Reclaiming Gendered Urban Spaces by Facilitating Fearless Movement of Women in the Fearful Cities: Enabling Inclusiveness by Advocating Spatial Mediation

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Abstract
While women in most developing countries contribute significantly to the development of cities by being an integral part of the urban systems, often they are the last to benefit from it. Women have far more dynamic relationships with cities than men, “Poor spatial planning can often leave women “time poor”, Violence and fear of violence prevent women from utilizing the intended equal opportunities the city offers.” (UN-HABITAT). Alexander Cuthbert explains “patriarchal capitalism”, a male-dominated approach for designing cities, that conveniently puts women in the back seat of the planning process making them vulnerable in the urban environment. The research advocates ‘Right to city’ and investigates its effectiveness for ‘right to everyday life in a city’, asserting right of women to public spaces, instead of treating it as transit. Through mapping and on-site observations, the study conducted in a commercial center of Bhopal, India, one can state that by loitering in public spaces with as much authority as men, women can reclaim gendered urban spaces. ‘Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces’ is one of UN Women’s Flagship Programme initiative for ‘freedom of movement’ for women in cities. This paper validates that better designed Urban Spaces can enable mobility, promote the sense of security and facilitate equal opportunity, the feminist agenda, by facilitating an urban character that is inclusive in nature. The research promotes the idea of diversity bringing together a variety of people extending opportunities to be a participant rather than merely being a passerby, making women an active user of the urban setting.

Keywords: gender, safety, planning, public spaces, gendered, loitering, mobility, inclusive, urban.
Urban Feminism: Planning and Design

The role of a woman against that of a man has been challenged time and again, the breadwinner verses the homemaker have had a constant struggle for identity and place in the social hierarchy. Where the question of who ‘owns’ and who ‘controls’ is still contested between genders and gender roles in everyday life. The 21st-century questions these gender roles, contests equality and fights for ‘Right to City’ for all, the world is aiming for empowering women, the UN (United Nations) SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) 5, has an emphasis on the same. However, development of women in South Asian Countries remains conflicted with every day increasing crime against women. While women in most developing countries contribute significantly to the development of cities by being an integral part of the urban systems and functions, often they are the last to benefit from this development.

As Dolores Hayden with her perspective towards gender, race, and ethnicity writes to reorient the urban history to spatial struggles, in her book ‘The Grand Domestic Revolution’, she says, “Women’s isolation in the home and confinement to domestic life is the basic cause of their unequal position in society” (Hayden, 1982). Theory and practice of what Hayden calls “material feminism” in pursuit of economic independence and social equality. She elaborates how this raised a fundamental question of the relationship of men, women, and children in industrial society. It was then, when, the realization of bringing women out in urban space and making them a participant in making a city was realized. The necessity of a physical space, to begin with, kitchen less houses, day-care centers, public kitchens, and community dining halls was incorporated in the planning process. Ebenezer Howard, Rudolph Schindler, and Lewis Mumford were among the many progressive architects and planners who promoted the reorganization of housing and neighborhoods around the needs of employed women (Hayden, 1982).

Today, cities have a lot to offer to an individual, one fetches for income, career, lifestyle and experiences in the city. This plethora of opportunities a city puts forward are limitless yet limited to gender mainstreaming. Women and men see cities differently, their experiences and expectations are different from cities, both may use public spaces differently, maneuver and function in cities differently, however, the approach to designing has been conditioned more for men as against women moving in cities.

“Violence and Fear of violence prevents women from utilizing the intended equal opportunities the city has to offer” (Schwarz, 2015), not only developing countries but also in a few developed countries women battle for safety in public places (Fig. 01). They see violence or fear of violence in public spaces as a big concern in their everyday functioning. The condition of women in South Asian Countries is even more sympathetic as they face social, economic and gender discrimination in every front of their life. If we see the case of India, the statistics contributes to the fact and the crime rate have been significantly high against women, in fact, have doubled up in a decade’s time, as per reports by National Crime Bureau, India (Fig. 02). The idea of having family members alone after dark, in cities, can be discomfiting for many people. In Delhi, 87% Households Begin Worrying if Women Are Out Alone Beyond 9 PM, for other cities, for the same time of the night, are 54% in Bengaluru, 48% in Chennai and 30% in Mumbai. (Sinha, 2017).
Fear landscapes

