Social enquiry of urban spaces in gated communities of neo-liberal Indian cities

Ankita Gaur[1]

[1]Assistant Professor, University School of Architecture and Planning, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi, India

---***---

Abstract - *Social interactions have always been a quintessential part of Indian culture. Historically Indian cities were built around the essence of social interaction. The urban form of Indian cities has undergone multifold built form transformation owing to urbanization. The urban form of the cities progressively transitioned from compact to neo-liberal. Along with the urban form so did transform the social nature of urban spaces. The built form of the cities has always been a key determinant in influencing the social nature of the urban spaces in the cities. The paper aims at analyzing the social nature of urban spaces in the gated communities in neo-liberal Indian cities. The methodology adopted for the paper includes identifying parameters which influence the social nature of urban spaces through literature review, assessing the identified parameters on a primary case study (located in the city of Gurugram) through direct observations, and physical interviews. The study identifies the type, nature and degree of social interactions in gated communities in neo-liberal Indian cities. The paper comments on the nature of urban spaces in neo-liberal cities by outlining the privatization of public space and fortification of the public realm which has changed the dynamics of the social nature of urban spaces.*

Key Words: *neo liberal, privatization of space, social interaction, urban form, urban space*

1.INTRODUCTION

Urban spaces in cities are the physical manifestations of the socio-cultural structure of the society. "Space encourages and discourages certain forms of interaction and gives form to social structures and ideologies" (Kumar, 2017). Indian cities have historically been supportive of social interaction through the city's physical structure. "The spatial structure of the Indian cities reveals an intense and compact arrangement of buildings and structures, containing and compressing the open white spaces that constitute the public realm of the city " (Kumar, 2017) . The historical Indian cities are known for their streets and bazaars which depict the plethora of Indian culture even today. The urban spaces in Indian cities are constituted of open spaces near monuments of religious importance in the form of bazaars and organically developed streets in residential neighborhoods. The bazaars and chowks have been active urban spaces in historical Indian city planning. These urban spaces have acted as a vital means of facilitating social interaction within the city. These spaces are temporal where the character of the space keeps on changing with respect to the time as well as the season. Owing to the climatic and cultural considerations the historical Indian cities had compact urban forms. The compact urban form was dominated by coarse grain, narrow streets, built-on-edge housing typology and active pedestrian movement.

As per the history of urbanization given by (Ramachandran 1989), the Indian cities can be classified within the followed periods:

1. The Prehistoric period (2300 BC to 1800 BC)

2. The early Historical period (600 BC to AD 500)

3. Urbanization in the medieval period (AD 600-1800)

4. Urbanization in the British period (1800-1947)

5. The Post-independence period

Indian cities have undergone a huge transformation in the terms of urban form. There have been multiple political and economic factors that have contributed to this change. Starting from the monarchical rule to the colonial rule to the independent era of the country, with the onset of different governance models, the urban form of the cities has changed dramatically. While the historical cities and medieval cities had compact urban forms after coming under the colonial rule the form of the cities started to alter and get dispersed. For example, "the transformation in Delhi between the early 19th and the mid-20th centuries were a process where by the British colonial government installed, apparently at will, particular spatial and physical arrangements in the old city of Delhi and in the region immediately beyond it" (Raychaudhuri, 2001). The colonial era saw the evolution of a different kind of urban form in which the typology of civil lines and bungalows came into existence. After the liberalization of the economy in 1991, the country witnessed a change in the role of the government from being a provider to a facilitator in terms of housing. Private developers turned out to be the major player in providing accommodation to the people. This led to the development of neo-liberal urban form in the cities which was also the capitalistic model of housing development. "Important aspects of neo-liberal housing policy are dealt with in ensuing sub-sections, for example, gentrification and privately governed and secured neighbourhoods (gated communities) "(Sager 2011).

With the transformation in the urban form of the cities, the nature of urban spaces in the cities also transformed. "Unbridled urbanization in the wake of globalization has drastically inflicted changes on these spaces and has paved the way for hybrid and newly evolved variants "(Prosperi, 2012). The relationship between people and the physical environment in these hybrid and newly evolved variants forms the baseline of the exploration for this research article.

The research aims at enquiring the social nature of urban spaces in the gated community in neo-liberal cities.

