SOLITUDE SEEKING SPACES: NEED OF THE HOUR

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Abstract: This research paper is an act to study spaces which has a strong conviction for solitude and its benefits. It is a journey to understand people and their relation with space and contentment they seek which recharges them and makes them happy. The problem lies with the current urban scenario where a group of people and their needs are neglected regarding spaces. This group is forced to accept a certain type of spaces and therefore this group was studied in detail on literature level as well as on local level. The literature study was done in the background of psychology, philosophy, and architecture. To verify the literature study, counselors, psychologists, and architects were consulted on the local level and with their guidance, a survey was carried out to deeply understand the intricacies of the problem. Results were analyzed and this led to an understanding of the relevance of solitude in one's life and how to apply it. With similar results at literature and local level, few design strategies were suggested.

Keywords: Architecture, Balancing Spaces, Quiet Spaces, Solitary Spaces, Solitude-Seeking Spaces.

Introduction: During the industrial revolution, urban areas came into existence. Hence, the focal point was created in big cities, they attracted population due to better living standards (health, education, amenities, and jobs) which resulted in flooding of people in urban areas resulting in congestion (more people per square foot of area). Today a large group of people is working in huge offices and industries and the evolution of that is commendable. We are collaborating more than ever; globalization and internet have made working in collaboration so much possible that one could have ever imagined and is considered positive for everyone. Marketing strategies have worked wonders to promote the group working style and open office plans which is adapted more frequently today. We, as a society, adhere more to work or be the part of a group/corporate culture and it is the dominant perception which affects everything connected to it and architecture is one of that. With this dominance in our schools, workplaces, etc., it is arduous to find solitude diligently in an Indian city. Concrete jungle, congestion, and demand for more to be accommodated in less punches architects to serve the demand. Now, there is a loophole in this system which does not cater to one particular need which is the primary aspect of living for humans i.e. creation. Creation is the primary wheel of evolution; to create we need solitude because solitude can be a catalyst for innovation [1]. But, when we reside in such an environment where you are constantly exposed to auditory and visual stimulation which hums in the background and make us less productive and vulnerable. Susan Cain has rightly said in her book that for a few people, solitude is the air they breathe and it is impossible for them to work in the highly stimulating environment. It is important to consider these people because it is an ethical and humane responsibility of us to strike the correct balance.

To search this balance, the literature study was done based on psychology and philosophy (of life and architecture both). Literature study suggested introverts seek more solitude and majority of these tend to be highly sensitive. Cain also said that if introverts are not provided with less stimulating (auditory and visual) environment, they get prone to many disorders. And with the extrovert dominant society, needs of introverts are hardly heard. This study was further directed towards local contextual level to understand whether literature study was relevant or not. Locally counselors and psychologists were consulted to understand the current scenario and their guidance about conducting surveys and interviews eliminated chances of assumptions. The target audience was pragmatically youths because they are 50% of country's population and are in the journey to find themselves and build their careers where they face a backlash and lack of awareness even amongst themselves and don't know about their

own needs and it affects their life indirectly. Surveys were conducted in 4 institutes comprising youths varying from the age group of 16 to 24. A randomly selected sample size of 26 students (13 males and 13 females) from each institute appeared for Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) test and based on tests introverts were identified and interviews were conducted with them. Post that, based on common inputs, strategies were generated which can be applied to most of the designs and should be scalable and flexible. Though introverts become a focus of study in this research, the goal has been to strike a balance and not create a biased perception.

Literature Study: Susan Cain in her book *Quiet* has done detailed research and analysis on the current scenario of the dominant culture of extroverts. She wrote introverts are differently social and with many unaware acts, society deems them to be guilty of not following a code of conduct to be an extrovert. Introverts are considered women in a man's world and their trait is rated as second class. Since the trait is something given to us and is metaphysical, this act of repelling should not happen. The author emphasized many times in her book about the importance of solitude and why introverts seek more solitude than extroverts and use it as their strength. She actively promoted co-existence of both is important and everyone should present themselves under the right light, for someone it may be a lamplit desk and for someone a huge stage. Since 30% to 40% of the population is introverted and considering India's population of 1.2 billion people and out of that 50 % youth (target audience) contribute to being 1.1 billion people. Now if we consider 35% are introverts on an average then it is 780 million people and it is not a small number of people.
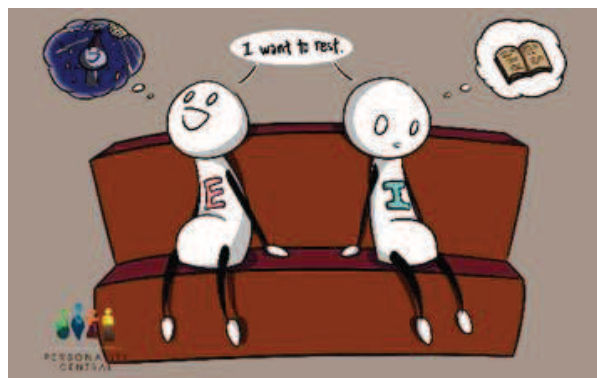

