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Changing Urban Education Trends

Case Study of a 'Small Town' in Madhya Pradesh

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In 1974, I travelled as a young graduate student volunteer to join Kishore Bharati (KB), an organisation working for rural education and development in Palia Pipariya village on the eastern tip of Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh. The train made a short halt at Pipariya station, leaving me with only faint memories of yet another nondescript small town.[1] Over the next 20 years, however, Pipariya was to be my nearest market town, and eventually my home. It also became a major centre of KB's educational and social mobilisation activities.

After moving to Delhi in 1992, I continued to visit the town and kept in touch with its people. Over the years, the educational landscape of the town and the aspirations of its young population underwent a striking change. Young students started to enrol in private engineering and management colleges across the country. Graduates from the town gained employment in national and international companies in Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, the United States (US), Europe and Canada. I was curious to know what developments had made these changes possible and who had been left behind.

On one such visit to Pipariya in 2018, I met two old friends: a couple who work as schoolteachers and who graduated from the Pipariya Government College (PGC). Hailing from the Other Backward Class (OBC)[2] social category, they were among the last few young science and mathematics graduates recruited as permanent government schoolteachers in the mid-1980s. At their home, the couple introduced me to their two children who had completed secondary

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education in Pipariya. They had moved to Bhopal to complete their schooling and joined coaching classes to prepare for engineering and medical school entrance tests. Their parents told me that they chose Bhopal as the cost of living and coaching there was much lower than in Kota.[3] The son later joined the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay to study computer engineering and went on to pursue a master's degree from the US. He would go on to join a multinational company in Texas on graduation. The daughter studied medicine at Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, in Karnataka and was a resident in gynaecology at a well-known hospital in Mumbai. Clearly, the parents' socio-economic capital had enabled their children to pursue successful careers. I realised that the dynamics of education and urban development in this small town had undergone an interesting change since the 1990s, which this chapter now studies.

After the introductory first section, the next two sections of the chapter explore the town's strategic geographical location, its predominantly agricultural economy and its social history – the transformation of a small settlement into a town and the emergence of stratified spatial and social structures. To map the social context, the fourth section briefly discusses the history of socialist ideology and political activism in Pipariya, which makes it unique among small towns. In the fifth section, I discuss urban research that has mostly focused on medium-sized and large cities – and more recently on census towns (CTs) – but not on small towns like Pipariya.[4] Based on the existing theoretical understanding, I then construct a framework to analyse the shifts in the town's formal education over the past three decades. After that, I analyse the findings from the interviews.

The Geography and Economy of Pipariya

Located in Hoshangabad district of Madhya Pradesh, Pipariya's population is around 50,000. It is around 150 kilometres from Bhopal, the capital of the state, and it is connected to road and rail networks. The bustling town is organised around its grain market, the *mandi*, which is located next to the railway station.[5] This area is home to the offices-cum-residences of some of Pipariya's wealthiest grain merchants. The southern boundary of the town is close to the foot of the Mahadeo Hills, which form part of the Satpura Range, and its northern boundary is close to the river Narmada.[6]

Pipariya is the railhead from where a 52-kilometres road climbs through the Satpura hills to reach the flat plateau of Pachmarhi. These forested hills are the traditional homes of the Gondi and Korku peoples.[7] Pachmarhi, the only hill station in Madhya Pradesh, is the location of the Army Educational Corps Training College and Centre. Close to its northern border, on the other side of the Narmada, lie the

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fertile wheat-growing surplus districts[8] of Raisen, Sehore and Vidisha, straddled by the Vindhya Range. The Pipariya mandi is accessible to farmers from these areas. Situated on the east–west road from Hoshangabad to Narsinghpur, the neighbouring district town, and onwards to Jabalpur, Pipariya is located at a very convenient road junction, making it an ideal location for a grain market (Figure 7.1).

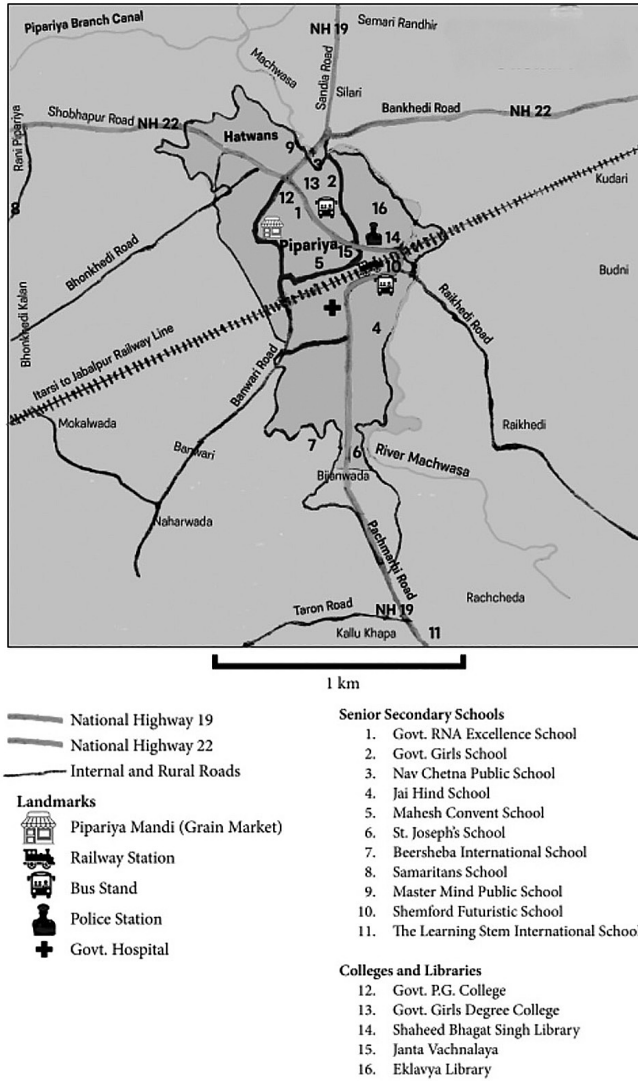

Figure 7.1 Notional map of Pipariya town

Source: Prepared by Kamal Mahendroo.

