CHAPTER – II

THE SUBJECT-OBJECT DICHTOTOMY:
THE DISCURSIVE DIMENSION
In the previous chapter we argued that solidarity between movements would emerge if they recognize that social reality exists as an ‘integrated material life’ and not in terms of bifurcated and regionally enclosed domains, as represented by the base-superstructure model. Concomitant of this is the status this static model ascribes to ideas/theory or discourse. Discursive practices are reduced to a secondary-epiphenomenon level. They are perceived as mere ‘reflections’ of material process. It is assumed that structurality of various social groups is ‘given’ and would translate into active politics, in course of time. The mediating role of subjective practice between the structure and the process is undermined. This chapter makes an attempt to recover an active subject in arguing that ‘discursive articulations’ have the potential to reconstruct structural positions in alternative forms. In other words, ideas/discourses generated, have the potential to penetrate material practices and alter them. In fact, discursive practices are in themselves material practices and do not exist at a regionally separated ideal level.

It could be observed that in course of time social movements in Andhra Pradesh have dichotomised the relation between theory and practice. Paradoxically, there have been occasions when movements have forged temporary alliances around issues but such experiences do not influence substantial changes at the level of discourse. The reason being the underlying assumption that discursivity is a secondary level practice that has no active role in restructuring the relation between the movements. It is imperative to recognize that cognitive praxis is understood as an indispensable part of any transformative politics. We need, as E.P.Thompson puts it, a ‘new set of terms’ to conceptualise solidarity. This chapter makes at attempt to recover a more comprehensive picture of the subject-object or structure-agency relation.

For this purpose, we will have to begin with the question, what is a structure? Structure is a certain mode of existence of social phenomenon. It refers to certain palpable, identifiable pattern-like phenomenon or arrangements, of various aspects of social interaction or historical process. In other words, any pattern like arrangements of
material and ideal aspects and their interaction would refer to the structural properties of
social reality. "Individuals and groups stabilize their relation by means of shared
memories which crystallize the interactive patterns that come about between them…
more generally, however, we can say that the memories that allow for the structuring of
social life need to be objectified in material forms. Although to a certain extent it is true
that in interactions as such those memories are reproduced and transformed— they are
deposited either in people’s mind or in material objects -memories are of technical and
scientific nature- or in cultural objects of diverse kinds -of which those that embody
writing are the most important ones"1. Interaction between individuals or groups (for
example between individuals of a single class or between antagonistic classes) get
crystallised around certain ideas- that maybe believes, traditions, conventions,
knowledge systems or skills- and material objects- means of production, buildings, etc.
Thus, as Giddens observes, structures are ‘rules and resources recursively implicated in
the reproduction of social system’. Ideas that function as taken for granted, pre-given,
natural or like fixed rules are indispensable part of any definition of structure or patterned
interactions. “Structures consist of inter subjectively available procedures or schemas
capable of being actualized or put into practice in a range of different circumstances.
Such schemas should be thought of as operating at widely varying levels of depth from
Levi-straussian-deep structures to relatively superficial rules of etiquette”2. The other
aspect of structures is resources or material objects (which serve as a source of power in
social interactions). “Resources are of two types, human and non-human. Non-human
resources are objects animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured, that can
be used to enhance or maintain power; human resources are physical strength, dexterity,
knowledge and emotional commitments that can be used to enhance or maintain power”3.
Material objects are material in the sense of being tangible objects that exist in time and
space.

3 Ibid, p.9.
Human resources are also real (though not as tangible as material objects) and exist in time-space. They are observable characteristics, abilities of people who live in particular times, and it is their actualization in people’s minds and bodies that make them resources. Ideas or cultural schemas are also material or have materiality in the sense of affecting (enabling and constraining) social life. Cultural schemas determine social group’s access to resources; they influence physical, emotional and psychological forms of domination and deprivation. For instance, in certain cultural schemas certain force of emotion become forms of enrichment and in others they are forms of deprivation. Ideas do materially and not notionally affect people’s lives.

I

Comprehending Materiality of Discursivity

Ideas/culture and material objects/human resources are all nothing but different forms of materiality. On the one hand while they are all inextricably linked in social reality on the other they possess varied scope to influence social reality in different concrete situations. In order to comprehend their varied scope one needs to understand the unique logic internal to each of these forms of materiality. Material objects have their own unique and varied forms of materiality and thereby have different type of influence on social life. “On closer examination we must distinguish between several types of materiality (of material objects—my addition) according to whether their existence and operation do or do not imply the existence of human beings.”  

Godelier distinguishes between, a) infinite part of nature—climate, nature of subsoil, etc; b) nature transformed by human beings—erosion of soil, changes in vegetation, agriculture, etc; c) directly transformed and cannot be reproduced without human beings-energy, domesticated plants, etc; d) extending the reach of human body—tools and weapons and material support for the production of social life—wood, metal, etc. Godelier is making a distinction between ‘natural materiality’ and ‘humanized natural materiality’. ‘Natural