Figure 1: Introverts and Extroverts are Socially Different
(source: daniasannisa.blogspot.com)

Introverts and extroverts differ in the level of outside stimulation that they need to function well. Both are socially different (refer Fig. 1) and have different priorities. So, because extroverts dominate the world doesn't mean every aspect of life has to be according to what they like. There has to be equal importance and opportunities given to each group.

The novel *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand ends with a stunning speech where the character speaks about the integrity of a man. Indirectly, Rand tells us how creation has been important in our lives with some examples from history. She writes each person is different in his/her own way because they cannot share their spirits with each other [2]. She emphasizes on an individual rather than a group. Similarly, in another book called *Philosophy: Who needs it*; Ayn Rand wrote essays about philosophy adapted by men in their life by conscious and unconscious choices. She guides the reader about what philosophy is and how to find your own philosophy and how it comes down to an irreducible primary. She talks about how the tone of culture has been set by a handful of men and their philosophies and media which affects whole society by a dominant perception of single-sided view [3]. What is right and what is wrong can be objectively identified. Both these books give importance to the liberty of an individual. They suggest it is devilish to force opinions on others for one's own benefits.

In *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor, offers a wide range of fascinating spiritual reflections and exercises developed as the leader struggled to understand him and make sense of the

universe. He has told that no other retreat other than by diving into our own thoughts and reflecting is as relaxing as others and which eventually results in soul nourishment[4]. This clearly directs the importance of solitude in a person's life.

Albert Camus, a contemporary philosopher in *The Rebel* told, "the rebel, on principle, persistently refuses to be humiliated without asking that others should be. He will even accept pain provided that his integrity is respected" [5]. Metaphysical rebellion is the means by which a man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. Also, he told the reasons for rebellion change with time. All these statements give us a clear idea about the importance of an individual.

A publication *The Philosophy Book* by DK holds 2000 years of philosophy in it. Connecting the dots, Jurgen Habermas- German sociologist and philosopher in the tradition of critical theory and pragmatism wrote "Society is dependent upon a criticism of its own traditions" [6] and Thomas Samuel Kuhn rightly states "Normal science does not aim at the novelties of fact or theory" [6]. Both of these directs us about the time of changing traditions. As quoted by Albert Camus, "An artist feels justified when he reduces various forms of bondages weighing upon men. If someone wants leverages from these bondages, he should not be quiet about his opinions and values." Hence introverts should not be quiet about their need and requirement of the less stimulating environment in this context.

Peter Zumthor, a celebrated contemporary Architect writes about nine principles/philosophy about buildings in his book Atmospheres. He says that the first impressions of a building matter and everyone's level of perceiving atmosphere changes according to their emotional sensibility [7]. High emotional sensibility is achieved through spirituality and can say that Zumthor's work itself is spiritual.

It was observed through literature study that design of a space shall give importance to the character of the space and also enhance the quality of a space. Apart from physical and psychological considerations, spiritual dimension shall also be considered. The principles of introverted planning suggest that there should be lack of direct visual relationship between internal spaces and outer urban environment. It also suggests lack of decoration on the outside of the building and regularity in internal volume [8].

Steve Wozniak, founder of Apple quoted, "Most inventors and engineers I've met are like me ... they live in their heads. They're almost like artists. In fact, the very best of them are artists. And artists work best alone... I'm going to give you some advice that might be hard to take. That advice is: Work alone... Not on a committee. Not on a team." Hence to evolve we need to create and creation happens in solitude. Solitude acts as the catalyst for creation. A research paper by Dr. U.K. Kulkarni tells us about increasing creativity through meditation and its benefits [9] and it is imperative meditation requires a solitary space. Hence, we need spaces where one can experience solitude in public and private both. Most important institutions of contemporary life are designed for those who enjoy group projects and high levels of stimulation.

