

Mass Migration from Rural India: A Restudy of Kunkeri Village in Konkan, Maharashtra, 1961–1987–2017

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Abstract

This article examines a particular village—Kunkeri—in Konkan, Maharashtra, characterized by persistent mass outmigration for over five decades, by combining a field study in 2017 with detailed ethnographic and statistical baseline data collected by the Census of India in 1961 and 1987. It documents the increase in outmigration rates, catch-up in outmigration intensities by the lowest castes to those of the upper castes, diversification of household migration strategies and outmigrants' occupations, the lessening of single-male migration strategies, the presence of a diasporic association and the growing significance of commuting and migration for education. Yet, despite mass outmigration and a general rise in the standard of living across castes, we observe strong continuity in the distribution of castes and land ownership structures within Kunkeri. These findings point to both the transformative and status-quo preserving features of persistent mass migration from rural India.

JEL: O15, J61, N35

Keywords

Migration, caste, land, village restudies, India

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Introduction

Migration has long been noted as one of the central forces affecting the transformation of rural societies across the world. The departure of individuals and families, for short or long durations in voluntary or involuntary circumstances, has attracted significant attention in the rural Indian context, albeit in cross-sectional settings. Important questions such as how migration patterns have changed over time and its relationship with village life have not been a major domain of research due to the dearth of longitudinal data in India at the micro-level.

Villages continue to remain important in India as two-thirds of the population live in them. At the same time, they are not timeless; they are transformed by changes taking place within and around them. In spite of the methodological challenges, investigating change becomes possible in longitudinal studies which make them important from an academic as well as a policy point of view (Himanshu, Jha, & Rodgers, 2016).

One common theme explored by village restudies in India is the rise of the non-farm economy and the blurring of village boundaries with urban areas to form the 'rurban'. In this context, studying labour mobility in longitudinal studies becomes extremely important. However, migration has not been a central theme in most of the longitudinal studies in rural India. Conventional village studies in India have seen villages as self-contained units, 'little republics' isolated from the influences of the outside world. Scholars like Madan (2002) acknowledge the need to study rapid changes occurring in rural India but do not mention mobility. In a similar vein, Breman (1989, p. 7) notes that 'migration tends to be ignored in conventional village studies'. This lack of emphasis on migration in village studies gets carried on in longitudinal settings. Unsurprisingly, most of the village restudies of India have been in regions not well known for high spatial mobility as persistent outmigration in India is highly clustered in selected regions. Figure 1 maps over 25 important village restudies in the last five decades and juxtaposes them with the intensity of outmigration.

As is evident in this map, most of the village restudies have bypassed high migration hotspots in India, including the Konkan region in coastal Maharashtra. Many village studies and restudies make only a passing reference to migration. A couple of studies, however, are significant in assessing changes in migration patterns at the village level over long periods of time. Jan Breman extensively studied labour for over five decades in south Gujarat, a region known for high levels of seasonal migration. He began his work in the early 1960s in two villages of Gandevigam and Chikligam in Surat District focusing on agrarian relations, caste and labour. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was an increase in the incidence of spatial mobility through daily commuting and short-term labour circulation (Breman, 1985). Over the years, income from outside the village became indispensable to the survival of landless households (Breman, 1993) and there was increasing casualization and contractualization of circular footloose migrants shuttling between rural and urban areas (Breman, 1996). Similarly, G. Rodgers and J. Rodgers (2001) and Datta (2016a, 2016b) analysed longitudinal data on migration from representative villages in Bihar at three points in time: 1981–1983, 1998–1999

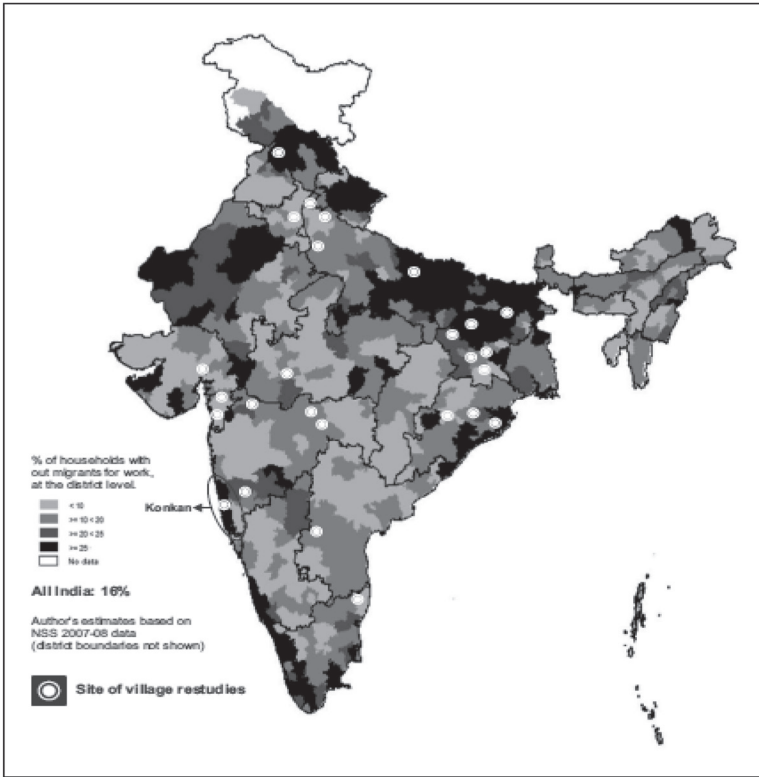


Figure 1. Village Restudy Sites and Outmigration Intensity in India

Source: Outmigration data for 2007–2008 from Tumbe (2015).

