

REIMAGINING PUBLIC TOILETS

- Priyanka Santosh and Manika Garg





PRIYANKA SANTOSH

Hello! I'm Priyanka! I'm a highly motivated individual and a competitive learner. Through these many years, architecture has kept fascinating me and has also been teaching me a way of life. I'm a graduate of the School of Planning and Architecture Bhopal which happened to be the second-ranking institute in India to pursue Architecture while I enrolled (equivalent to an IIT - Indian Institute of Technology). I have completed my 6 months internship under Sir Sanjay Mohe at Mindspace who is one of Bangalore's and India's renowned Architects. And during my internship, I was working on the project IIM - Indian Institute of Management Bangalore which is a top premiere Management Institute under the Government of India and was first designed by the then Pritzker Laurette B.V. Doshi.



MANIKA GARG

Hi, my name is Manika, and I am a fresh graduate in architecture. I always had a particular affinity for arts, logical and sequential thinking and so in my pursuit of creative endeavors six years back I had chosen to pursue architecture at School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal, INDIA. Since then, I have been constantly exploring new methods of creatively solving a question in hand. I not only learnt how to design buildings but also how they affect our surroundings. I like designing people's centric structures that have a holistic approach. I like staying connected to earth and so whenever I get some time away from my daily routine, I do gardening and sometimes pottery.

Reimagining Public Toilets: Alleviating Unconscious Gender Biases Existing in Public Toilet Designs

Authors: Manika Garg and Priyanka Santosh

ABSTRACT

A journal from Sage Pub stated how "More Indians have mobile phones than toilets" made sensational headlines in 2010. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was launched in 2014 to address this issue. Under the campaign a few 'Third Gender Toilets' were built. Although a laudable move, it pleads the question, why opt isolating exclusivity and not progressive inclusivity? Various surveyors including CNN have studied transgender–non binary groups and have reported a high degree of harassment ranging from 25.9% to 53% in public lavatories. When a user group is forced to 'hold it' they are throwing themselves at potentially serious health hazards. These problems include gender minorities but are not limited to the disabled, the blind, pregnant women or even the elderly and toddlers.

Our purpose was to aid in making washrooms inclusive and safe for all. Architecture is a social art, a change in it would resonate in society. To aid this change we began studying such pre-existing structures. Further, we got in touch with the involved user groups to understand their perspective and conducted surveys.

These studies helped us apprehend how often exclusive choices were made than inclusive. By critically analyzing both user group and design, we concluded that a few design guides would work better than a standardized model. Like, understanding the unique demographic needs of a place. Also, to include and not speculate the neglected user group views while making the design decisions. Lastly, we'd suggest designing based on functionality like urinals or water closets rather than groups like men or women.

KEYWORDS: *Gender Minorities, Inclusivity, Exclusivity, Health and Sanitation, Public toilets, Universal Design, Social Architecture*

INTRODUCTION

A toilet is one of the most private spaces and so it becomes difficult for many to use it in public. Public toilet usage in India is a habitual action rather than a conscious choice with the men and women directly heading to their allocated spaces. While this is simple for the binary group, what about the gender minorities like the Trans gender. Do they head where they identify with, or where society thinks they must? Choosing one's identity could call for uninvited scorns, stares, taunts and threats of harassment. And finding a unisex toilet or a "gender-neutral" is rarely a possibility.

The Supreme Court of India in 2014 accorded "third gender" status to transgender people and a right to individual's to determine the gender they identify with. The judgment included a directive for transgender individuals to be provided with separate toilets in public places including hospitals.

This judgment is far from being widely implemented even almost a decade later. However, subsequently, the 'Third Gender Toilet' was built in 2017 in Mangalwara, Bhopal. Situated in proximity to the Eunuch's community, it is only India's second of such kind out of the three. While this move is laudable for the acceptance of a neglected user group, it still doesn't demonstrate inclusivity. Moreover, it reflects the lack of understanding that society inherits by calling the rest of the genders under the umbrella of 'Third Gender'.

The current segregation of washrooms doesn't do justice to everyone. Inclusivity in the washrooms isn't only a cavernous concern for gender but also various age groups and degrees of physical abilities. Although tiny, these spaces reflect the psychology of our society.

Proper thought while designing a toilet or even merely the presence of a third toilet usually allotted for the disabled addresses not only disabled and trans folks but also parents who might need to take their small opposite gender children to the bathroom, and for older people who may need to be assisted by someone who happens to be of the opposite gender.

