Implementation and evaluation of 'Eshikayat'- A public grievance and redressal module in UP

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this website 'E Shikayat' is Grievance Redress. It is a simple way of filing complaints, without any hassles, to the highest government official in all the Ministries. This technological platform is a simple way of bridging the gap between the governed and the governing. The best features are that, firstly, its versions are available in Hindi and English, secondly, it can be accessed from anywhere regardless of the kind of device, thirdly, one can achieve all of this within the comforts of his/her home, and lastly, the user would get an acknowledgment as well as the complaint number which can be printed for future follow up. I applied my basic school knowledge of Computer Science to develop a mechanism to address the grievances of the residents by creating this online portal which I named 'E-Shikayat' (E-Complaints). From registering a domain to creating a website 'www.eshikayat.com' it took three weeks to put up the entire portal in public domain. By using this tool village residents of Uttar Pradesh, with a population of 250 million, could mail their grievance directly to the top administrative officers or the Governor of the State with an acknowledgment number generated to follow it up. Contrary to expectations, the response in the first few days was overwhelming, with complaints pouring in large numbers and prominent newspapers reporting about this initiative in bold letters.

Keywords: *Eshikayat, Use of computer technology, IT in rural India, Grievance redressal in UP, Community grievance redressal, Computer technology in aid of common man.*

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a case study documenting a public grievance and redressal module '*E shikayat*' (translated to English meant 'Electronic Complaint') which in the form of a website and mobile App is operational in whole of Uttar Pradesh, a State of India. Through *E shikayat* anyone having a grievance with the government machinery of Uttar Pradesh can register their complaint and track the progress of redressal (though email and phone numbers) using a complaint number generated at the time of registration of grievance. This step of generating a complaint number aims to build state-citizen accountability as a means to ensuring effective service delivery.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND IN THE WORDS OF THE AUTHOR

"Any morning newspaper in India is always full of clarion calls by politicians to make the life of its citizens better. New development schemes announced by political masters stared at me from every newspaper. When I looked around, I found the same potholed roads, beggar begging for alms, electricity cuts and poverty stricken people. It bothered me why the system doesn't deliver despite loud political oratory. I waited for my summer vacations to look deeper for an answer and it worked. I visited two villages and interaction with residents taught me that there was a huge gap between what is professed and what is implemented as the top administrators and political masters were blissfully ignorant about the gap between policy and its implementation on the ground.

