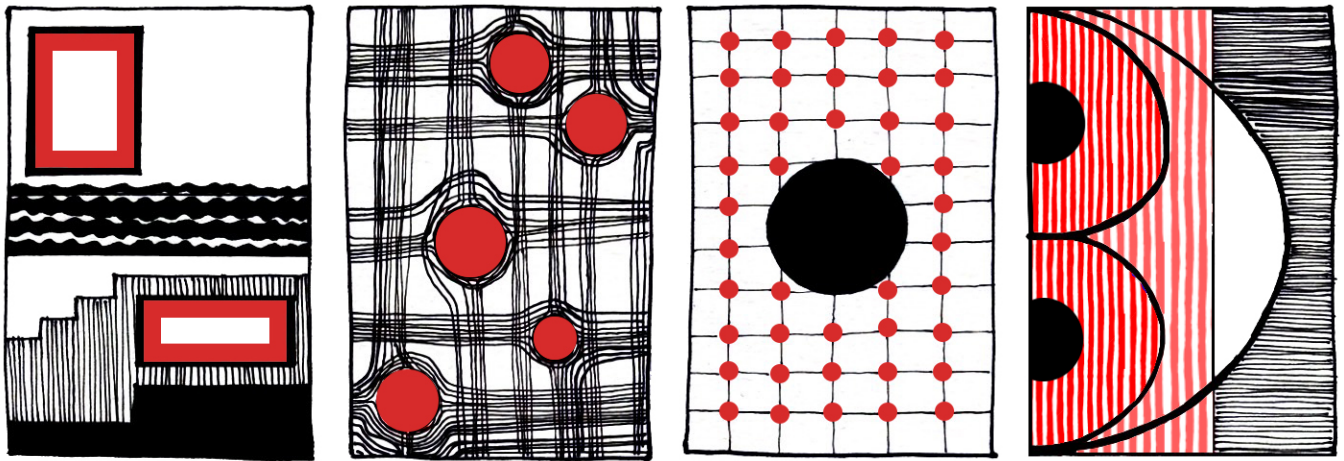




Gender and the City
A Roundtable on Possibilities, Practices, Policies

by
Akshara Centre and
The Feminist Collective in Architecture

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The Feminist Collective in Architecture**

**01 - 02 November, 2025
YMCA Bombay Central, Mumbai**

- Theme 1: Housing, Neighbourhoods and Basic Services
Theme 2: Mobility, Accessibility and Safety
Theme 3: Social Amenities, Care Infrastructure and Leisure



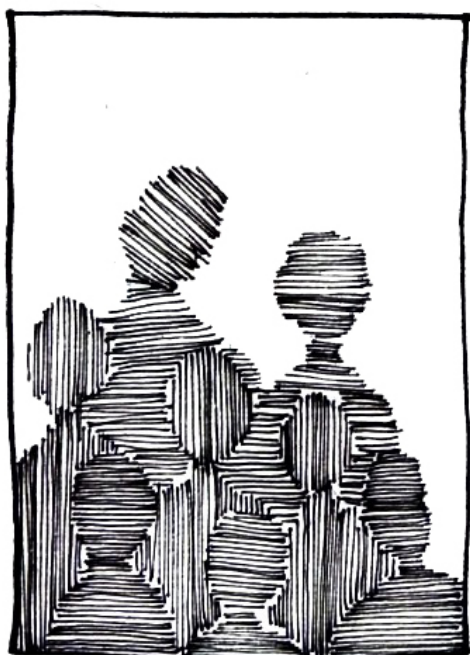
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Introduction to Akshara

Akshara Centre, a Mumbai-based non-profit organisation, has been at the forefront of advancing gender equality and social justice for over three decades. Founded by feminist activists from the women's movement, Akshara combines research, advocacy, and grassroots engagement to create safer, more inclusive urban spaces for all genders.

At the heart of Akshara's work is the belief that cities must reflect the rights and realities of women and marginalised communities — that gender equality must be built into the very design and governance of urban life. Through partnerships with municipal authorities, the Mumbai Police, transport authorities and urban planners, Akshara has contributed to inclusion of Gender chapter in Development Plan of Mumbai As a member of the Gender Advisory Committee of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), Akshara continues to offer recommendations that strengthen urban policies and infrastructure through a gender lens.

Under the Safe and City program, Akshara also contributed to developing the Subway Design Guidelines, promoting safer and more accessible pedestrian spaces. Akshara has launched many campaigns challenging Bollywood, engaging bystanders through campaigns such as Gaana Rewrite, Main hoon Na and Jagah dhakva reaching more than 20 million people.