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The Pipariya region was historically a monsoon-dependent single-crop area, and landless people used to migrate to the rich wheat-growing region, towards and across Narmada, for work during the lean *rabi* (winter crop) season. The coming of irrigation facilities, such as affordable ring wells (Kishore Bharati 1973), government tube wells and recently the Tawa Canal Irrigation Project, has turned the fertile land of north Pipariya into a multi-crop area. Irrigation made it possible to cultivate cash crops like long grain paddy, which is grown specifically for a private company. During the early years of the Green Revolution, a market also opened up for chemical fertilisers, pesticides and agricultural machinery (including tractors, electric motor pump sets and other accessories).

In the absence of any other industry, the agricultural economy of Pipariya and its hinterland revolves around the grain *mandi*, *dal* (lentils), oil, saw and rice mills, and retail and wholesale trade. Currently, the town has around 40 automated *dal* mills. The *mandi* committee is generally controlled by the powerful local political elite, though the Madhya Pradesh grain *mandi*s have been much better regulated since the major reforms of the mid-1980s (Krishanmurthy 2012). As the *mandi* grew and trade expanded, the business activities of enterprising merchant communities gained impetus. They were quick to grab the opportunities that emerging trade offered and moved to the town from surrounding villages. They later emerged as farmers, grocers, cloth merchants, gold and silver jewellers, and money lenders.

From a Small Settlement to a Town: Class and Community Power Dynamics

Pipariya was a rural settlement, which gradually grew into a village with the arrival of a railway line in 1870 and a railway station a few years later. The 1908 district gazetteer of Hoshangabad lists Pipariya as a village with a population of 1,900 and one of the nine villages in Sohagpur *tehsil* with a population above 1,000. Sohagpur is known as a historic town and was the centre of a number of cottage industries, including weaving, dyeing, and clay and brass pottery. Pipariya outstripped Sohagpur in population growth (see Table 7.1) and is now

Table 7.1 Population of Pipariya and Sohagpur

Census year	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Pipariya	1,900	N/A	N/A	3,968	5,874	10,230	13,037	18,281	25,319	34,558	44,378	48,826
Sohagpur	7,420	7,239	7,053	8,141	8,629	8,993	9,352	12,097	15,642	18,614	22,339	25,040

Source: Census data for the respective years.
Note: N/A stands for 'not available'.

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more than twice its size. This happened after Pipariya acquired the status of a municipal town in 1948.[9]

To understand the present social stratification of the town, a historical exploration of the evolution of the political economy of the hinterland is essential. Under British rule in the mid-nineteenth century, the *malguzari* rent system was introduced in the region. This recognised the erstwhile Gond Rajas as the *ala* (superior) *malguzar*s and gave them complete control over the lands of the village, provided that they paid *malguzari* (rent) to the British government. However, the British later also installed *adna* (lesser) *malguzar*s (with the title of Patel) from the migrant population, including Brahmins, Rajputs and some OBCs at the village level. They were gradually given greater powers and control over their village lands. The migrants came from Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh and had been settled in Pipariya for the past five or six generations. Some of them provided various services to the Raja households; for instance, the Brahmins worked as chefs and Katakwars (OBC) as managers. Others settled in existing villages or tilled fallow land to set up new villages. In the decades before independence in 1947, land property rights became consolidated in the hands of village *malguzar*s, and those who actually worked the land were rendered landless labourers, tenants or sharecroppers. A sharp division between the landed and the landless emerged.

The following generations of *adna malguzar*s and Gond Rajas marched into independent India controlling huge areas of land – sometimes the *malguzari* rights of many villages – which they cultivated using the labour of oppressed landless workers. The lack of proper land records and their manipulation deprived several tribal families of ownership rights over lands they had been cultivating in the assumption that it belonged to them. Some of these families gradually moved to Pipariya and found work in the *mandi* as casual labourers. This working class of Pipariya has also been actively involved in the workers' union and, at one time, formed the solid base of the Socialist Party that took root in Hoshangabad district.

The settlement of various communities and the making of Pipariya town have come at the cost of marginalisation, land alienation and the impoverishment of indigenous tribal people. The workers, labourers, Dalits and tribespeople who built Pipariya came from neighbouring villages, but lived on the fringes of the town.

A Brief History of Social Activism

Pipariya and the state of Madhya Pradesh produced many leaders who later made an important contribution to raising the social consciousness of people. Hari Vishnu Kamath, a member of the Praja Socialist Party, was one of them. He quit his job as a collector in the British government to join the independence

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movement and went on to be elected twice to the Lok Sabha from Hoshangabad in 1955 and 1967.

In the 1950s, Jaggu Ustad, also of the Praja Socialist Party, a popular local leader, launched many development activities, including the electrification of Pipariya. He also opened the first public library (Janata Vachnalaya), government hospital and government school for children of daily wage labourers. Narendra Maurya highlights the role of Janata Vachnalaya in raising political awareness among young people through its rich collection of Hindi books.[10] The Pipariya Samata Sangathan also later opened a library-cum-study centre (Samata Adhyayan Kendra).[11] In 1983, yet another library and cultural centre called the Shaheed Bhagat Singh Pustkalaya avam Sanskritik Kendra was established by KB.[12] The idea was to create a space for reading and interaction among the people of Pipariya, especially the younger generations. The library had a collection of more than 5,000 Hindi books on literature, history, science and the social sciences. With local support, the centre organised public lectures and discussions on education, science and other social issues. After this, from the early 1980s, an education organisation called Eklavya opened another library. Thereafter, for more than six decades, the town has had multiple libraries run by different organisations, which helped promote socialist thought and awareness among the youth.

