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## University and Urban Transformation

### Reflections on an Education City in the National Capital Region

*Debarati Bagchi\**

While education studies and urban studies have flourished as rich areas of research in South Asia, the interface between education and the urban has received little scholarly attention. It is quite difficult to trace any mention of the processes of acquisition, allocation or demarcation of land for the universities in the archival records on education. Similarly, specific discussions concerning university land seem to be largely absent from land department records in post-independence India. This is perhaps why the literature on the land question in India, in the fields of both agrarian and urban studies, rarely mentions the histories of land acquisition for universities. That the first education commission formed after India's independence was the University Education Commission of 1948 indicates that higher education was meant to have a significant role in the planned development of the new nation state. Many such institutions were built in the 1950s and 1960s, often at the fringes of big cities. The earliest were the higher technical institutes, the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the first campus of which was opened in Kharagpur, a little far from the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata). A study of the architectural history of the institute argues that patterned on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, IIT Kharagpur was India's first 'college town' (Jain 2020). An Indo-American partnership enabled the establishment of agricultural universities in various states between 1952 and 1973. The 'land grant university' model in the United States served as the basis for

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envisioning these universities (Goldsmith 1990). Similarly, a collaboration with Harvard Business School and the Ford Foundation helped in opening campuses of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Ahmedabad and Calcutta. Scholars who have discussed these various ‘models’ that were adopted for the higher education institutions of technology, management and agriculture in post-independence India rarely deal with the land question directly. However, they give us important clues on the emerging pattern of higher education campuses on acres of gated land. In the first few decades after India’s independence, Delhi witnessed the establishment of a few academic campuses. The IIT was established in 1961 and the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in 1969, both in the southern parts of Delhi. JNU came up on the agricultural land of Munirka village where a substantial amount of land was acquired in the 1950s and 1960s. Sushmita Pati’s recently published work on the urban villages of Delhi presents a detailed study of land acquisition in Munirka (Pati 2022). Pati’s work is not specifically on the question of university land. However, her analysis of the transformation of rural property to urban property helps us understand the backstory of this gated campus. Also, her reflection on the social fabric of the ‘urban village’ of Munirka, bordering the JNU campus, offers a glimpse into university–neighbourhood relationships.

With the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s, there was a boom in private investment in higher education. A number of education hubs and private university campuses have grown on the fringes of the megacity bordering Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. My chapter will look into the connection between higher education institutions and urban transformation in the National Capital Region (NCR) during the post-liberalisation decades. This chapter draws attention to issues such as land and locality in the study of higher education. I argue that from the early 2000s, the domain of higher education in India witnessed a phenomenal shift that fostered a very specific relationship between education, land acquisition and urbanisation. This enabled a certain discourse on the linkages between the land market and the education market, thus bringing education and the urban into a conversation. This chapter reflects on the land–university nexus on the northern, agrarian fringes of Delhi by examining an instance of land acquisition for an elite education hub, the Rajiv Gandhi Education City (RGEC). I focus on the education hub as a site for studying ‘frontier urbanism’ and the entanglements of the agrarian and the urban in South Asia.

This chapter is divided into the following sections: First, it outlines how the Sonapat–Kundli region in Haryana was envisioned as a multifunctional urban

complex, which would form a part of the expansion plan for Delhi NCR. It also tries to locate the RGEC in this urban imaginary. In this context, the second section presents three key government regulations and pieces of legislation that facilitated private investment in higher education. Together, the first two sections highlight how, in the post-liberalisation decades, the rhetoric of urban policy and education commissions converged and echoed each other, thus paving the way for enclosed elite private education zones. In the third section, I explore the role of the state and the judiciary in facilitating land acquisition for the RGEC and look at how private education was posited as a 'public purpose'. The fourth section presents a reading of the advertisements published by the Haryana government and real-estate agencies that projected the emerging education hub as the prime mover of urban growth in the area. This section addresses the nature of 'speculative urbanism' in the agrarian stretches of Sonipat. In the fifth section, I briefly reflect on the farmers' protests against land acquisition and their negotiations for compensation. In the concluding section, I mention a few important transformations that could be discerned in the agrarian villages where the education city has come up.

## Locating the Education City in an 'Urban Complex'

The district of Sonipat in the state of Haryana lies on the northern border of India's national capital, Delhi. Kundli is an old village in the Rai *tehsil* (local administrative unit) of Sonipat. The region has always been one of the prime centres of the agrarian belt of eastern Haryana. The river Yamuna forms the eastern boundary of the district, and the entire region depends on the tributaries of the Western Yamuna Canal, the oldest in the region. A robust irrigation network and the soil of the Yamuna floodplains made the district chiefly dependent on agriculture, along with cattle rearing. Sonipat also served as the region's principal agricultural market. In recent decades, the Sonipat *tehsil* and the district have gradually been incorporated under certain census categories that identify 'urban areas' in Haryana. The concept of 'standard urban area', introduced in the 1971 census, was retained for Sonipat, along with ten other regions in Haryana. This mostly included the 'growth areas' of a city or a town with a population of 50,000, along with intervening 'potentially urban' stretches (Directorate of Census Operations 2001, 2011). From the 2001 census onwards, Sonipat, along with its outgrowths, was upgraded to the category of 'urban agglomeration'. 'Urban agglomeration' has been defined as 'continuous urban spread constituting a town and its adjoining urban outgrowths'. 'Outgrowths' are those areas that are contiguous to core towns and match certain 'urban features', mostly in terms of

infrastructure and amenities, of the core town (Directorate of Census Operations 2001, 2011). The censuses of 2001 and 2011 recognised the Sonipat Municipal Council as an ‘urban agglomeration’ with an ‘outgrowth’ in Sonipat *tehsil*. With the entry of various corporate investors and the mushrooming of residential and infrastructural projects, Sonipat has witnessed a shift in land use patterns in recent times, but agriculture remains the mainstay of the local people, leading to conflicts over land acquisition. Over the last 15 years, Sonipat has become the centre of a grand urbanisation plan conceived as part of the imagination of an expanding NCR.

By 1985, Delhi’s urbanisation had expanded beyond its metropolitan areas and included the surrounding agrarian and rural areas, enabling the creation of the NCR. Urban planning for the NCR had indicated that a city plan could not deal with the fast-expanding pressure on Delhi and that it was necessary to draw up a ‘regional plan’. After the establishment of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) by an act passed in 1957, the first Master Plan for Delhi (MPD) was conceived in 1962, with a 20-year vision for the planned development of the national capital in post-independence India. The first MPD was renewed in 1990, and the most recent one – the Master Plan for Delhi 2021 (MPD 2021), also known as Vision 2021 – was published in 2007. These plans chiefly related to land use for the expansion of infrastructure and services, not only to deal with the pressures of an increasing population and rising in-migration but also to enable a projected vision of a ‘better quality of life’. Vision 2021 aimed to make Delhi a ‘global metropolis and a world-class city’, declaring that the planning process itself was the cornerstone of this imagination of what constituted ‘world class’ (DDA 2017: iv).

