

Outline of SAFAR-NLS Course on Accountability and Governance (March-May 2021)

Course Summary

India has been an enduring puzzle in the study of democracy and development. While the “vibrancy” of Indian democracy has been widely discussed, India’s development efforts have been treated with much more skepticism. India’s development trajectory has been marked by regular iterations of a range of welfare measures but weak political institutions, overburdened and under-resourced bureaucracies and pervasive inequalities. These pose significant challenges to citizens exercising genuine democratic freedoms. Amongst other things, ensuring the welfare of citizens brings out the contrast between electoral democracy and everyday democracy. Given this seeming incompatibility in India, how do ordinary people hold the state accountable between elections? What are the democratic interfaces through which people engage with the state every day to claim basic entitlements, ask questions and participate in decisions that affect their well-being? What role can these institutions, procedures and mechanisms of accountability play when democracy in contemporary India itself faces fundamental challenges?

This course is rooted in theory that has emerged from practice. It presents a view from the ground, developed through the articulation and practice of everyday engagement by ordinary people. Centering the experiences of social movements that have engaged with or critiqued the state, this course will explore a range of substantive debates around welfare rights and social accountability. It will also draw on empirical work from the disciplines of anthropology, economics, political science, and sociology.

Course objective and learning goals

1. To provide students with a critical understanding of current debates on social accountability
2. To learn about the legal, social and political history of social accountability in India
3. To learn about the essential elements of the practice of social accountability
4. To gain insights into examples of elements of social accountability in practice, through case studies and interactions with leading activists and practitioners
5. To orient students to contemporary challenges and limits to social accountability

Assignments

1. **250 word reflections** on assigned readings. Each student must choose any three out of 15 sessions of course to write a responses. For the chosen themes, students should incorporate (but are not limited to) following elements in their response:

- Analysis of the key arguments presented in the readings
- Highlight of the critical evidence presented in the readings that support or refute the key arguments
- Identification of research questions/discussion questions based on the readings as well as relevant personal experiences along with the rationale for these questions
- At least one question for the speaker/instructor of the class

Reflection papers are due *before* the scheduled classes for which you are writing. For the class on Tuesday for instance, the paper is due by Sunday 11:59 PM and for the class on Friday, the paper is due by Wednesday 11:59 PM.

2. The second assignment will be a **group assignment** where students will pick one of the four themes. Each group will consist of 4 - 5 people. Groups will use the duration of the course, which includes the period dedicated to group assignment between April 20th to May 7th, to do the research as laid down in Annexure 1, and prepare a presentation for a mini conference which will be held in the last week of class. The group will also be expected to submit a 8-10 paged (double spaced) paper based on the presentation for final grades by the May 30th.

3. Final Exam

The course will run for 12 weeks and will include 4 hours of interactive lectures per week. From April 20th April to 7th May there will be no lectures. These weeks will be dedicated for students' practical project. Students are expected to attend all classes and to actively participate in discussions on the assigned readings, films, case studies.

We understand that group work will take more than the time assigned in the course, but we hope that by scheduling group work time, students will get be able to engage more deeply with the ideas, practices and readings discussed every week.

The coordinators of the course will be Anindita Adhikari, Rakshita Swamy and Khush Vachhrajani. All three are a part of the [Social Accountability Forum for Action and Research \(SAFAR\)](#).

Evaluation

The class grade will be compiled as follows:

- 10% Reflections on the assigned readings (3 reflections)
- 30% Practical Group Project
- 60% Final Examination

Session logistics

While we wish we could meet in person, the pandemic still isn't over and the virtual world is where we will have to gather twice a week. However, this is an opportunity to bring some of the most important voices from academia, civil society, movements and government that have shaped the field of social accountability to our "classroom". Each session will have the following components: interactive lecture, discussion in breakout rooms, collective reflections, presentations and short films.

One of the main disadvantages of virtual teaching and learning is the isolation and lack of sociability. It is hard to get to know each other on zoom and also harder to establish a sense of community. We hope that breakout rooms will help meet this challenge to some extent. Each breakout room will have no more than 6 students so that each person gets enough space to speak and share their reflections.

