

The Promise of City and Education: Exploring Aspirations on the Margins of Delhi

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In the popular imagination, the two words 'education' and 'city' have often evoked a sense of optimism and liberation. It is a hope for a better life and liberation from disadvantages and stigmatised identities. Dr. B.R Ambedkar, for instance, was optimistic that the city held the promise of emancipation for the Dalits. These two concepts are also associated frequently with progress, civilisation and are oriented towards the future, a better future. It is not only material progress but about the very sense of being. This paper explores the educational aspiration of the marginalized residents in a squatter settlement of Delhi and how the city figures in their desires. In a city that aspires to become a world-class space, how the working class and poor, often the recipients of state violence, articulate their aspirations for a better future through the pursuit of education is the focus of this paper. In doing so, the paper goes beyond the narratives of exclusion, violence against the poor and class antagonism. The paper emerges from my doctoral work, an ethnographic study in a 40-year-old, multigenerational, poor neighbourhood of Delhi.