Notes: The map depicts the following village restudy sites compiled by Vartak (2018): Mithbhav, Sugaon (proxy name), Shirapur, Kanzara, Dongargaon, (Maharashtra); Gangaikondan (Tamil Nadu); Doaba region (Punjab); Sogur, Bisipara, Ainlatunga; Gandevigam, Chikligam, Sundarana (Gujarat), Jamgod (Madhya Pradesh); Susari, Pokharia, Dubailia Biswaspur, Inai, Baghakole (Bihar); Dokur (Telangana); two villages near Panipat (Haryana); Khanpur, Karimpur, Bijnor, Belapur (proxy name), Palanpur (UP).

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and 2009–2013. These studies found migration to be an important aspect of long-term transformation, seen mostly in positive light.

Studying migration over a period of time can prove to be immensely useful as one of the limitations of migration studies is the inability to capture the dimension of time (IMI, 2011; Massey, 1990; Poros, 2011). This article builds on this research agenda and shows continuity and changes in migration patterns and village life in one village of Konkan, Maharashtra, a region known to have one of the most intense and persistent mass migration episodes in global migration history. It combines detailed data provided by the village-level census monographs for 1961 and 1987, with a field study covering all the households in the village in

2017. By examining migration in a historical perspective, it departs from a large body of cross-sectional studies, and by restudying a village in a migration hotspot, it also departs geographically from much of the existing scholarship on village restudies in India, as well as other internal migration studies which tend to focus on urban areas and ‘why people migrate’ rather than the source areas of migrants. This article differs not only in its methodology from mainstream migration studies but also in its findings, many of which counter prevailing understandings in the field. For instance, the article documents the higher propensity of outmigration among the upper castes in early waves of migration conditioned by opportunity, rather than mass deprivation highlighted previously in the literature. Persistent outmigration from the Konkan region has also led to perceptions of it being a backward region but as the article highlights, this process was closely tied with substantial improvements in human development indicators.

The rest of the article is arranged as follows. First, we briefly review migration studies on the Konkan region. We then present the sources of data and methods used in our study of Kunkeri village and discuss the changes that have taken place in Kunkeri village since the first study was conducted in 1961. The final section concludes with a brief discussion on the implications of our findings in Kunkeri.

Mass Migration from the Konkan Region, Maharashtra

The coastal strip of Maharashtra and Goa from Palghar to Goa is known as the Konkan region. A larger part of the Konkan region falls in Maharashtra under two districts—Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg, the latter being carved out of the former in 1981. Its peculiar geographical location between the Arabian Sea on the west and the Sahyadri mountain ranges on the east connected this region with the rest of the world simultaneously making it culturally distinct from the rest of Maharashtra. The region is blessed with heavy rainfall from the southwest monsoon and it slowly moved from being a primarily subsistence rice farming economy to growing cash crops such as the Alphonso variety of mangoes and cashew nuts over the past century.

Villages in the Konkan region are organized in hamlets or wadis. These wadis are mostly organized along caste lines. Wadis are scattered at varying distances because of the uneven terrain. Organization of wadis along caste lines leads to residential segregation. Brahmins and Marathas have traditionally been at the top of caste hierarchy while Mahars have been at the bottom. Caste groups differ not only in terms of their traditional occupations and social standings but also in terms of their migration trajectories, as described in later sections.

Historically, the region has been connected with the outside world through trade. Even before the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, ports in Konkan were fairly well developed and traded regularly with distant places. The coastal location played a part in early connectivity, as water transport developed before and was much better and faster than road transport. The first migrants to Bombay went by sea, a route popular till the 1980s even after roads were developed. Planning the annual journey, activities on the ship, finding company and later on bullock cart transport were significant tasks in themselves. Better road and railway

infrastructure, especially the introduction of Konkan railway in the late 1990s, has considerably facilitated easier movement of people in recent times.

The first noted stream of outmigration from the Konkan was in the eighteenth century when the rulers of the Maratha Empire hired people in varying capacities to serve them in Pune. A large number of Brahmins migrated permanently during this time. With the fall of the Maratha Empire and the rise of British colonial rule, migration patterns from the Konkan region began to change as Bombay emerged as the main destination. Labour was needed in the construction sector, dockyards, army, police and other services. In the initial years, the need for labour was so great, that incentives were given to populate the city (Savur, 1982, p. 184). The British mobilized labour, timber and other raw materials from the Konkan region, which was under their control, to Bombay.

Migration from the Konkan region to Bombay was a 'well-established tradition', long before the emergence of mills in Bombay (Chandavarkar, 1994, p. 131) but large-scale emigration of workers began with the growth of the textile mills in the 1860s (Yamin, 1991, p. 13). By 1881, 15 per cent of those born in Ratnagiri were working in Bombay (Yamin, 1991). Initially, the movement of labour was seasonal in nature. Ratnagiri sent not less than 100,000 persons to Bombay during 1889, who returned seasonally to their fields in time for paddy sowing (Choksey, 1960, p. 85). Over time, these migrations became more semi-permanent in nature, with migrants spending majority of the year in the destination and returning home for festivals or important occasions. Because of the steady remittances sent by outmigrants through money orders sent by post, the region was termed as a 'money order economy' in many studies. These money orders enabled dependents in the village to survive, as well as to distinguish migrants from non-migrant households.

The overall evidence on caste selectivity in initial migration streams from the Konkan region is mixed. Yamin (1991, p. 21) noted initial migration from the region to be dominated by the upper and middle Maratha and Kunbi castes and under-represented by the erstwhile untouchable Mahar caste. Patel (1963, pp. 16–17) notes that it was initially the Kunbis who migrated in search of employment while the Marathas and Brahmins migrated later and that a majority of the mill operatives in Bombay were Marathas. Bombay police included the Marathas, Bhandaris and Mahars as the key recruits (Savur, 1982). In 1858 itself, 47 per cent of the Bombay army was recruited from the Konkan belt. Two separate army regiments of Marathas and Mahars were created, but by the end of the nineteenth century, a change in army recruitment practices led to a reduction in the recruitment of Mahars. Among outmigrants, there was and still is a high degree of concentration of certain castes in certain occupations.

