Can peri-urban development choose partnerships over displacement?

Neha Sami

From Farming to Real Estate: The Magars and Magarpatta

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Case No 1-0006

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Introduction

With India's rapid urbanisation, the national government has been encouraging large-scale involvement of the private sector—at the domestic and international fronts—in various aspects of urban development over the last three decades.[1] Private sector involvement has increased significantly in areas that were formerly the domain of government agencies, including infrastructure development and housing (Mathur, 2005; Banerjee-Guha, 2002). The building of such development projects in the Indian context is accompanied, both in rhetoric and physical design, by the aspiration of city residents (particularly from the upper classes) and business leaders to become a 'global' or 'world-class' city, echoing the sentiments of city and state government leaders. This desire, often expressed by state and national level politicians as well as prominent business leaders and the media, to achieve 'global city' status is also evident in emerging urban policy and government initiated reforms to help Indian cities become 'global' (Goldman, 2011; *The Hindu*, 2010; PTI, 2009, April 13; Times News Network, 2006).

However, not all these efforts have been successful and, irrespective of the outcome, the role of stakeholders controlling access to specific assets such as land has been pivotal. Growing dissidence from marginalised groups such as small farmers and agriculturists, in particular, against multiple urban planning agendas has repeatedly demonstrated this. The violent protests in West Bengal, in both Singur and Nandigram in 2007–8 against the proposed Tata factory indicates the growing power of local, former marginal communities like agriculturalists and the strength of the regional political alliances that these farmers were able to forge (Roy, 2009; Ray & Dutt, 2007).[2] This growing dissidence from marginalised groups and their strategies to exert influence (in West Bengal, and elsewhere in India) are better studied (Ghertner, 2011; Kaul, 2010; Benjamin, 2008) than the ways in which elite groups mobilise to push their agendas forward and shape planning and politics, leading to an incomplete understanding of the terms of contestation around urban development. In this case, I focus on a specific instance of elite mobilisation around urban governance and real estate development in Pune.[3]

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[1] Private sector involvement has taken on a variety of forms ranging from independent projects initiated by specific development companies to public–private partnerships that government agencies are forming with several private sector actors, which span the spectrum from corporate and business houses to NGOs. Examples of work done on private sector involvement include Weinstein, 2009; and Kamath, 2006.

[2] For more information on these projects, see: Bunsha, 2006; Financial Express Bureau, 2008; Ray & Dutt, 2007.

[3] I acknowledge the importance of examining the impact of growing elite mobilisation on marginalised groups in Indian cities and the manner in which marginalised urban and peri-urban populations are reacting, contesting and adapting to a changing urban political environment. However, a fuller investigation of these aspects of elite mobilisation lies beyond the scope of this case and I hope to return to these issues in future research.

Urban Politics and Coalitions

Urban alliances or coalitions examined in this study have their roots in personal social networks and are formed around the ability of various stakeholders to mobilise specific resources and use their personal relations as bargaining tools (Weinstein, 2009; Kamath, 2006). These coalitions are characterised by flexibility, especially with regard to their functioning, structure and composition, since they are much less hindered by government regulations and bureaucracy or electoral politics. As compared to established governmental and quasi-governmental institutions that are currently charged with planning and governing Indian cities, alliances of this kind are infinitely adaptable in their terms—the number and type of participants, duration of alliances and purpose or goals.

These coalitions are also flexible in the form they take and can choose to focus on specific urban issues: while some engage with specific issues relating to land and its development, others have a larger agenda of urban reform, of which land related issues form only one part. Urban coalitions like these have no institutional home; they lie between the formal and the informal and are largely comprised of members of elite groups in the city. They emerge as a response to the highly fragmented political power in Indian cities. The diffused nature of power in Indian cities makes it necessary for stakeholders to combine their influence with that of others to get things done, prompting the formation of such coalitions and opportunistic behaviour on the part of various stakeholders, both within and outside government. Reflecting a change in the roles of both the public and private sector in India, these coalitions are formed by groups of individuals with access to a set of key political, social and financial resources. Such resources that allow individuals to exert their influence are a consequence of shared social networks.

The last two decades have seen the empowerment of several actors (such as real estate developers, local entrepreneurial politicians, farmers with medium to large landholdings, urban designers, planning consultants, and civil society organisations) and the emergence of others who had been almost entirely absent earlier (like international architects, development firms and global financial companies) (Sharma & Thomson, 2010; Dupont, 2007; Jha & Sinha, 2007). The distribution of power as well as existing power structures in India are changing as a result of new opportunities made possible by the on-going economic reform programme, which began in the early 1990s, with the emergence of India's urban regions and regional corridors as engines of economic growth as well as centres of political decision-making (Mathur, 2005; Brenner, 2004).

One outcome of this is the increase in demand for and price of land in and around Indian cities and the regional corridors that connect them (AFP, 2007; *The Economic Times*, 2007; LaSalle, 2006). The combination of rising prices of and demand for urban land and the growing opportunities for a wider group of actors to participate in urban development has encouraged several urban actors to capitalise on their assets. For example, although farmers

in Pune, Maharashtra had owned large tracts of prime land for generations, converting this land into a large integrated township became profitable only after economic liberalisation created the demand for large-scale development in the city. Moreover, a changing economic climate also made it possible for the farmer community to build on their assets (land and political networks) and undertake the development project themselves without losing their land.

