

Course : B. A. (Hons.) Sociology

Paper Code: SOCY 3021

Paper Title: Sociological Theory -II

Topic Covered : Outline of a Theory of Practice, Cambridge University Press, 1977, Pierre Bourdieu, Chapter 2

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- Pierre Bourdieu in his classic book *Outline of Theory of Practice* in its second chapter introduces the concept of 'habitus' which is linked to another concept of structure.
- Bourdieu explains the relationship between habitus and structure to demonstrate his theory of practice.

- Let us look at how he defines habitus:
 - “The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment produce habitus; systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures that is as the principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively regulated and regular without in any way being product of obedience of rules.” (page 72)

- In this definition you may look at the words **practices, structures and dispositions.**
- These are important ideas in his theory of practice that he explains primarily through the concept of habitus.
- So first of all, habitus is meaningful practices, i.e they are not *opus operatum* which means habitus as meaningful practices challenges the very idea of methodological objectivism in Sociology.

- Habitus is also not an idealistic concept, but it interacts with the material world.
- Bourdieu emphasises on how people perceive the material and social world.
- People produce meaningful practices in social and material world.
- According to him people have ingrained dispositions due to their life experiences.
- So habitus is embodied and allows people to navigate the social and material world accordingly.

- Habitus produces practices which as a consequence reproduce further regularities so that it becomes a shared meaning for a class of people.
- So practices takes the shape of structures due to its similarities and regularities.
- So you can see, structures here are actually products of past practices or historically regularised practices.

- Subsequently these historically shaped structures produce structured subjective dispositions i.e. Embodied habitus which again reproduce objective structure.
- So objective structures and subjective dispositions are always in interaction with each other and rather than one shaping another, they both shape and reshape each other.
- Therefore, habitus is not a result of individual subjective will nor determined by structures, but the interplay of both is significant
- Habitus is not conscious, but unconsciously produced and reproduced.

- Habits and structure then are very much products of the cultural practices of any society.
- Habitus is actually an internalisation of the cultural practices and that is why it is embodied and shared.
- It is a product of inculcation and appropriation that takes place through socialisation in a particular cultural setting..
- In this way habitus is not fixed, but keeps changing according to the historical situations.

- Bourdieu is addressing the dialectics of subjectivity and objectivity, an important area in Sociology.
- He calls it dialectics of objectification (i.e. Structures) and embodiment (i.e. Habitus)
- It is not the process of mechanical determinism, as he calls it, but a mediation of orientations.
- You have seen that habitus, structures and practices are all interlinked in his theory of practice and habitus is at the heart of his theory.

Thank You

