

Circular Migration and Localized Urbanization in Rural India

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Abstract

Internal migration is a major driving force for urbanization all over the world and is of concern in Asia due to its rising magnitude. Most studies on internal migration focus on the migrant in the process of migration and a large majority of studies are interested in understanding the conditions of the migrant at the destination for policy concerns. This article makes a case for studying the source of migration and the role that circular migration plays in processes of urbanization at the source of migration. This is particularly important in the context of the growing urbanization away from cities in India. Using the case of a dryland village in northeastern Karnataka, this article attempts to understand the role that circular migration for construction work to cities has in the process of localized urbanization in the village.

印度农村地区的循环迁移和就地城镇化

国内移民在世界各地均是城镇化的一个主要推动力，并且随着数量上升在亚洲尤其引人关注。大多数关于国内移民的研究都集中于迁移过程中的移民，大量研究致力于了解移民在目的地政策环境下的状况。本文为研究迁移来源和循环迁移在迁移来源地城镇化进程中的作用提供了一个案例。这在印度城镇化日益加强的背景下尤其重要。利用卡纳塔克邦东北部一个旱地村的案例，本文尝试了解城市建设工作中的循环移民在乡村地区就地城镇化过程中的作用。

Keywords

Circular migration, urbanization, dryland, Karnataka, India

Introduction

Internal migration is known to be one of the main driving forces for urbanization globally; out of nearly 1 billion migrants in the world, 740 million are those who move within the boundaries of the nation from the rural to the urban (Beall, Guha-Khasnobis, & Kanbur, 2012). Most studies on internal migration, be it temporary, seasonal or circular migration have tended to focus on the migrant in the process of migration or the migrant at the destination of migration. Much less attention has been paid to the impact of

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migration on the places of their origin. This is a significant gap in our understanding, particularly in the case of short-term migration, where migrants go to cities to work for part of the year and spend the rest of their time at their place of origin. This article uses the case of village in northeastern Karnataka to capture the effects of circular migration on the place of origin, with an emphasis on the spatial effects. It traces the trajectory through which processes of circular internal migration leads to incipient urbanization along the highway creating a new habitation.

The first section of the article outlines the change a large dryland village, Mahagaon in northeastern Karnataka from 1961 to 2014.¹ The next section places Mahagaon's experience with circular migration in the larger context of existing studies of circular migration. The third section examines the process through which circular migration leads to localized urbanization in the form of a new settlement, the Mahagaon Cross. The final section comments on the nature of urbanization outside cities in India.

The Village

Mahagaon² is a dryland village in Kalaburagi district of Hyderabad Karnataka in the northeastern part of the state. As its name suggests, Mahagaon is a large village with a population of 8,731 in 2011 and is the second largest village in a radius of about 10 km. Figure 1 shows the location of Mahagaon village in Gulbarga district.

The backwardness of this region is reflected in several recent studies, such as those looking at low literacy rates (Aziz & Krishna, 1996), worsening sex ratio (Vivekananda, 1996), hunger (Bakshi, Chawla, & Shah, 2015) and low productivity (Rao & Gopalappa, 2004). The harsh environmental conditions contributed to the famines of the late 1800s in this region, which in turn had two important consequences for the peasantry. The first was an increase in landlessness among the poorer sections of the society as the moneylenders foreclosed cultivable land when the loans could not be repaid by small landowners. The second consequence was the rise of dominant class tenancy as moneylenders who were not native to the region could not independently cultivate dryland agriculture. Dominant class tenancy as a significant form of cultivation continued even after independence in this region and the 1971 Census of Agricultural Holdings in Karnataka showed higher number of tenants in the higher size classes (Pani, 1983). Furthermore, tenancy was present in all tenures but it was found to be more acute on non-*ryotwari* lands, such as *Jagirs* or *Inams* (Balasubramanyam, 1961).

The environmental constraint to productivity in dryland agriculture of the village had varied impacts on different members of society. There were large landlords who leased land out as they could not cultivate them, small landowners who also leased out land but because they lacked the capital to cultivate the land and dominant class tenants, who consolidated their own ownership holdings via tenancy. The nature of interest in land is summarized in Table 1.

The Brahmins were part of a small but powerful number of extremely large landlords (2.7 per cent of the landed households in Mahagaon in 1961) who were unable to cultivate all their holdings themselves. The Brahmins held 325 acres on average which was nearly nine times the land held by Lingayats, who were the next biggest group in this category. Most of the Brahmin households were involved in leasing out at least a part of their land, if not their entire landholdings. The general rhetoric in the village in 2014 was that the Naganath temple, the main Brahmin math, lost several hundred acres of land in the land reforms. The conversion of temple land to private property motivated the Brahmins to move out to various cities and towns, such as Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad, Aurangabad, Bidar and Gulbarga as doctors, engineers, professors and other professional occupations, while a section of the family continued to stay

