

Between Work, Worship and Play: Leisure Practices among the Garasia of Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

For the Garasia of Rajasthan, leisure is not experienced as free time separated from work or ritual life. Rather, it forms part of everyday living and is closely tied to agricultural routines, religious practices and social interaction. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper examines how leisure emerges in the spaces between work and worship and how it is practiced collectively within the Garasia village. Music, dance, informal gatherings and festival celebrations constitute important leisure practices through which social relationships are maintained and cultural knowledge is shared. At the same time, newer forms of leisure associated with mobile phones and digital media are becoming visible, especially among the younger generation. Instead of viewing these changes as cultural decline, the paper situates them within ongoing processes of continuity and change. By focusing on everyday practices, the paper argues that leisure provides an important lens for understanding social life and community organisation of Garasia.

Keywords: Leisure, Garasia, Work and Worship, Tribal Social Life, Rajasthan.

Introduction

In anthropological writing on tribal societies, leisure has rarely been treated as a subject in its own right. Most classical studies focused on subsistence, kinship, religion and social organisation, while everyday activities such as singing, dancing, sitting together or sharing the moments of rest were often mentioned only in passing (Malinowski, 1922; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). When leisure was discussed, it was usually understood as time left over after work, or as a form of recreation similar to that found in industrial societies (Veblen, 1899; Dumazedier, 1967). Leisure can also be understood as a social practice embedded in everyday routines rather than as time free from obligations (Kelly, 2012; Pink, 2012).

Such an understanding does not fully explain leisure in tribal contexts. Among the Garasia of Rajasthan, work, worship and social life are not sharply divided. Agricultural labour, ritual obligations and everyday interactions flow into one another. Leisure appears not as a clearly marked activity but as something that unfolds within these overlapping spheres.

This paper examines leisure practices among the Garasia by focusing on how people relax, gather, celebrate and enjoy social company within the rhythms of everyday life. Leisure here is not about individual choice or consumption but about being together. Singing, dancing, storytelling and informal gatherings are part of ordinary life. These moments may appear ordinary, yet they play an important role in maintaining social relationships and shared cultural life.

The paper also looks at recent changes in leisure practices, especially the growing use of mobile phones and digital media. These newer forms of leisure are changing how people spend their free moments, particularly among the youth. However, the traditional collective practices continue to hold importance, especially during festivals and community events. By looking closely at leisure as it is lived and experienced, this paper argues that leisure offers valuable insights into Garasia social life, cultural continuity and ongoing change.

While there is substantial anthropological literature on tribal economy, ritual and social organisation in India, leisure as an everyday practice remains underexplored. Existing studies often address festivals and ritual performance without treating leisure as an analytical category in its own right. This paper contributes to the study everyday life by examining leisure as embedded within work and worship in a tribal context.

The paper uses the concept of embedded leisure to understand Garasia practices. By embedded leisure, this paper refers to forms of rest, enjoyment and social interaction that are interwoven with work, worship and everyday obligations rather than separated from them. This concept provides a framework for understanding how leisure operates relationally rather than as an autonomous sphere of activity.

Methodology

The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork among the Garasia in Sirohi district. The study follows a qualitative and interpretive approach, drawing mainly from participant observation. The observations are based primarily in one Garasia village, where households depend mainly on agriculture and seasonal labour. Along with this, the study also draws on informal conversations and repeated interaction with men, women and youth across different age groups. The focus is on leisure as it happens naturally in daily life rather than as an activity separated out for special study. All names and identifying details have been kept anonymous.

Understanding Leisure in Everyday Life

In many studies, leisure is defined as time free from work (Veblen, 1899; Dumazedier, 1967). This definition assumes that work and leisure are separate spheres, each with its own space and time. Such a view fits industrial and urban contexts but is less useful for understanding rural and tribal societies.

Anthropological approaches suggest a different way of thinking about leisure. Rather than treating it as the opposite of work, leisure can be seen as a social practice embedded in everyday life (Kelly, 2012). From this perspective, leisure is shaped by cultural norms, social relations and shared rhythms of life.