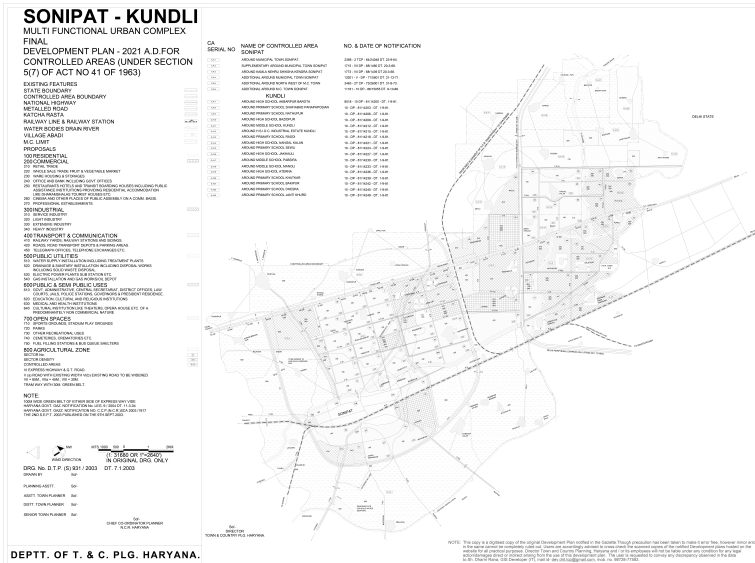
Scholars have noted that the remaking of the urban space to match a certain vision of what is understood as ‘world class’ has been a chief attribute of the rapid expansion of the urban frontier since the turn of the century (Roy 2011).<sup>1</sup> The MPD 2021 strongly disseminated this imagination and placed greater emphasis on regional development compared to the previous plans. Recognising a growing urban continuum between Delhi and the surrounding areas in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, a regional plan was drawn up as part of the larger master plan. It divided ‘urbanisable’ areas bordering Delhi NCR into a few ‘policy zones’, one of which was the Central National Capital Region (Central NCR). The neighbouring towns of Sonipat–Kundli in the state of Haryana were included as one of the regions of ‘urbanisable Central NCR’ (DDA 2017: 1). Previously, the NCR Plan 2001 had recognised Kundli area as one to be developed as a Delhi Metropolitan Area (DMA) town to have a population of 1.5 lakh by 2001.



Based on the NCR Planning Board's emphasis on developing DMA towns and tapping their 'developmental potential', the Haryana government resolved to earmark a larger belt for an 'integrated complex comprising of controlled areas declared around Sonipat town and for Kundli township'.<sup>2</sup> This complex was projected to become a major investment region and to serve a population of 10 lakh by 2021. The grand plan was called the Sonipat–Kundli Multifunctional Urban Complex.<sup>3</sup> The Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) and the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) were entrusted with the task of acquiring land and developing infrastructure to attract investment. The Town and Country Planning Department of the Haryana government was charged with implementing the final plan. Of the smaller jurisdictions of the Sonipat Municipal Council, the district of Sonipat was first upgraded into a DMA town and, finally, into a more integrated and bigger urban complex. Such transitions were indicative of what Sudeshna Mitra calls the 'flexible territorialisation of the peri-urban'. Mitra foregrounds the role of the state as an enabler for the real-estate market and shows how the state flexibly consolidates and alters the jurisdictions of development authorities on urban peripheries to fit with the planning conceptions of a metropolitan region (Mitra 2018: 60). We shall come back to this point in the third and fourth sections.

The Town and Country Planning Department of the Haryana government published the final development plan for the Sonipat–Kundli Multifunctional Urban Complex in 2003.<sup>4</sup> The plan divided the total urbanisable area into various land use categories: residential, commercial, industrial, transport and communication, public utility, public and semi-public uses, and green belts and open spaces. The government, however, reserved for itself the final authority to amend and flexibly alter the allocation and use of land (Sarkar 2015: 441). In this context, it is necessary to point out that the development plan included 'education institution purposes' in the 'public and semi-public' clause of the land-use classification. The 2003 notification declared that 'suitable areas on Sonipat–Murthal Road have been earmarked for educational institution purposes which would also serve as a buffer between other urbanisable area[s] and [the] agricultural zone'.<sup>5</sup> If we take a look at the list of markers on the left panel of the map of the urban complex, the area earmarked for educational institutions has been indicated as 620 (Figure 6.1).

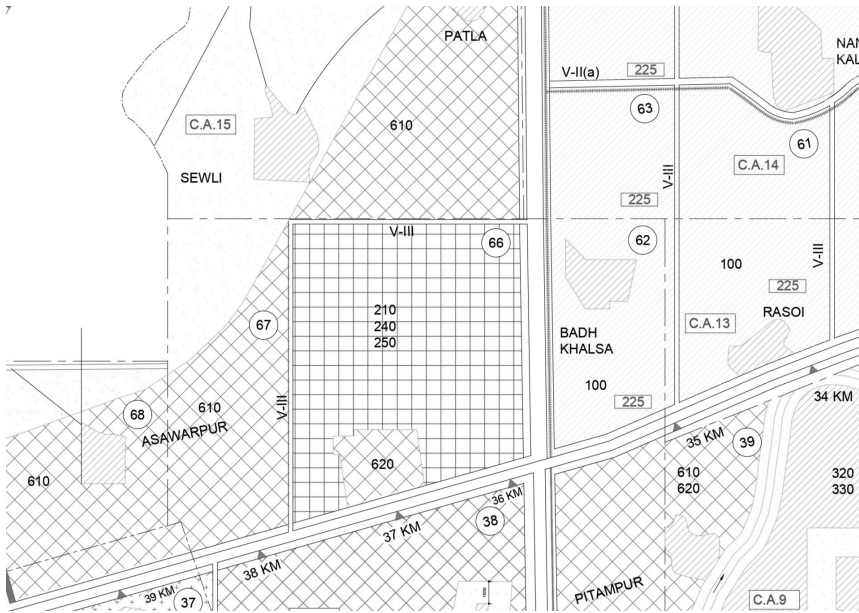
If we zoom into the earmarked area, we can see that it corresponds to the boundaries of a large stretch that would be projected as land for the RGEC a few years later. We can also locate Asawarpur, Sewli, Patla and Badh Khalsa – some of the villages where land would be acquired eventually (Figure 6.2).



**Figure 6.1** Sonipat–Kundli Multifunctional Urban Complex’s final development plan, 2003

Source: Town and Country Planning Department, Government of Haryana, [https://tcpharyana.gov.in/Development\\_Plan/ColouredCopy/SONIPAT\\_FDP\\_2021.pdf](https://tcpharyana.gov.in/Development_Plan/ColouredCopy/SONIPAT_FDP_2021.pdf) (accessed 20 January 2021).