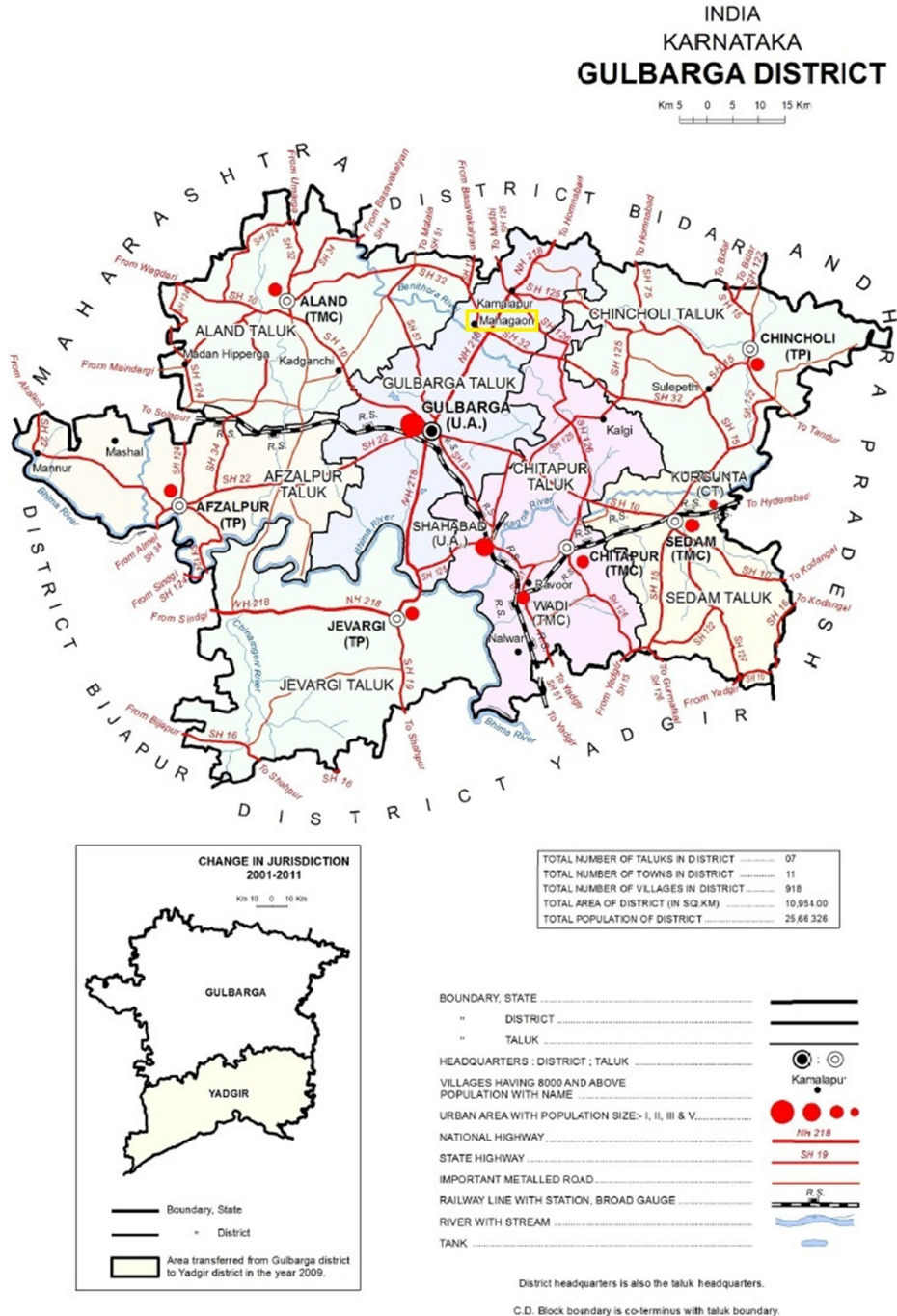


Figure I. Mahagaon Village in Gulbarga District

Source: Census of India 2011, District Census Handbook, Gulbarga.

Table 1. Nature of Interest in Land

Nature of Interest in Land	Proportion of Households in 1961	Proportion of Land in 1961	Proportion of Households in 2014	Proportion of Land in 2014
Owner cultivation	18.42	34.9	20.92	22.90
Pure leasing out	20.49	19.82	22.38	31.87
Pure leasing in	3.18	5.41	1.7	5.05
Owner cultivation and leasing out	1.24	15.73	1.45	10.97
Owner cultivation and leasing in	10.38	23.09	5.83	29.19
Owner cultivation, leasing out and leasing in	0.13	1.03	0	0
Landless	46.12	0	47.68	0
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Calculated by author from Village Survey Monograph, Mahagaon village 1961 and author's sample survey in 2014.

in the village to look after the functioning of the temple and math. The Brahmins were not as numerous in the village as they had been in 1961. While there were 29 Brahmin households in Mahagaon in 1961, their numbers were roughly halved in 2014.

The Lingayats were the dominant caste of the village as well as the region, in the way that M. N. Srinivas defined dominant castes (Srinivas, 2002). They were the most numerous caste in Mahagaon village in 1961 with about a third of all households in the village. The Lingayats were economically superior to most of the other castes, except perhaps the Brahmins, who were too few in number to constitute Srinivas' dominance. The Lingayats held nearly two-thirds of the land in the village. They were also managing various religious institutions in the village, each of which had a substantial amount of land. Not only were the Lingayats numerically and economically dominant, they were also politically dominant in the village in 1961. The Statutory Panchayat which was constituted in 1960 as per the Mysore Panchayat and Local Bodies Act 1959 had 10 Lingayats out of a total of 14 members.

There were several other castes in the village in 1961, such as the Kurubas, Kabbaligarus, Marathas and Vishwakarmas. These castes owned smaller landholdings and landlessness was widespread. Within these castes, the landed households were predominantly leasing out all their land to other larger landowners from the same castes or to dominant caste Lingayats. These households constituted 38.37 per cent of the landed households that were leasing out their entire land holdings which were 12.1 acres on average.

There was a substantial population of Muslims in the village with over a fifth of the population being Muslim in 1961. The Muslims in the area have traditionally been engaged in agriculture with some being involved in weaving which was a declining occupation. Besides this, several Muslims were engaged in self-employment such as grocers, vegetable vendors, hotel employment, meat sellers, tailors and carpenters.