Hence, we'd like to raise the question of why not have a design that serves the local community in toto?

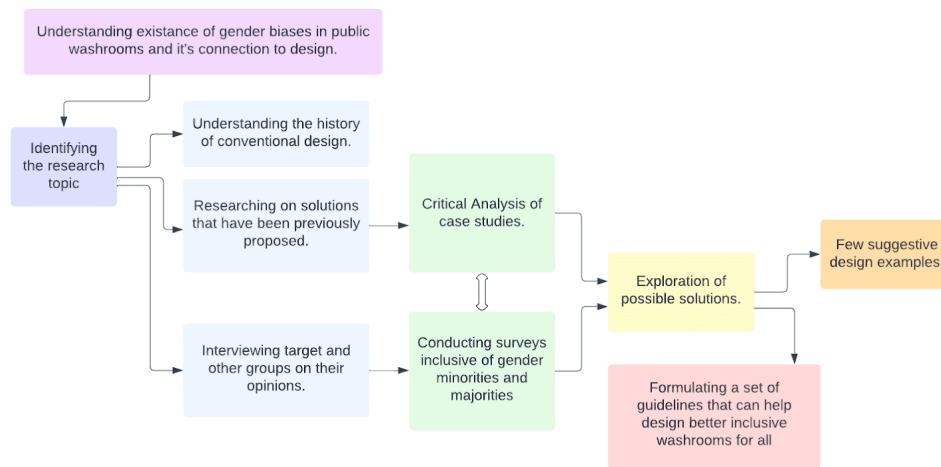
GENDER RELATED ISSUES WITH PUBLIC TOILET

- a. Dysphoria is a cut off between how they are perceived socially or the gender they identify with and their body. For instance a trans woman may feel dysphoria if she is referred to as 'he'. Having to make consequential choices while accessing basic sanitation facilities can be debilitating and can add severely to the dysphoria. Studies have also linked a drop in suicide rates of transgender people with access to facilities that match their identities.**
- b. Another issue that commonly surfaces while discussing this issue is of women not feeling safe in gender neutral toilets due to presence of 'men'. In this context, it is when trans women are referred to as men which is derogatory. Trans women are women and they have the right to access women's toilets just as much as any cis woman would have. And the converse is true for transmen.**
- c. When a person from the gender minority uses a washroom to which they are not perceived as conforming to, socially, by the people present there, harassment has been a common occurrence. For example if a trans woman was to use a women's washroom she could possibly face humiliation while if she were to access the mens washroom she could possibly face**

abuse. These cases could get more complicated with the group of people who haven't come out yet.

- d. While having a separate washroom for non-binary or transgender people may help sort a temporary problem, in the long run it creates labels and makes them a target for violence or harassment. And this is especially true in India where social acceptance is still a faraway dream.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



SECONDARY DATA- Chosen Case Studies:

1. Third Gender Toilet, Bhopal

The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was launched, under this campaign, a 'Third Gender Toilet' was built in Mangalwara, Bhopal. Situated in proximity to the Eunuch's community, it is India's second of such kind. This however may cause more 'labeling' or may open a new conversation.



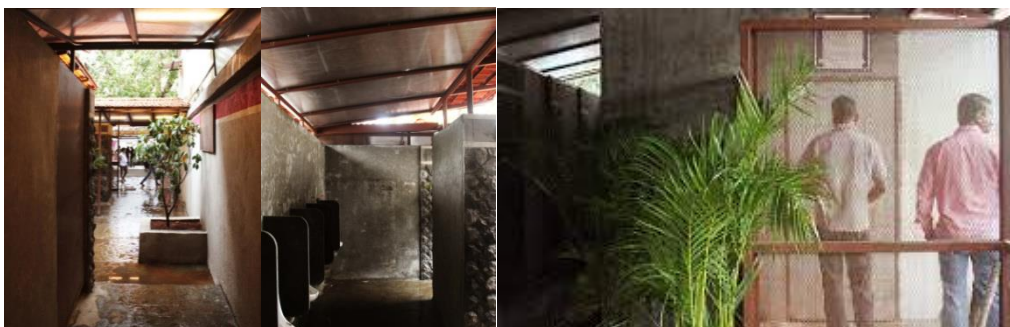
2. Lootel Cafe, Indore

This washroom is an example for places like highways where there's a few people who may want to use it but because harassment is an issue a surveillance point of view is placed adjacent to it, like the café in this case. Here, people can take a shower, use the loo and rest for a while with no labels as to who can use it. The concept behind is 'pay, use and redeem'. Washroom access receipts are dispensed by a machine installed behind the café for INR.10 that could be used to redeem food at the café.



