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The Changing Urban and Education in Delhi

Privilege and Exclusion in a Megacity*

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In the era of neoliberal globalisation, education is seen as shaped by the changing city and also implicated in it. Studies from the West have pointed to the complicity of education reforms in urban restructuring, including gentrification and disinvestment in poor neighbourhoods. Closures and rebranding of schools and the privatisation and commercialisation of education have been shown to be integral to making the city conducive to global capital and elite lifestyles (Lipman 2011; Cucchiara 2008; Aggarwal and Mayorga 2016). It is therefore surprising that children and their education are rarely referred to in urban studies scholarship in India, and research on schooling has not been contextualised within the changing city landscapes, with a few exceptions (see, for instance, the India section in Pink and Noblit 2017: 299–467; Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008). In this chapter, I attempt to understand how education is implicated in the changing urban.[1] I focus on Delhi,[2] India's national capital and one of its 'megacities'.[3]

In the first decade of this century, Delhi geared itself up to become 'world-class', driven by imaginaries of cities such as London, Paris and New York. The making of Delhi into a world-class city has been flagged by scholars as having led to increasing spatial polarisation and the sharpening of social inequalities.[4] In this chapter, I examine the implications of Delhi's changing urban trajectory

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for the education of the city's children. I draw mainly on urban and educational scholarship in Delhi, as well as on relevant policy documents. I also briefly discuss the findings of an exploratory study carried out in late 2019 in the Bawana JJ colony, one of Delhi's new resettlement sites.[5] The objective of my study was to explore how the transformation of city spaces affects the lives of the poor and their children's education.

I draw on Edward Soja's 'critical spatial perspective', which focuses attention on 'spatial' or geographical aspects of '(in)justice' and emphasises that 'the spatiality of (in)justice … affects society and social life just as much as social processes shape the spatiality or specific geography of (in)justice' (Soja 2010: 4). According to him, spatial justice 'involves the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them' (Soja 2009: 2). I see the spatial question as crucial in the struggle for the 'right to the city' and its resources, including education, in which the role of the state and contestations by diverse social groups are important (Harvey 2008). I keep in mind that cultural meanings around notions of 'stigma' and 'distinction' are also constitutive of unequal geographies and identities of the people who inhabit them (Wacquant 2016; Goffman 1964). I argue that socio-spatial polarisations that marked the city of Delhi after independence (1947) set in place educational fault lines well before the late 1990s – an era associated with the neoliberal turn in India. Further, the urban restructuring that took place during the subsequent process of world-class city-making compounded spatial and educational inequalities.

The discussion that follows first maps the changing urban landscape in Delhi's journey to megacity status, highlighting spatial inequalities that were shaped by the state's classificatory regime of settlements (planned or unplanned). I then go on to the making of the world-class city, drawing attention to policy shifts, emerging discourses and the increasingly segregated urban. After that, I discuss the interface between changing urban spaces in the city and education through the lens of privilege and exclusion, before finally engaging with the findings of the Bawana resettlement study to provide a glimpse of how the poor on the urban margins negotiate schooling for their children.

Becoming 'Mega': Mapping the Changing Urban in Delhi

Until the late 1960s, the policies of the post-independence Indian state were framed by a vision of socialist development that foregrounded the welfare of the poor and historically disadvantaged groups. The first Delhi Master Plan (Delhi

Development Authority [DDA] 1962) was informed by the intention to build an 'egalitarian and integrated' society. It stated that '[i]t is of the utmost importance that physical plans should avoid stratification on income or occupational basis' and that '[t]he squatters in *basti*s [squatter settlements] are to be relocated in various parts of the urban area so that they are integrated into the neighbourhood community' (DDA 1962: ii). Schools were envisioned spatially in relation to local 'housing clusters', referring to the neighbourhood community.

In reality, the planning process was restricted to a relatively small area and covered only a fraction of Delhi's residents. Thus, by 2000, when Delhi's population reached around 14 million (a sign of its megacity status), only 23.7 per cent of the population lived in areas that were earmarked for residential use under the plan (see Table 4.1). Only these areas were considered 'planned', and colonies within them were 'authorised' or legal. The rest of the population resided mainly in settlements that were in unplanned areas and hence deemed 'unauthorised' by the state.[6] Table 4.1 presents the eight different types of settlements in Delhi according to the state classificatory schema. It also indicates legal status and the rights of citizens to state-provided services in each category of settlement by the early 2000s.

Table 4.1 Type of settlement, population and legal status: Delhi

Type of settlement	Estimated population in 2000 ('000s)	Percentage of total population of city	Legality	Citizenship rights (individual water supply)
Jhuggi-jhompri clusters	20.72	14.8	Illegal and unplanned	No right
Slum-designated areas	26.64	19.1	Legal but unplanned	Right, but restricted for technical reasons
Unauthorised colonies	7.40	5.3	Illegal and unplanned but secure	No right
JJ resettlement colonies	17.76	12.7	Legal, planned and informalised	Right not delivered
Rural villages	7.40	5.3	Zone of exception†	Exempt
Regularised colonies*	17.76	12.7	Legal but unplanned	Good
Urban villages	8.88	6.4	Zone of exception†	Good

(*Contd*)

Table 4.1 (*Contd*)

Type of settlement	Estimated population in 2000 ('000s)	Percentage of total population of city	Legality	Citizenship rights (individual water supply)
Planned colonies	33.08	23.7	Legal and planned	Good
Total	139.64	100		

Source: Columns 1–3 are reproduced from table 1.1 in Bhan (2016: 19); it is based on data from statement 14.4 of the Government of Delhi (2009) and 'its data dates back to 2000 …' (Bhan 2016: 18). Columns 3–4 are from Heller (2015: 37).
Note: (*a*) *These are unauthorised colonies that have been regularised. (*b*) †These settlements are 'exempt from planning requirements' (Heller 2015: 13).