Migration from the Konkan region has been overwhelmingly male dominated. This is reflected in the sex ratios which have never been below 1,100 females per 1,000 males since the 1870s, indicating mass male migration for the last 140 years (Tumbe, 2012, pp. 93–94). Female migration was associated with the Muslims and those in the fishing profession and higher rates of female outmigration were noted among the artisans, low castes and untouchables (Yamin, 1991). Women migrants worked in textile mills before certain labour laws were introduced in 1891, after which the mill owners preferred not to employ women (Menon &

Adarkar, 2004, p. 102). Some women migrants ran *khanavals*, or eateries catering to the needs of mill workers and other migrants (Menon & Adarkar, 2004, p. 98). Desai (1982) notes women bearing the brunt of migration in the source region. Many women, who were present, were a part of a 'relay team', where one woman of the family would live in the city to cook and clean for the migrants, while others lived in the village and took care of the ancestral home (Bagwe, 1995).

In the middle of the twentieth century, Bombay continued to be the most important destination for Konkani migrants. According to the Census of 1961, Ratnagiri contributed to 45 per cent of the total migrants in Bombay City from the state of Maharashtra when its share in the state's population was only 5 per cent (Zachariah, 1966, pp. 51–52). In 1961, Ratnagiri contributed nearly half of the migrants from Maharashtra and made the highest contribution of any single district in India (Zachariah, 1966, p. 54). Bombay was the main destination for migrants, but there were others as well such as Goa and Karachi. There were numerous cases of outmigration to Goa when Goa became independent and offered government jobs, but this did not convert into a steady migration flow. Visaria (1968) in his study of nine villages notes that in spite of the presence of job opportunities in Goa and physical proximity of Kudal and Malvan talukas to Goa, there were no instances of migration to Goa. Migration from the Konkan area to the Persian Gulf countries has been observed in recent times and is dominated by Muslim communities (Gogate, 1991), like in other parts of the western coast of India.

Studies on migration from the Konkan region have focused on the causal factors within a 'push-pull' framework. Push factors are the lack of employment opportunities, stagnation in agriculture, lack of meaningful changes in agrarian structure, lack of industrial development, failure to tap existing resources, increasing population pressure on land and oppression of the *khots* (Chandavarkar, 1994; Dandekar, 1959; Punekar & Golwalkar, 1973; Yamin, 1991). The pull factors include the employment opportunities in Bombay (Padki, 1964; Savur, 1982). Padki (1964) and Visaria (1968) noted the practice of outmigration to be pervasive and over generations led to a 'tradition' of migration. Sita and Prabhu (1989) found that within the Konkan region, the most developed tehsils had the highest rates of outmigration.

The Konkan region's urbanization rate is well below 20 per cent as mass migration has occurred from rural and urban areas to places beyond the Konkan region. While not as developed as Mumbai, it performs much better than many other districts of Maharashtra and most parts of India. The 2012 Maharashtra Human Development Report showed that Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri ranked 'very high' and 'high' on the Human Development Index (HDI). Both districts fared well across education and health indicators. Yet, mass migration from the Konkan belt continues unabated even today as seen in Figure 1. This is even more surprising when one considers the collapse of the textile mills in Mumbai in the 1980s, the mainstay for many of the migrant workers. It is in this context of persistent mass migration and lack of scholarship on the region for at least two decades that we restudy one particular village in the Konkan area.

Kunkeri Village: 1961–1987–2017

We chose Kunkeri village in Sawantwadi Taluka of Sindhudurg District, primarily because this village was earlier studied intensively by the Census of India in its series of village monographs and therefore had rich baseline data for two time periods—1961 and 1987. Census authorities had commissioned over 300 village monographs in 1961 and restudied many of these villages in different parts of India in the 1970s and 1980s, providing a rich and largely untapped source of information on rural India. These monographs provided detailed accounts of village life including caste, demography, land ownership, livelihoods, amenities and more.

In Kunkeri, the census studied all the households in 1961, while in 1987, it reported some data for all the households and some data only for a sample of hundred households. Some of the data on migration given in the 1961 report were not collected in 1987. Against these baseline studies, we collected primary data from all the households in Kunkeri in May 2017. A household survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire contained questions on general information as well as migration-specific questions.

Kunkeri is located 12 kilometres away from Sawantwadi town and is today well connected by road and bus service. Census data of 2011 show that there were 363 households with a total population of 1,511 and the sex ratio was 1,004 females per thousand males. In the primary data collected in May 2017, we have information on 318 households, of which 14 belong to migrant households which are otherwise locked throughout the year. Migrants are those born in the village and residing elsewhere at the time of data collection, for reasons other than marriage and commuting. This is broadly similar to the definition used in the Census 1961 village monograph, which restricted its focus to work-related outmigration.

Apart from these 318 households, 10 houses belonging to migrants were found locked. These migrants were reported to come only on the festivals of Holi and Ganesh Chaturthi. Additionally, 11 households refused to give information or were not available at the time of the survey. The caste distribution of these 21 households was similar to the caste distribution of the village and hence there was little selection bias. In our study, we consider the 14 houses which are otherwise locked throughout the year but responded to our queries at the time of the study wherever migration-specific data are presented. Otherwise, 304 households constitute as our core sample.