In the disputed world, where, power and politics reinforce and declare ownership to cities, gender mainstreaming remains marginalized. However, being an integral part of the urban system, women are limited in terms of ownership to space, freedom of being an active user of the urban setting and liberty of choice while navigating in urban India. Our cities are landscapes of fear with everyday crime and threat to life, the fear of being a victim is for every citizen and may not only be limited to gender, class or creed. However, the boundaries of perceived fear are different for women than men, it greatly affects how they access cities, it also restricts them from utilizing equal opportunities as a rightful citizen. “Fear can be portrayed as having damaged the fabric of cities, to have adversely affected the quality of urban life.” (Ferrero and La-Grange, 1992). Perceived Fear restrict how they access and mobilize in cities while Anticipated Fear can affect the overall health of the city. “Fear functions as form of social control over women’s use of urban environments since women are persuaded to significantly curtail their travel and behavior in public spaces out of fear” (Day, 2011). Women’s experience of fear in urban spaces is different from that of men, they experience greater fear in urban environments that men, whereas Men’s fear is tied to masculinity and potential confrontation with other men.

Feminist approach to urban design corrects this oversight, by exploring how women’s identities shape their use of urban environments and how designs and communities can better identify women’s needs. Gendered access to resources and construction of gendered identities. How Cuthbert describes patriarchal approaches; “Entire city structures have been generated on the basis of patriarchal capitalism: Land use zoning pattern, including the form, location and type of residential areas, transportation networks, public open spaces and the relationship between work and home result from male-dominated expectation and values”, links the patriarchal city design to gender...
identity (Cuthbert, 2003). Post industrialization, cities were essentially designed for men, by men and masculinity dominated the city form. What Cuthbert tries to highlight is that the spatial arrangement of a city has been dominated by men to enable an urbanism that suites their everyday relation to the city. Women and their complex relation to the city are compromised in the fixation for work home relationship. Extremely defined land use planning dividing production and reproduction in cities leads to isolated zones limiting fluid accessibility across the urban system.

“Women have far more dynamic relationships with the city than men, utilizing public services more frequently. Poor spatial planning can often leave women “time poor.” (Schwarz, 2015). To be able to explore opportunities a city has to offer, one must not be limited by time, especially women while accessing cities are greatly limited by the changing landscapes of cities after dark. They may resist from moving out after dark as against men who seem relatively less affected by the same. Women tend to use these spaces in transit rather than being a part of it, leaving them as the transience population with no ownership of space. This leaves women ‘time poor’ and limits them from accessing equal opportunities a city has to offer.

Parameters Contributing to fear in urban spaces

It is important to identify what generates this sense of fear in the physical environment. The reasons can be found in tangible and non-tangible factors that constitute an urban space. If one can assess these places on a set of parameters that can be directly or indirectly addresses in the urban system, the issue can be further narrowed down. Therefore, parameters were identified on the basis of which urban spaces could be assessed on its potential for how women, in a general perception, would perceive spaces in terms of safety and accessibility. The parameters identified were divided into four major categories with subcategories to follow.

• **Physical Parameters**: are parameters with physical form and alterations can be made in the structure to combat these.
  
  • **Scale of place**: Inhumane scale of place dominates the user and inculcates Sense of fear.
  • **Density**: Higher Densities encourage Natural Surveillance and Community existence.
  • **Planning and Land use**: Incompatible mix in land use leads to limiting accessibility. Encourage Compatible Mix.
  • **Morphology**: Losing connection to the ground due to insensitive built arrangement.
  • **Accessibility**: No Physical Accessibility and permeability or limited escape route.

• **Visual Parameters**: are parameters that are tangible yet can be assessed visually to be acted upon.
  
  • **Quality of space**: Visual chaos and no sense of space affect Quality of space, increasing or decreasing a sense of fear
• **Legibility/ sense of orientation**: Compromised legibility leads to loss of sense of direction creating panic and fear.

• **Quality of enclosure**: Humanizing Enclosures and enhancing quality through maintenance. A higher degree of comfort in moving.

• **Illumination**: Poorly lit neighborhood limits Access and creates discomfort to the passer-by.