Only planned settlements were 'authorised' and officially entitled to adequate infrastructure and a range of basic services provided by the state. Unplanned, unauthorised areas that included '*jhuggi-jhompri* clusters' (slums) and 'unauthorised colonies' (UCs) were considered illegal and did not have access to basic services.[7] This led to citizens of Delhi having unequal rights depending on where they lived (Heller 2015). For instance, only planned settlements and regularised UCs had access even to basic services, such as individual water supply (see Table 4.1). The exclusionary implications of this official classification of settlements are plain to see. It led to 'differentiated citizenship' based on spatial location and the institutionalisation of unjust geographies well before the 1990s, when state policies of liberalisation and privatisation began (Heller 2015).

I draw attention to socio-spatial inequalities in relation to the main settlements in the city as these have implications for the education of children, as discussed later. The planned core of Delhi represented the postcolonial city and the national capital of India, which by the 1980s boasted of stately buildings, offices, residential complexes, impressive monuments, shopping areas (the malls came much later) and a new international airport. Opportunities in public administration, the professions, educational institutions, trade, business and construction attracted migrants of all social classes who found housing in a range of settlements.

Planned colonies included those constructed for officers and staff employed in the government and related services, private houses and flats, and housing built by the DDA for different income groups. DDA housing fell far short of what was required by the rapidly growing population in the city and was 'skewed dramatically in favour of the middle class' (Heller 2015: 10). Only a fraction of the housing needs of the expanding population was met. As a result, the bulk

of migrant poor and lower-income families were forced to live in illegal *jhuggi-jhompri* clusters (*basti*s or squatter settlements) and UCs on the peripheries of the planned city (Bhan 2016).[8]

The majority of migrants in Delhi have been the rural poor from neighbouring states such as Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar. The demand for labour to build the physical structures of the city and to serve the middle classes brought the poor to the capital where they settled down in makeshift hutments. There seemed no urgency for the state to provide reasonable dwellings for migrants who moved in with other families in squatter settlements or built new dwellings near sites where there was a demand for their labour. Parents I interviewed in the Bawana resettlement recalled that their fathers and grandfathers had come to the city as artisans and labourers in the 1970s and 1980s in a bid to escape the poverty in their villages of origin. They moved in with relatives and extended kin, relocating from *basti* to *basti* in search of work. As *basti*s were unauthorised, their residents were denied regular infrastructure and services and seen as illegal squatters on public land. Over the years, these dwellers were able to obtain a few services for their settlements via a range of methods, such as petitioning local political representatives and organising protests with the help of civil society groups. But these services were grossly inadequate and living conditions remained abysmal.

One of the largest clusters of *basti*s developed on the banks of the Yamuna River and came to be called the Yamuna Pushta (hereafter Pushta). Many migrant families who settled in the Pushta had come to Delhi in the early 1980s when labour was needed for construction related to the 1982 Asian Games. By 2004, over two decades later, around 30,000 families resided here, many of whom had built small homes and were engaged in a range of economic activities (Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008). Typical occupations included construction and other daily wage workers, municipal sweepers, domestic workers and small and petty entrepreneurs. Children were also sent to school around Pushta neighbourhoods. Between 2004 and 2007, the Pushta was one of the many *basti*s that were suddenly demolished as the state sought to beautify the capital.

Slum clearance and demolitions have been integral to the development of the megacity, as *jhuggi*s were viewed as eyesores from an early stage. The first major slum clearance was during the emergency in 1976, when many poor settlements were demolished in Delhi (Tarlo 2000). Early policy regarding the resettlement of those whose homes were demolished appeared to be concerned with the living conditions of the poor. Displaced families had to be given plots of land of a minimum size, along with basic services. But these provisions were rarely made fully available to resettlement colonies (see Table 4.1).

Electoral politics and political patronage played a role in preventing the eviction of some settlements and enabling their regularisation. What is important, however – and this needs to be emphasised – is that there was a larger policy space and legal and civil society concern for the poor, along with a general revulsion against forcible evictions, until at least the 1980s. Further, despite constant fears of eviction and displacement, the majority of *basti*s remained within the planned cityscape until around the end of the last century (Dupont 2008; Housing and Land Rights Network [HLRN] 2014).

The peripheries of the city shifted rapidly over the years as the state acquired land for 'public purpose', engulfing village lands and commons within the expanding urban landscape.[9] A large number of families in rural Delhi lost their land and livelihoods as they made way for urban infrastructure and facilities, including the new airport, office and residential complexes, and educational institutions. Relatively meagre compensation was given to those who owned these lands and none to those who worked on them. The latter resided in makeshift *basti*s on the peripheries of the city alongside migrant workers (Soni 2000; Srivastava 2015).

Delhi's urbanising peripheries were also sites of another category of settlement: UCs. UCs were largely created out of former village lands that were illegally sold as plots to lower-income families who found it cheaper to build their homes on the fringes of the city. This was affordable land, and tenants also found rents relatively cheaper in urbanising villages and the UCs that developed around them. Though house owners had legal title to land, these settlements were UCs under Delhi's official classificatory settlement schema. By the early 1990s, there were at least 2,308 UCs, of which fewer than 30 per cent (669) had been regularised (Bhan 2016).

The largest UC is Sangam Vihar, located towards Delhi's southern border. The origins of the colony date back to the 1970s; and by 2001, it had expanded to cover an area of nearly 5 square kilometres and was home to around four lakh people (Vedeld and Siddham 2002). As an unauthorised space, Sangam Vihar is not entitled to state-provided basic services. Residents (both house owners and an increasing number of tenants) were largely from the lower middle and working classes and engaged mainly in small business and private service occupations, including those of artisans, guards, drivers and domestic help.

The building of Delhi as the national capital and the extension of its urban frontier is a narrative of destruction of village lands and commons as well as of the state that failed to plan for its residents. It forced the majority of them to live on the urban margins and unauthorised spaces within the city without basic services and dignified living conditions. In contrast, thanks to the resources they

commanded, the elite and sections of the middle classes have had access to spaces both within the planned city and in elite unauthorised areas[10] where they could maintain increasingly exclusive and privileged lifestyles.