It is in this context that I examine the urban politics of real estate development and related governance issues in Pune. However, rather than focusing on the processes alone, I explore the role played by stakeholders in these processes. I identify which actors have power and are able to leverage their particular assets, ranging from control over land, access to technology, to political connections and financial capital. My focus is specifically on the social and political networks of elite groups in Indian cities, such as large landed farmers, state-level politicians, business leaders, and prominent middle class citizen groups.

Political power in India has its roots in a fragmented base that includes caste, culture, identity, community and socio-economic class. However, researchers have observed that in several Indian cities, power remains concentrated within a small fraction of the population, typically the higher social classes (Harriss, 2010; Singh et al., 2010; Benjamin, 2007; Fernandes & Heller, 2006). In addition, access to resources such as financial capital, education, governmental authority and land is distributed across similar groups. Moreover, although governmental responsibility for urban areas is spread across several regional and municipal institutions, the administrative power structure in Indian cities is such that decision-making abilities are concentrated at higher levels of government, leaving municipal and city government officials to perform service delivery functions (Weinstein, 2009; Corbridge & Harriss, 2000). State or regional level politicians and bureaucrats retain control over decision-making through state government-appointed officials and institutions, often leading to weak city governments, but take little active interest in catering to urban issues (Weinstein, 2010).

The combination of the dearth of power vested in local (city level) governments and the fragmented nature of local political power in Indian cities (within as well as outside government) has created a situation where those who seek to benefit from urban redevelopment cannot rely only on state actors playing a proactive role. As a result, they turn to their individual social and political networks, building coalitions across these networks to achieve their goals. This makes examining such ad hoc and opportunistic network building around redevelopment initiatives especially important to our understanding of urban politics in India. This case attempts to develop a framework to understand how and why elite groups of urban actors mobilise and exert different kinds of power in urban India.

The spatial transformation of Indian cities has perhaps been the most visible outcome of the economic liberalisation programme that began in the early 1990s. Rapid urban population growth, economic growth spurred by liberalisation reforms and an influx of domestic and

international capital have been accompanied by demands for improved infrastructure, better governance and a growing need for land and real estate development, making urban India a target for real estate-related domestic and foreign investments (*Khaleej Times*, 2011; Chandrashekhar, 2010; Chaudhary, 2007; Menon, 2007). This has been complemented by the Indian national government's efforts to encourage domestic and international private sector involvement in urban development by relaxing the guidelines for private and foreign investment in real estate (Ministry of Finance, 2007; Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2002).

A change in the focus and priorities of the Indian government at the national and regional levels over the last two decades has coincided with and perhaps created an environment where urban stakeholders in India have much greater power and freedom to act than they have had before.[4] Here, I argue that as a result of these changes, networks of state and non-state actors in Indian cities are able to mobilise and form strategic alliances with other networks to achieve specific goals of development (such as land assembly, deregulation of land or raising financial capital). The alliances discussed here have their roots in personal networks and are formed around the ability of various stakeholders to mobilise specific resources (such as access to land, government authority and financial capital) using their personal relations as bargaining tools.

This case explores the evolving relationship between developers, landowners, politicians and planners in Indian cities, focussing on one successful example of real estate development from Pune, Maharashtra. It is the story of the development of a 400-acre township, Magarpatta City, located on former farmland on the eastern periphery of Pune. While a favourable economic and political climate was essential for the success of this project, the development of Magarpatta City also significantly relied on the strategic use of socio-political networks and personal connections of those involved. The case examines the manner in which power over urban development in Indian cities is undergoing realignment. Using this urban development project as a lens, I explore the role played by key actors in Indian cities as agents of power and politics to shift and adapt to a changing economic and political environment.

Recent work on social networks in developing countries more broadly, and in India specifically, has focussed on a wide range of issues, from the impact of caste and class on education choices (Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2006) and marital and employment choices (Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2009; Luke et al., 2004) to the role that social networks play in local politics (Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2007). Here, I examine the resources that are available to members of these social networks (be it caste and community associations, business networks or alumni associations from elite educational institutions) that allow them to build coalitions across these networks in order to achieve specific goals of development.

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[4] Although this alone does not ensure that these stakeholders will actually be able to influence decision-making.

What catalyses a social network into a coalition is the ability of one or two key individuals—like the leader of this particular farmer community in Pune, Satish Magar—to recognise or sometimes create an opportunity out of emerging circumstances and consequently form a coalition of key individuals with access to specific resources. These individuals need not be central controlling figures of authority, like a mayor or a prominent corporate leader. Although socially and politically well connected, Magar is not himself politically active; neither was he among the leading entrepreneurs of Pune until he successfully developed Magarpatta City. His achievement lies in the fact that he was able to leverage his personal connections to form several small alliances or coalitions that allowed him and his community to successfully develop their land. He drew on associations with friends and associates from his undergraduate days, family associations with politicians and bureaucrats as well as business relations in addition to leveraging the strong kinship network that existed within the Magar community in Pune. Magar was at the centre of several overlapping social networks that he was able to bring together into a successful, cohesive development coalition. His role as a key figure and his ability to effectively tap into these multiple networks to achieve specific goals (such as the consolidation of land, obtaining development permissions and raising finance) is a characteristic of urban coalitions in India as well as an outcome of fragmented power bases in Indian cities.

