

Migration and Education in Regions with a Culture of Migration Observations from Kunkeri Village, Konkan, Maharashtra

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Abstract

The article explores the role of education in regions with persistent migration. Drawing from fieldwork conducted in Kunkeri village in Konkan, Maharashtra in 2017, the article contends that education serves as a preparatory tool for migration. The social and economic remittances of migrants encourage aspiring migrants to pursue education. In places with a culture of migration, such as Kunkeri village, a complex feedback loop between education and migration gets generated over time. Aspiring migrants seek specific training in order to migrate to certain destinations.

Introduction

Regions with persistent migration over generations, where migration “becomes independent and has its own momentum” (Massey et al. 1998), is “normative” (Kandel and Massey 2002, 982), and an “everyday experience” (Cohen 2004, 5), are said to have a culture of migration¹. Studies of regions with a culture of migration provide a richer understanding of migration and its associated factors, as well as of transformations in the region induced by it.

Certain districts in India such as Ratnagiri in Maharashtra, Udupi in Karnataka, Saran in Bihar and Ganjam in Odisha, and certain states such as Goa and Kerala, have come to be known as regions of mass outmigration (Tumbe 2018). Though these regions have the characteristics associated with cultures of migration, they have not been conceptualised as such. One exception to this is Ali’s study (2007) on international migration from Hyderabad. Ali (ibid, 43) notes how migrants come to be seen as ‘heroes’. This paper explores the themes of education and migration in a village located in a region with a culture of migration.

Globally, education is seen as the means to learn employable skills, and thus a gateway to higher incomes, and in general, a better life. Education, along with employment and marriage,

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is one of the most common reasons for migration in both internal and international migration streams. In migration studies, education has primarily been seen as an attribute of migrants or as a reason for migration. Migration literature points to self-selectivity of migrants based on education. In many cases, migrants have higher levels of education than the general population (Connell et al. 1976; Borjas 1994; Massey et al. 1998). Bernard and Bell (2018) contend that education stimulates migration globally.

In rural India, education and migration need to be examined in their contemporary context. Mc Duie-Ra (2016, 163) noted a shift in the perception of private education from a privilege to a norm in northeastern India. The private schools that were started by return migrants are symbols of success (ibid). Recent studies (Tilche 2016; Jodhka and Kumar 2017) suggest that the new values and aspirations of rural India make them view salaried jobs as the only way to upward mobility. A “job” is seen as a “work of the mind” and hence preferred (Tilche and Simpson 2018, 8). Government jobs are the most coveted jobs, offering stability, prestige and protection on retirement. Jobs in the private sector come next. Salaried jobs are seen as stable and are preferred, even when they are in the informal sector and, in reality, unstable. Education, especially through the English medium, is seen as the gateway to securing these jobs. Tilche (2016) notes that education is seen as the only way to secure employment. Jodhka and Kumar (2017) note the mushrooming of private English medium schools and coaching centres in response to a heavy demand for them, owing to the people’s desire to get their children out of agriculture. McDuie-Ra (2016, 180) describes education as a means to ‘migrate and generate remittances’.

In regions with a culture of migration, education, along with other social, economic, cultural and political factors, becomes an important factor influencing and in turn being transformed by migration. In the case of US/Mexico, Kandel and Massey (2002) note that those aspiring to migrate from Mexico to the USA are more likely to drop out of school, as the work available at the destination does not require much education. In Hyderabad, Ali (2007, 49) notes, “the glorification of migration has also had an inflationary effect upon schooling, the cost of which has gone up considerably in Hyderabad, due in part to the increased wealth of the many with Gulf money”. There is a preference (ibid) for private schools, medical and engineering colleges (ibid). Ali (ibid) briefly mentions how the choice of the migration destination affects the choice of education. A migrant interviewed for the study chose to study Arabic instead of the local language Telugu, as he wanted to emigrate to Saudi Arabia. Many private schools also gave the option of studying Arabic as a second language (ibid, 49). Those who aspired to migrate to the US chose to study Information Technology (ibid).

The paper looks at the relationship between education and migration in a village with persistent outmigration and how the village has been fundamentally transformed through migration over time. The role played by education in the preference for select destinations and schools, through the feedback loops, is examined further in this paper.

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The paper draws from my doctoral fieldwork conducted in 2017 in Kunkeri village in Konkan along with the destination sites of Pune and Mumbai. Kunkeri was one of the villages on which the Census of India collected detailed data in 1961 and again in 1987.² Availability of baseline data made it possible to discern the trends of continuity and change over a period of time.