In 2014, there was a similar diversity among Muslim households as well; however, the majority of Muslims were owner cultivators or were purely leasing out all their land. On average owner cultivator Muslim households held 3.6 acres of land. There were two Muslim households that were dominant class tenants and one Muslim household had too much land to cultivate on their own so was involved in leasing out a part of the holding.

The landless households in the village outnumbered the cultivators; nearly 46 per cent of the households were landless in 1961. Majority of these households were belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Muslims. The contracts that landless households entered into were mainly of two kinds.

Male labourers were found working as attached labour on an annual basis. They were typically paid once a year and some contracts were inclusive of food. Attached labourers not only worked in the farms but also in the residences of their employers. The other main form of labour was contract labour, women and men were paid daily wages for sowing, weeding, ploughing and harrowing. For harvesting, however, the payments were made in kind (Balasubramanyam, 1961). The sub-castes within the SCs in Mahagaon are the Holeyas, Madigas and the Waddars. The Waddars were stone cutters from Andhra Pradesh who had come to do stone cutting work on the Shahbad stone in Gulbarga and were given a place to settle in Mahagaon in a hamlet called the Chandar Nagar by an influential Lingayat member of the village, Chandrashekhar Patil. Thus, Chandar Nagar got its name. The Chandar Nagar Waddar colony was an exclusive settlement for Waddars with 47 households, nearly all of who were landless. There were other institutions for the SCs such as the SCs hostel which had the financial support of the Social Welfare Board.

In 2014, the SC households were predominantly leasing out all their land. The SCs were involved in agricultural labour and in the summer months several families were migrating to the urban areas to work in the construction sector. They invested their savings from the city into house repairs and construction in the village thus bringing about development in the village.

There was little change in the modes of cultivation in Mahagaon³ over a period of 50 years. Dominant class tenancy continued to be the mainstay of agriculture in the village with 11 per cent of the households involved in cultivating about 30 per cent of the land in the village. Even as the number of households that were dominant class tenants reduced, the area of land under dominant class tenancy increased as a proportion of the cultivated land. The Lingayats, Kurubas and Kabbaligarus were consolidating their ownership holdings via tenancy.

A larger proportion of the households in the village were involved in purely leasing out land, in fact 42.8 per cent of the landed households leased out their entire holdings. These were mainly small land owners with 5.9 acres on average. People of all castes, from Lingayats, Brahmins, Kurubas, Kabbaligarus to SCs, Muslims and Scheduled Tribes were engaged in leasing out their entire holdings to other landowners who then consolidated their holdings via dominant class tenancy.

Of the households leasing out all their land, the people living in Mahagaon and Mahagaon Wadi were found to be leasing out land which they owned within the village. Recent migrants into the village who lived in Dhammur Resettlement Colony (RC) and Mahagaon Cross were found to be leasing out land that they owned outside Mahagaon revenue village, probably in their previous village of residence. Thus, there is a high level of mobility in the village and between neighbouring villages which allows the smaller farmers to diversify occupations by moving around while leasing out their lands to large landowning dominant class tenants. At the same time, smaller farmers within the village who are unable to eke out a substantial living out of dryland agriculture due to lack of capital, also follow suit by leasing out their land. Many SC farmers were performing agricultural labour and other wage labour for this reason.

Circular Migration in Mahagaon

Theories on labour migration have focused on the migration of labour from rural to urban or from national to international settings. There is a one-time and one-way character to migration and permanent settlement at the destination is seen as the goal of all migration. Even in the dependency approach, the flow of resources is considered to be unidirectional, from the periphery to the core, leading to

impoverishment of the periphery. In this schema, circular migration, temporary migration or return migration (in the context of international migrants) is generally seen as a failed migration. The New Economics of Labour Migration (Stark, 1991) departs from neoclassical theories by rationalizing return migration and circular migration and looking at circular migrants as inhabiting a two-period, two-location world. In the NELM approach, migration is not viewed as individual independent behaviour as in neoclassical models, but as mutual interdependent behaviour. Agency of the migrant remains at the centre of this approach.

As an offshoot of the New Economics of Labour Migration, Deshingkar proposed an analytical framework for circular migration where the broad approach diverges from neoclassical and Marxist frameworks by adopting a livelihoods perspective. Two forms of circular migration are identified—(1) Coping migration is defined as ‘circular migration by the poor and the least educated which is mainly for survival and usually does not result in accumulation of assets even if it allows the household to smooth consumption and manage risk’ (Priya Deshingkar & Farrington, 2009, p. 18). (2) Accumulative migration on the other hand is carried out by better off households for the purpose of diversification of work and leads to accumulation of assets as a result of migration. This typology is focused on the migrant and the process of migration alone rather than the role that circular migration plays for the village economy.

Studies on circular migration address the two-way nature of migration. Most of these studies have focused solely on the migrants as they navigate between their homes and the destination of migration, their conditions of work and access to basic amenities at the destination (Kumar & Ajay, 2014; Pattenden, 2012; Picherit, 2012; Rogaly et al., 2002). While there are studies which have looked at the migrant in their local contexts, these have been from the perspective of production relations (Bremner, 1996; Datta et al., 2014). In these studies, when the non-migrant in the source village is studied, it is usually in the context of the role that migration has to play in mitigating unequal relationships between the landed and the landless. The nature of change in the village, particularly spatial change is a relatively unexplored area. The bulk of studies on circular migration have focused on the conditions of work at the destination (Bose & Rai, 2014; Premchander et al., 2014; Priya Deshingkar & Farrington, 2009).