To make the most of each session, we expect that you will:

- Attend class having read all the assigned materials
- Make informed contributions to discussions during the interactive lectures and breakout room discussions
- Demonstrate the ability to listen to and build on the contributions of other students
- Create a respectful learning environment. Your classmates may hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own based on their experience. If you disagree with them, challenge the idea or statement rather than the person using evidence and non-accusatory language.
- If you are going to miss a session, please check in with us to let us know, and make sure you view the recording of the session to know what was covered

Course overview

Module	Session	Topic	Date	Lecturer
1	1	Introduction	17/3 (Wednesday)	SAFAR
	2	The State Democracy and Accountability	19/3 (Friday)	SAFAR+Patrick Heller
	3	Trajectory of accountability and rights in India	23/3 (Tuesday)	SAFAR+Aruna Roy
	4	Debates on Accountability in Governance	26/3 (Friday)	SAFAR
2	5	Jaankaari: Access to Information	30/3 (Tuesday)	SAFAR
	6	RTI clinic	6/4 (Friday)	SAFAR
3	7	Sunwai and Karyavahi: Hearing and Public Grievance Redress	9/4 (Friday)	SAFAR
	8	Social Accountability through digital technology	12/4 (Monday)	SAFAR+Rajendran Narayan
4	9	Bhagidaari: Peoples' Participation	16/4 (Friday)	SAFAR+SM Vijayanand
	10	Social accountability and the commons	20/4 (Tuesday)	SAFAR + FES
	<i>Group Assignment (20/4/2021-7/05/2021)</i>			

5	11	Suraksha-identity, inclusion and protection in the struggle for social accountability	7/5 (Friday)	SAFAR+ TBD
6	12	Janta ka Manch- Peoples' Platforms	11/5 (Tuesday)	SAFAR
	13	Social accountability through social audits	18/5 (Tuesday)	SAFAR
	14	Social Accountability and Urban Systems	21/5 (Friday)	SAFAR+Gautam Bhan
7	15	Conceptual and legal framework of accountability + Wrap Up	25/5 (Tuesday)	SAFAR

Session 1: Introduction (Week 1; 2 hours)

This session will focus on introduction to the course, students and instructors. Students will be given an overview of the course, format and requirements and a trailer to the concepts and practices that will be covered in upcoming weeks.

Assignment to be done before lecture: Panchayat Video Clip

Lecturer: Anindita Adhikari and Rakshita Swamy

Session 2: The state, democracy and accountability (Week 1; 2 hours)

This session will introduce democracy as a link between social and political power and explore its potential and limits. We will ask fundamental questions such as what is the relationship between the state and government and in turn the state, government *and* democracy? What is the state of democracy in India today? What does the space for public action and accountability look like? How can accountability enhance democratic practice?

This session will explore the various forms (thick and thin) of democracy- procedural/formal, participatory and substantive to ask how we can both extend and deepen it. Through this discussion, we will arrive at a working definition of accountability (inspired by Ambedkar's partial exposition on social democracy) as a way to understand democratic deepening.

Key concepts: constitutional democracy, social contract, democracy between elections

Essential readings:

1. Degrees of Democracy: Some Comparative Lessons from India
Heller, P. (2000) Degrees of Democracy: Some Comparative Lessons from India, World Politics, Jul., 2000, Vol. 52, No. 4
2. Making Space for Civil Society: Institutional Reforms and Local Democracy in Brazil

Baiocchi, G., Heller, P., & Silva, M. K. (March 01, 2008). *Making Space for Civil Society: Institutional Reforms and Local Democracy in Brazil*. *Social Forces*, 86, 3, 911-936.

3. Ambedkar's statement on democracy

Lecturers: Patrick Heller, Professor of Sociology and International and Public Affairs, Brown University and Anindita Adhikari

Session 3: Trajectory of accountability and rights in India (Week 2; 2 hours)

In this session, we will move from theories of state, democracy and accountability to its concrete instantiation in the Indian context. This session will introduce students to the history of the struggles for rights-based welfare in India and the introduction of rights-based laws such as RTI, NREGA and NFSA. The analysis of the rights-based welfare agenda will throw light on a period in India's public policy history that marked a paradigm shift in how we understand social accountability, and how developmental rights were seen as cojoined with citizenship rights.