Thus, by the turn of the last century, the megacity was already marked by strikingly visible spatial and social inequalities. The twenty-first century has seen a distinct change in the city. On the one hand, Delhi witnessed an aesthetic turn as it geared itself up to become 'world-class'; on the other, the differentiation of populations based on the classificatory regime of settlements discussed earlier has been further shaped by neoliberal urban reforms and by discourses and practices around 'illegal settlements' and 'encroachers' as distinct from citizens. This has led to new practices of exclusion and privilege that influenced schooling opportunities as well.

From Mega to 'World-Class' City: Citizens and 'Encroachers'

Delhi began to seek its place as a 'world-class' city by early 2000. As has been discussed by many scholars, these aspirations can be seen in the coming together of the state (administrators/policymakers), the middle classes and the elite in relation to discourses and practices around making Delhi 'world-class' (Batra 2008; Bhan 2016). The makeover of the city was deemed urgent as Delhi was to host the prestigious Commonwealth Games in 2010. This meant that the national capital had to be showcased. *Jhuggi*s were to be cleared, and malls, parks and walkways were to be laid out in the image of Western cities.

In early 2004, the government announced that 'a 100-acre strip of land on the banks of the Yamuna' would be developed 'into a riverside promenade which would be marketed as a major tourist attraction' (Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008: 1). This was the site of the Pushta *basti*s referred to earlier. The remaking of Delhi was embedded in discourses around a 'world-class aesthetic' and what 'looked' planned – even if it flouted official guidelines, as in the case of the Vasant Kunj malls in South Delhi that violated the Delhi Master Plan (Ghertner 2015: 2–5). The DDA argued 'that the visual appearance of the future mall was in itself enough to confirm the project's planned-ness' (Ghertner 2015: 2).

Though the aesthetics of what looked appropriate for a world-class city appeared to dominate policy discourses and institutional practices, a regime of neoliberal urban reforms was underway. Changes in policy and legislation to facilitate urban restructuring were indicative of 'a concerted and multi-scalar attempt at corporate takeover of Indian cities' (Batra 2008: 38). For instance,

urban local bodies starved of resources were forced to look to the private sector for funding. The shift was written into the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), initiated in 2005, which presented the private sector as a key actor in the reform process (Batra 2008: 78).

Middle-class resident welfare associations (RWAs) in the national capital were key players in the changing urban after 2000. The hitherto dormant RWAs reorganised themselves to demand services as tax-paying citizens. In the reconstruction of discourses around urban citizenship, these associations played an active role. The poor ('slum' dwellers and hawkers) were projected as non-tax-paying populations and encroachers who were freeloading illegally on the resources of the city (Ghertner 2015). RWAs filed complaints and public interest litigations (PILs) in court demanding the removal of *basti*s in the vicinity of their increasingly bounded colonies.[11]

In contrast to rights-seeking middle-class citizens, poor *basti* dwellers were dismissed as 'encroachers' on the public land on which they resided. This was reflected in the language of the courts as well. For instance, the Supreme Court observed in 2000 that 'rewarding an *encroacher* on public land with an alternative free site is like giving a reward to a *pickpocket* for stealing' (cited in Bhan 2016: 114, 144, emphasis added). In the case of the Pushta discussed as follows, the court's ruling in favour of demolishing the *basti*s in 2004 emphasised that the river bed had been 'encroached by unscrupulous persons with the connivance of authorities' (Bhan 2016: 3).

Those who predominantly resided in settlements that were officially classified as *jhuggi-jhompri* clusters (illegal slums) mainly belonged to social groups such as Dalits (Scheduled Castes), Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes) and minorities (Muslims). In addition to their rights as citizens, these were communities that were also entitled to protection and special benefits under the Constitution of India. However, the labelling of 'slum' dwellers as 'encroachers' led to the glossing over of the constitutional entitlements and economic vulnerability of those who lived in these settlements and thrusting upon them the larger identities of illegal residents and non-citizens (Bhan 2016). Religious fault lines were also exploited as rumours around the presence of Bangladeshi residents in Delhi had begun to be circulated at the time targeting Muslim families. It was alleged that they were 'illegal migrants from Bangladesh and were beggars and petty criminals'. These are in a sense what Loïc Wacquant (2016) calls processes of symbolic stigmatising of populations in relation to spatial location and can be seen in the Pushta. The demolition of the settlements, ostensibly to make way for a promenade, was carried out between February and April 2004. Though efforts

were made by local residents and civil society organisations to obtain a judicial stay on the demolitions, they failed (Bhan 2016). The official reason for refusal of the stay was the illegal occupation of public land and the alleged pollution of the Yamuna.

Only an estimated 6,000 of the evicted Pushta families were resettled and 'the rest – over a lakh of people – were left to fend for themselves' (Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008: 12). The relocation site for the eligible Pushta residents was 40 kilometres away, near Bawana[12] on Delhi's northern border. Eligible evictees were given tiny plots of land after making a down payment for them (Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008: 36). The spatial isolation of the resettlement area and the harsh physical conditions under which the displaced families were expected to rebuild their homes from scratch have been documented vividly by Kalyani Menon-Sen and Gautam Bhan (2008).

Resettlements are planned settlements under the official classificatory schema and hence entitled to basic public services. However, in both Bawana and the Savda Ghevra resettlements located on Delhi's western periphery, evicted families who were allotted small plots had to build their homes without adequate infrastructure and facilities (HLRN 2014). Residents were denied their right to basic services that the state was obliged to provide to all citizens in authorised colonies. The lack of access to stable livelihoods in the vicinity and the distance from their former work sites made families economically fragile. Community networks and support systems built over the decades were also unavailable to families, as plots were allocated by lottery. This compounded the lack of security and safety in both sites. Women, and especially young girls, were extremely vulnerable, including to sexual abuse (Menon-Sen 2006).

Around 30–50 kilometres away from the centre of Delhi and part of the National Capital Region (NCR)[13] is the rapidly expanding new city of Gurgaon (renamed Gurugram), also referred to as the Millennium City. Any comparison between the Bawana and Savda Ghevra resettlement colonies and new, modern Gurgaon may look incongruous. However, they represent two faces of the changing urban. Gurgaon is the quintessential image of the neoliberal urban landscape, built upon the land and livelihoods of those who formerly lived there and are now forgotten. Resettlements are socio-spatial margins where populations that have no place in the new urban are relegated.