With constraints posed from the harsh environment and a growing population, the carrying capacity of the land in Mahagaon was limited. Over the years, the landholdings were further divided, such that the average land holding in the village came down to 2.99 acres in 2014 from 12.55 acres in 1961, making cultivation even further strained. As a result, the scope to improve productivity in northern Karnataka has been limited. It has been noted that the output of coarse cereals, pulses and oilseeds fell during the 1990s and the rate of growth of yield plateaued (Vijay Shankar, 2006). Figure 2 shows that Kalaburagi district, the *tur* (red gram) bowl of Karnataka, which produces nearly 56 per cent of the crop in the state has a yield that is substantially lower than the yield for red gram all over the country over the period from 1998 to 2009 in every year.

Environmental constraints to the development in agriculture were acute. At most, individuals have been investing in minor irrigation (groundwater). The water table is much lower in northern Karnataka and in order to be successful in groundwater tapping a farmer would typically have to dig over 100 feet deep. Over the years, the level of groundwater has further lowered, leading to several instances of failure of bore-wells which have left farmers in debt. In the face of these constraints to productivity, the possibility of accumulation from agriculture is necessarily limited. As a result of this, further investments in technology improvements for increasing agricultural productivity are also low and it is only amongst the rich farmers that there is an initiative to move to newer technologies such as drip irrigation for sugarcane cultivation. The irrigated area went up from 60.7 to 127 hectares in Mahagaon from 2001 to 2011, which

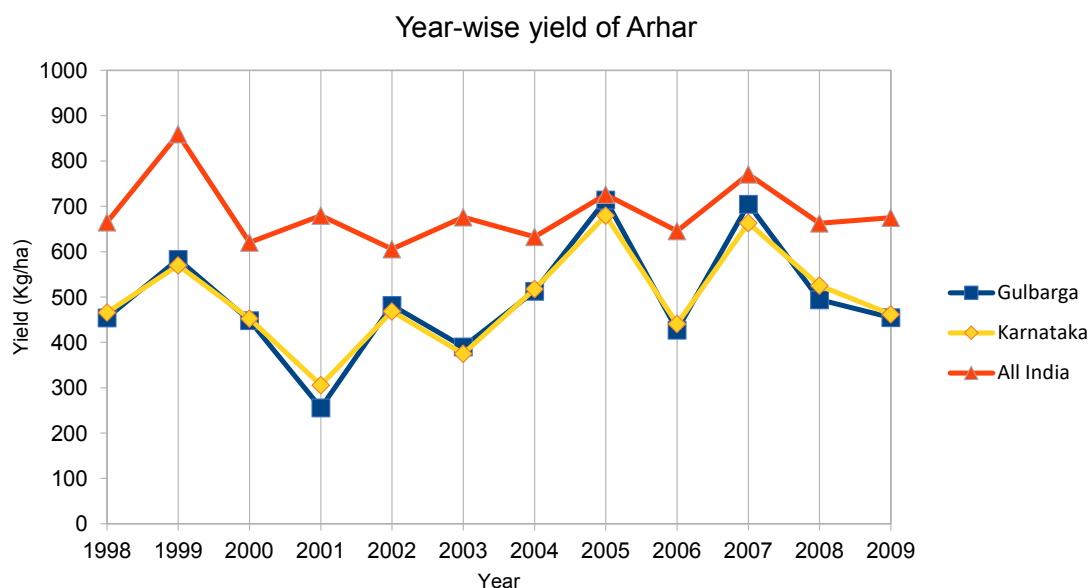


Figure 2. Year-wise Yeild of Arhar (Red Gram)

Source: Graph plotted using data on district-wise, season-wise crop production statistics from 1998–2009 obtained from <https://data.gov.in/catalog/district-wise-season-wise-crop-production-statistics> (accessed on November 10, 2016).

is a very small percentage of the net sown area as even in the Census of India, 2011, the un-irrigated area to net sown area accounted for 96 per cent of the land in Mahagaon.

At the farthest end of the spectrum, 47 per cent of the households were landless in 2014 and providing labour in a stagnant agriculture was not enough for their own reproduction. The proportion of landless households in the population rose from 46 to 47 per cent in a period of 53 years. The proportion of main workers in agriculture, however, has declined from 69 per cent in 1971 to 58 per cent in 2011 as per the Census where the decline is mainly as a result of decreasing main workers as agricultural labourers. Twenty-five per cent of the total agricultural labourers were marginal agricultural labourers who are perhaps part of the labour in circulation.

Pulses were grown as mixed crops along with jowar in 1961 and wheat with safflower. Ploughing was often done using the *kunte*. There was a gendered division of labour where men performed the operations of ploughing, sowing and harrowing, and women performed harvesting of crops, and dropping the seeds through seed drills. Children were entrusted the work of tending to cattle. Male labourers were also found as attached labourers—*coolie aalu*—on an annual payment where the work involved not only agricultural labour but also running errands for their employers at their homes. Depending on the operations performed, wages were paid in cash or kind. Specially for harvesting operations, payments were made in kind to female labourers. The wages were unequal with men receiving greater wages than women who received greater wages than children. Thus, there were broadly two forms of hired labour which both involved combinations of cash and kind payments. The first form was attached labour which was paid an annual wage and the second form was contractual labour for specific agricultural operations.

In 2014, the survey revealed the existence of both forms of labour, the former was locally called the *coolie aalu*. The payment of ₹70,000 (annual) was typically made in advance to the labourer in two

installments, once every 6 months. There was technically no compulsion to renew the contract with the landlord and continue working year after year, but the only other choice people had was to perform contractual labour in agriculture along with other wage labour in the village, Gulbarga town or in cities such as Mumbai or Pune. In order to meet their household needs, landless labourers, predominantly SC, Muslim and Scheduled Tribe Lambani labourers performed other wage labour as circular migrants, primarily in the construction sector in the cities of Mumbai, Pune and Bangalore, as well as agricultural labour in the harvesting season. Nearly 9 per cent of the workers in Mahagaon revenue village spent anywhere from 1 to 10 months in one of the above-mentioned cities in 2013 performing other wage labour.