2. THEORETICAL EXPLORATION

2.1 Neo -liberal urban form in Indian metropolitan cities:

In the long history of urbanization, Indian cities have altered immensely. Post the liberalization of the economy, urbanization in Indian cities entered a new phase. In the Government of India's seventh plan (1985-1990) major responsibility for housing construction was assigned to the private sector and it called for "radical reorientation of all policies to housing". The great impact of this move was visible in the cities which were either established (urban centers) with a political/economic impact or small towns which were closer to these urban centers. Owing to the demands of the housing sector the birth of the gated community or enclave development model in Indian cities was observed. As (Rafael E. Pizarro 2003) states on the nature of the urban form generated in the third world countries post the globalization, "Enclaves are formed to maintain or create new identities of diaspora, or ethnic and religious solidarities." On the nature of the public realm, they (Rafael E. Pizarro 2003) observed "There are signs of decreasing social contact and increasing isolation between people and neighborhoods. A different version of a dualistic society seemingly is on the rise, where gated communities and exclusive suburbs coexist with slums and squatter settlements". "The rapid urbanization fueled by industrial mega projects and more recently liberalized markets has failed to enable local governance to supply emerging urban agglomerations with sufficient infrastructure in all urban areas" (Sanjeev Vidyarthi 2017). "Gated communities are housing development that restricts public access, usually through the use of gates, booms, walls and fences" (Uduku, 2010). These residential areas have restricted access, and have public spaces which are privatized. They represent a class-based segregation housing model.

2.2 Transformation of urban spaces in residential areas:

Residential neighbourhoods are defined as places where people live together. As per Norberg Schulz besides streets and squares, they also form a category of urban space. The built form of the city has been a key determinant in influencing the social nature of the urban spaces in the cities. As (Krier 1979) states in his seminal text, urban spaces comprise two basic elements: streets and squares. Jane (Jacobs 1960) discusses that spaces need to be classified as private and public.

In Indian cities, the streets have been historically significant. The streets in Indian cities have undergone an enormous transformation with time. Traditionally the streets had been designed for pedestrian movement. The streets in medieval cities were narrow and active throughout the day. The Indian Street is a part of a 'spatial complex' which also comprises the bazaar and the fair and together they constitute an unclosed realm which provides a 'meeting point of several communities' (Fyfe, 1998). The streets were not only just meant for the movement of the pedestrian and vehicles but were also the site of various activities such as vending, talking, eating, places of worship and also the access to dwelling units etc. The multifunctional structure of the street provides an admixture of overlapping spaces that merge public and private, work and leisure, and holy and profane activities (Fyfe, 1998). The built typology of the medieval cities was such that the houses were built on edge having seating spaces as an embedded architectural element which helped in facilitating social interactions. The medieval cities show a stark contrast to the neoliberal cities in terms of built typologies as well as the street widths (Table 1). The dominance of automobiles has transformed the layout of the cities. To accommodate the ever-increasing demand for automobiles the streets have become wider. The streets in the neoliberal urban form are mono-functional and serve only as a movement corridor.

Characteristics of streets	Medieval cities	Neo-liberal cities
Function	Multiple function	Mono function
Width	Narrow (designed for human scale)	Wide (designed for car scale)
Edge relationship with building	Direct	Indirect
Active	Throughout the day	Partially active
Temporal nature	Change as per time and space	Non-temporal in nature

Table 1 : Comparison of streets in medieval and neo-liberal cities, (source: author)

2.3 The social dimension of urban space:

"Space and society are clearly related: it is difficult to conceive of 'space' without social content and, equally to conceive of society without a spatial component" (Carmona

2003). Public spaces play an integral role in generating a collective feeling in the neighborhood, as they act as places where social interactions can freely occur. "A public open space in the neighborhood is an available opportunity for neighbors to have communication as a friendly chat in a fenced garden or even public meetings in local parks which can be common gathering places and social-cultural interactions as results" (Farzad Soltanian, 2015). By definition the public spaces should be available to all yet in gated community their access is controlled in certain form and manner. Forms of access to public spaces have been identified (Stephen Carr 1992) as: Visually accessible, symbolically accessible and physically accessible.