When I came back to my hometown from Mumbai during summer of 2016, I felt an urge to visit a village to see for myself the living conditions and write a research paper on it. After talking to residents of the village *Bakkas*, I realised the problems they had been facing as well as its importance. The first thing which came to my mind was that if this is the state of a suburban village, what would be the condition of a far flung under-developed village? So after few days I visited another village *Papnamau*, to familiarise
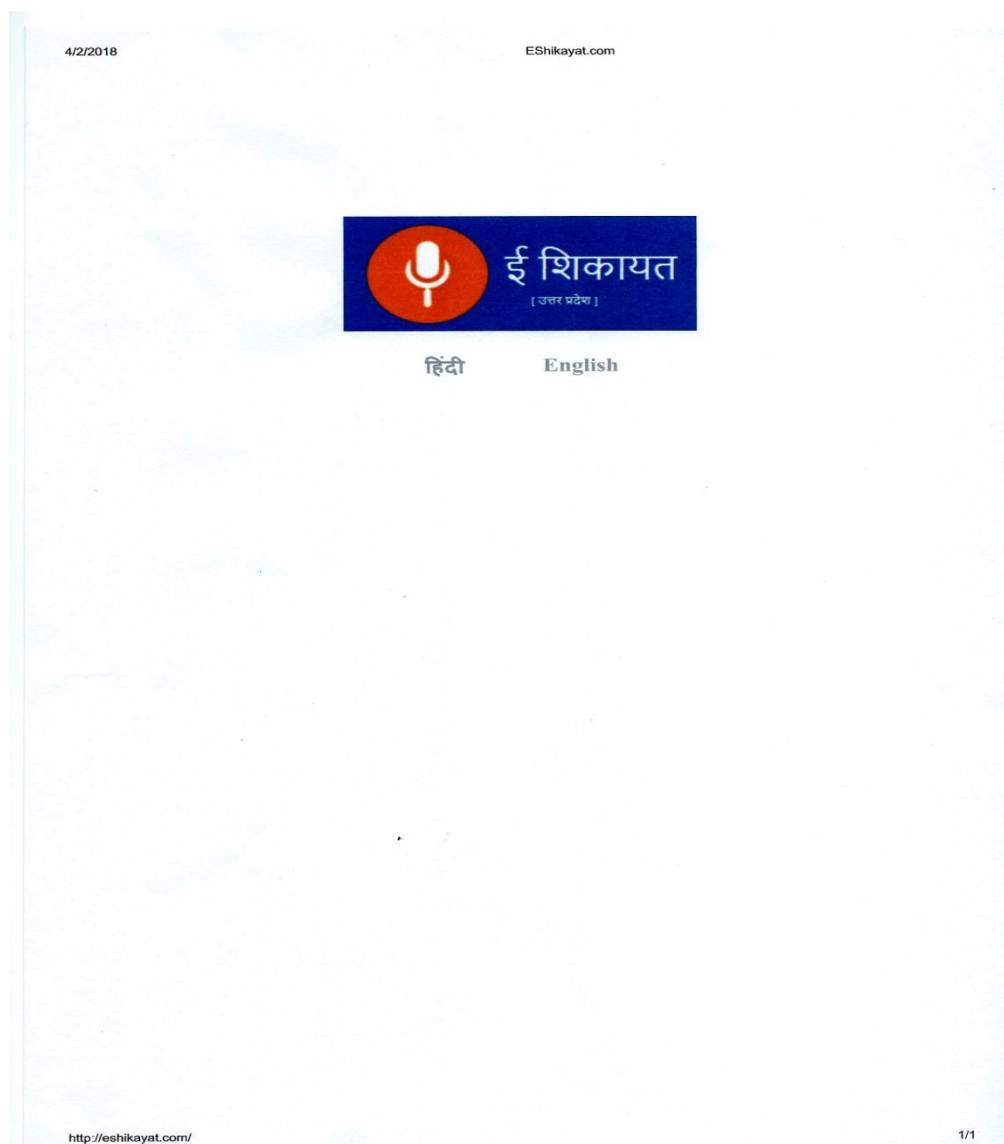
myself with their problems. I met more than 100 people, ranging from students to senior citizens. Their plight made me think that despite our country's progress, one thing it hasn't been able to deal with is addressing the issues and problems faced by the rural folks. The callous and cold attitude of the field level government officers and the helplessness of the residents give rise to a communication gap. Moreover, one doesn't expect a villager to spend hours in a government office as his survival is based on that day's earnings. Also, whenever an official person visits a village, he or she represents a certain ministry or department of government therefore he cannot cater to all the problems of villagers. Therefore, I realised there was a need for a centralised technological platform in the form of a website through which people can address all the departments, from the comforts of their homes. I started writing the code for this website and the result was *E- Shikayat*."

3. PROJECT CONTEXT

The main purpose of this website *'E Shikayat'* is Grievance Redress. It is a simple way of filing complaints, without any hassles, to the highest government officer in all the Ministries. This technological platform is a simple way of bridging the gap between the governed and the governing. The best features are that, *firstly*, its versions are available in Hindi and English, *secondly*, it can be accessed from anywhere regardless of the kind of device, *thirdly*, one can achieve all of this within the comforts of his/her home, and l*astly*, the user would get an acknowledgment as well as the complaint number which can be printed for future follow up. I applied my basic school knowledge of Computer Science to develop a mechanism to address the grievances of the residents by creating this online portal which I named '*E-Shikayat*' (E-Complaints). From registering a domain to creating a website '*www.eshikayat.com*' it took three weeks to put up the entire portal in public domain. By using this tool village residents of Uttar Pradesh, with a population of 250 million, could mail their grievance directly to the top administrative officers or the Governor of the State with an acknowledgement number generated to follow it up. Contrary to expectations, the response in the first few days was overwhelming, with complaints pouring in large numbers and prominent newspapers reporting about this initiative in bold letters.

4. PROJECT OVERVIEW

As a process when someone with a grievance wants to file a complaint, all he or she has to do is to log on to http://eshikayat.com and a page like the one below opens.

Next, one may choose the language, Hindi or English. For demonstration, we choose English.

