

# Introduction

## Education and the Changing Urban in India

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Over the past few decades, scholarship within diverse disciplinary fields has directed our attention to the complex ways in which new spatial formations have emerged in the Global South (Bhan 2016; Ghertner 2015; Roy and Ong 2011; Ranganathan, Pike and Doshi 2023). New urban forms and related processes of intense movements of people, capital and labour have marked Indian cities as places that have experienced significant changes in a short span of time. This moment of hyper-visibilisation of cities, especially in the developing world, often eclipses several other compelling and layered processes at work. Integral to this layering are the relatively under-researched changing landscapes of education and the complex ways in which they interface with urban transformations.

In this volume, we hope to address the multitudinous shifts that have occurred in systems of education and urban formation in India. The conceptual richness of multidisciplinary intermixing, along with a range of methodological strategies, can be seen in the different chapters in the volume. What we learn from these explorations is that the nature of the relationship between education and the urban has developed along socio-spatio-temporal lines inhabiting different sites, institutions and voices. In academic terms, the volume opens a conversation between education studies and urban studies by paying attention to the rapid expansion of institutional spaces, the elements of change in predominantly agrarian regions, the formation of peri-urban towns, the enclavisation of schools and the possibilities of imagining educational futures in swirls of change.

It is impossible to ignore the strategic significance of contemporary cities as sites of accumulation of capital and places of intense social and

economic polarisation. In particular, the production of globally desirable city projects, including world-class, mega and smart cities, has led to increased regulation of access, planned spatial segregation and differential provisions of education, health, food and housing (Nielsen, Sareen and Oskarsson 2020).

Urban India comprises a range of spatial formations that are differently named based on official norms. These include the mega/metropolitan/other cities, medium/small towns, census towns, and so on. We use ‘the urban’<sup>1</sup> to draw attention to the socially produced nature of these spatial formations that are constantly in the making. The ‘urban’ extends beyond the city and its peripheries and is also constituted by the dynamics of settlements and neighbourhoods within it. Viewing the ‘urban’ as historically and socially structured and bringing together the intersections of educational and spatial inequalities, change and development in different regions of India, this volume draws on a research collaboration on ‘Education and the Urban in India since the Nineteenth Century’, anchored by the German Historical Institute London through the Max Weber Stiftung India Branch Office (now the Max Weber Forum for South Asian Studies), New Delhi. The three partnering Indian institutions were Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai; and the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru. The three-year collaboration that began in 2017 sought to foreground a research agenda connecting questions of education and urban forms across India to better understand processes such as social–spatial restructuring, educational differentiation and the construction of new peripheries, among other issues. Our engagements included the organisation of workshops, master classes, conferences and a working paper series (see *Perspectivia* n.d.), in which earlier versions of some of the chapters in this volume have appeared.

Tracing the education–urban relationship since the middle of the nineteenth century in India, our collaborative project began with a sense of history and place. Fluidity and expansion have long been part of the historical trajectories of diverse urban formations that developed around trade, military bases and religious conglomeration. We wanted to explore the diverse ways in which education and the urban can be studied within a broad analytic frame, encompassing both contemporary and historical processes. The chapters in the volume present heterogeneous urban forms that include large metropolises, smaller cities, towns and peri-urban areas across diverse regions and states of India. Within each of these are several other categories such as rehabilitated colonies, old cities, ghettos and localities separated along the lines of caste, religion and class. The chapters demonstrate a mutually constitutive relationship between education and

the urban in the context of major forces that have shaped the history of modern India and continue to do so. The contributors engage with historical records and policy evidence and draw on rich ethnographic insights as well as case-based accounts of neighbourhoods, schools, families and youth.

## **Framing Education and Urban Transformations**

William Pink and George Noblit (2017: iv) emphasise the importance of ‘context’ and the need to understand ‘particularities’ in the study of urban education. They point out that ‘similar practices in different contexts can have quite different meanings’ (Pink and George Noblit 2017: iv). For us, context is important in understanding spatio-social transformations, places and institutions. We are mindful of the relatively distinct trajectory of urban and educational development in India. Shaped by colonial interests from the mid-nineteenth century, the growth of cities and educational institutions was subsequently influenced by post-independence economic and social policies since 1947 and the neoliberal economic drive from the 1990s. In addition, the deeply unequal nature of the social structure, federal polity and remarkable cultural plurality provide the larger and changing context of the urban and education interface in India. It is important, however, to understand that there is enormous diversity in terms of the ways in which several regions have become urbanised and that the ‘rural’, a space of increasing economic stagnation and impoverishment, is implicated in urban transformation (Balakrishnan 2018). On the one hand, rural migrants come to the cities in search of work and survival; on the other hand, urban areas are being increasingly stretched to incorporate nearby villages and agrarian hinterlands. The process of constant making of the urban is marked by privilege and exclusion which results in the coexistence of zones of luxury and deprivation within the same city (Nambissan 2017). Greater privatisation, the increasing dominance of markets and the withdrawal of the state are increasingly visible in cities, leading to a deterioration of the urban commons, including public educational institutions like schools and colleges (Nambissan 2017; Pink and Noblit 2017: 219–416).