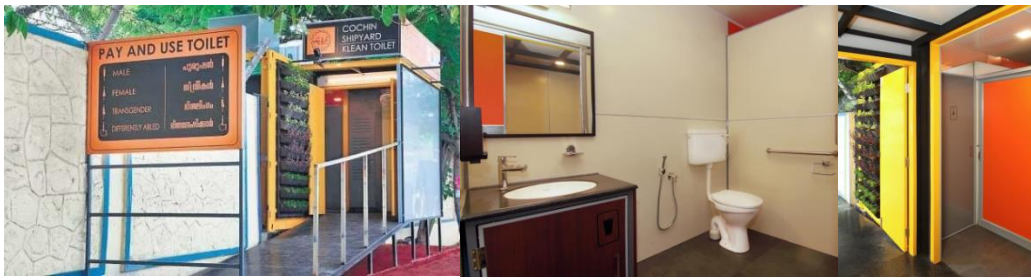
3. Toilet in a courtyard Rohan Chavan, Mumbai

The toilets design has been conceptualized surrounding a courtyard for two good reasons. One is to promote the courtyard as a natural disinfectant since it would bring in a lot of sunlight and help eradicate foul smell. Second is to match up with the floating population during rush hours at the Bandra Station. Nonetheless, the planning of this design is functioning based segregation which may help reduce safety issues.



4. Kochi's first gender-neutral 'container' toilet

Maintained by CREDAI under its 'Clean City Movement' campaign this is a gender-neutral concept, the toilet will be open for all genders. This will probably be the first public toilet for transgenders in Kerala.



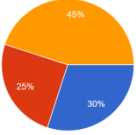
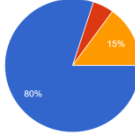
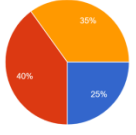
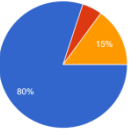
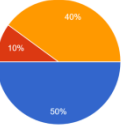
5. Tinted glass toilets by Shigeru Ban, Tokyo

Public toilets have a notorious reputation for being dirty, dark and dangerous. Tokyo recently introduced new washrooms in two public parks that aim to address the concerns. These are colorful, brightly lit and transparent. Through this, those who need to, can check out the safety and cleanliness of the stalls without needing to walk in or touch anything. When a person checks in and locks properly, the stalls' tinted glass toilet would turn opaque and frosted. When the door unlocks, an electric current passes that realigns the crystals in the glass allowing more light to pass through it, thereby creating a transparent effect.



ANALYSIS:

Parameters	Third Gender Toilet' Bhopal	Lootel Cafe, Indore	Toilet in a courtyard RohanChavan, Mumbai	Kochi's first gender-neutral 'container' toilet	Tinted glass toilets by Shigeru Ban, Tokyo
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USABILITY					
Rating on the scale of 10	7.1	8.55	5.5	8.75	7.9

Parameters	Third Gender Toilet' Bhopal	Lootel Cafe, Indore	Toilet in a courtyard RohanChavan, Mumbai	Kochi's first gender-neutral 'container' toilet	Tinted glass toilets by Shigeru Ban, Tokyo
INCLUSIVITY	yes	YES	NO	YES	NO
EXCLUSIVITY	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
DESIGN AND PLANNING	INTROVERT PLANNING	EXTROVERT PLANNING	EXTROVERT PLANNING	INTROVERT PLANNING	EXTROVERT PLANNING
PRIVACY	HIGH	MID	LOW	HIGH	LOW
SUITABLE LOCATION	-	STREETS/HIGHWAYS	SCHOOLS/GYMS/POOLS/WORKPLACES	STREETS / MARKETS	STREETS/MARKETS/GYMS/POOLS

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

While studying the case studies we discovered that every typology has its own benefits and issues. Segregated binary washrooms don't provide for third gender/ non-binary people. Separate toilets for non-binary people leaves them vulnerable to violence. Having a single washroom for all would make women feel unsafe because they'd

have to share it with men. While having a cubicle large enough to accommodate both a WC and a urinal may be acutely expensive.

