

Corruption: Issues of Legitimacy in a Decentralized Setting

Summary

Despite existence of a plethora of anti-corruption mechanisms, corruption in daily life continues to be a part of life for Indian citizens. This dissertation attempts to understand the multifaceted nature of corruption in daily life and the process through which it acquires social legitimacy. Using constructivist grounded theory approach we study different dimensions of corruption in daily life in the context of village *panchayats* in Indore district of the state of Madhya Pradesh.

Review of literature on corruption reveals an inadequate appreciation of the dynamic meanings and practices through which corruption in daily life reproduces itself and acquires social legitimacy. There is also a gap in understanding how institutionalized cultural practices and social construction results in emergence of legally corrupt but socially accepted practices.

This requires us to study the indexical nature of corruption and the process through which human interpretation produces and organises ‘corruption’ as a part and parcel of everyday life. We also attempt to understand how ordinary citizen wades through an environment of all pervasive corruption and to what extent he himself contributes to the *manufacturing* of the meanings and practices of corruption. In this work, we study the indexicality of corruption by studying the process of legitimization of corruption in the context of decentralization in India, against the backdrop of British colonial rule.

We use Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006) for our enquiry because it is best suited for finding answers to not only ‘what’ and ‘how’ but also ‘why’ questions. Moreover, it provides the necessary flexibility for unravelling a sensitive issue like corruption and enables us to look at the ‘processes’ as a whole and how meanings get created in action. Using this methodology we collected data from BPL families in three gram *panchayats* in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh over a period of six months.

Analysis of the data so collected reveals a number of interesting aspects of indexicality of corruption and the social processes, relationships and norms that lend legitimacy to certain forms of corruption. We find that corruption becomes all pervasive due to non-reporting and condoning certain corrupt practices. We have identified three kinds of social relationships and six kinds of social norms in this study. These social relationships and social norms inform the

context of a particular corrupt act. The legitimacy status of a particular corrupt act is informed by the context where blatantly illegal activities acquire social legitimacy under certain circumstances. In this work the process of legitimization of corruption is theorized in the form of a continuum ranging from lowest social legitimacy to highest social legitimacy. This dynamic nature of legitimacy reveals the indexical nature of corruption. We get the answer to the question ‘what’ in the form of prevalence of corruption and non-reporting and condoning of corruption. We get the answer to the question ‘how’ in the form of a legitimacy of corruption continuum.

Deeper analysis reveals that corruption is part of citizen-state relationship where it is used as a form of resistance against the state. The villagers exercise a complex practical rationality when thinking from the border of indigeneity and modernity. To get answer to the question ‘why’ we find the concept of border thinking given by Mignolo (2000) appropriate in explaining the complexities found in this study.

The main contribution of this work is, theorizing the process of legitimization of corruption in a post-colonial country in the form of a continuum, understanding the use of corruption as a tool of resistance against the State, and bringing to light, the border thinking in action by the common villagers in their everyday life. The understanding derived from this study enables us to suggest policy interventions that can lead to emergence of more socially informed anti-corruption policy.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the nature of the problem. The methodological aspects are dealt with in chapter 2. Chapter 3 comprises of main findings of the study and theorises legitimacy of corruption continuum. Chapter 4 contains discussion about the notion of State, and how corruption is used as resistance against the State. Chapter 5 provides deeper analysis and situates the theorizing and discussion done in this study amongst socio-political theoretical literature by explaining the concept of “border-thinking in operation here. Chapter 6 summarises the findings of this study and provides suggestions for having a socially informed anti-corruption policy in India.

References

- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Mignolo, W.D. (2000). *Local histories/Global Designs*. NJ: Princeton University Press.