Akshara also works closely with youth, training thousands of young men and women in colleges and communities to challenge gender norms, become advocates for equality, and participate in city-building processes. By bridging the worlds of policy, and movement-building, Akshara strives to ensure that cities are not just sites of opportunity, but also of dignity, freedom, and belonging for women and gender-diverse people.

Introduction to FCA

Founded in March 2021, The Feminist Collective in Architecture (FCA) emerged from a series of informal discussions led by Madhavi Desai, Urvi Desai, Miki Desai, Himani Vinodrai, and Priyanshi Pathak. Based in India, FCA is a growing community of professionals, academicians, and students committed to addressing and challenging gender bias within the discipline and profession of architecture.

The Collective creates inclusive spaces for non-cis-males and strives to foster gender equity and diversity across the field. Through discussions, research, collaborations, and awareness activities, FCA brings together people, skills, and ideas to question patriarchal structures and advocate for marginalized genders and identities. As part of a larger global movement, the Collective seeks to inspire dialogue and systemic change in South Asia—encouraging all feminists, regardless of gender, to unite in shaping a more equitable and representative future for architecture.

FCA has organized three significant national events since its inception. The first, a symposium on “Women in Architectural Practice in India,” was held in 2022, followed by a colloquium on “Explorations in Gender and Space” in 2023, and most recently, a forum on “Built Environment, Design, and Gender” in 2024. FCA was featured in Feminist Spatial Practices, an international archive of feminist collectives and practices launched in New York in 2023. Additionally, it was showcased under the theme “Samatva – Women in Design” at India's first design biennale, IAADB, in New Delhi (December 2023). In 2025, FCA expanded by launching its Delhi chapter while maintaining its headquarters in Ahmedabad.

About the Round Table

India today is undergoing an unprecedented wave of urbanization. Yet, despite this rapid transformation, most government departments and leading urban research and policy institutes continue to overlook the critical intersections between gender, care, and the built environment. While it is increasingly recognised that men, women, and gender minorities inhabit and navigate cities in different ways, these lived realities remain largely invisible within dominant urban planning and policy frameworks.

The reality, however, is that cities are deeply gendered spaces where economic survival, cultural processes, power relations, and social inequalities continuously produce and reproduce urban structures and spatialities. These are reflected in the daily experiences of marginalized populations such as the physically challenged, children, non-binary people, women, etc. Unequal gendered relations manifest in various urban layers: public spaces, neighbourhoods, transportation, workspaces, safety, education, healthcare and infrastructure, to name a few. Intersectionality, where people are simultaneously discriminated against on multiple grounds such as gender, social caste, economic class, etc makes the city inaccessible, confrontational and a difficult place to inhabit for such groups. Instead of being offered opportunities and possibilities, they are often relegated to the fringes of the full potential of an urban life.

Shaped by modernist traditions that privilege the notion of a ‘universal citizen,’ much of urban design and urban planning continues to operate on the false assumption of gender neutrality. The spatial discrimination, being mostly rendered invisible, is generally ignored as a non-issue. Although there is an absence of a formal mechanism within the urban local bodies to address this, there are efforts from NGOs, collectives and private organisations towards gender inclusion in the city and its spaces. These entities work on different aspects of urbanity (mobility, governance, housing, water supply, sanitation, education, planning and design, etc) and use multiple forms of studies (research, design, mapping, white papers, etc), to bring out the gendered relations and spaces in the built environment, and how they can be addressed. Their collective knowledge and insights can contribute to shaping urban futures that are vibrant, inclusive, safe, joyful and productive.

Drawing on emerging global and Indian discourses on a feminist and care-centred urbanism, the purpose of the conclave is to bring together people who look at the production and consumption of the built environment from the analytical construct of gender. It seeks to bring together a diverse and committed community from the disciplines of gender studies, architecture and planning, including practitioners, think tanks, NGOs, academics, activists and change makers to rethink the built environment through feminist, intersectional, and care-centred perspectives. The conclave challenges us to reimagine infrastructure, mobility, housing, public space, and governance through the lens of relationality, interdependence, and lived experience—placing care, dignity, and equity at the very heart of urban futures, and thereby inform urban planning and urban design efforts at the state and national levels.

