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Women And Constraints In Leisure: A Gender Perspective

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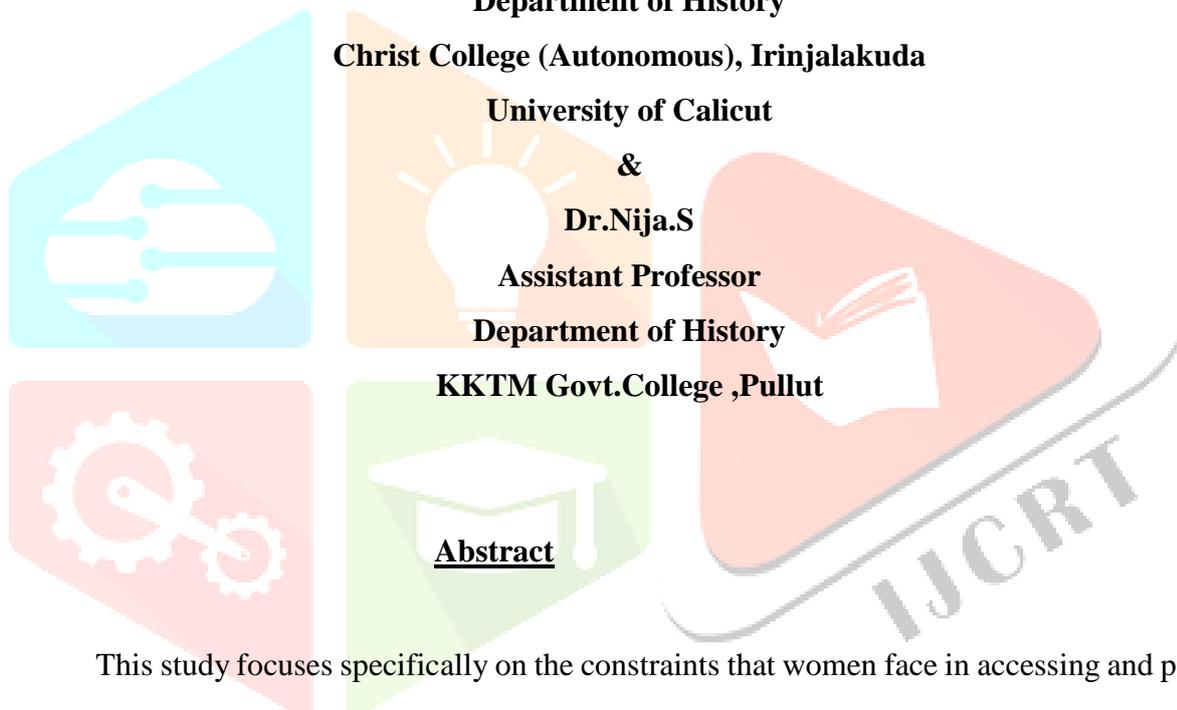
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This study focuses specifically on the constraints that women face in accessing and participating in leisure activities. The study examines the gendered dimensions of leisure and discuss how social, cultural and economic factors restrict women's leisure opportunities while comparing with men. Key themes include time, psychological constraints, economic limitations, safety matters, unpaid care responsibilities and socio-cultural norms. The study highlights the need for inclusive leisure policies and practises that address the systematic inequalities that affect women's access to free time and recreation.

Key Words

Gender, Leisure, Constraints

Introduction

Gender is not as straightforward a concept as many believe. It is distinct from sex, the physical and physiological features that differentiate females and males. As opposed to being a biological designation, gender is a social construction. It also refers to the rank ordering of the social division, and subsequent statuses, on interlocking social levels. The distinction between female and male spheres operates in the family, the economy, religion, political systems, educational institutions and culture.ⁱ Gender influences everybody's life from the time he or she emerges as a baby into the world until his or her dying days. Children are taught and negotiate an "appropriate" gender identity, both consciously and unconsciously from the first day forward, through the clothing they wear, the ways they are encouraged or not to use their bodies, and the toys they are given. Gender in all its manifestations is also enacted in play, recreation, and leisure.ⁱⁱ

A category of analysis is basically a methodological tool that enables a researcher to identify and isolate certain elements in the reality. Like caste and religion, gender is both a part of the reality we study as well as the lens through which we view that realityⁱⁱⁱ. On this basis gender is used as a category of analysis in this paper. A disparity in the social role of men and women is manifest among virtually all peoples in the world. This disparity raises the women question and refers to the overall position of women in a society. Certain customs and traditions in the society impose limitations which all women face with regard to their rights and duties. But the effect of these customs and traditions on men is entirely contrary.