Circular migrants brought back savings from the city, as they minimized expenditure in the city by various strategies—children stayed back in the village pursuing education there, jowar from the ration was taken to the city for food, they managed stay in accommodation that was below the standard of their life in the village. This enabled them to save money to build a cement house back in the village. Apart from bringing back their savings, the migrants also returned with skills in construction. There were several Lambani houses in Lambani Thanda and SC houses in Dhammur RC which had been built by the migrants themselves as they had learnt centring work in Mumbai. Thus, they were able to improve their living conditions back in the village by moving ahead from sheet roof houses to reinforced cement concrete houses.

Savings and skills were not the only things that were brought back to Mahagaon. In one instance, a dalit migrant had a photo of Babasaheb Ambedkar along with photos of other deceased family members on the wall of the house that he built by himself. This photo of Babasaheb was bought by the migrant in Chaitya Bhoomi in Dadar, Mumbai, during the gathering on the occasion of Babasaheb Ambedkar's death anniversary. At the time of the study in February 2014, the male member of the household and his wife were in Mumbai for work while his mother and child were in the house. This was a way of asserting dalit identity for the labourers back in the village. Other instances of dalit assertion were evident in that dalits not only had entry into the Akkamahadevi temple in 2014 which was controlled solely by the Lingayats in 1961, but also access to the marriage hall of the Akkamahadevi temple for weddings in the dalit community. A respondent said, 'we were not allowed (inside Akkamahadevi temple), now our people conduct marriages in the hall upstairs in the temple premises'. Circular migration has historically been used by dalits and tribals to counter deprivation in dryland India and they have been known to traverse long distances in order to eventually go back home and build a better life (Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003). In Mahagaon, dalits and tribes take back skills in construction, savings as well as cultural icons from the metropolis to Mahagaon.

On the whole, Gulbarga district saw a greater increase in road length than Karnataka as a whole when 1970 was taken as the base year in the last decade. The phenomenon of increasing investments in national highways, state highways as well as major district roads increased in Gulbarga from 2005 to 2015 at a rate greater than for the state as shown in Figure 3.

The Mahagaon–Humnabad road was declared a national highway (NH 218) by the National Highway Authority of India in 2006. The development of this road was meant to connect existing national highways between Pune–Bangalore (NH 4), Bijapur–Hubli (NH 218) and Hospet–Bangalore (NH 13) with Hyderabad–Mumbai National Highway 9 to provide better connectivity to people in Jewargi, Sindgi and Gulbarga cities and the villages along the route.⁴

Due to a backward dryland agriculture, the proportion of credit borrowed for cultivation was low in 2014. Cultivation accounted for 11.5 per cent of the total credit in 1961, and while it marginally came up to 15.5 per cent of the total credit obtained in 2014, it continued to remain low. The acute environmental vulnerability posed by dryland agriculture kept the credit obtained for cultivation very low. A troubling finding from 1961 was that nearly a fourth of all loans were obtained in order to clear outstanding debts,

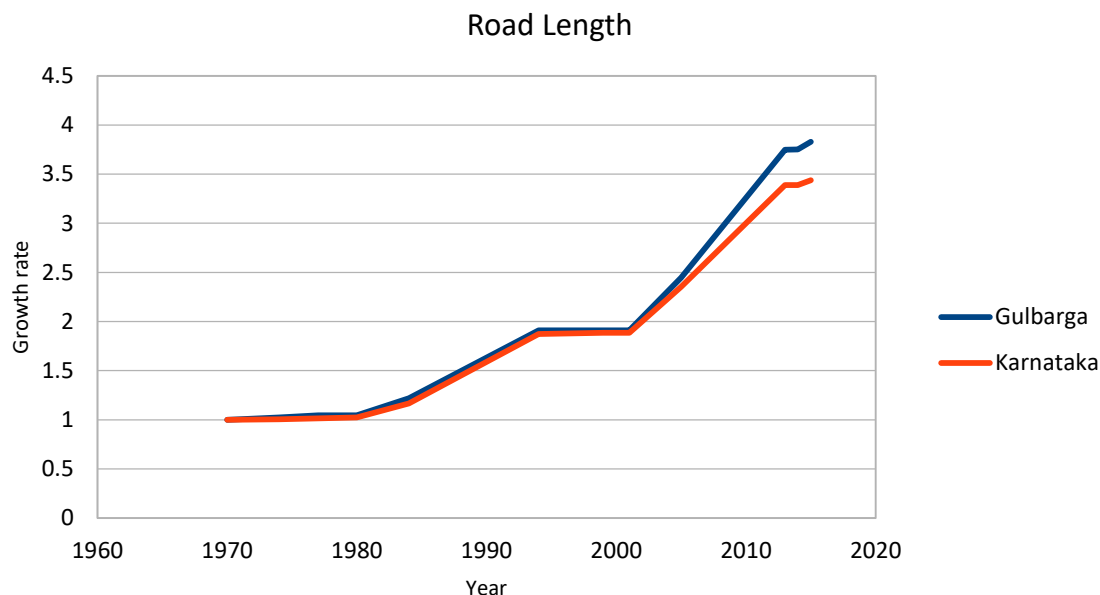


Figure 3. Growth Rate of Road Length

Source: The graph was plotted using data from Statistical abstracts for Karnataka from 1970 to 2015 downloaded from http://des.kar.nic.in/ptc_stat_reports.asp and <http://dli.ernet.in> (accessed on November 10, 2016).