Urban development in India has mainly focused on metropolitan cities. The skewed nature of urban planning and state provision of funding in the early decades after independence and the economic restructuring in the post-1990s period have led to the emergence of non-metropolitan urban spaces lacking in basic infrastructure, including adequate facilities for health and education. While some smaller cities and towns have been sites of industries relocated

from the larger cities, places ‘beyond the shadow of the metropolis’ lack adequate social infrastructure (Shaw 2019; Scrase et al. 2015). In a move away from ‘metrocentricity’, it is important to understand that almost half the increase in the urban population in the first decade of this century has been in smaller cities and towns, and this trend is expected to continue (Scrase et al. 2015). The growth has been uneven in non-metropolitan spaces as well because of the politics of policy and economic structures that have led to the neglect of many small towns (Denis and Zérah 2017).

Aspirations for livelihoods and education have been the major reasons for migration from rural to urban areas. B. R. Ambedkar described the Indian village as ‘a sink of localism, a den of ignorance and narrow-mindedness’ (Ambedkar 1948: 162). The move to the city was seen to offer political and transformative potential in India as the non-rural social landscape, and the economic and educational opportunities it provided signalled a possible way out of oppressive caste structures. Universities, colleges, technical institutions and community-run hostels in the city became places that offered possibilities for social mobility and political education for first-generation entrants to higher education, including Dalit and Adivasi students. However, marginalised groups often experience reproduction of structures of caste, class and minority status in the city and its institutions (Benjamin and Bhuvanewari 2006).

Loïc Wacquant (2008) observes that poor urban neighbourhoods characterised by caste, race, community and religion often take on the character of ‘ghettos’ of urban ‘outcasts’. The contributors to this volume, many of whom have explored urban neighbourhoods, show that these places are marked by discrimination at various levels and subject to complex associations of low-quality and chronically under-resourced public facilities, poor infrastructure, general civic neglect and lack of secure employment opportunities. Poor families in these neighbourhoods have high aspirations for the future of their children; however, the places they live in have become precarious, impoverished and relatively isolated in the new urban India. For marginalised communities, inhabiting city spaces has also brought with it experiences of stigma, prejudice and discrimination. Hence, following Edward Soja (2009), many of the contributors demonstrate that spatial justice is important for equitable access to the city and its resources. It is no surprise that struggles in urban India revolve around occupying and claiming the rights to *bastis* (shanties), essential facilities and movement (Bhan 2016).

The perspective that informs the discussions in this volume is that the urban is socially structured and continuously in the making. This is where the circuits of capital and the web of social relations are constituted and where privilege and

inequality are reproduced. All chapters present urban education as embedded in diverse historical and socio-spatial contexts and as influenced in diverse ways by contemporary economic and social processes. Intersectionality of class (and class fractions), caste, ethnicity, minority status and gender, as well as spatial location in unequal geographies within and across urban spaces, are seen to mediate access to educational and occupational opportunities. In particular, the aspirations and strategies of parents from lower-income/poor families for social mobility provide insights into the interplay between structures, institutions and agencies.

We now turn to the specific chapters in this volume brought together in four parts that deal with diverse urban forms in India. The first part 'City Histories and Educational Pasts' focuses on urban formations and education in colonial India. This is followed by the second part 'Urban Transformations, Marginalities and Education' that dwell on the metropolitan/megacity. The third part 'Beyond the Metropolis: Urban Spaces, Education and Changing Aspirations' draws attention to the smaller city and town. And, finally, the last part explores 'Neighbourhoods, Minorities and the Politics of Education' in the metropolitan city. There are some overlaps in themes such as marginalities, privilege, exclusion and aspirations across different locations. We hope to draw attention to the ways in which these processes are produced in different contexts and along varied timelines.