Data were collected on individual and household levels. A household schedule was administered to all the 318 households in the village. This schedule had migration-specific as well as general questions, structured in such a way as to allow comparisons with previous Census data. In-depth interviews of migrants and non-migrants³ and analyses of family genealogies were conducted in order to gain insights into migration processes.

This study defines migrants as those born in the village and residing elsewhere at the time of data collection, for reasons other than marriage and commuting. This definition is broadly similar to that used in the Census 1961 village monograph. In the household schedule, data on migrants were collected from their non-migrant relatives. The migrants who were interviewed at the destination sites verified the information given by their relatives. Non-migrants were those residing in the village at the time of data collection and included return migrants and aspiring migrants who had not yet left.

Introduction to Konkan and Kunkeri⁴

Due to its coastal location, the Konkan region was connected with the outside world through water transport for more than a thousand years. While the movement of people from the region is as old as water transport itself, the first notable stream of Brahmins moving to Pune can be traced to the sixteenth century. These Brahmin migrants, capitalising on their caste and education, did skilled work for the Peshwas such as maintaining accounts and other records. Steady migration to Mumbai began more than 150 years ago. Labour was required for construction work and also in the dockyards and railways, among other services. In the initial years, the demand for labour was so high that the Britishers gave incentives to workers to migrate to Bombay (Savur 1982, 184).

Migration from Konkan is a “well-established tradition” (Chandavarkar 1994, 131) and a “habit” (Padki 1964). Migration from Konkan has historically been male-dominated, leading to skewed sex ratios in the region. The sex ratio in Konkan has never been below 1100 females per 1000 males for the last 140 years, indicating a rich history of mass migration (Tumbe 2012, 93–94). As per the 2011 Census, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg were the only two districts in Maharashtra to have sex ratios of more than 1050. Both districts have been ranked high on the Human Development Index (HDI) in the Maharashtra Human Development Report (2012) and have fared well on educational indicators.

While under the Peshwa rule, mostly educated men used to migrate from the region, under the British a majority of the migrants were unskilled labourers. Only a small number of *khots*

or landlords in Konkan migrated to occupy administrative positions, capitalising on their caste position and education. In the early days, jobs were readily available in Mumbai. Many took to studying English specifically to get government jobs (Masselos 1995). Educational facilities attracted a large number of Konkani Brahmins who studied in English schools and later obtained jobs as teachers (Kosambi 1995, 20).

In the 1960s, Padki (1964) noted how people chose to continue schooling because there was a lack of jobs in Konkan, and once educated they did not want to stay and do work that they considered inferior, and thus were encouraged to migrate. Education continues to play a crucial role in strengthening outmigration flows. High educational levels and aspirations for further education, in the face of lack of appropriate opportunities, make outmigration seem the only viable option.

Kunkeri village is located ten kilometres from Sawantwadi town in Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra. Like most villages in Konkan, houses in Kunkeri are scattered in wadis or hamlets. There are twelve wadis and thirteen caste and tribes in Kunkeri. Marathas are the dominant caste and over 75 per cent of the population. Around 14 per cent of the population are OBCs, 7 per cent are Scheduled Castes, and 4 per cent are Nomadic Tribes.⁵ There was no seasonal⁶ outmigration from Kunkeri in 2017. Census data for 1961 does not mention seasonal migration. Migration from Kunkeri has increased substantially over the years – from 26 per cent of the households reporting outmigration in 1961 to 60 per cent of the households in 2017. The outmigrant⁷ to total population ratio was 7 per cent in 1961, which jumped to 25.5 per cent in 2017 (Vartak et al. 2019, 54). These figures point to the persistent and increasing outmigration from Kunkeri. Migration is no longer a privilege of the dominant castes or men—it is an option available to all (ibid).

The economy of Kunkeri is undergoing a rapid transformation, with the share of non-agricultural sources of livelihoods increasing dramatically. Agriculture is fast receding due to stagnant agricultural incomes and increasingly fragmented land, even as consumption is rising and aspirations changing (Vartak 2019). While in 1961, 75.98 per cent of the households were engaged solely in agriculture⁸ (*Census Report* 1966, 41), their share fell to 39.6 per cent of all households in 2017. Increase in the share of non-agricultural incomes and changing aspirations are two important aspects of rural change.

