DESIGNING DEMOCRATIC AUDIT: ADDRESSING
POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN INDIA

ABSTRACT
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ABSTRACT

Corruption has always been present in society and structures of state but the theoretical as well as the practical understanding of corruption has evolved only in the recent past. Corruption has either been understood as a structural problem of politics and economics or as a cultural and moral problem that makes the study of corruption multi-disciplinary. Notwithstanding this complex understanding of political corruption, theorists have generally identified lack of accountability as one of the major reasons for explaining political corruption. In a democratic setting this implies the failure of political institutions in a society. In this context this thesis makes an attempt to examine why the present institutional set up has failed to tackle political corruption in India, which is done by bringing in various theoretical and empirical studies on corruption and on the working of democracy. One of the attempts of this thesis is to understand the relationship between political institutions and corruption, which is important for an analysis of how we might root out corruption. Acknowledging the importance of political institutions in tackling political corruption, the study also presents its limitations by pointing out that existence and creation of political institutions are not enough to address political corruption in India and there is a need to look beyond institutions. There is a need to design a control mechanism that can prove to be effective in addressing political corruption, which need not be in the form of a new institution, rather, it can be found in the effective participation of the people.

Corruption is under-theorized, especially in India, which results in partial or distorted understandings of the nature of the problem. The general focus is on individuals who are involved in the corrupt act overlooking the systemic nature of corruption and it is because of this partial understanding that connections between corruption and democracy are not well conceived. The thesis, in this context, demonstrates that in India new anti-corruption institutions are created and new reforms are introduced without doing proper research on the subject, which results in the introduction of inefffectual institutions and unproductive reforms. In order to come up with effective anti-corruption reform process there is a need to draw connections
between theory and empirical research, as both form important parts of the research on corruption. It is in this theoretical backdrop that the thesis brings out the need of democratic audit as a tool to bridge the gap between the theoretical and practical understandings of political corruption and emphasises on conducting proper research, probing causal relations, using efficient techniques and starting off processes of debates and awareness to enhance effective people’s participation, which this thesis considers crucial for carving out an institutional mechanism of accountability best suited to tackle political corruption.

In order to identify where reform is most required and what kind of institutions can be most effective in the Indian context, an exhaustive assessment of Indian democracy is required. This requires a blend of the normative and the empirical methods, the former comprising the institutional design of democratic audit and the latter involving the implementation of that design. The focus of this research is on the former, that is, aspects dealing with institutional design of democratic audit and to press the justification for such a design as an intrinsic component of an anti-corruption policy strategy.

Apart from opening up new questions and considerations to be debated at practical level, the purpose of this dissertation is also to recommend a fresh direction for undertaking any anti-corruption policy and research. Democratic audit, as a tool in anti-corruption reform process, is a fresh attempt in the context of India and if successful it will go a long way in identifying innovative problem solving techniques.

Thus, this thesis develops three basic arguments to address political corruption in India. First, that popular understanding of political corruption is problematic and there is a need to understand that political corruption is not just a problem involving only a few individuals but is systemic in nature. Secondly, institutional reform, by itself, is not enough to curb corruption. Thirdly, democratic audit is a pre-requisite of any reform process.