It is crucial to keep in mind that apart from being an integral part of the new urban complex, the education city was also envisioned in connection with the two expressway corridors proposed in the Regional Plan 2021. The Kundli–Manesar–Palwal (KMP) Expressway, also known as the Western Peripheral Expressway, and the Kundli–Ghaziabad–Palwal (KGP) Expressway, also known as the Eastern Peripheral Expressway, were planned as a peripheral road network facilitating rapid transit between Haryana and Delhi, bypassing the inner city. The idea of developing a ‘global corridor’ with sector-specific, theme-based sub-cities along the KMP expressway was proposed, and education was one among the many themes: ‘Government of Haryana has proposed development of townships along the KMP expressway corridor. New townships are envisaged as functional theme towns covering education, knowledge, trade and finance, medical health, biotech, entertainment, leisure etc.’ (NCR Planning Board 2021: 84). Such cluster cities would together form the urban corridor. A fashion city, an entertainment city and a few more were proposed in the plan for Gurgaon (now Gurugram) (*Financial Express* 2009). The education city was assigned to



*Source:* Town and Country Planning Department, Government of Haryana, [https://tcepharyana.gov.in/Development\\_Plan/ColouredCopy/SONIPAT\\_FDP\\_2021.pdf](https://tcepharyana.gov.in/Development_Plan/ColouredCopy/SONIPAT_FDP_2021.pdf) (accessed 20 January 2021).

the Sonipat–Kundli region. Thus, the RGEC was integral to the planning vision of the urban complex in the Sonipat–Kundli region as well as to the larger plan for the expressway corridor. The MPD and the subsequent framing of the urban complex plan and the expressway corridor plan by the Haryana government helps us locate the phenomenon of the education city in the specific context of urban expansion in Sonipat from the mid-2000s. This chapter highlights how education has been central to the story of urbanisation in this urban periphery.

## Education Commissions and Legislations of the 2000s: Facilitating Privatisation

Private universities are not a new phenomenon in India. In 1995, Sikkim Manipal University was established through the Sikkim Manipal University of Health, Medical and Technological Sciences Act.<sup>6</sup> This pioneered a new era in private investment in higher education. Throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, however, during the early phase of privatisation, most Indian universities

were established to offer market-oriented technical courses, which also came to be known as 'professional courses'. It has been observed that the largest share of private investment in higher education went into engineering and management, promoting the so-called IT sector boom in India. The concept of the 'mainstream' private university, offering courses in all conventional higher education disciplines and established by an act passed by the state legislature, is a distinctly post-2000 phenomenon. In 2003, the University Grants Commission (UGC) brought out the UGC (Establishment of and Maintenance of Standards in Private Universities) Regulations. Recognising the setting up of private universities by state acts as a 'recent phenomenon', the UGC laid down a set of conditions and regulatory mechanisms specifically for the establishment and operation of such universities (UGC 2003). In little more than a decade after the liberalisation of the economy in 1991, higher education policies started to adapt to the new language of 'development' that urban policymakers had already ushered in. It is perhaps not a coincidence that 2003 was the year in which both the Haryana government's urban complex plan and the UGC's regulations for private universities were published.

By 2005, large-scale acquisition of land for the area earmarked for a 'world-class' education hub as part of the urban complex would begin. In the same year, the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was constituted to recommend changes in higher education financing and curricula to make them compatible with the demands of the market. This commission may be considered a watershed in the history of education commissions for its rhetoric on generating resources for higher education. The NKC did not overtly advocate the establishment of 'for-profit private higher education' and acknowledged the need to increase the share of government financing. But, at the same time, it strongly suggested that the expansion of higher education would not be possible without enhanced levels of financing from 'both public and private sources' (NKC 2007). The commission clearly stated the need to 'diversify' sources of finance and 'explore other possibilities' that could complement the increase in public expenditure. And land was one such possibility: 'It is essential to stimulate private investment in education as a means of extending educational opportunities. It may be possible to leverage public resources, especially in the form of land grants, to attract more (not-for-profit) private investment' (NKC 2007: 22). The commission suggested that public universities were 'sitting on a large reservoir of untapped resources in the form of land' and that they should be encouraged to capitalise their land entitlements.

Breaking away from the existing trend towards private universities offering technical and professional courses, the commission recommended the creation of 50 national universities that would 'train students in a variety of disciplines including humanities, social sciences, basic sciences, commerce and professional subjects at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels' (NKC 2007: 22). These would be 'exemplars for the rest of the nation', providing education 'of the highest standard'. And such a high standard of education was, for the first time, directly connected with an infrastructural need for land resource and its optimum utilisation and management to 'generate income'. Jandhyala B. G. Tilak, well known for his extensive research on finance in higher education, strongly criticised the commission for the favourable position it took towards privatisation. He cautioned that the proposal to use land as a source of finance

might mean either sale or renting (or leasing) out land to the private sector for commercial purposes. This means that land received either free or at a highly subsidised price from the government will be put to commercial use, essentially for the benefit of the private sector. This cannot be justified. (Tilak 2007: 632)

Pointing out that public finance was an integral constituent of universities worldwide, the commission further highlighted that the initial financial support should come from the government. 'Each university may be endowed with a substantial allocation of public land, in excess of its spatial requirements. The excess land can be a subsequent source of income generation.' Such a self-financed privatisation model had to work in tandem with a relaxation of tax laws by the state to encourage large endowments. And, finally, encouragement to tap 'other sources' for generating funds invariably ended up in the recommendation to give these universities autonomy in setting student fee levels (NKC 2007: 22).

As we have already briefly noted, the post-1990s private investment boom in higher education was initially an IT sector phenomenon. Thus, quite predictably, the push to incentivise privatisation came from the head of the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) within a decade of the establishment of Manipal University. In 2005, NASSCOM's president, Kiran Karnik, advocated the creation of special economic zones (SEZs) for higher education, along the lines of those in industry. Since the times required huge investment in education, he told reporters, 'the SEZ concept should be tried on a pilot basis in higher and professional education' to encourage more private participation in the sector. He believed it would pave the way for quality education

since the government had limited resources to invest (Zee News 2005). And two years later, the NKC came up with its recommendations, endorsing starkly similar views on facilitating the creation of a land reserve for private universities. Here, we should keep in mind that this was also the high noon of struggles against large-scale dispossession caused by land acquisition for corporate interests across India, after the passing of the SEZ Act in 2005. Although Karnik was mainly trying to suggest a way to address the talent crunch faced by the IT sector, it was quite a lucrative proposition for private investors in the higher education field in general. It is no surprise that in another 10 years' time, the founding vice chancellor of an elite private university in Sonapat, labelled a 'global university', would echo Karnik's words. It was emphasised that to ensure 'world-class universities', the government had to demarcate areas where rules governing taxation, resource use and bureaucratic regulation would be relaxed (Raj Kumar 2015).