5 Ibid.
materiality' determines the form of practices of humanized natural materiality. For instance, nature of subsoil determines the nature of crop. Humanized natural materiality (for instance, machines, organization of labour within factories, etc) determines social/collective or cultural materiality. These embedded structural processes need to be not only analytically distinguished but their ontological differences also have to be problematised. This implies that technical or material conditions relating men with nature do not, strictly conceived, include relation between men. In other words, these are two levels of reality natural/technical materiality and social/cultural materiality. "We may envisage a complete material description of a society- a socio-neutral description - from which we cannot deduce its social form. It will provide extensive information, detailing the material abilities and needs of persons, resources and facilities available to them, and scientific knowledge. But ownership patterns, distribution of rights and duties, social rules will go unremarked". Natural/technical materiality (both in its humanized and non-humanised form) has its unique ontological properties distinct from the social/cultural materiality. Many facts, which are fateful for society, are natural or material, and not social facts. For example that large quantities of iron ore are available, railways spreads the land, electricity is in use, etc. Physical properties do not reveal the social character. Though they influence and condition social forms they do not collapse or loose the distinctions of their materiality. According to Cohen, "a description is social if and only if it entails an ascription to persons- specified or unspecified -of rights or powers vis-à-vis other men". Rights and powers, distinct from natural materiality entail cultural materiality. These discursive formations- as rules that determine access to resources, and as ideologies that organize and legitimate existing social relations -have dynamics that are relatively autonomous from that of humanised natural materiality. In other words, they have a structure of their own. Thus, natural material structures and cultural material structures are dialectically linked yet with distinguishable ontological properties.

7 Ibid p.73.
Cultural material structures are, therefore not a second order reality or a reflection of natural material reality, and they are an indispensable part of any social arrangement. It is imperative to comprehend that “no material action of human beings upon nature, by which I mean no action which is intentional and pursued of their own volition, can be executed without a setting to work mental realities, representations, judgements, principles of thought which can under no circumstances be simply reduced to reflections in thought of material relations originating outside it, prior to and independent of it”

It is within cultural schemas that material objects gain their specific social meaning. For instance, material objects (iron ore, coal, machines, etc) become Capital under the capitalist social relations, reproduced through cultural schemas. To either comprehend or transform social material reality, human agency has to negotiate with cultural material structures, which are at the core of all material relations. “In short there is a mental component at the core of our material relation with nature. Three functions of thought mingle there: the representation, organization and legitimation of our relation with each other and with nature”

Thus, cultural structures, which are internal components of all social relations, according to Godelier, intervene in the material processes in three different ways. Firstly, they interpret or represent reality to us. The moment they represent an invisible world as being it starts to exist socially. The mental, therefore, cannot be opposed to the material for thinking involves setting matter- the brain-in motion; an idea is a reality, but an impalpable one. Secondly, cultural structures organize the relations human beings sustain between themselves and with nature. It exists in the form of rules of conduct, principles of action, permission or prescription, and so on. In other words, the symbolically represented world "enters" the material relations by negotiating with the conditioning capacity of the material objects or humanised natural materiality, which is external to the cultural realm. Thirdly, representations or interpretations that organize

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social relations either legitimise or undermine relations between human beings and nature.

These representations combine with other functions of social relations that cannot be reduced to ideas -producing and controlling the material means of existence- and become an inextricable part in such a way that it is almost impossible to clearly delineate social causation between them. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that within this apparently unified reality cultural structural dynamics differ with the dynamics of natural structural relations (due to differential ontological properties). “In the exercise of thought there is always something that transcends the historical moment and material and social conditions of its exercise, something which refers to a reality and history other than that of the thinkers, something rooted in the history of nature, which is at once anterior and exterior...”\textsuperscript{10} Thought cannot be reduced to the social and historical conditions of its existence and therefore its context; it has its own temporality. Discursive/cultural structures move back and forth and thereby create their own momentum and capacity to influence existing social relations.

It is this dynamics of mutuality that are central to what we refer to as structures or structural properties of social relations. “If schemas or to be sustained or reproduced overtime they must be validated by the accumulation of resources that their enactment engenders. Schemas not empowered or regenerated by resources would eventually be abandoned or forgotten, just as resources without cultural schemas to direct their use would eventually dissipate and decay. Sets of schemas and resources may properly be said to constitute structure only when they mutually imply and sustain each other over time”\textsuperscript{11}. For instance, a factory incorporates or actualizes schemas, the factory gate, the

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. p.8.
\textsuperscript{11} Sewell, 1992, op cit, p.15
punching in station, design of the assembly line- all these features of the factory (‘humanized natural materiality’) teach and validate the rules of capital-labor contract.

Thus, humanised natural materiality and cultural materiality have structures of their own; it is at the interface of these structures that one has to locate and problematise human agency. It is in and through human practice and human social relations these structures get produced, reproduced and transformed. It is within the context of these practices and social relations that ‘humanized natural materiality’ transforms into material interest, power resources etc, and within these contexts that natural materiality (with its technical/natural character) conditions social life. In other words, it is within these practices and relations that productive forces become Capital and condition the social life, for instance if productive forces are at the hand-mill stage, they are relatively under developed. Most of the labor will be agricultural in which case capitalist relations are unlikely. Material activity -production- has its own capacity to condition social life into conflicting or harmonious social groups. Similarly, cultural structures- by which we mean ‘propositions existing in any given social unit at a particular time that is corpus of truths and falsehoods cherished in society at any given time- have their own capacity to condition social life. In other words, “ideational interaction can spawn its own vested interest groups, collectives as we have seen, who first acquire different ideal interest through which they later develop different material interest by receiving differential material rewards from their collective capital”. Cultural factors often have been deemed accountable for the failure of conflict to manifest itself, although the structural conditions appear ripe. Ideas are not reducible to ideational expression of the struggle between material interest groups, on the contrary they have the capacity to create antagonistic material interest between otherwise dormant groups and create harmony and tranquility between antagonistic material interest groups. False consciousness of ideological groups gets manifested in their material practices (false consciousness itself is a material practice, it has to be materially negotiated for the groups to get constituted historically).

However, both cultural material structures and natural material structures are too closely enmeshed in historical process to be clearly delineated and for their causation to be clearly and separately grasped. “In other words, the interactional phase, whether we are dealing with social-cultural interaction or that taking place between structured interest groups, always entails a great deal of interpretation between the two”\(^\text{13}\). It is within this interactive domain that natural material structures are comprehensible only through discursive-cultural structures, which have no other embodiment other than natural material structures. This enmeshed existence not only makes it difficult to delineate, as aforesaid, the causation between the two structural domains but also makes the issue of human agency further complex.