Gurgaon has a business district with impressive architecture, malls, hotels, golf courses, and condominiums and gated communities for its residents. These are closed communities whose distinctive lifestyles are unmistakably those of the global elite but are mediated by selective signs of culture that retain a sense of

'Indian-ness' (Srivastava 2015). It is also ironic that protests against the decline of forest cover in the Aravalli Range which is the site of Gurgaon are forgetful of the way in which hillsides and village commons were ravaged to build the city (Ahluwalia 2019).

In all the sites discussed, families, whether affluent or poor, are likely to be concerned with their children's futures, and hence their education. In the following section, I discuss how Delhi's journey towards becoming a 'world-class' city has critical implications for education, while keeping in mind the backdrop of the changing urban landscape.

Education, Privilege and Exclusion

Delhi has a deeply segregated and stratified school system. There is a divide between government schools and those that are privately funded and managed. There are also inequalities in both sectors in terms of facilities and the quality of education on offer. In 2019, there were 5,703 schools in Delhi, of which 49 per cent (2,784) were publicly funded government schools.[14] As many as 60 per cent of government schools (1,675) offered only primary-level classes (grades), while barely 18 per cent (505) provided all levels of school education. Primary schools are run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Middle, secondary and senior secondary schooling is provided by the Directorate of Education (DoE) of the Delhi government which ran 1,022 schools.[15] There were also 2,666 private, unaided, recognised (legal) (PUR) schools. Since 2000, there has been a rapid growth in unrecognised private schools in Delhi, which are yet to be included in official statistics. These are also referred to as low-cost, low-fee or 'budget' private schools. Sukanya Bose, Priyanka Ghosh and Arvind Sardana (2020: 1) estimate that the size of the low-cost sector in Delhi 'accounts for nearly half of the share of the overall children attending private schools at the elementary stage'.

Spatial location, intersecting with social class, has influenced access to school education for Delhi's children from the early decades after independence. For the upper and middle classes, private schools (called 'public schools' in India) have long offered exclusive English-medium education, which has been a signature of the elite since colonial times (Nambissan 2010). These classes live in planned settlements, elite UCs and exclusive gated communities. It is not surprising that the oldest and most sought-after private schools and their subsidiary branches are located in up-market, planned areas of Delhi: Mathura Road (Delhi Public School, established in 1947), Barakhamba Road (Modern School, established in 1916), Lodhi Colony (Sardar Patel Vidyalaya, established in 1958), Pusa Road (Springdales School, established in 1958), and so on.

From the 1960s, prime land in Delhi was granted at 'concessional rates' for the setting up of private schools (Juneja 2005: 3685). What remained a well-kept secret until the turn of the last century is that schools that received public lands almost free of charge were mandated to keep aside a proportion of their seats (places) for children from economically weaker sections. However, nothing was heard about the implementation of the 25 per cent clause until a PIL filed in the Supreme Court of India in 2004 revealed that private schools (which included some of the most sought-after and exclusive schools in Delhi) had failed to adhere to the obligations imposed on them in return for their land and that the state had failed to monitor compliance. Private schools hence remained exclusively for the middle classes and the elite until the PIL raised the matter.

Subsequently, the Right to Education (RTE) Act enacted by the Indian parliament in 2009 brought in a clause whereby recognised private schools were obliged to set aside 25 per cent of their seats for children from 'economically weaker sections' and socially disadvantaged groups. However, the inclusion of 'distance' between the school and the child's home as a criterion for school admissions in Delhi favours families living in the planned areas where reputable private institutions are located (Chettri 2017).

Schools managed by the MCD and the DoE were established for the children of the general public in the city.[16] By the 1990s, the quality of state-run schools – especially those at the primary stage – came in for criticism because of the poor quality of their infrastructure, teaching and learning. The shift of children from better-off families to PUR schools was also visible by this time, and the state initiated efforts to stem the abandonment of government schools by the middle and lower middle classes. In 1997, the Delhi government established the Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas (RPVVs). The RPVVs received extra funds, facilities and good teachers and were English-medium schools. They are among the best-performing and most sought-after government schools in Delhi today. There are 24 RPVVs in Delhi, located in planned areas of the city. However, such schools are absent from many new colonies established by the DDA in the suburbs of Delhi (Farooqui 1998). The publicly funded school system has thus become increasingly stratified, with spatial location conferring an advantage in access.

Though *basti*s were illegal; they were, as mentioned, located largely within planned areas of the national capital until the 1990s and hence had access to government schools, especially at the primary level (Juneja 2017: 33). However, municipal primary schools catering to poor settlements within the city lacked adequate facilities and teachers and were also overcrowded (Banerji 2000).

By the 1990s, and especially after 2000, a rapidly expanding market for private schools was visible in Delhi. The more vocal sections of the spatially privileged middle classes had already abandoned government schools in favour of English-medium private education. The demand for English-medium education grew among lower-income groups as well, leading to the spread of increasingly differentiated markets in schooling and related services, such as tutoring and English-speaking courses, in terms of costs, facilities offered and the social composition of students, among other characteristics (Menon 2017). These were new markets for English-medium education that included elite international schools at the higher end and low-cost, unregulated schools at the lower end. The latter targeted lower-income families (Menon 2017).

New Markets for Schooling

Since the late 1990s, and especially after 2000, there has been a rapid expansion of the private school sector in Delhi – particularly of low-cost, unregulated schooling (Menon 2017: 445–467). Private, unaided and unrecognised (PUU) schools are now visible across the national capital, especially in UCs (Chawla 2017). It is important to keep in mind that the unauthorised and unplanned status of colonies removes their entitlement to state-provided services, and this is likely to have led to the denial of adequate school provision as well.