Understanding Indian Urban Development

On the southwest fringe of New Delhi, just across the Haryana state border in Gurgaon, stands DLF City. Sprawled over 3,000 acres and almost a city in itself, it is one of Asia's largest townships, being built by Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) Limited in five phases (DLF, 2007). In the southern part of India, on Bangalore's periphery, RG Villas, an Italian themed community with luxury villas, an international school, malls, movie theatres, an equestrian and polo centre, swimming pools, a 'village square' and a Jack Nicklaus signature 18-hole golf course, proclaims itself to be 'India's most exclusive gated community' (Promotional material, Royal Garden Villas, 2008). DLF City, RG Villas and similar developments are in various stages of construction on the peripheries of several Indian cities. They range from private enclaves or gated communities of 30–40 acres to large integrated townships spread over thousands of acres of land.[5] Intended to be largely self-sufficient, these developments include large tracts of residential and office space as well as shopping and entertainment complexes, schools,

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[5] Although specific definitions of 'integrated township' differ from state to state in India, this form of development is broadly understood to be a single large project, sometimes enclosed within a walled boundary. Integrated townships typically include a variety of land uses and services within the project boundaries such as housing, commercial premises, hotels, resorts, city and regional level urban infrastructure facilities such as roads and bridges, mass rapid transit systems.

For more on integrated townships and the role that Indian national and state governments envision for these projects, see Joshi, 2009.

For examples of more descriptive accounts of integrated townships and popular writing on the issue, see Bari & Savitha, 2010; Chandrashekhar, 2010; PTI, 2009, November 22.

Details of what constitutes an integrated township with respect to foreign direct investment may be found here: Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2002.

For an example of a specific state government policy document on integrated townships, see: Government of Maharastra, 2005.

hospitals and hotels. Some also provide physical infrastructure such as roads and dedicated water and power supply. These attempts to become 'global' or 'world-class', are also given considerable governmental assistance in the form of financial incentives, easy availability of land, and a speedy approval and permissions process for such projects (Roy, 2009).

This form of urban development is not unique to India nor is it a recent phenomenon. Regions around the world are witnessing the development of similar mega-projects that include a variety of 'complex components' such as different types of homes (ranging from apartment buildings to stand-alone villas, for example), service industries (like information technology, tourism and leisure industries), shared facilities like recreational spaces and infrastructure (such as roads and waste management facilities) and new transport facilities (Orueta & Fainstein, 2008, p. 760; Lungo, 2002). While there is little consensus on what is causing a proliferation of urban mega-projects across the world, a few possible reasons have been suggested. Brenner & Theodore (2004) argue that the development of urban mega-projects is part of the agenda of the neoliberal national state where the government prefers to act as a facilitator rather than developer of projects (Orueta & Fainstein, 2008, p. 760; Brenner, 2004). Meanwhile, Orueta & Fainstein (2008) suggest that the motivations behind mega-project development are not the same in developing and developed countries. For example, they contend that mega-project development in cities in the developed world (especially those emerging from or engaged in economic revitalisation efforts) is often a means of 'confronting the threat of global competition' whereas similar projects in cities like Shanghai or Dubai in the developing world 'are seen to symbolise their rise to power rather than being regarded as defensive actions' (Orueta & Fainstein, 2008, p. 761).

In the case of India, the development of large integrated townships like DLF City or luxury private enclaves like RG Villas constitutes a departure from the way Indian urban development took place from independence to the early 1990s. Government agencies like the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and public sector companies like Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) in Bangalore were very active in building houses in Indian cities. Their efforts were supplemented by local private sector developers, although few had a national presence or the ability to develop large parcels, usually restricting their activities to specific regions: for example, development companies such as DLF and Unitech were well established in northern India, particularly around Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) but had negligible presence outside that region. However, the demand for sanitised conditions, reliable infrastructure and other amenities like schools and hospitals in close proximity have made gated communities and townships desirable residences (Chandrashekhar, 2010; Interviews with real estate developers and contractors; Joshi, 2009; PTI, 2009, November 22). The national and state governments also view integrated townships as a way of addressing the urban housing crisis (Joshi, 2009).[6] To encourage a higher rate of township development, the

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[6] The National Urban Housing Policy (2007) explicitly highlights the need to build integrated townships as a way of dealing with the increasing urban population. Moreover, specific state governments (Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, for example) have formulated integrated township development policies to help the government with

Indian national government began to gradually liberalise the real estate sector in 2002 (Searle, 2010).