Bourdieu's idea of habitus helps in understanding this process. Habitus refers to the ways in which people learn to act, feel and behave through everyday participation in social life (Bourdieu, 1977). Leisure practices are not randomly chosen; they are learned over time. People know when it is appropriate to sing, dance, joke or sit quietly, and these practices differ according to age, gender and social context.

Studies of everyday life also highlight the importance of routine activities in producing meaning (de Certeau, 1984). Leisure, in this sense, is not extraordinary. Instead, it is a part of the ordinary flow of life and plays a role in maintaining relationships and shared understandings.

For the Garasia, leisure is best understood in this way, as something woven into daily living rather than separated from it.

The Garasia Context

The Garasia are a tribal community living in parts of Rajasthan, particularly in the Sirohi district. Their livelihood is mainly based on agriculture, with additional dependence on occasional wage labour. Village life is organised around kinship ties, neighbourhood relations and a shared ritual calendar.

Social interaction is largely collective. Agricultural work often involves co-operation among family members and neighbours. Rituals and festivals bring together the entire village. These collective orientations also shape leisure practices. Leisure rarely takes place in isolation; it is usually shared with others.

The observations presented in this paper are based on ethnographic fieldwork that involved participant observation and informal interaction over an extended period. Leisure was observed as part of everyday life, during evenings, festivals and moments of rest, rather than as a separate activity to be studied in isolation.

Leisure within the Rhythms of Work

Agricultural work plays a central role in shaping daily and seasonal rhythms among the Garasia. Daily routines are shaped by the demands of the fields, seasonal changes and collective labour. Yet the work does not occupy every moment in a rigid or continuous manner. Periods of intense labour during sowing and harvesting are followed by relatively lighter phases. Leisure practices tend to appear during these intervals.

Leisure does not begin only after work is completed for the day. Rather, it is also present within work itself. Singing while working, playful exchanges during collective labour and shared meals blur the boundary between work and leisure. These practices show that leisure does not necessarily interrupt work; instead, it accompanies it. In such a context, work and leisure cannot be clearly separated.

Moreover, evenings are particularly important as moments when leisure becomes more visible. After returning from the fields, people often sit together in courtyards or open spaces. Conversations, jokes and shared silence are common. These moments allow people to relax while remaining socially connected. These gatherings are informal and unplanned, yet they occur regularly and form an important part of daily life.

Women's leisure often unfolds alongside domestic work. After completing household tasks, women may sit together while preparing food, caring for children or resting. These moments allow for conversation, singing and companionship. Leisure in this sense is closely tied to domestic space and does not require withdrawal from responsibilities. In fact, it offers brief moments of relaxation within the flow of daily duties.

One important part which is observed is that leisure does not appear as a clearly marked category of time. There is no fixed hour designated for rest or recreation. It appears when work loosens its hold, when tasks are temporarily set aside or when people choose to remain together after completing necessary labour. This fluidity challenges common assumptions that leisure must be scheduled or deliberately planned.

Anthropological studies of non-industrial societies have long noted this overlap between work and leisure (Malinowski, 1922). Among the Garasia, such overlap is not accidental but central to the social life. Leisure practices help maintain social bonds and allow individuals to remain connected to the community even during demanding periods of labour. Shared moments of rest and interaction reinforce a sense of belonging and mutual dependence.

Leisure also plays a role in regulating the pace of work. Continuous labour without social interaction is neither expected nor valued. Instead, short pauses for conversation or humour are seen as natural and necessary. These pauses also allow individuals to recover physically and emotionally, while also reaffirming social ties. Leisure thus supports the work rather than opposing it.

Such observations challenge the idea that leisure must be separate from productive activity. Among the Garasia, leisure emerges naturally within the flow of everyday labour. It does not function as an escape from labour but as a complementary aspect of everyday life. By paying attention to these small but often overlooked moments, we gain insight into how social life is sustained through ordinary practices.

