

LEISURE AND RECREATION

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Since the tone of any society depends largely on the quality of its leisure, the author points out in this article the importance of leisure and the evils of its improper use; he makes a plea for planned leisure-time and recreational activities which, he maintains, should be so planned as to contribute to the complete development of every part of man's complex nature.

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NO discussion of a new social order can leave out of account the problem of leisure. Leisure has been defined as "the time at the disposal of the complete man." It is "opportunity for disinterested activity." Dean Inge rightly says : "The soul is dyed the colour of its leisure thoughts." Leisure is necessary not only for the realisation of individual personality, but also for the culture and civilisation of every society. C. D. Burns aptly describes leisure as the "seed-plot of civilisation." An ancient proverb says : "Wisdom cometh by opportunity of leisure." It is "the germinating time for art and philosophy" and affords opportunity for the appreciation of the finer things of life. Ancient China realised the importance of giving its scholars ample leisure which they utilised in working out an abiding philosophy of life. In the highly industrialised countries of the West to-day, where money-making and comfortable living are a craze, there is a high degree of civilisation, as the term is interpreted by themselves, but a low level of culture, partly because they have not yet learnt the right use of leisure.

In the modern industrial society, it is usual to distinguish between work and leisure. The term 'work' is used to cover any activity in which a man is engaged in order to make a living, whereas the term 'leisure' is used to describe what he does with himself at other times. In earlier societies, however, such a distinction was not observed. Even to-day in a non-industrial and non-mechanised society, work and leisure often go together. Where, as it sometimes happens in India, the whole family is engaged in all the processes of a piece of work such as the carding of cotton, spinning it, and weaving it into cloth, it is difficult to say where work ends and leisure begins. The same merging of leisure into work is true in the case of every true artist. 'Art for art's sake' is the ideal for which he lives and works.

But in the case of a large mass of industrial workers and even agriculturists who use machinery on a large scale, the distinction between 'work' and 'leisure' is a vital one and cannot be slurred over. Even in this sphere, it is

possible to find individuals who are fortunate in having struck upon types of work which give them the fullest possible opportunity for the expression of their personalities. But the vast bulk of industrial workers are obliged to do a fraction of some dull and monotonous piece of work, such as the making of the head of a pin, times without number. One of the serious criticisms of the industrial system of to-day is the deadening, devitalising, and dehumanising effect which it has upon the millions who are called upon to do a small fraction of a mechanical piece of work, which is unrelated to their life and its purposes and which they are obliged to do merely for the sake of a living. They have no chance of seeing the work completed by their own hands or of making it for their own use or profit. It is manufactured on a mammoth scale with the aid of large scale machinery, primarily for the cash returns of a body of unseen and unknown shareholders of a company. It is true that a great many of these people have become so mechanised that the idea of expressing themselves through the various processes of work has deserted them altogether. But it is possible to reverse this order by a different type of industrial organisation and give workers real joy and meaning in work. Till such time is reached, we must plan for the leisure of large masses of people. In undertaking this task it is necessary to remember that leisure does not mean idleness. It is the use of one's free time in such a manner as to contribute to his true well-being and happiness. By the extensive use of machinery and the harnessing of mechanical power, the industrial West has made ample spare time possible for its toiling masses. But as yet people have not learnt its proper use.

Leisure and recreation do not mean one and the same thing. For our purpose we may regard 'leisure' as the genus of which 'recreation' is a species. There are many other ways of utilising leisure besides engaging oneself in recreation, although in popular conversation the two terms tend to be used interchangeably. The primary purpose of recreation is to "re-create" oneself in body, mind, and spirit ; and it is with this object in view that we should judge the use to which a person puts his leisure. If recreation is used by one in getting dead drunk or in dancing till very late at night or in playing cards till the small hours of the morning, it cannot be said that the person concerned has "re-created" himself. If anything, he has made himself less fit for the work of the day following the enjoyment. It is said, with a certain amount of justification, that in some offices the day following every important public holiday is also to be declared a holiday in order to enable their employers to get over the after effects of their undue enjoyment of the holiday.