Education in Kunkeri

Available infrastructure: The first primary school in Kunkeri was established in 1908. By the time the Census collected data in 1987, there were two schools – one primary and the other up to the 7th standard. In 2017, there were three schools in Kunkeri, with one of them being till 10th standard. After having completed the 10th standard, students go to towns and cities to study, with Sawantwadi being the closest amongst them.

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Before the development of transport infrastructure and the coming up of a secondary school in the village, most children dropped out after the 4th standard. The few who carried on walked to the school in Sawantwadi. Ravi Sawant, a farmer in his 70s, vividly recalls walking to school in all seasons along with a few others. In the absence of footwear, he and his friends would tie leaves to their feet and walk. On the other hand, Pandurang Sawant, an octogenarian, was sent by his parents to Mumbai to study. When he was younger, he could not access the school in the village from his *wadi*(hamlet)⁹ during the monsoons. Since his parents were keen on him attending school during the monsoons, they sent him to a relative's house in Mumbai to attend school there.

Literacy: Literacy in Kunkeri has increased from 28.8 per cent in 1961 to 86.2 per cent in 2017. The gap between male and female literacy levels has steadily reduced. The literacy rate for migrants in 2017 was 99.5 per cent. While there was hardly any difference between the literacy rates of male and female migrants, there was a substantial gap between the literacy rates for female non-migrants (80.6 per cent) and female migrants (98.8 per cent).

Table 1: Percentage of literacy across the years (of people residing in the village)

Percentage of literate population residing in the village	1961	1971	1981	1987	2017
Male	46	59.5	65.1	83.9	91.5
Female	12.9	25.3	39.4	53.1	80.6
Total	28.8	42.1	51.4	58.2	86.2

Note: Calculation excludes 0-6 years.

Source: 1987 Report, pp.36; 56-60. Primary data for 2017 collected by the researcher.

The number of years of schooling and educational levels: The average number of years of schooling for migrants was higher than for those residing in the village. Data on migrants were collected from their family members residing in the village.

Table 2: Average number of years of schooling, 2017

Average number of years of school education	Males	Females	Total
Those residing in the village	8.52	6.73	7.64
All outmigrants	11.61	11.12	11.42

Source: Compiled by the researcher from primary data collected in Kunkeri, 2017.

During the 1961 survey, not a single graduate was recorded (*Census Report 1988*, 60). In 1987, twelve men and eleven women had matriculation and higher secondary qualifications, while three men had graduate degrees; there were no postgraduates. At the time of the survey in 2017, there were seventy-eight graduates and four postgraduates. Two migrants had completed PhD degrees.

The 1988 Census Report provides some data on education and caste. The Dhangar and Nhavi caste groups lagged behind other groups. The study also calculates ‘average educational score’ as per the formulae given in the Appendix of the Census Report (1988, 178), which was found to be slightly more for heads of migrant households than those of non-migrant households (*ibid*, 61).

Table 3: Differences in education of migrants and those residing in the village, 2017

Educational classification of migrants and those residing in the village	Percentage of those residing in the village	Percentage of Migrants
Illiterate	13.83	0.46
Stds.1 to 4	13.46	5.29
Stds. 5 to 7	20.65	4.83
8 to 10	25.89	28.28
11 & 12	16.64	32.87
ITI	1.03	2.53
Diploma (Engineering)	0.75	4.14
B.A.	2.34	4.14
B.Com	2.99	5.29
BSc	0.65	2.76
LLB	0.19	0.00
B.Ed., D.Ed.	0.93	0.69
B.E.	0.28	3.91
Masters	0.37	3.91
Medicine	0.00	0.46
PhD	0.00	0.46
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: Compiled by the researcher from primary data collected in Kunkeri, 2017.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 indicate migrants being more educated on an average. Table 3 shows the educational qualifications of those residing in the village and those of migrants. Many of the graduates living in Kunkeri have opportunities to work in Sawantwadi, which is close enough for them to commute daily. The number of persons with B.Ed. or D.Ed. degrees is higher amongst non-migrants. Many of them already have teaching jobs in schools in the village or in nearby villages where they commute every day. Those with specialised degrees are mostly migrants since job opportunities and remunerations are higher in urban areas.

