

Exploring the Geography of patriarchal oppression in Delhi Metro

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ABSTRACT

In human geography space and place are important concept. Space is abstract, without any substantial meaning. A space is where women feel free to live, move, and there is no fear of any kind of violence. Place refers to attributes and values we associate with a location. Place refers to how people are aware of/attached to a certain piece of space. The aim of this paper is to identify the spaces of safety for women in Delhi Metro. So it is very important to understand first, that what makes a space safe and unsafe and second, what are the characteristics of these safe spaces.

Keywords: Space and Place, Delhi Metro, safe and unsafe spaces

INTRODUCTION

In human geography space and place are important concept. Space is abstract, without any substantial meaning. A space is where women feel free to live, move, and there is no fear of any kind of violence. Place refers to attributes and values we associate with a location. Place refers to how people are aware of/attached to a certain piece of space.

In Agnew's (1987) view a place can be specified in terms of the three dimensions which are place as location, a series of locales and as sense of place. Place in the first dimension refers to a location or a site in space where an activity or object is located while relating to other sites or locations because of interaction, movement and diffusion within them. Second is the view of place as a series of locales or settings where everyday-life activities take place. Here the location is not just the mere address but also includes the setting around. The third dimension is place as sense of place or identification with a place as a unique community, landscape, and moral order. A strong sense of "belonging" to a place would be indicative of "sense of place."

A woman is supposed to use public spaces as a transit between one private space to another (Gardner 1990). Her negotiation with the public spaces is more likely to be governed by some markers like the built environment, landscaping, crowd, positioning in the space, etc...

In earlier studies, only public spaces were considered as unsafe space for women, but now, it is believed that a private space such as home can also be an unsafe space for women. It all depends on the characteristics of space that makes it safe or unsafe for women. A public space can be made secure for women or anyone for that matter through many ways. Street lights, street vendors, rickshaw stand, auto stand, etc... can make a space safer for women however spaces with isolated areas, very less hustle bustle can make a space unsafe.

METHODOLOGY

Information vide Right To Information Act (RTI) 2005 was sought from Delhi Metro Rail Corporation. As per information received, it was found that DMRC don't have any system that can quantify passengers as male and female separately. However, based on my observations during my field visits it was found that out of every 15 passengers 1 is female.

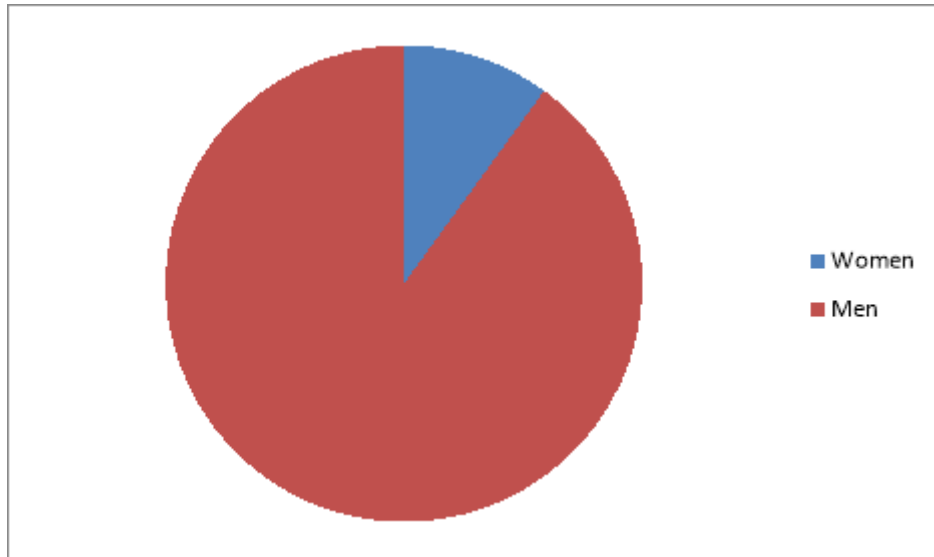


Figure 1: Ratio of female passengers to the male passengers

According to the pie chart that represents ratio of female passengers to male passengers, it can be clearly seen wide gap in the ratio of female passengers to the male passengers. Also in response of RTI dated 06.12.2022 average daily passenger journey for November 2022 is 50.803 lacs. Total monthly passenger journey for November 2022 is 1524.09 lacs. Total yearly passenger journey for the period from December 2021 to November 2022 is 14366.82 lacs. Now, considering the interpretation as per field visits that out of every 15 passengers 1 is female, the following table is made. So, daily around 5 lacs women travel in Delhi metro.

