

STUDY OF “WOMEN-ONLY” PUBLIC SPACES TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN’S MOBILITY IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Analysing the connections between space, place and identity remains a significant task, if we seek to transform unequal relations of gender and sexuality as they are materialized and lived spatially. (Bettina van Hoven, 2005)

“Gender Segregation” in spatial arrangements was a traditional practice all over the world. Such concepts and practices were the products evolved through sex discrimination, which is still evident in most patriarchal societies. Segregation results on the pretext of women safety, religion, ethics and virtues, however, the degree of segregation varies depending on socio - cultural background, income groups, community, sects and cults of the religion, etc. (Mahimkar et al, 2012)

The detailed study of evolution of “Women - Only” spaces derives that women were banned or discouraged to access and move freely in the public spaces. To avoid their active participation in public affairs, many societies allotted certain quarters to women even in public spaces. As a result of women’s persistence and desire to access such spaces, exclusive “Women - Only” spaces were created and used. Existence of such spaces is evident in various parts of the world since historic times which are still proving instrumental as far as women’s mobility in urban sphere is concerned.

Various types of spaces are created and lived through longer periods of time due to consistent need for them. Such spaces not just exist and continue to exist but also leave their mark on the evolving future societal pattern. Similarly, evolving society and its demands also affect and influence the character and types of evolving spaces. (Harvey, 1973) This underlines the need for the study of “Women - Only” spaces, which evolved gradually and changed their character as per the need of the society and in the process might have influenced societal behavior and needs.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the initial phases, women’s spaces were mere few left out spaces mostly indoors, marked by child rearing and home - making activities. Such spaces also did not completely ban the entry of men of the family or society. The scene remains unchanged with many of such indoor “Women - Only” spaces. After the World War II, as women started getting access to public spaces for education and work, the need was felt to have exclusive spaces for them where they would feel safe and secured. This era was marked with such spaces and witnessed a complete transition in the approach toward “Women - Only” spaces that banned men’s entry at all. Such spaces and actions have an extremely powerful effect on building autonomy for women as a class and changing the cultural view of women as individuals and as a group. It is no wonder that encouraging women - only initiatives and spaces has historically been high among the goals of feminist agenda. (Kamienski, 2003)