

SPACES for LEISURE



For us to comprehend even marginally why there is a change occurring in the status of leisure in the 'developing world', and why building and provision for leisure on the model of industrialised societies are few, it is necessary to briefly and very broadly survey the change in the status of leisure over various historical periods.

Most records of leisure activity in pre-colonial society are restricted to those of the privileged social classes in a feudal society: the monarchy, land-owning nobility, and the clergy. This should come as no surprise, since the pursuit of leisure by any social class in any society requires that they are either wholly or partially relieved from productive activity. Traditional social organisation based on the exploitation of servile peasant labour enabled the social surplus product to be appropriated and largely consumed by a ruling class of landowners and, whenever trade was a significant factor, by the various merchant groups who reaped the profits of trade. The range and experience of leisure and recreation by these groups generally corresponded to their access to, and control of, the social surplus product. Very few resources were expended on public leisure by the feudal state under classical feudalism. While these observations are true of the empires and feudal structures of the East, they are not generally representative of pre-colonial African societies, where the ratio of the surplus product to the social product is lower than under classical feudalism. It is possible that this "relative equality" hindered the development of opulent leisure construction patronised by powerful rulers, as is commonly found in the east.

The principal means of leisure practised by the rulers of the Eastern empires has bequeathed a sophisticated legacy of palaces and landscape garden design, and leisure pavilions associated therewith. Colleges and libraries are frequently mentioned as special building-types which catered to the intellectual pursuits of monks and the nobility. In addition, traders, bureaucrats and landlords appear to have occupied their leisure hours in hunting, riding and other house-centred activities like entertaining, gambling, scholarship and management.

In times of prosperous and vigorous trade, feudal cities or urban centres grew up on account of manufacturing as well as commerce. Less exclusive recreational facilities may be looked for in these

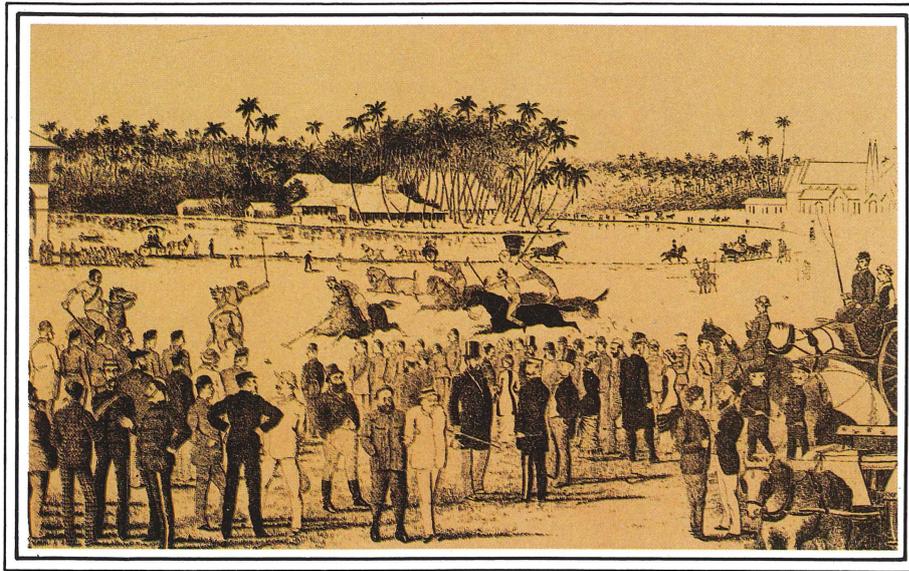
periods and in feudal cities. Like peasant leisure these may have taken the form of temporary structures or been strictly outdoor pastimes, thus denying us any material remains. There are scant records of training and recreational facilities for military personnel, especially within the large city-forts characteristic of certain regions of medieval feudalism. These refer to the construction of swimming baths, gymnasia and equestrian training facilities during times when standing armies were maintained.