## City Histories and Educational Pasts

The importance of education in the history of modern India is reflected in the prodigious histories of education that began to be written in the wake of the nationalist movement of the 1920s (Rao 2023: 290–295; Dharampal 2000: 1–2). The vast body of the literature on education in India that has emerged since the early twentieth century, rich and diverse as it is, nonetheless shows – with a few recent exceptions – a general lack of attention to the significance of space, place and location in the history of education. Histories of education – like other historical studies – are often based on case studies of specific regions or cities/sites, but they have rarely engaged with the spatiality of the site itself and its relationship to the ever-growing processes of nineteenth- and twentieth-century urbanisation.

In the course of a little over three decades, the urban history of India has produced a vast field of groundbreaking research, including industrial relations in urban spaces and the production of class, caste, gender and community therein, focusing specifically on the relationship between space, society, economy and politics (Ballhatchet and Harrison 1980; Chandavarkar 1994, 2009b;

Nair 1998, 2005; Dodson 2012; Bates and Mio 2015; Banerjee 2016; Ghosh 2016; Kidambi 2007; Kidambi, Manjiri and Dwyer 2019 – to cite only a few in a rich and diverse field). Nonetheless, this research has generally overlooked the centrality of education and its manifold social and cultural ramifications in such relations. More often than not, education in urban settings is treated as a given, not deserving of closer scrutiny or problematisation. Along with education, urbanisation was long regarded as one of the key pillars of modernisation. Yet the often fundamental relationship between them, the centrality of education to the process of urban-making, its often co-constitutive relationship with the increasing urbanisation brought on in the course of British colonial rule in India in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries has been under-researched in scholarship in both fields. The role of education, as Akash Bhattacharya remarks in chapter 1, in the ‘distinct but interconnected histories of agriculture, industry, transport’ and other fundamental aspects of state-building and colonial modernity has been largely overlooked in historical scholarship. Yet both education and urban formations were key to the colonial developmental and modernising project in India and to the transformation of subjectivities under colonial rule, just as they were central to the postcolonial, nationalist imaginary about India’s future.

Sporadic research in the past two decades has addressed the relationship between emerging urban spaces and education and pedagogy from a historical perspective. This research has often focused on the formation of a new, urban culture of civility and a sensibility that was based on a modern pedagogy of selfhood and a new notion of the public sphere that emerged in urban spaces (Chattopadhyay 2006; Dalmia 2012; Stark 2007; Khan 2022). The production of space through a coming together of educational institutions, a new pedagogy and the city has been explored by scholars such as Margrit Pernau (2014, 2015) and Razak Khan (2022). The historically framed chapters in this volume offer a significant contribution to this emerging field.

Several contributors to this volume address the historical antecedents of education and the urban in contemporary India. They do so by including the more recent approaches referred to previously, but they also push the argument further by linking educational experiments and institutions with the physical space of the city, with urban infrastructure and with changing social relations in urban spaces in colonial India. More importantly, they link the history of education to the defining moments in the history of modern India since the middle of the nineteenth century: the expansion of the colonial state and the emergence of a centralised imperial state in the late nineteenth century, which went hand in hand with large-scale infrastructure projects; the rapid pace of industrialisation

and urbanisation that followed; the emergence of nationalism and the politics of caste and religion; the growth of private capital and philanthropy; the rise of industrial labour as a social and political force (and its subsequent decline); the partition of India; and, finally, the postcolonial development of the Nehruvian state and its subsequent dismantling, the rise of neoliberalism and the new globalisation of the late twentieth century. Nirmali Goswami, in chapter 8, has framed her work on Varanasi with reference to the historical antecedents of the city under colonial rule as a socially and spatially segregated cluster of neighbourhoods around which schools were organised. Anasua Chatterjee, in chapter 10, shows how the partition of India retains a physical and symbolic meaning in Muslim neighbourhoods in Calcutta, a theme of spatial segregation that is further developed by Farah Farooqi in chapter 11.

Three chapters in this volume have a primarily historical framing and they deserve special attention here. Akash Bhattacharya, Nandini Manjrekar and Poushali Basak, and Margrit Pernau, in their respective chapters, examine the various ways in which educational projects were fundamental to urbanisation and the related reimagining of the spaces in which the projects were situated. Although located in very different geographical regions and cultural settings, taken together the chapters provide a glimpse into a chronology of urbanisation that began tentatively in parts of colonial India around the middle of the nineteenth century and gathered momentum with increasing industrialisation, migration of populations from villages to cities and growth in the strength of industrial labour in the early decades of the twentieth century. While the relationship between this emergent urban landscape and education was not necessarily causal – and the contributors do not make this claim – education was inscribed into such developments. Thus, Bhattacharya, in chapter 1, shows how education was a part of the general process of development, social change and the caste–class stratification in the town of Uttarpara, situated in close proximity to Calcutta (now Kolkata) on the western bank of the river Hooghly. Bhattacharya focuses on the almost coterminous establishment of the English-medium Uttarpara Government School (now known as Uttarpara Government High School), on the basis of a private initiative of the local landed elites led by the *zamindar* Joykrishna Mukherjee, and the start of a host of infrastructure projects and civic institutions funded by private capital.