Key concepts: Social movements and the state/government, public action and deliberation, legal and institutional frameworks, rights-based welfare and social accountability

Essential readings:

1. The Non-Party Political Process by Rajni Kothari PRAXIS International, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1985)
2. Social Activism, Political Processes, and Rights Legislation by Zoya Hasan
3. The RTI Story – Chapter 8 to 12
4. Reforming the Pre Legislative Process by Tarunabh Khaitan, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 46, Issue No. 25, 18 June 2011

Recommended readings:

1. Democratic Assertions: The Making of India's Recognition of Forest Rights Act by Kundan Kumar and John M. Kerr
2. Himanshu Jha (2019) Institutional Change in the Welfare Regime in India: Broadening the Dominant Narratives" (Review article), *Indian Politics & Policy*, Volume 2, Issue 2, Fall 2019

Lecturers: Aruna Roy, Founder Members, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) and Anindita Adhikari

Session 4: Debates on accountability in governance (Week 2; 2 hours)

In continuation of the previous week, we will extend the debate on democracy to discuss different types of accountability structures. What are the traditional forms of accountability at the national level (vigilance commissions, audits by the C&AG, Public Interest Litigations), state level (top-down monitoring, department-led audits), local level (panchayati raj structure, nigrani samitis) and how are these different from social accountability mechanisms and institutions? How effective have traditional forms of accountability been and what are the limitations?

Through this discussion, we will arrive at the structure of the Bhilwara Principles which emphasize six elements crucial to the realization of social accountability. These six principles of *jaankaari*, *sunwai*, *karyawahi*, *bhaagidaari*, *suraksha* and *janata ka manch* seeks to address power inequities by democratizing and decentralizing information and creating institutionalised platforms for people to participate in decision making and oversight

Key concepts: vertical vs horizontal accountability, centralized vs decentralized accountability, bhilwara principles

Essential readings:

1. Schedler, A. (1999) 'Conceptualising Accountability.' In Schedler, A., Diamond, L and Plattner, M.F. (Eds) *The Self-restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*. Boulder, US: Lynne Rienner.
2. Goetz, A.M and Jenkins, R. (2001) 'Hybrid Forms of Accountability: Citizen Engagement in Institutions of Public-Sector Oversight in India.' *Public Management Review* 3(3): 363-83.
3. Rakshita Swamy (2020) *From Peoples' Struggles to Public Policy: The Institutionalization of the Bhilwara Framework of Social Accountability in India*, Accountability Research Centre, American University

Recommended readings:

1. Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say? Fox, J. A. (August 01, 2015). *World Development*, 72, 346-361.

Lecturers: Anindita Adhikari and Rakshita Swamy

Session 5: Access to Information – Jaankari (Week 3; 2 hours)

Information is power. People need information to know, act, self-govern, make informed choices and hold those who govern, accountable to their mandate. Access to credible and comprehensible information is therefore an essential element of social accountability. This session will look at how in spite of living in the age of 'open government' and 'big data', a gap persists between information disclosed in the public domain, and information relevant for citizens that ought to be disclosed in the public domain. It will also look at ongoing efforts underway to bridge this gap and the essential elements that have come to constitute citizen centered transparency for accountability.

Key Concepts: Right to know as part of fundamental right to freedom of expression, 'Management Information Systems', Data vs knowledge

Essential readings:

1. Fox, J. (2007) 'The Uncertain Relationship between Transparency and Accountability.' *Development in Practice* 17(4): 663-71.
2. Fung, A. (2007) 'Designing Transparency Policies' from the book 'Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency', Cambridge University Press, 2007
3. 'The politics of information', *Indian Express*, April 2019

Assignment to be done before lecture: Reflection piece on access to information

Lecturers: Rakshita Swamy and Anindita Adhikari

Session 6: RTI Clinic (Week 3; 2 hours)

This will be an interactive two-hour clinic in which students will learn the provisions of the RTI law, draft and file RTI applications on issues of personal/political interest.