2.4 Parameters of successful urban space:

The importance of urban places as mediators of social interaction has been established by several authors. William (White 1980) carried out a street project in New york and used "demography of users, gender of the user, sittable space, the role of natural elements, food, relationship of the space to the main pedestrian traffic flow, capacity and triangulation" as parameters for identifying the social use of urban places such as city's parks, playgrounds and city blocks. (Appleyard 1981) identified streets as an important factor for sociability, neighbourliness, friendliness and community life. In this book the streets are identified as important factor for sociability, neighborliness, friendliness and community life. He conducted a study on three residential streets in San Francisco and compared their livability. He took the traffic movement as the main parameter and found that as the traffic volume increased the interactions decreased as heavy traffic led to decrease in exchange spaces and no sidewalk activity. The factor of social interaction can be measured by "determining the level of different social groups' presence, formation of social societies and living in different hours of day and night". Four key attributes of successful places were identified by (Madden 2000) which are: "comfort and image, access and linkage, uses and activity and sociability". There are more parameters which influence the social interaction namely: "Relation which is related to the quality of circulation, space connections and access along with space visibility and accessibility to the space which Tibbalds refers to as physical and visual access that affects security and performance of the space" (Farzad Soltanian, 2015).

3. METHODOLOGY

In the case of neo-liberal cities there are two types of urban spaces in gated community that are formed: one which is inside the boundary wall and other on the outside of the boundary wall. The study limits itself to assessment of urban spaces surrounding the gated community. Two types of urban spaces have been identified for analysis (Fig 1):

1. Inside the gated community (inclusive of the setback, internal road and green area)

2. Outside the gated community (includes the access road to the gated community)
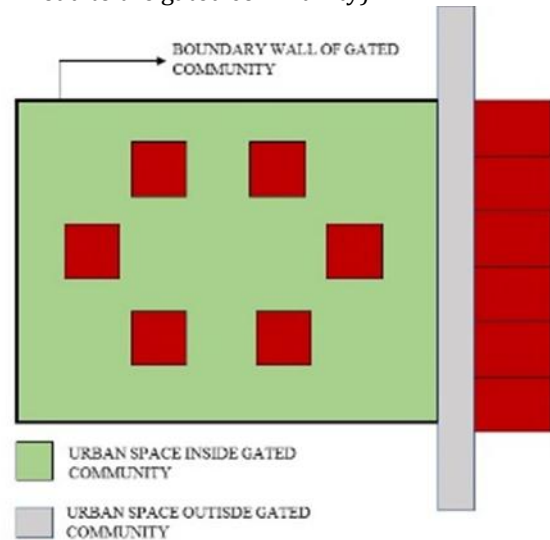

Fig 1: Urban spaces in gated communities (source: author)

Through the literature review the criteria for analyzing the urban spaces in gated communities was formulated (Table 2):

Criteria	Observation (inside the gated community)	Observation (outside the gated community)
Age group		
Gender of user		
Visual Access		
Symbolic Access		
Physical Access		
Nature of space (private/public)		
Traffic movement		
Comfort and image		
Access and Linkage		
Uses and Activity		
Sociability		

Table 2: *Criteria for analysis of urban spaces, (source: author)*

The criteria does not follow any particular hierarchy. The method used for the analysis is direct observation and physical interviews.

3.1 The study area:

The site for primary exploration is located in Gurugram which is a satellite city located southwest of Delhi. Due to HDRUA (Haryana Development and regulation of Urban areas act) major parts of the city have been developed by the private developers in forms of gated communities and plotted development. The site chosen is located in Sector 41 called The Palms which is a residential development developed by a private developer - Unitech Group (figure 2).

Fig 2: Location of The Palms, Gurugram (source; author)

The residential development comprises of 2BHK ,3BHK, 3BHK+ Servant and duplex apartments. The height of the residential towers varies from 15 floors to 17 floors. The total site area covered by the gated community is 12.5 acres having the plot dimension of 185 m x 275 m. Access: The gated community is accessed by 7.5m wide road as shown in figure 3 which lacks footpath and presently acts only as movement corridor.

Fig 3:Image showing the road abutting the main entrance (source: author)

Surroundings: The gated community is surrounded by plotted residential development on three sides and by a major movement corridor on one. The adjacent residential development comprises of double storey houses which are built on large plot sizes varying from 318 to 455 sq. metres. The gated community is governed by the principle of exclusivity as at the entrance one finds boom barrier and to enter one either has to be resident of the community or has to be a friend/acquaintance of the resident. The gated community is bound and defined by high boundary walls on the four sides which are visually permeable but not physically as shown in figure 4.

Fig 4: Image of boundary wall from inside the gated community (source: author)

Inside the gated community two types of urban spaces are found: the central green space (figure 5) and the inside peripheral road (figure 6)   surrounded by residential building on one side and boundary wall on the other.