The discussions were held across three broad intersecting themes:

Theme 1: Housing, Neighbourhoods and Basic Services

Theme 2: Mobility, Accessibility and Safety

Theme 3: Social Amenities, Care Infrastructure and Leisure

Structure of the Roundtable

Day 1: 01 November 2025

10am - 11am: Registrations & Refreshments

11am - 11:50pm: Introductory Session

- Welcome + Introductions of Akshara and FCA - Nandita Shah & Urvi Desai
- Introduction to The Roundtable and its Vision - Madhavi Desai & Shimul Javeri Kadri

11:50pm - 03:10pm: Theme 1: Housing, Neighbourhoods & Basic Services

11:50 - 12:00: Introduction to Theme and Speaker

12:00 - 12:20: Overview of the Theme & its deliberations by Amita Bhide and Bijal Brahmbhatt

12:20 - 01:30: Group Discussions

Lunch Break

02:30 - 03:10: Presentations by Groups of Theme 1

03:10pm - 05:55pm: Theme 2: Mobility, Safety & Access

Theme 3: Social Amenities, Care Infrastructure & Leisure

03:10 - 03:20: Introduction to Theme 2, Theme 3 & Speakers

03:20 - 03:30: Overview of Theme 2 & its deliberations by Kalpana Viswanath

03:35 - 03:55: Overview of Theme 3 & its deliberations by Sandhya Naidu & Shilpa Phadke

Tea Break

04:20 - 05:30: Two Parallel Sessions - Group Discussions for Themes 2 & 3

05:30 - 05:40: Presentation from Theme 2

05:45 - 05:55: Presentation from Theme 3

5:55pm - 06:00pm: Closing

Day 2: 10:00am to 3:00pm

10:00am - 11:00am: Synthesis and Summary session

Tea Break

11:20am - 12:50pm: Open Discussion on solutions, recommendations, actionable plans, etc. for Integrating gender-inclusivity and gender responsiveness in Shaping Cities.

Lunch Break

01:50pm - 02:30pm: Way forward

02:30pm: Vote of Thanks and Group Photo

Participants of the Roundtable

Team Akshara

Nandita Gandhi, Co Director
Nandita Shah, Co Director
Priyanka Devrukhkar, Administration
Shimul Javeri Kadri, SJK Architects
Snehal Velkar, Lead - Safe and Inclusive City
Sudipta Iyer, Consultant

Team FCA

Madhavi Desai, Co-founder
Meeta Goel, Committee Member
Priyanshi Pathak, Co-founder
Ujjaval Parekh, Committee Member
Urvi Desai, Co-founder and President

The roundtable was a closed-door event, with invited participation to reimagine infrastructure, mobility, housing, public space, governance and entire cities through the lens of relationality, interdependence, and lived experience—placing care, dignity, and equity at the very heart of urban futures. Akshara Centre and Feminist Collective in Architecture sent invitations to individuals and organisations, including:

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Sr.	Name	Designation & Organisation	Phone No.	E-mail Id
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Report Abstract

This report outlines the Roundtable held at the YMCA in Mumbai, on November 1 and 2, 2025, titled, “Gender and the City: Possibilities, Practices, Policies”, organized by Akshara Centre and the Feminist Collective in Architecture (FCA). The gathering included activists, urban planners, scholars, architects, and community leaders, all who shared a commitment to building cities rooted in equality, dignity, and care. 50 participants in total attended this two day roundtable. It was proposed to be a space for deep listening and group engagement to share strategies, learn from one another, and build a collective momentum. Three main themes were developed, which were discussed through short keynotes and group discussions. At the end of the Roundtable, several ideas came up for strategies for creating a network and taking the goals further. There was a shared commitment to continue this process of dialogue, reflection, and collaboration, ensuring that Gender and the City remains both a political and a practical agenda.

Some actions that can be taken up at the earliest include:

- Document successful stories and build a compendium of best practices vis-à-vis feminist or gender-inclusive initiatives in the country. This would call for all participating organisations, collectives and practitioners to contribute by sharing their successful stories.
- Create an online working platform for networking, knowledge sharing, and to develop an online documentation platform.

Opening Session

On the first day, the morning discourse was opened by the Round Table organizers with brief introductions to the subject matter and the goals by Nandita Shah, Madhavi Desai, Urvi Desai and Shimul Jhaveri Kadri.

Cities represent both vibrant opportunities and deep-seated exclusions, the way a city is planned and built shapes far more than its infrastructure; it determines whose needs are visible, whose safety is prioritized, and whose voices are heard. True urban transformation requires inclusion-of not only women but also men and boys-in the dialogue on equality. Norms around patriarchy, privilege, and partnership need to be challenged and reshaped. The transformative potential of a feminist perspective to concretize actual urban planning processes is important. Current investments in urban infrastructure, such as flyovers, overwhelmingly benefit the small proportion (roughly 6-8%) of the population who own four-wheelers, while pressing concerns of pedestrians, cyclists, including care givers, remain marginal and under-addressed. A city of care and empathy goes beyond physical and sexual violence towards activity patterns and integrated social and physical structures that support all residents' well-being. Architectural ethos, often obsessed with creating “glass boxes,” should instead give voice to the lived realities of inhabitants, where architecture is an embodiment of its users, not just a matter of aesthetic absorption. Design is fundamentally an act of care, for nature, for culture, and, most importantly, for the community. Policy, advocacy, and action can work together to “feminize and humanize” urban spaces.