Need arises from the contemporary scenario of evolved humans, we are social animals but we are so diverse and unique in ourselves within this unified category. But our workplaces, schools etc. are designed with a single motif of serving one particular personality, i.e. extroverts as told by Cain. There is an imbalance right now in the type of spaces we craft. A particular type of personality does not feel comfortable in this environment and those are important too, they are differently social. They seek solitude and need less stimulation to give in their best inputs (and everybody wants to give their best and employers want best inputs from their employees to make their company best) but sadly they don't seem to find it. Built and unbuilt environment should provide it and it is an ethical responsibility of us as architects to be aware of needs of end users, especially if they count to be 30 to 40% of the whole. Secondly, we as a society are unaware of it. As a matter of fact, even some extroverts seek solitude and love such an environment. Since it is not possible to give each and everyone their corner it can be incorporated in a public place which is a contrast to the realm of today's public place. It has to be quiet being in a chaos of the city and shall reduce stimulations.

The aim of the research is to identify design parameters/strategies for solitary spaces and objective is to study and analyze the importance of solitude seeking spaces and why they are important in an urban realm.

Research Methodology: The methodology adopted for the research paper starts with the identification of the problem and based on the problem, formulation of a hypothesis is done. In order to perform research on the need and impact of solitude seeking spaces in crowded urban fabric, the three-stage analysis is done. The first stage includes literature study in relevant areas like psychology, philosophy, and architecture. Inferences are drawn from it. The second stage includes meeting counselors and relevant people for further analysis according to the literature study and context of research. Inferences are drawn. The third stage includes conducting tests, surveys, and interviews (including counselors as well as students). This stage further includes the collection of data, making inferences and drawing conclusions. These three stages represent different contexts, first is theoretical whereas the other two are practical. It is devised in this way in order to judge if theory suits the local context or not. Analysis and conclusions from all the three stages are done which completes the detailed analysis of research questions and proves the hypothesis. After this step, the design outline is framed leading to design requirements. The research outcome, as well as the design requirements, forms the base to start the designing process in order to get the final design outcome.

Survey and Data Collection: Considering surveys to be the most important source of information about the current local scenario, it was done with the help of psychologist's and counselors' guidance. Firstly, a set of relevant people were approached and asked about their thought on this topic. They were asked if they deal with introverts in a specific way and if introverts demanded private spaces or not. Do introverts feel any pressure of society or not. Also, what they think about architecture and how it plays a role in providing a comfortable environment.

It was observed that they were very much aware of the needs of the introverted group but agreed upon unawareness in society. Also, they had, on many occasions, observed introverts often seek solitude more and get segregated to recharge themselves. Counselors also agreed upon most of the points quoted in *Quiet* by Susan Cain. They think there should be no biases by nomenclating "spaces for introverts" but spaces for them should be amalgamated well with the environment. Architecture, through planning and designing, plays a very important role in reducing auditory and visual stimulation and hence can improve the quality of life of people.

Based on interviews and discussions with counselors it is found that a sample of at least 30 introverts shall be taken to get appropriate results. Considering the time constraint and sample size, 4 institutes of different academic backgrounds where different age-groups of samples can be found were selected.

In the category of 16-17 age group, The Swaminarayan School, Nagpur was selected and the survey was carried out for 11th standard students including science and commerce both. In the category of 18-19 age group (First-year students), Priyadarshini Institute of Engineering and Technology (PIET), Nagpur was approached for the survey. In the category of 20-21 age group (Third-year students), Priyadarshini College of Engineering (Civil Branch) was approached for the survey. One branch of architecture students of the fifth year under the age group category of 21-23 was taken. Priyadarshini Institute of Architecture and Design Studies was asked for the same

Surveying process encompasses selection of 26 people by asking them to voluntarily stand up, half of the people standing, were asked to sit and half of the people sitting, are asked to stand again, in order to shuffle and get mixed traits of people for sample of the survey because introverts are usually shy and don't stand up voluntarily. 1:1 ratio of males and females were considered. MBTI test [10] was conducted online through a website (www.25quiz.com) and results were recorded. Those who were introverts according to test were interviewed with a set of questions and answers were recorded. Introverts were asked about what spaces they interact regularly and out of those what they like and dislike and why. They were also asked if they like to spend time in isolation and for how long they went into an isolated

zone. They shared what they felt about their isolated time and it's needed. Quite common observations were noted. The most important of all questions was how and where would they spend that time and what activities they would prefer doing at that time.