Migration for Education

In Kunkeri in 1961, “there is no emigration for education as such, and all migration is for employment” (*Census Report* 1966, 70). The Census Report (1988) mentions that poverty made parents keep their children out of school, as their labour was needed in the field and there was a “lack of determination on the part of parents to send their children to school” (*ibid*). The reasons for migration have changed since then – Mumbai, Pune and Goa were now the main destinations. Several youngsters commuted to Sawantwadi, the closest town, for accessing higher education. Around 18 per cent of migrants left the village for education in 2017. More than half of these migrants managed to secure a job in the destination where they had migrated for education. Migration for education points to increasing recognition of education as crucial for accessing jobs. Families send their children to cities for higher education if they can afford to. Regions with a culture of migration have strong social networks, leading to more support for migrants migrating for education.

Women, Education and Migration

In 1961, there was no migration for education from Kunkeri and all migrants were men, with women only moving for marriage. In 2017, 20 per cent of the migrants were women. They migrated for work as well as education. In fact, of the total migrants who migrated for education, 60 per cent were women. In in-depth interviews, a few women expressed their goal to be independent and saw education as a means to achieve that end. A few families, as we see later in this paper, strive to educate their daughters. However, the migration of women for education, although empowering, may not have the same outcomes as those of men. Some families only send their daughters to study further as it improves their chances of finding a suitable groom.

Role of Remittances

Regions with a culture of migration are usually receivers of high social and economic remittances. These play a role in strengthening the link between education and migration. Social remittances are the “the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending country communities” (Levitt 1998, 927). Social remittances may be

individual or collective. The experiences of migration influence the general attitude and vision of the people and also what they want for themselves and their community (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011).

Economic remittances: Many migrants support the education of family members in the village through remittances. In addition to efforts that benefit their families, many migrants undertake steps that benefit the village at large. A highly successful Dalit migrant, who was amongst the first to migrate for education, donated a computer and television to the primary school so that students could get exposure. Several migrants claimed to have donated cash for school expenses. The migrants' association in Mumbai has donated cash, benches, curtains and stationery to the school, and has also contributed to school celebrations with toys, clothes, fancy dresses, props etc. The association also gives interest-free educational loans for higher education to students who score well in their board exams.

Social remittances: Stronger than economic remittances is the role played by individual and collective social remittances. Migrants bring back strong support for education. Ravi Sawant, who was in Mumbai for nearly a decade before he returned and became the Sarpanch of the village, claims to have understood the importance of education when he went to Mumbai. He had observed that those in higher work positions in Mumbai were more educated. He says,

“... educational progress is the main thing. When does a house really improve? If my son studies well, then his whole family will improve. Economic progress ultimately depends on education. How many times have I told people from Harijanwadi¹⁰ to educate their children more? But they do not listen. They have reservations. Education is free. Education is the only way ahead.”

Ravi Sawant's social remittances lay utmost importance on education. The role of caste and class in gaining access to education is ignored, with the focus only being on the willingness to learn. Formal education is equated with street-smartness and knowledge. In the words of the octogenarian Pandurang Sawant:

“I studied in Mumbai till 10th. Later I started working. I learnt many English words on the job ... When they came to take away our land for the [construction of] Palnekond dam, I said let us go to the collector; we can approach the courts for better compensation. You know, I was the only educated person here [in the wadi]. The rest are all 'anadi', just like adivasis, illiterate and they know nothing.”

The migrants, return migrants and members of the migrants' associations: all emphasise the importance of education. Migrants with specialised degrees are lauded for their success. The Kunkereri migrants' association in Mumbai felicitates outstanding school students annually and holds career guidance camps for them.

Dalits, Education and Migration

The study by Jeffery et al. (2004, 968) on the Dalits in Uttar Pradesh reveals their belief in the potential of education and how education gives them “a sense of individual dignity and confidence”. They state that the increase in formal education has led to a degree of emancipation. Elsewhere we have contended that it is caste-based social remittances that generate resistance (Vartak and Tumbe 2020). Formal education is mostly accessed outside the village, making it conceptually challenging to separate the impacts of education and migration.

In-depth interviews in Kunkereri reveal that while migration for education was initially restricted only to the dominant castes in the village, people of all castes were migrating for education in 2017. The elders in the community encourage others to study. Bandoji Kunkerkar, a man in his 70s, said:

“Will you understand anything sitting here in the village? I think all children should be sent to the hostel. At home, they are spoilt by their parents. In the hostel, they learn to be independent, take responsibility and are disciplined well. After the hostel, they would work well.”