From the early 2000s, various state governments started to enact legislation to establish private universities. Chhattisgarh was the first state to pass a Private Universities' Act in 2002, followed in 2005 by Rajasthan, the state with the most private universities to the present day. The allocation of plots for university hubs as part of the urban complex in Haryana was facilitated by the Haryana Private Universities Act, 2006, which defined the key criteria for setting up a private university. It required the investor to demonstrate prior possession of land for the university: 'No university shall be established unless the sponsoring body is in possession of – I. a minimum of 20 acres of land outside the municipal limits; or II. A minimum of 10 acres of land within the municipal areas' (Government of Haryana 2006). The act also clearly indicated that the 'university shall be self-financed and will not be entitled to any grant or other financial assistance from the Government or any board or corporation owned or controlled by the Government' (Government of Haryana 2006).

With reference to this discussion, I wish to draw attention to the overlapping timeframes and converging rhetoric of urban policies and higher education commission reports. This reveals how the discourses of urbanisation and education were gradually becoming more entangled during the post-liberalisation decades. Universities, like roads, industries and housing, were now part of the discourse on land acquisition for private interests and change of land use on urban frontiers, and thus more integral to so-called urban policies. Similarly, the idea was spreading that to be 'world class', higher education required universities to be part of a large gated area with other urban amenities. The discussion about setting up and running universities was no longer confined to the issue of 'financing'. As Tilak rightly observed, the NKC's recommendations on the proper use of land

resource left ample scope for commercial use of university land. By focusing on the case of an ‘education city’, I will argue that universities were now conceived of as corporate landholders and states as land brokers in facilitating a specific nexus between education and urbanisation. Higher education was, for the first time, being envisioned as part of a larger zone of corporate investment.

## **Privatised Education as ‘Public Purpose’: Land Acquisition for the Education City**

Proximity to a megacity has been seen as the main reason why investors and developers were attracted to Haryana’s districts bordering Delhi. Loraine Kennedy’s study of SEZs in the NCR reveals that right from the 1990s, the Haryana government adopted an aggressive policy of building up a land bank (Kennedy 2014: 172). The agrarian stretches of Gurgaon in the south-west of Delhi were transformed into a leading IT hub, followed by other districts, such as Manesar, that saw the establishment of Industrial Model Township. Gurgaon has remained one of the most important sites for studying the making of India’s ‘urbanising frontiers’. It was one of the first urban peripheries where ‘hundreds of acres of agrarian land was changed and from a cluster of ... villages, Gurgaon emerged as India’s Millennial City’ (Gururani 2019: 2). Urbanisation and transformation of land in the Sonipat–Kundli region is more recent and remains relatively understudied.

Swagato Sarkar has examined the larger process of acquisition and the dynamics of the land market in this area between 2005 and 2014, although he does not mention the education hubs. He demonstrates how the Sonipat–Kundli Multifunctional Urban Complex plan made two kinds of land market possible in the Sonipat region: First, there emerged a market in leasehold land that the government acquired and controlled and sold to private parties by constantly amending the original land use zones. Second, outside the control area, there emerged a private micro-land market dominated by private players (Sarkar 2015: 441). The two chief sites for education hubs on both sides of National Highway 1 (NH 1) in Sonipat represent the two forms of land acquisition model that Sarkar mentions. In the proximity of NH 1, the Haryana state government acquired land for the RGEC, with the purpose of demarcating and selling plots to private universities and other developers and corporations. On the other side, at a small distance from the highway, the O. P. Jindal Global University was established at around the same time. The Jindal Group, a leading business conglomerate



based in Haryana, themselves acquired land in phases from the farmers for the university. This chapter focuses on the first model.

As already mentioned, the combined plans of the Sonipat–Kundli urban project and the expressway corridor project envisioned the Rai *tehsil* of Sonipat as predominantly fuelled by a knowledge economy close to the national capital. It has been observed that since the ‘urban turn’, proximity to urban centres and highways has emerged as a crucial determinant of land values. The price of land now depends on ‘location’ instead of the availability of irrigation or the fertility of the land (Gururani 2019: 8; Balakrishnan 2019: 7; Pati 2022). The location of the RGECE, well placed in terms of its distance from a megacity and the expressways, was to become one of the selling points for the region’s urbanisation (*Business Standard* 2013). The RGECE was a 5000-acre dream project of the then chief minister of Haryana. The land acquisition for the RGECE was conceived in two phases. In 2004, the land of seven villages was acquired for the construction of the KMP Expressway. Government notification of the first phase of land acquisition for the education city was issued a year later, in November 2005.<sup>7</sup> The notification declared that land of nine villages, totalling 2,006.50 acres, would be acquired for ‘the development and utilisation of land for commercial, institutional and residential purposes for Sectors 65–68, Sonapat known as the Rajiv Gandhi Educational City, Phase-I’ (Punjab–Haryana High Court 2019). In the conceptual plan, the total amount of land acquired for the first phase was divided under different heads. Only 535 acres were assigned for ‘education plots’, while the rest was allocated to various infrastructural and commercial purposes, such as residential, commercial, transportation, health facilities, water treatment, and so on (SBA Enviro Systems Private Limited 2019: 5).

Understanding the role of the state has been an important focus of the literature on the restructuring of the ‘urban frontier’. Using terms such as ‘megaprojects’, ‘greenfield frontiers’, and ‘peri-urban’ gated spaces, urbanists have produced a substantial body of research on state strategies. It has been observed that these strategies have certain tendencies in common, such as the framing of special regulations, expediting policies and creating enclaves insulated from the social and political realities of the surroundings. Kennedy and Sood have defined ‘greenfield urban development’ as ‘industrial parks and townships built through public–private partnerships on the urban peripheries’ (Kennedy and Sood 2016: 42). The RGECE followed a somewhat similar model for building universities and education institutes. The creation of a land bank through ‘eminent domain’ and enclosure processes and the strengthening of a regulatory mechanism to



attract investment have been central to the making of such urban hubs and infrastructural corridors.

Notification of the first phase of land acquisition for the RGEC was issued under section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894. This section of the act allowed the government to acquire land for 'public purpose':

Whenever it appears to the [appropriate government] that land in any locality [is needed or] is likely to be needed for any public purpose [or for a company] a notification to that effect shall be published in the Official Gazette ... and the Collector shall cause public notice of the substance of such notification to be given at convenient places in the said locality. (Land Acquisition Act 1894: section 4)

Land acquisition in the name of 'public purpose' is based on the idea of 'eminent domain' that confers sovereign power on the state to acquire private land in exchange of compensation, for a purpose that will serve the society. Sarkar's study of commodification of land in Sonipat shows how the 'public purpose clause was misused ... public and semi-public and industrial sectors [were] converted into the residential and commercial sectors' (Sarkar 2015: 442). HUDA and the HSIIDC acquired large stretches of land demarcated as public utilities and public/semi-public use zones by applying the public purpose clause of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894.