Small Towns and Their Neglect and Anonymity

In the context of urban education, the definition of 'urban' needs some discussion, as there are difficulties and methodological inconsistencies associated with defining and classifying the urban (Nath Roy and Pradhan 2018). In India, half of all urban growth between 2001 and 2011 has come about through the rising number of CTs, which became a source of cheaper property and labour for the expansion of industry (Scrase et al. 2015). According to census data, the number of CTs increased from 1,362 in 2001 to 3,892 in 2011, whereas small towns grew only marginally (Glover 2018; Pradhan 2013). Hence, the broader picture of urbanisation over the last decade has been influenced by the dynamics of CTs, and from 2011 onwards, urban studies have focused solely on these (Denis, Mukhopadhyay and Zerah 2012). Since Pipariya is not a CT, despite being much bigger in population and land area, it has escaped the attention of urban researchers. Scrase et al. (2015) explain this anomaly by pointing out that attention is focused on large cities and CTs that have been directly impacted by globalisation and technological changes. Based on her study of seven small towns in north India, Khyaati Sharma (2012) argues that since larger cities receive the most funding for development and research,

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they also get the most attention in academia. Also, the stagnation of small towns is an indicator of skewed priorities and the neglect of agriculture at the policy level. Existing research, such as Scrase et al.'s (2015) study on the urban expansion of mid-level tourist towns like Darjeeling and the economic transformation of Anand through a major dairy cooperative programme, does not help in understanding 'economically unimportant' towns like Pipariya.

Pipariya is less significant also because it is neither strategically important nor close to any industrial city. Nor is it located on the fringe of a megacity like Delhi, which is expanding spatially and whose peripheral villages are becoming important CTs in their own right (Menon 2017). Similarly, the town has no commonality with coastal cities like Vijayawada, where rich farmers are setting up private education institutions for their children and abandoning government schools, or with deindustrialised medium-level towns like Kota, as mentioned earlier (Prasad 2017).

Clearly, the town has not followed the same trajectory of urbanisation as big and middle-level Indian cities, which feature gentrification, the emergence of business districts, bounded self-contained residential spaces for the middle classes, gated communities, shopping malls and exclusive spaces for consumption and leisure (Nambissan 2017). It is clear that studies like those discussed previously are not of much help in understanding the shifting dynamics of urbanisation and education in Pipariya.

Conceptual Framework

To understand the impact of globalisation on urbanisation and education, William T. Pink and George W. Noblit (2017) strongly argue for the need to focus on the specificities and uniqueness of the context, and not to reduce it to a list of differences and similarities or to seek generalisations. They emphasise that context – including factors such as region, nation, people, cities, development and political economy – is important and that the challenge is to understand how urban education is embedded in historical and other processes. India is a large and diverse country, so there will always be a temptation to find patterns for policy formulations, but this always comes at the cost of specificity. In the context of studying the privatisation of secondary schools in Bijnor, Roger Jeffery, Patricia Jeffery and Craig Jeffery stress the same point: 'Looking in detail at one setting does, however, reveal how globalised educational policies impact on a particular locality' (Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffery 2007).

This chapter also draws on Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) framework of capital, which is an important tool for understanding the emergence of a stratified school

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and higher education system in Pipariya, and its inequalities in terms of access and quality. Research on the new political economy provides a framework to examine the entanglement of economic restructuring, neoliberal education policies and the geographical (spatial) restructuring of smaller towns (Lipman 2011). Under neoliberalism, there is a marked shift in the goal of education from achieving equality and democracy to 'human capital development', whereby education becomes a private good instead of 'a social good for development of individuals and society as a whole' (Lipman 2011). In this chapter, the restructuring of educational policies and goals and urban geography in the neoliberal economic context forms yet another prism through which to examine educational shifts in Pipariya. A noteworthy point here is that the beneficiaries of neoliberal restructuring are the middle classes who, in turn, also shape the perception of 'good education'.

Education in Pipariya

Senior Secondary Schools

Until the 1980s, in addition to two government-run and two aided schools, Pipariya had only one Hindi-medium private senior secondary school called Mahesh Convent. In the late 1980s, the Catholic church opened Saint Joseph Convent School (SJCS), a popular English-medium school. From the early 1990s, Pipariya's middle classes started to abandon government schools. By 2000, SJCS became the first choice for the trading communities and professionals. To cater to the growing demand, several English-medium private schools opened within next 15 years. Beersheba International English-Medium School, run by a Lutheran church group, also became another preferred institution later on.

Recent data from the Madhya Pradesh right-to-education (RTE) portal show that Pipariya and its surrounding small towns and villages are dotted with low-fee and other private schools (Government of Madhya Pradesh n.d.). Pipariya and the neighbouring Hathwans village have about 50 private schools, of which nearly a dozen offer senior secondary education. These are run either by local trusts, national school chains or church groups. Most of these schools started between 2005 and 2010 and initially offered secondary education. After being formally recognised by the state or national education boards, they started offering senior secondary education. Most of them are co-ed and run classes in both Hindi and English except Beersheba International and SJCS, which are English-medium schools. Interestingly, there are now many 'international' schools, such as Learning Stem International School, which was started by a local elite family. In 2005, a Don Bosco residential school was opened in Jhirpa village (about 20 kilometres from Pipariya) by a Christian who was not a resident

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of the state. Parents were required to deposit INR 1 lakh to secure admission to the school. Upper-middle-class parents, mostly belonging to the Patel caste from Pipariya and its surrounding villages, sent their children to the school; however, it was shut down after a few years due to lack of funds.

It must be mentioned here that no new senior secondary government schools have opened in Pipariya in more than three decades. Only one government middle school, which has poor infrastructure and is located in the middle of the town, was upgraded to a secondary school in 2014. The town has only one government senior secondary school for girls. While it has not had a regular principal for many years, its student population has remained steady at around 1,500. The reason for this is that not all parents are keen to spend money on privately educating their daughters. RNA (Ram Narayan Aggarwal) is the boys' government school. The school enjoyed the reputation of the best school from the 1970s to the mid-1990s.

The locations of these private schools correspond to the ongoing spatial reorganisation of the town and reflect the social status of the institutions' clientele. For example, gated residential complexes are being built on the road leading to Pachmarhi, where SJCS, Learning Stem and both English- and Hindi-medium schools are located. Similarly, for example, newer schools like Shemford School, Samaritans School and Master Mind School have been established close to the emerging elite areas around Hathwans and Sandiya Road – two important peripheral areas of Pipariya located on the state highway. Most of these schools have better infrastructure and sprawling campuses – features otherwise missing from institutions located closer to the town centre. Their transportation services facilitate enrolment of students from nearby villages. Old private schools such as Mahesh Convent and Nav Chetana and low-fee private schools and aided schools, including new junior schools, are located in the densely populated and the busiest part of town.