Sangam Vihar, the UC discussed earlier, had a population of four lakh people by 2001; yet there was only one government-run senior secondary school, which was established in the colony as late as 1992. The school catered to around 3,000 girls in 2003 (Sati 2003: 3). Fifteen years later, in 2018, a newspaper report stated that the number of students enrolled in the school had almost doubled, but that '5,500 girls squeeze into the building's 66 airless classrooms' and that 'the evening shift is for the 3,066 boys who stream in once the girls leave' (Bhatia 2018). At the primary level, there were only seven overcrowded and poorly resourced municipal schools that ran two shifts each.

Given the evidently inadequate provision of government schools from the early years of Sangam Vihar and the poor conditions in which such schools function, it is not surprising that a market for private, unrecognised schools has flourished within the colony. These schools are often run in their owners' private homes or in rooms rented for the purpose (Chanchal 2015). In 2018, there were 35 private schools in Sangam Vihar, of which the majority were unrecognised and provided mainly primary-level education.[17] A 2011 study of aspirations for private education among low-income families in Sangam Vihar pointed to the poor quality of PUU schools, which lacked adequate space, infrastructure and

qualified teachers. Parents appeared to be aware of this and planned to send their children to regular government schools outside the colony after primary level (Chanchal 2015).

Another study of three UCs in Okhla and Badarpur (towards Delhi's south-eastern border) showed parents accessing PUU schools within the colony as they were unwilling to send their young children to government schools that were available at a distance (Mousumi and Kusakabe 2017). They preferred to access government schools when children were older and could safely travel the distance of 3–5 kilometres. Significantly, while none of the colonies contained government schools, their UC status made it difficult to get recognition for PUU schools – even if school owners were willing to pay bribes. One such owner reported that 'the government authority said that the school was located in an unauthorised colony' and 'does not meet many requirements such as water supply' (Mousumi and Kusakabe 2017: 10).

At the high end of the new private school market are international schools, which are increasingly becoming the main institutions to which the elite/upper and upper middle classes send their children. These are patterned on the International Baccalaureate (IB) system that offers access to global opportunities in higher education. Dominating the educational landscape, especially outside the centre of Delhi, international schools offer the ambience of global schooling to families living in the Millennium City – Gurgaon – where many of them have been established since 2000. As mentioned, Gurgaon is a business and financial centre, and schools have emerged here to cater to families of professionals (including expats) and others who reside here. Many children from Delhi also attend these schools.

Many international schools are spread over 5 to 10 acres carved out of forest and village lands. These sprawling campuses include huge playgrounds, swimming pools, impressive buildings, state-of-the-art facilities, and so on. The websites of these schools describe their facilities and infrastructure as exclusive and in line with world-class standards of education and children's development. A profile of a few of the well-known schools in Gurgaon and their unique selling points, as advertised on their websites, is given in Table 4.2.

Thus, by the end of the 1990s, UCs in Delhi constituted a space where the abrogation of the rights of citizens to basic services extended to education as well. The denial by the state of quality education to lower-middle-class and poor families in these settlements led to the growth of unregulated school markets that have expanded enormously after 2000. The quality of education available to children in unplanned settlements is abysmal, whether provided by

Table 4.2 International schools in Gurgaon

Name	Established	Space (acres)	Key features
Heritage Xperiential Learning School (HXLS)	2003	12	Experiential project-based pedagogy and fully air-conditioned sprawling campus
GEMS International School	2000	5	Values-driven international education and lush green campus with modern facilities
Pathways World School	2010	10	World-class academic and sporting structures
K. R. Mangalam World School	2010	5	Tradition of excellence, eco-friendly green campus and pollution-free
Shiv Nadar School	2012	6	Sensitive and child-centric environment

Source: Official websites of respective schools: https://www.heritagexperiential.org/about-us/school-profile; https://gemsinternationalschoolgurgaon.com/index.html; https://www.pathways.in/gurgaon/gurgaon_school; https://krmangalamgurgaon.com; https://shivnadarschool.edu.in/overview (accessed in July 2020).

the government or through PUU schools. The contrast between schooling in unauthorised settlements and that of planned colonies and neoliberal urban areas (such as Gurgaon) is glaring and raises serious questions about children's unequal access to dignified living and equitable education.

Demolition, Resettlement and the Right to Education

The RTE Act of 2009 gave children aged 6–14 years the right to education regardless of spatial location. It is paradoxical that the process of drafting the bill to enact the RTE began in 2002, at a time when the clamour to remove poor settlements and dismiss their inhabitants as 'encroachers' was getting louder in the national capital. There is no systematic documentation of the educational consequences following the demolition of a large number of *basti*s across Delhi after 2000. A few studies of families who were relocated to Bawana and Savda Ghevra colonies showed that the demolition of their former *basti*s resulted in disruption of schooling for the majority of children who had resided there (Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008; HLRN 2014). There were a number of reasons for this. Most importantly, facilities for schooling were not available in the early years of resettlement.

In Bawana, there were 'no functioning schools inside the colony until March 2005' (a year after the Pushta demolitions) and children were 'refused admission to the school in Bawana village' (Menon-Sen and Bhan 2008: 99). For the 6,000 families in Savda Ghevra, there were no schools in the colony for the first two years after their forced relocation (Rao 2010: 422). It is not surprising that a large number of children who were formerly in school discontinued their education. Economic precarity of families and fear of safety of girls in the resettlements were among other reasons why there was dropout of children from school (Rao 2010: 422).

From the perspective of the urban poor in general and those whose original settlements were demolished in particular, the rights offered under the RTE to seats in private schools or even to equitable access to high-quality state-funded education did not have much meaning. The schools in question were spatially out of their reach. Further, there was little concern with the fate of the children from families whose *basti*s were demolished but who were not entitled to resettlement because their documents were not in order. The denial of the right of education to children living in the resettlement areas and from families who were no longer visible[18] was the stark reality of Delhi's path to 'world-class' city status.

In 2015, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) swept to power in Delhi. AAP's election manifesto included promises to the urban poor to give them permanent homes, provide free electricity and water, and address issues of public health and education. In fact, 'education first' was one of the party's main slogans in the run-up to the elections. After five years in power, AAP's achievements in education included the construction of new schools, the provision of better infrastructure and facilities and a special focus on teacher training and pedagogy, resulting in improvements to the quality of publicly funded schooling (Sisodia 2019).