Historically, at certain conjunctures, it is possible to observe certain trends where one could argue (notwithstanding the fact that it is only an approximation) that one of the structures is clearly influencing and transforming the other. It is possible “when there are discontinuities between the morphostatic/morphogenetic sequence in the structural and cultural domain that one of these is found to be more consequential for the other, temporally and temporarily”\(^\text{14}\). (Though the temporality Archer is referring to could vary from an era or century to a specific event of few days). Archer refers to four such plausible historical situations.

a) **Conjunction between structural morphostasis and cultural morphostasis:**

It refers to a situation where force of hegemonic ideas imposes itself on stable social groups and the fortune of dominant groups reinforces the stability of ideas. There is a monolithic unity between cultural discourse and dominant material interest group.

\(^{13}\) Ibid. p.282.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.p.288
(b) **Distinction between cultural morphostasis and structural morphogenesis:**

Once new material interests groups have unleashed novel ideas and provided that they continue to hold to them, then the old unification of the population has been undermined by definition.

(c) **Distinction between cultural morphogenesis and structural morphostasis:**

Cultural morphogenesis can quietly prompt the sectional differentiation of new groups or can intensify conflict by bringing about the polarization of existing latent interests. Ideational change stimulates social regrouping. It transforms people into potential competitors, although it occurs in the cultural domain, its effects do not stop there because cultural actors are also structural agents. For instance, upsurge of renaissance and enlightenment washes over and around social institutions, reducing them to crumbling sand castles.

(d) **Conjunction between cultural morphogenesis and structural morphogenesis:**

It is possible that the discursive structures undergo transformation along with social group’s access to resources, opportunity structures, and power equations. In such cases often new social groups with new ideational principles become dominant with change beginning simultaneously in both structural and cultural domains.\(^\text{15}\)

Human agency is located at the interface between morphogenic and morphostatic cycles. Social groups become active agents not only when material objects are unequally distributed to create antagonistic groups but also when these groups negotiate with dominant discursive structures. It is necessary to understand that “a unified theoretical approach will permit full account to be given of how discursive struggles are socially

\(^\text{15}\) Ibid.p.289-99.
organized and how social struggles are culturally conditioned. Individuals, thus, are born into not only material structures, as Marx observed, but also into structured cultural systems, which have temporality of their own. Counter-hegemonic ideational structures are as necessary for the subordinate social groups as material interests to maintain cohesiveness and transform the existing social conditions and sustain the changes. Social groups can coalesce and split not only according to given structured material interests but also discursive formations. Human agency has to be located within these dual systems.

**Fig. 2.1**

![Diagram](image)

Agency is conditioned by both material interest structures and cultural material structures. In turn it has to negotiate both these structures to transform social relations. Human agents face an integrated and enmeshed reality with both the aforesaid structures overlapping at times and contradicting at other instances. If individuals are born into these pre-given, cultural and material interest structures, from where do social groups gain the capacity to act and what is the scope of this volition? How far is this subjective dimension identifiable independent of its structured condition? Bourdieu recognises the mutual reproduction of schemas and resources that constitutes temporally durable structures, which he calls the 'habitus'. According to him schemas and resources

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16 Ibid. p.XXVI.
17 Ibid.
reproduce one another, so powerfully, that even the most cunning or improvisational actions undertaken by the agents necessarily reproduce the structures and thereby can never be clearly delineated from its structural conditions. "Thus, when there is a fairly close correspondence between 'vocation' and 'mission', between the demand that is for the most part implicitly, tacitly even secretly inscribed in agent's possession and the supply contained in their disposition, it would be futile to seek to distinguish those aspects of their practice which derive from their positions and those which derive from the dispositions they bring into these positions" 18. Bourdieu cites the example of Louis XIV, to argue that he was so totally identified with the position he occupied in the gravitational field of which he was the sun that it would be futile to try determine which of all the actions occurring in the field is or is not the product of his volition 19. Bourdieu purports to argue that structures are all encompassing and that there cannot be human volition independent of them. In a sense, human actions cannot go beyond structures and therefore it is futile to look for a subjective dimension. Bourdieu makes such formulations because he intends to look for agency outside structures- social systems, institutions, and organizations. Human agency does not mean it exists outside all spatial-temporal conditionality; on the contrary it is within the contours of structures that agents constitute their volition. Moving beyond totalising formulations does not mean moving beyond structural conditionality.

Agency is implied by the existence of structures and not their absence. Agency is active not when structures are suspended but when they are consciously transformed. In other words, structures as external, constraining resources and rules are transformed into enabling properties of transformation. This 'duality of structure' is significant to understand the ongoing process of structural constraint and human volition. Agency and structure are involved in an endless three-part cycle of, structural conditioning-social