Also shared were the facts that Akshara’s pivotal role ensured that Mumbai’s Development Plan 2034 included, for the first time, a dedicated Gender Chapter as well as helped in establishing the Gender Advisory Committee within the Mumbai Municipal Corporation, integrating gender priorities into official city planning. She emphasized that such efforts demonstrate the possibility of embedding care, inclusivity, and community into urban projects, and expressed hope that collective action through policy, advocacy, and practice can help humanize and feminize Indian cities. FCA’s focus and efforts towards gender and architecture as well as gender in architecture were narrated, including the three non-traditional national conferences conducted by the Collective.

Theme 1: Housing, Neighbourhoods, and Basic Services

(*Keynote Speaker:* Prof. Amita Bhide, TISS, Mumbai)

Amita Bhide's reflections on housing, neighbourhoods, and basic services drew attention to the everyday disconnect between policy, design, and women lived realities. She emphasized that while housing, water, and sanitation are planned as separate sectors by different municipal departments, women experience them as a single, integrated living system. This fragmentation, she argued, calls for a care-centred, cross-sectoral approach to housing and amenity provision that aligns policy with real life use. She further stressed that one of the most overlooked elements in housing discourse is "community." Community spaces, passages, shared thresholds, unfixed and non-commodified areas enable everyday interactions, mutual care, and social support, especially for women. Yet, these spaces are steadily shrinking under developer-led models and rigid functional zoning of public spaces. From bus stops that serve more as advertising sites than shelters, to crowded platforms and overly programmed open spaces, Amita pointed to how cities are losing their capacity to foster interaction across gender and class.

The trend in government housing schemes of listing property in women's names as a gesture towards gender mainstreaming is very good but since land is often commodified, and housing increasingly treated as a financial instrument a deeper systemic change is advocated. Public, interactive urban spaces that nurture community are increasingly being replaced by privatized urban spaces. Toilets are often the only amenities provided with women in mind, however, surrounding paths, access and many other crucial issues are neglected. There is an increasing fragmentation of urban activity: education, mobility, and social interactions are separated by class and geography. The centrality and essentiality of "community" for women cannot be over-emphasised. Therefore, we require protection and creation of public spaces that are "non-commodified, non-priced, and not eternally fixed in function." Multiple support systems can emerge from shared, well-designed spaces. Feminism needs to reframe and rethink public spaces within these critical issues.

Theme 1: Housing, Neighbourhoods, and Basic Services

Discussion by the Participants (Group A):

Gendered Design and Technical Frameworks: Existing diversity in household types, such as women-headed and single-women households, are often not considered in design frameworks, primarily because technical professionals most often lack this knowledge. Also not known is the fact that women's economic activities may often extend into common spaces in the neighbourhood.

The Erosion of Community and Public Spaces: As housing becomes increasingly developer-driven, shared spaces are either monetized or rendered inaccessible. This erasure isolates women and diminishes opportunities for informal social support and collective engagement. As urban design often reinforces insularity, prioritizing private over public life, without avenues for gathering and shared recreation, women's presence in public life becomes further restricted. There is an increasing tendency to render working classes and their labour invisible by setting up exclusionary infrastructure like separate lifts and washrooms for the service people. Worse is the newer policy of choosing one's neighbours in a housing scheme by voting out the 'others.'

Policy Gaps and Institutional Challenges: There are systemic shortcomings in existing housing and urban development frameworks such as the non-inclusion of creches and community spaces for housing projects with inadequate control of monitoring and maintenance of such existing facilities.

Sanitation, Care, and Everyday Infrastructure: Sanitation emerged as a key dimension of spatial inequity. In informal settlements, community toilets frequently fail due to poor design, corruption in construction, lack of maintenance, and disregard for women's safety and privacy. Similarly, care

infrastructure—including day-care centres, community kitchens, and health services—remains inadequate or absent.

Governance, Monitoring, and Accountability: There is an urgent need for government-led enforcement of gender-responsive planning, rather than relying solely on private sector initiatives, including the establishment of design audit processes within government departments, gender review mechanisms, and inclusion of gender experts in architectural teams. There is also a great importance of participatory planning processes, supported by legal frameworks that ensure accountability at ward or neighbourhood levels.