The opening up of the real estate sector to domestic and international private sector investors and the simultaneous liberalisation of the financial sector have impacted real estate developers and development in two important ways. First, the liberalisation of the finance sector and easing of restrictions on investment have made it easier for developers to legally source capital with a variety of newly available financial instruments, and a growing number of institutional investors such as mutual funds have now become available (*Khaleej Times*, 2011; Menon, 2007; *The Economic Times*, 2007). For example, with the recent changes governing foreign direct investment (FDI), FDI is now permitted in development and construction projects without prior approval from the national government or the Reserve Bank of India; venture capital and mutual funds are allowed to invest in real estate projects; and banks (public and private sector) are increasingly offering loans for development and construction (Searle, 2010; Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2002). A growing number of development firms have also issued Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), listing their assets on the Bombay Stock Exchange to raise capital (Table 1) while some real estate firms (such as K. Raheja, Hiranandani Constructions and Unitech) are also listed on the London Stock Exchange's Alternative Investment Market (AIM) (Searle, 2010).

Table 1: Selected real estate firms listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange

Name of firm	Date of offer	Amount (In crores)
Sadbhav Engineering	2006	53.65
D.S. Kulkarni Developers, Ltd.	2006	133.65
Patel Engineering, Ltd.	2006	425.0
Parsvnath Developers Ltd.	2006	1089.77
DLF	2007	9187.5

Source: Searle, 2010

Second, the combination of increasing domestic and foreign investment and growing demand for housing, retail and office space have made it possible for real estate developers to expand their operations beyond their traditional strongholds. While developers earlier limited their activities to specific states or regions, domestic development companies are now emerging as national level players. For example, DLF has expanded from Gurgaon in northern India to become one of India's largest real estate development companies with projects in most major Indian metropolitan areas: the company's profits have risen from US$9.2 million (₹46 crore) in 2004–05 to US$1.6 billion (₹78,500 million crore) in 2007–08 (Searle, 2010). As they expand nationally, private development companies have also amassed large tracts of land—or 'landbanks'—that serve both as collateral for loans and to build the company's asset base

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the creation of urban infrastructure as well as housing development 3iNetwork (India) & Infrastructure Development Finance Company (India), 2009.
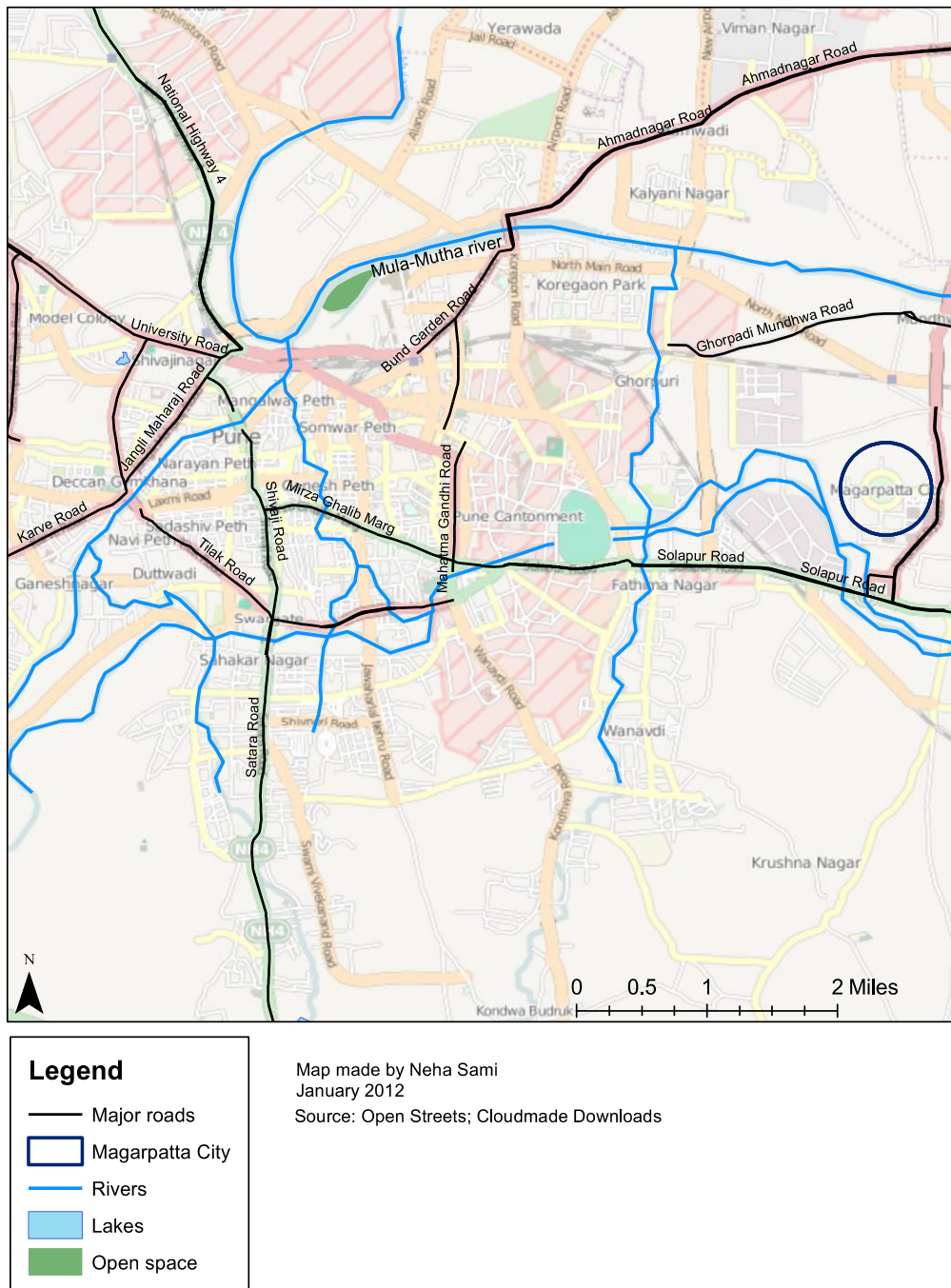
(Interviews with real estate developers in Bangalore, Pune and Mumbai). For example, according to Searle (2010), just prior to announcing their IPO in 2008, Emaar Properties had a landbank of almost 13,000 acres, most of which consisted of agricultural land (Rai, 2007).