It is a matter of common knowledge that the same kind of recreation cannot do good to everybody. It depends on various conditions, such as the

person's temperament and upbringing, the nature of his work, and the environment in which he lives, moves, and has his being. Thus, in the case of a manual labourer, bodily rest may in many cases be the best form of recreation, while to a person who works with his mind all the time, bodily labour may mean rest. "Change of occupation, and not merely cessation of occupation, has a remarkable effect in restoring poise and tone." Our society should make it possible, say for a philosopher to work in the garden every now and then, while his own gardener sits under the tree and philosophises. It is a welcome sign of the times that with a view to relieving industrial workers of the monotonous nature of their work, attempts are being made to vary their work by shifting them periodically from one branch to another.

If leisure is to be of maximum value to the maximum number of people, it is necessary to classify people as well as their interests in life. In olden times leisure was the privilege of the few. The aristocrat, freed from the necessity of earning his living, very often spent his time in idleness or in trivialities. Thomas Carlyle, who was a great apostle of work and glorified it, claimed that a well-to-do member of the British aristocracy, with an income of £200,000 a year, consumed the whole fruit of 6,666 men's labour and did nothing for it, but to "kill partridges." "While this statement may be true generally, in spite of the characteristic exaggeration of Carlyle's language, it must be admitted that the English nobility in general has tried to put into practice the principle of *Noblesse Oblige*. For generations now it has rendered conspicuous service to the national and political life of the country and to its education and culture, without indulging in conspicuous waste and luxury. It has built up a tradition of service and has acted as the carrier of what is good in the past.

When we turn from the English aristocracy to the Princely Order of India, it must be confessed that a good many of that Order make a thoroughly improper use of their leisure and of public money. The riotous living of some of them in foreign lands and the maladministration which prevails in several of their States make one wonder whether the time has not come for cutting down their freedom and emoluments to the narrowest limits possible. It is true that there are a few among them to whom the general well-being and economic prosperity of their subjects is a matter of utmost concern, but such Princes are few and far between. The leisure time of many of them is spent in expensive and unnecessary continental tours and in travelling back and forth to the various summer and winter capitals of India, basking in the sunshine of Governors and Viceroys. They spend lavishly on entertaining high government officials and others of their own rank, while their own people wallow in poverty. The sports in which some of them indulge, such as the

killing of tigers and leopards which have been carefully preserved in their jungles by a State department and are driven to the mouth of their guns to be shot on specified occasions and at the appointed time, are wasteful. In order that their Royal Highnesses may indulge in game hunting, polo, golf and the like, a great deal of valuable land has to remain uncultivated.

What the Princes do on a large scale, the Zamindars and taluqdars do within limits. Several of them are absentee landlords fleecing their tenants to the utmost degree possible and contributing very little to their prosperity. Instead of giving their time and attention to the scientific methods of cultivation, the improvement of cattle, and social uplift, they waste their substance in litigation and extravagant living. They have not yet learnt the truth of the principle of *Noblesse Oblige*.

When we pass from the Princes and the landed aristocracy to other classes, we find that they too have an inadequate understanding of the meaning of leisure. A great many of our successful merchants and traders live for money and die for it. The fact that many of them march to an early grave on account of over-work, unrelieved by the proper use of leisure, does not seem to deter them from their suicidal course. Recently the Ceylon Government had to pass a Shop Ordinance limiting the hours of work, particularly with a view to checking the unfair competition offered by Indian merchants and shopkeepers, who at the risk of their health, were keeping their places of business open from early morning till late at night. The trouble with many of our well-to-do business men is that they have not yet learned the art of enjoying life in the best manner possible. Even such a gentle and harmless form of recreation as daily walk is not to their liking. They prefer to go about in their comfortable cars all the time, forgetting the primitive art of walking. Some of them go to summer resorts and attend horse races, blindly imitating those higher up in the social scale. They have no time for any hobby or for such vigorous games as hockey, cricket, and tennis or for health-giving exercises such as rowing and riding. Many of them are not even patrons of music, painting, sculpture, poetry or literature. Their one and only God of worship is Mammon.