There have been accolades for AAP's work in increasing education budgets and refurbishing schools, and for its success rates in the class 12 (board) public examinations. However, there has also been criticism regarding changes to curricula and pedagogic practices. For instance, the Chunauti scheme (which streams children by ability within grades), simplification of curricula and the alleged practice of failing or holding back children in class 9 to improve pass rates in the board examinations have raised concerns that cannot be brushed aside (Praja Foundation 2019; Nehru 2020). AAP's policies are also leading to the further stratification of the publicly funded sector, with some government schools being packaged and branded as English-medium 'model schools' and 'schools of excellence'. Although concerns have been raised, there is as yet no systematic research on education under AAP's regime, especially where the poor

are concerned. I will now discuss some findings from the study I conducted with families and young people in the Bawana resettlement colony to understand their perspectives on education from the margins of the city.

Negotiating Education: Perspectives from the Margins

In late 2019, I carried out interviews with a cross-section of families from the Pushta who were living in the Bawana JJ Resettlement Colony (henceforth referred to as the colony) in order to understand the trajectories of their children's schooling. I wanted to see how educational journeys were shaped by the aspirations and strategies of families and young people themselves, given the marginal urban space that they had been relegated to around 15 years earlier. Keeping in mind the dominant narrative of disruption in schooling as a result of the demolition of *basti*s and the relocation of their residents, I specifically included families where children had completed or were continuing secondary education, and some were engaged in further studies. It was also five years since AAP had come to power in Delhi. I wanted to also briefly explore how the efforts of the government had influenced educational journeys in the colony.

All the parents I spoke to recalled the 'jungle'-like stark and unknown place that they were 'dumped in' and how they were expected to carry on with their lives without the most basic of facilities or opportunities for stable livelihoods. The years that followed saw them develop the site, transforming the Bawana colony into a bustling space with rows of houses on small plots of land that had been leased from the government. There is now some transport, though infrequent, to and from the colony. While they are yet to obtain permanent titles to their plots, parents reported that AAP had kept its promise of free electricity and water. Though facilities are far from adequate, the colony is no longer the *banjar* (barren) land that had confronted the families when they first arrived.

The economic condition of families in 2019 was relatively better than in the early years of the colony; however, stable incomes are still a major concern. The industrial estate in the vicinity offers low-paid, insecure work involving long hours. Even this work is inadequate, and there are rumours of closures of some industrial units. Some of the fathers I interviewed were autorickshaw drivers, while others ran small pushcart businesses; some of the women went to Bawana census town (formerly Bawana village) to work as domestic help; and many families took on piecework on contract to try and make ends meet. Only a tiny

minority appeared to be on regular salaries, one avenue for this being working with the non-government organisations (NGOs) in the colony.

In the early years, families struggled to keep some of their children in school and many failed to do so. For instance, Anjali faced severe hardship as she sought to find work in the industrial complex and simultaneously get her children enrolled in middle and primary school. School admissions were difficult, as discussed by Menon-Sen and Bhan (2008). The primary school in the colony was overcrowded, and Anjali said she also lacked the documents required for admission to a government school. She managed to clear several administrative hurdles so that at least one of her sons could be enrolled in the middle school in Bawana village, but admission was refused. Given the economic distress she was suffering, Anjali gave up and sent her children to work. This was the case with many relocated families. As parents had lost their livelihoods and were struggling to survive, many older male children entered work while daughters looked after the household, which was also a priority.

Schooling in the settlement was visibly inadequate in the early years, and there were rumours of child abductions and rape. This made some parents hesitate to enrol their children in the colony school. For instance, Sabina said that she initially sent her children to a local NGO, where they were engaged in academic and recreational activities. Subsequently, the NGO helped her children gain admission to a new government school that was established in the colony by 2008. Hence, after a break of two years, her children were able to continue their education.

Avoiding discontinuity in studies following the demolition required quick thinking and foresight on the part of parents while they were still in the Pushta. Nazneen was one of the few who, alerted to the possibility of displacement and relocation to Bawana, got her older son to 'write' her younger son's name in time in the sole primary school in the colony. Her son was subsequently admitted to the school and was able to continue his education without a break. Some parents mentioned that they left their son or daughter with a relative near the Pushta so that they could complete the academic year and take their examinations. Neelam stayed on for a few years, taking up residence with a relative near her former school, and completed her examinations with great difficulty before coming to the Bawana colony.

Resettlements are officially called JJ (*jhuggi-jhompri*) colonies, despite the fact that these are planned settlements. In common perception, *jhuggi*s are associated with slums and notions of illegality and nuisance. Hence, the 'JJ' in the colony's name is likely to give the resettlement and those who inhabit it a

'spoiled' identity (Goffman 1964). It is therefore not surprising that the Bawana JJ colony soon became a stigmatised space – one seen as occupied by *jhuggi-jhompri* families. In the early years, the few children who gained admission to the Bawana village government school found themselves subject to derogatory comments and discriminatory practices. They 'routinely face humiliation, abuse and ill-treatment' from students and teachers of the Jat and Gujjar communities, which were socially dominant in the village and the school (Menon-Sen 2006: 1972). Students said they were targeted because of their spatial location as *jhuggi-jhompri ke bacchhe* (slum children), as well as their poverty and social identity as Dalits and Muslims (Menon-Sen 2006: 1972).

In 2019, almost 15 years later, Bawana settlement is still called a 'JJ colony' and continues to be a stigmatised space. This is despite the fact that the residents are legal lessees of their small plots and the colony is now relatively developed, with far more facilities than in its early years. Laali, who had just completed her secondary education at the government school in Bawana census town, recalled that their residence in a '*jhuggi-jhompri* colony' was brought home to students on several occasions by teachers and peers. She felt that parents were not given adequate respect when they came to school meetings, primarily because they resided in what was understood as a colony of *jhuggi-jhompri*s that was generally seen as a space of filth, crime and drugs.