PRIMARY DATA- EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW:

"I think Gender Neutral washrooms are enough, because there are so many gender identities and it should be for all of them, in India it will be very difficult to just create transgender washrooms where we don't even have enough gender neutral washrooms. I as transwoman feel comfortable in gender neutral washroom"

"Once I was going to the men's washroom and one person got to know that I'm a girl. He asked me in a very weird way...do you have a penis?? Or should I give you mine!!it was so terrible..so traumatizing!! I just left from there "

"Woman mentioned me as 'chakka' with another woman in the toilet when I was inside the toilet. This happened in a hotel owned toilet. Location is in the middle of Mangalore and Bangalore. Time : 2:30."

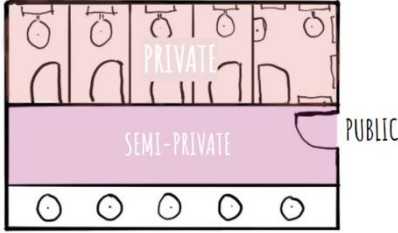
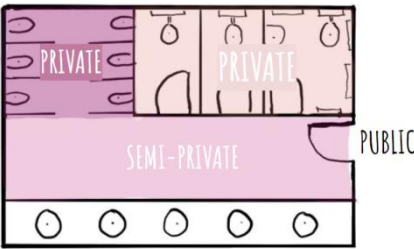
"I'm a transman, I've done all the surgeries! But not the bottom. I couldn't stand and pee, I was traveling from Bareilly to Delhi. The bus driver stopped the bus where male washroom didn't have a close column/ western seat! And I face this problem many times."

"Even if there is a separate restroom for other genders even then it might difficult to use it due to the society as some community peoples are still not yet came out hence we need a equal rest room without anyone's knowledge the we are community this is for some people who are not been out for society."

"There is shortage of gender neutral washrooms. In my company gender neutral washroom is shared with disabled people. On a bright side its there but they just put all gender label on a disabled person washroom. To show that they are inclusive."

**When asked on the third gender toilets in Mangalwara, we heard:
"This looks decent but I feel this create a attraction for audience and**

makes it uncomfortable to use , as unnecessary judgemental looks or opinions can raise.”

GENDER	TYPICAL WASHROOM LAYOUTS	ISSUES
FEMALE		<p>When a person walks into that door and enters the semi-private space, they are judged by physical aspects like appearance and voice and are morally policed by the surrounding crowd if they are deemed fit to access the toilet. A woman would not conform fully she would be at threat of humiliation or harassment.</p>
MALE		<p>Again, when a person walks into that door and enters the semi-private space, they are assessed if they are fit for access. Not to mention that this becomes even more problematic in the area allotted for urinals due to the absolute lack of privacy. It also usually lacks dustbins which makes it hard for those men/transmen who may be menstruating.</p>

GUIDELINES FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE DESIGN:

These guidelines are suggestive of what could help create better washrooms. These are however not one size fits all scenario, so each case type must be uniquely handled, while the quest for a perfect solution may continue.

1. The design of a washroom is subject to factors like its footfall, the location, its geography, and the demography of the user

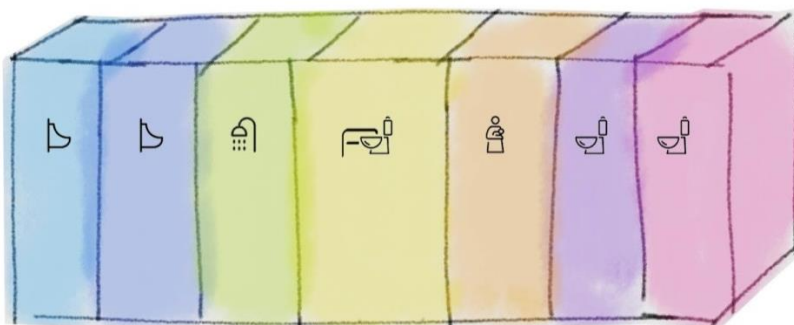
group. It is important to consider all of these factors before executing the design. For instance, a washroom design for a school with heavy footfall would vary largely from a design for a highway stop with sparse footfall.

