



The Architecture of Segregation

Only two decades ago, Gurgaon was merely a vast tract of fertile, hinterland territory. It is now the 'Millennial City of Gurugram', an identity so formidable, that the land's rich, mythological heft — it is believed that warrior academy run by Guru Dronacharya, the royal preceptor to both the heroes and villains in *Mahabharata*, was situated here — now lies largely ignored. Today's Gurgaon, a giant, self-multiplicating organism, with its plethora of office complexes, apartment towers, golf courses and shopping malls, is the poster child of newly globalized India.

Around the world, mid-20th century urban architecture sought to shape itself around the ideas of inclusion and accommodation. Since land was limited, and reclamation slow, we prepared designs to colonise the sky: vertical cities were declared the future. There is little doubt that high-rises are indeed the only plausible solution to the paucity of land and the pressure exerted by an incoming immigrant population. However, the modular structure and design of the modern high-rise, has also ensured that it has now become a mechanism that perpetuates class division and segregation.

The layout of the private island of a prototypical apartment complex — sovereign, privatised; with the lives of its residents furnished with all the essential details: full-time security, water, back up electricity, parks, gyms, shops — results in the cultivation of a curious contrast between those who are inside, and conversely, those who are outside. High-rise architecture becomes therefore, in a country with a deeply entrenched, feudal past, a physical embodiment of class hierarchies. This architecture of segregation, not unique to modern cities, was prevalent in several oppressively capitalistic societies all the way from feudal Japan, ancient Rome to colonised Africa. The following set of films stands for the enormous role that urban architecture plays in sustaining and then preserving all manners of social and economic segregation.

Films

High Rise (2015) | Ben Wheatley | 119m

Class struggle becomes all too real as a young doctor moves into a modern apartment block in suburban 1975 London. Drugs, drink and debauchery dissolve into murder, mayhem and misogyny in this pseudo-post-apocalyptic breakdown of societal norms.

Metropolis (1927) | Fritz Lang | 193m

In a futuristic city sharply divided between the working class and the city planners, the son of the city's mastermind falls in love with a working class prophet who predicts the coming of a savior to mediate their differences.

Playtime (1967) | Jacques Tati | 124m

Monsieur Hulot has to contact an American official in Paris, but he gets lost in the maze of modern architecture which is filled with the latest technical gadgets. Caught in the tourist invasion, Hulot roams around Paris with a group of American tourists, causing chaos in his usual manner.

Offside (2006) | Jafar Panahi | 93m

Many Iranian girls love soccer as much as their countrymen and sport fans all over the world but, they are prevented by law from attending live soccer matches in their country. Inspired by the day when his own daughter was refused entry to a soccer stadium in Iran, Jafar Panahi's film follows a day in the life of a group of Iranian girls attempting to watch their team's World Cup qualifying match against Bahrain at the stadium in Tehran.

City of Contrasts (1968) | Djibril-Diop Mambety | 22m

A somewhat humorous look at the city of Dakar, its people, architecture, politics, social behavior, even its white French tourists, and especially the influence of France's culture and its contrast with the indigenous culture of Senegal pre-colonization, but still present in Dakar.

High and Low (1963) | Akira Kurosawa | 143m

In this police procedural crime drama, an executive of a shoe company becomes a victim of extortion when his chauffeur's son is kidnapped and held for ransom. Adapting Ed McBain's detective novel *King's Ransom*, Kurosawa moves effortlessly from compelling race-against-time thriller to exacting social commentary, creating a diabolical treatise on contemporary Japanese society.

Snowpiercer (2013) | Bong-Joon ho | 126m

Set in 2031, the entire world is frozen except for those aboard the Snowpiercer. For 17 years, the world's survivors are on a train hurtling around the globe creating their own economy and class system. Led by Curtis, a group of lower-class citizens living in squalor at the back of the train are determined to get to the front of the train and spread the wealth around. Each section of the train holds new surprises for the group who have to battle their way through. A revolution is underway.

The Second Mother (2015) | Anna Muylaert | 114m

Val, a hard-working live-in housekeeper in modern day Sao Paulo, is perfectly content to take care of every one of her wealthy employers' needs, from cooking and cleaning to being a surrogate mother to their teenage son, whom she has raised since he was a toddler. But when Val's estranged daughter Jessica suddenly shows up the unspoken but intrinsic class barriers that exist within the home are thrown into disarray. Jessica is smart, confident, and ambitious, and refuses to accept the upstairs/downstairs dynamic, testing relationships and loyalties and forcing everyone to reconsider what family really means.