CHAPTER III: How to Study the One Discursive

In humanities, ‘the one discursive’ (De Certeau, 1984: 65) is one of the main objects of study to be newly raised in 20th century. Many scholars have been interested in what to be flexible, what to be changing, and what to have no boundary. Gramsci leads the interest not about ‘stable, bounded cultural wholes’ but about ‘fluid and shifting social entities’. (Crehan, 1984; 66) De Certeau traces out the characteristics of practices in everyday life, or ‘bricolent innumerable and infinitesimal transformations’ (De Certeau, 1984; xiii) Goffman suggests that it is needed to study over diffuse behaviors in public spaces which are difficult to catch up with the concept of group. Bourdieu (1984) tries to explain in relation to social structure the meanings of hobby, taste and preference which have been excluded from sociological study in that these seem to be too ‘pure’ and personal. Lastly, Lefebvre discusses the spaces in which we actually live, as an unlimited multiplicity or uncountable set of social spaces. (Lefebvre, 1991; 86)

They respectively rely on different concepts in order to deal with the one discursive : for example, Gramsci’s hegemony, de Certeau’s everyday practice, Goffman’s gathering and body idiom, Bourdieu’s habitus, Lefebvre’s the perceived-conceived-lived triad, and so on. They use their own concepts, but they have in common to open up the field which have been neglected because of its discursiveness. Also, they are in common to lay a stress on genesis which is the process to be considered with time, rhythm, symbols, and practices.

In an anthropological fieldwork, how can we have access to such an object? As for my research, I would count on three concepts, that is to say, Goffman’s gathering and body idiom, and de Certeau’s walking. The concept of gathering makes it possible to study the discursive and instant interactions to have communicative meanings in spite of immediately presenting without forming any stable group or any physical boundary. He defines gathering as ‘any set of two or more individuals whose members include all and only those who are at the moment in one another’s
immediate presence’ (Goffman, 1963: 18) It is the concept for researching a slightly different set of others in unobstructed places in which mutual presence can be said to prevail. (Ibid.: 17-18)

Next, body idiom means non-verbal communications to express bodily appearance and personal acts when individuals come into one another’s immediate presence. For example, there are dress, bearing, movement and position, sound level, physical gestures such as waving or saluting, facial decorations, and broad emotional expression, and so on. (Ibid.: 33)

Lastly, for de Certeau, walking means a daily practice. He compares walking to talking in order to emphasize its practical character. He tells that it is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language). (De Certeau, 1984: 97-98 ; Low and Juriga, 2003: 226) Pedestrians’ movement starts on ground level. Walkers directly tread on earth, and appropriate space through their own footsteps.

They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a style of tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. (De Certeau, 1984: 97)

He suggests that such a ‘narrative action’, walking, will allow us to specify a few elementary forms of practices organizing spaces. (De Certeau, 1984: 93) For instance, he distinguishes “itinerary” from “map” in that the former is the procedures of delimitation or “marking boundaries” (“bornage”) and “enunciative focalization” (that is, the indication of the body within discourse). (Ibid.: 116)

I walk in the streets for my need, feel it through my sense-organs, and understand it in my everyday life. I experience the space through walking and become a part of street landscapes through walking. Anthropologists have articulated that it is so important to directly take part in people’s activities for understanding them. I choose ‘walking’ as a kind of the participant observation methodology. I think that it is a proper methodology for studying the streets of the city in the respect of one of the
main activities done in streets. My field work in Delhi started at 2nd August, 2010 and the field note of the day is as follows.

(From the first field work note of mine, Aug. 2, 2010)

I wear the flip-flop whose outsoles are thin, in order to feel the texture of streets. Nowadays, the streets of Delhi, here and there, are under construction for ‘Common Wealth Games 2010’. Roads are dug, mounds are made, some pedestrians harden the mounds by their footsteps and others go around the obstacles. Such a process changes the texture of soil, and makes a lot curves on foot passengers’ route.

It is 6:30 am. I get out of the boarding house in which I stay, for going to the library of Delhi University. The house is located in Outram Lines, Kings Way Camp. As soon as I step out the house, I see many young students going to school. There is a public grade school at the end of the road. The students are in their school uniform, a kind of Punjabi suit. Most of them are skinny, whereas students in school buses are chubby and dressed in Western style uniforms.

After 10 minutes, I reach the road in front of Gate No.1 of Delhi University. I see a lot of laborer and their temporary tents. The laborers are thin. Some of them are sleeping in mosquito nets outside tents, others are bathing, and some women are baking chapatties on their small traditional stoves. Their tents make a long row on the footpath.