- 2. Inclusivity is a mindset that must be attuned to while designing. It is important to remember that people come in all forms and everyone is equally deserving of basic dignity. Hence it is important to keep in mind to design for more than just simply men or women.**
- 3. Often, in an attempt to provide an easy temporary solution, a 'third label' is created, which does not help in the longer run. And makes it an easy target for harboring violence and harassment.**
- 4. Depending on location and footfall the architect/designer can choose between Introvert planning or Extrovert planning. Introverted Planning would have more privacy if compared to extroverted planning. In places with higher footfall more privacy is desirable so it's advised to go with introverted planning. However, in places with controlled footfall or the places that are located in isolated regions, needs less privacy so it's better to have an extroverted toilet layout.**
- 5. Privacy is a critical element and issue to be tackled. Everyone must be entitled to privacy yet feel safe in semi-private spaces. These spaces are usually the point of harassment, these spaces can either be eliminated or worked around with clever manners to reassure safety.**
- 6. A surveillance point adjacent to the washroom helps create a sense of security and provides for reaching out to someone if things were to go down south. Especially in locations such as highways.**
- 7. If it is affordable, including both a WC and a urinal in the same cubicle aids inclusivity.**

8. **When space and affordability is a tight constraint, the least that could be done is to include a gender-neutral disability-friendly toilet if segregation is a must. This not only reduces the harassment chances for non-binary people using this facility, but also has the benefit of creating a public space that's more accessible for people with disabilities. This space can also double up where people could breastfeed their infants, in cases where it would not be viable to provide a parted nursing room.**
9. **Again, when either affordability or space is a concern, or the footfall sparse then a single space with urinals, water closets and handrails would serve best for all the people involved without discrimination and was also found to be a very welcome model during the survey.**
10. **It's important to place a dustbin for disposal of sanitary waste in the men's washroom. There are some trans men who menstruate, and would require this facility.**
11. **Most importantly, it is important to take inputs from the local crowd for whom it's being designed and any non-binary or trans people who could provide suggestions on how to improve the washroom layout. It may happen that not all suggestions are feasible but having an open mind and working around them is key.**

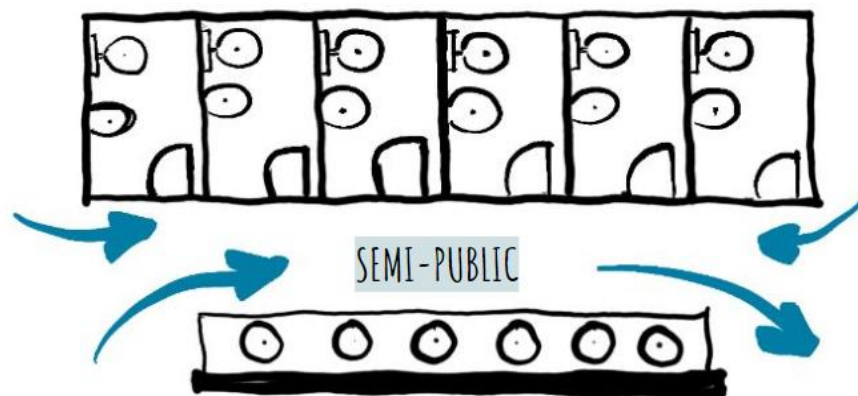
SUGGESTIVE DESIGNS:

1. Inclusive design idea type A:



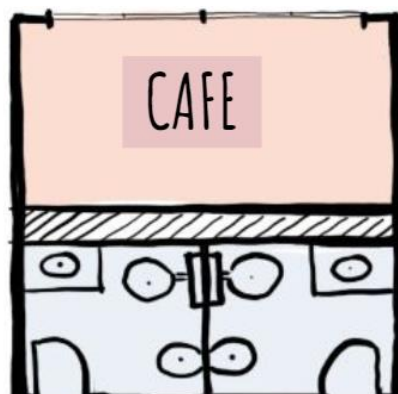
Deriving from Shigeru Ban's design, this format can be adopted in public places that expect a considerable amount of footfall. Multiple single stalls with elimination of semi-private spaces. However, rather than segregation based on gender or disability, it is separated by function and fixtures. And also, the design need not necessarily be translucent as during the survey we encountered a higher preference of privacy.

2. Inclusive design idea type B:



In this layout all toilet stalls are identical as each one of them have a water closet and a urinal. Here the semi private space has been made a semi public so that all genders can use it together. This kind of layout can be used majorly in workspaces, universities, pools and gyms.

