

○ CONTEMPORARY “WOMEN-ONLY” SPACES:  
WOMEN’S PERCEPTIONS AND NEEDS

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*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.*

*Through the detailed study of evolution of women only spaces, it can be derived 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. It is a result of women’s persistence and desire to access such spaces that exclusive “Women’s spaces” were created and used. Existence of such “Women-Only” spaces is evident in various parts of the world from historic times which are still proved instrumental as far as women’s mobility in urban sphere in concerned.*

*India witnessed a gradual transformation in sex segregation practices; from a complete exclusion to recent development toward design of women-centric spaces. This paper aims to examine how urban public spaces and their character evolve, through the survey conducted to identify the various needs and uses of contemporary Women-Only” public spaces in urban environment by women of different age groups and backgrounds.*

*The public spaces selected for the survey were of the “Mandatory” and “Voluntary” types, where the nature of use of such spaces by women was assessed. Mandatory spaces include Reservations in public transportation, women only parks and gardens, clubs and swimming pools, segregation at work places; whereas Voluntary spaces include areas near schools, children’s parks, grounds, children play areas within the residential complexes, tours conducted for only women’s groups, etc.*

*The methodology incorporates physical surveys based on observations and personal interviews of the users and non-users of contemporary women only spaces primarily in and around urban and suburban areas of Mumbai. The study aims to understand the women’s needs as well as changing character of such spaces and to identify the future directions for design of them accordingly.*

**Keywords:** Women-Only, public spaces, gender segregation

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