Industrial development, the efflorescence of cotton mills and the consequent growth of an industrial workforce which had to be accommodated and whose children had to be educated in Bombay (now Mumbai) in the early decades of the twentieth century form the background to Nandini Manjrekar and Poushali

Basak's chapter. Histories of colonial education in India, they argue in chapter 2, have traditionally neglected the 'industrial proletariat' and what they describe as 'the constitutive role of industrialisation to the development of modern systems of education'. Their chapter has focused on a joint initiative of the colonial state, the local urban government and local elite philanthropy to provide public primary education – free and compulsory primary education (FCPE) – for the children of the millworkers in Girangaon against the backdrop of Indian nationalism in the early decades of the twentieth century. Focusing on selected wards of the district, for which archival records still exist, the authors show in granular detail a microhistory of much larger public debates on the education of working-class children in urban areas, thus writing the history of public education into the social and political terrain of the city.

Margrit Pernau, in chapter 3, demonstrates the close link between the training of sensibilities and cultivation of skills and the production of space in a city university, Jamia Millia Islamia, in its early years in Aligarh and Delhi, against the backdrop of Gandhian nationalism and the idealism of the young, modernist-minded Muslims of the Khilafat movement. Pernau examines the spatial and pedagogic history of Jamia Millia Islamia from its inception in 1920 in Aligarh to its move to Karol Bagh on the outskirts of Delhi in 1925 and finally to its sprawling campus in present-day Okhla in Delhi in 1935. She links these spatial shifts in the making of the urban in the areas around Delhi to the university's unique pedagogy, which both embraced Gandhian nationalism and maintained its own modernist, Indian Muslim identity. She conceptualises this relationship between the pedagogic practice of the university and its spatial location neither as a mere rejection of the urban in favour of the rural, as in Gandhian pedagogy (*nai talim*), nor as a wholehearted embracing of urbanism and urban civility, but as a reconfiguration of 'the relationship between education, urban space and emotions'.

## Urban Transformations, Marginalities and Education

The direction and intensity of urban expansion since the 1980s unmistakably highlight numerous aspirational regimes that have cast their influence on Indian cities in significant ways. The desire and promise of the Indian megacity, for instance, reveal the spatio-temporal transformations of urban spaces. It led to the stretching and shifting of cityscapes to accommodate newly configured geographies wherein some spaces were made exclusive, adjacent villages were drawn into urban folds (while at times retaining their agrarian structures), and poor and migrant communities began inhabiting the peripheries of cities.



The three chapters addressing these themes cover macro processes enveloping the urban and beyond and discuss in detail the micro realities of lives, labour and learning in cities that are at different phases of transformation. The migrant families in Delhi's Yamuna Pushta, in chapter 4, for instance, recall their experiences of peripheralisation as the city transitioned from a megacity to a world-class city, with a sense of loss of former neighbourhoods and good schools in their vicinity. Not too far from Delhi, and influenced by the production of its urban aspirations, the towns of Sonipat–Kundli (chapter 6) became identified as 'urbanisable', leading to a sense of alienation as the predominantly agrarian belt became the site of a proposed 'world-class' educational hub. On the other hand, the regimes of compensation in Bangalore (chapter 6) created rehabilitation housing complexes in the peri-urban, underscoring the sense of disconnect, stigma and inadequacies among its residents.

The three sites discussed in these chapters underwent significant restructuring after 2000. The contributors demonstrate that the changing educational landscapes in these locations have been shaped differently, in response to the demands placed upon them. As they offer a close and detailed reading of the changes, the following aspects emerge. The state-led urban reform agenda and numerous planning regimes that see cities as engines of economic growth do not have a substantive plan for education. New economic interventions in Indian cities are based on an overall neoliberal direction of state policy that espouses market drive, deregulation and greater private participation in social services. Education in India has expanded a great deal, and while there has been a growing demand for good quality education, access to it remains uneven.

The reality of segregated living and learning in India gets further compounded with policies of urban development that lead to the institutionalisation of exclusively protected and increasingly privatised places. Furthermore, the interventions of urban restructuring have produced deeper social margins. In many ways, the imagination of a mega/world-class/smart city that is based on greater urban connectivity, amenities and flexibility holds within it the contradictions that lead to exclusion of different types for the working poor. To accelerate urban development, the Indian state has invested in three prominent strategies: eviction of the poor through slum clearance, creation of special economic zones and construction of peri-urban settlements and towns.

