Introduction
Most renditions of the history of leisure describe a path that traces back through the Christian traditions of Western Europe to the philosophies of ancient Greece (cf. Goodale & Godbey, 1988). Surprisingly, there has been little effort to trace the history of leisure in non-western cultures. This paper reviews concepts similar to leisure in the Aryan/Vedic age in India (2000 BCE – 500 BCE), and highlights commonalities between those concepts and the Greek philosophies with which we are more familiar. Though Greece and India had somewhat similar philosophies circa 500 BCE, leisure evolved very differently in India than in Western Europe. Understanding these concepts in Indian culture not only expands our understanding of the history of leisure, it offers an alternative perspective on leisure as a forum for self enrichment and community-building.

Greek Origins and Leisure Ideals
The western concept of leisure traces its origins to the Greek society and Aristotle (350 BCE), and to the Greek word schole, “a state of being free from the necessity to labor.” According to Goodale and Godbey (1988), schole was “the search for the wisdom of life” (p. 2) or “a way of living” (p. 11). Leisure was the cultural ideal, “the only life fit for a Greek” (deGrazia, 1962, p. 20). Aristotle was the chief architect of this classical view. In Politics he wrote that work and leisure were both necessary in the good life, but “the first principle of all (good) action is leisure.” Aristotle concluded that leisure is necessary for the development of excellence and the performance of political duties. According to him the life of excellence, which all free men should lead, occurred only during leisure. This came to be accepted as the Greek ideal. Leisure in Greek society was elitist, privy to the select few who spent their lives in music, education, cultural pursuits, and contemplation. Contemplation was believed to raise one to a higher intellectual plane of existence, and was the key to moving from the materialistic world towards self-actualization. For the hoi polloi, there was anapausis (recreation), which was a socially organized form of institutionalized leisure available to everybody. Anapausis was to rejuvenate those who had to work so that they would have the emotional and physical strength to return to work.

Vedic Origins and Leisure Ideals
In India, the Aryans established the Vedic civilization which lasted from 2000 BCE to about 500 BCE, preceding but also overlapping with the Greek civilization which flourished towards the end of the Vedic era. The Vedic civilization was the forerunner of modern Indian society and laid the roots of modern day Indian culture including literature, philosophy, arts, and crafts. The Vedas (from the root ‘vid’ – ‘to know’ in Sanskrit) are the most sacred scriptures of the Hindus and were a record of the religion, philosophy, and ways of life of the Vedic culture. Besides the Vedas, the advanced state of this society is evident in works on sciences, music, ayurveda (alternate medicine), vaastushastra (architecture), and astronomy, all of which were very highly developed.
However, the main advancement of Vedic culture was their refinement of philosophy. According to the Vedas, the pathway to eternal bliss begins with *sat*, or clearing the path of obstructions with recognition that awareness can not come about without truth. This is followed by *chit*, or pure consciousness which provides knowledge about the self and awareness about its infinite nature. *Ananda*, the last step, represents absolute bliss where all tension, stress, and obstruction have been released. While one is in a state of *sat-chit-ananda* the spiritual pores are completely open and harmony and synergistic synchronicity permeate one's entire being- a concept which resonates with the Greek understanding of *schole*. While one may pursue *sat-chit-ananda* through meditation, it ultimately comes to pervade one’s consciousness and exerts a visible influence on the demeanor, attitudes, and actions of those who pursue it.

**Commonalities in Leisure Philosophies**

There are historical records of contact between the ancient Greek and Vedic civilizations, most significantly through Alexander the Great whose conquests extended to the shores of the Indus River in India. Cultural exchange worked in both directions, with Alexander spreading his form of Hellenistic philosophy and ideals in the lands he conquered and bringing back to Greece the ideologies and philosophies of those distant lands. For example, the neo-platonic school which emerged in Greece strongly suggests the influence of Vedic philosophy from ancient India.

Without attempting to attribute the direction of influence, it is worthwhile to note important commonalities in Greek and Vedic ideology. Both cultures identified “happiness” as a goal in life, defining happiness as a spiritual state characterized by intrinsic motivation, intellectual freedom, and intuitive peace. In the Greek culture this was described as a life of pleasure (Epicureanism), a life of virtue (Stoicism), or the total suspension of judgment (Stoicism). Rising above the banal pursuit of worldly pleasure, the Greeks propagated a philosophy of reason and moderation as the path to true happiness. The end of human activity, or the highest good, was happiness, or perfect and reasonable activity in a perfect life.