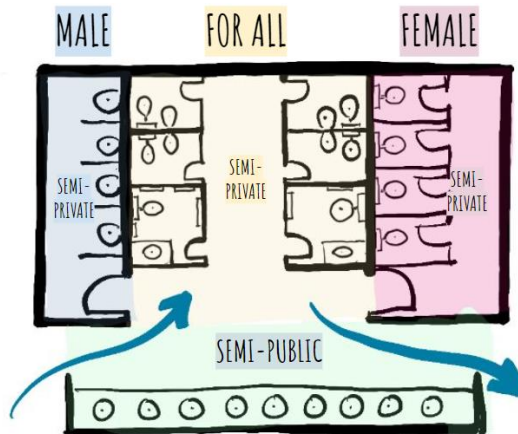
3. Inclusive design idea type C:



This layout will work best in isolated/less populated locations such as Highways, bus stands, etc. Having a small cafe right next to toilets

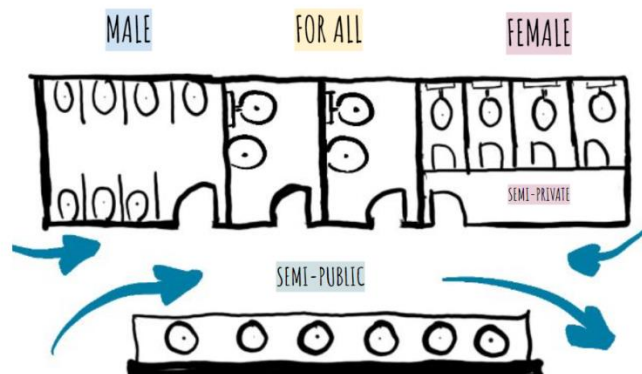
can make the user feel safe. Each stall is made gender neutral with a wash basin attached so that there is no need for a common semi private space.

4. Inclusive design idea type D:



This layout will work best in places that experience a high footfall such as malls, shopping complexes, markets, etc. Here the conventional male and female toilets are connected to each other through a neutral zone in the center. This neutral zone consists of toilets that can be used by any gender/age/disability group. This neutral zone has direct connectivity to the common hand wash area which is made semi-public as it is open from two sides. In this design the privacy that male and female gender groups required has been kept intact by providing an introverted planning. On the other hand the neutral zone has an extrovert planning so as to avoid any harassment situations.

5. Inclusive design idea type E:



This layout will work best in places that experience a large but controlled population such as workspaces, hotels, etc. Here the conventional male and female toilets are connected to each other through a free standing neutral toilet stalls at center. These stalls at the center can be used by any gender/age/disability group. This neutral zone has direct connectivity to the common hand wash area which is made semi-public as it is open from two sides.

CONCLUSION:

Having a public toilet design that satisfies all genders, age, disability group poses multiple challenges. These challenges vary due different site specifications, user group and many other regional factors. It's important for the designer to have a deep understanding of the site and location. Before designing it is always advisable to interview the user group and take their views on gender neutral toilets. Every toilet can be made inclusive with few design strategies. Remember that inclusivity shouldn't lead to exclusivity.

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ANNEXURE I

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE DATA COLLECTION:

General questions

1. **Name**

2. **Please choose your gender identity :**

Male | Female | Transman | Transwoman | Transgender | Intersex | Nonbinary | Others

3. **Your sexual orientation :**

Heterosexual (Straight) | Lesbian | Gay | Bisexual | Others

4. **Do you identify with any of the following user groups? :**

Physically with disabilities | Senior citizen | Pregnant women | I do not

5. **How often do you use public toilet facilities? :**

Every time | Sometimes | Rarely | Never

6. **Are there any concerns that you face while visiting a public toilet facility? :**

Yes | No | Maybe

7. **If yes, what are the concerns that you face while visiting a public toilet facility? :**

Security | Gender Labels | Sanitation | Inappropriate design | Discomfort in usage | No concerns | Others

8. **Have you ever been harassed while visiting a public toilet facility? :**

Yes | No | Maybe

9. **If yes, can you please share some information about your experience and time and location.**

10. **Have you seen/heard about Transgender Toilets? :**

Yes | No

11. **What are your thoughts on transgender toilets? :**

Excellent | Good | Fair | Bad | No opinion (Unaware)

12. **If bad, then why? :**

Needs Improvement | It is creating more labels and not helping | It is needless | Others

13. **What are your thoughts on gender neutral toilets? :**

Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor | No opinion (Unaware)

14. **At which place have you felt most vulnerable while using a washroom? :**

Streets/Roads Highways | Markets/Plaza | Malls/Indoor Complexes | Gym/Pool | Restaurant/Club/Bars | Movie Theaters | Workplaces

15. **Any suggestions you would like to give us for Public toilet designs?**

Questions related to rating each case study

16. **Please rate this washroom on a scale of 1-10.**

17. **If you were presented with a choice to use this washroom, would you? : Yes | No | Maybe**

18. **Any suggestions or opinions?**

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