19 Ibid p. 301.
interaction-structural elaboration. As Archer observes, time is incorporated as a theoretical variable rather than simply as a medium in which events take place. Objectified structures- a definite pattern of dispersion of resources and rules -themselves provide the necessary conditions and resources to transform them. For instance, occupancy of different social positions - as defined by gender, wealth, social prestige, class, ethnicity, occupation, generation, sexual preference or education- gives people knowledge of different schemas and access to different kinds and amounts of resources and hence different possibilities for transformative action. All social groups have in varying degrees certain constraining structural properties and certain enabling features. For women while patriarchy operates as a structural constraint their education will act as an enabling structural property. Thus, structures themselves have a dual role. Each social group has some resources at its disposal by virtue of its structural location. For instance, working class has solidarity as a resource at its disposal. The resource of solidarity is as much part of the structure as constraining condition of lack of possession of means of production. This duality of structure, as Giddens argues, allows for human agency under any social condition. Structure therefore not only conditions and constraints human practice but also gets constituted and reproduced by these very practices. In other words, structures (material and ideal) are both the 'medium' and the 'outcome' of social activity. "The rules and resources we draw on are the medium of our activity in the sense they enable us to do things and have intentions. At the same time, they also represent the outcome or consequences of our activities in so far as we endorse their value by using them, contribute to their reproduction"20. Thus, various material and ideal structures simultaneously condition the outcome of a practice and also enable in constituting motivation and intentions in human actors. The creative and transformative impulse in human beings occurs through the very structural properties that otherwise condition their action. Structures cannot be reproduced outside human practice and it cannot occur outside the existing structural conditions. Caste-class-gender structures reproduce themselves only through the concrete, everyday activity of individuals in various face-to-

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face situations and therefore structures are not static but are in continuity with human action. Thus structure-agency relation is nothing but the “nature of interaction in situations of co-presence and the connection between these and ‘absent’ influences relevant to the characterization and explanation of social conduct”\(^{21}\). The ontological continuity of structure-agency relation however is coupled with the interlacing of intended and unintended consequences. Ontological continuity is not based on a game plan or a blue print of human actors; on the contrary often structures get reproduced as the unintended consequences of human action. Certainly people do intend to do things in social situations but by so doing they unintentionally reproduce the social fabric which underpins rules of the game, the etiquette of courtship, norms of co-operation and so forth. In other words, for Giddens the unintentional activity of human beings gets converted into the unintended consequences of both reproducing the existing structures and producing new structural arrangements. Duality of structures can be comprehended only if we understand structures as both being reproduced by human activities and also as existing prior to these activities. Structures have 'depth ontology', they are at a distance from everyday activity because they are the very conditions and also pre-date these activities. Yet, quite paradoxically, they get reproduced only through the concrete practices of individuals. “The objectivity of social structures derives from their relative independence from specific instance of social activity, although they are not independent of reproductive activity per se. Of course macro phenomenon of this type are historically created through the transformative activities of human beings, but once they are constructed and ‘in operation’ so to speak they represent preformed constrains and facilities in relation to the conduct of future generations”\(^{22}\). The ontological property of structure is such that they are both independent and dependent on concrete human activity. In other words, structures are more than mere ‘aggregations’ of specific human interactions. For instance, Collins argues that social structures are only a collection


of repeated micro situations. Ideas about structure of power in organization can be translated into detailed empirical description of the ways in which particular people actually exert authority in those settings. It is the sheer number of encounters that make up a macro structure. Structures cannot be reduced to repetitions of micro encounters between concrete individuals, their ontological properties extend beyond these encounters. It is within this differentiated, yet integrated ontological existence that one has to make sense of structure-agency relation.

Structures and their existence, their reproduction and production have to be understood as separate moments within a unified historical process. Between the spatial and temporal expanse of the structures and the compressed face-to-face interactions between individuals, there are distinct sets of ontological properties of structures that operate and condition human interaction. These distinct sets cannot be collapsed into a simplistic continuity between structure and activity. Derek Layder attempts the partial explanation of such differentiated existence of structures through the following distinctions:

![Fig.2.2](chart.png)

The objectivity of social structures lies in their pre-constituted, transituational and impersonal existence. This ontologically separates them from interaction between concrete actors and the structures they generate therein. On the basis of this fundamental
differentiation we could comprehend how structures at various levels condition the concrete, everyday action and how these practices in turn produce and reproduce their conditions of existence. Formal and substantive structures are contextual structures, which provide the conditions and environment of action. No action occurs beyond these structural conditions, which are given and pre-constituted for the actors. Formal structures, according to Layder, refer to objective structures which exist at high level of generality and influence action in a rather diffuse, though systematic manner. For instance, language, economy, law, etc. These structures though function in a systematic manner they get dispersed in various fields or practices. They are tangible only in concrete organizations and practices. The other forms are referred to as substantive contextual structure. Substantive structures do not necessarily refer to a physical location, such as particular factory or firm but rather to certain distinct social structural properties. In other words, substantive structures are certain 'nodal points' around which specific and overlapping effects of formal structures can be observed and negotiated. The exact formal contexts involved are important for analytical purposes will vary with specific problem at hand. Both formal and substantive contexts provide different moments or aspects of the conditions of interaction. "That is, by concretizing and grounding the more general constraints of wider social system, in the structural sites of interaction, such constraints are realised in the interaction. As mediating agencies substantive contexts handle and mediate the overlapping influence of many analytically separable formal contexts simultaneously"\textsuperscript{23}. For instance, to analyze interaction vis-à-vis a wage negotiation between workers and management in an industrial organization, certain formal structural conditions would be relevant, (a) general economic climate (b) legal position (c) class based interests. Layder cites the example of a bureaucratic work organization where the hierarchy of authority reflects both the differential power situations of different work or occupational groups in the economy as a whole while also