Table 1: number of daily, monthly, yearly male and female passengers travelling in Delhi Metro

Passengers	Women(in lakhs)	Men(in lakhs)	Total Passengers(in lakhs)
Daily	5.033	45.297	50.803
Monthly	152.409	1371.681	1524.09
Yearly	1436.682	12930.14	14366.82

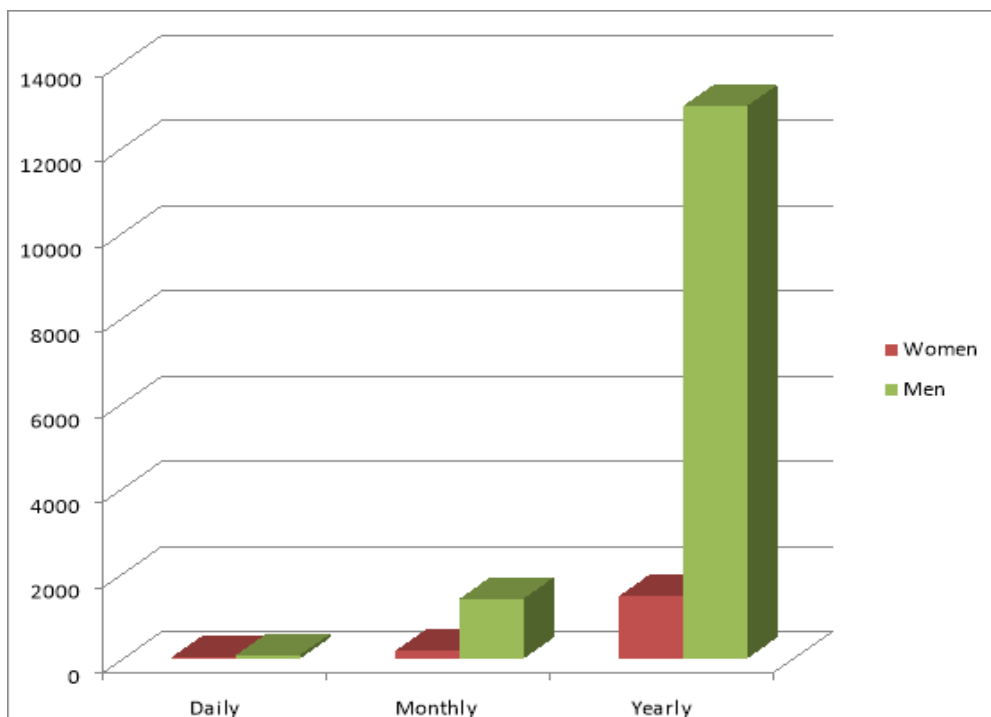


Figure 2: Comparison of male and female passengers travelling in Delhi Metro

The height of the bar graph shows the comparison of daily, monthly and yearly male and female passengers travelling in Delhi metro. As the data shows women are marginalised community in Delhi Metro. An unbiased sample of 5000 women selected at random who were travelling in metro has been used to carry out the research. The data were thereafter transcribed, coded, and analyzed. It is a result of Qualitative Research Methodologies and collection and analysis of Qualitative Data.

METRO COMPARTMENTS

The Delhi metro are usually of four, six, and eight-coach length. According to Delhi Metro officials, the eight-coach trains will have a capacity of carrying about 2,400 commuters, or nearly 300 passengers in each coach. First coach in moving direction is reserved for ladies. From my survey, I found that women prefer to travel in ladies coach as there is sense of safety attached to it.