Among the educated classes of India, especially of the younger generation, there is a greater appreciation of the importance of leisure. But in the case of a good many, it is only a theoretical appreciation. The large band of lawyers and politicians the country abounds in turn to politics as the elixir of life. In a subject country like India it is perhaps inevitable. Till national freedom is won, everything else seems to be of minor importance. But this does not mean that we should take life so seriously as to exclude from it all forms of leisure and recreation. One chief trouble with a good many of our

educated people is that they talk shop everywhere. They cannot be at ease with themselves when they are off their work, unless they carry with them the worries of their office or desk wherever they go. In recent years a large number of recreation clubs have been organised in towns and cities where educated men, and sometimes women, can spend their afternoons and evenings, playing tennis, billiards, cards, etc. and reading newspapers, magazines and light literature.

These recreation clubs are for the most part patronised by government officers, often of the "gazetted" rank, rising professional men such as doctors and lawyers, and a few business men. Members of the Civil Service who through the years have built up a myth of efficiency and paternal care for the suffering poor also have a variety of opportunity for leisure and recreation. Their office hours are short and they enjoy a large number of holidays and leave of one kind or another on full pay, half pay, etc.

When we turn from people of this kind to the thousands of clerks and others like them working in government and semi-government offices and private firms and companies, the situation is indeed pitiable. They are overworked and under-paid, a good many of them contracting such diseases as tuberculosis and dying a premature death. Although many of them are University graduates and have a taste for art, literature, music, outdoor games, and the like, the exacting nature of their work and the pittance they are paid for it make anything like the enjoyment of leisure an idle dream. No new social order for India can rest satisfied with the low position to which the huge army of educated clerks and others like them are reduced. So long as the present order of things continues, there cannot be a widespread enjoyment of leisure.

Turning our attention now to the working classes in cities and the common people in our villages, we find that the struggle for existence is so keen that there is little or no time for recreation of any kind. When mill workers have to walk some five to six miles a day even before sunrise after having cooked their food for the day and attended to the children and return to their humble abodes late in the evening after sunset and cook another meal we do not expect them to bother about leisure or recreation. The same situation is true as regards village women who walk ten to fifteen miles a day in order to sell two to three annas worth of buttermilk, firewood or grass in the nearest town. The grinding poverty of the masses is so intense that the question of leisure becomes altogether irrelevant, if not a cruel joke.

Both industrial workers in cities at times of unemployment and agricultural workers during the off season have periods of enforced leisure, but they have not been trained to utilise it to the best advantage possible. Much

of the time is spent in idle gossip, meaningless wandering here and there, and ruinous litigation. It is not yet realised either by the public or those in authority that if the spare time of these people could be properly organised and utilised, it would immensely add to their enjoyment as well as to the productivity and general well-being of the country. Just because a great many of them find time hanging on their hands at a time of economic depression on periodic unemployment, it does not mean that they are incapable of enjoying leisure. Anyone who is acquainted with our villages knows of the important part played by *bhajan*s, theatrical performances, indigenous outdoor games and the like in the life of the villagers from time immemorial. With the decline of rural life and the drawing away of the talents to the city and towns, there has been also a marked decline in the capacity to utilise leisure. One of the urgent needs of the hour is, therefore, to resuscitate the village life and create a renewed interest in leisure-time activities. Leisure should be so used as to illumine one's work.

Two important facts which emerge from what we have said above are that leisure ought not to remain the monopoly of a special class or classes and that it should be carefully planned and organised on a national scale. Early civilisations, such as the Egyptian, the Chinese, the Indian and the Greek, reached a high stage of development by providing leisure to a few select classes and compelling the masses to work for them. Such a state of affairs is not in consonance with the democratic ideal of our day. We do not believe in a society which reaches a high level of culture and civilisation by allowing a few people to climb on the shoulders of the masses. Such a society is a "slave society" and its foundations are weak. What we want to-day is an equitable distribution of leisure so as to avoid the extremes of social parasitism on the one hand and undue concern with one's own daily task for the sake of eking out a livelihood on the other. Where the Greeks used slave-labour to provide leisure for a select few, we may use machinery on a large scale to provide leisure for all.

In the democratic society of our dream, everybody should have work and everybody should enjoy leisure. There is no justification for the so-called leisured class which does not have to depend on its own efforts for its living—such classes as large landed proprietors, rentiers, holders of sinecures, and hangers-on at courts and public offices. Work is worship. If there are Princes and others who are not obliged to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, justice demands that they should spend themselves unstintingly in the service of their people and patronise arts and sciences. According to Theodore Roosevelt, "Those who work neither with their brains nor with their hands are a menace to the public safety."