The quality of schools, infrastructure and facilities was poor in the early years following resettlement. Even in 2019, the MCD primary schools remained overcrowded and lacked adequate facilities and teachers. Parents also reported that teachers were lax in their duties. However, residents were unanimous that post-2015 infrastructure and teaching have improved considerably in the secondary and senior secondary schools run by the Delhi government in the colony. For younger children, the availability of post-primary schooling within the settlement and improvements to the quality of education facilitated transitions to secondary school. There were still challenges, in that the number of schools was inadequate and the science stream was not offered in class 11.[19] There was also a passing reference to the negative implications of streaming of students by ability in government schools under AAP's Chunauti initiative. Some students said that their friends in the *nishta* (lower ability) group were unhappy and demotivated by the way teachers and peers viewed them as 'unintelligent'. The implications of classroom reorganisation (streaming) and the new pedagogic strategies initiated by the AAP government need research attention.

Economic resources were still a constraint, and many families such as Laali's had to struggle to ensure that at least one child completed secondary or senior

secondary education. This was a significant achievement that not only required the availability of a school facility within a reasonable distance but was also dependent on the support of the family, which had to set aside scarce resources for the purpose. While her elder sister was married at a young age, her mother was firm that Laali would complete class 10 before getting married. Laali herself had aspirations for higher education, but her family circumstances did not permit further studies. She acknowledges the strong support from her mother and the encouragement of a teacher who helped her complete class 10 at Bawana secondary school.

The colony school showed good results in the board examination in 2019. I was told that in the boys' school over 90 per cent of students had passed the examination.[20] Group discussions with young people revealed that many families could not afford to let them complete secondary school and hence they opted for the 'open' route to complete their education. They did so through the Patrachar Vidyalaya, which allowed them to continue their studies and take examinations via distance learning. Thus, students aspired to complete their school education even when regular schooling had been discontinued or was impossible. However, given the many constraints and challenges of distance learning, it is a moot question as to how many of those who left regular schooling completed their education and how many went onto further studies.

Higher Education Transitions

Transitions to higher education were far more difficult, and only a negligible proportion of young people in the relevant age group reported that they intended to engage in further study. It must be remembered that parents in the colony have little or no formal schooling, so children who complete even secondary education are the first generation and usually the only one among their siblings to do so. Former students I interviewed said that lack of economic resources was the major constraint in accessing higher education since it involved considerable expense, including transportation to colleges that were located a considerable distance away. However, they admitted that they had also not attained the minimum class 12 examination results to seek admission to regular colleges in Delhi. All emphasised that while government schooling had improved, it had to be of far higher quality if students were to compete for higher education admissions and continue their studies.

The fortuitous location of a women's college, Aditi Mahavidyalaya (affiliated to the University of Delhi), in Bawana census town provided a unique opportunity for some girls to enrol for regular higher education. That the college

was for women only and located close to the colony enabled families to take a major decision in favour of sending a daughter for higher education. Some of the women I spoke to were the first from their Muslim and Dalit communities to go to college. In group discussions conducted with these students, I learnt that without their mothers' firm support, it was unlikely that the extended family would have agreed to their going to college. It was also important that in each of the college-going women's families, there was also an elder brother in employment who encouraged his younger sister to complete her graduation. The educational trajectories of these young women students indicate that their journeys were relatively unique. Most of their peers (male and female) had left education after class 10 or 12, and many girls among them were married. The college's location near the colony and family support – especially from students' mothers – were crucial in seeing them through to college. Their own agency was also particularly striking.

Improvements in schooling quality and support from teachers were also underscored as important in transitions to higher education. Lack of adequate economic resources in the family and the absence of the necessary cultural capital (especially inadequate teaching of English at school) were also viewed as constraints to participation and performance in college. Many of those who were unable to access regular college enrolled in correspondence courses (referred to as 'open' courses) in the hope of obtaining a graduate degree. However, the general view was that the 'open' route to higher education lacked the *mahaul* (academic environment) and face-to-face interaction of the regular college, resulting in a tendency for students to lag behind.

A course in social work offered by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was one of the most popular correspondence courses, partly because NGOs offered some opportunities for employment in the colony.[21] When asked, young people were unsure of what else they could do for a living. Nor were there many examples of people from the colony who had got good jobs. Preferences included teaching and joining the police force, but students did not know how to access these careers. Those who had not completed school or had just about completed class 12 had few options beyond low-paid work in the vicinity.

Parents I spoke with were anxious about the uncertain futures their children faced in the colony (which was not Delhi from their perspective), compared with the promise that the Pushta (in their view the city) had held in terms of education and access to better occupations. They lamented that 'when our *jhuggis* were lost, everything was lost'. Yet as I have shown, families rebuilt their lives in extremely difficult conditions, accessing whatever opportunities were available. It is also

evident that the state has largely failed to treat the colony residents as citizens of Delhi. Although some attempts have been made in the last few years to improve schools and provide a few services, such efforts are far from adequate.

What is striking is that the aspirational city, with its more powerful and vocal social classes, and a complicit state have destroyed the futures of large sections of the poor, who originally arrived in Delhi as impoverished migrants and just managed to stabilise their lives over two or three generations. One can only hope that families who have begun to rebuild their lives after the dislocation of the demolitions will not have to face further upheavals because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been particularly devastating for the urban poor.[22] Here, the role of the state in ensuring children's rights to an equitable education, opportunities for further study and stable livelihoods must be underscored.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has highlighted urban transformations in Delhi as it achieved megacity status and subsequently attempted to become world-class. I have shown that the spatial inequalities following the official classification of urban settlements that marked the city's journey over the decades after independence have had a deep impact on the education of its children. Socially dominant classes who are also spatially privileged residents of planned colonies in the national capital have had early access to exclusive government-run 'public' schools and elite private education for their children. International schools are integral to the neoliberal urban and open up global pathways to their students. State policies have led to the growing stratification of the publicly funded school system. Selective institutions such as RPVVs have catered mainly to middle- and lower-middle-class families residing in planned areas of Delhi.