Vedic culture captured a similar idea in the concept of ananda (unbounded bliss or happiness). This was the universal goal that all beings seek in the attainment of a happy life. Ananda is a state of being outside the ken of space and time and hence free from all bondage. The Aryans strived to attain ananda by performing good deeds (karma) such as contemplation, critical thinking, and reading, or by engaging in community events and discourse. Striving to reach the full potential of the mind and spirit gave rise to an ideal state that had order, harmony, and lack of conflict and hostilities.

In both the Greek and Vedic cultures of this era, contemplation and focused attention were believed to lead towards a higher plane of existence. Leisure—schole for the Greeks and ananda for the Aryans—was exemplified in a life that balanced the physical world with the spiritual and was characterized by a rich sense of happiness and self-actualization. Not only did both cultures seek this form of spiritual happiness, but they each promoted focused thought or meditation as a pathway towards that happiness. In both cultures, this ideal state of happiness appeared not through transitory pleasures but through a life that was dedicated towards goodness and attainment of spiritual bliss, through reason and action. In addition, in both cultures this ideal lifestyle was embedded
in serving the broader community of citizens whose spiritual and mental elevation provided a heightened sense of achievement of the leisure ideal.

**Leisure Embodied: Cultural Differences in the Meaning of Leisure**

In spite of tracing our history back to the Greek ideal, contemporary western leisure is not linked to contemplation or ethics. In America, leisure has come to represent segmented portions of time or activity, or fleeting states of mind. Rather than *schole*, this more closely represents *anapausis*, the diversional recreation of the Greek working class. In contemporary India, however, leisure ideals are manifested in a manner much more consistent with those ancient philosophies upon which they are rooted, and contemporary lifestyles still embody the Vedic traditions. In fact, the American word *leisure* has no direct parallel when translated into any Indian language. The closest translation is *ananda*, the old Sanskrit term representing a freedom full of bliss and joy, not a segment of time or activity but an overall state of existence associated with happiness and the good life.

It is therefore intriguing to contrast the evolution of leisure in the Indian culture with what has happened in Western culture. Modern Indian society still respects and encourages practices such as meditation and yoga through which the mind and body search for balance and purity, propagating a life of renunciation (of material pleasures), simplicity (in thoughts and action) and inner calm (through peace and selflessness). Rooted either in religious doctrine or social mandates, these philosophical discourses have transcended the ages and permeated societal ideals which Indians respect and strive to attain. Similar to the ideals of Greek citizenship, current Indian society encourages and supports cultural, educational, and spiritual exchange and discourse. These enrich not only the individual but the entire community and society as well.

American leisure scholars persistently describe a historical path that leads back to ancient Greece in spite of the fact that our leisure bears little resemblance to the ideals espoused by Greek philosophers. Considering the extent that Indian culture has retained a philosophy (of spirituality) akin to central ideals from Aristotle, it might be worthwhile to give more attention to the ways these concepts are embedded in Indian culture. These philosophical roots and spiritual understandings have transformed Indian society through a long and rich ethical tradition exemplified by sacrifice and non-violence. Rather than simply admiring these qualities, we must incorporate them into our daily lives and within our own families and communities. The nature of happiness and its practical attainment is embedded in this different understanding of leisure, where leisure is a means towards the attainment of life’s goals, connection of the mind and soul, discovery of our inner self, and self-actualization. With application of these concepts, leisure can promote greater civic engagement, peace, justice, harmony and thus eventually a happier society.

**References**


ABSTRACTS
of Papers Presented at the
Eleventh Canadian Congress on Leisure Research
May 17 – 20, 2005
Hosted by
Department of Recreation and Tourism Management
Malaspina University-College
Nanaimo, B.C.
Abstracts compiled and edited by
Tom Delamere, Carleigh Randall, David Robinson
CCLR-11 Programme Committee
Tom Delamere
Dan McDonald
Carleigh Randall
Rick Rollins
and
David Robinson

Copyright © 2005 Canadian Association for Leisure Studies
ISBN 1-896886-01-9