

Society, Leisure and Women

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ABSTRACT

The word leisure gives us a great sigh of relief, but the fact is that there is no leisure in the lives of women. Leisure is a male domain. Leisure time is denied to women since ages. She is so much overburdened with her house hold duties that she does not find any time for leisure. Giving leisure time to women means handing over the power to take her own decisions, and this is what the male dominated society never wants. Using leisure time effectively for games and sports is possible only for men. Only women who belong to upper class can have leisure time, for those belonging to the middle and lower classes leisure is a distant dream. In case they are able to draw out some time from their busy schedule by their hard work, they are not permitted to spend it for activity of their liking especially for outdoor games which are again considered to be meant for males only.

Keywords: Feminist, Leisure, Limitation, Opportunities, Sports, Society, Women.

Introduction

"All work and no play make jack a dull boy". It means all work and no play does not make Jill a dull girl, because Jill is a girl she can work all day and does not require any play or leisure. Leisure is a missing element in the lives of women, like it is in the above saying. Leisure is a male domain. Giving leisure to a woman means offering her the opportunity to take responsibility of herself and her time, and this would mean handing over the power which man has over woman. Leisure is the most challenging responsibility a person can be offered. Man does not offer any such responsibility to woman. Women's role was so carefully planned in this male dominated world, that women neither had access nor opportunities to leisure.

In the fields of leisure participation of women is considered to be secondary, while participation of men is considered to be of primary importance. Shaw [1994] gave evidences to suggest that women fear violence outside as well as inside the home, which restrict her leisure choices. In case leisure opportunities do exist outside the home they have been offered to women in such a way that they do not interfere with her household responsibilities¹.

In his short story "A small step" Chand Sherma writes about the protagonist Sheela's mother that after having spent hours cooking food on cow dung fire, which ruined her eyes with smoke, she would hesitatingly ask her husband to have his meal. He often snarled - "shut up you bitch I'll have my dinner when I am ready and make sure it is piping hot." He would be sitting on a charpoy in the sun enjoying himself while her mother had to go through the ordeal of lighting the fire again and waiting for the call for hot food².

Even after having finished her daily chores, woman is kept engaged in it to prevent her from having any leisure. The male dominated society knew that involvement in leisure and sports activities gives confidence to women to challenge society's gender based restrictions and stereotypes. Leisure and sports can empower women by offering her better physical and mental health but society was least interested in this. A woman is made to light up the fire of the stove to maintain the warmth of the family. The consistency of the warmth of the kitchen parallels the consistency of her warmth and affection towards her husband and children. Even if the society accepts sports as integral part of leisure the participation of women in sports would not increase significantly. It can increase only when women are provided with leisure.

Definitions of Leisure

What is leisure? It has been defined variously from - time at one's disposal, free time, play, relaxation, residual time, to extra time and so on. Jackson and will (1994) suggested that leisure is the time left over when the necessities of life have been taken care of, for example eating, sleeping and working.³ According to Aristotle the end of labour is to gain leisure. This definition too is not fit for woman because there is no end to women's labour. Jackson (1993) gave two definitions of leisure. According to the older concepts of tradition leisure is the cultivation of self and a pre-occupation with higher values

of life. Another definition says tradition regards leisure as free time or time not devoted to paid occupations⁴. This definition too does not stand true for women as the society does not feel the need of leisure for women as it considers her unpaid work as leisure. Iso-ahola et al. (1994) pointed out that free time is the prospective of quality of residual time, while leisure is the prospective of quality of free time and activity⁵. This definition can also be out rightly rejected because the society does not consider giving women free time so the question of quality does not arise at all.

Hemingway (1990) attempted to synthesis various definitions of leisure by saying that it has three interdependent constituents; relaxation, entertainment and personal development. He proposed four common acceptable definitions of contemporary sociology; remunerated work, family obligations, social - spiritual and socio-political obligations and activities external to these institutional obligations and mainly oriented towards self fulfillment⁶. This definition of leisure stands rejected because woman is not considered to possess a "self" therefore her self fulfillment is not required according to the society.

Definitions not fit for women

It is alarming to note that women's leisure time does not fit into any of the definitions stated above. Equally shocking is the fact that leisure has different meanings for men and women. Feminists working with leisure studies observe men's leisure as a sign of patriarchy, which may be translated into the control of women by men. The dynamics of this control is permanently derived from patriarchal capitalist ideologies. Women cannot spare a certain period of time for leisure. She has to remain "on alert" to tend to the requirements of the family for all twenty four hours. She has to play her role model of an ideal wife, sister or mother. Unlike men she does not have period of eight to ten office hours, to enjoy leisure after her job is over. Word web dictionary defines leisure as time available for ease and relaxation or free from duties and responsibilities⁷, but both these definitions do not hold true for women because women neither have time available for ease and relaxation, nor they are ever free from their household duties and responsibilities. Women live a poor life, full of care, she has no time to stand and spare.