Non-negotiables: Inclusivity must be structural, not symbolic with corresponding shifts in ownership models, governance, and accountability.

Social infrastructure of shared/community spaces underpins women's equal access to leisure, safety, and solidarity.

To integrate technical competence and social understanding, training and institutional reforms are needed to bridge the divide between spatial design and gender equity.

Policy enforcement requires legal backing, therefore bye-laws need to be created and implemented through law.

Sanitation, care, and mobility are interlinked domains of gendered access that must be addressed holistically.

Emerging Directions and Actionable Considerations:

Develop internal gender audit tools for assessing housing and spatial design initiatives.

Advocate for gender-responsive design guidelines within government frameworks, drawing from global models. Reimagine community spaces as essential infrastructure and not amenities.

Embed participatory mechanisms that include women and marginalized groups in planning and monitoring processes, including the possibilities of providing incentives to private developers or better, government sanctions for non-compliance.

Lobby the government to implement gender-sensitive mechanisms already existing in urban development plans, and to ensure a dominance of walkability in place of car-focussed development and parking spaces.

Need for a standardised policy document that then discourages convenient interpretation and implementation of existing policies.

Digital platforms such as Blinkit and app-based delivery can exacerbate isolation and diminish human interaction.

Theme 1: Housing, Neighbourhoods & Basic Services

Discussion by the Participants (Group B):

We need greater inclusion of queer and trans communities, as cities are increasingly becoming ghettoized for these groups with “protectionist” framing in policy that needs rethinking.

Collaborative and cross-caste approaches are essential for navigating legal and practical challenges in rehabilitating slum families, and process but can be achieved. Unfortunately, the present-day cities no longer have spaces for unstructured play and making of friends. In the rental sector, there exists class-based exclusion and fragmentation, especially for single women.

Efforts are required at more intersectional lens-class, caste, gender, and climate towards creating buildings. Tweaking of government schemes like PMAY and micro-level interventions as well as impactful policy changes are needed, including research on lesser-served cities.

There is a centrality of “community” for women: multiple support systems can emerge from shared, well-designed spaces. In short, there are multiple instances of unsuccessful interventions, the ‘invisibilisation’ of marginalised populations and their labour, and the erosion of community spaces under market-driven urban development. We must rethink public spaces by designing collective, child-friendly, and alternative models of urban belonging. The worrisome parts are the political economy of urban change, including questions of finance, the corporatization of consulting, and the outsized role of consulting firms in shaping urban policy and implementation priorities.

Theme 1: Housing, Neighbourhoods, and Basic Services

Discussion by the Participants (Group C):

There is a critical and often overlooked link between housing conditions and women's health, as poor housing design directly and significantly impacts women's physical and mental wellbeing. Public spaces systematically fail to account for women's safety and accessibility needs, because the complex relationship between urban design and women's mobility is often overlooked. Housing design fails to facilitate complex, overlapping movements and the multiple roles women perform across these supposedly distinct private and public spaces. There is a critical need for flexibility in housing design, in contrast to rigid, standardized solutions. Women in co-operative societies are often not empowered or sensitive enough to effectively advocate for gender-responsive design.

The profound question is: against the existing male-dominated professional and bureaucratic structures, whether mere representation of women in governance structures translates to meaningful participation and actual influence over design decisions. There are significantly more men engaged in architectural design, urban planning, and the design of policies that govern housing and urban development. As a result, critical requirements are systematically overlooked in housing design, including properly designed cooking areas with adequate ventilation, accessible and safe childcare facilities, reliable and safe water availability, and proper sanitation infrastructure without safety risks to women. The private public binary is rigid and incorrect because women navigate both spaces constantly and simultaneously.

In informal settlements, unsafe sanitation practices in various aspects are some of the most serious problems: shared toilets located away from household premises, hours spent fetching water, insufficient cooking space with poor ventilation, the absence of safe areas for play and childcare, etc. Redevelopment projects should accommodate women's workspaces at home, flexibility for incremental building options and genuine participation of women in governance of housing societies.

Theme 2: Mobility, Safety and Access

(Keynote Speaker: Kalpana Viswanath (Co-founder and CEO, Safetipin, Delhi))

Women's safety and mobility are core to the concept of "right to the city," unfortunately none of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) directly address transportation in their indicators, despite its central role in daily life and gender equity. There are many shortcomings in "gender-neutral" design of transportation systems and spaces, such as over use of CCTV cameras for police use, lack of recognition of women's 'trip chaining' as well as walking more than men, lack of gender-based data collection, etc. Ensuring women's mobility is about connecting women to economic opportunities, healthcare, education, and other aspirational outcomes.