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- **Perceptual Parameters**: which are perceived by an individual and can change from person to person or group to group, in the chosen case, a general perception of a female is taken for the kind of Territoriality she finds herself comfortable or uncomfortable in or the Uncertainties and Image of a place along with unfriendly activities.

- **Territoriality/ ownership**: identifying gender-based ownership in public areas can create a sense of belonging. Increased Territoriality can reduce fear.

- **Uncertainty in place**: A place with no intended function that it narrates.

- **Image of Place**: Image Directing the purpose and intention of place and people around.

- **Presence of unfriendly Activities**: Illegal or anti-social activities

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• **Social Parameters**: these are in-tangible parameters that cannot be assessed directly but has collateral impact on how people use and move in urban spaces.

- **Masculinity in space**: Masculinity through the presence of male’s or activities supporting male loitering

- **Public Gaze**: Physical environment making women object to the gaze, discomfort.

- **Association with past event**: Knowledge or being witness to a past event can create a sense of fear of the place.

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**Case of Exploration: Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.**

Bhopal the capital of Madhya Pradesh, also known as the “Bhopal of the Begum’s”, was once ruled by Begum’s. A city led by great women leaders like Sikandar Jahan and Shahjahan Begum who glorified the city of lakes for its own identity. The very city of the begums is now for the fifth year in a row, one of the most unsafe places in the country for women and children. Data by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) revealed that 35 cases of sexual abuse and crimes against children were reported every day in the state of Madhya Pradesh last year. According to the NCRB report, Madhya Pradesh reported the highest number of rape cases (4,391). The state’s overall crime rate stood at 348.3, much higher than the national average of 234. In comparison with the National Average the chart (Fig. 3 and 4) shows a comparison of the heinous crimes against women recorded in Bhopal to the national average over the past five years.

Bhopal as a city was placed significantly on the map of India when it was declared the capital of Madhya Pradesh in 1956 after the splitting of the state of Chhattisgarh. To accommodate the new infrastructure for administration, residential facilities, commercial centers and industrial zone, the southern portion of the city was planned.
A well laid out master plan was put in force that neatly divided and designated different functions to different parts of the city. It aimed at a land use plan that zoned out activities in different part of the city.

Site of Exploration: M.P. Nagar, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

The selected area for study was Developed by BDA in 1991 an initiative to decongest the Old City Market, M.P Nagar was conceived as a wholesale market, predominantly commercial in nature. Now roughly in 30 years, the precinct, which was then in the outskirts of Bhopal has now become a part of the cities fabric. It has evolved to accommodate newer activities like the restaurants, cafes, bars, low budget hotels, girl’s hostels and a number of coaching classes. These activities now house with the pre-existing activities like the car repair garages and accessories, wholesale building construction material, retail, healthcare and private and public offices. The selected precinct is in transience to become the city center, it citizens expect it to be, although the mix of activities and other factors makes it difficult for women to maneuver in space with full authority.
"CB mall feels safe and active."
"Poor street light and walking condition difficult to trust surroundings."
"No resting spaces or sitting spaces for us."
"Lanes in MP Nagar have no activity, difficult to get out in night as well as day."
"Very less people along the railway line road, so dirty and shabby. Not preferred us any time."
"After 7pm all places start to shut down, difficult to be outside so no body there."
"Not much to do in MP Nagar for us, we like to go to New Market."
User Perception

To understand the user and their perception, on-site interviews, observation and mapping exercises were taken up. It was understood that women did not find the place engaging enough, they mostly covered their face while moving and constantly found the dominant male gaze in the space as an issue. When asked about if they would wait for a friend by the corner of the street they said that they felt most comfortable inside rather than outside, at all times of the day, also, they felt that there were not enough resting spaces, street light, halting points and very few other women on street. To make their way through the crowd, they moved hastily and always looked up for a company to walk around with. Being alone brought in a sense of vulnerability in urban space.

The interviews unfolded the user’s perception of place and how they delineate spaces for themselves and maneuver through. These women were understood to be working women, students, and homemakers (Fig 8), who had their residences (permanent or temporary), their commute (public and private), their place of work and education in the area. They expect the place to accommodate to their needs of safe access and comfortable environment to be able to dwell as an urbanism. Had the area been more conducive to their requirements of safety and comfort, it would make it more convenient for them to move around and utilize the urban spaces around them.