Leisure as a need

Leisure is an experience that gives one pleasure and happiness without any restriction or bondage. Activities during leisure need not to be productive. There are positive associations between quality time spent in leisure activities and life satisfaction.^{iv}

The study of leisure is largely a twentieth century phenomenon. Until the 1980's the topic of women and leisure was mostly unexamined. Infact a focused analysis of leisure women and gender remains an important area of exploration. In 1975 the United Nations commissioned a

Report on world leisure and recreation. The report highlighted these factors and the growing importance of leisure in today's world. It claimed that people cannot grow on the basis of physical sustenance alone, they need a cultural identity, a sense of social fulfilment, a regeneration of body and spirit which comes from various forms of recreation and leisure.^v

The word 'leisure' means the time when one is not working or occupied. It is the time when one is free from work or other duties and can relax. Leisure activities play a very important role in the wellbeing of an individual. They provide many opportunities to meet life values and needs. By participating in leisure activities people build social relationships, feel positive emotions, and acquire additional skills and knowledge. It also can improve the quality of life. But for many reasons women's leisure remains fragmented and secondary. It remains fragmented because of the interpretation in leisure due to responsibilities like attending the children or the needs of other family members. Leisure becomes secondary when it is combined with no leisure activities.^{vi}

Factors of constraints

Women's participation in leisure activities is affected by many constraints, such as gender roles expected from women, the cultural structure of society, and society's perspective on women, economic dependency, psychological factors, safety issues etc. In a traditional society women were assigned the responsibility of childcare and household activities. These roles have definitely affected their experience in public space, as well as their participation in leisure activities.

Franck and Paxson in their book "*Women and Urban Space*" refers to several effects because of these. The most prominent one is that women's mobility tends to be more restricted than that of men. The engagement in housekeeping and child care led women to be less prone to benefit from the public space for discretionary use, often accompanied by little children or older people. Fatherhood is neither an arduous task nor a responsibility for a man. Men do not worry about children in an obsessive sort of way. Child care is considered as a part of the natural organic female universe.

V. Geetha in her work "*Gender*" says that "If the glory of motherhood is expounded in songs and literature, fatherhood enjoys a significant status in law and matters of the state. The status of a father is thus both biological and secular: as a father a man partakes of a civil identity. The civil identity places him in two worlds: the familial and the social. Motherhood on the other hand possess no civil status and remains locked within the familial sphere of home, babies, nurture". In this regard, the presence of men is predominant in public spaces characterized by amenities such as betting, chess playing, or sports facilities such as baskets, football, and baseball courts.^{vii}

Psychological constraints are also a barrier for women in enjoying their leisure time. Education and work enhance a women's chances to travel and entering new friendships. Yet these chances are limited because women rarely imagine they deserve these things.^{viii} The social patriarchal structures impose barriers to women both functional and symbolic. They suffer guilt if they utilize a holiday to get away somewhere on their own. Women are convinced that leisure experiences that lie beyond the ken of the family are not legitimate. Child care, housework, kinship obligations combine to render her world limited and closed.^{ix} Gender roles always give women the position of care giver. She is always expected to spend most time in household chores and looking after children and the aged ones in the family .On the contrary men do not suffer from similar blockage. While lack of access to experiences and resources lead to women's disadvantage, men utilize their alienation from certain experiences to underscore their authority.^x

Safety is another concern that women has to deal with while thinking of spending their leisure time alone. Lack of safe accessible public spaces discourage women from participating in leisure. When alone, women tend to avoid public spaces perceived as unsafe, especially those with low maintenance. Public infrastructure and state policies often overlook women's need in leisure planning. Urban planning rarely centres on women mobility and safety. Woman who stands up bravely to sexual harassment, who refuses to remain passive in the face of provocation finds out that ultimately the streets are not safe for her. People will be there to blame her for being forward and unfeminine. Most important she realizes is that she does not possess the mobility and ease to feel entirely comfortable in public places. It is as if she is being told that she belongs to the inner world of home and family. Here there is the recognition that female recreation is clearly home and family based. But there is no questioning of unequal access to leisure space either at home or in the public sphere for these women when compared with their partners.^{xi}

Economic constraint is also a factor that deny women their leisure time. Even those women who are gainfully employed have some economic independence, they are not totally free from the control of their parents, if unmarried, and from their husbands, if married. Whether women enjoy economic dependency or independence they are submissive to the dominant one in the family. The argument that economic independence will give a free hand to our women does not sound realistic. Cultural impacts do affect male and female behaviour. It is culture which elaborates the psychological, social and moral implications of biological characters. Their cultural norms explain why a large number of women remain at home and a very few come forward to access the public spaces and enjoy their freedom.