Worship, Festivals and Leisure

Among the Garasia, worship is not confined to moments of ritual performance alone. Religious life extends into everyday social interaction and sacred spaces often function as important sites of leisure. Temples, village shrines and open ritual grounds are places where people gather not only to offer prayers but also to meet others, talk, observe and spend time together. In this sense, religious life is closely tied to leisure practices.

Festivals such as Holi provide the clearest example of how work, worship and play come together. These festivals transform the village into a shared celebratory space. Ritual activities are accompanied by music, dance and enjoyment. Festivals allow for expressions of joy that are otherwise restrained in everyday life. Participation is expected and encouraged. These occasions strengthen the community bonds.

Sacred spaces themselves change during festivals. Areas usually associated with reverence and restraint become lively and animated. Yet this does not diminish their sacred character. Instead, it reveals a different mode of engagement with the sacred, one that includes joy, laughter and shared

pleasure. Leisure, in this context, does not undermine worship; it complements it by reinforcing collective belonging.

These moments can be explained through the work on ritual and play by Victor Turner. Turner (1982) suggests that rituals create spaces where normal routines are temporarily relaxed, allowing for expressive interaction. Among the Garasia, festivals provide such spaces, where leisure becomes an accepted and meaningful part of religious life.

Religious narratives and songs further blur the boundary between worship and leisure. Worship of local deities, periodic offerings and community rituals draw people together, creating opportunities for interaction beyond the ritual itself. Leisure is woven into the ritual experience itself.

Music, Dance and Collective Leisure

Music and dance form an important part of Garasia leisure. Practices such as the Walar dance are not performed for display but are participatory in nature. Men and women of different ages take part according to social norms. They emerge naturally during festivals, social gatherings and moments when people come together.

One of the most visible forms of leisure is the Walar dance. This dance is performed during festive occasions, especially during Holi. It involves group participation rather than individual display. Men and women take part forming semi-circles, moving rhythmically. The most striking feature of this dance is that it only relies on clapping and voice. Unlike many dance forms that depend heavily on instruments, the rhythm here is produced collectively through co-ordinated clapping and singing.

Traditional instruments like the *dholki* and *tambura* accompany during the festive occasions and performances. The emphasis is not on skill or perfection but on participation. Dancing and singing allow people to express joy, strengthen social ties and affirm a shared identity. Songs often carry references to everyday life, relationships and shared values. While some songs have religious associations, others reflect social themes and local experiences.

These collective practices reflect what Turner (1982) describes as the social importance of performance. Leisure here is active and communal rather than passive or individual. It reinforces social bonds and collective belonging through participation.

Even as newer forms of leisure become visible, music and dance continue to hold significance during festivals and major gatherings. Their persistence highlights the importance of collective forms of enjoyment in Garasia social life. Through music and dance, leisure becomes a shared experience that connects work, worship and social interaction in everyday life.

Informal Leisure and Social Interaction

Not all leisure takes the form of music or dance. Informal gatherings are equally important. Sitting together in the evenings, sharing stories, teasing and casual conversation are common features of daily life. They emerge naturally as people finish their tasks and choose to remain together rather than retreat immediately into their homes.

Conversation during these gatherings is fluid and wide-ranging. People talk about the day's work, local events, family matters or upcoming rituals. Elders occupy an important place within these gatherings. They often narrate experiences or stories, while younger people listen. These interactions help transmit knowledge and values across generations. Leisure thus becomes a space for learning, though not in a formal sense.

On many evenings, after returning from the fields, small groups gathered in the courtyards between houses. One such evening, three older men sat on woven cots while younger men squatted nearby. Conversation moved between the day's work and village matters. At times, no one spoke for several minutes. These silences were not awkward but part of the gathering. An elderly man eventually began narrating an incident from earlier years related to land matters. Children played nearby. Leisure here was marked not by activity alone, but by shared presence.