In Kunkereri, Anil Kunkerkar, a highly educated Dalit who has a government job, continues to be a source of inspiration and pride. He believes that he could not have obtained the highest university degree without the village schoolteacher's encouragement, which was crucial in getting him interested in studying.

“In our village, there was a teacher who encouraged me a lot. Because of him, I enjoyed studying. Otherwise, no one from our wadi even went in the 1st grade, forget completing seventh. No one went to school. It was not compulsory, and no one bothered to go...”

Continuing education was no easy task for Kunkerkar. He lived in hostels, studied in government colleges and worked part-time to support his family in the village. He believes that caste can be transcended through education.

“People in the village give me respect. Not just in our wadi [Harijanwadi] but the entire village. Why? Because I am educated, I have a respectable job. That is what I tell boys in our wadi. Who has stopped you? Can other castes stop you? Study, get education. Then caste will not matter. “

The intertwining of the effects of education and migration is clear from a vignette of Jayant Kamble's interview. Kamble is a schoolteacher in a neighbouring village. After finishing his Std. 10th, Kamble lived in boarding schools in various cities and completed his education. He actively works for Harijanwadi. He says:

"...If you go out, educate yourself only then can you make progress...Those who went out made progress and those who stayed here barely finished school. They are stuck doing some small things, labour work and did not make progress. I became aware because of Babasaheb's writing. Living in the village has no future. I learnt this because I studied outside."

Social remittances that emphasise the value of education in getting a respectable job and dignified life are important as they stress the need to migrate for education. The wide caste-based disparity in migration for education is gradually declining, although the extent of social change brought through education-related migration in the context of the Dalits needs further exploration.

Education for Migration

As noted in the introduction, in regions with persistent migration, aspiring migrants choose to avail of the education that will enable their migration. Ali (2007, 49) notes that the desire to migrate to the Gulf or the USA took root at an early age and was reflected in the educational choices of the young. Kandel and Massey (2002) observed the aspirations of Mexican schoolchildren to work and live in the US. These aspirations were higher in areas with a high prevalence of migration. The male students had more strongly articulated their desire to migrate than the female ones (ibid).

Obtaining educational degrees is a conscious choice made in order to migrate. It is a pre-mediated move. Ravi Sawant, who had migrated to Mumbai almost 50 years ago, had learnt to type in Sawantwadi before moving to Mumbai: his maternal uncle in Mumbai had told him that it could fetch him a job there. Education also provides a channel for those wishing to stay put and not migrate. Arvind Parab, a schoolteacher in his late 30s, for example, did not want to migrate. He said:

"I did not want to go anywhere, I like the village. Since I am the only son, it is best to be at home. I was hoping to get a teaching job. So I did B.Ed. Luckily, I got this job immediately. People who were with me, went out. You will not find one young person at home. They will be in cities working. Or in Sawantwadi."

Preference for destinations: Not only did aspiring migrants undertake education that would aid their migration, but they also chose specific streams based on the destinations they wanted to migrate.

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While for Arvind it was his choice of not migrating that led him to study for a B.Ed degree, for Ramesh it was migration, and purposely one to Goa, that enabled him to study for a Masters in Chemistry. He has been working in a multinational pharmaceutical company in Mapusa, Goa for the last five years. He remarked,

“... I have been to Mumbai. I did not like it there. I cannot adjust in Mumbai, Goa is better. It is easier to travel here. Sometimes I come once a week.

There is no difference between here and Goa, in terms of climate, way of life. I like Goa. I did not want to go to Pune or Mumbai. I decided when I was in 12th standard. So I did MSc in Chemistry so that I could get a job in pharmaceuticals.

If you start working after BSc, you get a limited type of jobs. There is a wider scope when you do a Masters. You can get a job after 12th standard also, in pharmaceutical companies in Goa. But the terms of employment are not fair. It is not worth it.

I am guiding my uncle's son to join Pharmaceuticals. He is majoring in Chemistry. He will either come with me, or go to Mumbai. It depends on where he wants to stay.”

Ramesh's testimonial shows his clear preference for Goa over other destinations. He lists the advantages of working there, as well as hints at his dislike for Mumbai. While previous exposure to the destination encourages further migration, in Ramesh's case it did not lead to him choosing Mumbai automatically. Instead, he chose a place that was 'similar' to the village, and not as expensive as Mumbai. This shows that migrants do exercise their agency occasionally to defy the more popular patterns. Armed with the knowledge that prospects are not so good for those with only a 12th degree, Ramesh chose to study further before he worked. He is encouraging his cousin to do the same. Previous migration generates knowledge that is used by the later migrants to make better choices.