The public purpose clause has caused much debate among scholars and policymakers at different junctures in the history of land acquisition in India. It has been observed that the insistence on a public purpose implicitly assumes that those who have to surrender property are being asked to make sacrifices for the greater common good, which adds a touch of public morality to involuntary loss and dispossession (Ghatak and Ghosh 2011; Ramanathan 2011). The Indian state has often acted as an estate agent for companies, facilitating land acquisition in favour of private interests by using the public purpose clause. The literature on the struggles for the SEZs from the mid-2000s onwards reveals that even after subsequent amendments in the Land Acquisition Act, the definition and intent of 'public purpose' has remained quite vague (Gonsalves 2010). The Singur and Nandigram movements in West Bengal against the state acquiring land for a corporate car factory and an SEZ in 2006–2007 re-energised the debate on whether private interest can be legitimised as a public purpose. Ananya Roy has observed that corporate investors were not only getting land in these two sites but also substantial state subsidies in the name of 'public purpose'. And then displacement was justified in the name of 'consent-based compensation'

(Roy 2011: 269). Together, these twin concepts were supposed to ease the process of displacement and dispossession and to free up agrarian land on the peri-urban edges for the making of 'world-class cities'. The Land Acquisition Act provided the juridical framework for this process, while the movements in Singur and Nandigram, Roy argues, put up a 'blockade' to it (Roy 2011).

Veronique Dupont's work draws our attention to how the judiciary has emerged as a key actor in urban governance through the public interest litigation (PIL) procedure. Instead of being neutral in the face of conflicting interests, the courts often act as a 'stakeholder in the affairs of the city', maintaining an ambiguous position (Dupont 2007: 92). In her incisive study of the legal cases related to the Bangalore–Mysore infrastructural corridor between 1996 and 2007, Janaki Nair shows that the judiciary moved away from the discourse of the 1950s and 1960s that emboldened the postcolonial state to acquire land for various developmental projects and redefined 'public purpose'. First conceived as an expressway and later renamed an 'infrastructure corridor', this road 'was a mere ruse for real estate production', Nair observes, since the investors' chief interest was in the five townships planned along the corridor (Nair 2015). And the court judgments justified the state's role in facilitating townships that offered the 'benefits of big city life', thus equating 'public purpose' with company interest and assigning a new role to the state as 'a complement to the production of real estate'. Thus, 'public purpose' now implied the state's participation in fuelling the growth of speculative markets in the urban peripheries.

Since the 1990s, states have increasingly taken on the role of acquiring land for private companies, and courts have largely refused to entertain petitions questioning whether the promotion of private industry is a legitimate public purpose. It was now imperative to legitimise private investment in higher education as a 'public purpose' (Ramanathan 2008: 27). Once the government notified land acquisition for the RGEC, an 'instant petition' was filed by the landholders to nullify the notification. The court dismissed the petition and expressed its view that it should not 'interfere' in the matter since the land was being acquired for the 'laudable purpose' of establishing an education city. To explain why it was laudable, the court reiterated the rhetoric that the state government was using to promote the RGEC, liberally drawing on phrases such as 'top class' and 'world class' as essential markers for catching up with some kind of globally recognised 'standard' that could only be guaranteed by large-scale corporate investment. The court insisted that the land was for

a knowledge city which was likely to have top class infrastructure and support services to attract world class educational institutes to open their

campuses there. The effort is to attract the world's best education talent in this era and make the education city a hub of learning by taking the maximum advantage of globalisation. (Punjab–Haryana High Court 2008)

The creation of elite hubs of learning in the midst of a predominantly agrarian society, prioritising 'importing talents' from other parts of the world as opposed to serving the locality or region, was given legal legitimacy by the court's endorsement. The court's rhetoric emboldened the process of 'consenting' to the hegemonic icon of the 'world class'. The dream of the 'world-class city' was premised on a neoliberal model of urban development with an overt emphasis on 'efficiency in urban infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms' and was meant to appeal to the new urban consumer-citizen. In the case of the education hubs in Sonipat, a niche urban consumer class with aspirations for higher education matching 'global standards' was being targeted. Education was conceived as the infrastructure that would turn the region into a city and open it up for real-estate speculation.

## Education in the Real-Estate Market

Not only was education redefined as a 'public purpose' in the context of land acquisition, but it also became the major driving force behind selling land in the region. Michael Goldman's research on Bangalore introduced the notion of 'speculative urbanism'. He argued that the phenomenon of 'world city'-making relied on the transformation of rural economies into urban real estate and that the government played an active role in this speculative economy: 'Land speculation and active dispossession of those working and living in the rural periphery ... is the main business of government today.' This has led to a shift into new forms of 'speculative government, economy, urbanism and citizenship' (Goldman 2010: 1). Subsequent research on various urban spaces in India has deployed and expanded on Goldman's formulation. Michael Levien's work on SEZs identified a shift in the ideology and mode of land acquisition in India in the 1990s and argued that while the Nehruvian developmental state represented a regime that acquired 'land for production', the neoliberal regime acquired 'land for the market'. In line with the 'speculative urbanism' framework, Levien has observed that under the new regime of urban development, the state acted as a land broker facilitating the transfer of land from peasants to corporate entities (Levien 2013). Bhuvaneswari Raman's study of the peri-urban real-estate markets in Chennai developed and further nuanced Goldman's concept by analysing his layered and complex account of the large, middle-sized and small developers and their varying

roles in the real-estate market. She also presents the story of land acquisition in a more layered way and highlights how the responses of dispossessed landowners to various kinds of acquisition and to the agencies implementing the laws differed (Raman 2016).

In the process of conceiving, promoting and framing regulatory mechanisms for land acquisition for the RGEC project, the state opened up the land market for private investment in universities. Not only did this promote a certain form of enclosed, elite higher education, but it also meant that education became part of real-estate speculation. The education city was to host multiple university campuses, housing facilities, commercial establishments and green zones (Pani 2018). A glance at HUDA's advertisement for plots for sale in the education city reveals the government's role in forging an education–real estate nexus. HUDA invited applications from 'eligible organisations keen on setting up world class educational institutions/universities in the well-developed and fast upcoming Rajiv Gandhi Education City'. A detailed chart listed the cost per square metre of land in accordance with the size of the plot. 'Good connectivity' – the fact that the RGEC was to be located at the strategic juncture of the national highway and the new peripheral expressways that reduced the distance between Sonipat and Delhi – was a crucial selling point for the project.<sup>8</sup> The advertisement also laid out the criteria for eligibility and invited applications from four kinds of educational institutions. The first was 'reputed institutions/private universities' that included institutions run by organisations/educational societies/trusts with an established track record of more than ten years. The second category included institutions of higher education 'run by business houses having annual turnover of 5,000 crore INR, provided they run on no profit no loss basis'. The other two types of eligible institutions were private universities with long-term foreign tie-ups and universities set up under the Haryana Private Universities Act of 2006.<sup>9</sup> As already mentioned, the act had framed a set of regulations to encourage investment in education. The advertisement reveals that HUDA's scheme of opening up agrarian land for real estate speculation in Sonipat not only facilitated the entry of big businesses into higher education but also directly connected the excellence of the so-called world-class higher education with the big corporates' annual turnover and foreign tie-ups. The RGEC became a crucial site for studying the coming together of the land market and the education market.