The areas of Northern Africa annexed to the Roman Empire present a different picture of sport and leisure. Remains of popular sport-related leisure which characterised the predominantly slave society of urban Rome are thus to be found in Africa, where slavery on the Roman pattern was atypical of the pre-colonial era. The massive social surplus generated by slave labour was channeled, in some measure, towards entertaining the masses — especially in the urban centres. The circuses, amphitheatres, colonnaded walks and *thermae* are a part of the officially decreed leisure facilities for citizens. It has been argued that these gigantic structures were made possible due to the exploitation of slave labour, and that this very same slavery created the idleness of the plebeians. It was safer to control plebeian leisure time by diversion than to let them dwell upon social injustices of slavery and mass poverty. The spectacle of leisure organised by the aristocracy thus acted as a safety valve to deflect mass social unrest. The peculiarity of Roman public leisure cannot be understood without recognising that the social surplus product of slave societies differed considerably from that of feudalism found elsewhere. Classical feudalism did not engender the stupendous public spectacle of sport-related leisure. Sport in the Muslim Arab world for example, was subsequently a more private activity inclusive of horse riding, swimming, archery and similar pastimes.

The significance of religion in pre-colonial society led to a large share of public leisure related to the arts being combined with sacred establishments. This association precluded the evolution of a specific building form to accommodate the arts. They had at best special pavilions or platforms designated for such purposes within medieval religious complexes. The arts were privately pursued by the ruling classes, within courtly confines or private dwellings.

Leisure: Some Observations on Planning Traditions

Shanti Jayewardene



*Polo in Colombo, 1880. Popular pastime of the British.
Illustrations from R.K. de Silva "Early Prints of Ceylon" 1985.
Courtesy of the author and Serendib Publication, London.*

The material, literary and artistic remains of pre-colonial societies have provided us with many examples of parks and gardens which have both religious and leisure time associations. Pleasure gardens were built by the elites for their private use. On occasion when the clergy became powerful as a result of controlling great wealth, monasteries echoing the luxury of palaces were built. This phenomenon was especially common in late Buddhism. The public shared this leisure provision only when popular religious practice overlapped private provisions.

Early Buddhist literature records the gift of groves and parks assigned for use by monks and laymen. Many-Buddhist places of worship include halls and pavilions laid out in compounds amply landscaped with water, trees and boulders amidst which are located the principal shrines. These areas were public spaces intended for meditation, perambulation and prayer. Some late examples of this tradition are to be seen in the 8th to 10th century monasteries of China, Japan, Burma, India and Sri Lanka. The Tun-Huang caves of Kansu, China, have yielded paintings depicting the western paradise of Amitabha. They perhaps depict an idealised version of the lavish architectural and garden settings habituated by emperors and the monks of well-endowed monasteries. The 10th century remains of the Sri Lanka monasteries consist of walled college compounds, several of which together make up a major monastic site of a particular order. Imposing gateways penetrate the boundary wall leading to palatial multi-storey buildings surrounded by landscaped gardens, generously supplied with bathing and ornamental pools, libraries, cafeterias, bath houses and private shrines. It is believed that such opulent building by monastic establishments was made possible due to efficient hydraulic agricultural production. Hydraulic agriculture generated a relatively high productivity whose surplus was appropriated by monks as part of the land owning nobility.

The secular gardens of China, the oldest being at Shantung, 479 BC, attest to a sophisticated appreciation of nature and the development of informal and irregular, though highly planned, garden traditions which were more symbolic than natural. The secular gardens of China and Japan catered to a variety of contemplative activities ranging from composition of poetry to the viewing of fish, blos-