reflecting specific relations of deference that are a feature of bureaucratic organization and the particular variance of this that arise under specific conditions. Formal and substantive conditions are analytical distinctions in order to comprehend how social structures have, spatially-temporally, generalized existence beyond specific physical locations and instances of interaction, yet they ground their conditioning and transmute their affect at these very sites. In order to grasp structural objectivity and the link with human practices, comprehending this paradoxical situation is imperative. However, these structural conditions do not exhaust social reality. Beneath these or within these structural conditions concrete individuals or social groups interact (co-operate, negotiate, contradict, communicate, etc). This interactional process is conditioned by the contextual structures and yet retains its own autonomy manifested in the situation-specific properties. This is what Layder refers to as the ‘interaction structure’. "The concept of interaction structure is designed to facilitate the emphasis upon the relational (and indexical) nature of interaction. Whilst its connection with the pre-constituted and constraining contextual structure secures its link with reproduced structures as an essential conditional mediation of interaction". While all interaction occurs between the context of formal and substantive structure, the practice of interaction itself retains certain capacity to negotiate with these social structures. This capacity is nothing but the interpretive, reflexive, reasoning capacities of concrete social actors. These encounters produce versions of social reality, which are not deducible from a formal analysis of the constraints of social structure but are also not reducible to the analysis of individuals or interaction. These indexical features born out of interactive structures have to be necessarily understood as the subjective dimension of social reality. Though interaction is located within given social/structural conditions, its outcome is hardly comprehensible from these conditions. It is this ‘specificity’ of interaction that needs to be studied in relation to contextual structures. Layder believes that, "articulation between contextual and interaction structures which constitutes the important generative

24 Ibid, p.100.
mechanism lie beyond the lived experience of interaction"\textsuperscript{26}. Actors mostly have only partial knowledge about the contextual structural conditions of existence and therefore structures have distinct ontological capacity to survive and reproduce themselves both spatially and temporally over generations. This complexity of the objective terrain is therefore both dynamic and beyond the immediate lived experience of the individuals. This notion of everyday activity or practice is very important to comprehend the relation between structure and interaction. It in fact defines a large portion of this relation (though by no means is this relation exhaustive). Thus, everyday, routine activity of individuals and groups only reproduce the existing structures and often fail to effectively transform them. Actors in this sense are the ‘tragers’ of structural conditioning. “This is by way of saying that the creations, negotiations, constructions, that are ‘products’ of skilled actors in routine interaction in everyday life and which are implicit in the notion of indexicality, pertain solely to the production of interaction structure, and not to the contextual structure which constitute their pre-constituted and constraining environment”\textsuperscript{27}. As structure and action cannot be conflated, production and reproduction activity of individuals and social groups need to be differentiated. Social groups are thus born in to pregiven material and discursive/cultural contextual structures, which condition their interaction and in course of interaction reproduce themselves and gain stability and durability. Production-reproduction duality sensitizes us to the fact that not only structures; even action has depth ontology. “That is to say that structures that are produced by actors are interactive structures and not contextual structures... Bourdeiu and Giddens (is to) engage in a sophisticated form of reductionism and empiricism, that is conflation of (contextual ) structures with action, by their conceptualisation of this kind of structure as an effect on production of interaction”\textsuperscript{28}. In other words, routine activity only reproduces the structures and the emergent features of interaction are limited to the situation-specific structures generated in course of interaction. These features attain only limited

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p.109.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, p.112.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, p.108
externality and autonomy and in so doing would constrain only the behaviour of those within the domain or scope of its influence. According to Layder, “a truly generalised externality and autonomy could only be realized under specific (non-routine) conditions conducive to full institutionalization” 29.

The relation between interaction and contextual structures can shift from mere reproduction to transformation under specific conditions of organized activity by social groups. Interaction and social praxis does not relate to the contextual structures in any single manner, it shifts according to concrete conditions. As Perry Anderson notes, there are three forms of agency, (a) an agency that pursues private goals (b) agency that pursues public activity or goals but with in existing social relations- military conflict, diplomatic transactions, etc (c) unprecedented form of agency, which aims at global social transformations, such as American and French Revolution. According to Anderson, scope for human action -self-determination- depends on historically specific conditions. Althusser’s structuralism and Thomson’s humanism may each, in particular condition and circumstances, be true 30.

Revolutionary activity and social movements represent a non-routine form of agency. They are organized modes of practice that have the potential, not just to reproduce structures, but negotiate and transform them. We need to locate this discussion on structure-agency relation within the context of contemporary social movement’s activity.

29 ibid. p.115
II

Contemporary Social Movements and the Structure-Agency Relation

In the first section of this chapter, we delineated the structure-agency relation in the context of everyday/routine activity. How such activity is connected to social structures by reproducing them as unintended consequences of their practices. Material and discursive structures have capacity to reproduce themselves beyond the specific instances of interaction between individuals and social groups.

However, interaction within social movements is of a different order. Individuals and groups within social movements interact- negotiate, communicate, and construct -not only to grasp the objective nature of social structure but also to transform and alter them. Social movements are precariously located at the intersection of material structures that unevenly distribute power and resources and cultural and discursive structures that determine meanings in everyday life, collective self-definitions, traditions of protest, transformation in consciousness vis-à-vis dominant ideology. Social movements have to negotiate with and through these material and discursive arrangements, to transform the complex of given social relations.

How do social movements negotiate and transform these given structural arrangements. Do counter-hegemonic discourses become effective only when structural conditions are destabilised? In that case, shouldn’t we be studying the structural factors generating disequilibria rather than cultural challenge that only then come into play? Or, alternatively, do cultural/discursive process create political opportunities and not just in the subjective perceptions of mobilisers. How do these alternative formulations alter the notion of the agency? Finally, how can these abstract processes be empirically demonstrated within concrete social movements?
As we have already argued in the first section of this chapter, cultural and material structures have independent internal dynamics and both have the potency to influence and transform the other. There is no linear relation between these two structures, in this sense, material transformation need not necessarily lead to ideological changes among social groups and vice versa. However in the long run there need to be some symmetry between these structures to maintain their stability and reproduce themselves. Human agency needs to be aware of this basic autonomy between these structures and potential each of them possesses to transform the other. This complex interrelation between them is a never ending and open-ended process. Human agency needs to grasp the internal dynamics of each and effectively use them to bring overall social transformation. There cannot be a strict theoretical formulation regarding either the scope of each of this process or the conditions under which they become effective and dominant. However, it is possible to trace the contours and consequence of these complex processes.