Although the process of acquiring land for the education city had begun in 2005, the foundation stone was not laid until 2012. By that time, the government had received applications from ten projects, three of which became operational in the next few years (SRM University 2012; *Deccan Herald* 2012). A little before

the inauguration, industry observers had already started speculating about whether the Sonipat–Kundli region was another Gurgaon in the making. According to a contemporary estimate published in the *Economic Times*, average real-estate prices plummeted more than four times between 2005 and 2012. The report quoted well-known corporate executives, who reassured prospective investors that property prices in the area were not likely to fall in the foreseeable future (Sinha 2012). In Gurgaon, the urbanisation model was fuelled by an IT sector boom in the area. In the Sonipat–Kundli region, the state government envisaged a higher education city. Several real-estate players and property developers were interested in investing in this urban complex. A look at some of the real-estate websites around this time gives us an idea of how this area was imagined as a real-estate market. A study of the advertisements reveals that a few markers were identified to promote and market land in the region: First, the education hub was portrayed as the major driver for the urbanisation of the area and thus for an increase in land prices. Second, proximity to the big city was another major index that would potentially allow the education hub to flourish in this otherwise largely agrarian area. Third, connectivity through major highways and expressways made the location of the education city strategic and thus capable of attracting buyers for residential and commercial plots.

In a few days after the inauguration of the RGEC in 2012, one real-estate property dealer, Care Investment, published a write-up with a description and images of the Sonipat–Kundli area with the RGEC at its centre. Under the catchy title ‘Kundli: New New Delhi ... the Next Gurgaon in Making’, the piece promoted Sonipat–Kundli as ‘the emerging new destination’ (Careinvestments Real Estate 2012). It began by explaining that escalating real-estate prices in Delhi had compelled people to look for cheaper alternative options within driving distance, and thus the need for the development of regions like Sonipat–Kundli arose. At the outset, the advertisement charted a number of ‘mega crore’ infrastructural projects allocated to the region – the promised fast trains, horticultural market terminal, textile park and one SEZ project. However, all of these were still at the planning stage, whereas the RGEC was the first INR 5,000 crore project already inaugurated by the chief minister. It was thus projected as ‘the main driving factor in this region for development like IT hubs are for Gurgaon today’ and as the ‘first-[of]-its-kind in the country’. It was claimed that a hub of elite private universities had the potential to attract ‘middle class families out of Delhi’ since ‘good universities can create opportunities for employment for lecturers/teachers/human resources/class IV jobs. When fully established Rajiv Gandhi Education city would be world’s largest education city accommodating 1.5 lakh students.

They are planning to bring in institutions like Oxford and Cambridge, so as to attract international students as well' (Careinvestments Real Estate 2012).

To further emphasise how sprawling these private education hubs would be, the writer of this advertising piece compared the total planned area of the RGEC with the landholdings of other established private universities to demonstrate that no other campus in India occupied as big an area:

Just to emphasise how big area 5000 acres was, here is what I found when I googled Delhi University area in acres: North Delhi University campus is spread over 495 acres. South Delhi University enjoys over 69 acres campus. Jawahar Lal Nehru University campus occupies 1000 acres land. Renowned IIT Delhi campus covers 320 acres area. AIIMS has 115 acre campus. Delhi College of Engineering is sprawled over 164 acres of land. (Careinvestments Real Estate 2012)

The real-estate company's advertising piece ended with the promise that the Sonipat–Kundli region was going to host India's biggest educational project and would thus eventually become one of the regions with the best urban amenities.

A few years after the inauguration, another prominent real-estate agency, 99 Acres, came up with a similar approach for advertising the region. Their website on Sonipat properties carried the headline 'Sonipat set out to be the Biggest Educational Hub in NCR' (99 Acres 2014). The page explains that Sonipat, 'once an agricultural village', was 'now emerging as a hotspot for end users and investors' (99 Acres 2014). It clearly stated that 'following the announcements by the state government to make Sonapat an educational hub supported with various infrastructure developments', the focus of urbanisation around Delhi had started shifting from city centres to the suburbs and satellite towns towards the Haryana border. The approach was designed to attract buyers by projecting a rise in the demand for residential properties in the area. This demand was brought about by the way in which the state government had planned to 'change the skyline in Sonapat' by turning it into 'a haven for higher learning in the coming years'. The advertisement went on to point out that 'so far, in the entire NCR area, there is no well-defined hub of medical colleges, research, genetics, engineering colleges and law schools all in the same campus. Apart from being the centre for higher learning, Rajiv Gandhi Education City will also serve as a laboratory for advanced technologies' (99 Acres 2014). Thus, the advertisement persuaded potential buyers that a region developed on the back of higher learning was bound to offer higher standards of living as well.

The Jindal Group has had a long presence in the Sonipat region. Not only is it a major real-estate developer, but it has also invested in a university outside the boundaries of the RGECC. Around 2005–2006, the Jindals acquired land directly from farmers in the villages of Jagdishpur and Rathdana, a few kilometres from the national highway, and established the O. P. Jindal Global University with its own gated campus and housing. The Jindals also own vast tracts of land designated for their housing project – Jindal Global City. The Jindals are a key player in the land market in Sonipat; their website showcases the region in terms of not only the RGECC but also the university (Jindal Realty n.d.). Their advertisement tried to persuade homebuyers that the establishment of the 5,000-acre RGECC in Sonipat had made the city an important residential destination for those who had been moving out of the NCR because of skyrocketing property prices: ‘Apart from this, Jindal Global City also boasts of O. P. Jindal Global University that provides world class education.’ The Jindals claim that ‘taking into consideration the growth momentum, properties in Sonipat are expected to yield handsome returns in the next few years’. The advertisement thus urges: ‘Buy your dream property in Sonipat’ (Jindal Realty n.d.).

The state of Haryana developed a narrative that foregrounded Sonipat’s locational and other strategic advantages as an emerging urban centre near Delhi in order to invite businesses to buy and lease land. The state had, indeed, acted as a land broker by enclosing and putting agrarian land onto the real-estate market. The real-estate agents, on the other hand, developed a parallel narrative by foregrounding the education hub, which would eventually urbanise the region, in order to sell residential and commercial plots to potential buyers. The saleability of property in Sonipat depended on the saleability of higher education and vice versa. The hegemony of imported, first-world knowledge and expertise were invoked not only to market the universities and attract students but also to market the entire urban complex. ‘Oxford’ and ‘Cambridge’ were not merely examples of the coveted ‘world-class’ education infrastructure, but served as magic words that made education the prime mover for urbanising a region and providing a boost for speculation in the real-estate market.