Lower-income and poor parents' aspirations to provide their children with high-quality education have been largely thwarted, and many have been left with little choice but to educate them at lower-end government-run schools, many of which function under abysmal conditions. I have argued that markets for private unregulated schooling have expanded rapidly primarily because the exclusionary implications of state policy have led to differentiated citizenship rights based on location. This has led to the denial of adequate government schooling to unauthorised or unplanned colonies. In these settlements, parental aspirations for their children's education have led to differentiated school markets based on ability to pay.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, it is reported that many of the low-cost, 'budget' private schools across Delhi (especially in UCs) have closed down as

low-income households are not in a position to pay fees and the owners are unable to pay teachers their salaries. This points to the unsustainable nature of low-end school markets and their detrimental consequences for children's futures (Sharma 2020; Agarwal and Sharma 2020).

For the most marginal groups, lack of spatial and social justice was evident in *basti*s within the city even prior to the neoliberal restructuring after 2000. Their subsequent relegation to the urban margins and the construction of stigmatising discourses around illegal *jhuggi-jhompri*s and the populations inhabiting them have been important in normalising the denial of citizenship to disadvantaged sections of society who built the city and served its more vocal and privileged classes. As shown, they came to be viewed increasingly as illegal residents and encroachers rather than citizens. For the poor, spatial injustice has compounded social inequalities and led to the abrogation of their children's right to education. This is a violation of children's constitutional right to equitable education regardless of location.

I have drawn attention to the complexity of changing city spaces and their implications for education. My work has been more in the nature of an exploratory enquiry and calls for a focused study of both Delhi and other urban contexts in India. Given the urgency posed by the pandemic and its reverberations across the urban, it is critical that scholars across disciplines come together to build conversations and engage in research that foregrounds intersections between spatial, social and educational inequalities. Soja's call for a 'critical spatial perspective' is important as we engage with the changing city and envision new imaginaries and solidarities around the urban (Soja 2010). In this, the equitable right of children to the city and its socially valued resources – especially education – must be kept in mind.

Notes

1. As discussed in the introductory chapter, urban India comprises complex socially produced formations whose landscapes are constantly changing. I use the term 'the urban' to refer to these spaces.
2. Since 1991, Delhi has been officially known as the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, a union territory with its own legislative assembly. The NCT had a population of around 16.7 million, according to the 2011 census.
3. A megacity is a large metropolis with a population of over 10 million, a node of the global economy and a driver of economic growth in its hinterland. For more, see Castells (2011).

4. The impact of world-class city-making on the poor has been seen as especially adverse, as they were increasingly relegated to the peripheries of the city in situations of extreme precarity. For more, see Ghertner (2015), Bhan (2016) and Baviskar (2006).
5. The Bawana colony is officially called the Bawana JJ Resettlement Colony. I conducted in-depth interviews with a few families who were former residents of the Yamuna Pushta settlement, which was demolished in 2004. I also engaged in group discussions with young students from the settlement. These are discussed later in this chapter.
6. Only those settlements built within the 'development area' delineated under the Master Plan were authorised or legal. Thus, Gautam Bhan (2016: 60) notes that 'an "unauthorised colony" then is precisely one that is built on land not included in the development area in the plan or one built on land within the developmental area but not zoned for residential use'.
7. The villages within the city became what are called 'urban villages' (see Table 4.1). Residential spaces were retained in these settlements and there was an official exemption from building norms. Landowners built vertically on every available space and provided relatively cheap housing for low-income families.
8. 'Slum' and *jhuggi-jhompri* are terms that have derogatory connotations of being unsafe and unsanitary spaces attached to them. Like Bhan (2016), I prefer to use the term *basti* for informal settlements of the poor.
9. This was done under the coercive colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (see Revenue Department 1984).
10. There are also elite unplanned colonies that are officially categorised as 'unauthorised colonies inhabited by affluent sections of society'. See 'National Capital Territory of Delhi Recognition of Property Rights of Residents in Unauthorised Colonies) Regulations, 2019', published vide notification no. G.S.R. 814(E), dated 29 October 2019, http://www.bareactslive.com/Del/dl190.htm (accessed 15 March 2020).
11. The power and reach of the RWAs can be seen in their active involvement in the high-profile flagship scheme of the chief minister of Delhi launched in 2003: Bhagidari. The scheme made space for the RWAs to participate in urban governance, and they came forward to mobilise residents and place their demands for adequate infrastructure and facilities, secure neighbourhoods and removal of *basti*s. As many as 2,700 RWAs in middle-class colonies were included in the Bhagidari scheme, but there was no space in it for the poor or their representatives (Ghertner 2015).

12. I refer to Bawana as a village and a census town interchangeably depending on whether I am referring to it before or after 2011. Bawana was a village till 2011. Based on the population census of 2011, Bawana has been designated as a census town (CT). CTs have urban characteristics of population size, density and non-farm workforce, but are not statutory towns and are governed as villages (Pradhan 2017).
13. The NCR includes the NCT of Delhi and the neighbouring cities of Gurgaon, Ghaziabad, Faridabad and Noida.
14. Statistics for 2019 (2018–2019) are from the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE n.d.). There is no information given for unrecognised (illegal) private schools.
15. The Delhi state-run Sarvodaya Vidyalayas are composite schools that provide all levels of school education.
16. Public funds were also used to establish special schools for children of the Indian Armed Forces and higher-level transferable government employees. These were established in prime locations in the planned areas of Delhi and other cities (see Nambissan 2021: 17).
17. These were schools that appeared in a Google search result for schools in Sangam Vihar in 2018. The actual number of unrecognised schools in the colony is likely to be far greater.
18. That is, families officially not entitled to resettlement.
19. The president of the Bawana Sangharsh Samiti, an organisation formed in the settlement, said that the *samiti* (association) has been fighting for more schools and better educational facilities in the colony.
20. Were students failed or kept back in class 9 to ensure these excellent results as is alleged in some reports (such as Praja Foundation 2019)? I did not explore this; however, if this is the price of high school success rates in examinations, it raises serious concerns.
21. IGNOU in New Delhi provides opportunities for higher education via distance learning.
22. The interviews were carried out between October and December 2019, a few months before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown in India.

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