In Delhi, the production of the capital city rested on the destruction of village lands, a slowly growing network of differentiated schooling that thrived since the 1980s and the expanding migrant neighbourhoods at the fringes that tell the story of the expanding city. Detailing the turbulent history of Delhi's

city-making, Geetha Nambissan, in chapter 4, points to the aspirational transition towards becoming 'world-class' that led to the clearing out of working-class neighbourhoods in favour of aestheticisation. As the *bastis* were demolished, relocating the poor to the periphery of the city, many families had to discontinue schooling of their children as barely any provisions were made at the site of relocation. In her chapter, Nambissan juxtaposes the growth of urban infrastructure in Delhi and the expansion of 'international' private schools for the elite with the dwindling of good-quality, publicly funded education for the poor.

Shivali Tukdeo, in chapter 5, focuses on Bangalore's expansion and the introduction of the metro rail as an essential element towards becoming a global city. She focuses on families that were 'legally' relocated and given housing on the outskirts of the city that have been part of Bangalore's speculative growth. Being a city also known for its scientific institutions, information technology hubs and public sector units, the contribution of its educational institutions to the city has been recognised. Similarly, the city's turn after 2000 towards enclave-based living and high-end consumption practices has also received attention (Goldman 2010; Nair 2005).

Tukdeo's chapter focuses on the workings of the peri-urban as she investigates how a loss of livelihoods for working parents adversely affects the trajectory of schooling for their children. As the city is being spatially reordered, it is also important to understand how the 'peri-urban' becomes a place where the poor are relegated to and from where they must struggle to access the city and its institutions. Thus, the politics of spatial and educational restructuring under neoliberal urban directives shows a steady constriction of access to education for the poor on the one hand and their aspirations to access good-quality institutions for their children on the other.

Post-liberalisation policy directions in India have been unambiguous in facilitating private and exclusive zones for a smooth landing of capital. The refashioning of economic and social priorities after liberalisation led to the promotion of private enterprises with minimum restrictions. Just as India moved to the production of market-driven ideas of urban reform, these priorities also enabled a discourse on private educational enterprises that stressed the need for these to be freed from excessive regulation. Debarati Bagchi, in chapter 6, looks at the linkages between land markets and the education market as she historicises land-grant policies of the 1960s that were instrumental in creating reputed institutions of higher education in India. Contemporary practices of land acquisition, as Bagchi points out, use the rhetoric of 'public purpose', but

deploy strategies of acquisition in predominantly agrarian areas that create an educational space for the elite. Bagchi demonstrates how private investments in higher education at the fringes of a metropolitan city like Delhi occur by manipulating laws, thus creating the practice of gated property and speculative markets that give way to ‘world-class’ universities in the hinterland.

Each of the chapters focuses on specific contexts and considers different driving forces that set education in conversation with the urban. The aspirational transition of Delhi from a megacity to a world-class city, the desire for better-quality urban rail infrastructure and the formation of an exclusive education hub are different moments in the overall historical trajectory of reforms. In a highly stratified and deeply fissured education system as in India, policy imperatives based on cutting down public expenditure and enabling market expansion are bound to bring out tensions. As Indian cities take up transformative reforms in alignment with larger global regimes, spaces of habitation, work, leisure and learning in cities get altered. The working poor in urbanising India are always on the move and never settled in a place. Education under these circumstances often becomes the first casualty as moving populations are rarely supported educationally. By invisibilising the poor and their struggles, the right to equitable educational access is denied to their children.

## **Beyond the Metropolis: Urban Spaces, Education and Changing Aspirations**

The neglect of ‘non-metros’ by the Indian state in the early decades after independence, the subsequent stagnation of the agrarian sector and the slow structural transformation of the economy have disadvantaged these urban spaces (Scrase et al. 2015; Shaw 2019). The three chapters in this part present a small window into the urban–education dynamics in non-metropolitan spaces in India: a small town, Pipariya (Madhya Pradesh); a rural district that is seeing urban aspirations and migration, Raichur (Karnataka); and a ‘provincial city’, Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh).