As real estate emerges as a sector of growth for the Indian economy, it is also simultaneously shaping conflict and contestation around the issue of urban and peri-urban land (Benjamin, 2008; Dupont, 2007; *The Economic Times*, 2007). These conflicts are rooted in both the scarcity of land and the growing multiplicity of claims being placed on this land (Dupont, 2007). As the state, in its various forms, appropriates land in and around Indian cities, it sanctions certain developmental agendas over others. For example, state governments have been assisting large corporations to acquire large parcels of land on the urban periphery for various uses ranging from developing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and industrial plants to establishing large integrated townships and business campuses (Searle, 2010). In response, there has been growing dissidence from different interest groups (comprised by farmers, agriculturalists, small landowners, fishing communities and others who depend on land for their livelihood) that also have a stake in that land. Recently, there have been a number of high-profile cases where members of different marginalised communities have come together to protest against state-sponsored developments, indicating that alliances between these interest groups are of increasing importance. These protests also often have the support of opposition political parties, giving them access to political power as well—for example, in the case of the Singur conflict, peasant groups were supported by opposition party leaders in West Bengal (Financial Express Bureau, 2008; Bunsha, 2006).

I use the case of Magarpatta city in Pune as a way of understanding the process by which specific types of projects, namely, large integrated townships and gated communities in Indian cities, are being developed as well as the power structures in each city involved in this kind of development. I focus particularly on the roles of particular interest groups or individual actors and on how they use personal relationships and networks to successfully achieve their goals. I begin with a discussion of Magarpatta City in Pune, examining how individual social and political connections were key to the successful completion of this project. Studying Magarpatta City revealed fascinating connections between state-level politicians, bureaucrats and farmers in Pune. The developers and landowners used their personal social, political and business networks, leveraging connections within and outside the government to achieve their developmental goals. This case reflects a planning regime in India that often seems to be antithetical to the very idea of planning (Roy, 2009).

Building Magarpatta City

Figure 1: Location of Magarpatta City on the eastern periphery of Pune

Source: Open Street; Cloudmade Downloads

Located in Hadapsar on the eastern periphery of Pune (Figure 1), Magarpatta City stands on 400 acres of former farmland that has been owned by the Magar farming community for over 300 years.[7] The Magar community is one of the many sub-groups that make up the elite Maratha-Kunbi caste in Western Maharashtra (Kumar, 2007). The members of this caste cluster are typically engaged in agriculture or related occupations and are 'bound together through kin networks and behave as one large social continuum', acting collectively (Jadhav, 2006, p. 5157). For instance, most of the farmer families in the community have strong kinship ties through blood relations as well as through intermarriage within the group. Jadhav (2006, p. 5157) adds that although members of the Maratha-Kunbi caste seem to be somewhat socially homogenous, the group is 'internally stratified on the basis of economic class, ranging from landlords to marginal peasants and landless labourers'. This was true for the Magar community as well. There was significant economic disparity in the Magarpatta farming community, reflected in the size of family landholdings: the smallest farmer owned less than half an acre of land while the largest owned over 150 acres (Interview, Staff (MTDCC), 2008).

Hadapsar also houses a large industrial estate and several Information Technology (IT), Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) and biotechnology companies. Consequently, there was and continues to be a great demand for housing space as well as commercial and retail establishments in the area. Moreover, the 1982 draft of the development plan for Pune identified this area of the city as a potential location for increasing urban development (Dalal, 2008). Feeling the pressure of urbanisation, the farmers in the region (small and medium landholders) were worried by the prospect of losing both their homes and livelihood if the area were to be developed as part of the city. Small farmers in the area had already begun to sell off their land (Dalal, 2008). As several respondents associated with the Magarpatta Township Development and Construction Company (MTDCC) said during interviews, the Magar community knew that it would only be a matter of time before developers began to approach them to buy their property. Collectively, the community owned more than 400 acres of land. Taking advantage of the existing demand in the area, the farmers decided to pool their land together and develop it themselves, instead of selling it to another developer.

Pune's farmers have been key players in the city's real estate development industry. They are also an extremely powerful community—financially and politically—as a consequence of their involvement in the sugar cooperative movement in the region.[8] In addition to fostering a culture of cooperation and collaboration, sugar cooperatives have been extremely influential politically (Lalvani, 2008; Chithelen, 1980/1981). Farmers in Pune are therefore no strangers to politics. While land acquisition and development is highly politicised in Pune as in most Indian

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[7] 'Magar' is the name of the clan that owns most of the land in the area, while 'patta' means land strip. The name 'Magarpatta' therefore means 'the strip of land owned by the Magars'.