The tuition fee charged by most private schools ranges from INR 1,000 to INR 4,000 per month. A shift towards higher fees has been witnessed in recent years. According to Learning Stem's website, the fee for the 2019–2020 school year was INR 34,000 for nursery classes and INR 44,000 per year up to class 8. Parents also have to pay monthly transport charges and INR 500 for the admission form, a new development.

Higher Education

Before 1990, there was only one co-educational college in Pipariya: the PGC, which is currently affiliated to Sagar University. In its heyday, it offered only

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undergraduate courses and was the only higher education option for most students in the town. Postgraduate teaching was introduced in 1985 and a law course was launched in 1995. An undergraduate government college for women opened in 1990, followed more recently by a private college. Both these colleges offer only arts undergraduate courses. In contrast to mushrooming private schools, the growth of higher education has remained stagnant. For many years, students only from deprived communities of Pipariya and the surrounding villages are studying at these colleges. Currently, more than 3,000 students are enrolled in the PGC. I have been informed by teachers that most students who have the socio-economic capital to do so now leave the town to pursue higher education.

To understand the intersections of class, caste and gender in the educational and employment trajectories of students in Pipariya, interviews were conducted with people from different parts of the town. Of the 23 interviews, 14 were with parents of students and 7 with former/current students.[13] I also interviewed the block education officer and the author of a popular history of the town. From the interviewees, I gathered information about children of eight other families who were either related or known to them. The interviews were conducted to explore narratives of education and to get a sense of the changing educational landscape of the town.

The social backgrounds of the 23 interviewees and the 8 families about whom further information was obtained were as follows: merchant/trading castes (8); Brahmins (5); OBCs, including two Gujar Patels who were landlords (10); and Scheduled Castes (SCs)/Scheduled Tribes (STs) (8).[14] Their occupations included middle school teachers (5), high school teachers (3), government officials (1), self-employed (2), traders and money lenders (8), farmers (2), activist (1), engineers (1), retired government officials (1) and students (7). Based on the interviews, the period of educational transformation in Pipariya could be divided roughly into two phases: (*a*) the mid-1990s to 2005 and (*b*) 2006 to the present. The findings from these periods are briefly presented in the sections that follow.

Shifts in Educational Trajectories

Mid-1990s to 2005

Of the four middle school teachers whose children completed their education during this period, two were Brahmins and two came from the OBC community. One of the Brahmin teachers, who had retired from the RNA school, was from a lower-middle-class *purohit* (priest) family. He was the first in his family to get a government job. His three sons studied at RNA while his daughter attended the girls' school. All of them completed their school education between the mid-1990s

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and 2000. According to the teacher, English-medium and private schools were not popular at that time and RNA was considered the best school in the town. He said that appointment of contract teachers in government schools started around the mid-1990s, which adversely affected the quality of public education.

It was only around the 2000s that Pipariya witnessed both the burgeoning of institutions, including coaching centres, and the growth in aspirations of mobility through education. Interviews revealed that the expansion of professional education in urban centres in the region around Pipariya enabled the upper castes and even those from the lower middle class to acquire social capital through postgraduate education and secure employment, especially for their sons. Most of these children attended RNA in Pipariya and moved out after graduating from the local college.

It was interesting to observe the diverse educational pathways of children from OBC families. One lower-middle-class OBC teacher shared his struggle to provide 'good' education to his four children. Since he was posted in a village, his children attended local primary schools before he could move them to schools in Pipariya. His schools of choice were RNA and Mahesh Convent for his sons and the government girls' school for his daughter. The sons went on to obtain a postgraduate education in sciences, finance and engineering, gaining employment in other cities, with the youngest now a software engineer working for a multinational company in Germany. It is interesting that in the latter case, the teacher obtained a loan to put him through English classes.

Another OBC teacher was from a well-off landed family and farmed his own land in addition to teaching. He belonged to the Patel community (the erstwhile *adna malguzar*s), which has prospered from land ownership and investment in agribusiness. According to him, the community was never inclined towards higher education, and unlike other trading communities, mothers were not involved in their children's education. This teacher initially taught in village schools but later joined RNA in Pipariya. He wanted to send his children to a private school and chose Mahesh Convent, not SJCS. The daughter was married off after completing class 12, whereas the son pursued postgraduation from PGC. After failed attempts at obtaining a government job, the son now assists in his father's farming business.

The children of a trading community resident of the town, who was a tailor, moneylender and agricultural landowner, also completed their education during these years. He emphasised that he did not want his children to pursue his own occupation and was eager for them to move away for higher education and better prospects. His children studied at Mahesh Convent and graduated from PGC. His daughter went on to study for a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree from Pune and later settled in the US with her husband. The youngest

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son was accepted to study engineering without attending any coaching classes. He studied at a private engineering college in Bhopal and later obtained an MBA from a private college in Pune. Like other students from Pipariya, he too had to study English. He worked for various multinational companies in India and the US and eventually settled in Vancouver, Canada. His wife is also a software engineer. The eldest son is a freelance journalist and lives in Pipariya. Unlike this person from the trading community and his wife, the teachers hardly spoke about their daughters' education. In trading communities, mothers play a crucial role in taking decisions about their sons' and daughters' education, said the mother.

While discussing the education of his children, this person also gave detailed information about two young women: one from a land-owning OBC family and the other from a rich Brahmin family. Both graduated from SJCS and went on to study engineering, followed by an MBA from Bhopal in around 2005–2006. The two then worked in senior positions in the US. One of them later returned to India and set up an information technology (IT) company in Gurugram. These two women did not take any coaching in college but did take private lessons to improve their spoken English.