Discussion by the Participants:

There is a critical contradiction in transport financing, as many municipalities run the bus system in deficit but massive road infrastructure projects are created at huge disadvantage to public transport. Public-private models in bus services have several challenging issues besides the relative absence of women's employment in senior transport roles and other systemic barriers to their professional advancement in the sector. Current data, which is not disaggregated by gender, systematically obscures women's travel patterns. There is a huge technological challenge where many users are without smartphones or digital literacy. There are also infrastructure inconsistency and inadequacy in the provision of women-only train compartments shows women's safety remains an afterthought rather than a planned priority.

With private space-home-being a site of potential domestic violence for many women, the safety discourse in public space functions as control, limiting women's access to economic opportunity, social networks, and, more specifically, escape routes from violence.

Politically popular, free bus fare schemes raise complex questions about equity and resource allocation. Here the critical question is: does it address women's mobility barriers, or does it risk becoming a politically expedient gesture that does not challenge deeper infrastructural and safety failures that restrict women's movement?

Transport planning fails to take into various intersectional aspects of women, particularly women with disabilities, elderly women, women from marginalized castes, including migrant, poor and trans women. Often micro-level infrastructure failures such as efficient and safe last-mile connectivity can completely negate macro-level transport investments.

Other observations:

Essential urban gig, informal and domestic workers are systematically excluded from basic infrastructure such as dedicated rest spaces or free and dignified waiting rooms in public areas, adequate toilet facilities (often paid services that exclude the poor), which is the responsibility of the government.

Transport planning cannot be separated from larger questions of social justice, dignity, and belonging.

There is a need to make all transportation subsidies visible-including roads, parking, and private vehicle infrastructure-to reframe public discourse and policy debates. This transparency would challenge the false narrative of public transport "inefficiency" while road subsidies remain hidden.

Last-mile connectivity should be budgeted and planned simultaneously with major projects-never as an afterthought, including upgrading pedestrian infrastructure with adequate lighting.

Theme 3: Social Amenities, Care Infrastructure and Leisure

(Keynote Speaker 1: Sandhya Naidu Janardhan

- Founder & Managing Director, Community Design Agency, Mumbai)

Within the M-East Ward of Mumbai, the Natwar Parekh Colony houses approximately 25,000 residents (majority Muslims from low-income groups) within five hectares of land, comprising around 5,856 flats in a dense, vertical resettlement colony that exemplifies the policy failures and commodification of urban space besides being a public health hotspot, with a high rate of tuberculosis (TB) amongst the residents. Ms Naidu has worked closely with this community, especially the women, and has made great inroads in improving the built environment, culture, and health issues after an initial resistance. Beginning with micro-projects, Ms. Naidu's team helped the women themselves develop spaces for care, rest, communication, and socialization, including a community library and a women's gathering space known as Awas which included multiple activities. The key insights were: Sustainable transformation through incremental, bottom-up actions, dignity and agency through reclaiming and reimagining space, creation of shared, green open spaces and play with the Municipality. This work proved that design-led, participatory urbanism can empower marginalized communities to reclaim agency over their environments.

Keynote Speaker 2: Shilpa Phadke (Professor, School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai)

Poor or absent infrastructure is often deliberate and planned, embodying the priorities of those who govern cities. Based on colonial urban legacy, the cities enforce a politics of exclusion, where infrastructure actively marginalizes women and non-binary genders as well as lower-income groups through poor lighting, lack of free, open spaces for rest and leisure, inadequate transport, and fragmented connectivity. When public services are privatized, access to urban amenities becomes conditional upon purchasing power, transforming citizens into consumers rather than rights-bearing members of society. It is important to realize that once infrastructure is provided, the spaces for women develop an autonomous life, often fostering forms of participation and solidarity that exceed its original intent.

Discussion by the Participants

Care infrastructure includes, but is not limited to, public toilets, creches, healthcare centres, and spaces for recreation. This should be supported by safe transport routes, well-lit public spaces, and spaces that allow for interaction and a sense of community. For women's safety and security, the following are needed: Effective "eyes on the street" (public surveillance and presence), full-day open gardens and parks without high walls, accessible and well-designed and well-maintained toilets (some of them could become community spaces for women to breast-feed or rest), good lighting, etc.