If in an ideal social order there is no place for social parasites, neither is there room for grinding poverty. So long as we have vast extremes of income and inherited wealth, there is no scope for the enjoyment of leisure by large sections of the population. A recent American writer observes that a man who has to work fourteen hours a day or eight hours under a speed-up system has really no leisure. What little free time and recreation he has are just enough to enable him to return again to toil. His life is one round of monotonous work, slaving for the benefit of unknown and unseen persons.

To relieve this situation, it is suggested by the advocates of Gandhian economy that we should revive cottage industry on a vast scale so that everybody will be engaged in doing the various processes of a unified piece of work himself, for his own personal profit without exploiting anybody in the bargain. These advocates claim that so far as India is concerned heavy industries such as railways, mines, the manufacture of motor cars and machinery should be undertaken by the State on a *service* basis, while cottage industries should be worked on a small scale, with a limited use of machinery, on a *profit* basis. The advantages claimed for this arrangement are that it will give every individual zest in his work, abolish the artificial distinction between work and leisure, and render unnecessary the exploitation of helpless people and weaker nations.

There is undoubtedly much force in all these contentions. But they do not completely solve the problem of leisure. Those engaged in government-owned heavy industries would certainly require a large measure of leisure. Even those working for their own profit under conditions of cottage industry would require leisure. They may derive a great deal of joy from their work and be able to find satisfaction for the creative impulse in them, such as artisans. Notwithstanding all that, they would require opportunity to get away from themselves and their daily worries and work. Not all work is capable of being transformed into perfect art. Therefore, the planning of leisure in our modern society is of utmost importance.

The proper starting point in training people for the enjoyment of leisure is the home. The Catholics express a profound truth when they say "Give us the child until he is seven and you may have him for the rest of his life." It is during this period that habits, attitudes and dispositions are formed which are likely to last all through life. Therefore, it is necessary that during this early stage parents should train children to understand and appreciate the uses of leisure. The kindergarten, the play method in pedagogy, and learning things by doing them—all have their value. Parents themselves must have the spirit of play in them and realise the profound truth that play is not a waste of time. During this period parents can instil in children

a love for hobbies, such as gardening, poultry-raising, bee-keeping, drawing, painting, stamp-collecting, etc. Children may be encouraged to take long walks enjoying the marvellous beauties of nature.

If the foundations are laid by the home and the school, the nation can build on them. Schools should be encouraged by means of special grants and other such means to instill in their children a keenness for "hiking" or rambling and travel by cycle, train and motor bus to places of historical interest and natural beauty. Every school should have a neatly laid out garden worked by the pupils themselves. There should be facilities for learning carpentry, blacksmithy, pottery, farming, paper-making, tailoring, typewriting, printing, etc., depending upon the local circumstances. A child should be encouraged to use his hands and fingers much more than is the case at present. While at school every child should cultivate some simple and inexpensive hobby, which he can keep up all through life and which can give him immeasurable delight when he grows up and is weighted with the burdens of the household and his work. Every school should have ample facilities for athletics, and no child should be given his school leaving certificate unless he has put in a minimum number of hours of attendance at games and sports of various kinds. Movements such as the Boy-Scouts and Girl Guides should be actively encouraged so long as they are free from sectarianism or suggestions of imperialism, and do everything possible to teach boys and girls the art of social living.

The Scout Movement has three advantages.—(1) It brings the children into close contact with nature ; (2) it provides companionship in adventure and (3) it promotes social equality. The cinema should be widely used by schools or groups of schools inasmuch as it is a quick and vivid way of learning a great deal about the world. Travel films, films of wild life, films depicting great stories in prose and poetry, and films exhibiting the historical monuments and beauty spots of India can all be used to great advantage. The radio also can come to the aid of the school in educating as well as entertaining the pupil. Care should be taken to exclude propaganda of every description.

