CHAPTER II: Theoretical Perspectives

De Certeau points out that the objects produced by an inquiry result from its (more or less original) contribution to the field that has made it possible, or the field of the intellectual and social “commerce” that organizes their definition and their displacement.(De Certeau, 1984: 43-44) Actually, it may be not an exaggeration to say that each theory or concept has its own background and historical context which helps us understand why it was created and what it means. For my study, the theoretical backgrounds are the discussions over practice and space which owe to the sociological and phenomenological approaches to human body that emerged in the 20th century. Therefore, I will start with the theoretical perspective on human body in this chapter.

2.1 New Approaches to Body

Among the political and sociological approaches about the human body to be developed in the 20th century, we can not overlook Foucault’s contribution. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses ‘the political technology of the body’. (Foucault, 1977: 26). He tries to discover the relation of body and power through looking at the pedigree of the penalty.

According to him, by 1830-48, public executions which was preceded by torture almost entirely disappeared.(Ibid.: 14) The spectacle of physical punishment gave way to the new mechanism, or the analogical penalties of the judicial process and the punitive semio-technique characterized by the transparency of the sign.(Ibid.: 103-106) Foucault explains the transformation as the result of the great expansion of the bourgeoisie. At that time, this social body became a powerful and influential force and they needed a new system of the judicial system, in order to set up against the infra-power of the unpropertied as well as the super-power of a monarch.(Ibid.: 84-87)

In the later part of the eighteenth century, there was another big change in the form
of penalty. That is to say, detention or imprisonment became the essential and general form of punishment. (Ibid.: 114-115) A great prison structure was planned, and the great enclosed, complex, and hierarchized structure was integrated into the very body of the state apparatus, or the central administration as a political system. The structure replaced the scaffold. It was a quite different materiality, a quite different physics of power, a quite different way of investing men’s bodies. (Ibid.: 115-116) In the structure, human bodies are distributed, isolated, surveilled, and disciplined. As a result, the bodies become objects and instruments of the exercise of power. (Ibid.: 144, 155, 170)

For Foucault, discipline is a modality of domination developed in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. (Ibid.: 137) It is characterized by its new techniques to control and manage human body, or ‘enclosure’, ‘partitioning’, ‘functional sites’, ‘ranks of location’, and so on. (Ibid.: 141-146) In the 1830s, the Panopticon became the architectural programme of most prison projects. (Ibid.: 249) In such a space, the magical force of discipline induces in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. (Ibid.: 201) In other words, power becomes automatized, anonymous and functional. (Ibid.: 202) It results in ‘gentle efficiency of total surveillance’ and ‘homogeneous effects of power’. (Ibid.: 202, 249) De Certeau evaluates that Foucault’s works bring to light the springs of this opaque power that has no possessor, no privileged place, no superiors or inferiors, no repressive activity or dogmatism, that is almost autonomously effective through its technological ability to distribute, classify, analyze and spatially individualize the object dealt with. (De Certeau, 1984: 46)

Next, phenomenologists have discussed the role of spatio-sensory in the relationship of world and perception. Specially, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger have an enormous influence in the twentieth century Humanities. Merleau-Ponty intensively argues that there can be no partition between mind and physical body in human life. (Philosophy Dictionary, 2007: 321) He tells that we must not overlook both the role of bodily sense-organs in perception and a normally rational agent in
understanding human behavior. That is to say, ‘the mental is intrinsically bodily’, and, equally, ‘the body is intrinsically mental’.(Ibid.: 321) He observed a patient who had suffered from brain injuries and after that, could not fully anticipate possibilities of behavior or event. The study of the patient’s disability helped Merleau-Ponty to conclude that mind and physical body is not independent from each other.(Ibid.: 322)

On the other hand, Heidegger distinguishes between an entity(anything that is) and the being of an entity.(Ibid.: 307) He terms the being of an entity as Dasein, or ‘being-in-there’ or ‘being-in-the-world’. (Ibid.: 312-313) According to him, we understand entities in their being not fully and immediately but only partially and discursively.(Ibid.: 313) Human beings can understand an entity by knowing it in its being. The being is temporal and is in a given situation, that is to say, ‘being-towards-dead’. (Simonsen, 1987: 2) Dasein opens up the arena of significance by anticipating its own death. (Philosophy Dictionary, 2007: 307) In short, the concept of Dasein embraces both time and space.

