

## INTRODUCTION

Civilisations leaves immortal imprints of their existence along the course of history, Art, language and architectures remains as the echoes of the past. It is an expression of human civilization, its strengths as a society and their technological progress in a particular era.

Architecture is the juncture where the marvels of humanity pertaining to form and function collides. The history of human kind and justifies the social, functional and technical aspects of the residences and the residents both. The evolution of the architecture has reflected the evolution of humanity.

The classical architecture of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC predominant in the ancient Greece and Rome, for example the Parthenon of Athena. Graceful French Gothic Architecture of 1100 AD-1450 AD, Neo-classical and colonial architecture of 1750 AD-1920 AD, Modern 1917-1960s and the Brutalism in the Soviet Union. Each style is a reflection of the societies it was built by and built for. It can be regarded as an epiphenomenon of society, dependent on socio-economic and political and cultural processes for its various transformations. Architecture represents the society that produces it and reconfirms its hegemony. Architecture reflects the economic, social and political status. The difference in styles of the architecture within a society is a determinant of the social hierarchy and the composition of a civilisation.

The stark differences between the architecture for the Clergy and Noble estates in the pre-renaissance Europe is a good example. The Gothic, Baroque and Romanesque style of architecture were massive, graceful, exaggerated, and no less than a marvel and pinnacle of human artistry. Marked by high vaulted ceilings, huge stained-glass windows, use of wood and stones, arches, domes, colourful interiors and the larger-than-life silhouettes are a sight to witness. Such exaggerated, bold ornamentation made the architecture exclusive. The exclusivity is a reflection of the disproportionality of the social structure. On the other hand, the bourgeois dwellings of the same era were humble. Today urban spaces are filled with abysmal concrete slabs that are mere rudimentary shelters rather than 'architecture', aimed at meeting the aspirations of the low-income segment of the population, serving only the function without any elevated form or design.



East Courtyard, Monster Building, Hong Kong

# HOSTILE ARCHITECTURE

Enshrined in the Agenda 2030 is the principle that cities and human settlements should be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

World population has reached a remarkably high number of 8.1 billion as in expected to grow even more. According to the World Bank Data, almost 56% of the world's population that is about 4.4 billion inhabitants, live in the urban settlements and the percentage is expected to go up to 68% by 2050.

The massive influx of population from the rural to urban settings in pursuance of better economic opportunities is a common phenomenon of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

This internal migration creates another problem where the major cities and metropolises are past their bearing threshold and thus the distressed slum areas have become a reality of the almost all the major urban settings.

The last time a global survey was attempted by the UN in 2005, an estimated 100 million people were homeless worldwide. Almost 1.6 billion lacked adequate housing (Habitat, 2015)

In 2021, the WORLD Economic Forum reported that 150 million people were homeless worldwide. It is a great challenge to record a statistically correct tally of 'Homelessness' and it is assumed that the number is far greater than the actual recorded numbers.

Nevertheless, 1 or 150 million, the question of inclusivity remains prevalent. Although there is no universally agreed markers or benchmarks for social exclusion, it can all be pinpointed to a basic 'lack of participation', be it social, economic, political, cultural or the question of inhabitancy and residence in a settlement.