District *

Select District

PIN

Mobile/Telephone No.

Research If Any

Date *

Category of Complaint *

Category

Details Of Complaint(200 Words Max) *

Department / Ministry / Organisation Resonsible *

Resonsible

Complaint By

Email By

http://eshikayat.com/en/your-voice   2/3

Do You Want To Send Your Address along with your Complaint (⦿ Yes/ ◯ No)

Send

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http://eshikayat.com/en/your-voice   3/3

Once a complainant fills up the Form given above and presses the SEND button, the complaint is registered and a Complaint Number is generated. The complaint is mailed to the highest authority of the concerned department as well as the District magistrate who is the highest authority in the district geographical area. It is easy for the complainant to visit the local district authority with the complaint number in case a follow up meeting is required. The next page looks like this.

4/3/2018   E Shikayat

E Shikayat
[Uttar Pradesh]

Home   About Us   Contact   FAQ

Home › E Shikayat

Your Complaint Has Been Registered With Complaint No:
13/58 On Date 03-04-2018

For Citizen

About Us

If you want to contact a department itself,then you can use the information provided under department's website.

IMPORTANT LINK   PRINT

Aniket Gupta explaining the concept of this portal to HE Governor of UP.

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http://eshikayat.com/en/your-voice   1/1

In case a complainant wants to directly correspond (through email) with the Government Authorities after registering the complaint, a link is available providing all the email addresses of the Head of the Departments.

The link pages looks like this, Page 1.

4/3/2018   E Shikayat

E Shikayat

[Uttar Pradesh]

| Home | About Us | Contact | FAQ |

Home › Important Link

Important Link   ## For Citizen

Sr No	Category	Website	About Us
1	Alternative energy	NEW & RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY	HO_SECY@REDIFFMAIL.COM DIRUPNEDA@GMAIL.COM
2	Agriculture	AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT	
3	Animal husbandry	ANIMAL HUSBANDRY DEPARTMENT	
4	Appointment	DEPARTMENT OF APPOINTMENT AND PERSONNEL	CSUP@UP.NIC.IN
5	Energy	DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY	PSECUP.ENERGY@NIC.IN
6	Food	FOOD AND CIVIL SUPPLIES DEPARTMENT	PSFUP@NIC.IN
7	Handicapped	HANDICAPPED DEVELOPMENT	
8	Industry	INFRASTRUCTURE & INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT	IDC.UP@NIC.IN INFO@UDYOGBANDHU.COM
9	Irrigation	IRRIGATION DEPARTMENT	PSECUP.IRRIG@NIC.IN
10	Khadi	KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES BOARD	PRSECY-KHADI@NIC.IN
11	Land reform	PARTI BHUMI VIKAS VIBHAG	UPBSNHQ@UPBSN.ORG
12	health	DEPARTMENT OF MEDICAL, HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE	PSECUP.MEDICAL@NIC.IN
13	Primary education	PRIMARY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT	
14	Panchayat	PANCHAYATI RAJ DEPARTMENT	PSECUP.PANCHRAJ@NIC.IN

Aniket Gupta explaining the concept of this portal to HE Governor of UP.

http://eshikayat.com/en/Important-Link   1/2

The departments and government authorities listed in the **link pages** cover almost the entire gamut of grievances pertaining to the life of a common man, living in urban or rural areas of the state of Uttar Pradesh. Since the sample villages visited by me had more or less the same category of grievances, an effort has been made to list those departments and authorities. Further additions can be done anytime in case of need.

15	Public work	PUBLIC WORK DEPARTMENT	PSECUP.PWD@NIC.IN
16	Revenue	REVENUE DEPARTMENT	PSECREV@NIC.IN
17	Transport	TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT	PSECUP.TRANSP@NIC.IN
18	Rural development	DEPARTMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT	PSECRD@NIC.IN
19	Rural engineering	RURAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT	PSECRES@NIC.IN
20	Secondary education	DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION	
21	Social welfare	DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE	
22	Technical education	TECHNICAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT	PSECTEDU@NIC.IN
23	Board of revenue	BOARD OF REVENUE	BORLKO@NIC.IN
24	Police	UTTAR PRADESH POLICE	DGPCONTROL-UP@NIC.IN
25	Land records	LAND RECORDS	BORLKO@NIC.IN
26	Political pension	POLITICAL PENSION DEPARTMENT	
27	Tehsil	TEHSIL DIVAS	
28	Chief secretary	CHIEF SECRETARY	CSUP@NIC.IN
29	He governor of up	RAJ BHAVAN UTTAR PRADESH	HGOVUP@GOV.IN HGOVUP@NIC.IN

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WSC XHTML 1.0   WSC CSS

For the convenience of the users, FAQ section is added to the website. The page looks like this:

All forms and details shown above are also in Hindi, in case the complainant chooses Hindi as his/her preferred language.

5. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACED DURING IMPLEMENTATION

The biggest challenge that I encountered from the beginning was in identifying the nature of the grievances of the villagers. The villagers were hesitant initially and I was not taken seriously. To few, I appeared a research student and to others I was a Government sent agent to report on the local authorities.

Identification of grievance was challenging as people considered voicing their grievance similar to speaking against local government authorities for fear of reprisals later. The villagers were reluctant to speak about non-governance and lack of development.

In the two sample villages I visited, I found the 'village headman' (*Gram-Pradhan*) hands in glove with the local *Patwari* (Land Record keeper), the *Gram Sewak* (Village Development officer or VDO overseeing development works) and common people owed allegiance to him out of fear or political influence. They were not forthcoming at all. Not only there was complete absence of responsible leadership in the village, even the children were shy to speak about their school conditions or the absence of teachers from their duty. The condition of the local primary health center (PHC) was appalling. The doctor and the medicines were unavailable.

Firstly, my immediate goal was to generate confidence amongst the people. Since I was not part of any NGO (Non Government Organization) and acted alone, I had to spend considerable time and converse in their lingo to make them comfortable. My Mumbai School ID helped me a lot. I met the village level functionaries of the Government and heaped praises on them for their sustained interest for the village (though it was fake) to win their confidence and highlighted their helplessness to do their duty because of lack of support from their seniors. I commiserated with the village functionaries and assured them that their efforts to do more for the villages can bear fruit in case the topmost government functionaries are made aware that despite their best of intentions there was inadequate support. To illustrate this point, I talked to the Junior Engineer of the electricity department in charge of the village who blamed his organization for lack of material replacements to provide better electricity supply in the villages. I assured him that his demand for electric transformers for the village and the required cables would be met once the senior officers of his organization become aware. Though mockingly cynical and circumspect, he was won over by me and agreed to give my efforts a try.

Similarly, I talked to the *Gram Sewak* and other Junior Engineers of various departments overseeing development activities in the villages, and I tried to earn their confidence for their professed earnestness, which I believed they lacked. My explanation of technological architecture of *Eshikayat* in one of the 'public meeting' (*Chaupal*) with the villagers helped me in earning a working trust and acceptability from the two stake holders-villagers and the local government functionaries. My own conduct and demeanor might have helped me to win over their hearts as I dressed, talked, ate and almost behaved like one of them.

While I gained some sort of acceptability and trust at the local level, another challenge was to convince them that their voice would be heard. The local *pradhan* (village headman) who was a crook, had to be on my side as his voice was better understood by his people. I made him believe that he will benefit in terms of people's support if there is a flow of funds to the village and people find him working towards the development of the village. I believe he was more interested in availability of funds than actual support of people. I asked him to arrange meetings with the villagers and his avarice helped me to push my technological module *'Eshikayat'*. He accompanied me on visits to few senior officers of the government to explain my concept of *Eshikayat*. His presence added to my credibility before the senior officers of UP State Government.

A big help to bolster my efforts came when the Lucknow press and media picked up the story. The prestigious newspapers TIMES OF INDIA and HINDUSTAN TIMES carried news about my work (*Eshikayat*).

Times of India, Lucknow.

Hindustan Times, Lucknow.

The biggest help in garnering support of top bureaucracy of the state for my website (*Eshikayat*) came when I met His Excellency the Governor of Uttar Pradesh and explained my concept.

Few photographs are shown below:

With Hon'ble Governor of Uttar Pradesh explaining my concept.

With the Hon'ble Governor of UP along with Governor's Secretariat officers.