which meant that households were in a vicious cycle of indebtedness where loans had to be obtained to clear previous loans. Debt from moneylenders was eight times more than from any other source in 1961. A heartening change in 2014 was that even as households continued to be indebted for one reason or another, there was a drastic reduction of loans being obtained to clear outstanding debt to only 1.7 per cent of all loans. Fewer loans were obtained to obtain livestock. Marriage was the main reason for which loans were obtained in 1961 with over a fourth of the loan amount being obtained for marriage. This was not the case in 2014. The biggest reason for obtaining loans was business in 2014 with 29 per cent of all loans in Mahagaon being for the sole purpose of setting up or perpetuating a business. Moneylenders continued to be the most important source of loans in 2014 with nearly 40 per cent of the amount of credit in the village being obtained from moneylenders. Formal sources such as banks and co-operative societies were just about approaching this monopoly by moneylenders at 37 per cent. Obtaining credit for house repairs and construction also saw an increase in 2014, which are consistent with the resettling of Dhammur RC along the highway from Mahagaon to Humnabad, as well as intensification of housing on the Mahagaon Cross. Summary statistics are found in Table 2.

The lack of improvements in productivity in dryland crops in Mahagaon resulted in different strategies among the populace of Mahagaon. The landowners with capital to invest began to invest in various businesses, transport emerging as the most profitable due to a high demand. Some landowners moved to Gulbarga, and would look after their land remotely, with the help of attached labourers or tenants. They purchased cruisers which could carry nearly 14 people in one trip on a shared basis from Gulbarga to Humnabad, with informal stops at every village along the highway, a service that government buses had not provided. A driver and a conductor were hired for the functioning of each cruiser from Mahagaon or nearby villages. Those who could not afford a large scale business such as this, bought their own autos

Table 2. Causes of Indebtedness in Mahagaon in 1961 and 2014

Cause	Percentage of Debt by Cause to the Total Amount of Debt in 1961	Percentage of Debt by Cause to the Total Amount of Debt in 2014
Marriage	26.20	16.20
To clear outstanding debts	25.72	1.71
Domestic expenses	13.36	19.95
Purchase of livestock	7.42	1.68
Cultivation expenses	11.53	15.47
Purchase of land	5.22	3.18
House repairs and construction	3.76	9.74
Business	2.68	28.87
Other	4.11	3.21
Total	100.00	100.00

Source: Village Survey Monograph No. 28, Census of India 1961 and author's sample survey 2014.

and either hired a driver for the auto or drove themselves. While cruisers catered to ferrying people along the highway between villages, the autos filled in the gap of providing mobility between hamlets of the villages. The village directory for Census of India 2011 also shows the existence of nearly every mode of transport, namely, public buses, private buses, autos, vans and taxis in Mahagaon, indicative of the investment in transport in the village. The frequency of the cruisers was phenomenally better than the public transport and they were also relatively cheaper. During the period of my field work, I often used the services provided by the cruisers due to the lack of enough buses serving on the highway. Majority of loans were accessed to invest in businesses in 2014 which is strikingly different from 1961, when the most credit was being accessed for conducting marriages.

Localized Urbanization in Mahagaon

Mahagaon had a new settlement along the highway, called Mahagaon Cross, which grew along the intersection of the Mahagaon–Humnabad and the Mahagaon–Chincholi roads. The village survey monograph of Census of India 1961 describes Mahagaon as having four hamlets in 1961, namely Mahagaon, Mahagaon Wadi, Mahagaon Thanda and Chandar Nagar Waddar Colony. By 2014, Mahagaon Cross was substantial and Dhammur RC had been created along the NH 218. The Mahagaon–Humnabad road was a national highway and the Mahagaon–Chincholi road was a state highway in 2014. Figure 4 is a map of Mahagaon revenue village with its hamlets in 2014.

This phenomenon of spontaneous growth of a new hamlet with an urban character in a rural context is what I call 'localized urbanization'. Localized urbanization is prompted by developments in the metropolis but occurs locally, away from the metropolis, often at a considerable distance. Urbanization is a process of movement from the rural to the urban (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Lewis, 1954); localized urbanization is the further stage when workers return back to the rural and contribute to urbanization in and around the village. This last stage of urbanization near the village is localized urbanization. This growth is not only a result of the circular migration of workers, but is driven by an agglomeration economy. Agglomeration is essentially 'a chain of activities in which each