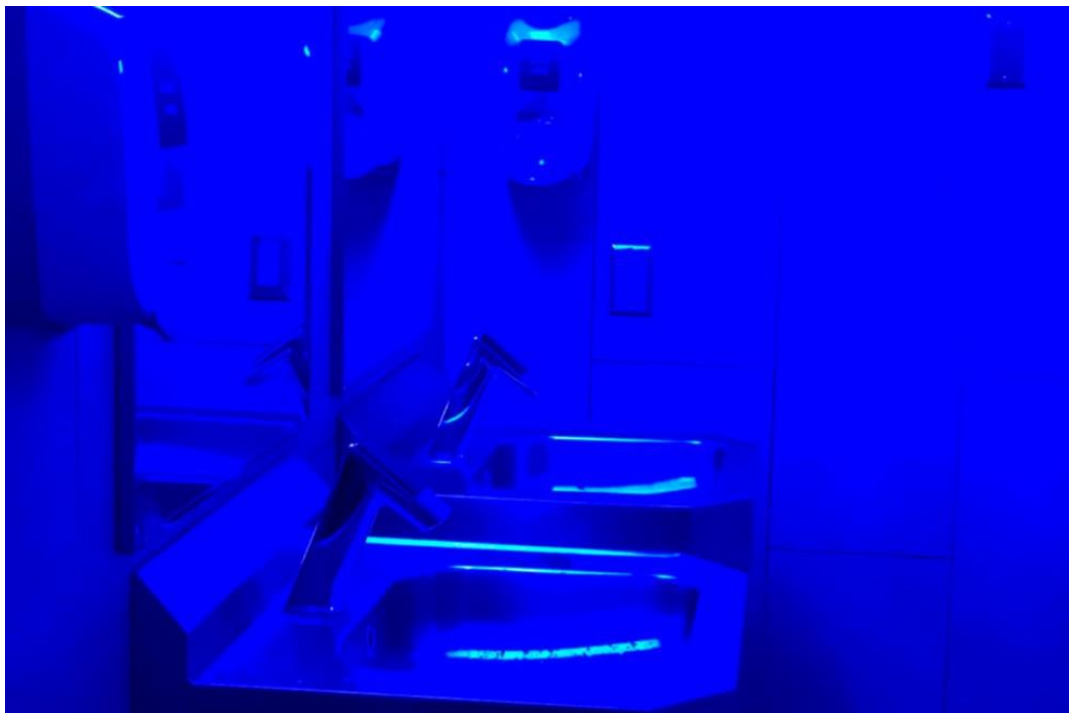
Hostile architecture is a medium through which social exclusion manifests itself in the public and common areas of the human settlements, by limiting the access for a particular group of population. In the urban centres of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, major parts of the cities are zones of consumerism, which means that the space is already constricted, this leaves the vulnerable mass of migrated population of lower strata pushed into congested ghettos and slums and the lowest of the low are the homeless, who are basically living on the streets, sidewalks, parks, parking lots, railway and subway stations and under the bridges. Crude engineering designs and planning the urban landscape in a defensive, exclusive or hostile manner, which essentially performs the function of keeping the homeless away, is nothing short of a discriminatory and exploitative practice.

Let's understand it with the example of a quintessential metropolitan, the poster boy of all urban cities- The Big Apple- New York. The beating heart of the most developed society of 21<sup>st</sup> century- the USA. With a population of 19.45 million, the New York State is the fourth most populous US state and has a population of more than 8.3 million people, who are homeless. That is nearly one in every 83 New Yorkers. More than 4000 people are living unsheltered in the subways, on the streets and parks.



Leaning bars in Bay Ridge station, New York

Although these bars were installed to “conserve space”, they prove to be challenging for the elderly, disabled and ill. Also, they are aimed at deterring the homeless, stopping them from sleeping inside the station.



Blue-lit public washrooms in British Columbia, Canada

To deter intravenous drug use, public washrooms have installed blue lights, which obscure superficial veins. However, it is noticed that the drug users still try to inject themselves, thereby increasing the risks of infection and soft tissue damage. The blue light also serves another function and keeps the homeless persons away, who try to spend the nights in there.



Under-road spikes, Guangzhou, China

Spanning nearly 200 square metres beneath the Huangshi highway, these concrete spikes prevent homeless people from using the bridge as shelter



Sectioned benches in England

These sectioned benches are installed in order to stop homeless people from sleeping on them.



Another crude example of Hostile architecture.



Obstructed spaces in France.

Metal spikes and bars are drilled into the ground to stop the homeless population from using it.

## Conclusion

Today the streets are armed with spikes and unusable benches and other discreet measures. They deter homeless persons, skateboarding teenagers and political activists gathering in a public space. These elements of hostile architecture are specifically designed to curtail the “undesirable” use. Not only the practice is discriminatory and promote social exclusion, it practically contradicts the main tenets of “public space” (i.e. accessibility, freedom of usage and inclusivity). The hostile design creates a separation that is not just physical but is reflected in the stark contrasts of the social design.