As per standard practice, a household is defined as a unit which has a common kitchen. If people cooked together, we counted them as one house. There were some houses constructed in the fields, by people living in distant hamlets or wadis. In order to avoid repetition, we did not cover these houses. Hence, there is a slight difference between census data and our survey data, in terms of the total number of households.

Table 1 shows the evolution of key indicators of Kunkeri village as per census records and our field study. The number of households, stagnant between the 1960s and 1980s, shows a relative increase over the last 30 years due to the move towards more nuclear families and some in-migration. Literacy rates have increased from below 30 per cent to over 80 per cent, mirroring national trends. The percentage of households reporting outmigrants has consistently increased

Table I. Demography of Kunkeri Village, 1961–2017

Year	1961	1971	1981	1987	2011	2017
Households	254	262	253	260	363	337
Population	1,182	1,326	1,378	–	1,511	–
% of Households reporting outmigration	26	–	–	–	–	60
Sex ratio (females per 1,000 males)	1,074	1,037	1,146	1,064	1,004	955
0–14 Age group as % of total population	43.6	–	–	36.0	–	13.3
55+ Age group as % of total population	9.3	–	–	14.1	–	31.1
Literacy rate (%)	28.8	42.1	51.4	58.2	85.6	86.2

Source: Census reports and monographs on Kunkeri and field study in 2017.

from 26 per cent in 1961 to 60 per cent in 2017. However, the sex ratio which was very high initially has fallen in recent years reflecting the changing gender dimensions of migration that we describe in a later section. Due to the rise in outmigration rates, the population grew at an annual rate of only 0.5 per cent over the past 50 years, well below India's population growth rates of 1.5–2.0 per cent in this period. More generally, the Konkan region has been the slowest growing region in India between 1921 and 2001 (Tumbe, 2012, p. 93). The age structure has also undergone a dramatic change due to fertility reduction as the share of under 15 age groups has fallen from 44 per cent to 13 per cent while the share of the aged (55+ age group) has risen from 9 per cent to 31 per cent. Today, Kunkeri is a village with relatively many old people, few children and many people in the prime working age groups absent due to outmigration.

Caste Composition and Residential Pattern of Kunkeri, 1961–2017

In Kunkeri, a little more than 75 per cent of the households belong to the Maratha caste. In our database, the 'General' category comprises of all Maratha households, one Tamil household with unspecified caste in 2017 and one Brahmin household in 1961. Other Backward Classes (OBCs) includes Bhandari, Sutar, Vani, Nhavi, Madval, Kumbhar, Deoli and Gurav castes. Scheduled Castes (SCs) include only the Mahar caste which constitutes around 7 per cent of the households, the largest caste share in Kunkeri after the Marathas. Nomadic Tribes (NTs) include Dhangar, Laman and Wadar and the 'Other' category comprises of Muslim and Koli (Christian). As per the traditional caste-based occupations of this region, Brahmins were priests, Sutar were carpenters, Vanis were traders, Nhavis were hairdressers, Kumbhars were potters, Madval were washermen, Guravs were to help the main priest and Kolis were fishermen. Although some have moved out of their caste

Table 2. Caste Distribution of Kunkeri Village, 1961–2017

Social Group	Caste	% of HH in 1961	% of HH in 1987	% of HH in 2017
General	Maratha	77.95	82.31	77.63
	Brahmin Goud	0.39	0	0
	Tamil*	0	0	0.33
Other Backward Classes (OBCs)	Vani	1.57	1.15	0.66
	Madval	1.18	1.54	0.99
	Nhavi	2.76	1.15	2.30
	Bhandari	1.97	1.92	2.96
	Maratha Deoli	0.39	0.38	0.33
	Kumbhar	1.18	0	0.33
	Gurav	0.39	0	0
	Scheduled Castes (SCs)	Mahar	5.51	7.69
Notified Tribes (NTs)	Laman	0	0	0.33
	Dhangar	2.76	1.54	2.63
	Wadar	0	0	1.32
Other	Muslim	0.39	0.38	0
	Koli (Christian)	0	0	0.33
Total percentage		100	100	100
Total households		254	260	318

Source: Census reports and monographs on Kunkeri and field study in 2017.

Notes: HH = Household; *Tamil refers to in-migrant from Tamil Nadu with unspecified caste.

occupations, we find many continuing and having the same status as inscribed in the traditional caste hierarchy.

As seen in Table 2, the dominant status of the Maratha caste persists between 1961 and 2017, with little change in the overall caste distribution of the village. There is a marginal increase in the percentage of households belonging to the NT category. This is because of a few new in-migrants belonging to Wadar and Laman groups who came to work in stone quarries and other manual work requiring hard labour and now stay in a wadi at the fringes of the village. Field enquiries revealed that the singular Brahmin and Gurav households noted in 1961 have moved out as also the one Muslim household noted in 1961 and 1987.

Figure 2 shows the layout of Kunkeri and its 12 hamlets or wadis with all the households and associated castes. Because of the hilly terrain, villages in Konkan are more spatially spread out than elsewhere. Houses within a wadi are huddled together, though it is not uncommon to find houses scattered in the fields as well. Wadis have historically been segregated on caste lines and Figure 2 depicts this residential reality. The Mahars and NTs are confined to their own wadi, the Marathas have their own clusters, while some clusters have a mixture of Marathas and OBCs. This segregation has been remarkably constant through time, as reflected in Table 3 that compares wadi-wise distribution of castes between 1961 and 2017.