![Image: Understanding the User](image)

Figure 8: Understanding the User

Everyday Urban Issues limiting Women’s Accessibility and Mobility.

The physical condition of open spaces strengthens the argument; they are poorly maintained, (Fig 9), with undefined activities. These open spaces have un-defined edges and poor physical, visual and social connectivity, they do not satisfy the function of an open space, with not enough resting stops, pause points or spaces for social interaction. Broken connectivity and lack of availability of open spaces makes the users doubt the urban and generates a sense of uncertainty and fear. A well-
connected network of urban open spaces can trigger vitality and urbanity. It facilitates a platform to accommodate diversity and makes people an integral part of the urban.

Insufficient and ill-maintained public infrastructure, (Fig 10), like the bus stop, public toilets and on street furniture can deter people, more specifically women, from using these services. Urban furniture can not only be considered a facility but also a point where strangers can interact to create urbanity. Sensitively designed public infrastructure can encourage women to become an active user of the urban setting eliminating the fear of uncertainty.

Different cities treat their citizens differently after dark, they can be welcoming or repellent, in this case, after dark hours have high chances of becoming notorious as the shops and offices close down but the commercial residential like the hostel and hotels continues to have people in the vicinity, who become vulnerable in the dark inactive urban environment (Fig 11). Illumination and visibility have been discussed as essential in making a space perceived to be safe. It provides deterministic value and limits insecurity, one could be aware of the approaching danger.
Natural surveillance and eyes on the street, as recommended by Jane Jacobs, have been said to be crucial for coherent urban spaces. The quality of enclosures, that is the built edge and its interaction with the street may directly impact the users, it enhances the sense of security and safety. The ability of an urban environment to facilitate a sense of belonging and ownership to its user may encourage more and more women to access the city with less perceived fear.

Figure 12: Edge conditions along the street and open spaces

These pictures have been taken during the day, in bright light, but one can hardly notice any women sitting by the stalls (Fig 13). One may say, that the Activities present onsite support male interaction more than that for females. This results in street pockets mostly occupied and used by men, be it tea/ pan/ cigarette stalls, they are loitered by men, omitting women from space. Women tend to avoid or only transit hurriedly through such spots. Masculinity in space and the male gaze marginalize women’s use of the urban, making urban spaces more gendered. A simple mapping exercise to plot the male and female bodies on the map was conducted, (Fig 14 and 15), based on on-site observations and interviews. The blue map indicating the male bodies present in groups, pairs or single were mapped and similarly pink map for female bodies was mapped. This briefly explains the share of space and ownership for both the genders in the selected case. Both genders are moving in the precinct, but, one can observe some limitation in movement across the site for women as against men. This limited accessibility and mobility can be further discussed in relation to the immediate physical environment.
Negotiating Urban Public Space

India, with its own share of socio-cultural diversity, where, class, caste, creed and ethnicity, where, these factors govern how women are expected to move into public spaces. “Interestingly, the findings confirm the sexist stereotype Indians are well aware of; men are confident and rest almost anywhere in a public space while women prefer moving in groups or walking past by-lanes hurriedly. The way Indian women
sit or lean to rest in public is also more careful in comparison to men, reflecting the patriarchal nature of society.” – ‘Gender, Urban spaces and Resting places’ (CEPT University).

Negotiating through these highly gendered public spaces, while navigating in urban India, has become an everyday challenge for women and girls. A crucial literature on women’s safety in the cities of the twenty-first century India, Why Loiter? maps the exclusions and negotiations that women from different classes and communities encounter in the nation’s urban public spaces. It establishes the importance of being in a space to own it, seeing loitering by women as a way of reclaiming gendered spaces. (Shilpa Phadke, Sameera khan and Shilpa Ranade, 2011).

The authors explore urban spaces from women’s point of view. The thrust of the literature lies in realizing that, more the number of women visible as a user in the urban public spaces, it encourages other women to be a part and enhance a sense of belonging to the place. This presence of the female body as against the male body in urban space is explored with behavioral patterns, movement patterns and the nature of accessibility our cities facilitate for women. It explores the Right to everyday life in a global city, asserts right of women to public spaces, instead of treating it as transit.