However, the experience of first-generation learners, as described by the mother of the two Dalit brothers who could have completed class 12 around the mid-1990s, was completely different. From a village in Bhagalpur, Bihar, the landless parents came to KB in 1975 in search of a livelihood. For the sake of their children's education, the parents moved to Pipariya in 1986. Their elder son was admitted to class 5 and the younger one to class 3 at a government primary school. After class 5, the elder son joined Navchetna, a private-senior secondary school, as he was not accepted to RNA. Two years later, the younger son joined RNA. Neither could complete their schooling: the elder son dropped out in class 10 and sat his final exams as an external candidate, while the younger one dropped out in class 9. Their mother underscored the caste discrimination the two suffered at school as primary reasons for their dropping out. Significantly, during this period, RNA and the girls' senior secondary school were considered the best schools in Pipariya; yet people from higher socio-economic classes, who were looking for exclusive spaces, chose to send their children to Mahesh Convent. The establishment of private engineering and management colleges in the state created further opportunities for children from these families. Competition to study engineering was less fierce during this period, and the business of coaching classes had not yet begun. Therefore, students passed engineering entrance exams on their own. To study engineering, Master of Computer Applications (MCA) and other professional degrees from new private colleges, many young people migrated to Bhopal, Indore and Pune, but almost all attended PGC for their first degree.

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2006 to the Present

In around 2005–2006, enrolling children at SJCS or other English-medium schools became a priority for better-off families, particularly those from the trading and service communities. The educational trajectory of the two children who attended SJCS, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, reflects their parents' resolve to ensure a better education for their children.

The author of the oral history book *Aise Basi Pipariya*, who belonged to the OBC community, studied at the local government school and the RNA school and went on to study further at PGC in the early 1980s (Maurya, Unanayan and Sarkar 2022). He started a theatre group in Pipariya and was an active leader of the Samata Sangathan. He then joined KB in 1980, where he helped found the Shaheed Bhagat Singh library and cultural centre, before moving to Delhi in 1989 to work for a newspaper. His two sons studied at government schools in Pipariya and later completed their school and college education in Delhi in around 2009–2010. He trusted the government system and did not look for private alternatives. Unlike the author, his younger brothers' two daughters studied at Mahesh Convent, except for the youngest who attended SJCS. For coaching classes and engineering courses, the girls relocated to Nagpur and Indore. In this case, the girls in the family were more successful than the boys. One went on to become a software engineer and the other obtained a Bachelor of Computer Applications (BCA) degree. Both found employment in the IT sector in Bengaluru.

Another Samata Sangathan leader from a trading community said that his great-grandparents migrated from Rajasthan more than a hundred years ago and made this town their home. He spoke about his joint and extended families' determination to send the younger generations to bigger cities for better prospects. He worked with Eklavya while his brothers and other kin worked in family-run businesses.[15] He was the first in his family to send his son and daughter to SJCS in 2003–2004. Following this, all his younger brothers, cousins, uncles and aunts also sent their children to SJCS. The family eschewed Beersheba, the famous Hindi-medium private school, 'as only farmers' children study there', one of the brothers stated with disdain. Educated mothers took charge of helping children with their homework, English tuition and other education-related responsibilities. During the interviews, women were far better informed and more articulate than men about their children's education and future planning.

The Samata Sangathan leader's son was selected for admission to a private engineering college but had to give up the opportunity due to financial constraints. Both his children, son and daughter, attended coaching classes, studied in private colleges in Indore and became chartered accountants. Currently, the son working

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for a multinational company and, as his father pointed out, frequently travelled to Europe. For the other children of this extended family, this eldest cousin has emerged as a role model for the rest of the family.

Narratives of upward social mobility through education are clearly more common in Pipariya's trading communities. Another enterprising person from the Maheshwari community, a trading and merchant caste, spoke of his joint and extended family's experiences and achievements. His elder brother, an income tax lawyer, went to Indore in the early 1990s to practise law but returned due to lack of knowledge of spoken English. This experience strengthened the family's resolve to educate their children at SJCS. His advice to the younger generation was 'padho, aage badho aur dunia dekho' – learn and explore the world. The option to pursue farming or trading was not given to the children. The mothers, who were educated in Indore and Nagpur, played an active part in their children's education.

Agriculture and trade are no longer considered occupational options by the merchant community of the town. The trader interviewed previously studied at government schools and PGC, as did his brothers, and their well-educated wives are from Indore and Nagpur. With better education and exposure, these women took an active role in their children's education. Beginning with his eldest brother's son in 1997, all the children in the family moved to Pune after completing class 10. There, they each joined premier junior colleges to complete class 11 and class 12 and then took coaching classes to prepare for competitive exams. Interestingly, investment in the reproduction of educational status is reflected in the long-term renting of a house in Pune to accommodate family and community members who go to the city to study. The interviewee's three daughters studied at SJCS and later in Pune. The eldest daughter, an MBA graduate and engineer, works in California and lives there with her husband. The other two daughters work in senior positions in law and chartered accountancy firms set up by their cousins in Pune. All three daughters were able to get educational loans from banks, thanks to their father's social contacts and networks.

The number of private engineering and management colleges has been rising across India since the late 1990s (Tilak 2014). In Pipariya, young people from better-off families are following the trend of pursuing these courses, with few exceptions. One of these was a Maheshwari girl who completed her schooling at SJCS in 2015, scoring well in her class 12 examinations. However, she then enrolled to study economics at a premier women's college at the University of Delhi. She stayed in an exclusive Maheshwari community guest house located in an upmarket area of Delhi and did fairly well in her studies. Her father, a major landlord, local moneylender, businessman and influential political leader, is clear that, unlike his daughter, his son will study engineering and obtain an MBA degree.

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Another exception was a young Brahmin boy who teaches English at Beersheba International. His father, an employee of the telephone department, decided to send his son to Navodaya Vidyalaya instead of a private school. His is a nuclear family, and so the father was the lone decision-maker. The teacher completed his school education around 2005 and studied for a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree from PGC before moving to Indore. He obtained a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in chemistry from Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, formerly University of Indore, and went on to teach at a private university in Gujarat, but moved back to Pipariya for personal reasons. He seemed committed to the pure sciences, keeping himself informed about the latest research in the discipline.

