MSME]; MSME-DI Mumbai, 2017).

Digital initiatives such as SAMADHAN can improve accessibility by enabling complaint filing and monitoring, potentially lowering transaction costs for workers and unions (Ministry of Labour & Employment). Yet, the existence of a platform does not guarantee procedural empowerment if parties lack digital access, legal literacy, or trust in outcomes. Thus, accessibility must be assessed as an ecosystem property, requiring both institutional design and enabling conditions.

4.2. Timeliness, Delay, and the Institutional Burden of Adjudication

A persistent critique of India's grievance-settlement machinery concerns delays at the adjudicatory stage. Official accounts attribute labour-court pendency to systemic factors including inadequate court capacity, procedural delays by parties, repeated adjournments, and slow disposal (Press Information Bureau, 2012). These explanations are consistent with broader access-to-justice frameworks that treat timeliness as an essential component of effective labour justice, particularly where delayed decisions can erode remedies and incentivize strategic behaviour (International Labour Organization, 2021).

At the same time, empirical evidence complicates the notion that the system is uniformly slow at all stages. Sapkal's (2015) findings indicate that conciliation especially where mandatory can reduce disposition time relative to cases proceeding into labour-court appeals and can be associated with improved settlement rates (Sapkal, 2015). The policy implication is that strengthening the credibility and capacity of conciliation and in-plant grievance committees may be an efficiency strategy, potentially reducing burdens on adjudicatory bodies.



4.3. Substantive Justice and Enforcement

Statutory bodies vary not only in speed and access but also in the nature of outcomes they can deliver. Internal committees can recommend or broker resolutions but may lack coercive enforcement. Conciliation outcomes, if reached, produce settlements that are binding under the statutory scheme, while adjudicatory awards provide authoritative remedies backed by state power (Government of India, 1947). However, substantive justice depends on the alignment between forum capacity and the power asymmetries of industrial relations. In manufacturing contexts marked by hierarchical supervision, disciplinary control, and heterogeneous workforce contracts, internal committees may face pressures that constrain perceived neutrality, thereby pushing disputes outward toward state-mediated processes (International Labour Organization, 2021).

4.4. Political Economy: Regulation, Manufacturing Performance, and Conflict Externalities

A critical review must also consider the political economy of statutory design. Besley and Burgess (2004) argue using state-level amendments to the Industrial Disputes Act as a measure of regulatory direction that pro-worker regulatory changes were associated with lower output, employment, investment, and productivity in formal manufacturing in their period of study, while informal manufacturing output increased, suggesting complex distributional dynamics in labour regulation (Besley & Burgess, 2004). While this literature is not a direct evaluation of grievance bodies, it is relevant because grievance and dispute-settlement institutions can influence investment incentives, workplace bargaining, and the perceived costs of conflict. In industrial districts such as Nashik where policy sources emphasize industrial infrastructure, exportable production, and cluster development labour governance that is simultaneously credible to workers and predictable for firms becomes particularly consequential for inclusive industrial

growth (Development Commissioner [MSME]; Government of Maharashtra).

5. Transition and Reform: The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (Effective 21 November 2025)

5.1. Consolidation and Institutional Reconfiguration

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 consolidates three existing laws Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, Trade Unions Act, 1926, and Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 into a single framework, an approach presented by the Government as simplifying compliance and promoting industrial harmony (Press Information Bureau, 2025). The Code text itself records enforcement from 21 November 2025 via Gazette notification, signalling a formal transition from the older statutory regime (Government of India, 2020).

One salient element of continuity-with-modification concerns grievance redressal. The Code retains a Grievance Redressal Committee mechanism with specified composition, procedural timelines, and women's representation requirements, including a thirty-day period for committee proceedings and an appeal pathway where the worker remains aggrieved (Government of India, 2020).

At the same time, critical scholarship argues that the Code rebalances institutional arrangements in ways that may shift bargaining power. Bhuta (2022) critically examines the Code's provisions and contends that reforms framed as streamlining can risk undermining essential labour protections, particularly regarding trade unionism and strike regulation, thereby raising concerns about the Code's distributive consequences. The divergence between governmental narratives of "balance" and critical academic assessments underscores why institutional reform must be evaluated not only for efficiency but also for fairness and voice.

5.2. Implementation Conditions and Transitional Complexity

Secondary professional analysis notes that although the labour codes were enacted earlier, their implementation was awaited and was announced effective 21 November 2025, with additional rule-making processes still pending across central and state levels (Ernst & Young, 2025). Such transitional conditions matter for grievance settlement because procedural rights often depend on detailed rules, prescribed forms, and institutional capacity. In multi-layered states like Maharashtra with its own industrial relations statutes and courts transition introduces the risk of forum confusion unless harmonization and stakeholder education accompany enforcement.

5.3. Implications for Nashik's Manufacturing Ecosystem

For manufacturing clusters like Nashik, the Code's consolidation may offer potential gains if it reduces procedural uncertainty and strengthens internal resolution through time-bound grievance committees. At the same time, the effectiveness of any consolidated regime depends on local institutional capacity, worker awareness, and the practical functioning of conciliation and tribunal processes. Given Nashik's industrial diversity spanning engineering-linked manufacturing and agro-based processing clusters an effective grievance regime must be capable of addressing both classic industrial disputes and contemporary claims related to wages, deductions, termination, and statutory dues, categories prominently reflected in the grievance typology presented on government monitoring platforms (Ministry of Labour & Employment, ; MSME-DI Mumbai, 2017).

6. Conclusion

This critical review has argued that India's statutory bodies for industrial grievance settlement form a conceptually coherent architecture that moves from participative internal committees to state-facilitated conciliation and specialized adjudication. The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 institutionalized this architecture through Works Committees, Grievance Redressal Committees, conciliation officers, and labour courts/tribunals, embedding both representational principles and procedural duties aimed at amicable settlement (Government of India, 1947). Yet, the system's practical legitimacy and efficacy remain uneven, shaped by representativeness challenges in fragmented workforces, the chronic problem of adjudicatory delay, and variations in conciliation quality (Press Information Bureau, 2012; International Labour Organization, 2021; Sapkal, 2015).

With special reference to Nashik, secondary evidence depicts a diversified manufacturing and processing region with multiple industrial areas and cluster trajectories that increase the demand for credible, timely grievance institutions (Government of Maharashtra; Development Commissioner [MSME]; MSME-DI Mumbai, 2017). Maharashtra's additional statutory layer under MRTU & PULP further illustrates how state-level institutions can shape collective bargaining and forum access, potentially strengthen remedies while increase complexity (Government of Maharashtra, 1971).

Finally, the shift to the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 effective 21 November 2025 marks a significant institutional reconfiguration. Government narratives emphasize simplification and balance, while critical scholarship warns of distributive risks and potential weakening of worker voice (Press Information Bureau, 2025; Bhuta, 2022). For industrial districts like Nashik, the central challenge remains implementation:

whether statutory bodies, old or new, can deliver accessible, timely, and fair grievance settlement at scale in a rapidly evolving manufacturing economy.

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