The way she moves: mapping the everyday production of gendered space. A Study done for Gender and space project, Pukar, focused on how male and female bodies locate themselves in and move through public spaces in their everyday negotiation of space. (Ranade, Shilpa, 2007)

**Approach to Reclaiming Gendered Urban Spaces**

‘Reclamation of Gendered Urban spaces’ through inclusive design and urban strategies can be processed by activating the urban environment to accommodate women. An inclusive design may have the potential to offer something for every citizen. The strength of an urban space to facilitate a platform where urbanity can be created to encourage inclusivity, in this case in terms of gender-biased urban environments, could prove to be the backbone of a healthy and livable city. The approach to the given case can be addressed at three different stages that act upon urban design and urban policy making (Fig 16). One can be by ‘Making Women and girls an active user in the Urban Setting’ by promoting diversity of people and nature of activities, generating ownership to space, thrusting upon values of design that women can associate to. Two, by ‘Reducing Perception of Fear from Urban environment’, design can guideway to reduce the perception of fear. An urban setting embarking upon the parameters identified for designing safer cities can facilitate an environment where women move fearlessly. Three, ‘Mobilizing Women in Urban Space’, by empowering them through infrastructural support, backing up law and order and technological advancements. This particular stage can stitch the city together to mobilize people across the city, enhancing accessibility and mobility. These stages can guide the way to ‘Reclaim Gendered Urban space by facilitating fearless movement in fearful cities.'
Figure 16: Approach to Reclaiming Gendered Urban Spaces

Facilitating Fearless mobility by Spatially Mediating:

Identifying how Urban Design can contribute to understanding the spatial relevance of the case is important. Improving the quality of space through physical interventions can directly impact the issues identified and facilitate an environment where people, specifically women in the context of the study, may find an engaging urban...
environment. The relevance of the issues identified can be mapped to understand the relationship of the user to the immediate physical environment.

Fig 17 shows a map with blue pockets as highly male dominant areas and yellow as the shared pockets for both men and women. One can note that the association of these yellow pockets are related to the nature of activity present along with it as shown in Fig 18.

Therefore, activities that women may relate to and find purpose it could be introduced, as in Fig 19. These activities and place of intervention can be strategically identified as the context demands, here, activity could be of the nature that is more engaging and encourage outdoor interaction. The pockets where these activities are introduced can bring vitality to place and an intensive network of existing and proposed activities may encourage through movement across the site, as suggested by Fig 20. This Fluid Mobility can be encouraged by reconnecting the already active streets across the site and stretching it to create a well-connected network that helps people move in light and sight. (Fig 21 and 22).
Figure 19: Introduction of Activities

Figure 20: Network of Existing and Proposed Activities

Figure 21: Exiting Active streets

Figure 22: Thorough network of streets
An urban system that is well connected, activated and vibrant can encourage more women to participate in the urban than treating it as transit. This spatial mediations for the identified issue results in an activated central spine and core connecting variety of activities and making a free movement plan for all, dwelling upon an inclusive urban environment (Fig 23 and 24). Accessibility enhances opportunities and opportunity may dilute gender biased identities while increasing a sense of belonging.

**Conclusion: Approach to gender mainstreaming in urban design**

Therefore, to Facilitate Fearless mobility by Spatially Mediating, the focus can be on developing safety links, designing and developing edges and open spaces. The built form can be responsive to the context that helps channelize diversity. A visual landscape where every citizen is involved can guideway to safer and more accessible urban public spaces. Taking the fact that urban systems are complex and dynamic in nature, design opportunity could focus on encouraging adaptability and strengthening this system through sensitive design.

This can create an urban experience, where women and girls can access cities with equal liberty of choices, ownership to place and have full access to opportunity. Facilitating fearless movement in the fearful cities by enhancing publicness of public spaces through fluid movement patterns, promoting diversity and sense of security, moreover, creating an inclusive urban environment that instigates reclamation of gendered urban spaces through spatial mediation. Better designed urban spaces have the strength to empower women and create a platform where they have access to
opportunities. The strength of a good city lies in the chances it can provide its citizen, being a rightful citizen can expand the horizons of Gender Equality.
References


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