Lastly, Lefebvre ‘discursively’ tries to approach a living human body in the Production of Space. Especially, in the third chapter of the book, ‘Spatial Architectonic’, he explains the body in various aspects of rhythm, repetition and differentiation, space, time, energy, the unconscious, and so on. (Simonsen, 1987: 4) It is an attempt to go beyond persistently lasting dualisms of time-space, mind-physical body, subjective-objective, and so on. In brief, for him, the body is the site of unity of physical body and mind, and acquires the peculiarity through death like Dasein. Further, he tells that each living body is space itself and it also produces that space. (Lefebvre, 1991: 170) According to him, space and living body do not exist independently. There is just a relative closure between them. Lefebvre explains it as follows.

Very early on, in phylogenesis as in the genesis of the individual organism, an indentation forms in the cellular mass. A cavity gradually takes shape, simple at first, then more complex which is filled by fluids. These fluids too are relatively simple to begin with, but diversify little by little. The
cells adjacent to the cavity form a screen or membrane which serves as a boundary whose degree of permeability may vary. …… A closure thus comes to separate within from without, so establishing the living being as a ‘distinct body.’ It is a quite relative closure, however, and has nothing in common with a logical division or abstract split. The membranes in question generally remain permeable, punctured by pores and orifices (Lefebvre, 1991: 175-176)

He suggests that the living organism has neither meaning nor existence when considered in isolation from its extensions, from the space that it reaches and produces. (Lefebvre, 1991: 196) The spatial body’s material character derives from space, that is to say, from the energy that is deployed, and the body with the energies at its disposal, or the living body, creates or produces its own space. (Ibid.: 170, 195) For him, the body is along with space, in space, and as the generator (or producer) of space. (Ibid.: 407) In other words, body and space incessantly interact with each other in a dialectical way.

Thus, he criticizes that the Western thoughts have denied, abandoned, and betrayed the body since the Cartesian school suggested the distinction of body and mind. (Ibid.: 406-407) In this regard, it is very interesting that Hinduism has never abandoned human body. Even gods and goddess have the bodies, sometimes to dance, sometimes to play the musical instruments, sometimes to tempt the opposite sex, and sometimes to suffer from hardship. As a clear example, Lord Shiva is the great yogi and lord of dance. In the streets or the parks, it is so easy to see the god represented as the yogi, meditating amongst on the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. (Channa, 1984: 14) He is famous for strengthening his power through his practice of yogic austerities. (Donald & Johnson, 1976: 42) At the same time, the god is Nataraja (the king of dance). In Hinduism, his dance symbolizes ‘the eternal flux and movement of the universe’ and teaches ‘the transitory of existence’, and ‘the joy and the sadness of existence’. (Ibid.: 42) Also, Lord Shiva is not only the creator but also the destroyer of the universe. The contradictory characters symbolize his sexual or creative energy.
Actually, the most popular form of worshipping the god is that of lingam. Thus, in Hinduism, the gods and the goddess were represented as attractive bodies. It results in the innumerous god idols and images displayed in the streets.

2.2 Practice

Whereas Foucault focuses on the ‘docile body’ as an object and instrument of the exercise of power, Bourdieu considers human body as the bearer of a form of “kinetic knowledge”. (Bourdieu, 1990a: 20) Bourdieu strongly argues that we have to overcome the binary divisions such as individual and society, subject and object, the soul and the flesh, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and the unconscious, and so on. (Bourdieu, 1990b: 55 ; Paulle, 2012: 70) According to him, there are no clear boundaries between them, they continue interacting with each other through practices, and therefore, it is difficult to get to full understanding about the total beyond these arbitrary divisions.

The essential point I try to put over in this book, a point which is in no way personal, would be liable to lose its meaning and its effectiveness if, by letting it be dissociated from the practice from which it started and to which it ought to return, I were to leave it in the unreal, neutralized mode of existence which is that of theoretical ‘theses’ of epistemological essays. (Bourdieu, 1990b : 1)

Bourdieu conceives a creative thinking tool of habitus in order to explain principles which generate and organize practices and representations. (Bourdieu, 1990b: 53) Habitus can be explained in various aspects. First, habitus is a system of models of perception and appreciation, cognitive and evaluative structures which are achieved through the lasting experience of a social position. (Bourdieu, 1990a: 131) That is, habitus is limited by historically and socially situated conditions. Second, it is characterized by a capacity for producing an infinite number of practices. (Bourdieu,
1990b: 55) The capacity is learned through an acquired system of generative schemes formed through time, but the process of learning is neither wholly conscious nor wholly unconscious. (Bourdieu, 1984: 173-174) Third, habitus is what is embodied. It is learned by body and is never detached from the body that bears it. (Bourdieu, 1990b: 73) To sum up, habitus means the incorporated products of historical practice. (Ibid.: 52; Bourdieu, 1984: 461) Thus, Bourdieu tries to emphasize the genetic process between practice and social structure. However, de Certeau criticizes that the concept of habitus leads to the affirmation of “reality” which the discourse needs in order to be totalizing, although it provides the basis for explaining a society in relationship to structures. (De Certeau, 1984: 58-59) There is some true to such a claim when we consider the following reference.