The third exception was the son of a legal advocate, who belongs to the OBC artisan caste of goldsmiths. The father, former member of Pipariya municipal corporation, has always been very active in campaigning on behalf of oppressed people. The son completed his schooling in 2013 at Beersheba International as it was less expensive than SJCS. While his peers started preparing for admission to engineering courses, he decided to study law and attended coaching classes for two months in Bhopal. He completed his law degree in Pune and is now planning to enrol in a master's programme. It is noteworthy that all three of the individuals described thus far studied at government colleges, unlike their peers.

PGC students also include the children of medium- and small-scale farmers from neighbouring villages. They live in rented accommodation or with relatives or travel every day from their villages. Many of them attend coaching classes in Pipariya after graduating and compete for lower-level jobs. For instance, an educated mother of two decided to move to Pipariya from a village 30 kilometres away for her children's education. She was married to a farmer who was also the leader of the agricultural workers' union. Both her children, a son and a daughter, graduated from PGC. The son was studying for a master's degree from a private university in Bengaluru on full fee waiver.

Another OBC landless family from the same village also moved to Pipariya for their son's education. The father, a graduate who regularly wrote on social and environmental issues, had no means of paying for coaching or professional education for his son, who went on to graduate from PGC in 2016 and then enrolled for a degree in fine arts at a well-known college in Gujarat. In both these cases, it was social and not economic capital that played a crucial role in shaping the educational futures of the next generation.

A completely contrasting picture emerged from interactions with Dalit and tribal students. Of the seven former students interviewed, four were female and three male. Four were from SC (Dalit) and three were from ST (tribal)

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communities. Their parents' occupations were teacher (1), peon (1), driver (2), farmer (1) and labourer (2). Their mothers worked as domestic help except for one who worked as a sweeper with the municipal corporation. All but one of the students were first-generation learners and held the opinion that formal education was their only means of 'upward mobility'.

Earlier generations of their families migrated to Pipariya from villages in search of a livelihood. Six of the families were landless and had no other assets, while the farmer owned a small piece of land. The tribal families lived in the old part of Pipariya and the Dalits in a Dalit settlement (except for one whose family moved to a slightly better locality as her father was a teacher). One tribal boy studied at Mahesh Convent as he was refused admission to RNA. Later, he joined a private college after failing to get accepted to PGC. Of the others, two girls studied at the government school and one in Pachmarhi, while one boy went to RNA, and one girl and one boy completed class 12 through open schooling. One Dalit girl, who had scored well in class 12, was prevented from enrolling in a BSc programme by her father. She pursued a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree from PGC and was attending coaching classes to prepare for the civil service entrance exams. Six students graduated and two obtained postgraduate qualifications. However, none were able to secure government employment or a regular private job.

None of the students were able to obtain bank loans to support their education, even though all of them applied. Their applications were rejected since their parents did not have fixed assets. They could not take English tuition, despite a strong desire to learn the language. All tribal and caste students received scholarships, but their higher education was interrupted due to economic constraints. Most reflected on their school journeys as unpleasant and tough, even though two of them recalled having supportive teachers. Even though they aspired to better education and jobs, lack of quality teaching and support from home made their journey challenging. Unlike students from higher classes, tribal and caste students lack social and economic capital, making their future uncertain.

Findings

Changing Schools and Colleges

Multiple factors led to the decline of government schools in India from the early 1990s. One crucial reason was the abandonment of the constitutional commitment to equality through education (Velaskar 2010). Kiran Bhatty (2014) discusses the marginalisation of equal opportunity in elementary education, most importantly in the 1986 education policy, through the creation of hierarchies in the public school system and the non-formalisation of schooling. The quality of education also

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suffered because of the failure of successive governments to respond to an increasing demand for secondary education, heightened non-teaching responsibilities for teachers and the appointment of contractual teachers in government schools (Bhatty 2014). Educational shifts in Pipariya reflect these changes at the national level.

Until the early 1980s, government schools were considered the best in Pipariya. Mahesh Convent, which opened in early 1980, was the first major initiative by the rich to create an exclusive school for their children. The second major shift in Pipariya's school system came with the opening of SJCS in the late 1980s. From the 1990s to 2005, most students were enrolled at RNA and admissions were based on merit. Yet student numbers at RNA and other government schools started declining from the mid-1990s. The student population at RNA fell from over 3,000 before 2000 to 1,000 in 2018. The total number of students at SJCS rose to 3,000 during the same period. The extent of the drop in demand for RNA can be gauged by the lament of one teacher, who said: 'Ab to bacchhon ko nahore kar lana hota hai' (Now the children have to be persuaded to come). Most senior teachers agreed that the deterioration of teaching quality at RNA was the main reason for the decline.

But what changed, given that RNA previously enjoyed a reputation for high academic standards? Teachers and some parents held the new teacher recruitment policies and increasing burden of non-teaching tasks responsible for the decline of the government system, which they felt also coincided with a governmental push for privatisation and increasing demand for English-medium schools. In Madhya Pradesh, under the neoliberal educational reforms, recruitment of permanent teachers was stopped from the early 1990s (Kumar, Priyam and Saxena 2001; R. Sharma 1999). Instead of regular recruitment, teachers were appointed on a contract basis, which created new hierarchies in schools and resulted in insecurity and a loss of interest in the teaching profession (Majumdar 2011; Saxena and Mahendroo). In 2018, many teachers reported that most of the government schools in Madhya Pradesh, including RNA and the girls' school, are run mainly by contract teachers. Some teachers also said that the credibility of the government system was eroded further when, instead of regular schools, a large number of poorly funded and ill-equipped Education Guarantee Schools (EGS) were opened in Madhya Pradesh in the late 1990s (Leclercq 2002).