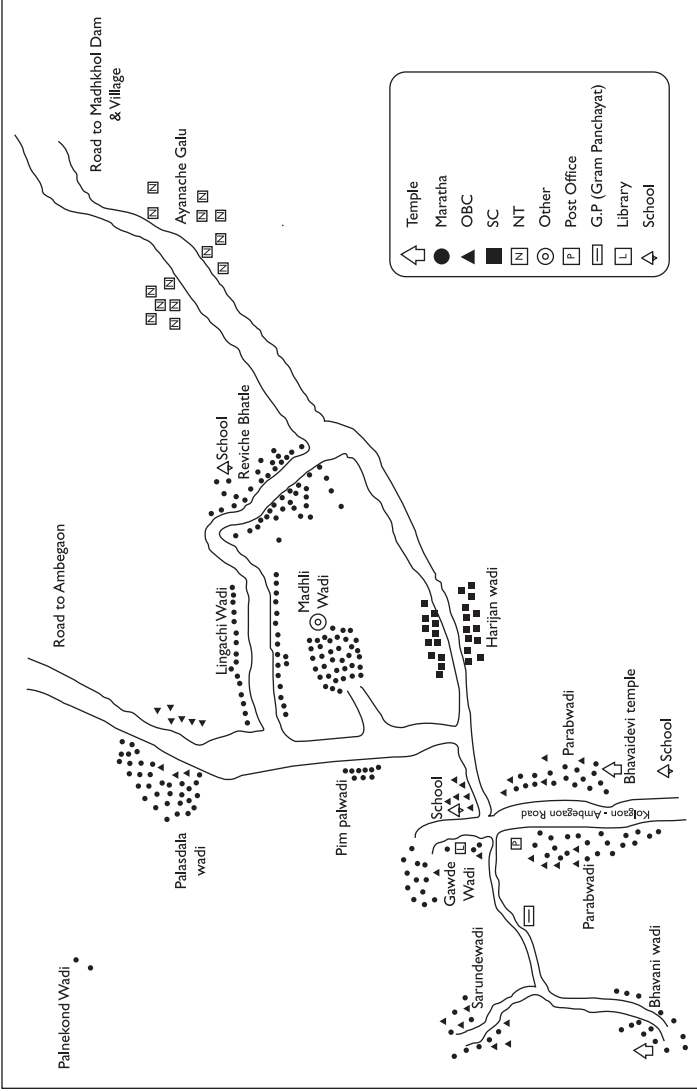


Figure 2. Kunkeri Village Map, 2017

Source: Field notes.

Table 3. Caste Distribution of Kunkeri across Hamlets, 1961–2017

Hamlets/Wadis	% of General HH			% of OBC HH			% of SC HH			% of NT HH			% of Other HH		
	1961	1987	2017	1961	1987	2017	1961	1987	2017	1961	1987	2017	1961	1987	2017
Parabwadi	75	88	79	23	12	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gawdewadi	0	48	67	0	47	33	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Harijanwadi	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	100	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bhawaniwadi	78	100	100	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Palnekondwadi	0	100	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sarundewadi	0	69	60	0	31	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pimpalwadi	86	73	100	14	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Palasdalawadi	65	100	78	35	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Madhiliwadi	97	100	97	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Lingachiwadi	100	100	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reviche Bhatle	100	98	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Ayanche Galu	11	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	78	100	100

Source: Census reports and monographs on Kunkeri and field study in 2017.

Notes: HH = Household; OBC = Other Backward Class; SC = Scheduled Caste; NT = Notified Tribe. Decimals rounded to nearest place.

The number of wadis has gone up from 9 in 1961 to 12 in 2017, while the number of houses in older wadis has not decreased. Sarundewadi, Palnekondwadi and Gawdewadi did not appear in the 1961 study. Gawdewadi appears to have separated from Parabwadi, while Sarundewadi appears to be a spillover of Bhavaniwadi and Parabwadi. Palnekondwadi consists of two houses which were displaced and resettled when the Palnekond dam was built in the 1980s. This wadi has 10 Maratha houses of which three fall in Kunkeri, while the rest report to be in the neighbouring village of Kolgaon. Reviche Bhatle and Sarundewadi are the newer wadis, both dominated by the Marathas. In earlier times, Maharwadi or Harijanwadi was the last wadi of the village. As the village grew, there was a shortage of residential space, and newer wadis such as Reviche Bhatle came up ahead of it. In 1961, it was called Maharwadi and then changed to Harijanwadi in 1987; and in 2017, there was a written application submitted to change the name to 'Mata Ramai Nagar' by the residents of the wadi. The change in wadi name signifies the assertion of Mahar or Dalit identity in the village.

Earlier, the Dhangar community lived closer to the village, but then they preferred to move out and be closer to their fields. There is an increase in the number of OBC households in Palasdala wadi, Sarundewadi, Parabwadi and Gawdewadi. Ayanache Galu has now become fully NTs. Other wadis such as Bhavaniwadi and Reviche Bhatle are 100 per cent Marathas. Persistent residential segregation points to the continued importance of the caste system in the life of Kunkeri village.

Continuity and Change in Migration Patterns in Kunkeri

As noted in Table 1, outmigration rates have more than doubled in Kunkeri over the past five decades. The 1961 monograph had observed the following on the caste selectivity of outmigration: 'The sex ratio for the entire village was 1,074 per 1,000 males in 1961, while for the Mahars it was only 967 which may indicate that emigration amongst Mahars is less as compared with general population of the village' (Census of India, 1966, p. 70).

This is also backed by the data on outmigration presented in Table 4. In 1961, the outmigrant to population ratio was 7 per cent at the village level with virtually no representation from the SC and NT social groups. This ratio rose to 25 per cent in 2017 with a sharp increase noted among the SC and NT social groups. To place these migration magnitudes in some perspective, in their seminal volume, *The Age of Mass Migration*, Hatton and Williamson (1998, pp. 9–10) considered an outmigrant ratio of over 5 per cent as mass migration.