It is not always true that given material structural arrangements dictate the cultural process and therefore social movements are born out of either crisis or disequilibria of these structural arrangements. In other words, social groups with material interests do not become aware only during crisis situations and can transform the condition when dominant material structures are suspended. Cultural/discursive process often precedes and attenuates the process of structural change. They can precede mobilization and often transform the modes of protest and their effect on various forms of domination. In fact certain forms of domination have purely symbolic existence, which may or may not overlap with material inequalities. In that case, struggles do become symbolic or cultural in nature. Social movements create social meanings, identities, values that do not just reflect existing structural inequalities and forms of exploitation but create awareness regarding new forms of domination and new political opportunities to struggle against them. For instance, a movement may be responsible for lowering the level of State repression that is considered legitimate and that can therefore be deployed against
subsequent challenges. Thus not only are material inequalities closely based on reproduction of meanings that are contestable but these ideas can destabilize obdurate institutional arrangements. These counter-hegemonic discourses originate within the conscious interaction, communication, and exchange of ideas between individuals and social groups. They can originate in what Polletta refers to as ‘free spaces’ - “small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from direct control of dominant groups and are generative of the cultural challenges that precede political mobilisation”. These ‘masterframes’ influence the strategic aspects of movements—means and modes of protest, and mobilisational strategies, recruitment networks, social base along with the framing of goals and ends. For instance, demarcations of private and public or personal and political influence claiming making within movements as well as outside them. It is often through these discursive practices that collective identities are ‘recognised’ and ‘constructed’. Cultural process is not a second order reflection of already constituted social/material reality but is the indispensable part of that reality and plays an active and determinate role in both representing and organizing it. No social reality can exist outside cultural scheme and therefore reality is ideal and discursive alongside materially constituted social groups, and their interests and conflicts. Discursive practices are central to not only the subordinate group and their politics of transformation but also for the dominant group. Their material interests are often expressed within the dominant cultural practices, and cultural practices they adopt become dominant and hegemonic. “State-makers and managers are suspended in webs of meaning... (It is reflective in) the ways in which state official’s ideological commitments, moral assumptions, policy styles and collective identity help shape particular state policies and institutions.\(^3\)

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\(^3\) Ibid.p.435
\(^3\) Ibid.p.440
Thus, the floating discursive processes mediate the whole edifice of social reality. Reality itself is organized according to certain discursive formations; 'experience' of such reality is not linear but is further mediated by ideological constructions, which in turn influence social and political action. Reality-experience-action, continuum is always a mediated process. Each moment of mediation can create complex variations to the process, which always makes it partially an open-ended process. "Collective identity anchored in structural inequalities can be constructed in different ways and in ways that entail different kinds of challenge to the system"34. For instance, Asian and Caribbean youth calling themselves 'black' in British youth movement. In other words, "a social group defined by social location can be constituted in more than one way in a mobilisation context"35. The meaning and mode of construction of social identity can be constructed in different ways and transform the manner in which material demands are made and thereby change the nature of challenge to the system. Apart from the construction of identity intervening in the constitution of the material demands, constructing a new collective identity itself can be an instrumental and radical aim of protest. Identity struggles need not neatly overlap with clearly delineated material interests. This dual process should be comprehended to grasp how structure-agency relation gets transformed in each of this context. Agency can get constituted on the basis of material interests or can be posited through conflicts based on identity construction. Both forms of struggle are material and reconstitute social relations in the concrete reality.

Thus, structure-agency relation gets complexly interlaced with material and cultural processes. Neither of these concepts can be rigidly separated from each other nor can any of them be equated with each other. "conceptualising social categories in

35 Ibid.p.105
dichotomising terms obviously precludes analysis of the interplay of each side of the
dichotomy. It also defines each term by analogy to other dichotomous terms. Thus, with
no attempt to substantiate the claims implicitly made, culture becomes subjective and
structure objective, self-conscious normative orientation becomes cultural and strategic
ones acultural, and culture becomes ‘deep’ and politics superficial\textsuperscript{36}.

Social movements, therefore, negotiate and in turn get constituted by the structural
and cultural processes simultaneously. ‘Subjective’ cannot be equated with just cultural
because both structural and cultural processes reproduce themselves only through the
regular practices of individuals and social groups. In other words, subject-subjective is
present in both structural and cultural practices. Similarly, structural cannot be equated
with objective because even cultural practices (ex: knowledge systems) have a structure-
pregiven pattern independent of individual’s awareness about them. Cultural practices
are as objective as structural-material practices.

Subjective-objective dimensions undergo radical reconstitution in the context of
social movements. Individuals and social groups and their practice in social movements
cannot be equated with the generalized ‘subjective’ element that reproduces the social
structures unintentionally. Subjective dimension or agency within social movements is a
conscious agency that desires to alter social relations on the basis of ‘critical knowledge’.
Subject-object relation posited on relation of reproduction has to be transmuted into an
activity based on production, creation and transformation. How individuals and social
groups re-negotiate the existing cultural structures-knowledge systems, laws, rules,
traditions, dominant ideologies, etc, and alter the structural arrangements. The interaction
within social movements therefore, as Layder claims, does not produce just interactive
structures and reproduce social structures but constitutively intervenes and
institutionalises alternative pattern of social relations. This alternative practice is what is
strictly meant by ‘Agency’. “Agency arises from the actor’s control of resources which

\textsuperscript{36} Polletta, 1997, op. cit. p.440
means the capacity to reinterpret or mobilise an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constituted the array. Individuals and social groups create new meanings and material arrangements. This conscious transformative activity cannot be collapsed into a generalized relation between subjective-objective factors in dormant social conditions.