Key Concepts: Familiarity with key provisions of the Law, filing RTI application

Readings:

1. Adjudicating the RTI Act: Analysis of orders of the Central Information Commission – Satark Nagrik Sangathan and Centre for Equity Studies
2. People's monitoring of the RTI regime in India (2011-2013) by RTI assessment and advocacy group, and Centre for Equity Studies
3. RTI Act, 2005

Lecturers: Rakshita Swamy, Khush Vachhrajani and Amrita Johri, National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information

Session 7: Citizens right to be heard – Sunwai and Karyavahi (Week 4; 2 hours)

“Hamaari kaun sunega” is a familiar refrain among citizens when faced with the choice of registering complaints and expecting a fair resolution. Registration of very grievance is an act of stating dissatisfaction with the administrative status quo, and is thus an act of challenging the State. This session will look at systemic and social barriers faced by citizens while petitioning the State and persevering for just and time-bound corrective action. It will also look at essential elements that have come to constitute platforms and processes that enable citizens to be heard, and be responded to.

Key Concepts: socio-legal framework of grievance redress

Essential readings:

1. Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner (2020) Great Expectations, Great Grievances: The Politics of Citizens' Complaints in India. Comparative Politics
2. Bihar Public Grievance Redress Act (2016)

Recommended readings:

1. Nick Robinson (2013) Closing the Implementation Gap: Grievance Redress and India's Social Welfare Programs. 53 Columbia J. of Transnational Law (320) (2015)

Assignment to be done before lecture: Call the complainant and compare the story of grievance redress

Lecturers: Anindita Adhikari and Rakshita Swamy

Session 8: Social Accountability and Digital Technology (Week 4; 2 hours)

The last two decades have seen the changing form that digital technology and data have played in our social, political and economic lives. This session will critically look at the role that digital technology has assumed in social policy by understanding examples of how digital technology have made their way into public policy through machine based learning, use of management information systems, electronic public finance management systems, creation of databases and their interoperability, aadhaar and direct benefit transfers. The costs and benefits of these innovations will be debated based on evidence of denial of entitlements and social exclusions on one hand and examples of how technology can enable and expand access to entitlements when designed and driven by users themselves. This session will also attempt to connect the challenges in governance in through the incorporation of digital technology with the citizen's ability to be heard and responded to as discussed in previous lectures.

Essential Readings:

1. Impact of Aadhaar on Welfare Programmes - Reetika Khera
2. Who is responsible when technology fails the marginalized? – Sakina Dhorajiwala

Recommended readings:

Cathy O'Neill, Weapons of Math Destruction, Introductory chapter

Assignment to be done before lecture: Read data protection bill/PRS summary of bill

Lecturers: Rajendran Narayanan, Assistant Professor, Azim Premji University and Rakshita Swamy

Session 9: Peoples' participation – Bhaagidari (Week 5; 2 hours)

'Peoples' Participation' has become a catch phrase for any attempt at ushering in transparency and accountability in governance and decision making. Who are the people? What is the accountability of eliciting participation? Are there administrative, social and political pre-conditions for facilitating public participation, such that it leads to improved efficiency? What is the cost of participation to citizens? This session will look at these necessary questions and use them to unpack the concept of peoples participation and arrive at its essential elements so that it can grow conceptually beyond rare islands of success.

Key Concepts: decentralization; citizen participation

Readings:

1. Participation - From Tyranny to Transformation?; Towards Participatory Governance - assessing the transformative possibilities by John Gaventa , [Click Here to View](#)

Format and Structure: Lecture presentation and discussion

Lecturers: SM Vijayanand, Former Chief Secretary and Former Principal Secretary, Local Self Government, Government of Kerala and Rakshita Swamy

Session 10: Governing the Commons (Week 5; 2 hours)

This session attempts to place the accountability and public participation debate within the broader context of ecological security, which has implications for both conservation of nature and protection of livelihoods. Students will be introduced to existing legal provisions that govern the management and ownership of commons which includes land, forests, and water. By laying out the trajectory of governance of commons in India, the session will explore conceptual and operational questions of how accountability manifests in a paradigm where natural resources are owned by citizens and the State plays the role of a trustee. The session will look at specific examples of attempts made at strengthening institutions and enhancing the capacity to self-govern, promoting inclusionary processes and collective decision-making.