Ramesh's testimony points out an interesting fact—the choice of destination was made before choosing the educational field. The path of education selected was such that it supported the choice of the destination. He is also guiding his cousin to follow his path. Ramesh's story shows that both education and social networks contribute to the formation of ties with new destinations. As migration becomes a well-rooted practice, it also becomes more nuanced, interlocking education with the choice of destination.

While earlier it was uneducated who migrated, now aspiring migrants know that the prospects are better for a person with degrees, resulting in education *for* migration. Significant resources—time, money and energy—are invested by aspiring migrants and their families

in order to migrate in the future. Schoolchildren, young teenagers and adults, all aim to migrate in the future and prepare themselves for a good job in the city. The role that schools play in fostering the link between education and migration is dealt with in the next section.

Role of Schools in Creating a Culture of Migration

Schools play a role in cementing the link between education and migration. The desire to migrate often takes hold at a young age. In a nation-wide survey in the Philippines, a country known for its culture of migration, around 50 per cent of the children wanted to emigrate (Asis 2006). Students receive exposure to the benefits of migration through various school-level activities, which contributes to their desire to migrate. During a visit to a village school in Konkan, Patwardhan (2013, 39) found that almost all the students had been to Mumbai whereas not more than ten had visited the Vijaydurg Fort that was five kilometres away. This anecdotal evidence suggests that schoolchildren may sometimes have better exposure to places that are far away than those in their immediate surroundings.

The desire to migrate is often not confined to youngsters and their families; it sometimes becomes the collective desire of an entire society. The village schools in Kunkeri are taking specific steps to adapt to the aspirations of the children and their families. Ramesh Rane says:

“Migration is not ‘achanak’ (sudden or abrupt). The mind-set is groomed through school. There are workshops in school also. In school only, jobs are fixed in the children’s mind. We get information like there are more (number of) jobs for engineering and pharmacy.”

The village school organises career guidance camps for students in higher secondary classes in order to facilitate the students’ success in the ‘outside world’. Their successful alumni, mostly migrants, are invited to talk to students about their careers. Such workshops are, according to the school principal, the need of the hour. According to the principal,

“Students need to do well in life. They have to understand the competition that exists outside the village. They need early exposure. They need to be motivated.”

Students are also taken on a three-day trip every year, usually to Mumbai or Pune, where they see tourist attractions. There is a WhatsApp group of eighty alumni, many of whom are based in cities and keep in touch with schoolteachers. The silver jubilee of the school was entirely organised and funded by the school alumni. The primary school in its centenary year came up with a magazine that featured alumni who had ‘succeeded’ in the ‘outside world’.

Education and Migration: Need of the Hour

Everyone in the village felt the importance of education. As education becomes a necessity for the future of children, parents do all that they can to facilitate it. Outmigrants from that household also aid them. In the case of Ramesh Rane, the father and the uncles, all small farmers, did extra agricultural labour, took loans and put in their savings to educate the first of the children, Ramesh's eldest cousin. After the boy finished his B.Sc., he got a job and repaid the debt. Then he helped finance the education of his siblings and cousins. It was because of family support and the guidance of his migrant cousins that Ramesh could study full-time till he completed his Master's degree.

Those who do not have direct contacts in the destination still take risks. Ragini Sawant, a 27-year-old software professional who works in Pune, wanted to study engineering. She scored good marks in the 12th standard and wanted to pursue a B.E degree. Her father said,

“It [to send a daughter to study elsewhere] requires daring. We only vaguely knew of engineering. The fee was 80,000 rupees. But we just could not pay the fees. We raised some [money] and also took some loan and paid the fees in the first year. In the second year, I took a loan ... In the third and the fourth years, my daughter took loans first from the educational society and [then a] bank. That is how she finished her degree.”

English education is so important that some households have shifted to Sawantwadi so that their children can go to English medium schools and attend evening coaching classes. When asked about the declining enrolment rates, the primary school principal replied that an excessive craze for English medium education attracted parents to private schools. Jayant Sawant, a middle-aged farmer who is a graduate and a member of the village school committee, has enrolled his children in private English medium schools in the village. He said,

“The main reason for migration is education. Those who study here and go out for jobs have studied in Marathi medium, which is not that relevant. They cannot face competition. Four years ago there were 120 students in our primary school, and now (in 2017) it is fifty-five. Students have turned to the city. In Sawantwadi, earlier there was only one private English medium school, and now there are five.