Gender shapes informal leisure in subtle ways. Women's informal leisure often unfolds alongside domestic responsibilities. While preparing food, caring for children or resting after household work, women sit together and talk. These moments allow for sharing concerns, exchanging advice and offering emotional support. Men's gatherings may take place in slightly different spaces, often involving discussion of work or village matters.

Such everyday leisure practices highlight how social relationships are maintained through routine interaction. They show that leisure plays a quiet but significant role in sustaining community life. It does not rely on spectacle or performance. Instead, it operates quietly through presence, conversation and shared time.

Changing Forms of Leisure

In recent years, mobile phones and digital media have introduced new forms of leisure. Young people increasingly watch videos, listen to recorded music and engage with online content.

Several times, young men sat together in the same courtyard, each focused on his phone. Although physically close, interaction was minimal. Sometimes, a video would be shown to others, followed by brief laughter, before attention returned to individual screens. A woman passed a remark that earlier people talked more, now everyone sits quietly with phone.

This shift has changed the nature of everyday leisure, making it less collective in some contexts. Unlike traditional forms of leisure, which are largely collective and publicly visible, digital leisure is often individual or semi-private. Young people may sit together physically while each person engages with their own phone. This marks a noticeable shift in how leisure is experienced and perceived. The presence of the body remains in shared space but attention is directed elsewhere, creating a different kind of social interaction.

However, traditional practices have not disappeared. Festivals, dances and communal gatherings still continue to attract the people. Elders often evaluate prolonged phone use through moral language, describing it as 'wasting time' in contrast to leisure that follows work and involves shared presence.

The shift towards digital leisure also reflects broader changes in aspiration and exposure. Mobile phones connect young people to worlds beyond the village, offering images, music and narratives that differ from local experiences. Leisure thus becomes a site where global influences intersect with local realities.

Appadurai (1996) reminds us that global influences are always interpreted locally. Among the Garasia, digital leisure exists alongside traditional forms rather than replacing them entirely.

Changing forms of leisure reveal ongoing negotiation rather than abrupt transformation. Traditional collective practices continue to hold significance, especially during festivals and rituals, while digital leisure introduces new modes of engagement that complement them.

Leisure, Continuity and Change

Leisure practices offer insights into broader changes within the Garasia society. Because leisure is embedded in everyday life, it reflects shifts in social relations, aspirations and moral expectations in subtle but revealing ways.

Collective leisure continues to reinforce social bonds and shared identity while newer forms reflect changing aspirations and exposure to wider cultural influences. The growing presence of digital media, individualised entertainment and new modes of engagement suggests a gradual shift in how leisure is experienced, particularly among young generations.

Leisure thus acts as an indicator of social change. It reveals how new practices are absorbed without completely displacing older ones. At the same time, it shows the resilience of collective ways of life. It also reveals generational differences in how social life is valued and organised.

Leisure does not simply mirror change; it mediates it. It allows new practices to enter social life while maintaining continuity with existing norms and relationships.

Conclusion

For the Garasia, leisure is not separate from work or worship. It is a part of everyday living, shaped by agricultural routines, ritual calendars and social relationships. Leisure emerges in the intervals of daily living rather than being set apart as a distinct category of time. Through music, dance, informal gatherings and festival celebrations, leisure helps sustain community life and cultural continuity.

It can be observed that leisure among the Garasia is fundamentally social in character. It is experienced through participation, presence and shared engagement with others. These practices are not peripheral to social life; they are central to how relationships are maintained and community cohesion is achieved.

At the same time, changing forms of leisure associated with digital media reflect ongoing transformations. However, these newer forms do not simply replace older collective practices. Instead, they co-exist with them. Leisure thus becomes a site where social change is not only reflected but actively managed and mediated in everyday life.

By focusing on everyday practices, this paper shows that leisure provides a useful lens for understanding social life among the Garasia. Paying attention to such ordinary moments allows anthropology to move beyond formal institutions and towards a deeper understanding of how people live, relate and find meaning in their daily lives.

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