Uniforms, regulations, and marchings in groups have their value, but they are apt to be overdone. They may destroy spontaneity in the play of children. In organising the leisure of children utmost care should be taken not to crush individuality and originality. While the West has made great advances in the art of comfortable living, it has produced too many standardised men and women who conform to a type in matters of food, dress, taste, general outlook and politics, and even love-making. Undue conformity and conventionality are some of the worst features of life in the West. We want **our** people to be normal and natural, to be themselves.

When we turn from children to youth, we need to remember that youth do not want to be treated like children. Young people to-day are much more independent and assertive than the youth of the last generation. The forms of recreation in which they are most interested are the cinema, commercialised sports and athletics, and mass meetings of a political character. Also, with the general removal of barriers between sexes, young men and women seek the companionship of each other and like to spend their leisure hours together. The older generation may shake its head in disapproval at this kind of innovation, but it cannot stem the tide. The right thing is to place high ideals before youth, especially when they are in their teens when hero-worship and lofty idealism make a powerful appeal, and trust them to do the right thing. Indigenous movements, such as the Bratachari movement, aiming at the building of strong and healthy bodies in the service of the country should be encouraged. So also should such organisations as the University Training Corps, if we are convinced of the Tightness of war as a "cruel necessity" in defending one's country against an aggressor.

Youth may be guided in selecting the right type of moving pictures and those forms of recreation which will really "recreate" them. The guiding principles should be entertainment as well as enlightenment. There should be a network of national play-fields and parks throughout the country subsidised by the State. Instead of contenting themselves with witnessing somebody else play cricket, football, hockey, or tennis, every young man, particularly in our schools and colleges, should be encouraged to play these games himself, supplementing them by inexpensive indigenous games. It is unfortunate that, in spite of Mahatma Gandhi's pleading, communal cricket is patronised in India to-day. Sports should know no distinctions of caste, community or race. Communal sports should receive no countenance whatever. There should be musical and dramatic societies in every school and college, and in every village and *mohulla* in the city. Those who have a taste for photography should be encouraged to become amateur photographers and become members of photographic societies. Young people should be made to realise their responsibility towards the poor and unfortunate. Teachers and elders should inspire them to take an active interest in some form or other of social service by their own personal example.

There should be a network of libraries, reading rooms and research centres all over the country open to everybody who can utilise them. The admission fee to them should be next to nothing so that even the literate labourer and enterprising peasant can find his way to them. In this respect Soviet Russia has made great headway. For years now British Universities have conducted evening extension courses mainly for the benefit of workmen

in scientific and technical subjects, literature, art and civics. Such endeavour might usefully be undertaken by Indian Universities too. But even before that, adult education should be undertaken on such a large scale as to wipe out illiteracy in the course of a generation. Agricultural Colleges, research centres and radio stations are disseminating very useful knowledge to the farmers and agriculturists, but such information should be more closely related to actual village conditions than is the case at present. We should build on the common experience of the people of the village. There should be a rural reconstruction officer in every village, organising the spare time activities of the villagers.

As said earlier, the common people in our villages, towns and cities cannot be persuaded to make time for leisure and recreation till their bare human needs are met. Some of the indirect methods of meeting these needs are providing for free public education and public health, and an extensive use of State-aided insurance against unemployment, old age, accidents, premature widowhood, etc. The social services provided out of public funds should be so large and varied that one will be relieved of the necessity of devoting every minute of his time and every ounce of his energy to provide himself and those dependent on him the bare necessities of physical existence. Common property in the form of public parks, libraries, recreation centres, musical halls and the like should be so large and social services, such as free education, free medicine and subsidised housing, should be so abundant that there will be no need for more than a limited amount of private property. In other words, our immediate goal should be "Common Property Large, Private Property Small."

In order that common people may utilise their leisure hours properly, we need both positive and negative measures. Government should compel every factory and mill owner to provide ample recreation facilities for his employees. The employees themselves through their recognised organisations, such as the Trade Unions, should supplement the efforts made by the employers. Non-sectarian and non-political organisations which aim at the improvement of the conditions of the people, such as the Servants of India Society, might be given every possible inducement to arrange a well-thought out programme of sports, outdoor and indoor games, moving pictures, and simple talks on civic rights and duties, on public health and sanitation, as well as musical, dramatic and radio programmes.