Analysis: It was found that 27% (refer Fig. 2) of students were introverted in The Swaminarayan School and 19% (refer Fig. 3) were introverted in PIET. In other two institutes PCE and PIADS, 36% (refer Fig. 4) and 50% (refer Fig. 5) were introverted respectively.
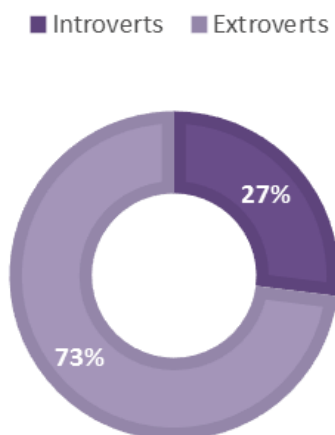
PERSONALITY TYPE

■ Introverts ■ Extroverts

27%

73%

Figure 2: Pie Chart Showing Personality Types in The Swaminarayan School

PERSONALITY TYPE

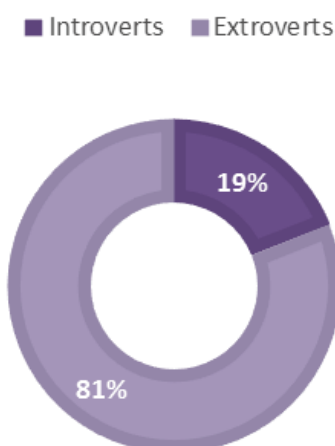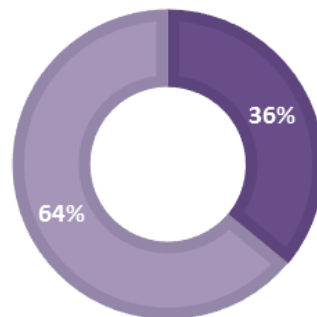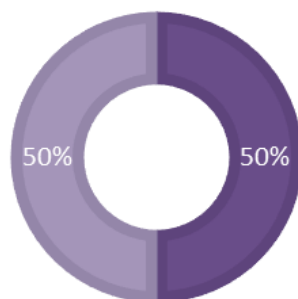■ Introverts ■ Extroverts

19%

81%

Figure 3: Pie Chart Showing Personality Types of PIET

PERSONALITY TYPE

■ Introverts   ■ Extroverts

Figure 4: Pie Chart Showing Personality Types in PCE

PERSONALITY TYPE

■ Introverts   ■ Extroverts   ■   ■

Figure 5: Pie Chart Showing Personality Types in PIADS

It was analyzed that on an average 35% (refer fig. 6) youths were introverted and this assured that the data given in literature study compliments local contextual study.
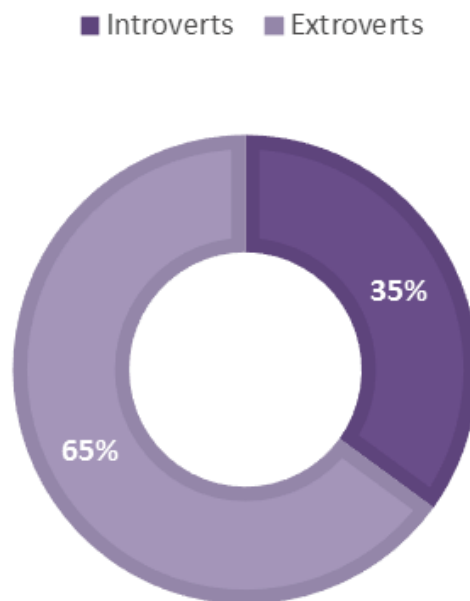
PERSONALITY TYPE

■ Introverts   ■ Extroverts

Figure 6: Pie Chart Showing An Average of Test Conducted

Observations: It was accepted that differentiation on the basis of introversion and extroversion shall not be done as it creates a negative image and impact. Introversion trait varies in a huge spectrum in a lifetime of a person, he maybe introverted half his life and extroverted in the other half. It was noted that spaces should not worsen the introversion trait, so, they should be private within public and individual in the group at the same time. Most introverts like spending time with themselves for 1-2 hours each day.