[8] A very successful co-operative movement, which began around the 1950s, controls sugarcane farming and the manufacture of sugar in Maharashtra. It was also very closely connected to local, regional and state level politics. At one time, the leaders of the sugar co-operatives influenced the state government very strongly. This led to serious issues of corruption and power grabbing. While the co-operatives are still in operation, their hold over state politics has somewhat diminished. For more see Lalvani, 2008; Chithelen, 1985.

cities, what is unusual is the role that farmers play in the development process. They own a significant amount of land in and around Pune. They are also highly involved in politics at the local level. As a result, in Pune, farmers, local politicians and the real estate lobby overlap to a large extent. The founder of MTDCC, Satish Magar, and his family are an example of this overlap—both his grandfather and uncle were prominent local and state-level politicians and also owned agricultural land that was actively being farmed. Magar's father owned a civil engineering company that was involved in real estate development and construction projects. Satish Magar himself was trained at the agricultural college in Pune with the intention of pursuing an agro-based occupation, but he eventually turned to real estate development, with the development of Magarpatta City. There are several other instances of farmers involved in the sugar co-operatives moving on to play important roles in the state legislature, a couple of whom even rose to be Chief Minister (such as Sharad Pawar) (Lalvani, 2008). While not actively involved in real estate development, these farmers-turned-politicians continue to own property and have interests in urban development in the Pune region.

Magarpatta City owes its success largely to three key factors: the favourable economic climate in Pune at the time, the entrepreneurial nature of the Magar community, and the coalitions that one of the farmers, Satish Magar, was able to mobilise by leveraging his social networks. Magar is not an ordinary farmer. He comes from a very influential local family, extremely well connected socially and politically. His grandfather was the mayor of Pune. His uncle was a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in the Maharashtra state government and later became a Member of Parliament (MP) and was very influential, especially in state politics (Dalal, 2008). As politicians, both his grandfather and uncle had very close ties with the Congress Party, which happened to be in power in the state in the 1990s, when Magarpatta City was being conceived. Magar's father was an engineer and ran his own civil construction firm. Satish Magar was therefore familiar with both politics and project development. Moreover, he and his family were the largest landholders in the Magar community. Of the 400 acres that collectively belonged to the Magar farming community, Satish Magar and his family owned about 150 acres. All of this added to his influence on the decision-making process within the farmer community.

Magar and his social and political connections proved to be invaluable in the development of Magarpatta City. He leveraged his influence with the farmer community to encourage them to participate in the project. Several farmers in the community often looked to him—or 'Satish dada' as he is fondly known—for advice.[9] As several interview respondents involved with the development project and close to Magar narrated to me, he met with the farmer families, individually and as a group, several times to demonstrate the costs and benefits of the project. He particularly highlighted the fact that developing the land would ensure that the farmers continued to own their land while selling it would be a one-time gain with unclear future prospects. This, along with the reassurance that Satish Magar himself was going to be

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[9] 'Dada' means 'elder brother' in Marathi, the local language.

contributing all of his family's land to the project, helped generate confidence in the project among the Magar community members.

Satish Magar also tapped into his vast personal social network to elicit advice and assistance from experts in a variety of fields as consultants for the project. Two broad coalitions were formed, with Magar at the centre of each. The first was an alliance that he forged with the farmer families in order to create the parcel of land on which the development was to take place. The second was a series of smaller alliances with specific individuals who came together as the board of directors of the company, and in the form of consultants to the project, consisting of experts from different fields including IT, education, finance and planning and design. I explain these in greater detail below.

The favourable economic climate in Maharashtra and Pune was another key factor that contributed to Magarpatta City's success. Following economic liberalisation, several multinational companies began to establish a presence in the Indian market (Business Standard staff, 2007; Clay, 2005). Pune with its proximity to Mumbai and ready pool of highly skilled labour emerged as an attractive location (The Independent, 2008; Shaw, 1999). As a result, the demand for residential and office space in Pune rose (Bajaj, 2011; Sinha and ET Bureau, 2011; LaSalle, 2006). The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) was unable to cope with this growth, providing the perfect opportunity for the private sector to fill this void. While several local developers jumped into the fray, Magarpatta City was one of the first integrated township projects to begin offering mixed-use development i.e. office, residential commercial and institutional space located in close physical proximity within the project boundary. There continues to be a spate of large project development in and around Pune, most of which has been built by various coalitions between mostly local (Pune-based) real estate developers and city and state level politicians (Bari & Savitha, 2010; Chandrashekhar, 2010; Interviews with Pune-based developers and former government officials). What is unusual about Magarpatta City is that it was a very ambitious project born out of an alliance between landowners, without the involvement of any real estate developers.