However, the block education officer said that the quality of education at many government schools is better than most low-fee private schools in Pipariya (Nambissan 2012).[16] He said that the RTE Act of 2009, which guarantees a minimum 25 per cent reservation of seats in private schools for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) has, ironically, resulted in the expansion of low-quality English-medium private schools in Pipariya.[17] He explained that the children

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of marginalised communities in Pipariya town and the neighbouring villages are provided free transport and that they study in these elementary-level private schools free of charge. In return, the schools receive fee reimbursements as per RTE norms, which are adequate to run such schools. Despite the poor quality of education, parents are happy that their children are studying in English-medium private schools, though they are forced to shift them back to the government schools after class 8.[18]

Higher Education

Higher education remained egalitarian until the 1990s and most students chose PGC. However, no new government college has been established in Pipariya in the last three decades. This is why parents from higher social classes started moving their children out of the town to cities like Bhopal, especially for professional courses. A large number of private engineering, management and law colleges and technical universities opened in the cities, creating opportunities for the middle classes from small towns like Pipariya. Therefore, Pipariya became a supplier of students to coaching centres and private colleges in cities like Bhopal, Indore, Nagpur, Pune and, in some cases, Kota, Mumbai and Bengaluru. For colleges in bigger towns and cities, small towns emerged as suppliers of students, with English-medium private school education serving as a stepping stone.

Changing Aspirations and Career Choices

The popularisation of socialist thought in Pipariya led its people to explore diverse academic interests, including in literature, poetry, theatre and the social and physical sciences. While science and commerce had always been considered elite subjects, literature and the arts were equally in demand. Young people pursued reading as a hobby, set up libraries and organised social awareness events.

The advent of neoliberal reforms in education during the 1990s shifted the goal of education in India from education for equality and democracy to education for 'human capital development', and from investment in education for social good and the development of individuals and society as a whole to investment for oneself (Lipman 2011). The consequences of this transformation can be seen in Pipariya, as the privatisation of professional and school education over the last three decades has brought about a shift in focus among the middle classes.

With more professional colleges, software engineering became the most sought-after option for Pipariya's young people. The opening of several private engineering (and later management and law) colleges across different states in India around the late 1990s created opportunities for more students from

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Pipariya to enrol in these professional courses.[19] These opportunities also shifted the career choices of middle-class youngsters, who went from obtaining graduate and postgraduate qualifications in social and physical sciences to primarily studying engineering and management. The trend continued beyond 2000 as professionally successful individuals became role models and students pushed their parents to invest in private coaching and professional education. However, the job market started to shrink, and from 2012–2013 onwards, many engineering and MBA degree holders from Pipariya failed to find work (Tiwari 2018).[20] Most of them have either set up their own businesses or are studying for the civil service. Not many chose law as a career because they did not have the money to set up a private practice. Similarly, medicine has not been an option for many because of the tough competition and huge expense.

Community Response and Access to Education

The occupations of Pipariya's higher social classes are mainly trading, landholding and jobs in service sector. Their response to changes in the education landscape and their plans for their younger generation's future have not been uniform. Therefore, the rush for English-medium schools and subsequent migration to other cities for coaching and professional education has also not been the same across these classes. From the early 2000s, sensing the importance of English in the era of globalisation, many parents from trading communities encouraged their children to move out of Pipariya for better prospects. They were not averse to the idea of their children going abroad as liberalisation and access to technology opened up new frontiers. In fact, one parent pointed out that the growing need for computer engineers in the West at the turn of the century encouraged students and their parents to look beyond Pipariya and India. They chose Mahesh Convent and then SJCS and other English-medium private schools for their children's education in order to enable them to move out of Pipariya. Parents underscored the importance of peer interactions and guidance from teachers at SJCS in making strategic educational choices for their children. Pipariya's trading communities are very well organised, and with their exposure to national business networks, they have been able to create support structures for their children in different cities. Additionally, the growing number of private institutions in India and the availability of bank loans ensured access to professional education for their children.

In order to plan for the neoliberal India, middle-class mothers needed to take primary responsibility for their children's education (Nambissan 2009; Donner 2008). This trend is found in Pipariya, but only among trading communities,

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where well-educated women took charge of guiding and supervising their children's education and sacrificed their own careers in the process. Most of these women regularly meet at community social gatherings and exchange information about their children's education. They remained focused and came across as articulate, assertive and well informed about education trends and job prospects.

The big landholding castes, such as Brahmins and OBCs (Patels and Rajputs) – the descendants of the erstwhile *malguzar*s – have by and large been conservative about higher education and are not keen on sending their children out of town. The rich Patels and Rajputs encouraged their younger generation to invest in agriculture and agribusiness in Pipariya. Barring the children of two schoolteachers and an IT professional, the younger generations of Brahmin landlord families have been active in controlling the *mandi* committee and in local elections. They are also engaged in real estate and the liquor trade. The influential Brahmins have clout among political leaders and the local and state-level bureaucracy. These networks allow them to acquire lucrative contracts for development and construction work. Despite having access to financial resources, most prefer Hindi-medium private schools for their children.

People from the service classes, such as teachers, municipal corporation members and telephone department employees, are also deeply concerned about the education of their children, especially their sons. Generally, they are well aware about the need for English-medium education and higher education opportunities and are willing to invest in them. They enrol their sons in RNA or other affordable private schools. They struggle to finance their children's education and often take out loans for higher education. Unlike in the trading communities, these students do not get academic support from either their peers or their mothers. In fact, the kind of extended family networks that help youngsters from trading communities to negotiate life in new cities do not exist for these young people. Instead, it is their education and stable income that help them support their children's education.

Experience of Marginalised Communities

Most Dalits, tribespeople and children from underprivileged classes enrol in government schools. Many of those interviewed for this chapter were the first generation in their families to enter higher education and, in some cases, even school education. It was their parents' determination and support from government schemes that facilitated their entry into the formal education system. These students either studied at government schools from class 1 or at low-fee private schools up to class 8 under the RTE Act. The falling quality of RNA and

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the girls' school – their only choices – has been detrimental to their careers. For higher education, these young people choose PGC or the women's college. If they fail to gain admission to PGC, their last resort is the new private college that has been started by a local business family.

Unlike children from higher socio-economic groups, the parents of these students are employed in low-income jobs or as casual workers. Most of their relatives and acquaintances live locally or in villages. Therefore, they have no support network to help them migrate to other cities for education or work. Intellectual support and guidance are also limited due to lack of exposure among their peers and family. They have few or no economic resources for upward mobility. For example, with private English-medium and professional education beyond their reach, they are forced to aim for the lowest-level jobs as bank and railway clerks, contract teachers, police constables, peons and drivers. Only public institutions and welfare programmes offer them a chance of upward mobility. However, in the era of neoliberalism, these very institutions are under attack, leaving dispossessed people at the mercy of the market.

