



Work and Leisure among the agrarian societies

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Abstract: *Since the period of industrialization, the concepts of work and leisure have become pioneer to understand the working system among different social groups and organizations. Though the concepts of work and leisure differ among industrialized and non industrialized societies, the growth of industries and urbanization have made the concepts more complex. This paper aims to understand and analyze the concepts of work and leisure among the agrarian societies in the contemporary social setups.*

Introduction:

Work and leisure has become two of the pioneer concepts that were concentrated from the recent past both in academics and non academics. It was from 1970s, many scholars from U.S.A and U.K concentrated and focused on planning the future with the increase in the growth of leisure researchers. With the beginning of industrialization, concepts of work and leisure were given high regard in understanding work culture among the people. The literary works of nineteenth century concentrated on the struggles between the labour masses and dominating capital world regarding work and leisure time during industrialization and urbanization. The studies of work took its initial concern from the capitalistic domain. Many definitions on work and leisure were based on the concepts relating to industrialized societies. But it is a fact that the definitions which were prescribed by western scholars are not applicable to non western societies and they believe that the concept of leisure and work are similar and universal to many other societies. It is evident that very less amount of work and focus were given to the understanding of concepts of work and leisure among the non western societies by the scholars of work and leisure studies. It is believed by many scholars that non industrialized societies pass through the phase of globalization and urbanization which ultimately results in industrialized phase of social setup. Nevertheless, the fact that the concept of work and leisure among the non western societies are not similar and some times overlap with each other. This is because of the lack of clear division between work and leisure among non industrial societies, that is, between the time spent on work for earning livelihood and time spent on other activities. Some times, the time spent on other activities can also be viewed as time spent on earning a livelihood or 'working' among the non industrialized societies. As per Rojek, (2000:115) "Human culture did not begin with the need to work, it began with language, dancing, laughing, acting, mimicking, ritual and a variety of play forms". This explains that the leisure activity was born in the lives of humans way earlier than the emergence of concept of work. But in the contemporary western societies, work is viewed as a progress of human development and the progress at both individual and social level. Development, both at individual and societal level leads to procurement of materialistic artifacts which defines the progress of human life. But it is always the major task for humans to achieve a balance between the material needs, work and leisure. In spite of the major task of achieving satisfactory balance, globalization and urbanization have tremendous effect on creating societal imbalance. Though the concepts of work and leisure are overlapping one another among the non western societies, it is visible that distinction and discrimination always exists within the social setups among these groups.

Leisure and Work in rural villages:

Leisure in India has always been aligned with rich cultural heritage. The leisure activities in India have evolved with the influence of folk and classical heritage which have a long history and distinct forms. Based on the descriptions in the literature in epics and social histories, it is evident that the leisure activities have been often distinguished between the high class of leisure and low or mundane class of leisure. The high class of leisure was always related with classical forms of leisure and the lower class or mundane class was related with folk forms of leisure activities. Leisure activities in India includes singing, dancing, visiting pilgrimage centers (an ancient tradition of tourism), playing games, participating in

religious festivals, attending cultural functions, picnics, social gatherings etc are some of the major activities that have been existed as leisure activities. It is evident that certain factors like economic status, social position, education, gender, age etc influence the preference and participation in such leisure activities. Of all the various leisure activities, games and sports are the major pastime activities that were played by both children and adults in the villages. There are different types of games, some of which could be called as sports that are played in villages. Certain games are significant to certain regions depending on the social and cultural significance of the game. Though the leisure activities seem to be available to every one in the society, it is understood that only a certain privileged section of the people enjoy the concept of leisure.