## **Farmers’ Agitation against Land Acquisition: Some Reflections**

The agrarian belts of north-western India have long been a stronghold of the Jat community. The Jats have emerged as the most dominant landowning class, with a very strong clan-based social organisation. They have also remained powerful and



in control of the political scene in Haryana. Thus, quite predictably, they played an important role in the transformation of agrarian land and developed high stakes in the process of urban transformation and the entailed non-agricultural activities (Kennedy and Sood 2016: 175). Scholars have observed that the participation of the agrarian landed class in the emerging urban economy has 'blurred' the rural–urban divide (Kennedy and Sood 2016: 175) and has often produced curious spatial forms such as 'urban villages' (Pati 2022). A recent body of scholarship on 'frontier urbanism' has pointed out that to grasp the processes of urbanisation in South Asia, it is necessary to understand the entanglements of the agrarian and the urban (Gururani and Dasgupta 2018; Gururani 2019). The agrarian, this literature claims, has remained the most understudied area in urban studies scholarship. '[I]n predominantly agrarian societies like India, only by charting how the rural and the urban are co-produced, can we begin to understand the complex processes of sub/urbanisation and recognise that *the urban question is indeed also the agrarian question*' (Gururani 2019: 3, emphasis original). The analytical lens of the co-constitution of the agrarian and the urban can be useful in understanding the changing social and economic relations in the villages where land was acquired for the education city. It will also be crucial to understand what new forms of negotiation and alienation were engendered by an enclosed education hub in the predominantly agrarian areas. This section presents some preliminary reflections on these questions and indicates the direction that this research will eventually take.

As mentioned, the education city in Sonipat was initially conceived as a project on 5,000 acres of land in Sonipat, but the first phase of acquisition was limited to 2,006 acres. Fertile agricultural land from nine villages – Jakholi, Sewli, Patla, Badhkhalsa, Ferozepur Khadar, Asawarpur, Khewra, Bahalgarh and Badh Malik – was marked on the land acquisition plan. Landowners in these villages received a formal notification of acquisition on 17 November 2005 (*Dainik Bhaskar* 2018). Initially, the government offered INR 12.60 lakh per acre as compensation. Farmers in most of the villages accepted the compensation, but the landowners of Badhkhalsa, the village closest to NH 1, refused to accept compensation for their collective share of 282 acres of land, and they started an agitation under the banner of the Bhumi Adhigrahan Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti. Jagdish Chaudhury of Badhkhalsa, a close associate of the first president of the *samiti* (association), shared the story of how the protests began.<sup>10</sup> He recalls, with absolute conviction, that the farmers of Badhkhalsa were betrayed by the village Brahminwas – a Brahmin-dominated village in the midst of a predominantly Jat-dominated region. The story goes that Badhkhalsa was not originally included



in the land acquisition plan but the village Brahminwas was. However, since the member of legislative assembly (MLA) from the area was from Brahminwas, he somehow managed to get his village removed from the acquisition plan, and this was why Badhkhalsa was added. 'From the very first day, Badhkhalsa had looked at this project with bitter hatred,' Chaudhury explained, 'and not a single farmer from Badhkhalsa, including the present MLA, accepted the compensation offered by the government.'<sup>11</sup> Such local contingencies, it can be assumed, played a role in altering the original plan of land acquisition. The *samiti* wrote a letter to the chief minister, not merely expressing their disapproval of the acquisition but also pointing out how the government could have averted the acquisition of Sonipat's fertile land. 'In the letter, we alerted the government that the students of the area already had access to the universities in Rohtak, Kurukshetra and Delhi. Still, if the government wishes to establish more universities, why don't they acquire land in less fertile and relatively arid areas like Gohana or Mahendragarh?' Chaudhury resentfully wondered.<sup>12</sup>

The Jindal Group had also started acquiring land directly from the farmers to establish its university at around this time, and they offered more generous compensation. The *samiti* pointed out that since the Jindal Group was paying in crores for land that was a few kilometres away from the main highway, the government's offer of INR 12 lakhs for Badhkhalsa, which of all the nine villages was closest to the highway, was absolutely unacceptable. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, several scholars have established that location or proximity was valued more than fertility in determining the price of agricultural land in the era of 'frontier urbanism'. In September 2011, an enhanced compensation package of INR 45.51 lakhs per acre was offered. The owners of only 70 acres of land accepted the new offer, while the rest remained firm and continued to offer resistance. The *samiti*'s president, Jeetendra Sewli, who documented the protests, sounded quite confident when he pointed out that 'the market price for the land at that time was above 1 crore and we were not ready to compromise on a single penny less'.<sup>13</sup> Farmers who had accepted the previous rate soon realised that land prices in their neighbourhood had experienced a sharp hike after the announcement of the education city. They now approached the court with a demand for enhanced compensation. They also joined the *samiti*-led agitation of Badhkhalsa farmers asking for compensation at current market rates. The MLA from the Rai constituency at that time was from Badhkhalsa village. He announced increased compensation and tried to mediate between the government and farmers. But the farmers were not ready for any sort of compromise. In October 2011, the *samiti* members observed 'black Diwali' in

protest at the land acquisition (Deswal 2011b). Recent research has pointed out that farmers are not always against acquisition; rather, the level of compensation is more often the point of contention. And farmers have often participated in, and successfully negotiated on, the land market. In some places, they have voluntarily converted their fertile agricultural lands into an urban township, choosing 'both to transform their protected agricultural land into real estate and to transform their stakes in land from those of agricultural landowners to those of real-estate shareholders' (Balakrishnan 2019: 17).

The land for the education city was integrally linked to the acquisition of land for the two major expressways (KMP and KGP) that were projected to create a circular road network in the region. In 2004, a year before the land was acquired for the RGE, two gazetted notifications officially declared the acquisition of land from seven villages – Badh Malik, Jatheri, Pritampura, Akbarpur Barota, Chattera Bahadur and Abaspur – for the completion of the KMP Expressway, also known as the Western Peripheral Expressway. The entire urban complex, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, was conceived around this new KMP–KGP corridor. Jeetendra Sewli analysed the complexities of the story and explained that the point where the KMP and KGP expressways were to converge in Kundli overlapped to some extent with the land earmarked for the education city.<sup>14</sup> About 22 acres of this land belonged to Badhkhalsa. This was the reason why the protests against the RGE land acquisition became entangled with the demand for enhanced compensation for land acquisition for the expressway. After the inauguration of the RGE in 2012, the *samiti* staged a protest at Badhkhalsa market and constructed a permanent *dharna manch* (site of protest) against the dispossession of Badhkhalsa farmers.

The political context of the entire region, along with that of the whole country, witnessed a significant shift in 2014. The new regime, both at the centre and at the state level, did not have the same symbolic and material investment in the growth of the RGE as the previous regime. Some key functionaries of the *samiti* aligned with the new regime and persuaded the new chief minister either to return the land acquired or to compensate the farmers with land elsewhere so that they could continue with agriculture. By 2017, the *samiti* and the government had come to an agreement and the Badhkhalsa farmers ended their 11-year-long agitation. They agreed to give away the 22 acres needed for the KMP Expressway in exchange for compensation. For the remaining 212 acres of Badhkhalsa land acquired for the RGE, the government agreed to compensate the farmers with land at an alternative site.