Well-designed spaces attract users and encourage positive engagement. The availability of trees, benches, community seating, and clear walkways, can make a space feel welcoming and promote a sense of ownership. While technological solutions could be part of a larger strategy, there should not be an over-reliance on surveillance cameras (e.g., CCTV), as these measures often only provide post-facto information and do not prevent crime or ensure real-time safety.

Despite the growing awareness of gender inclusivity, gender-neutral toilet facilities remain rare in most cities, especially near transit hubs or large public venues.

It is important to create, not be overly segregated spaces, specifically for women and children. Parks

maintained by local women's groups or community organizations are generally more successful at fostering a sense of ownership and safety. Good connection between transport hubs and leisure areas is necessary to ensure that people, particularly women, have easy access through well-lit paths, adequate pedestrian infrastructure, and clear signage that guides people safely.

There must be greater transparency in how decisions are made and how resources are allocated at the planning level by the government, along with disaggregated data on gender, age, and income as well as participation of local communities in design and management.

Core Insights Across the Themes

A. Gender Is Embedded at Every Urban Scale

Participants consistently emphasised that gender operates across all scales of the city—from the design of a single housing unit to neighbourhood layouts, transport systems, and citywide infrastructure investments. Gender and city planning must be framed as a political issue, not just a technical or “add-on” concern or as ‘tokenism’.

- Housing design often assumes a “typical” user, who is a middle-aged, able-bodied, white-collared male of high social & economic standing ignoring women’s multiple roles, home-based work, care responsibilities, and mobility patterns.
- Transport systems are planned around linear, peak-hour, work-home trips, erasing women’s trip-chaining, off-peak travel, and dependence on walking and last-mile connectivity.
- Social amenities and leisure spaces are treated as optional or residual, rather than essential public infrastructure that enables safety, dignity, and participation.

Key takeaway:

Gender-neutral planning frameworks systematically reproduce inequality because they are built on false assumptions about a “universal citizen.” True gender-responsive planning must simultaneously address the intersectionality of caste, class, disability, age, and other dimensions of marginalization.

B. Community Is Central to Women’s Urban Lives—but Is Being Eroded

Across housing, neighbourhoods, and public space discussions, community emerged as a critical yet disappearing urban resource.

- Shared spaces—courtyards, passages, thresholds, informal gathering areas—enable mutual support, childcare, information exchange, and collective safety.
- Developer-led housing models and rigid zoning increasingly commodify or eliminate these spaces.
- Privatization and gated development isolate women, fragment social life, and make care work harder and more invisible.

Key takeaway:

Community spaces are not amenities; they are essential social infrastructure, especially for women, children, elderly persons, and informal workers.

C. Care Infrastructure Is Systemically Undervalued and Fragmented

The government should ensure dignified baseline infrastructure as a non-negotiable right and not a privilege. Address infrastructure gaps that disproportionately burden women, particularly in informal settlements where these deficits are most severe and their consequences most acute. Participants highlighted how care-related services—sanitation, childcare, healthcare, rest spaces, community kitchens, play spaces—are:

- Planned in silos across departments
- Poorly designed, inadequately maintained, or entirely absent
- Treated as welfare add-ons rather than core urban infrastructure

“Mass” infrastructure investments exhaust budgets before addressing specific needs of the elderly, persons with disabilities, women, and children. Free public toilets, waiting rooms, rest spaces for informal workers, adequate lighting, and universal accessibility features must be government-provided. The private sector’s role is to enhance beyond this baseline, never to substitute for it.

Key takeaway:

Cities function as everyday care environments, but care is neither recognised nor budgeted as a planning priority.

D. Safety Discourse Often Functions as Control, Not Freedom

Discussions on mobility and safety revealed a deep contradiction:

- Women's safety is invoked rhetorically, but infrastructure continues to prioritise private vehicles, surveillance technologies, and policing.
- Poor public transport, unsafe last-mile connectivity, and inadequate lighting restrict women's access to work, education, healthcare, leisure, and escape from violence.
- Over-reliance on CCTV and women-only compartments treats women's presence as an exception rather than reshaping systems for universal accessibility and dignity.

Key takeaway:

Safety must be reframed as security, governance, and rights, with the state responsible for providing dignified and accessible baseline infrastructure that centres mobility as a right, not a privilege requiring protection.

E. Representation Without Power Is Insufficient

Participants questioned whether the presence of women in governance, professional practice, or housing societies translates into meaningful influence.

- Architectural, planning, and policy-making spaces remain male-dominated.
- Technical expertise is often detached from lived experience.
- Participation is frequently symbolic rather than decision-making.

Key takeaway:

Without structural reforms, representation alone does not lead to gender-responsive outcomes.