Structures -both material and cultural- are pregiven, though contestable, social conditions in which social actors operate either to reproduce or transform them. As invoking structures does not mean rigid, static and inevitable social life, allowing play to cultural dynamics does not mean there is no situational and contextual logic to social conditions. While structuralism has come to represent rigid reproduction of social conditions, contemporary culturalism seems to argue for a complete absence of ‘logic’ of existing social conditions. In other words, it is true that social actors are not only structural agents but also cultural actors, in the sense of holding the capacity to generate-through collective mobilization- collective definition of interests, norms, values and identities in order to transform the existing social conditions in manifold ways. However, this penetration into the existing social structural conditions, by collective subjectivity through cultural dynamics does not mean that there is no material and cultural- ‘situational logic’. In fact, social actors act at both levels - structural and cultural - in order to constitute collective subjectivity and forge radical transformation. There can be no situation in which there is either ‘pure’ structural change or ‘pure’ cultural transformation. There could be asymmetrical relation in terms of relative influence of each of these dimensions but there cannot be a complete absence of either of them. There could be social conditions in which rigid structural material conditions do not allow counter-hegemonic culture to shape itself and therefore change might occur through some sort of suspension or crisis of structural arrangements or on the contrary, rigid cultural practices might not allow opposing material interest groups to struggle. Similarly, certain

37 W. Sewell, 1999, op. cit p.20
pattern of dispersion of material interests among different social groups might allow them to contest or collide in accordance with the dominance of different cultural practices. None of these instances, however, refer to an absence of a pre-given situational logic. For instance, Klaus Eder is justified in arguing that contemporary social movements represent, "the shift of emphasis away from a historically given field of class conflict to fluid areas of social conflicts"\textsuperscript{38}. In other words, social actors are creating alternative meanings and are involved in social construction of material and cultural struggles. This however does not mean that either material or cultural arrangements lack any sort of pre-given logic and that social actors are free to construct collective identities beyond the constraints of any context. This is evident when Eder argues, "class is not a social fact but is a social construction. This forces the abandonment of any idea of the natural existence of class. There are no lower, middle, and dominant classes as such"\textsuperscript{39}. Structural logic of social conditions is equated, in such arguments, with floating cultural practices. Hence, it is assumed that discursive intervention is the singular force around which collective identities and social groups shape themselves. \textit{Structure-agency relation is posited, in such formulations, only within the cultural field neglecting the dynamics propelled by opposing material interests within the material structural domain.}

Similarly, Prezeworski ultimately reduces the social field to that of a 'structure of choices' to individuals and social groups. Unlike Laclau and Mouffe who argue that identity is exclusively a product of discourse and it enjoys absolute autonomy from material constitution of social groups. Prezeworski believes that without an understanding of the structure of interests, values or norms that are autonomous from the activities of organized collective actors we fall into a radical indeterminism.


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, p.33
In other words, Prezeworski is tracing a series of action-structure-action in which structure is nothing but or determination outside the unintended activity of individuals, which is capable of determination outside these practices. This argument refers to the earlier formulation regarding the paradoxical nature of social structure. Prezeworski argues that, "in France socialist party seeks to mold individuals who are machine operators, mails, Catholics and small-town dwellers into workers; the Catholic Church tries to convert them into Catholics; the army seeks to forge them into Frenchmen.... The result of this strategic interaction at every moment is some structure of identities on the basis of which individuals act in collective life, the structure of collective action. In turn, the effect of collective actions is a structure of identity. And so history marches on"\(^40\). Prezeworski does not recognise a structural realm 'outside' subjective human practice. Not only is the social and historical logic molded by the intended and unintended practice of human beings, but also historical logic itself has the potential to determine this human practice. Recognition of this paradoxical logic of history is imperative in comprehending emergent properties of collective action. "Class formations are generated by living and experiencing within a complex totality of social relations and historical legacies, they presuppose what is lived and experienced: production relations and the determinate situations into which men are bond or enter involuntarily"\(^41\). Alongside human practice is the imperative of historical logic. This historical logic manifested as 'objective determination never imposes itself on some non descript, undifferentiated raw material of humanity but is always mediated by human beings who are bearers of historical legacies, traditions and values. "Classes develop within mode of production in the process of coalescing around the relations of the production and as the composition, cohesion, consciousness and organisation of the resulting class formation change"\(^42\). Social reality

\(^{42}\) Ibid p.97
can be comprehended only in terms of graded structurality. None of the levels of this can be conflated or collapsed into the other. Neither is there a linear motion from one level to the other. In short, individuals and groups are organized into production relations in accordance with the imperatives of production process and these objective grounds provide the basis for the social groups to "experience" a common situation and emerge as classes or collective actors. This experience itself is opened to manifold mediations of political, ideological and cultural processes. The processes themselves are internally divided and possess contested strands. This whole complex of social conditions is opened to stratified objective determination and conditioned subjective interventions. Thus objective economic, political and ideological determination is not, as Preworski himself argues 'acted out' by social groups, because they are mediated by collective action and struggle, however collective action itself cannot occur within unbounded social conditions where everything including the class one belongs to is reduced to a matter of choice. "Social relations-economic, political or ideological-are not something that people 'act out' in ways reflecting places that they occupy, but are structure of choices given at a particular moment of history". In other words, historical process has to be made sense of in terms of complexly graded social situations, which are differently structured in terms of the scope, cohesiveness, discursivity, etc. Material and cultural processes though omnipresent have varied scope in different social conditions. Each of these concrete social conditions has to be ascertained in order to comprehend and contextualise social movements and the continuum of the structure-agency relation within these movements. Structure-agency components and their relation would therefore manifest itself quite differently in different social movements. Each movement has to be empirically studied in order to understand how movements are structurally grounded and how they in turn are negotiating with the given 'situational logic'. There cannot be blanket conclusions about structure-agency relation within social movements or the impact of this difference on the relation between social movements.