The issues and challenges faced by me in developing *Eshikayat* were gradually taken care of by continuous visits to the villages, solution of people's grievances, the publicity it attracted in the state and the encouragement from the Head of the State of Uttar Pradesh.

6. OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

Eshikayat has many benefits. It allowed a standard system of complaint registration and redressal applicable in the entire state of UP. Till now thousands of complaints have been logged. It helps in identifying the category of problems faced by people, especially living in areas which are distant from urban centers. People have gradually become familiar with the potential benefits of the technology used in this portal and how it can enhance efficient and timely service delivery. People have become more vocal and demanding about what they perceive as their right.

It also provides a snapshot of area specific problems. With proper monitoring at the Government level, pockets of dissent can be identified.

This portal/module is scalable. With necessary additions/deletions and changes it can be implemented in a limited area or in the entire country.

It has helped in making the lowest level and *cutting edge* functionaries increasingly responsive due to potential fear of their superiors coming to know of realities at the ground level.

7. KEY LESSONS

Initially it seemed difficult to establish my credibility with the villagers as well as for the instrument I was creating in the form of this module of Eshikayat, yet I being a non-state actor helped me in both as I capitalized on the disillusionment and distrust in the villagers for state-actors. It may be argued that the inherent weakness of the module was lack of complete enforceability of the complaint made, but it was never the objective of the initiative. The objective was to ensure that complaint reached the top rung of bureaucracy. I had devised the mechanism to make all complaints reach the appropriate level in the government and the means of following it up. The very fact that it reached the highest echelons of government ensured its major success.

The *implicit* assumption that *Eshikayat* would help in completely eliminating middlemen who used to act as 'go between' the villagers and the government authorities may not have taken place. The limited preliminary objective of this module was to make the senior level in bureaucracy aware of field situation and solve the problems if any. Though *Eshikayat* did help villagers and saved them from petty middlemen who used to fleece them earlier, but it would be difficult to stop new section of middle-men emerge as it happens with every reformist measure. This section might still try to entice the complainants and seek favors from them in the name of *following up* of registered complaint. But addressing this concern would be beyond my scope of *Eshikayat*.

The number of complaints does not completely provide a comprehensive picture of the nature and seriousness of grievances. In time rumors about few frivolous complaints registered to harass people surfaced. The central point is that the success of *Eshikayat* owes

a lot to its simplicity and without compromising the simplicity of the module I found it difficult to add a feature in Eshikayat for verification of a complaint before action. But the government can certainly verify the complaint before acting upon it.

I presumed that usage of *Eshikayat* portal would encourage children to be educated for its better use and spread of computer literacy. This is difficult to fathom in a short time. A long term evaluation would be needed to draw comparisons.

8. METHODOLY ADOPTED FOR CASE WRITING

The case study documentation is based on field work carried out initially in 2016 and subsequently in during summer of 2017. The findings given above are based on a combination of semi structured qualitative interviews, participant observation and secondary data analysis. The interviews in 2016 covered the residents of villages *Bakkas* and *Papnamau* of district of Lucknow and officers of the state government of UP. More than 100 interviews were conducted in the villages. These interviews focused on identifying the problems of the two villages, their major grievances. In 2017, around 60 interviews in the same villages were conducted to understand the impact of the module *Eshikayat* and its objectives. These interviews focused on the implementation and benefit the target villages derived from the functioning of *Eshikayat*. The interviews sought explanations as to how the module *Eshikayat* was perceived and helped in solving the grievances of the people, the role of state and non-state actors after *Eshikayat* was introduced and people started using it. Interviews were mainly in Hindi, the primary language of the people in the two target villages. Political representatives at village level (*Gram Pradhan* and Block Development Council members) were interviewed to understand their perception about *Eshikayat* and its utility. This approach allowed a triangulation of information from diverse sources.

AUTHOR PROFILE

Author Profile:

Aniket Kumar Gupta is a student of Grade 11 (IBDP) at Singapore International School, Mumbai. He is passionate about computer technology and at an early age had devised a technological platform (Eshikayat) for grievance redress which is currently used by people in the villages of the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. Having learnt *Programming for Mobile Apps* at Stanford University in 2017, Aniket is learning *Data Science with Python* and scheduled to attend course at Harvard University, US in 2018. He created the School Mobile App for Singapore International School, and is used by faculty and students. He intends to graduate from US in Computer Science.