Fig 5: Central green space inside the gated community (source: author)

Fig 6: peripheral road inside the gated community (source: author)

3.2 Urban space inside and outside the gated community:

After direct observation the urban space inside the gated community was divided into two parts for social interaction assessment:

1. Peripheral road – The peripheral road comprises of sidewalks, carriageway and on street parking. Due to the presence of sidewalks presence of people was observed. Acts as access to individual buildings and common amenities within the gated community.

2. Central green space – The central green space being majorly softscape in nature is located in between all building towers and is visually accessible from most points inside the gated community. It comprises of tot-lot, jogging tracks, amphitheater and landscaped area.

The peripheral road is private in nature and is physically accessible only to the residents of the gated community. The time-based usage of the peripheral road in the gated community is as follows (Table 3).

Time	Activity type	Age group	Gender	Level of different social group's presence
5 am – 8 am	Physical activity	Old people, middle age group	Women and men	High
8 am – 10 am	Transportation	All	All	
10 am – 5 pm	Inactive/ as means of pedestrian access			

5 pm – 7 pm	Transportation	All	All	
7 pm – 10 pm	Physical activity	Old people, middle age group	Women and men	High
10 pm – 5 am	Inactive/ as means of pedestrian access			

Table 3:time-based usage of the peripheral road in the gated community (source: author)

The central green is private in nature and is physically accessible only to the residents of the gated community. The time-based usage of the central green in the gated community is as follows (Table 4).

Activity type	Time	Age group	Gender	Level of different social group's presence
Inactive/ partially active (means of seating space depending on climate)	5 am – 4 pm	Old people	Women and men	
Physical activity	4 pm – 8 pm	Old people, kids and youngsters	Women, men	High
Inactive	8 pm – 5 am			

Table 4:time-based usage of the central green in the gated community (source: author)

Another typology of urban space is found outside the gated community which is the access road of the gated community. The access road is public in nature and is physically accessible to all. The usage of the access road is as follows (Table 5):

Activity type	Time	Age group	Gender	Level of different social group's presence
Transportation (Moderate vehicular movement)	6 am – 11 am	All	All	High
Inactive/ as means of pedestrian and low vehicular movement	11 am – 5 pm	All	All	High
Transportation (Moderate vehicular movement)	5 pm – 11 pm	All	All	High

Table 5 : time-based usage of the access road (source: author)

After mapping the time-based usage of the two typologies of identified urban spaces, these spaces were assessed with respect to the literature derived parameters.

Criteria	Observation (inside the gated community)	Observation (outside the gated community)
Age Group	All (governed by the principle of exclusivity)	All
Gender of user	All (governed by the principle of exclusivity)	All
Visual Access	Partially visually accessible	Visually accessible
Symbolic Access	Symbolically inaccessible to people who are non-residents	Symbolically accessible to all
Physical Access	Not accessible to non-residents	Physically accessible to all
Nature of space (private/public)	private	public
Traffic movement	Low	High
Comfort and image	Internally has a strong image and provides visual and thermal comfort to the residents	Lacks comfort and image
Access and Linkage	Has good access and linkage within the gated community	Does not have good access and linkage
Uses and Activity	Barring the night time and afternoon time has multiple use and is thoroughly active	Only used for transportation
Sociability	Only for residents	Sociable in nature

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the primary study, as all the amenities and facilities like grocery store, milk booth, medicine shops, gym, swimming pool, Amphitheatre, badminton court, and tiny tots play area are provided within the boundary wall thus the need for the residents to go outside becomes less. This further impacts the informality that could have thrived on the access road given the residential population and their demands. The self-sufficient model of gated community hampers the activity that can occur on the road abutting the gated community and decreases the chances of social interaction of the gated community with the outside city. The boundary walls and surveillance provide a sense of security within the gated community. The boundary walls help in creating a safe environment inside as the people are saved from the traffic as well as intruders. The social interactions happen within the boundary walls. These Traffic congestion on the exterior roads has driven people inside the boundary walls of the gated community.

The findings from the primary case study are as follows:

1. The social nature of urban spaces exists in the neo-liberal urban form but differs drastically from their traditional counterparts in terms of typology

2. The urban spaces in neo-liberal cities don't depict the plethora of Indian culture like their traditional counterparts

3. Chances of encountering strangers have reduced as people are confined within the boundary walls of the gated communities

4. Large block sizes of gated communities make them physically impermeable

5. Visual permeability in gated communities is present

6. The access streets have transformed from multi-functional to mono-functional due to the indirect relationship with the buildings

7. Successful urban space in terms of social nature is the urban space which is present inside the gated communities as the interaction with the exterior urban space has become obsolete.

