

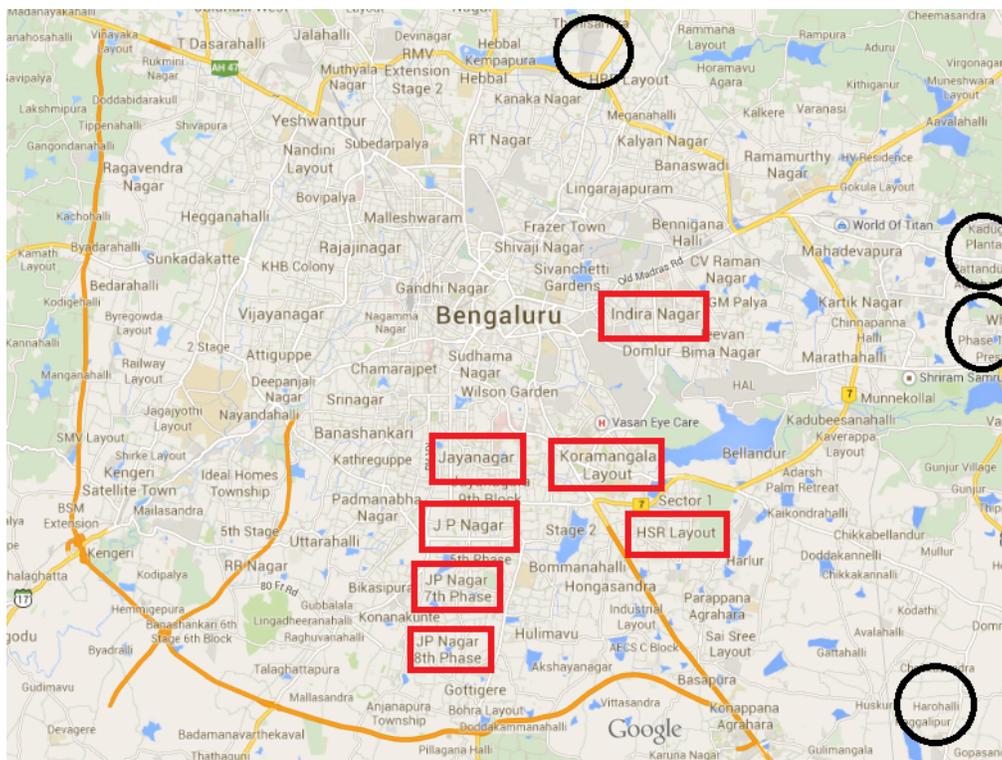
Gender and Public Spaces

We often consider the environments in which we live to be only a background. However, **how we experience public spaces like benches, parks, lighting, toilets, etc, determines how free we are to live our lives.**

1. Organization of urban spaces.

The infrastructure of modern cities is designed to enable comfortable living and working conditions for what is regarded as the economically productive class. **Most cities and towns are designed to favour the able-bodied, working, middle-class male.** Mobility is not regarded as a concern for this class, so there is no emphasis on accessibility of workspaces from places of residence. Workspace hubs are concentrated in geographical locations that are at great distances from residential areas.

2. Layout of the structural organization of Bangalore.



Rectangular outline: Prominent residential areas in Bangalore

Circular outline: Exclusive workspaces such as Electronic City, Manyata Tech Park, ITPL.

3. What constitutes a public space, what doesn't and why.

Public spaces are areas open and accessible to all individuals, irrespective of who they are. Streets, public toilets, bus stops, railway stations, marketplaces, open parks, water-bodies, public transport, etc.

Privatized recreational spaces, such as shopping malls, multiplexes or cafes are often confused to be public spaces. These spaces are gated and designed to seclude a large section of the population based on certain biases, such as class, caste, gender, etc. This exclusion is **not necessarily explicit** - an expensive restaurant automatically excludes a certain class by cost barriers; a stripclub automatically excludes a certain gender/sex as visitors due to in-place gender/sexual politics.

4. Intersectionality of gender and space in cities.

*When you navigate the city and look around you, do you notice the difference in behaviours of men and women? Do you notice, for example, that there are clusters of men aimlessly **loitering** - standing without purpose near tea-stalls and small shops? Do you notice that all women you encounter seem to **require a purpose** to be outside? That they are always walking from point A to point B - that it is imperative for them to have **a destination**? Do you notice that **women do not have the implicit right to loiter**?*

Public spaces in urban areas are occupied almost unrestrictedly by men. **Men seem to possess, on account of their gender, the authority to occupy and manage public spaces.** Having been conditioned from childhood to not spend much time in the public, the role of a woman in a public space becomes that of a trespasser. A woman in a public space is expected to have a purpose that is not only clear to her, but also to the ones watching her. **Her presence in public spaces is expected to be only in transit from one shelter to another shelter.** Her access to public spaces is restricted by notions of time (*"is she out too late?"*), company (*"who is she out with?"*), appearance (*"what is she wearing?"*) and purpose (*"what is she doing here?"*)

5. Why surveillance and protectionism are not solutions.

Surveillance of public spaces is not an effective solution to deter violence. It assumes that the only reason for violence is circumstantial, and that if circumstances were prevented or closely monitored, then violence would recede. This does not take into consideration the underlying causes of violence. Instead of increasing the overall safety of outside spaces, it simply makes them more private and more inaccessible to women, and increases their confinement to their homes.

Example: In March 2012, Gurgaon High Court banned women from working beyond 8 pm.

Not only does this fail to address the real issue of making public spaces accessible and safe for women, it is also a violation of civil rights, exercised under the excuse of protection.