The making of the small town can be seen in chapter 7 by Sadhna Saxena. Pipariya was a rural settlement till 1860, and by the 1940s it became a municipal town. Locational advantage and a relatively thriving agrarian hinterland made it a major market (*mandi*) for agricultural produce and agribusiness by the 1970s though there has been an absence of industrial development. The agrarian hinterland benefitted from programmes of agricultural development in the 1960s and 1970s; hence, there are fairly well-off farmers in villages around

the town. Traders, farmers and professionals migrated to the town for business as well as educational opportunities. The stratified spatial and social structure of the town is reflected in its dominant social groups: traders and farmers who belong to Brahmin, Rajput and some other caste groups. Adivasis who were displaced from their former forest lands live on the fringes of the town. Dalits and other poor migrants who come to the town in search of work from rural areas in Madhya Pradesh and beyond also reside on its margins. The city of Bhopal, the state capital, is just 150 kilometres away.

Raichur is one of the most economically backward and least urbanised districts of Karnataka state with a stagnant agrarian economy and the absence of industrial development. There is circular migration from the villages in search of work to cities – Bangalore (350 kilometres away from Raichur town), Pune and Hyderabad. Supriya RoyChowdhury and Vishaka Warriar draw on research carried out on youth from low-income/poor rural families who enrolled in skill centres in the towns of Raichur and Maski. They dwell on their aspirations and mobility pathways to the city of Bangalore (Bengaluru). Varanasi (Benaras), in contrast, has been a well-known centre for commerce, culture and indigenous traditions of education since precolonial times. It has, however, not experienced the rapid urbanisation of the metros and larger cities. The dominant caste groups are Brahmins and Bhumihars. There are Muslims who are traders, but most of them are low-income weavers. Nirmali Goswami, in chapter 8, refers to early residential segregation in Varanasi along caste and community lines to protect the relatively wealthy social groups 'ghettoising the poor'. The 'slums' and *mohallas* (localities/neighbourhoods) of Muslim weavers are situated in the densely populated areas of the old city. After the 1980s, peripheral areas of Varanasi were developed as spaces for elite residential spaces and private schools. Pipariya has also been expanding outwards as new settlements and private schools are being established on its periphery.

The broad contours of early publicly funded small-town schooling and the shift of the middle classes (traders and professionals) to private English-medium schools that began to emerge after the 1980s can be seen in Pipariya. Saxena attributes this trend to the lack of adequate provisioning of government schools and the decline in the quality of those available following shifts in the national education policy by the early 1990s. Growing demand for good-quality education, including from the rural hinterland, led to the mushrooming of low-cost (lower-fee) schools on the periphery of Pipariya and in nearby villages.

The unequal positioning of the metropolis vis-à-vis the smaller 'provincial' city in relation to the 'hegemonic' cultural practices of the metropolitan middle

classes is an interesting concern raised by Goswami. She shows how this has implications for the spread of private schooling and the demand for a 'certain kind of English'. Goswami's study of Muslim weaver families who lived in a cluster in the old city and their changing aspirations points to a complex negotiation of private education (mediated by gender norms) by parents for the first generation of children who were being sent to these schools. Also clear is that expanding school markets were creating further educational inequalities in relation to the 'kind of English' offered and spatial location.

Socio-spatial inequalities especially come into play in the arena of higher education. Middle classes in small towns (and cities) are sending their children to metros and larger cities for higher and professional education as well as 'coaching that is not available in the urban spaces they reside in'. Saxena's interviews with parents and youth in Pipariya present some of the varied trajectories of migration from small towns to the metropolitan/larger cities for professional education and high-status occupations. This is in a sense the back end of migration to metropolitan cities by middle/lower-middle and new social classes who no longer find the small town/city adequately catering to their children's futures. It is likely that these processes have encouraged the spread of higher education markets and the coaching industry in larger cities. Marginalised groups as seen in many of the chapters in this volume lack economic, cultural and social resources which constrain their ability to use education for social mobility, unlike the middle classes. Saxena's study shows that for her Dalit respondents, this also meant the unequal ability to use migration (to the city) as a key strategy for gaining access to higher education and better futures.

In the larger context of a stagnant agrarian economy, the absence of industrial growth and growing educated unemployment, especially among rural youth, RoyChowdhury and Warriar discuss the implications of the Skill India policy in its 2014 avatar. The policy was to train youth with skills, so that they could meet the needs of the growing urban services sector. The grim prospects of gainful employment and sustainable living for educated rural youth in Bangalore city or in Raichur town and the fault lines of the skills policy visualised with corporate interests in mind emerge starkly in the discussion. The authors flag larger questions that need to be raised around economic and urban development and education (skills) policy. Furthermore, the metropolis impinges on the smaller cities and towns (and their environs) in different ways. The latter also help constitute the former as seen in relation to migration to access higher education and coaching markets and low-paying service sector jobs in the urban economy.