After a few moment, I arrive at Gate No.1 near the Department of Zoology. A very different scene appears as soon as I pass through the gate. In the space, there is located in the office building of vice-chancellor of the University and the building is surrounded with a few beautiful gardens. Every morning, many people come for exercise in these gardens. Almost all of men are bulky and wearing sports shoes. Some men are in fashionable sports wears. On the other hand, a majority of women have Kurta, Chunni, and sports shoes. I presume they are of middle class by their appearance and by their automobiles in front of the gate of Main Campus.

I lived in two residential areas of Outram Line and Hudson Line during four
months, from July, 2010 to November, 2010. During the time, I repeated to walk from the Delhi University to the residential areas where I lived in. I also experienced many streets of Chandni Chowk, Tibetan Colony, Connaught Place, Civil Lines, Indraprastha Estate, and so on, for touring, meeting, participating in religious rituals, shopping, and so on. Then I moved in the University Hostel for Women and resided in the hostel until finishing my thesis, February, 2013. After I decided the main field areas, my walking primarily performed in the areas. I used to follow it whenever I came across something special in the streets. For example, Kanwariyas in saffron colored clothes, the popping sound of firecrackers, the loud sound of traditional drums, etc. Also, I entered into a mandir or a big tent in spite of not being invited, sat inside, got bindi or maulli (a red sacred thread tied around the wrist) from a pujari (a ritual priest), and ate many kinds of free food they served me. Sometimes, I participated in a parade, danced with two arms holding up in the streets, and stood at the backside of a truck running towards the river Yamuna. Through such a observation, I discovered the characteristics of the streets. These were so much different from cities like Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, Manila, etc. that I had ever seen before arriving in Delhi. The significant differences are as follows.

Firstly, the space is, at the same time, open and closed, or semi-open and semi-closed. Secondly, animals and vegetation are not yet relegated from the urban space. Thirdly, some parts of the streets have being appropriated as spaces for other everyday activities such as bath, excretion, sleeping, selling, playing, and so on. Fourthly, there are the sharply distinct differences between women and men in the ways to use the streets. Fifthly, the streets are the space where many agencies compete for use, for example, peddlers, vehicles, trees, animals, and so on. Lastly, the landscapes of streets are dynamically changed depending on many kinds of festivals. It seems that every Hindu festivals start from the streets; decorating the outside walls of houses or mandir, setting up service tents on the roads, etc. Sikhs and Muslims are passionate to take out a large scale procession, too. Thus, the public streets are open for using and appropriation in Delhi.

In the next place, I chose my main field areas and began to interview diverse persons. I often found myself to ask wrong questions in the process. A lot of times,
interviewees were puzzled by my questions: “Who manages the procession?”, “Where do you report the fact that you take part in the *kanwar yatra*?”, “Who is the director of the function?”, “What is the name of the decoration or amulet?”, “Who decides the route of procession?”, “Where can I buy a ticket for *Ramlila* dramas?”, etc. However, they just repeat to answer, “We are following just what our ancestors did.”, “There is no head. All of us get together and prepare for it.”, “There is no ticket.”, etc. After all, I became to realize cultural differences to exist between them and me. It gave me a chance to learn an anthropological methodology of ‘being a stranger’.

As in *Tristers tropique*, we travel abroad to discover in distant lands something whose presence at home has become unrecognizable. (De Certeau, 1984: 50)

In Delhi, I was a foreigner and a female researcher. The fact that I am a foreigner helped me to get access easily to diverse religious temples. For them, I am not a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh, just but a foreigner. People always welcomed me and tried to help me. Also, as I was a stranger in the space, I could be interested in the landscapes that Delhi residents took for granted. I have lived in Seoul, the capital of South Korea. The city has Metro lines stretched on the space, high-rise buildings hiding the sky, the roads ‘conquered’ by running vehicles, and a lot of CCTVs installed on the roads to prevent from illegal parking. In the city, it is not easy to see animals. The urban space has no room for animals and the citizens do not take care of animals and trees. Therefore, I was very surprised at the scenes that a herd of dogs freely are roaming, a few cows are crossing over carriageways, and trees grow passing through the artificial holes made for human beings.

On the other hand, the latter made me refrain from going out at night and as a result, my study confined to daytime landscapes. I rarely go out at night except for a few festive days like *ramlila festival, kanwar yatra, janmasthami, lohri*, and so on. In the cases that I had to stay in the streets until metro stations were closed, I stayed up all night in Sisganj Gurdwara or the Old Delhi Railway stations instead of returning my hostel at night because I thought that it was not safe for a woman alone to move a
long distance at night. Lastly, I must clearly tell that I got much information through reference books, newspapers, and net-surfing. It helped me to approach meanings of the scenes and activities of streets in different angles.