Our access to baseline data here is significant because in several migration studies, it is not possible to accurately assess the selectivity of migration streams or their permanence. It is clear in Kunkeri that the lowest castes and social groups were the last to start migrating but over time their propensities have almost caught up with those of the upper castes. The reduction in the number of Vanis (traders), Deolis and exit of the Brahmin, Gurav and Muslim household suggests permanent outmigration of these groups from Kunkeri or their assimilation in the growing category of 'Marathas'. There is also a marked increase in outmigration propensities

Table 4. Outmigrant to Population Ratio across Castes, 1961 and 2017

Social Group	Caste	1961	2017
		Outmigrant to Population Ratio (%)	Outmigrant to Population Ratio (%)
General	Maratha	7.5	27.6
	Brahmin	0	–
	Tamil*	0	66.7
OBCs	Vani	11.1	28.6
	Nhavi	13.3	14.3
	Bhandari	4.5	41.4
	Sutar	2.9	17.5
	Maratha Deoli	14.3	0
	Madval	9.0	17.7
	Kumbhar	0	25.0
	Gurav	0	–
	SCs	Mahar	1.7
NTs	Dhangar	3.3	4.8
	Laman	0	25.0
	Wadar	0	5.6
Other	Koli	0	50.0
	Muslim	0	–
	Total	7.0	25.5

Source: Census reports and monographs on Kunkeri and field study in 2017.

Notes: HH = Household; *Tamil refers to in-migrant from Tamil Nadu with unspecified caste.

Table 5. Number of Outmigrants within Households, 1961 and 2017

No. of outmigrants	1961		2017	
	No. of HH	% of HH with outmigrants	No. of HH	% of HH with outmigrants
0	189	74.41	126	39.60
1	54	21.26	53	16.67
2	6	2.36	32	10.06
3	3	1.18	22	6.92
4	2	0.79	44	13.84
5+	0	0	41	12.89
Total	254	100	318	100

Source: Census Report (1966, p. 54) and field study in 2017.

Note: HH = Household.

among the OBCs, especially Sutars and Bhandaris. Table 5 shows that migration has not only affected more households, but more members *within* each household. Almost all the households with outmigrants in 1961 sent out only one migrant, whereas the distribution among households sending one, two, three, four or more than five migrants in 2017 was fairly even. Migration has therefore become a more broad-based livelihood diversification strategy. In contrast with the northern Konkan region, outmigration has also become more gender-balanced in nature in Kunkeri, as reflected in its sex ratios and migration statistics. The 1961 study had noted 83 outmigrants, all men migrating for work. In 2017, we document over 20 per cent of outmigrants to be women, for reasons other than marriage. There were 60 female outmigrants and the principal reason for female outmigration was education and work, a massive shift from the 1960s.

Education has become an important driver of outmigration in recent years. The Census 1961 monograph had noted that ‘there is no emigration for education as such, and all migration is for employment’ (Census of India, 1966, p. 70). In our study, we find 18 per cent of outmigrants to have migrated for education. This reflects the rising importance of education felt by households and also their capacity to bear the costs. Education is also seen to be an important asset towards successful migration, that is, the migration for education is linked with an education for migration. Hence, we find that the literacy rate among migrant households is far higher than that of non-migrant households in 2017.

The main destination of outmigrants continues to be Mumbai. In 1961, all 83 migrants had migrated to Mumbai. In 2017, apart from Mumbai, there were a few migrants who had gone to Pune and Goa. A large number of migrants were employed in the government sector in 1961, while in 2017, it was noticed that very few were employed in the government even though there were some aspirations. Employment was more in ‘private jobs’ in the informal sector such as drivers, delivery person, factory workers, attendants and so on.

Earlier, people would travel on foot to Sawantwadi and take a bus to the port to board a steamer to Mumbai. Because of improved road transport infrastructure, migrants can visit Kunkeri from Mumbai more frequently as travel time has reduced to 9 hours. Virtually, all the migrants had returned to their village at least once in the year prior to our study. Most migrants come for the two important festivals of Ganesh Chaturthi and Holi. Many also come in the month of May or during local elections. Kunkeri village, like many other villages in the Konkan region, has its own association of outmigrants in Mumbai. This diasporic association is an important route towards binding ties between Mumbai and Kunkeri.

Remittances have played an important role in sustaining the economy of Kunkeri. In 1961, 44 households received remittances and the total amount received by way of postal money orders was ₹18,749 (Census of India, 1966, p. 54). In 2015–2016, this figure was ₹255,000 for the villages of Ambegaon and Kunkeri together, but remittances were also sent through other mediums such as bank transfers or cash transfers through returning migrants. Since 60 per cent of households report outmigration, nearly all these households are directly dependent on remittances in one form or the other. In terms of reported livelihoods in 2017, we observe that

40 per cent of households were purely 'agricultural households', 12 per cent were purely 'non-agricultural' households, while the remaining were a combination of these two with remittances providing an important supplementary source of disposable income.

Land Ownership in Kunkeri, 1961–2017

The fragmentation of landholdings has taken place in Kunkeri as in other parts of the country due to population growth and switch towards smaller families. In 1961, around 22 per cent of the holdings were greater than three hectares. By 2017, this figure had reduced to below 10 per cent. Consequently, the share of landholdings less than half a hectare increased from 20 per cent in 1961 to 33 per cent in 1987 and 49 per cent in 2017.

The caste distribution of land ownership showed virtually no change over time. In 1987 and 2017, Marathas owned around 90 per cent of the land in Kunkeri, higher than their share in population by about 10 percentage points. The number of Mahars owning land has increased from two in 1987 to four in 2017, but they collectively own less than 1 per cent of the land in Kunkeri, lower than their share in population by about 6 per cent. Majority of the Mahars do not own land even today. Mahars (SC) and NTs are both historically marginalized groups but because of some land ownership, NTs are relatively better off than the SC households. Among the NT households, the Dhangars have land while Laman and Wadar households remain landless. In addition, the Kumbhars and Deolis among the OBCs were also observed to be landless in 1987 and 2017.