Ladies Compartment

Women in the national capital got a Gandhi Jayanti gift in 2010 from the Delhi Metro with a special coach being reserved for them. With that, Delhi Metro then became the second Metro in the world to reserve special coaches for women after the Dubai new age transport system. Male Children up to the age of 12 years are only allowed to travel in ladies coach if accompanied by a women passenger. Adequate signages have been provided to clearly indicate the area of platform where the reserved car normally stops. To strictly implement these laws, there is a fine of Rs. 250/- on male passengers for travelling in women coach. Moreover there are guards that ensure that no male passenger is travelling in ladies reserved coach.

A large number of women prefer to travel in first cart of Delhi metro when they are travelling alone. The ladies coach is the safe haven for women. It is the place where every woman feel free, secure, and the place where they could care less about how they are standing, what they are wearing and are safe from inappropriate touching.

“Men’s Compartment”

The introduction of ladies compartment has become an excuse for many male commuters to get away with anything. During the interview, many female passengers complained, told incidents and shared their experiences, in which they have been asked or taunted by male passengers to go to Ladies Coach. These kinds of incidences and the mentality among few male passengers, promote the idea that all the ladies of Delhi are supposed to travel only in the Ladies Coach and the rest of the metro belong to the men only. The General Section becomes a Men Coach in their mind.

General Compartment

The compartments that can be used by anyone irrespective of their sex, is known as general compartment. Apart from one compartment that is reserved for ladies, all the other compartments are general compartments in a metro. In each metro coach, there are 6 reserved seats – 4 for women and two for disabled and elderly.



Figure 3- special reserved seats for women in general compartment

After interviewing many female passengers who take Metro more or less 5 days a week, a pattern has emerged that shows how the women passenger map their journey in public space of Metro and what is the logic behind it. When girls travel in Delhi Metro, there are some spaces that they stick to that makes them feel little safer and comfortable. It is how they perceive space and makes it more comfortable for them in a metro which is filled with men.

One of the interviewee explains her logic of choosing a certain location while travelling in metro, “The best place is when you are standing with or around few ladies, and then I guess you are not the only one that is being looked at. I usually prefer to stand near ladies seats which are reserved in every compartment”

There are many examples in which female passengers who travel daily have a fixed spot decided for them. Whenever girls travel in general coach they prefer to be around other girls or in front of ladies reserved seat. This location provide them comfort and a sense of safety.

Areas those are near to the gate of the metro are unsafe because of the continuous rush that comes in and goes out. It becomes a space where there is greater chance of getting groped or harassed by any men. During peak hours, the rush is so much that it becomes really hard and impossible to stand in the zones that are marked by red colour because of its position, where the passenger would be surrounded by other people or rather pressed between people. This increases the chances of sexual harassment.