As for the negative measures, both the State and public opinion should co-operate in abolishing such evils as drunkenness, use of narcotics, gambling and prostitution. Gambling is assuming serious proportions in India. The instinct of getting something for nothing is deep-rooted in man, and gambling

caters to that instinct. Even villagers gamble on cock fights and bull fights, partly because they have no other excitement. In industrial centres, gambling is becoming a serious menace and poor people lose vast sums of honestly-earned money on it. A good many take to gambling in connection with horse racing, which is an evil introduced into the country by the foreigner, and one of the first duties of a national government would be to abolish horse-racing or at least make it penal for people to bet on horses.

Prostitution is another social evil which needs to be tackled resolutely. Nietzsche spoke truly when he said : "The mother of debauchery is not joy, but joylessness." The experience of the Western countries is that with the provision of a positive recreation programme, there has been a visible decline in the amount of drunkenness and prostitution. The same is likely to be true of India, too, if the recreation programme we have outlined above is put into effect. At the same time, direct measures should be adopted in the eradication of prostitution and the traffic in women and children.

In planning for the leisure activities of people, we need to provide for the two opposing moods of men—the desire for excitement and the desire for quiet. Some people, especially certain classes of workers, require more excitement than others. But every one should have opportunity for the exercise of both excitement and quiet. Mere excitement is not good for man. It is likely to make him a nervous wreck. All that it does is to provide an escape mechanism for the time being. It should be supplemented by quiet, which is indispensable to thought and reflection. Picture going, witnessing an exciting football match, etc. may advantageously be supplemented by long hours of quiet walk into the country or the outskirts of a city, away from the din and noise of people. We must not lose sight of the fact that man is a creature who "thinks before and after". A man who does not take time to think and reflect is no better than a brute. Even in married relations there should be opportunity for each partner to be by himself or herself so that one can think and reflect. The husband and wife should have many common as well as some individual interests. C. D. Burns is right when he says : "A wife who is only a wife is a bore, just as a husband who is only a husband is generally a beast."

In promoting companionship and providing opportunities for the enjoyment of one's spare time, we should plan on having a chain of cafes and restaurants which will provide simple and wholesome food and drink in attractive surroundings and at a reasonable price. The present practice of only men going to restaurants, leaving their families behind, should be discouraged. On holidays and other such occasions the whole family may want to have their meals together in one of these cafes or restaurants. Such eating places

should undertake a diet revolution, utilising the services of nutrition experts. The whole family can enjoy leisure together not only by having a few of their meals in good cafes and restaurants but also by going out together on short trips and for picnics. Week-ends could be spent together in quiet, out-of-the-way places in tents or *dak* bungalows.

In spite of their aberrations, it is not desirable to put down commercialised recreation altogether. What is needed is the proper supervision and control of it by the State. In India one rejoices to find that much of our entertainment and recreation is connected with religious festivals, frequently in a beautiful natural setting on the banks of sacred rivers, on the sea beach or on hill tops. While there is scope for abuses here as well, it is much less than in places where people assemble merely for enjoyment, provided by commercial agencies. People travel great distances, often by foot, through fields and valleys, hills and mountains in order to take part in a religious festival. In undertaking such a trip they not only satisfy their religious cravings but also their aesthetic sense. It is regrettable that we have not yet utilised these religious festivals to the fullest extent possible in the interest of recreation and popular education.

Thanks to the life-long efforts of the late Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, public taste in India has been raised to a high level. We are no longer satisfied with a blind imitation of western art, music and dance. We have come to realise that in drawing, painting, sculpture, music, dance and drama we can hold our own with any other country in the world. What Tagore has done for the re-orientation of education in an artistic setting, Uday Shanker and his followers are doing for dance. The late Mr. G. S. Dutt has popularised physical culture through the Bratachari movement. The movie industry in India is becoming more dignified as a result of well-educated and respectable young men and women adopting a film career. All this shows that the amateur and semi-professional can do a great deal in developing public taste along right lines.

In the planning of leisure, literary, cultural, and athletic societies as well as village and caste organisations can play a vital part. Owing to our lopsided education, several of our organisations and associations devote more time to literary activities than to cultural activities or to the building up of the body. We should so change our emphasis that every part of man's complex nature will have facilities provided for its complete development. We should remember that the tone of any society depends largely on the quality of its leisure.