MTDCC was formed as a private limited company to oversee development and management of the project. Before forming the company, a variety of models were considered, including a co-operative approach. The co-operative approach was rejected partly based on the experiences of the sugar co-operative movement in Maharashtra, but also because landholding sizes within the community varied immensely. A co-operative structure would have stressed equality rather than equity and might have dampened some of the enthusiasm and initiative that the families had. In addition, since landholding sizes ranged from one acre to 150 acres, giving equal importance to all landholders would have taken away the incentive the farmers had for pooling their land (Deshmukh, 2008; Ganguli, 2008) Mr. Prakash Deshmukh, the architect (i.e. the physical designer) of Magarpatta City, explained to me that the driving idea behind the formation of a private limited company was to put a structure in place that functioned efficiently but was also democratic, thereby giving the landowners a say

in the running of the business. He added that the forming of the company was made easier by the fact that all the farmers, including Satish Magar, owned and farmed their own land. Each family got shares proportional to its landholding and has been made an equity shareholder. Each share is equal to one square metre of land. The shares of the company may be held and traded among member families only and not publicly. The company is run by the managing director and the technical director in consultation with the board of directors, eight of whom come from the landholding families (Deshmukh, 2008; Ganguli, 2008).

Through a personal acquaintance, Satish Magar approached a prominent architect and designer from Mumbai, Hafeez Contractor, with the proposal to produce the initial master plan for the township. With the preliminary plan ready, Magar approached the then Chief Minister of the state, Sharad Pawar, with whom he had close personal ties, for assistance in getting governmental permissions.[10] This was a particularly challenging undertaking since permission for urban development on agricultural land is notoriously difficult to obtain in India (Morris & Pandey, 2009). The recently retired Cabinet Secretary for the state of Maharashtra, B.G. Deshmukh, another acquaintance, was one of the consultants on the project. He introduced Magar to the Secretary for Urban Planning in Maharashtra at the time, D.T. Joseph, who took a personal interest in the project. These connections were vital in obtaining project approval and permissions from the government. Magarpatta City was one of the first projects of its kind to be proposed in the state of Maharashtra. There were several legal and regulatory constraints in place at the time that would have made construction under such a project challenging—for example, the Urban Land Ceiling Regulation Act (ULCRA), which had been put in place to prevent a few individuals or entities from controlling large plots of land.[11] Navigating government bureaucracy and obtaining the requisite permissions would have been close to impossible for a group of farmers without these political connections.

Another major obstacle to the development of Magarpatta City was the lack of financing. As farmers, the Magars did not have significant capital to invest in the development of the project. However, they did have one big advantage: since they as landowners were themselves developing the land, they did not have any land acquisition costs or any displacement or resettlement issues. Given the regulatory structure for lending to real estate companies in India at that time, it was difficult to get bank loans for development projects.[12]

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[10] Sharad Pawar was then a very high-ranking leader in the Congress Party. He now heads his own political party: The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). He comes from a small village near Pune and is extremely influential in the region. He has a very close relationship with the sugar co-operatives and farmers in the area. His daughter and nephew continue to be prominent in regional politics in Pune. Satish Magar's family knew him as a result of their political background.

[11] Magarpatta City's proposal to pool land together would have been a violation of this act. This act has since been repealed.

[12] Loans in India are typically granted for construction costs rather than land acquisition. Once the state or city government agency approves the plans, financial institutions loan money on a phase-by-phase basis, requiring the simultaneous development of a revenue stream and the completion of one phase of construction prior to loaning more money.

In addition, bankers and financiers did not consider the project to be feasible. During interviews with bankers at the Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) as well as with employees at MTDCC, respondents explained the bank's reluctance in financing Magar's proposal: a group of farmers with no prior knowledge or experience in real estate development did not inspire confidence in lenders. However, Satish Magar was well acquainted with the retired Deputy General Manager (DGM) of HDFC. On his advice, Magar approached the managing director of HDFC, Deepak Parekh, and managed to secure an initial loan of ₹2 crore (approximately US$420,000) to help them start construction (Dalal, 2008).[13] Moreover, Parekh shared a personal rapport with Magar and provided valuable guidance on the actual construction and marketing process (Interviews, Banking officials (HDFC), 2009; Dalal, 2008). HDFC also entered into a preferential lender agreement with MTDCC whereby it offered lower rates of interest for retail home loans to those interested in buying property in Magarpatta City (Interviews, Banking officials (HDFC), 2009) .

The actual planning and design process was essentially managed and controlled by the board of directors. The time taken in getting the necessary clearances from the government was used for capacity building. As I learned during interviews with the staff of MTDCC, the company promoted and encouraged entrepreneurship among the farmers by providing special training to develop particular skill sets relating to construction, development and associated services. At least one working member from each of the 120 farmer families was trained based on aptitude tests, so that he would be able to assist with the actual construction of the project. Some farmers were sent to various construction sites across India to study how other projects were being executed while others were sent to learn construction management or other specific skills at local technical institutes. Satish Magar provided the funds for this initial training. As a result, the company had its own trained team by the time it was ready to start construction. This served a dual purpose—not only did it cut down on the cost of construction since most of the work was being done in-house, it also helped former farmers to gradually transition into alternative occupations, ensuring that they were not unemployed when their land was put to non-agricultural use.

