**Faculty of Letters and Languages – M’sila**

**Department of English**

**Level:** Master 01

**Course:** British Civilization.

**Lecture**: Leisure, Sports and the Arts

**Lecture number**: 10

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**INTRODUCTION:**

The Diversity of Life in Contemporary Britainis reflected in the ways the British organize their personal, sporting, leisure and artistic lives. These features reveal a series of different cultural habits, rather than a unified image, and are divided between participatory and spectator pastimes. Some are associated with national identities and, in many cases, are also connected to social class and minority participation. According to the authors of *We British* (Jacobs and Worcester 1990: 124), the rich variety of leisure, arts and sporting activities disproves the notion of Britain as a country of philistines who prefer second-rate entertainment to the best. Yet there are frequent complaints from many quarters about a ‘dumbing down’ of British cultural life in television programs, films, the arts, literature, popular music and education. Certain findings about ‘leisure pursuits’ and their social implications have been formulated by academics. Since most leisure time in Britain is now spent within the home and/or family environment, this would seem to indicate a separation from the wider social context. Much leisure provision is commercialized or profit-oriented and is therefore part of the consumer society. But access to leisure activities is unevenly distributed in the population, because it is dependent upon purchasing power and opportunity. Nevertheless, the creative and cultural industries which service the ‘leisure market’ are an important part of Britain’s social and economic life. According to a *DCMS* survey in 2001, these industries generate £112.5 billion a year in revenue, contribute £10.2 billion in export earnings, employ 1.3 million people and account for over 5 per cent of the gross domestic product.

**Leisure Activities**

Leisure activities in earlier centuries, apart from some cultural interests exclusive to the metropolitan elite, were largely conditioned by the rural and agricultural nature of British life. Village communities were isolated and transport was either poor or non-existent. People were consequently restricted to their villages and obliged to create their own entertainments. Some of these participatory activities were home-based, while others were enjoyed by the whole village. They might be added to by itinerant players, who travelled the countryside and provided a range of alternative spectator entertainments, such as drama performances and musical events. Improved transportation and road conditions from the eighteenth century onwards enabled the rural population to travel to neighboring towns where they took advantage of a variety of amusements and wider social opportunities. Spectator activities increased with the industrialization of the nineteenth century, as theatre, the music halls and sports developed and became available to more people. The establishment of railway systems and the formation of bus companies initiated the pattern of cheap one-day trips around the country and to the seaside, which were to grow into the mass charter and package tours of contemporary Britain. The arrival of radio, films and television in the twentieth century resulted in a further huge professional entertainments industry. In all these changes, the mixture of participatory, spectator, home-based and wider social leisure activities has continued.

In addition to cultural and sporting pastimes, the British enjoy a variety of other leisure activities since many opportunities are now available and, despite their long working hours, more people have more free time. Most workers have at least four weeks’ paid holiday a year, in addition to public holidays such as Christmas, Easter and Bank Holidays, although Britain has fewer public holidays than most other European countries. The growing number of pensioners has created an economically rewarding leisure market, while unemployment (although reduced) means that such groups of people have more enforced spare time. Consumer patterns associated with leisure activities are also changing in Britain. These coincide with part-time and shift working and greater disposable incomes, particularly among young people. There is a demand for pubs and leisure services as well as shops, companies, businesses, doctors and schools to remain open longer or to be available for longer periods. The most common leisure pastimes are social or home-based, such as visiting or entertaining friends, trips to the pub (public house), watching television and videos, reading books and magazines and listening to the radio, tapes, records and cassettes. The most popular non-sporting leisure activity for all people aged four and over is watching television (for 26 hours a week), and for men television viewing is apparently the single most popular pastime throughout the year. But, according to the *Henley* research centre in 2001, the British public now spends more time reading each year and less time listening to radio and television. Although television still tops the list, the decrease in viewing hours may be due to dissatisfaction with the quality of the programs shown on British television.Leisure activities outside the home and their social implications consequently encompass travel; excursions; playing sport; watching sport; walks; church; civic duties; cinema and theatre; discos, dances, parties and bingo; social clubs; pubs; and visiting friends.

**Sports**

There is a wide variety of sports in Britain today, which cater for large numbers of spectators and participators. Some of these are minority or class-based sports (such as yachting and rugby league respectively), while others appeal to majority tastes (such as football). The number of people participating in sports has increased. This has coincided with a greater awareness of health needs and the importance of exercise. Spending on playing and watching sports, and buying sports equipment, amount to a considerable part of the household budget. But it is argued that Britain has inadequate sporting facilities and leisure centers in both the public and private sectors.