8. The temporal nature of the urban spaces is lost

9. Social interactions occur but within the confined boundaries of the gated communities

Due to urbanisation and the ease of affordability, the lifestyle of the people has changed. The urban spaces in neo-liberal cities have become commodified and are governed by the principle of exclusivity. In the capitalistic model of development economic class-based exclusion happens. The urban spaces have become introverted and exclusive. The urban spaces inside the gated communities are not accessible by the public. These urban spaces have become a product of modern capitalistic society.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The urban structure of the neo-liberal cities is dis-continuous and impermeable. Concerning gated communities, democratic urban spaces have become obsolete. Large block sizes of gated communities are leading to the development of isolated parcels of land which further are leading to a discontinuity in the urban fabric. The proliferation of automobiles has led to streets in neo-liberal

urban form turning into mono-functional spaces which are drastically in contrast with their traditional counterparts. Privatization of urban space and commodification of the public land has occurred due to the commercial model of development. The urban spaces in the neo-liberal urban form are socially interactive but their nature has turned inwards as the interactions are happening within the confined boundary walls of the gated community. They are governed primarily by the principle of exclusivity. Owing to the limitations of living in a gated environment the social interactions have also decreased in amount as the self-sufficient bounded environment has decreased the chances of stepping outside the gated environment and fostering interactions.

REFERENCES

[1] Appleyard, Donald. 1981. *Livebale Streets.* University of California Press.

[2] Carmona, Matthew. 2003. *Public Places, Urban Spaces: The Dimensions of Urban Design.* Oxford: Architectural Press.

[3] Farzad Soltanian, Atefeh Mohammadi. 2015. "Study of characteristics of urban public open spaces based on social interaction." *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences 2015;.*

[4] Fyfe, Nicholas. 1998. *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space.*

[5] Jacobs, Jane. 1960. *The death and life of great American cities.* New York: Random House.

[6] Krier, Rob. 1979. *Urban Space.* Great Britian: Academy Editions.

[7] Kumar, Raj. 2017. "Overview: Social Spaces in Urban Areas." *International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology (IRJET).*

[8] Madden, Kathleen, and Andrew Schwartz. 2000. *How to turn a place around : a handbook for creating successful public spaces.* Project for Public Spaces, Inc.

[9] Meeta Tandonn, VandanaSehgal. 2017. "TraditionalIndianreligiousstreets." *Frontiers ofArchitectural Research.*

[10] Oliveira, V. 2016. "The Elements of Urban Form." In *Urban Morphology, The Urban Book Series*, 7-29. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

[11] Prosperi, Priya Sasidharan & Prof. David .C. 2012. "Dichotomy of Urban Public Spaces."

[12] Rafael E. Pizarro, Liang Wei and Tridib Banerjee. 2003. "Agencies of Globalization and Third World Urban Form: A Review." *Journal of Planning Literature* 111-130.

[13] Ramachandran, R. 1989. *Urbanization and Urban Systems in India.* Oxford University Press.

[14] Raychaudhuri, S. 2001. "Colonialism, Indigenous Elites and the Transformation of Cities in the Non-Western World: Ahmedabad (Western India), 1890-1947." 677-726.

[15] Sager, Tore. 2011. "Neo-liberal urban planning policies: A literature survey 1990–2010." *Progress in Planning 76* 147–199.

[16] Sanjeev Vidyarthi, Shishir Mathur, and Sandeep Agrawal. 2017. *Understanding India's New Approach to Spatial Planning and Development.* Oxford University Press.

[17] spaces, Project for public. n.d. *Project for public spaces.* https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat.

[18] Stephen Carr, Andrew M. Stone, Mark Francis, Leanne Rivlin. 1992. *Public Space.* Cambridge University Press.

[19] Tandon, Meeta. 2017. "Traditional Indian Religious streets: A spatial study of the study of Mathura." *Frontiers of Architectural Reasearch.*

[20] Uduku, Samer Bagaeen and Ola. 2010. "Gated histories." In *Gated communities*, by Samer Bagaeen and Ola Uduku.

[21] White, William. 1980. *The Social life of small urban places.* Project for Public Spaces, Inc.