If you add to this the fact that this sense of one’s place, and the affinities of the habitus experienced as sympathy or antipathy, are at the basis of all forms of cooperation, friendships, love affairs, marriages, associations, etc., thus of all the relationship that are long-lasting and sometimes sanctioned by law, you see that everything leads one to think that classes on paper are real groups - all the more real in that the space is better constructed and into which this space is subdivided are smaller. (Bourdieu, 1990a: 128-129)

De Certeau criticizes that Bourdieu’s enterprise is limited to a discourse on non-discursive practices. (De Certeau 1984: 61) According to him, Bourdieu’s theory throws a blanket over tactics, although ordinary people’s creativity and subjectivity in practices can not be simplified with the characteristics of theory because these are so confused and discursive. (Ibid.: 59) He stresses that many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are not strategical but tactical. (Ibid.: xix) He defines that strategy is the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an environment. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as propre. However, the place of a tactic belongs to the
other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. A tactic depends on time - it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized “on the wing.” Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into “opportunities.”(Ibid.: xix) He compares such a tactical activity to dancing on a tightrope in that the former also requires one to maintain a balance that is never permanently acquired.(Ibid.: 73)

Consumption is an example to show devious and dispersed practices. It insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, and it subverts dominant economic orders by rejecting or altering them, but by using the products imposed dominant by the orders that they had no choice but to accept.(Ibid.: xii-xiii) The ordinary people have the talents to combine heterogeneous elements. Through such a combination, they make innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules.(Ibid.: xiv) For him, the practices of ordinary people are tactical. They are the weak, a marginal group, a silent majority, and the other, but at the same time, they are the immense “remainder” constituted by the part of human experience that has not been tamed and symbolized in language.(Ibid.: v, xvii, 61)

To the ordinary man.

To common hero, an ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets….This anonymous hero is very ancient. He is the murmuring voice of societies. In all ages, he comes before texts. The increasingly sociological and anthropological perspective of inquiry privileges the anonymous and the everyday in which zoom lenses cut out metonymic details - parts taken for the whole...(De Certeau, 1984: v)

De Certeau starts his book, The Practice in Everyday Life, with the above eulogy for the ordinary people and stresses on tactical characteristics of their practices. For him, human practices can not be wholly controlled. It depend on a vast ensemble which is difficult to delimit.(De Certeau, 1984: 43) Thus, he tries to free discussions
of practice from structure and power.

In Hinduism, there is a concept, karmar, corresponding to the word of practice in Western thoughts. Karma means both action and the result of action. However, these show different results through being entangled with rebirth, dharma, and caste. Karma does not too much encourage an individual to change the present world. Rather, it makes people agree with given social inequality. Hindus believe that they can attain a better position in the next life as the result of ‘good karmar’ of this world. Karmar is different from the western concept of practice in the respect that the result of karmar could be harvested not in the present but the next life. (See 4.3.1 Hinduism) However, the concepts have some thing in common that both of them encourage people to do the best for a better life and it affects their everyday life.

2.3 Space

Lefebvre strongly suggests that we must first change space in order to change life. (Lefebvre, 1991: 59, 190) For him, space and life is closely related each other in that a space is not only the outcome of past actions but also the tool of thought and of action. (Ibid.: 26, 38) Furthermore, he tries to demonstrate that a space is a product and we can produce new space. In this chapter, I would approach his discussion by focusing on his three propositions, that is to say, space is a set of relations, space is to be produced, and an already produced space can be decoded.