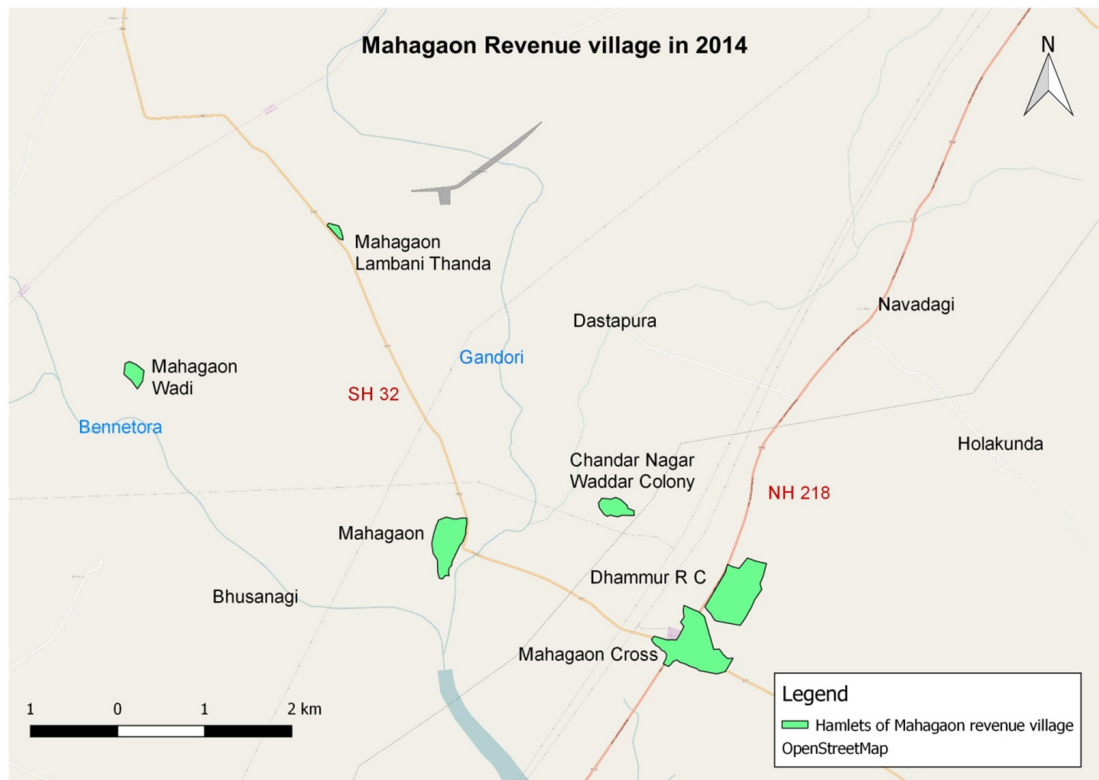


Figure 4. Mahagaon Revenue Village in 2014

Source: Author's own.

additional link in the chain heightens the prospects for a fresh link to be forged' (Ray, 1998). The fundamental difference is that agglomeration economies are understood as occurring when there is a concentration of production, whereas in Mahagaon, a provision of services has predominantly led to the agglomeration on the cross.

Localized urbanization would qualify as a subset of subaltern urbanization (Denis, Mukhopadhyay, & Zerah, 2012), as it is defined in opposition to metropolitan urbanization. If one were to use the typology suggested by the authors, Mahagaon would be a non-peripheral settlement whose administrative status is contested.⁵ This is merely a descriptor of Mahagaon's current spatial and administrative status. Subaltern urbanization is defined as being 'autonomous, economically vital and independent of the metropolis' but the process of development of Mahagaon Cross does not neatly fit into this description. Autonomous urbanization is where 'the demographic capacity exists for urbanization to be self sustaining, independent of rural to urban migration, and very rapid' (Vries, 1990, p. 58). The authors of subaltern urbanization use the term autonomous as a bottom-up and non-state led urbanization which may be influenced by local and global connections, but is fundamentally independent of the metropolis. This implies that subaltern urbanization is independent of migration of people to the metropolis. The growth of Mahagaon Cross, however, has been a result of circular migration of labour to the metropolis.

The burgeoning literature on subaltern urbanization has also discussed migration, circular migration and return migration and their role in spatial restructuring of small towns (Prasad-Aleyamma, 2011; Priya Deshingkar et al., 2009; Sharma et al., 2009). However, even these studies tend to look at the growth of the town that is the destination of seasonal migrants. This article shifts the focus to understanding what circular migration spatially does to the source of such migration, which is still classified as a village. Thus, a large village like Mahagaon with a population of 8,731 individuals in 2011 grew due to the processes kick started by repeated circular migration over decades and resulted in localized urbanization at Mahagaon Cross.

The earliest settlement on the Mahagaon Cross was in connection to the 'sterilization plots' (Tarlo, 2001) that were given to women by the government to encourage them to get sterilized in the late 1970s. At that time, the government was granting plots of land to those who agreed to be sterilized. There was a preference by the poor to accept the sterilization measures and move to Mahagaon Cross which led to the formation of two colonies on Mahagaon Cross. These two colonies are populated largely by Muslims and SCs, but are not restricted to them alone. Several respondents reminisced that when they were given the plots on Mahagaon Cross, there was absolutely no habitation and also an overgrowth of thorny shrubs which are invasive species characteristic of semi-arid regions in south India. Mahagaon Cross had grown beyond the two sterilization colonies by 2014.

The consequence of the stagnation in the nature of cultivation and the dynamism in the nature of mobility in the village led to localized urbanization in Mahagaon. Over a period of time, investments by landowners also took place on the cross, in the form of a petrol bunk, several Lingayat hotels, private English medium schools and banks. A large part of the construction of buildings on Mahagaon Cross was carried out by labourers from Mahagaon itself. The police station had moved from Mahagaon village to Mahagaon Cross, and the Panchayat was also in the process of moving to the cross during the period of the survey in 2014. There is a Dairy Science college on Mahagaon Cross today.

Several respondents in Mahagaon claimed that there was nothing in Mahagaon village anymore, and everyone aspired to move to Mahagaon Cross. This was evident in the survey in 2014 as one-fourth of the households of Mahagaon were on the Mahagaon Cross. During the course of field-work, panchayat members and members of youth sanghas were often only available in Mahagaon Cross, even though several of them resided in Mahagaon village. Thus, Mahagaon Cross was an important space for local village politics. Mahagaon Cross had an urban character, the streets were not as strictly segregated by caste as in Mahagaon. There was a higher proportion of cement roof houses on Mahagaon Cross than in any other part of the village. While open defecation was widespread in Mahagaon, Mahagaon Cross had a higher proportion of pit latrines than the rest of the village as well as a higher incidence of the use of LPG for cooking as opposed to firewood. Mahagaon Cross was also home for several local migrants, such as school teachers and government officials. Thus, there was a rental housing market in Mahagaon Cross which was unheard of in the rest of the village. As a whole, agricultural land holding in Mahagaon Cross was the lowest. The Mahagaon Cross had higher than average SC households due to the sterilization colonies. A fourth of migrating workers were residing on Mahagaon Cross. Summary statistics are provided in Table 3.