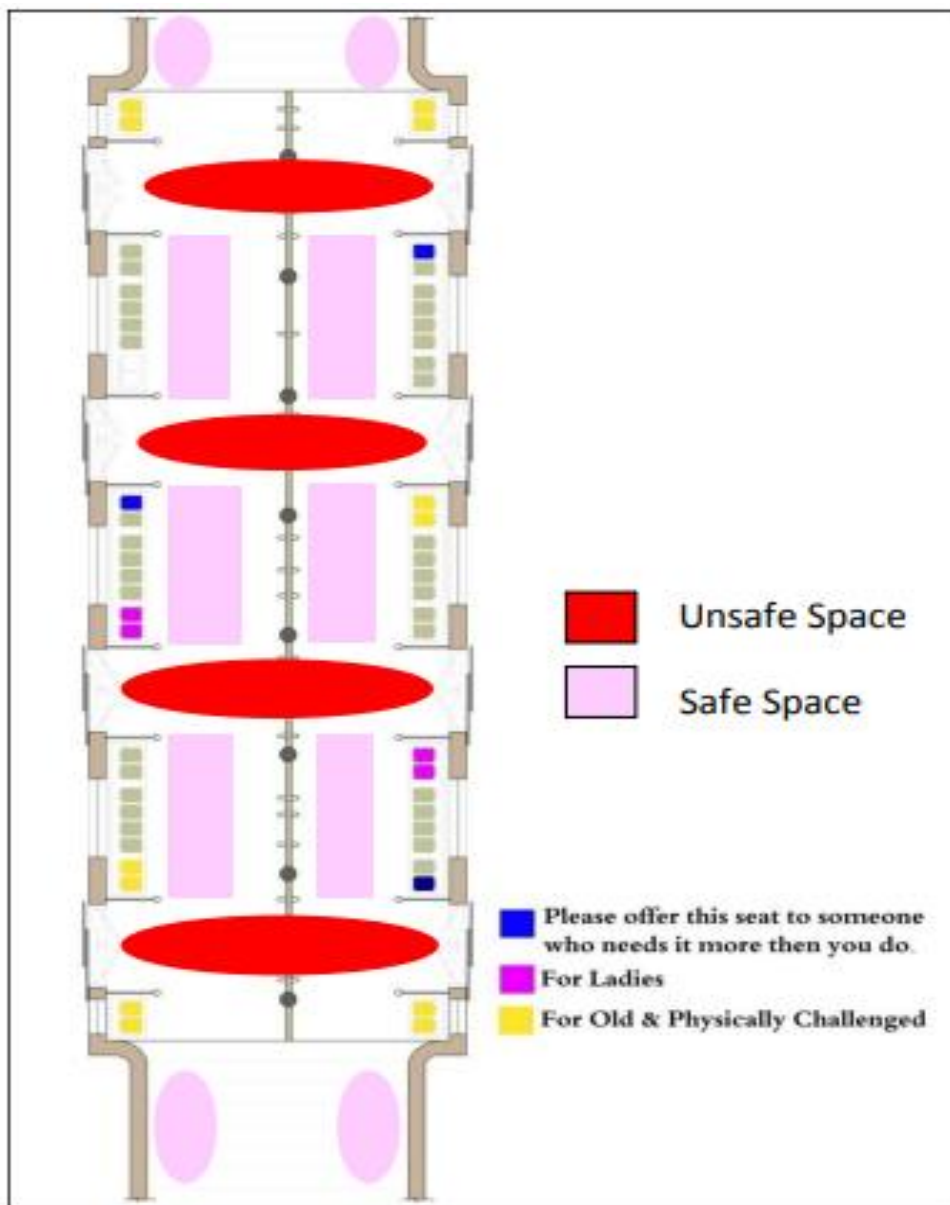


Figure 4– The layout of Metro from inside. It maps the perception of female passengers about “safe spaces” and “unsafe spaces” of a general compartment in a crowded metro.
 Source – Self Prepared

In Figure 5, the mental map explains and gives a general understanding of how female passengers makes sense of space as safe or unsafe especially during rush hours. According to the female passengers areas near the seats are safer not in just context of getting a seat but also it prevents them from getting sandwiched between men during rush hours. However areas those are near to the gate of the metro are unsafe because of the continuous rush that comes in and goes out. It becomes a space where there is greater chance of getting groped or harassed by any men. During peak hours, the rush is so much that it becomes really hard and impossible to stand in the zones that are marked by red colour because of its position, where the passenger would be surrounded by other people or rather pressed between people. This increases the chances of sexual harassment.

PLATFORM

The platform of Metro Station is as important as the Metro itself. People stand on the platform while waiting for the metro, or some person. So they share a fare amount of time on metro platform or within the metro premises. So it is very important to ensure safe and comfortable environment within the Metro station also. This is the most guarded area. As there are many female and male guards present on the platform and within the metro premises. Moreover this area is completely covered with CCTV cameras. This provides a very safe environment.

However these kinds of facilities are not present in every station. There are many stations that lack the availability of female and male guards on platform. Only few of the main stations like Rajiv Chowk, Central Secretariat, Hauz Khas and New Delhi in Yellow line and kashmiri gate and inderlok in Red Line have female guards on platform. There are many stations that very high rush, still there are no guards available on platform to manage the crowd and ensure the safety of all. Stations that do have guards on platform mainly serve important areas and therefore all other areas are neglected even though more people are served by them.