## Neighbourhoods, Minorities and the Politics of Education

Neighbourhoods are central to the social and historical evolution of modern cities. *Mohalla*, *para*, *pol*, *ilaka* and *cheri* are among the terms used for residential settlements like localities and neighbourhoods in Indian and, more generally, in South Asian cities that are marked by distinct social and cultural identities. What binds these terms conceptually and materially is that they function not as administrative units of a city, but are defined by the social and historical bonds between those who inhabit them, whether through caste, class, kinship, religion or occupation.

The socio-historical constructions that define diverse neighbourhoods in Indian cities, and the ways in which these spaces come to distinguish their character and culture, have remained largely unexplored in the Indian context (Donner and De Neve 2007). The labour historian Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (2009a) was the first to draw attention to the importance of the neighbourhood as a 'social institution' within the industrialising city. A defining social characteristic of everyday life in urban neighbourhoods is 'proximity of living' that allows for practices of reciprocity, friendship and control, and 'sensorial intimacy' involving shared senses of sight, smell and sound (Abraham 2018). According to Henrike Donner (2007: 155), 'rules and regulations governing the mental map of the city or the neighbourhood are constantly negotiated, and transform a place into a space through gendered practices'.

The chapters by Anasua Chatterjee, Farah Farooqi and Yamini Agarwal focus on urban neighbourhoods, which are distinct in terms of their historical trajectories, social composition, internal differentiation and their experiences in relation to education. These chapters provide insights into the production of urban marginality in metropolitan cities of Kolkata (West Bengal) and Delhi through ethnographic inquiry into the social life of neighbourhoods. Bringing out the diversity of neighbourhoods within Indian cities, the chapters highlight the importance of looking at socio-historical context, social location of communities and questions of educational reform in the processes underlying marginality. Muslims dominate the neighbourhoods of Park Circus in Kolkata, with its historical roots in colonial urbanisation and the evolution of Calcutta as an imperial centre. Neighbourhood histories of old Delhi and Bara Hindu Rao stretch back to precolonial forms of occupation-based clusters and shared cultures of the Mughal court. In both Kolkata and old Delhi, the marginality of these neighbourhoods was produced by the historic events of the partition of India and successive incidents of communal violence accompanied by religious

stigmatisation since independence. These historical underpinnings, amplified by contemporary majoritarian politics and marginalisation of Muslims in the country, have acted to heighten segregation and various forms of exclusion of people living in these neighbourhoods. Tilak Vihar in New Delhi represents a different historical location, having been set up by the state as a rehabilitation colony for widows of anti-Sikh violence in the capital in November 1984 following the assassination of the then prime minister Indira Gandhi. It is interesting to observe that while all three sites present distinct socio-spatial character and ‘in-betweenness’, they are often referred to as ‘ghettos’ because their social composition comprises religious and, in the case of Park Circus and old Delhi, an increasingly persecuted community. The perception of Sikhs as an entrepreneurial and prosperous community that was able to recuperate from the ravages of 1984 ignores the operation of closure, or the ways in which dominant groups established mechanisms to maintain their positions of social and material privilege. As a result of closure of different forms, Tilak Vihar emerged as a distinctly gendered space, with women and their families subject to everyday violence.

Neighbourhoods have a complex relationship with the internal dynamics of class, caste, gender and other status groupings that mark social relations and social life within them. While the character of all neighbourhoods changes with time with the ‘slow violence’ associated with neoliberal urban development projects (Nixon 2011), dramatic events of history that involve social-ethnic violence and rupture are the most salient forces of change. In all three sites, social and ethnic violence created distance from other localities in the city. The aftermath of violence produces stigma through the association of *mohalla* with *mahaul* (ethos) (Manjrekar 2015; Sheth and Haeems 2002). The effects of stigma range from denial of education and employment opportunities to precarity of friendships as well as marriage alliances. Studying neighbourhoods involves understanding these linkages with processes of placemaking and association of place with space and territory in cities.

Anasua Chatterjee, in chapter 10, focuses on lived contexts and shows how educational access is coloured by stigma at a wider level but also limited by communal closure within the space of the neighbourhood of Park Circus. Elite private schools in close proximity to Park Circus are accessed by the affluent and upper-middle-class families in the Muslim community. Narratives of lower-middle-class residents reflect aspirations for their children through ‘good’ education, one that they hope to access through low-fee private schools in the area, as well as anxieties around meeting these demands of their children’s education.



The chapter places these realities within changing urban contexts, in which education is viewed as the principal route to social mobility and community betterment among Muslims, even as contemporary political conflict within society and in experiences of education intensify their marginalisation.