...A job is so much easier [than farming]. People in cities are happy doing jobs ... Get ready, go and do your 8 hours duty sitting on a chair; come home, take rest. The kind of leisure that a job has, farming does not have.

If I make my son a farmer, there is so much stigma now, that when he becomes 20-25 years old ... he will not find a bride. Job is necessary.”

“...We have put everything at stake for our children. Shikshan kara ani sheharat jawa. [Finish education and go to the city!] Unless you go to the city, you cannot prosper. You cannot stop people from flocking to the city! What is the future here?”

Having a job is seen as more comfortable and better than facing fluctuating incomes and the back-breaking labour of agriculture. While the situation may not actually be as bleak as portrayed by Jayant Sawant, his views are shared by most respondents. There is a preference for English medium schools, and private schools are associated with quality. “Get educated and go to the city” is reiterated by parents to their children. Previous migrants educated in the Marathi medium have taught the next lot of migrants that knowing English is an advantage. Education and migration create a feedback loop. Previous migrants reinforce the awareness about the importance of education, especially knowledge of English. With increasing migration for education, education for migration is also observed.

Ithe kay ahe? (what is here?): During fieldwork, when I put forward the question, “why do you (want to) migrate?”, many retorted, “*Ithe kay ahe?*” For me, this reply summarises many things—the perception of agriculture, the move towards non-agricultural jobs, the perception of non-migrants as non-achievers and of education as a way to achieve aspirations. The widespread articulation of all the problems with rural life, and the resulting frustrations, fuels the demand for city jobs, and education is recognised as the only way to these jobs.

Conclusion

Most studies see education only as an attribute of the selectivity of migrants. While there is evidence that those who have higher levels of education have higher chances of migration, there is more to the relationship between migration and education. In regions with a culture of migration, the link between migration and education becomes dynamic. This paper contributes to the theory of cultures of migration by exploring the link between education and migration in Kunkeri, a village with a rich history of migration.

Levels of literacy and the average number of years of schooling have consistently risen in Kunkeri. There is a growing preference for English medium schools, and private schools are associated with quality and assumed to give children a competitive edge. There is an increase in migration for education. In 1961, all migration was for work, while in 2017, 18 per cent of migration is for education. Vignettes of interviews presented in this paper show that respondents see migration and education as the key to upward mobility, both in terms of class as well as culture. For the oppressed castes, migration and education are twin means to overcome caste-based discrimination. The feedback loop of migration and education strengthens over time and is soldered by the economic and social remittances of migrants. Aspiring migrants opt for educational streams that have value in the destination. The choice of certain streams of higher education is made with outmigration in mind, which shows the planned and informed nature of migration.

Notes

1. Several overlapping definitions exist. For more please see Massey et al. (1998), Kandel and Massey (2002), Cohen (2004), Ali (2007), Cohen and Sirkeci (2011), Sharma (2011).
2. The Census collected data in 1961 and 1987 and the village monograph reports were published in 1966 and 1988 respectively. Whenever the Reports are mentioned the latter set of years is implied.
3. Data on marriage migrants and commuters was collected separately. They are not included under the term ‘migrant’.
4. For an extensive introduction to migration from Konkan and Kunkeri see Vartak et al. (2019).
5. Detailed social structure of the village, physical layouts and names of the wadis can be found in Vartak et al (2019).
6. There are a number of studies on education and seasonal migration in India. This is an important policy issue. Since there was no seasonal migration from Kunkeri, this paper does not address the issue.
7. The terms ‘outmigrant’ and ‘migrant’ are used interchangeably while referring to migration from Kunkeri. There is no in-migration in Kunkeri village.
8. Excluding allied activities. In 2017, 1.7 percent of the HHs were dependent on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood.
9. Villages in Konkan are organised in hamlets or wadis. These wadis are mostly organised on caste lines and are scattered because of the hilly terrain.
10. In 1961, the wadi with Dalit households was called Maharwadi. This name had changed to Harijanwadi by the 1987 Census study. In 2017, the Dalit households had proposed a name change, but there was no official change.

[Note: Names of respondents have been changed to maintain confidentiality]

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