Way Forward

A. Documentation and Knowledge Creation

Documenting a series of case studies that are successful gender-inclusive projects or actions, which can serve as reference points.

Establishing a virtual library and online platform to host reports, academic research, design guidelines, and safety audit tools, bulletin board, as a shared repository and learning space, ensuring open access to collective knowledge.

B. Research, Data, and New Indices

Reviewing and introducing new indices and gender audits that capture inclusivity, safety, and care within urban systems-linking them to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and measures of liveability.

Generating data around care infrastructure-crèches, community kitchens, day-care centres, and play spaces-to understand existing gaps and operational challenges, including exploring housing typologies and climate resilience, for response to both gender and environmental considerations.

C. Learning and Capacity Building

Teaching modules on gender, inclusion, and feminist urbanism be introduced in architecture, design, engineering, management, and planning institutions that emphasises participatory approaches and encourages students to observe lived experiences. Integrating inclusivity into educational programs and youth engagement initiatives can foster a broader understanding of what makes a space accessible and welcoming for everyone.

D. Feminist Principles in Design and Planning

Articulating a set of feminist principles for urban design, applicable across genders to guide design review processes and inform the development of gender audit guidelines, inspired by existing examples.

E. Policy Engagement and Institutional Mechanisms

Introducing policy clauses that make community infrastructure-such as day-care centres, crèches, and open community spaces-mandatory components for housing approvals. Also, consciously emphasise technical knowledge in waste management planning among architects and developers. Take up advocacy efforts to engage with councillors, municipal representatives, and policy-makers, ensuring that gender inclusion is a central element in city-making.

F. Partnerships and Collaborative Networks

Civil society organisations, feminist collectives, academic institutions, and professional associations should be essential partners in promoting gender-inclusive urban processes, working with a decentralised network model instead of a single institution. There should be a shared manifesto outlining feminist principles for inclusive urban design.

G. Demonstrative and Pilot Projects

These projects should operationalise feminist design principles, generate case-based learning, and serve as models for replication across cities. A potential pilot initiative in Mumbai's M East Ward could be a starting point.

H. Financing, Advocacy, and Long-Term Vision

A financing pitch should be prepared to engage the government, private developers, and corporate networks such as CII and NASSCOM as there is a need for a funding strategy and resource mobilisation framework. Engage builder lobbies, advocate for differential interest rates from banks for various classes, and learn from public-private partnership models in cities.

I. Building a Shared Vision

Document, disseminate, and demonstrate feminist urban practices. Build a networked community of practitioners and organisations grounded in ethics of care. Engage in strategic advocacy and policy dialogue to make gender and inclusion central to urban governance. While there was interest in long-term institutionalisation, participants emphasised retaining the flexibility and advocacy-driven character of the collective.

J. Sustaining Dialogue and Political Advocacy

Make “Gender and the City” a political agenda that informs governance, planning decisions, and even electoral discussions. Have ongoing dialogue, reflection, and coordination among members of the collective to maintain momentum and accountability. To this end, regional consultations to be held across different cities allowing for localised discussions, experience sharing, and strategy building to feed into a larger collective vision.

Some Actions that can be immediately taken up:

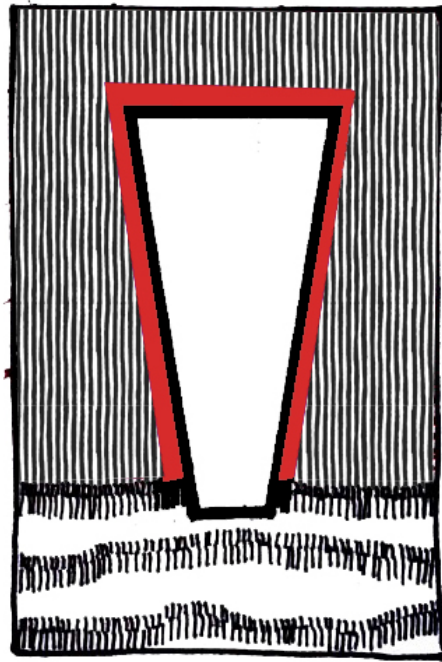
Everyone agreed that while the broad aim would be to engage in all the above points to take this dialogue forward and transform it into actionable agendas, it would be a good idea to start with the low-hanging fruits. Some actions that can be taken up at the earliest include:

- Document successful stories and build a compendium of best practices vis-à-vis feminist or gender-inclusive initiatives in the country. This would call for all participating organisations, collectives and practitioners to contribute by sharing their successful stories.
- Create an online working platform for networking, knowledge sharing, and to develop an online documentation platform.

Photo Gallery







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