Localized urbanization was in turn able to support the process of circular migration of labour by providing connectivity in the form of shared transport to the city. Several people from Gulbarga city, Mahagaon and other villages had invested in cruisers, autos, jeeps and buses which drastically increased the frequency of vehicles between villages as well as between hamlets of a large village like Mahagaon. Mahagaon, a dryland village with a stagnant agriculture and a large majority of landless population, thus transitioned into a mobile population with its own local urban area, the Mahagaon Cross.

Table 3. Summary Statistics of Mahagaon Cross and Other Hamlets of Mahagaon

Hamlet	No. of Households in Sample Survey	Assets	Percentage of Households with Reinforced Cement Concrete Roof	Percentage of Households Using LPG for Cooking	Percentage of Households with Pit Latrines	Percentage of Households Living on Rent
Mahagaon	180	241.41	26.1	7.8	17.2	10.0
Mahagaon Cross	101	107.26	60.4	24.8	36.6	38.6
Dhammur RC	44	210.43	61.4	11.4	36.4	15.9
Mahagaon Wadi	41	273.47	14.6	0	4.9	0
Chandar Nagar	27	16.12	18.5	0	7.4	7.4
Mahagaon Thanda	18	215.40	22.2	0	5.6	0
Total	411	192.38	36.5	10.7	21.7	16.1

Source: Author's sample survey, 2014.

Notes: Assets were significantly different across the hamlets ($p < 0.01$). Data on assets owned by each household were collected in the sample survey. The asset indicator was computed by assigning weights to each asset based on the local market value of the asset, calculating their relative values on a scale of 100 and then summing the weights up for each household (Pani & Iyer, 2012). The weights given were as follows; an acre of irrigated land–100, an acre of un-irrigated land–50; car–50; power tiller–50; tractor–50; motorcycle/scooter–15; bullock cart–12.5; cow–12.5; bull–12.5; sheep–1.75; plough–1.5; colour TV–1.25; cycle–1.25; black & white TV–0.375; mobile phone–0.375; radio–0.125.

Conclusion

Localized urbanization in Mahagaon is part of a more widespread process of urbanization that is occurring away from cities. Even though India's urbanization is slow at 32.7 per cent as compared to the rest of the world where over half of the world's population lives in cities today, the striking feature of Indian urbanization is the fact that 30 per cent of the urban growth in the last decade came from what is known as 'Census towns'⁶ (Pradhan, 2013). These processes of urbanization outside cities are less understood, and this article is a contribution in that direction. Although Mahagaon is still a village due to the fact that 49 per cent of the male workforce is still engaged in agriculture according to Census 2011, it is in the process of demanding taluk status which would lead to an increase in built up area with the construction of taluk offices. The development of village crosses is also not a stray phenomenon in Gulbarga, every large village along the highway had a cross, where there were markets, colleges, schools, banks and petrol bunks.

The process of urbanization is traditionally understood as a one-way migration of labour from agriculture into industry, rural to urban, from the traditional to modern. This article shows that urbanization can also be driven by labour that moves from the rural to the urban and back, bringing economic resources, cultural resources as well as skills, in this case in construction to contribute to urbanization in the village. Localized urbanization is a phenomenon that is driven by circular migration between the village and the metropolis.

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Notes

1. This article compares data from field work on Mahagaon in 2014 with those in 1961 from the Census of India Village Survey Monograph for changes in land ownership, tenancy, household size, credit, labour etc. A systematic sample survey of 411 out of 1,634 households accompanied by semi-structured interviews with key informants was conducted in Mahagaon in 2014.
2. Mahagaon revenue village consisted of the main village Mahagaon, Mahagaon Wadi, Mahagaon Thanda, Chandar Nagar, Dhammur RC and Mahagaon Cross in 2014. Of these, Dhammur RC was a village that was relocated along the highway from Gulbarga to Humnabad, close to Mahagaon due to construction of a medium irrigation project at Bennethorai river, a tributary of Bhima river. Mahagaon Cross is a spontaneous urban outgrowth which consists of one-fourth of all households in Mahagaon revenue village today.
3. A primary survey was carried out in Mahagaon village in 2014 in a systematic sample of 411 households (one in every four households). Mahagaon in the Census of India, 2011 consisted of 1,634 households and a population of 8,731 individuals. Data on basic household amenities, caste, religion, agricultural and non-agricultural assets, individuals in the household, land ownership, tenancy, crop, irrigation, labour and details of standing loans were collected from the household.
4. <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-karnataka/bijapurgulbargahumnabad-road-made-national-highway/article3032274.ece> (accessed on 2 September 2016).
5. Mahagaon has been demanding taluk status for over 10 years and the protests were ongoing at the time of this fieldwork in 2014. The grounds for this demand were that it had enjoyed Taluk status until 1901 and that Mahagaon had grown into a large settlement with a population of 8,731 individuals in Census 2011. Kamalapur, a village 10 km ahead of Mahagaon, was a competing candidate for taluk as it was a larger village than Mahagaon. For news reporting on the issue see <http://www.thehindu.com/2004/01/20/stories/2004012003500300.htm>
6. Census towns are defined on the basis of the following criteria: (a) a minimum population of 5,000; (b) at least 75 per cent of the male main workers engaged in non-agricultural pursuits; and (c) a density of population of at least 400 per sq. km.

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