Fieldwork conducted by the researcher at a village in coastal Andhra Pradesh in 2016 made way for a better expansion and analysis of the concepts of work and leisure in agrarian societies. Through the ethnographic data that was collected from the fieldwork, it has been understood that the dominating community in that village belongs to the caste of Reddy who are landlords. Attempts are made to understand the perception and implications of work and leisure among the community of Reddy. Similarly, a lower community Maala, who are agrarian laborers, are considered for the purpose of understanding and analyses. People of Maala community are of a low income profile and work for daily wages at the Landlords. Their work involves a lot of physical toil and they are the people who actually work on ground to result in the successful agricultural yield. The landlords here are affluent and make the people of lower caste communities work for their agricultural fields. Other than the occasional supervision, checking of the accounts and planning, there is no physical toil involved in the work of the landlords. They are, hence, with a lot of accessibility to leisure time and involve in various activities all through the day. On the other hand, the Maala workers at the fields work for a minimum of six to eight hours in the fields in hot sun and have lunch in the field itself. Their day starts at around seven in the morning and continues till evening. Sometimes it is observed that some of these workers remain at the fields to safeguard the crop and the yield during the nights. Despite such variations in their lifestyles both the landlords and the workers spend time towards leisure activities, though the attributes of such leisure are extremely different and the perception of the same by themselves and the rest of the society are also varied. When a Maala worker spends his time in a leisurely activity, it is majorly towards smoking, sitting and chatting with other workers in the fields, gossips, drinking rice beverage (Kallu), playing small board games etc. In the community of Reddy, the leisure time activities include spending time with the higher community people in the name of social networking, watching television, discussing politics with the fellow community people, drinking alcoholic beverages etc. Though both the communities do similar activities during leisure times, the perception of leisure by the people is diverse. The time spent on leisure activities by the Maala workers is often criticized by the Reddy communities as a futile time waste activity or addiction or valueless chatter which doesn't make any sense.

When the Maala workers are asked about the leisure time activities, they said that they do not have any leisure time at all. This explains that any work gaps that they go through during the day is not perceived as a leisure time by them. They further said that flocking together for a chit chat is an attempt to understand the world better and to gain the essential support of the fellow men. They reason drinking rice beverage as a relief from their body pains and fatigue because of continuous physical strain at the fields. A game played at the field is perceived as a brief relief while they say that they still continue to keep an eye on the field when they do it. This explains the meaning of leisure among the Maala community people as different when compared to the one that was explained by the western societies. On the other hand, when the people of Reddy community are asked about their leisure time activity, there is a sense of pride that exists in their talk to explain about various things that they do as leisure time activities. They tend to expect the listeners to appreciate their hobby instincts, taste for aesthetics and their humble attitude despite their profound affluence. The instinct to bet in games such as rooster fights and poker games is boasted as an adventurous way of living life, rightfully lived as they own the affluence but don't value its possession. They comment on the leisure time chit chat of the lower communities as the illiterate and unknowledgeable chatter and advise the working communities to focus on their work for the improvement of their lives. They further claim that their affluence is because of their smart hard work and discipline though it is most of the time properties descended from their previous generations.

In the field village, a sample of 200 people belonging to Maala and Reddy communities was studied focusing on the employment and unemployment thus prevailing (Table: I). It is visible that the number of male workers in agriculture sector is more than females. The Maala community works as agriculture labour at the agriculture fields where as Reddy community people own the lands of agriculture. In the recent periods, there is a shift of higher communities moving from agriculture

industry to other industries like business, financing, shifting to urban cities for private jobs and Government employment etc. There is also a shift among the lower community people from agriculture labour to construction works, brick industry, factories, migration to urban cities for the posts of watchmen, labour contracts, etc. This shift from villages to cities and towns, in fact, is not providing lower communities to progress through their existing economic or social status. The work among the lower communities that is available at the urban setups is considered as a lower level of work among the people living back at the villages.

Table I. Employment by Gender.