The 2001 *General Household Survey* reported that 71 per cent of men and 57 per cent of women (29 million people over sixteen) participate in outdoor and indoor sports or forms of exercise. The most popular participatory sporting activity for both men (49 per cent) and women (41) is walking (including rambling and hiking). Billiards, snooker or pool (20) are the next most popular for men, followed by cycling (15), indoor swimming (11) and football (10). Keep fit or yoga (17) is the next most popular sport for women, followed by indoor swimming (15), cycling (8) and snooker and pool (4). Fishing is the most popular country sport. Amateur and professional football (soccer) is played throughout most of the year and also at international level. It is the most watched sport and today transcends its earlier working-class associations. The professional game has developed into a large, family-oriented organization, but has suffered from hooliganism, high ticket prices, declining attendances and financial crises. However, enforced changes in recent years such as all-seater stadiums, greater security, improved facilities and lucrative tie-ins with television coverage (such as Sky-Sport) have greatly improved this situation. Many of the top professional football clubs in the English Premier League have become public companies quoted on the Stock Exchange, and football is now big business. But there is a widening gulf between these clubs and others in the lower divisions. Some 80 per cent of England’s soccer clubs in 2001 were losing money despite television income, which goes largely to the twenty clubs in the Premiership. Most football clubs (even in the Premiership) are in a precarious financial position despite increased income, with only a few making a profit and many losing control over their costs. It is argued that this situation is due to poor club organization, bad business sense, huge salaries for players, inflated transfer fees and lack of success on the pitch. Rugby football is a popular winter pastime and is widely watched and played. It is divided into two codes. Rugby Union was once confined to amateur clubs and was an exclusively middle-class and public-school influenced game. But it became professional in 1995 (at least for the top clubs) and now covers a wider social spectrum. Rugby League is played by professional teams, mainly in the north of England, and still tends to be a working-class sport. Both types of rugby are also played internationally. Cricket is a summer sport in Britain, but the England team also plays in the winter months in Commonwealth countries. It is both an amateur and professional sport.

The senior game is professional and is largely confined to the English and Welsh county sides which play in the county championships. Attendance at cricket matches continues to decline and the contemporary game has lost some of its attractiveness as it has moved in overly-professional and money-dominated directions. It has lost many spectators and is in danger of becoming a minority sport. A *National Centre for Social Research* survey in June 2000 found that 72 per cent of British adults gamble at least once a year. The National Lottery came top (65 per cent of adults) followed by scratchcards (22), fruit machines (14), horse racing (13), private bets with friends or workmates (11), football pools (9), bingo (7) and casino gambling (3).The sporting notion of ‘a healthy mind in a healthy body’ has long been a principle of British education. All schools are supposed to provide physical recreation and a reasonable range of sports is usually available for schoolchildren. Schools may offer soccer, rugby, hockey or netball during the winter months, and cricket, tennis, swimming and athletics during the summer.

Some schools are better provided with sporting facilities than others and offer a wider range of activities. However, there are frequent complaints from parents that team games and competitive sports are declining in state schools. School reorganization and the creation of large comprehensives have reduced the amount of interschool competition, which used to be a feature of education; some left-wing councils are opposed to competitive activities; there is a shortage of playing fields; and a lack of adequate equipment and coaching facilities. The position is particularly acute in the inner city areas, and is of concern to those parents who feel that their children are being prevented from expressing their normal physical natures. They maintain that the state school system is failing to provide sporting provision for children and some parents turn to the independent sector, which is usually well provided with sports facilities. But government aid may improve the availability and standard of state school sports.

**The Arts**

The ‘arts’ once had a somewhat precious and exclusive image associated with notions of high culture, which were usually the province of the urban and metropolitan middle and upper classes. This attitude has lessened to some degree since the Second World War under the impetus of increased educational opportunities and the gradual relaxation of social barriers. The growth of mass and popular culture has increased the potential audience for a wider range of cultural activities, and the availability and scope of the arts has spread to greater numbers of people. These activities may be amateur or professional and continue the mixture of participatory, spectator and home-based entertainment.

It is argued that the genuine vitality and innovation of the British arts are to be found in the millions of people across the country who are engaged in amateur music, art and theatre, rather than in the professional and commercial world. Virtually every town, suburb and village has an amateur group, whether it be a choir, music group, orchestra, string quartet, pipe band, brass band, choral group, opera group or dramatic club. In addition, there are 500 professional arts and cultural festivals held each year throughout Britain, many of which are of a very high standard. The funding of the mainstream arts in Britain is precarious and involves the private and public sectors. The public sector is divided between local authorities and the regional Arts Councils. Local authorities raise money from the council (property) tax to fund artistic activities in their areas, but the amounts spent vary considerably between different areas of the country and local authorities are attacked for spending either too much or too little on cultural activities.

Members of the regional Arts Councils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. They are responsible for dividing up an annual government grant to the arts and the finance has to be shared among theatres, orchestras, opera and ballet companies, art galleries, museums and a variety of other cultural organizations. The division of limited funds has inevitably attracted much criticism. It means that many artistic institutions are often dependent upon the private sector to supply donations and funding, in addition to their state and local government money, in order to survive and provide a service. But some cultural organizations, such as the Royal Opera and museums, have received much-needed finance from the National Lottery. British theatre can be lively and innovative and has a deserved international reputation. There are some 300 commercial or professional theatres, in addition to a large number of amateur dramatic clubs, fringe and pub theatres throughout the country. London and its suburbs have about a hundred theatres, but the dominant influence is the London ‘West End’. The majority of the West End theatres are commercial, in that they are organized for profit and receive no public funds. They provide a range of light entertainment offerings from musicals to plays and comedies.

**EXERCISES**

**1-**Explain and examine the following terms

**Rugby- Pub- Cricket-Sponsorship- Theatre**

**2-Write a short essay about:**

What is your impression of the British people, in terms of their leisure, sporting and artistic activities?

**REFERENCES**

Oakland, John. 2002. *British Civilization: an Introduction.* London: London University Publication Office.

Mcdowall, David. 2008. *An Illustrated History of Britain*. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.