Women do not fit into all definitions given by leisure scholars and seem to cry out that they have not gained their true leisure.

Restricted Leisure Opportunities for women

If women succeed in sparing some time, they do not have the freedom to choose a past time or enjoyable activity of their liking. Men and women are seen to engage themselves in different types of leisure activities. Men have more leisure and can participate in more types of leisure activities specially the outdoor and sporting activities because he can leave the home and go out alone. For women such outdoor leisure activities are limited to either visiting the cinema or theatre, where she can take her children along with her. Leisure for women is considered to be a secondary concern. Leisure opportunities for women exist only after she has addressed her household duties and concerns. Working women who are economically independent too have to fulfill their household duties first. In

exceptional cases where women have equal opportunities like men for leisure they still have the tendency to perform feminine activities first. This difference between men's and women's access to and experiences of leisure are a reflection of the sexual division of labour in a capitalist society and reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Researchers have recently begun to recognize the significance of gender issues as a factor influencing leisure activities of women. An inequality of gender poses a threat to women's participation in leisure and sports.

Leisure Studies by Feminist Sociologists

In the beginning of 1980s feminist sociologists tried to enter into this male domain of leisure and examined women's leisure in its own rights. They studied in details the relationship between gender and leisure patterns. They tried to understand leisure by their approaches to women's position in society, oppression of women, lack of female political representation, gender difference and female consciousness in a male dominated world. Human sexuality is crucial to the determination of opportunities and constraints in leisure. There is a sexual division of labour according the ideology of patriarchy. Men are the earning members, who go out in the public sphere and occupy the public sphere and leisure, while women are confined to the household i.e. the private sphere of life. This division results in the concept of dual labour market, where men are in primary labour market, and they have full time contracts, job security promotion and pension while women are in secondary labour markets, which offer inferior conditions. Thus women are exploited on the two fronts of home and work, which hinders their leisure opportunities as they do not have enough time, proper transport and are economically weak. Moreover it is always men who take decisions, concerning provisions for women. It is he who determines what is appropriate for her to do and where it is appropriate for her to go, thus restricting her leisure opportunities.

Indian Women and their Awakening for Leisure

British colonialism shaped numerous facets of Indian society including the implementation of modern ideals on contemporary Indian women. Indian educational process is still trapped in Western structure and curriculum. Educated women in India came to learn about feminism through the British influence. This changed her ideology forever. She started comparing the roles of women in Indian and Western society and noted the sharp contrast between Western feminism and Indian patriarchy. Education of Indian women in Westernized institution exposed her to Western feminism.

The condition of women in India was lamentable before the Britishers came to India. Child marriage, male polygamy, lack of education, suttee, denial of human rights and a number of social practices reduced the average life span of women to only 27 years. In a country where women were not given the right to even live after the death of her husband, providing leisure to her was unthinkable. The Western concept of the role of women awakened Indian women. The study of European women's movement resulted in rise and growth of Indian feminism. With feminism crept up a demand for the rights of women including the right to have leisure time. Leisure consists in all those virtuous activities with which men grow morally, intellectually and spiritually. It is that which makes a life worth living. According to

Lewis Mumford (2012) "A Society that gives to one class all the opportunities for leisure, and to another all the burdens of work, dooms both classes to spiritual sterility."⁸

Colonialisation resulted in research about women and leisure from different cultural perspectives. This began to provide a means for understanding leisure as a basic human right. The bonds of tradition are slowly being broken down under the influence of different ideologies and we are at least moving towards gaining equal rights for women. Western culture has begun to influence modern Indian society giving opportunity for economic independence to women. Women are fighting for the right to spend their money and indulge in their own kinds of leisure. Though Indian Women are influenced by emerging trends of Western Feminism, they are still affected by the conventions and traditions of Indian society. Thus their participation in leisure is caught between the clash of two cultures. Western Culture through mass media like newspaper, T.V., movies, internet and magazines has tried to change the attitude of women towards life and leisure and sports. Indian women observe the women of other countries seeking leisure from out door and indoor activities. Education too has influenced the attitude of women towards leisure. Modern professional women have abandoned the traditional standards of women's life and have stood on an equal footing with men, but they have not been readily accepted by the society and even their own family members fail to understand them.

Suggestions

People have to be taught to ignore gender differences and focus on individuals regardless of gender, and allow women to decide on their own what activity they wish to engage themselves in. To be free to enjoy leisure, women need the same conditions that characterize men's lives. They need time, freedom from domestic chores, paid employment, absence of maternal responsibilities, confidence and competence to engage themselves in existing and new forms of leisure. Today Indian women too wish to gain their leisure for their complete physical and mental development

William Henry Davies' (2012) poem entitled "Leisure" stands true for women. He writes "What is this life if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare".⁹ Today, women need leisure and spare time to indulge in sports activities.

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