It is interesting to note that no major change has taken place in terms of landholding. For a village with mass migration, located close to Sawantwadi town with many buyers interested in land either for commercial crops or other purposes, no major change has yet taken place. Key informant interviews of activists based in Sawantwadi suggest that villagers of Kunkeri are well aware of the importance of land ownership and do not sell their land at all. In recent years, certain villages where land was grabbed under the name of development projects suffered dire consequences. Those who have sold land in Kunkeri have sold it decades ago. Inequalities in ownership of land exist, but there are no big landlords or money lenders. Nor did we come across cases of absentee landlords. Very few households today have landholdings above five hectares.

Previous studies have noted a strong dependence between land ownership and the capacity to migrate (Connell et al., 1976; Deshingkar & Farrington, 2009). In Kunkeri, the evidence is somewhat mixed. In 1961, outmigration intensities were lowest among the landless and those having large landholdings. That is, the Marathas with some but not large landholdings were the most likely to migrate. Today, with outmigration a reality across castes and smaller landholding sizes in general, there appears to be only a weakly positive relationship between landholding size and outmigration.

Agriculture and rural employment has also changed. In 1961, along with rice, there was cultivation of vegetables which were grown in their own fields such as math, radish, brinjals, bhendi, chillies, onions and so on. Villagers did not purchase vegetables except potatoes in the market. Maximum area was under paddy cultivation followed by nagali (ragi), kulith, chavli, onions, bananas, chillies and coconut (Census of India, 1966, p. 42). While the 1961 study mentions the number of coconut and mango trees, there is no mention of cashew nut. It is most likely that there were no cashew nut trees in the village at that time.

In 1987, after paddy, ragi continued to be the principal crop, but the area under cultivation as well as total production reduced substantially between 1961 and 1987 (Census of India, 1988, p. 101). In 1987, cashew nut production was limited, but in 1986, 2,000 cashew nut trees were planted in Kunkeri and the number rose to 2,300 in 1987 (Census of India, 1988, p. 5). Cashew nut plantation is one of the major crops and sources of income for farmers in Kunkeri in 2017. Many farmers have moved from rice and other crops to cashew as cashew gets better price and reportedly lesser efforts than rice. In 2017, 72 households reported cashew cultivation.

There has been no improvement in technology or investment in rural industry. Whatever industry existed earlier declined. There is a preference for non-agricultural work. Twenty-six per cent of the households in 2017 took no crops and for 58 per cent of the households, there was at least one non-agricultural source of livelihood. These trends mirror those that have been documented at the pan-India level in regions of 'missing men' or mass male outmigration, where there has been a greater uptake of services in the non-farm economy and little uptake in manufacturing (Tumbe, 2015).

Amenities in Kunkeri, 1961–2017

Amenities in Kunkeri have improved significantly over the years. Along with amenities, the material life of people has also improved considerably. Census studies (1966, 1988) report data on certain aspects of consumption in both these years. Census 1966 presents data on the number of meals per day per household, number of houses possessing furniture, different goods such as bicycles, radio sets, stoves, soap, tea and sugar (Census of India, 1966, pp. 22–25). For example, in 1961, there were only two Maratha households who owned bicycles, while none owned a radio set. In 2017, it would appear that the standard of living has improved significantly as television sets, two wheelers, gas stoves and fans are now common possessions, even among the lowest castes. Remittances from Mumbai have contributed tremendously towards increasing purchasing power and also passing on new tastes and habits of consumption.

Table 6 shows the changes that have taken place on a wide range of parameters. Transport infrastructure has improved substantially giving a boost to commuting as a phenomenon separate from longer term migration. In 1961, there were three commuters to Sawantwadi. One was a clerk in a bank, one worked as a salesman in a co-operative shop and one worked as a tailor (Census of India, 1966, p. 55).

Table 6. Amenities in Kunkeri, 1961–2017

Amenities	1961	1987	2017
Roads	Joined to Belgaum–Vengurla national highway by road of 1.5 miles. <i>Kutchra</i> road. Not navigable during monsoon. Inside the village, there are only foot tracks	Road to the village improved and widened. Roads connecting wadis are foot tracks	Pucca road runs to every wadi, except the last stretch to Ayanache Galu. Well connected to other villages of Kolgaon, Madhkhoh and Ambegaon
State transport (ST) bus	Every day between Sawantwadi–Vengurla and Sawantwadi–Belgaum	ST bus throughout the year	Fourteen buses to the village—three bus stops
Sub post and telegraph office	Sawantwadi and Kolgaon (2 miles)	Post office in Kunkeri in 1983 but not telegraph	Post office shared with Ambegaon village
Health service, judicial court, high school, college, vocational training	In Sawantwadi	Medical sub-centre established in 1984	Medical sub-centre present
Schooling and education	One primary school till fourth standard (established in 1908)	Two schools, one primary and one middle school till seventh standard	Three schools in the village. School till 10th standard. After 10th education in Sawantwadi
Communication	Telephones absent	Telephones absent	Landline phones since 2001. Mobile range not there
Electricity	NA	Available. Introduced in May 1973. Out of the 100 surveyed HH, 75 had electric connection	All houses have electricity connection
Fair price shop	0	—	—
Entertainment	No special importance. Perform bhajans, Ganesh Chaturthi, fairs and festivals of neighbouring village. No radio/transistor/TV	Radio/transistor is common, few HH have TV. 'Krida and Kala Vikas Mandal Kunkeri' was established in 1984. Various activities and festivals. For films, villagers go to Sawantwadi. Increased participation of women	Most households have TV. Wi-Fi zone in one place
Village industry	Carpenters (3 HH), bamboo workers (6), wooden toy makers and pot making (2 HH)	Carpenters (5 HH), bamboo workers, wooden toy makers and beedi making	No one makes wooden toys anymore. Bamboo work on decline. Carpenters (8 HH)

Source: Census reports and monographs on Kunkeri and field study in 2017.