Readings:

1. The Myth of the Tragedy of the Commons by Ian Angus
2. “One World in which Many Worlds Fit” – On the Commons (Article)
3. Many Faces of Madness (Short Film) - <https://youtu.be/FKQUyThMQ-g>
4. Baphlimali (Short Film) - <https://youtu.be/p1c54Ktm-1U>
5. The Symbolic Making of a Common Property Resource: History, Ecology and Locality in a Tank-irrigated Landscape in South India by David Mosse

Lecturers: Jagdeesh Rao, Foundation for Ecological Security and Anindita Adhikari

Session 11: Social Audits – Janta ka Manch

This is a pair of sessions that will be dedicated to understanding the legacy of ‘Jan Sunvais’ and its evolution into ‘Social Audits’ in practice. The first session will look at the historical trajectory of how social audits evolved from civil society-led initiatives to transform into a state financed and institutionalized mechanism of public oversight. It will look at the anatomy of social audit and delve into concepts of deliberation and dispute that underpin the process.

Key concepts: participation, deliberation, social audits

Readings for session 11:

1. Watch plenary session of National Social Audit Workshop held in November 2020 featuring Aruna Roy, Justice Lokur, Raj Vishwanathan, Jonathan Fox, SM Vijayanand, Sowmya Kidambi, Roma Barla, Meera Sanghamitra: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7H2bYiSrHc&t=306s>
2. Watch film on social audits led by Jan Jagran Shakti Sangathan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBY2nouZo7E>
3. Auditing Standards for Social Audit (CAG), <https://cag.gov.in/en/page-cag-s-auditing-standards-2017>

Lecturers: Anindita Adhikari and Augustina Soreng, SAU Jharkhand

Session 12: Social Audits II– Janta ka Manch

This second session will look at social audits in action in two different cases and contexts to understand the legal and institutional setting within which the social audit takes place, who makes claims of the government, what are the enabling and constraining conditions in rural and urban

settings, what are the different structures and flow of information, who facilitates, who presides and who takes action.

Key concepts: participation, deliberation, social audits

Readings for session 13:

1. Social Audit Action Taken Report – Meghalaya Society For Social Audit & Transparency, http://mssat.nic.in/social_audit.htm
2. BoCW social audit report: [Click Here to View](#)

Format/Structure: Lecture presentation and discussion

Lecturers: Anindita Adhikari, Khush Vachhrajani

Session 13: Accountability, identity and protection – Suraksha (Week 6; 2 hours)

Those who seek information, ask questions or demand answers become a threat to vested interests in any society. The threat becomes even more complicated when those asking difficult questions represent historically oppressed and deliberately marginalized communities such as dalits, adivasis, sex-workers, transgender persons, those suffering from physical and mental disabilities, those in caste based occupations such as manual scavenging etc. How can accountability frameworks be conceived of by placing their strengths and weaknesses at the center of attention? This session will look at how historically marginalized communities need to be guaranteed protection and dignity in order to facilitate them in being active participants in the accountability agenda.

Key concepts: pro-active inclusion, facilitation, protection

Readings: TBC

Lecturers: TBC

Session 14: Accountability in the urban context (Week 8; 2 hours)

This session attempts to contextualize Bhilwara Framework for cities and urban challenges in the times of rapid urbanization. The learning objective is to enable students to think about social accountability from the lens of spatiality and scale of different types of urban areas as well as get an insight into some of the challenges and opportunities urban contexts offer to the conventional framework of accountability and transparency. The session shall also explore conceptual and operational questions of how urban projects and processes offer a new paradigm to think about accountability practices while addressing questions like how can delivery of social protection and entitlements be improved in urban areas?

Key concepts: urbanization, informality and accountability

Readings: TBC

Lecturer: Gautam Bhan, Faculty, Indian Institute for Human Settlements and Khush Vachhrajani

Session 15: Conceptual and legal framework of accountability (Week 7; 2 hours)

The course so far would have given students a glimpse of the different elements of accountability at play, in the midst of the various pushes and pulls of an inequitable democracy. Do these elements contradict each other? Or are there commonalities that emerge? This session revisits the Bhilwara Framework of Social Accountability and discusses it in more detail. The framework has emerged from citizens and collectives that face the unjust violations of social accountability on a daily basis and has moved in its journey from a public campaign into a draft bill. Through this presentation, students will be invited to discuss and critically analyze the framework and Bill through their individual and collective understanding from the course so far.

Key concepts: Explore a conceptual understanding of social accountability and its manifestation into Law

Readings:

1. Dr. Ambedkar's Last Speech in The Constituent Assembly on Adoption Of The Constitution (November 25, 1949)

Lecturer: Rakshita Swamy, Anindita Adhikari, and Khush Vachhrajani