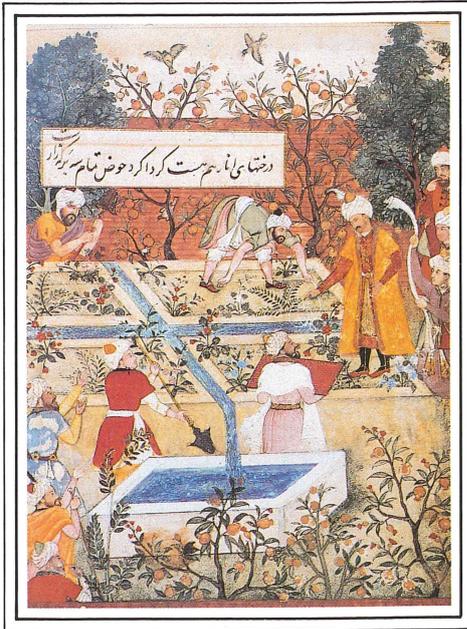


Dramatic Ballet, 1841. Peasant entertainment.
Illustrations from R.K. de Silva "Early Prints of Ceylon" 1985.
Courtesy of the author and Serendib Publication, London.

soms, boulders, the moon and snow. There were gardens which catered to the specialities of the different seasons, and pavilions designed for viewing purposes were an integral part of the design layout. Such gardens were made for the leisure of the feudal nobility and contributed little to the leisure of the common man. Many of the extant private gardens and monasteries are now open to the public.

The earliest evidence for the Persian garden tradition is to be found in the palace of Cyrus at Pasargadae, 546 BC. Persian walled gardens called *pairidaeza* were groves and wildernesses well irrigated by a complex system of *qanats* or *jubes*. They were provided with cisterns, fountains, fruit trees, shrubs and flowering plants and originated with royal hunting and leisure. It is believed that they, along with Egyptian precedents, inspired the later Graeco-Roman gardens of Europe. Their wild dense growth, and emphasis on water did not however uniformly arouse the enthusiasm of 19th century European visitors, in vivid contrast to whom the 4th century Greeks gave to English the word paradise which is a transliteration of the Persian original, *pairidaeza*. The *chaharbagh* Persian garden was developed to a fine art by the Sassanians during the 3rd to the 7th centuries. The earliest records of which come from a description of the great winter carpet of Khusrau I who ruled in the 6th century. The silk carpet portrays the perfect formal court garden. The most fundamental feature of these gardens was the irrigation system which made possible the nurturing of planting during all seasons even when water was scarce.

Possibly the most impressive and one of the best excavated 5th century gardens in this genre is to be found in the royal pleasure gardens at Sigiriya, Sri Lanka. An intricate system of underground water courses supplied all of the various gardens which served the royal palace with its complement of pools and terraced gardens located on the summit of the Sigiriya rock. The base of the rock is girdled by a series of gardens beginning with a water garden followed by a terraced garden and a boulder garden. The *chaharbagh* garden comprises the lowest level, and all are linked by pavilions and paved walkways. The whole is enclosed by ramparts and moat. A reservoir located outside the complex fed the underground channels throughout the year, thus making possible a constant play of water in the pools and fountains.



Miniature painting from the Babur Nama, 16th century. Victoria and Albert Museum. Barbur directs planting of a "Garden of Fidelity".

General public access to the Persian garden heritage came through the design of the Islamic mosque, madrassas, and other pre-Islamic bazaars, *serais* and hammams. The gardens and open spaces which accompanied these forms were the vehicles by which the public had access to the leisure heritage of the rulers. Though the building-types mentioned above are not strictly for leisure as conceived in a modern sense, due to the non-specialist character of public leisure in the feudal era, it is reasonable to assume that work and leisure did overlap within such built forms, which justifies their inclusion here.

The gardens and public buildings discussed above are a passive component of public leisure experience today, deriving from extant building of the more recent past. Further experience of ancient leisure may be had, albeit adulterated, either at archaeological sites, within the confines of religious establishments and in the built fabric of older cities which have escaped deep colonial and industrial penetration. These limited examples lead us to conclude that, in terms of a dynamic historical continuity, the relationship between *pre-colonial* and *contemporary* leisure accommodation is static and moribund. There is little evidence to warrant the belief that this special heritage of leisure design we have attempted to sketchily trace here has had any significant impact upon contemporary leisure provisions in the developing world; though records and remains of these design experiences are varied and legion, they do not appear to inform the practise of modern designers. The reasons for this discontinuity have to be looked for in the complexities of the disintegration of feudal societies and the paths of transition to capitalism as they occurred in the various zones of the world with the onslaught colonialism.