The stations that are mostly less crowded and serve to less number of passengers have very safe platform, because there is no rush and crowd of people. There are hardly 10 people in these stations making it a free space to move around and stand. Stations like Civil Lines, Vidhan Sabha, etc can be given as examples. However the main problems of safety within the platform arises in the stations that are highly crowded, like Kashmere Gate, Rajiv Chowk, Nehru Place, Central Secretariat, etc... because of so much crowd it becomes very easy for anyone to violate the safety of any passenger. The sense of safety is very less in stations like these. Therefore I took the layout of Kashmere Gate as an example to explain that which spaces becomes safe and unsafe in a crowded platform.

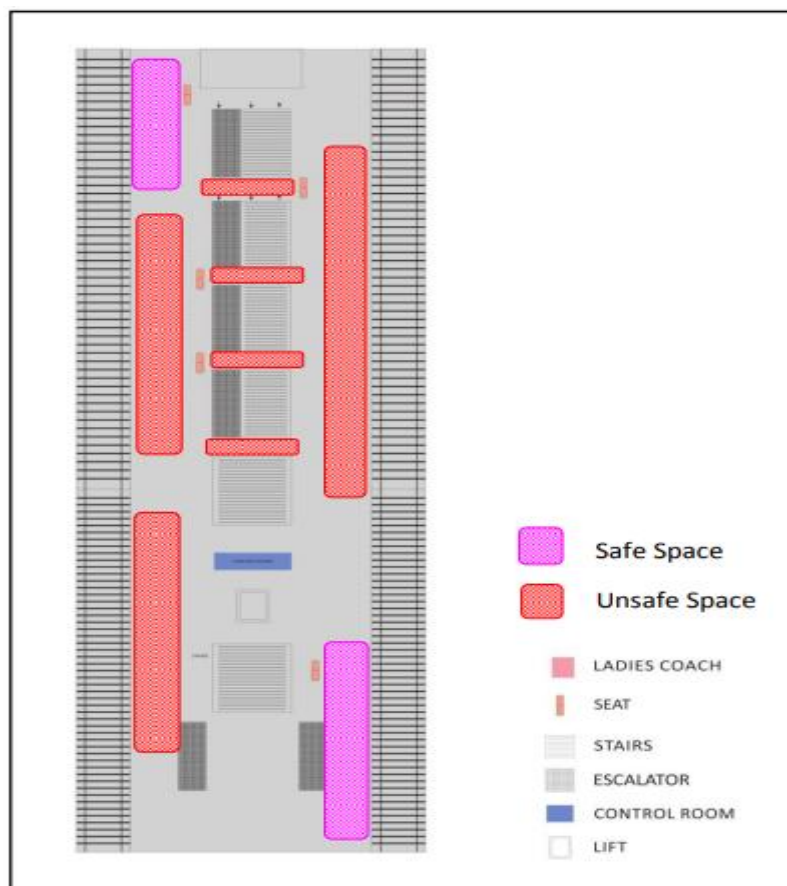


Figure 5 : shows mental map of platform self prepared

Figure 6, shows that the areas near the stairs and escalators are generally considered as unsafe because of so much crowd that gathers around this area. Thus the compartment that is just near the stairs and escalators also becomes highly crowded.

It creates a fear of violence among the female passengers as they usually get jostled by the men getting into the coach. So these spaces become unsafe zones for women passengers. During field study also very less number of females were found standing in these Red Zones. The female passengers that stand in these Red Zones are usually with group of friends, that makes this space safe for them.

At the platform they have a separate space to stand while waiting for the train's arrival and which separates them from the male passengers even on the platform. On some stations guard is present on the platform to instruct men not to stand on the space which is reserved for the women. Therefore the "Ladies Only" zone is marked as Safe Zone, because it is a controlled zone and no male passenger stands there, that makes this area a power space for women.

METRO STATION

With the term metro station (here) I mean that the building of metro station and its surrounding. The planning and surrounding of metro station is very important. It should be a place that provides sense of safety and comfort to its passengers.