In chapter 11, Farah Farooqui describes, in her words, an 'extraordinary' school, Shafiq Memorial School, within a neighbourhood of old Delhi. The chapter is an ethnographic account from the 'inside', as she worked as a manager in the school. It places the school within the sociological matrix of Bara Hindu Rao where it is located, detailing the different communities and everyday social life of the neighbourhood. Economic precarity, state neglect, the real and feared anticipation of communal violence and deep mistrust of state agencies are part of the collective ethos of this neighbourhood, even as the community resiliently lays claim to citizenship rights and fights injustice at the everyday level.

Yamini Agarwal, in chapter 12, focuses on Tilak Vihar, known as 'widows' colony', a rehabilitation site set up in an area of New Delhi for the women survivors of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Unlike the neighbourhoods discussed in the previous papers, Tilak Vihar is not a self-segregated space but one demarcated by the state and, significantly, it is not the religious but the gender identity associated with the neighbourhood that signifies its stigmatised location in the city. The prejudice and stigma associated with Tilak Vihar add to the everyday violence faced by its residents. Within Delhi's world-class urban projects, Tilak Vihar remains singularly unserved and derelict.

Life histories of women survivors living in Tilak Vihar show how memory and trauma are kept alive through continuing discrimination at many levels. Lack of educational and occupational opportunities has hindered social mobility of the next generation and prolonged the trauma of violence. Agarwal shows how the gendered space of the neighbourhood is critical to the cycle of economic vulnerability and social stigma, influencing choices of schooling and employment. The very exercise of choice has a strong dependence on women's resilience in dealing with the multiple negotiations necessary for survival.

## Looking Ahead

As mentioned earlier, this collaborative project started with the aim of exploring the relationship between education and the urban in India since colonial times. Little did we know at the time that the final months of the project would be hit by a global public health crisis of epic proportions – the COVID-19 pandemic. In India, the pandemic caused enormous devastation of lives, livelihoods and education. It broke open the cracks in the systems of essential care and swept



away many of the established networks of economic stability. As in many other countries, the pandemic not only exposed the fault lines of the public health system in India but also exacerbated the precarity of a deeply unequal school system. An extended closure of schools and the introduction of online learning in the absence of digital reach in the school-going population led to the widening of existing educational inequalities. Many of the concerns raised in this volume around urban transformations, marginalities and education were brought into sharp focus over the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. That the effects of the pandemic were experienced by the urban poor in devastating ways reflects the patterns of urban expansion over the recent decades and the cumulation of disprivilege, including educational marginalisation (Meo and Chanchal 2021; Bakhla et al. 2021; Tilak 2021).

The chapters in this volume offer a window into understanding the complex and diverse urban formations in India and how these interface with emerging education landscapes, in relation to spatial transformations, institutional inequalities, policy shifts and social marginalities. Systems of exclusion and privilege created through these complex intersections are approached through the lens of urban transformations that sharpen our understanding of their social reproduction in relation to cities. Since the chapters refer to specific regional contexts and span a long time frame, beginning in the late colonial period and extending into the first two decades of the twenty-first century, we gain granular insights into how the provision of schools, access to education, experiences, aspirational landscapes and real outcomes have historically been, and continue to be, shaped by social, political and economic dynamics underlying mobility, aspirations, exclusions and privilege of different communities in cities.

Neoliberal policies in education especially since 2000 have been part of the larger set of market logics involving national and transnational corporate interests, changes in regulatory frameworks, and, most importantly, the creation of an elite consensus around large-scale privatisation in every domain, including education and urban development. As the chapters (by Nambissan, Bagchi and Tukdeo, for example) show, these recent changes in institutions and practices have been dramatic and spectacular; yet we also see that social exclusion of lower castes, working classes, Muslims, Adivasis and women has a longer history in Indian education in relation to urban expansion (see Bhattacharya's and Manjrekar and Basak's chapters, for example). A socio-historical lens enables us to see that exclusion has also involved struggles by people to negotiate with questions of marginality, and to secure opportunities, however meagre and tenuous, for advancement through education (see Agarwal's, Farooqi's, and Saxena's chapters, for example).

Examining linkages between education and socio-spatial justice, keeping in mind the diverse trajectories of the urban in India, is an important and urgent area of research. This calls for dialogue and collaborative research across disciplines. We hope that this volume will be a step towards building conversations in that direction.

## Note

1. The term 'the urban' is used to focus attention on socio-historical and contextual specificities of these spatial formations rather than as a generic descriptor. Urban scholars who have used the term include Gururani (2019); Lefebvre (2003 [1970]); Roy (2016); and Rath (2021). For a discussion on the urban and education interface, see Nambissan (2017).

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