Conclusion

Pipariya's uniqueness stems from a combination of factors, such as its geographical location, rich socialist history and multiple communities. It has also experienced stagnation and a lack of growth opportunities in recent years. Its economy is dependent on agricultural produce from the hinterland and revolves around the grain *mandi*, agribusiness and trade. There has been no infrastructural or industrial growth. Transport, health and sanitation facilities remain rudimentary. There is only one government hospital, and no new public health facility has been established here in the last three decades. Unlike private schools, the private health sector has not grown here and people have to travel to Bhopal or Jabalpur for treatment.

At the same time, educational and occupational shifts in the town represent changes at the national level. Young people have been migrating to towns like Bhopal, Pune, Indore and Kota since the 1990s for coaching and to access higher professional education and employment in the global IT sector.

However, class as a category is not sufficient to understand these shifts, as better-off communities and castes have not responded uniformly to these changes. Unlike Brahmin and Patel landlords, the trading and merchant communities have clearly emerged as major beneficiaries of the privatisation of schools and expanding private professional education. Educated women in this community took charge of their children's education and played a decisive role in shaping their future. In contrast, among Brahmins, Patels and the service classes, women did

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not emerge as active providers of academic support. Thanks to their education and stable income, the service classes across all castes have also been able to support their children's professional education and, in some cases, even non-professional higher education at premier universities. Despite expanding education access to the marginalised communities, the decline of public institutions and the high cost of professional education have led to new inequalities in the education system. The history of socialist thought and the presence of public libraries have inspired the youth of Pipariya to aspire for social change. The importance of education was recognised as early as the 1950s, but the ushering in neoliberal reforms and the privatisation of education have changed people's aspirations. It can be argued that privatisation weakened the middle-class base of social movements like the Samata Sangathan, as the career-oriented younger generations abandoned socialist ideas. The camaraderie that existed among people of different castes and classes who studied together at government institutions in Pipariya during the 1970s and 1980s did not continue in the generations of the 1990s. Such forces will continue to impact not just the education system but also the social movements and histories of small towns such as Pipariya. These issues require further research, but they lie beyond the scope of this chapter.

Notes

1. A 'small town' is not a well-defined category. Here, it is used for a town which has its own municipality and a population close to 50,000, though some have used it for towns with a population of less than one lakh (see Gupta 2015). Dipankar Gupta (2015) refers to cities like Bhopal, Ludhiana, Kochi, Hanamkonda, Kazipet, Tirupur and others that have a population of nearly a million as 'small towns' that have private English-medium schools and technology and management institutes.
2. Other Backward Class (OBC) is a collective category used by the Government of India to classify castes which are educationally or socially disadvantaged. In the hierarchy of castes, all OBCs are above Scheduled Castes (SCs). However, OBCs are further divided into creamy and non-creamy layers based on economic levels.
3. Kota is a medium-level de-industrialized town in Rajasthan state which has emerged as a major hub of coaching institutions for engineering, medical and business management education, thus representing the privatisation of higher education. For more on Kota and its status as a growing hub for coaching, see Rao (2017).

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4. A census town (CT) in India is one which is not formally identified as a town but whose population has acquired urban characteristics. CTs have a population of more than 5,000, with 75 per cent of the male population engaged in non-agricultural work.
5. A new law passed by India in September 2020 provides for the abolition of these *mandi*s, which will have serious consequences for grain merchants and farmers.
6. For a map of Hoshangabad district, see https://www.mapsofindia.com (accessed 30 May 2020).
7. A large area of forested hills around Pachmarhi became the Satpura National Park and Tiger Reserve in 1981. As a result, the tribal villages in these forests were relocated to settlement villages on the periphery of the reserve close to Pipariya. Torn from their livelihoods and cultural roots, these relocated families continue to struggle for respectable resettlement. This has sharpened the conflict between the forest department and the displaced villagers. Narendra Maurya, personal interview, January 2019.
8. Wheat surplus districts are the districts that export wheat to other parts of the country.
9. For a detailed account of the development of Pipariya, see Maurya (2000).
10. Narendra Maurya, personal interview, January 2019.
11. The Pipariya Samata Sangathan is an organisation inspired by the ideas of socialist leaders such as Ram Manohar Lohia and Kishen Pattnayak.
12. Bhagat Singh was an Indian socialist revolutionary who was executed by the British government when he was 23 years old. He became a legend of the Indian independence movement (Kishore Bharati 1984).
13. Most interviews were conducted in November 2018.
14. SCs and STs are officially designated groups of people in India. The terms are recognised by the Constitution of India. SCs include Dalits, formerly and derogatorily referred to as the untouchable castes. ST is the term used for the indigenous or tribal people of India. SCs and STs are socially and economically disadvantaged groups.
15. Eklavya is another non-governmental organisation (NGO) working in the field of education in Madhya Pradesh. For details, see https://www.eklavya.in (accessed 15 April 2020).
16. Geetha Nambissan (2012) argues that not all private schools are high-quality schools and that a large number of low-fee private schools offering education of dubious quality have been opened for the poor, primarily in order to shift the burden of educational expenditure and responsibility from the state to parents.

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17. The RTE is an act of Parliament of India, enacted on 4 August 2009, to provide free and compulsory high-quality elementary education to all the children in the 6–14 age group.
18. Pradeep Sharma, personal interview, October 2019.
19. For detailed, a discussion of the privatization of higher education – particularly engineering, medical and management education – see Tilak (2014) and Kapur (2010).
20. Deepak Tiwari (2018) notes that there were 215 engineering colleges in Madhya Pradesh in 2018, but that 58 per cent of their student places remain unfilled. This is because students with more socio-economic capital go to institutions in southern states. Low demand for engineers from industry has also contributed to this situation. In 2020, the number of engineering colleges in Madhya Pradesh was 267, of which 45 were government colleges and 222 were private colleges.

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