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43 Op cit. A.Preworski. p.173
All social movements have both structural and cultural dimensions within them. They are partially grounded in certain constituent features of social organization and partially mobilize through discursive construction of identities that are akin to the experiences of these constituent features. Social movements can also generate new forms of experience from old forms of social organisation of the society. However movements might differ to what extent they are structurally grounded and what extent they have to discursively construct a social base necessary for the struggle. It should however be remembered that strong structural groundedness does not mean either linear relation to action nor absence of cultural dynamics. Similarly social construction of a movement does not mean absence of tacit structural conditions. It can be observed that “social movements tap collective identities that are structurally and historically grounded in the social organization of the society; movements based on race, gender and class provide obvious examples. There are differing degrees of structural groundedness even across these categories. Thus, blacks have had the most consistent sense of collective identity, women have had the least consistent sense of collective identity; and workers have occupied an intermediate ground between blacks and women” 44. In other words, structural logic possesses different type of challenge for each social movement. Different social movements cannot adopt similar strategies to construct collective identities and forge transformation. Women’s movement, due to a situational logic that is dispersed, and divided between public and private spheres has by necessity to follow a different strategy from that of other social movements. This difference is visible for instance in how confrontationist they cab be; whether structure of organization can be centralized or decentralized; whether collective movements can be continuous or sporadic; how close are the movements to everyday life and institutionalized practices. The structural logic to an extent also determines the ideological orientation; in turn these ideological orientations transform the structural reality and the way it is perceived by women over a period of time.

Not all social movements enjoy this kind of structurally grounded organization. For instance, anti-nuclear, and environmental movements have no natural or cohesive social group. In fact, a large section of population is affected by some of these issues. Such situations allow cultural processes to play a more dynamic role. In other words, 'the symbolic' mode of expression of these forms of domination have to be socially constructed for various social groups to identify and struggle. The structural logic of society is such that there cannot be any 'immediate' social group that would constitute itself around this issue. Culturalism in such movements does not refer to an absence of situational logic, though there could be a larger mosaic of cross alliances and opposing social groups. For instance, it is possible that worker's groups can adopt pro-nuclear stand. ‘Intermediate stages' in collective action such as ideological orientations, social recruitment, forms of organisation and infrastructure, conflicting strategies and mobilisation techniques have definitely a more dynamic role. The two extreme points of the ‘collective identity continuum' signifies that structural reality is neither unified nor linear. It is always graded and stratified. It also means that conversion of structural logic into collective movements depends on subjective perception of this situation. As argued earlier, alternative constructions will have varying influence on whether collective movements can be built or not. In other words, structural groundedness makes it more probable that cultural processes are cohesive and structural dispersion of elements makes cultural practices more floating and dynamic. These are, however, only generalised conclusions and can often differ in concrete empirical situations. At another extreme of the continuum is Melucci’s observation on contemporary new social movements. He argues that these movements address individuals as individuals rather than as representatives of groups. He analyses power relations in Foucauldian terms. They operate not through collective identities but through individual experience and through ‘micro-phycization' of power and for its existence “power must effect every day life, the
deep motivation of individual action must be manipulated. One can speak of ‘power micro-physics’ or a shift in social action from external to internal nature. In other words, experience is conditioned directly at the level of the individual and social or collective identities no longer matter. Individuals thus have multiple social experiences and thereby temporary identities on the social field. Individuals voluntarily decide to collectively act around issues and it would be temporary and shifting. It is this ‘homelessness’ of personal identity that has transformed the nature of contemporary social movements. It perhaps suggests, “sociological analysis of these processes of social de-and re-composition leads Melucci to conclude that we may be facing the end of (old) politics, as well as the end of (actor-type) social movements. This is the most radical breach not only with class interpretation but also with traditional sociology which views action as socially embedded and structurally rooted. Authentic action, Melucci suggests, is free action that is open-ended and creative. In such formulations agency has an unbounded freedom to actualise itself.

To conclude this chapter, structural-material processes and cultural-material processes cannot be clearly separated or permanently heirarchised. They in fact are inextricably linked and intervene in each other’s dynamics. Therefore neither can structure be equated with objective nor culture with subjective. On contrary, subjective dimension is present through out the structure-culture continuum. It is the structural agents who are the cultural actors. Subjective and cultural dimensions are part of the structure and not outside it.

Second conclusion that can be drawn from the above reformulation is that though subjective and cultural elements are inextricable part of the material structures, they have differentiated constitutiveness in particular historical moments. In other words, interaction and structure as routine practices are linked through unintentional

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46 Maheu. 1995, op .cit p.75
reproduction of social structures and creative production of interactive structures. Thus, structure-agency relation is interlaced with unintention-reproduction, because of the preconstituted, transitiuational existence of social structures.

However, structure-agency relation undergoes a definite change in the context of social movements and the practice of institutionalization. Hence the relation transmutes from unintentional reproduction to conscious, creative intervention. In other words, interaction within social movements creates not only interactive structures but also alternative social structure.

Further, within this non-routine context of mutual influence between structure and agency, there are differing moments of structuration between structure and agency. In some contexts while the structural-cultural processes are cohesive and grounded, collective action can take relatively more definite shape and where these processes are fluid and floating collective action can be temporary, sporadic and local. Within the creative plain in the context of social movements, structure-agency relation can alter from 'structured processes' to 'individualized protest behavior'. 