The human body is schooled into looking, acting, desiring, expressing and controlling its movements in a certain way through a range of institutions and agents as well as ideas and beliefs. The family, school, media, religious and cultural organizations provide norms as well as exercise power and influence over us. Among these are modes of dress, child rearing practices, food, education entertainment and leisure are allocated differently to boys and girls. Very few people seriously dispute widely accepted social and cultural norms.^{xii}

“The limits to rule-breaking constitute the outermost contours of a social system which we shall describe as patriarchy, keeping in mind the diverse interpretations of this system. These limits have to do with the material life lead by men and women and the roles and functions that are supposed to be innate to them. Thus whatever interpretations we choose ,it is clear that under patriarchy,women,whose life are defined by reproduction and familial responsibilities ,find themselves blocked out of many experiences: for example the freedom of outdoors,a life of adventure, professions that require travel and mobility”^{xiii}

Cultural norms and values existing in a society plays an important role in determining the leisure time and space of women in that society. In many societies women engaging in public leisure activities can face disgrace or disapproval. In a conservative community it will be more intensive. These attitudes discourage women from pursuing leisure in both inside and outside the house .A woman's free will to participate in the activity she wants is only possible if the constraints to participation are removed. ^{xiv} When inequality is discussed, money, property, power and rights become key players in the conversation. But rarely do we discuss time and its ownership, quantity and quality as a resource. In reality, the freedom to have time and choose what to do with it is tied to our social and economic standing, which in turn are informed by our caste, class, geography and gender.^{xv}

Conclusion

Leisure is not just a feminist issue, it's a feminist tool to create a new world—first within and then beyond. It wins the capitalist, patriarchal and casteist battles by declining to fight them. It is a victory that chooses the power within instead of the power over. It is this refusal to fight these man-made battles that effectively proves that they are not worth fighting because there are more important things to do like cuddling your loved ones, singing songs in a group, sipping tea while staring into space, grieving a loss with all your might or appreciating a good sunset with all your heart. They actually have little to relax, explore themselves

and be idle. For men, being idle is a choice. A right they earn by virtue of being a breadwinner, or one in the making. For women, especially homemakers, it is an accusation. Because the value of labour is measured in economic terms, the labour of caregiving and managing homes is unpaid, unacknowledged, underappreciated and unceasing. For women finding free time to do nothing is foreign and being idle is equivalent to being worthless. So they work constantly for not to feel guilty.

In practice, our benchmarks for feminist struggles are not high enough because we are stuck in the survival mode of fighting for land, labour and money distribution. The basic security of physical and financial safety is essential, but not sufficient. Our standards for feminism should be much higher, something that demands undisturbed and unguarded time for women to be themselves. A lot needs to be rectified in the world for a woman. They should be able to sit on a chair on her porch, reading a newspaper, sipping her morning tea. She should get enough personal time for self-care, less judgment and more mind space for encouraging self-actualisation. Guilt-free leisure can truly be a vehicle for liberation.^{xvi}

END NOTES

ⁱ M.Bahati Kuumba, *Gender and Social Movements*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2003, p.9.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.sagamorepub.com/products/leisure-women-and-gender?src=lipdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ V.Geetha, *Theorising Feminism, Gender*, Mandira Sen for STREE, Kolkata, 2002, p.10.

^{iv} Anju Beniwal, *Leisure for Working Women: An Indian Scenario*, *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, Vol.5, 2022, p.1.

^v Betsy Wearing, *Leisure and Feminist Theory*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1998, p.1.

^{vi} *Opcit.*, Anju Beniwal.

^{vii} Seri Valera, Hernan Casakin, *Integrating Observation and network analysis to identify Patterns of Use in the Public Space :A Gender Perspective*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol.13, 2022, p.2.

^{viii} *Opcit.*, V.Geetha, p.134

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x *Ibid.*, p.135.

^{xi} *Opcit.*, Betsy Wearing, p.6

^{xii} *Opcit.*, V.Geetha, pp.131-132

^{xiii} *Opcit.*, V.Geetha, p.134

^{xiv} Aydın C., & Özel C.H, *Factors determining women's participation in leisure activities in Turkey*, *World Leisure Journal*, 2022

^{xv} <https://www.vogue.in/culture-and-living>

^{xvi} <https://www.vogue.in/culture-and-living>