Community	Employed				Unemployed	
	Agriculture		Non Agriculture			
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Reddy	78	10	36	4	14	58
Maala	87	50	15	10	20	18
M- Male. F- Female. (Total Sample Size 400 people) (200 from each community)						

Women, work and Leisure:

It is a general perception of male members of all the communities universally in the village that the work of any sort done by women are trivial and are in no condition at par with the males do in the society. The work done by women at homes is not considered as work at all. Raising of children, cooking, taking care of the family members and elders, participating in social gatherings and family bonding etc are all not many times are not considered as work as they do not yield money. This happens to women across all the communities irrespective of their higher or lower economic or social status. Men sometimes describe the condition of women as a day full of leisure despite her tightly packed day schedule with the handling of many responsibilities and activities. This is reflected in the wages that are paid to the women as well. Despite the clear legal guide lines that stipulate equal pay to men and women, the wages paid to the women are lesser than what are paid to the men. Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 guarantees equal pay to both men and women in the country. But, even then, this way of thinking is further supported by saying that men work for a higher or better yield because of their physical strength. In fact, in a true condition there is no difference in the quantity of work or yield and sometimes women are reputed to work the whole day with minimum time spent towards relaxation. Men are observed to take breaks during the work for smoking and tea, while women generally take breaks when they want to go to toilet, have lunch or take care of their child.

Women of higher communities do not go to work. Not working is not treated as an inability or lapse. Further, it is considered by the men and women of the higher communities that their women going to work is a stigma to their status and that their affluence does not necessitate women to go to work. Though the women have any hidden interests to work for themselves, such interest is suppressed by the rest of the members of the families of the higher communities. The idea of working for themselves in women itself is killed at a very early age as it has become a part of the culture of the village. But in the case of women of the lower communities, work of women is treated as an essential support to the families. Men in lower communities also support women working and earning for the sake of supporting their families. In some cases, it is also observed that the men completely depend on the earnings of the women who go, work and bring the payment.

Leisure is a product of Freedom and Independence. Freedom and independence are scarce for women in patriarchal societies. The stringent social and cultural setups in the rural societies generally restrict the women from acting independently or emancipating themselves from the tight chains and cuffs of the restrictive lifestyle. Women are often in the fear of being criticized by their own families and societies and hence don't participate in expressing their ideas of freedom and thought.

The women of higher caste communities are encouraged to refrain from the concept of leisure and any activity that is dear to heart as they fancy. The idea thus imposed again by the society on a women is that they should spend their leisure time in pious activities such as worshipping God or visiting a temple only. Along with the concept of worship, activities like embroidery, learning musical instruments, learning to cook various recipes etc; which cater to the advantage of the men and family are considered to be meaningful leisure activities. Playing indoor games, watching television, chit chatting, activities that require woman to step out of the house are treated as trivial activities. In the case of lower community women, freedom and independence are integral parts of their lifestyle. The freedom thus brought in by the social setup and the economical necessity of the lower community women offers an ease to do any leisure time activity as they wish, though they are considered trivial. The social constraints that are prevailing over the rest of the society are implemented in a lesser magnitude and intensity because of a necessity driven, freedom oriented, independent lifestyle of the lower community women. This situation is made use by the lower community women to escalate in terms of the ability to understand and maneuver through any situation as exposure to multiple conditions always builds experience. Influence of education and urbanization is also visible on the social setup. The women who go to the village from an urban setup with the tag of being well educated is not considered of any low look even if she participates in any of the restricted activities and further all the socially restricted activities are in fact demonstrated in pride to the women by men themselves. This emphasizes that education along with caste and class, influences the status of women positively when they are educated despite all the social restrictions.

Conclusion:

Among the non industrialized societies, the concept of work and leisure differs with the concept of western societies. The social and cultural setups of the people in the villages influence the concepts of work and leisure in the non western societies. India, being a caste and class driven society, the understanding of work and leisure gets influenced by the hierarchical setup that is prevailing over a long period of time. Though work and leisure are two different entities, one has to study the two concepts as a single entity, such that it helps in understanding the pattern of work and leisure among these societies. Work, though is defined as something which is serious, result oriented, not play etc differs from its stereotypic explanation and reflects a much complicated concept in relation to the social setups. Leisure is always viewed as a time pass and not a serious activity. But the meaning of leisure differs when compared with the concept that is shared among men and women from the same society. What is leisure for one may not be a leisure for other and thus, it is always better to understand what leisure is in a complete sense by comparing it with the concept of work and its social and cultural dimensions.

Reference:

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