Table I: Recorded Inputs of Introverts. Source- Author

Sr. no.	Questions	Inferences/outputs in general	Divergent outputs
1	What are the places you interact with regularly.	Classroom, bedroom, playground, tuition	Temple, restaurants, marriage halls/lawns, friend's home, library, churches,
2	What kind of building do you like(visited till date)?	Home, school/college, Historical buildings, temples, museums, Red Fort, Taj Mahal, Golden Temple, Swaminarayan temple, Gardens	CPS-Wardhaman ngr, , old british buildings, forts of Indian kings, burj khalifa, old buildings made of wood, , MLA house-Bhopal, RBI-Nagpur, SFS, St. John, St. Joseph, Golf club, PIADS campus, Deeksha Bhumi, Taj-Mumbai, Jaguar(car) showroom
3	Do you feel need of spending isolated time? If yes, for how much time?	1 to 2 hours regularly.	thrice a week;
4a.	Where would you like to spend your recharging time?	Home alone, sitting under a tree in isolation or small group, empty roads at night with greenery, Library,	Hanging gardens in balcony/terrace, orphanage, old-age home, game studio, swimming on terrace, roller coaster in garden, forest, near sea/waterfall, , a separate room in tution to get away for few minutes, a hidden room where I can teach poor kids, imagining new ideas.
4b.	Define character of space	A small hidden room in house, no people, Surrounded by plants with a small library, less/no disturbance, Gardens and lush green spaces(preferable in morning), terrace,	A cosy room with huge semicircular window(s) and a view of forest, not an apartment, an underground room, a tree house, studio in basement, a sound proof room to play DJ, near water, good air flow, breathable, clean, good light, spacious, less sound, heighted space, cafe with dim lights,
5	How would you spend that time? What activities would you prefer doing?	Drawing sketches, listening mild/loud music, dancing, read, write, doing something creative	Playing guitar, recording my songs, wildlife photography, watch movies, with pets, gym, making car models, deep conversations with dad, watching rain, making craft work, meditate, paint, design apparels, A place where people perform their talents

Some secluded spaces should be created where there is no or very less auditory and visual stimulation and are amalgamated well with the highly stimulating environment without nomenclating them as spaces for introverts. By doing this a perfect balance can be achieved in which most people feel happy and productive.

We hardly see long pathways with trees and benches and scenic views promoting walks in an urban setting in India. Urban parameters and congestion may not allow us to give luxurious space to each individual but certain common public spaces shall be developed which has less stimulation which encourages people to come and spend some private time in a public place doing what they like.

Some spaces may be designed in a way which stimulates the mind with a sense of mild surprise through transition and leads to some individual activity like reading or painting. Spaces for individuals shall be

planned with the utmost sensitivity so that even the view from window or transition contributes to their experience.

Many introverts wrote terrace as their solitary experiential space, it can be concluded they like observing people but don't like being gawked upon. Discussions with one or two people are comfortable. Therefore, some spaces shall be designed with intention of accommodating two to three people. Having some hidden space or underground space is the idea for gaining solitude for quite a few of them. The idea of segregation and being with themselves amuses them. The fun of experiencing the surprising element and moving towards a secluded space gives introverts happiness. They feel relaxed and calm.

The designed space shall be open for all but shall be designed in consideration with the needs of introverts and with the emphasis on seeking solitude. Certainly, good light, ventilation and the breathable environment was mentioned which gives an opinion that they don't get it in day-to-day life since arrangements in today's date are more claustrophobic than ever.

Conclusion: It was concluded from literature and local contextual study that introverts are 30% to 40% of total population. We as a society are unaware about what introverts and traits of introversion are and there is nothing wrong with it since it is a metaphysical aspect. Introverts need at least one to two hours alone (to seek solitude) on daily basis to be healthy not only physically but mentally also. In their solitude-seeking time they majorly preferred pursuing activities which involves them individually, not a group. Spaces should be secluded but should be merged with other spaces in such a way that does not highlights it. It can be concluded that in urban areas, spaces are not designed keeping this group in mind and therefore at least 30% spaces should be planned accordingly to seek solitude. All introverts may not use space at once and it is a matter of fact that even some extroverts would love to use those spaces. It can be concluded that a balance of spaces is need of the hour which is positive in terms everyone.

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