The farmers themselves did most of the actual construction work, from laying bricks and shifting soil with their farming equipment to managing the construction project. The first phase of construction involved the simultaneous building of villas, a few apartment blocks, some commercial space as well as part of the IT Park. Magarpatta City targeted IT firms and their potential employees. The money that was generated by selling or leasing these developments funded further construction. Also, the company secured a constant revenue stream by not selling any of the commercial space in the IT Park but only leasing it and also retaining control over the maintenance of the entire project. The construction process began in 2000. The first residential buildings and part of the school were ready by 2003

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[13] US$1 is approximately equal to ₹48 at the present exchange rate (2009).

and the first phase of office space followed in 2004. As of 2008, Magarpatta City was about 80 per cent complete.[14] A total of 7,500 apartments have been planned, of which about 90 per cent have already been sold (Interview, Staff (MTDCC), 2008). In addition, there are single-family homes or 'villas' also being built.[15] The total residential population, once development is complete, is anticipated to be around 100,000 people. Most of the people living in Magarpatta City (apart from the farmer families) are new migrants to Pune who moved there to work in IT or related industries. A large number of people living in Magarpatta City also work at companies located in the IT Park (Interview, Staff (MTDCC), 2008). Several employees of MTDCC also live on the premises.

After development, most of the families continue to stay on site and own either apartments or villas bought with money made through the company. As shareholders in MTDCC, they continue to earn a proportion of the company's profits. Moreover, a number of them have succeeded in renting out some of their property, creating yet another source of income. The land continues to be registered in their name, allowing them to maintain ownership and giving them a sense of security. Farmer families have also managed to move beyond agriculture and into other occupations. Several spin-off subsidiary businesses have emerged, such as local companies providing cable TV and broadband Internet, catering and food supply, laundry, landscaping and a local transport system. About 70 per cent of the families are now under tax audits, earning a minimum of ₹40 lakh (approximately US$85,000) a year and paying a total of about ₹10–12 crores in taxes as a community (Dalal, 2008).

Magarpatta City owes its success to the Magars' ability to leverage their social networks and kinship ties to first build an informal working coalition and then convert that into a more formal arrangement in the form of the development company. It has been heralded as a huge success by the media and the government (Nair & Ahluwalia, 2010; Shah, 2009; Ganguli, 2008; Arun, 2006; Financial Express Bureau, 2004). In part, this is due to sheer disbelief that something of this scale could be accomplished by a group of farmers. However, as with any large undertaking, it was not without its opponents, from both within the farming community and outside.[16] Initially the farmers were unwilling to pool their land together because of the risks associated with the project and there were a few families that resisted and decided to go their own way. Local environmental groups and activists are not happy with Magarpatta City

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[14] As a result of the global economic crisis in 2009, further development was halted, with plans to complete the project once demand picked up. As of February 2010, construction is gradually being resumed.

[15] The master plan for Magarpatta City, as distributed by the company in promotional materials, is attached in the Appendix.

[16] During fieldwork, it was very difficult to find anyone who would openly talk about any form of opposition to Magarpatta City. Despite several attempts, I was unable to talk to the farmer families that decided not to participate in the project. Extensive searches of newspaper archives (in English and the local language, Marathi) also yielded little by way of critiques of the development. Despite there being clear evidence of opposition to the project, it has not been vocalised very prominently. Most respondents during interviews downplayed their concerns and requested that they remain anonymous, citing the reason of Sharad Pawar's involvement in the project.

either. During interviews, several of them complained that it has begun a trend of using agricultural land in Pune to build large projects, raising food security threats. They also point to other areas around the city that are not being used for agriculture and have been zoned for development in the proposed master plan but have not yet been developed. Another concern that social activists in Pune raised during interviews is that the success of Magarpatta City and similar developments has led to an increase in housing for higher income groups but little progress has been made in low-income or affordable housing projects. However, the opposition has not affected Magarpatta City much. The development is a success for the landowners and investors and the Magars are planning their next project, to be built a little outside Pune, along the same lines.

The coalitions in this case used personal social and political networks to effectively accomplish the development of Magarpatta City. Conditions created by the globalising of the Indian economy presented the Magar community with an unusual opportunity that they capitalised on by using their social and political networks. The Magar community and Satish Magar in particular recognised the potential in the community developing the land on their own. They began by building on the mutual cooperation and trust from years of farming in an agricultural co-operative. They also used their kinship ties and social networks to control relations within the coalition—Satish 'dada' is a prominent member of the community and emerged as a natural leader. He was able to create a coalition within the farmers that converted their social capital into a business relationship.

However, merely developing a successful internal coalition would have been pointless without the external coalition that the development company formed with city and state level actors like politicians, government bureaucrats and bankers. Had the farming community not forged these connections, this would have been yet another story of farmer displacement. Once again, these were networks that Satish Magar and his family had cultivated over three generations. He was able to draw on them to identify specific individuals who came to be part of the company's board of directors and act as independent consultants to the project. It is important to recognise that most of the dealings took place outside formal governmental or business channels. This is due to the nature of the relationships and networks (informal, social, personal) that made the coalitions possible in the first place.

Successful coalition building, in this case, therefore, depended on three factors: access to political and financial resources, strong cohesive leadership and the ability to recognise and capitalise on opportunity. In the case of Magarpatta City, Satish Magar proved to be a capable leader by uniting the larger community towards a common goal. He also provided the necessary political resources as well as the initial financial capital. The farmer families complemented this by providing their labour, in addition to the initial investment of land.

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