The understanding of women, in terms of safety is very different than men. It is just the safety that should be the main focal point while planning the metro stations, but also the sense of safety. The fear becomes the main issue while going to the public places. The main reason of fear is isolation and the deserted places. The overcrowding of a place, makes it unsafe and becomes a factor in violation of safety, but the empty and vacant areas with very less number of people also makes it a space of fear.

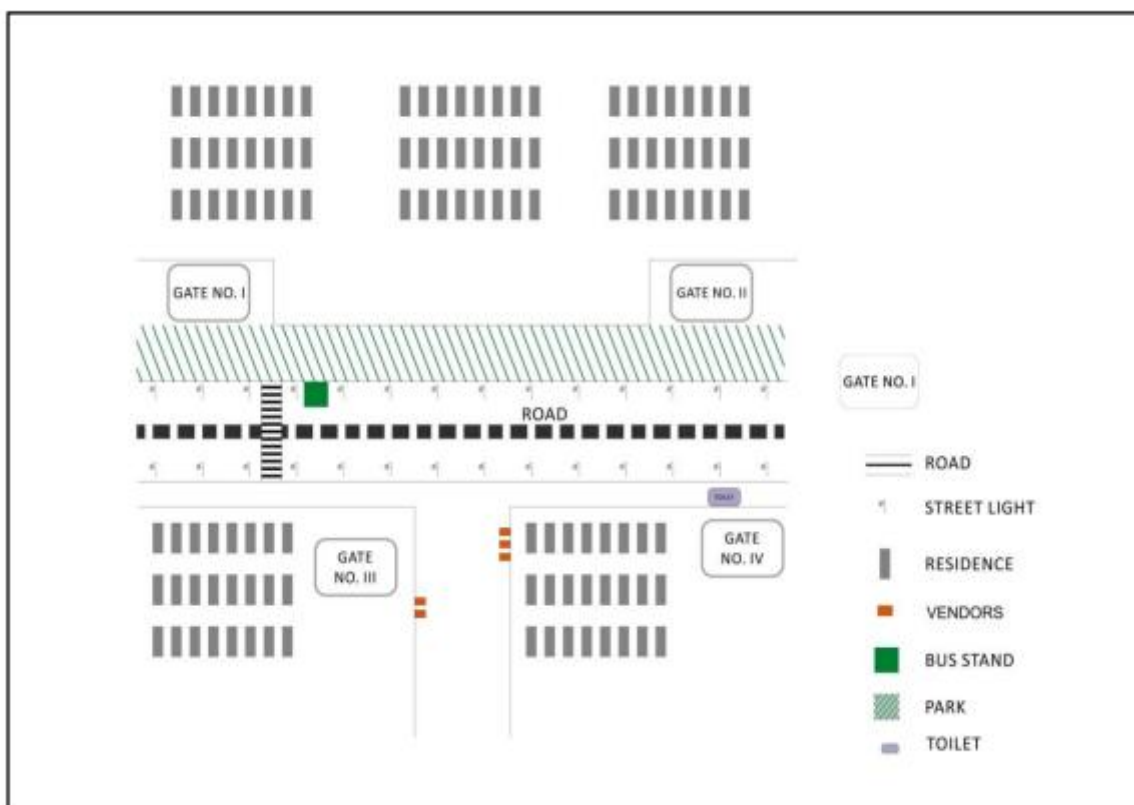


Figure 6 - The layout of Khan Market Metro Station, showing the surrounding of station. Source - Self Prepared

The major focus of urban planners to ensure the safety of women in public spaces should be on lighting, landscaping, visibility, motorized traffic, pedestrian traffic, etc... all these becomes a major factor in not only ensuring the safety but also to provide a sense of safety and comfort to the females while accessing these public spaces. Figure 6 shows the actual layout of Khan Market Station that is in violet line. The metro station is underground and hence only the gates are visible at the ground level. This area have proper lighting on the road side, presence of motorized traffic and vendors and a bus station that makes it a considerably safe station for women.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The sense of safety is greatly attached to the space. Safety is very spatial in nature. Few spaces give more sense of safety than others. Like the ladies coach feels safer than general coach. However there are various things that make these spaces safer than others. They are:

Symbolic Power of Ladies Coach provides women a capacity to police men in the ladies coach. To make them exercise their symbolic power they are given symbolic capital (in form of punishment and penalty to the invaders). Public space has always been a no-authority space for women and women were always expected to negotiate with the power relations, which are tilted towards men. However, the ladies coach of the Delhi Metro, representing symbolic power and symbolic capital to women, has brought a transformation of power relations in the public space. The space of the ladies coach as a part of public transport has provided certain amount of agency as well as power to women which has manifested in making their negotiation with the public space smoother.

The idea of **Men's Compartment** has been emerged because of the introduction of ladies compartment. There are many women who always travel in ladies coach, mostly by mistake refer to general compartment as the men's compartment. Because they have the notion that the general compartment is the space of fear and crime and is completely unsafe for women. Thus limiting them to a small space and reproducing the idea of male dominance. This increases the inequality between men and women over space. Many men have also argued with the women who travel in general compartment that if they are feeling so uncomfortable then they should go to ladies coach, as if it is impossible for men to behave. The overcrowding and rush becomes equal to indecent touching, groping and pushing in the space of Delhi Metro.

The built structure becomes a very important part in making space safe and unsafe, spaces that are isolated and quiet, automatically becomes the space of danger as anyone can assault anyone there without the fear of getting caught. However the properly built environment like proper street lights and street vendors, shops and hustle bustle of city and cars can make space more safe and secure. The physical characteristics of the immediate neighborhood where a station is located can affect people's perception of risk and fear. The specific design characteristics of a transportation setting can induce fear among passengers. People are mostly fearful in places where they do not have a clear line of sight of their surroundings; where there are many nooks, corners, or other objects behind which someone can hide; and where they may feel trapped with no possibilities of escape.

"Eyes in the Street" should be the major focus point of planners while designing any public space. In this every actor on the public space become a civil guard of that place. Because if the place is isolated and deserted, then it becomes inaccessible for women. So it is very important that the Metro Stations should be always surrounded by people, whether shopkeepers or commuters or guards.

Women develop individual **mental maps** of places where they fear assault. These mental maps are based on the perception of that place. It gives them an understanding of the safe and unsafe spaces and zones. For e.g. when a lady enters in the general compartment, she automatically assess the space and would stand in a place that is safer based on the type of people standing, the number of females present or it could any other factor that gives her a sense of safety.

When a woman is in an area beyond her local environment she makes judgments about her safety in public space on the basis of preconceived images she holds about that area and its occupants, as well as from cues she receives about social behaviour from the actual physical surroundings. Therefore the **sense of belongingness** to her local environment gives her more sense of safety and confidence, whereas in other areas the fear of violence increases.

The Delhi Metro authorities have been proactive in attending to women's safety. They enforce the fines, have posted signs and announcements throughout the rail system, and train their guards to watch out for harassment. But the real solution, I believe, lies in a shift in mindset, fueled by the public visibility of women in every space, not a designated corner. It will create actual safety rather than the illusion of a comfort zone.

CONCLUSION

In the gender and space discourse, the public space is the site for exchanging ideas, values and a platform for leisure activities for men. However, for women, public spaces are often regarded as transit ways to other regions. Safe public transit for women and girls is very important as it allows women and girls to move around the city freely, without fear. In the absence of action on this issue, women are forced to adopt different defensive strategies such as wearing only "appropriate" clothing when travelling on public transit, travelling in groups, only boarding ladies coach, ignoring verbal and sexual harassment etc. These defensive strategies add extra burden to women, and deny them their right to freely access their city. Delhi Metro even being the most advanced, clean, automated land transport service in India, still lacks the most important aspect of modernity i.e. the sense of safety. The safety and security of every commuter has always been the agenda of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, but it lacks the complete understanding of the meaning of

safety. This is not just the issue of DMRC but the people and the society. The public space is just the means to practise these meaning of safety, security and gender.

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