To begin with, Lefebvre tells that a space is not a thing but a set of relations. (Ibid.: 83) He says that a space is not simply an empty vessel waiting to be filled with contents. Rather, a space is a totality of diverse objects including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information. (Ibid.: 77) For him, the form of space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity of everything that there is in space. (Ibid.: 101) De Certeau and Foucault’s definitions will help to understand the concept of the space.
A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, relocations, and time variables. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporize it, and so on. (De Certeau, 1884: 117)

The space of our primary perception, the space of our dreams and that of our passions hold within themselves qualities that seem intrinsic: there is a light, ethereal, transparent space, or again a dark, rough, encumbered space; a space from above, of summits, or on the contrary a space from below, of mud; or again a space that can be flowing like sparkling water, or a space that is fixed, congealed, like stone or crystal. (Foucault, 2008: 146)

Next, the second proposition is that a space is a product. Lefebvre tells that spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space. (Lefebvre, 1991: 38) In order to explain such a process, he tenaciously traces the genesis of a space. He asserts that the medieval society is a produced space. Although the society has its variants and local peculiarities, the space commonly embodies the feudal mode of production. It would be composed of autumn-plant, spring-plant, fallow, a cathedral, a monastery, and so on. The positions of a manor house, a church and a mill would affect the networks of lanes and main roads. Here, it is no doubt that the medieval society created its own space. (Ibid.: 53) According to him, capitalist and neocapitalist societies also produced another new space. He terms it ‘abstract space’, which is characterized by power of money, commodity fetishism, management of the political state, and so on. The space also has the networks of motorways, airports and information lattices. (Ibid.: 53) Thus, diverse spaces have appeared along with changing societal standards and are respectively defined by its own characteristics. It means that a space is a social product.

Lastly, he tells that an already produced space can be deciphered and that we can discover the practices of the space by such a work. (Ibid.: 17, 38) But, a space is not easily readable and understandable because it has several moments to be entangled
with each other. He terms the moments as spatial practice, representation of space, and representational space. First, the spatial practice is ‘the realm of the perceived’ in that it is based on the perception of the outside world. We perceives space through our own body and the perceived space affects practice. In other word, practice and space reinforce each other.(Ibid.: 40) Second, the representations of space is ‘conceptualized space’, which is disseminated with an admixture of ideology, or it is the realm of scientists, planners, and so on.(Ibid.: 38, 40) Third, representational space is the space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’. In the lived, the imagination seeks to change and appropriate.(Ibid.: 39)

Thus, Lefebvre’s concepts of space and moment emphasize the totality of life. In my opinion, the meaning of space is not too much different from that of ‘world’. I think that Lefebvre uses the word of space to highlight physical dimensions of the world and to reduce ‘abstract mood’ that the word gives off. Likewise, the word of moment puts a stress on temporal dimensions of space.

He tells that there are three moments of space and the three dimensions are complicatedly entangled and respectively contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period.(Ibid.: 97) In short, the three moments of space echo and mirror each other in the dialectical relationship. These respectively correspond to the terms connected with our body, that is, the perceived, the conceived, and the lived. For him, a total body is considered as the unity of the three moments, or ‘the perceived-conceived-lived triad’. (Ibid.: 40)

However, capitalism or neocapitalism has brought new contradictions into play.(Ibid.: 30) Capitalist or neocapitalist society destroys the historical conditions for imposing an ‘abstract homogeneity’. (Ibid.: 370) He terms such a society as ‘abstract space’ (Ibid.: 48) Inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences. It is the reason that Lefebvre calls the new space as ‘differential space’. (Ibid.: 52)

The new space is characterized by quality against quantity, a primacy of use and
enjoyment against the expanding of profitability, practice against gaze, difference against homogeneity. (Ibid.: 380-382) Therefore it restores the unity of moments broken in abstract space and contributes to solve the contradiction of the space. For Lefebvre, the differential space is not for survival but for life. The level of survival is to the bare minimum of energy what the level of life is to the surplus or superfluity of energy. (Ibid.: 176, 177) Life is not possible by ‘the principle of economy’, rather it needs waste, play, struggle, art, festival, and so on. (Ibid.: 177)

We have looked at the attention to body and the discussions about practice and space. In these discussions, the terms of ‘body’ and ‘space’ are newly defined as the total of mind, physical body, time, place, and practice, that is to say, as the totality of human life. I count on these concepts to approach the totality and discursiveness of realities. Marriott has already pointed out that Western dualisms do not fit Indian realities. (Marriott, 1989: 2) According to him, persons are considered not as “individual”, bounded units, but “dividual”, divisible in South Asia and dividual persons give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances - essences, residues, or other active influences - as well as absorb heterogeneous material influences. (Marriott, 1976: 111) Also, he clarifies that Hindu realities have the many layers like “sheaths”, “bodies”, or “spheres” but we do not need to either deny any of them or provide a definitive ordering or articulation of them all. (Marriott, 1989: 7) Thus, he points out that dualisms are not of tune with the realities known to Indian people. It is clear that the Indian society is a proper field to study the discursiveness of human life or world, although it may be not only about the society.

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1 A sheath is one of five coverings of the atman. (wikipedia-kosha)