In 2017, this number was 169. Availability of proper infrastructure, importance given to education, growth of Sawantwadi and the presence of jobs there, and attraction for non-agricultural jobs among the youth are the reasons behind this tremendous rise in commuting. Along with increase in commuting, there are two key changes that have taken place. There is commuting for education and an increase in the number of women commuters. Ownership of private two wheeler vehicles of many households has led to commuting to different destinations as well. Eighty-one per cent of the commuters commute daily to Sawantwadi. Except for a few commuters to Goa, rest of the commuters went within the district of Sindhudurg.

The first school was established in the village in 1908. This school is located in Gawdewadi and continues to be till the fourth grade. One high school is located in Reviche Bhatle, while the school till 10th standard is located just at the beginning of the village. Three different schools were established as the village is spatially scattered, and movement from one wadi to another is difficult in the monsoons.

In recent years, enrolment numbers have gone down, as fertility has gone down, and there is an increasing preference to send children to private English-medium schools in Sawantwadi. All the three schools have good infrastructure and staff. Yet we find an increasing pull towards English-medium schools based on the popular belief that they signal quality education. This preference of those who can afford to send their children to private schools in Sawantwadi is also linked to the widely held belief in the village that there is no 'future' in agriculture; for an economically secure future, one has to be in non-agricultural urban jobs.

Electricity arrived in Kunkeri in May 1973 and by 1987, three-fourths of the population had access to electricity. Today, all households have access to electricity in the village. According to the residents of Kunkeri, improvement in infrastructure and amenities in Kunkeri has been due to the twin processes of overall development and economic and social remittances sent by migrants. The diasporic association takes credit for pushing for taps in the wadi, signing up first for the telephone connections, demanding bus service till their wadi, and for better roads. Migrants from Reviche Bhatle wadi claim to have spent their own money to have roads in their wadi. The association at present has also given an application for a mobile tower to be installed in the village. While there is limited mobile phone network connectivity, there is now one 'Wi-Fi' zone in the village. Improvement in infrastructure has increased the standard of living of the people, connectivity and facilitated access to information and opportunities, thereby increasing aspirations of the people. With increasing levels of education and the stigma attached to agricultural work, the young see migration as the only option. The rise in commuting has not led to a fall in migration.

Discussion and Conclusion: The Kunkeri Paradox

This article has presented longitudinal data on Kunkeri village in Konkan, Maharashtra and differs from other village restudies in two aspects. First, the detailed baseline data were collected by the Census of India. And second, the

study focuses mainly on migration as Kunkeri is located in one of the hotspots of mass migration in India which has not been as well studied as places in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar or Kerala.

In 1961, the census village monograph of Kunkeri had reported that the 'economic condition is deplorable' and that 'people have to lead a miserable life and have to depend upon outside help to migrate to meet the expenditure of the households' (Census of India, 1966, pp. 24 and 43). In 1987, it was reported that '21 per cent of the villagers live well' and that 42 per cent of the population was below the poverty line (Census of India, 1988, p. 123). Three decades later, in our study, we find that absolute poverty in Kunkeri is no longer prevalent with all households reporting consumption expenditures well above the poverty levels. And yet, over the past five decades, outmigration rates more than doubled in Kunkeri to levels that would mark it as among the most affected villages in the world. Why has migration increased during this tide of rising prosperity?

Some clues to addressing this question come from understanding the caste selectivity of outmigration in Kunkeri. While the lowest castes simply could not migrate in the past, they can do so today, with about the same propensities as the upper castes. The relationship between the Marathas and Mahars was also noted to have improved between 1961 and 1987 (Census of India, 1988 p. 173). As a result, the economic gains of migration are now more equally distributed across castes in Kunkeri. In this, migrant networks have played a crucial role in securing jobs in Mumbai and other destinations. Migration is no longer a bastion of the Marathas or men and the emergence of gender-balanced migrations and a village-level diasporic association shows the consolidation of village-level identity in securing development. There are also important feedback loops between migration and development, especially in the case of education. As noted earlier, the rising premium on education was facilitated by outmigration, which in turn enhanced outmigration as higher skilled jobs were not available in the village.

Yet, if mass outmigration presents an image of upheaval in the source region, the evidence in Kunkeri also suggests a diametrically opposite experience. Despite being a village of mass outmigration, we do not find much change in the caste composition of the village over the years. Caste-based residential segregation also continues to be the same. Landholdings have fragmented further and there is no change in the landholding patterns over decades. This could be perhaps because the initial conditions and the present conditions which drive migration are different. Mass migration from Konkan is no longer a result of absolute poverty as observed in many north Indian states. What is evident from our study in Kunkeri is that outmigration persists not because of underdevelopment, but other reasons such as individual motivations, attitudes towards migration and strong social networks in the destination.

If Kunkeri is to serve as a template for other villages in India which have only recently embarked on a trajectory of high spatial mobility, it is that over time, migration becomes more inclusive as different castes, genders, purposes and destinations come within its fold. Being able to migrate, however, does not mean similar outcomes for all. Our observations in Kunkeri suggest that these vary significantly at the extreme ends of social hierarchies. It is paradoxical that

persistent mass outmigration does not get reflected adequately in caste demography or the distribution of land ownership within the village. Persistent mass migration from rural India can, therefore, be both transformative and status-quo preserving at the same time.

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