The period of colonial occupation in the colonies began with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century. It eventually led to the formation of new social classes, reflecting changing economic activity under colonial rule. This period saw the colonies and subordinate zones being drawn into the orbit of a world economic system, which ultimately initiated the development of certain zones at the expense of others. Early development of manufacture as a precursor to industrialisation had already begun in some of

the future colonies, but industrialisation for most began under colonial rule. The social division of labour caused subdivisions within the broad category of leisure, and resulted in a divorce between religion and public leisure. The arts, for example, distanced themselves from their courtly and spiritual origins and became part of the commodity market, with new and complex built forms to sustain them. Henceforth, leisure was to be organised as an independent secular category with many sub-categories.

It is this process of organisation which has led to the current demand for new building forms for leisure. Dominant European cultural trends arrived via the avenues of colonialism and underdevelopment. Imposition of European precedent in colonial times has led to many European built forms being uncritically transplanted in the developing countries and a brief account of the history of this process is due.

The most ubiquitous building-type of late colonialism is perhaps the social *club* of the ruling elite. Colonial clubs offered facilities from eating and sport to short-stay accommodation. They were notorious for having severely excluded the native elites till after independence, when they were appropriated by the latter. Generally, even today, they retain some degree of the exclusiveness which marked their inception. The colonial regime usually provided a few parks modelled on those of their homelands, as well as zoos, sports grounds, and safari parks with lodges. Rest houses were established for the travelling civil servant. These meagre provisions were bolstered by leisure facilities for the rich, which included golf and racing courses, cricket and polo fields generally accessible to a select urban minority. The same period saw the introduction of theatres, and later cinemas, eating houses and sports facilities by the private sector as well. These provisions essentially belong to the mid 19th-century and thereafter. The frequency of their appearance is linked to patterns of industrialisation in the colony and thus invalidate any broad generalisations.

However, a common feature of all these provisions, which are perforce tied to colonialism or subordinate development, is that they drew upon *non-indigenous* precedent. The circumstances of their origins have not, so far, permitted a meaningful continuing link with the leisure provisions of pre-industrial



*A temporary stage for festival recreation in 12th century China.
From the Ch'ing-Ming Shang-Ho Tu (A city of Cathay)
scroll painting of every day life
National Palace Museum, Taipei, Republic of China.*

societies. While it is apparent that modern public leisure has expanded its scope, this expansion in itself is not sufficient to explain why there exists such a sharp discontinuity between provisions for similar leisure activities of the pre-colonial period and the present. We are therefore faced with two major historical realities when we confront the phenomenon of contemporary leisure buildings in the 'developing' world. Firstly, the absence of a strong, independent tradition of secular public leisure *and*, deriving from it, a relative dearth of building provision of a permanent nature catering to this public.

The more frequent appearance of modern public leisure facilities in the Third World over the last 40 years seems to imply an increasing demand, relative to what prevailed in the colonial and pre-colonial periods. This would imply that the social surplus product of these societies is now greater or relatively more evenly distributed. Whatever the case may be, we can hardly afford to be optimistic on this score. The very fact that we are discussing building in "development" suggests that the social surplus is still low when compared to that of the "advanced" world, thereby denying provisions for leisure to substantial sections of the people. Broadly speaking this is certainly true, and while the situation is evidently changing, the examples we are presenting in the theme of the issue, clearly reflect the incongruities and contradictions arising from the historical limits of the status of leisure in the developing world. It is hoped that it has been possible to even tentatively arouse some interest in the general issues governing the historical practice of leisure in pre-industrial societies of the non-European region; and that such a rich experience, though exclusive by nature, can be filtered and deployed to enhance the design and building for contemporary leisure. There appears to be no good reason as to why links between past and present should remain obscure and unrecognised.

While such discontinuities are a part of the historical inheritance of 'underdevelopment', uncovering their sources, explaining their disparities, and enhancing contemporary life with past experience is surely a modern task yet to be mastered.

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