## Some Notable Transformations in and around the RGECC

If we recall, the government had received 10 applications during the launch of the RGECC and offered land to a few more institutes in the following years. It is quite striking that as of now, only four universities have started operating from the RGECC campus. A tour of the campus and conversations with people from the villages where land was acquired revealed interesting aspects of the urbanisation process that the education city has ushered in. Modern buildings of the universities lay scattered in different corners of the education city, surrounded by huge stretches of cultivated land. Blue boards with the name 'Rajiv Gandhi Education City' carrying plot numbers with the plan for the designated plots stand in the middle of mustard and cauliflower fields. Devender Antil, who runs a transport business and caters to Ashoka University, is from the Asawarpur village. The boundary of the RGECC runs through his land, so parts of his land were acquired and the rest he could retain. He has collected the first phase of compensation and is waiting to receive the remaining at an increased rate, based on a recent court order. Devender explained that most of the farmers who agreed to give their lands and accepted compensation actually never stopped cultivation. 'Just have a look.' Devender pointed out at the green fields overlooking Ashoka University. 'Do you see many universities? No, there are only a few. They acquired 2,000 acres, but most of it just lay vacant.' So Devender and his family never stopped cultivating on their land: 'We cultivate on both sides of the boundary. But once we get notices from government, we will stop cultivation on the acquired side.'<sup>15</sup> On my way from the Ashoka University campus to the SRM University campus also, I noticed cultivated lush green fields of wheat and mustard on both sides of the road. The 'agrarian' truly is the central character in the story of urbanisation here, as Thomas Cowan (2022) has observed in the context of Gurgaon. To explain such apparently incongruous coexistence, he used the term 'agrarian city-making' to explain the phenomenon of frontier urbanisation. Some elderly men of the villages expressed their doubts if the education city will ever materialise. 'The education city is turning into a failed project,' some said with conviction.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, in its first 17 years, the RGECC has not kept pace with the IT hubs in Gurgaon. But it is still too soon to pass a judgement on the future of the education hub.

Akshit Dahiya, Devender's friend, accompanied us to SRM University, towards the villages Sewli and Patla. We stopped at a juice corner at the bifurcation where one road went to Badhkhalsa. We noticed a board with an advertisement for PG

(paying guest) accommodation for students. Akshit told us that these universities have opened up new business opportunities for some people. Many have started renting out a part of their homes to students. Also, there were some people who did not agree to give away their land and moved to the court. 'Since they did not collect compensation, their land is still technically unacquired.' But once the universities came up, land prices have gone up steeply. A few such landholders have rented portions of their land to cafes and eateries. Not too far from Ashoka University, there is a lane at one end of the campus dotted with eateries, a café, a small grocery and an alcohol store. The café, named Aroma, has clearly turned into a hang-out zone for young urban students. A report on the changing space of Sonipat has pointed out that a couple of grocery stores have opened up in the area that cater to the tastes and demands of the 'city people' who have started to settle in the region (Roy Chowdhury 2018).

The universities have provided some opportunities for work – mostly unskilled – for the local people. Devender's cousin is the transport in-charge at Ashoka University, and his friend works as the store in-charge. The unskilled jobs in maintenance, housekeeping and security are all outsourced to third-party companies. They sometimes employ locals but also encourage migrants to apply. Sandhya Antil was among the very few from the region to secure a skilled job as a librarian in one of the universities of the RGEC. Sandhya shared her observations on the kind of job opportunities that these universities offer to the locals: 'While all the teachers and students come from Delhi and other parts of India, some of the non-teaching clerical jobs often go to the locals'.<sup>17</sup> The education city reminds us of the IT hub on agricultural land in Rajpura in Rajasthan, where the dispossessed farmers were also culturally and socially alienated from the emerging 'knowledge economy', and only a small minority received low-paid and precarious informal work (Levien 2018).

The predominantly agrarian villages with strong caste and community networks stand in stark contrast to the gated and securitised campuses of isolated higher education institutions. The universities mostly attract a particular class of socially and culturally elite students from big cities. Local students have little access to this dream of world-class education. 'Ye ek alag hi duniya hai' (This is an entirely different world), remarked an elderly landowner when asked to share his thoughts on the education hub.<sup>18</sup> Alienation has been an important trope for analysing how urbanisation processes on the agrarian frontier bring class and cultural contradictions and entrenched inequalities of aspiration and access to the surface. However, it is crucial to understand whether education hubs add any specific dimension to the otherwise well-researched subject of land acquisition,

dispossession and alienation on urban frontiers. To grasp the specificity of education in the shaping of 'urban frontiers', it will be crucial to trace the changes that the new education hub has engendered in the neighbourhood and to tease out the 'contradictory ways in which subjects participate in the world class city making project' (Ghertner 2011: 282). Is the education city an incongruity amidst the agrarian heartland of Haryana? Is the icon of 'world-class' education sustainable in this region? Following Asher Ghertner, it is important to ask 'how long can the vision of the world-class city, premised on the democratisation of aspiration, endure without a democratisation of rights, a democratisation of space' (Ghertner 2011: 301)? This chapter wishes to open up the discussion on the specificities of education as infrastructure and whether it enables a new urban articulation.

## Notes

1. For further discussion on this category of 'world class', see Ghertner (2011).
2. Government of Haryana, Town and Country Planning Department, notification dated 2 September 2003.
3. Government of Haryana, Town and Country Planning Department, notification dated 2 September 2003.
4. Government of Haryana, Town and Country Planning Department, notification dated 2 September 2003.
5. Government of Haryana, Town and Country Planning Department, notification dated 2 September 2003.
6. Sikkim Government Gazette, Gangtok, 15 November 1995, No. 184; Sikkim Manipal University Health, Medical and Technological Sciences Act, 1995 (Act 9 of 1995).
7. Keeping with the thematic arrangement, the timeline of the RGEC project is spread out in different sections of this chapter. Let me briefly spell out the basic chronology here for the convenience of the reader. The land acquisition process for the RGEC started in 2005 and the foundation stone was laid in 2012. Meanwhile, the farmers' agitation for enhanced compensation and legal cases against acquisition continued for almost a decade; and, finally, in 2017 the farmers of Badhkhalsa village reached an agreement with the government.
8. Advertisement for HUDA New Plots Scheme: Rajiv Gandhi Education City, Sonipat, Haryana, 2017.
9. Advertisement for HUDA New Plots Scheme: Rajiv Gandhi Education City, Sonipat, Haryana, 2017.

10. Phone interview with Jagdish Chaudhury, 29 August 2020. Names of all respondents have been changed.
11. Phone interview with Jagdish Chaudhury, 12 September 2020.
12. Phone interview with Jagdish Chaudhury, 12 September 2020.
13. Phone interview with Jeetendra Sewli, 8 September 2020. See also Deswal (2011a).
14. Phone interview with Jeetendra Sewli, 16 September 2020.
15. Interview with Devender Antil, 13 December 2022.
16. Interview with Rana Singh, 13 December 2022.
17. Phone interview with Sandhya Antil, 27 September 2020.
18. Phone interview with Ramesh Singh, 30 September 2020.

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